



The Future of Upskilling and Professional Development

D2L is tackling the talent gap and skill shortages by embedding professional development in its everyday culture.

As the global digital economy grows, the demand for skilled talent is growing with it. It's critical to encourage employees to learn new skills, but professional development initiatives are often overlooked and underutilized. To tackle the growing skill and talent shortages, D2L launched a new platform—D2L Wave. D2L Wave connects the workforce to a curated catalog of high-quality professional development courses and programs offered by top-tier education providers. To put its new platform to the test, D2L decided to become its own first customer of D2L Wave.

AT A GLANCE

Client: D2L
Learners: 1,100
Industry: Education, Information Technology
Website: www.D2L.com

Platform/Features:

- D2L Wave

Interviewees:

- **John Baker, President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)**
- **Nick Oddson, Chief Technology Officer (CTO)**
- **Yvonne Bell, Senior Vice President (SVP) of People and Culture**

Highlights:

- More than a 2x boost in uptake of professional development opportunities compared to **the Canadian national average**
- More than 50% of employees who registered for courses on D2L Wave have already become repeat users
- Increased visibility of upskilling, helping leaders identify and address skills gaps
- Zero cost for companies and their employees to use the D2L Wave platform

Challenge

Digital skills for a digital world

It's estimated that by early to mid 2022, **65% of global GDP** will come from digitally transformed enterprises. The pandemic, combined with other factors, has accelerated North America's transition to a digital economy by **seven years**. With around half of all enterprises still needing to digitize their businesses, there is an urgent need for skill development within the workforce.

This means that half of all enterprises will need to implement a digitally transformed organizational culture in order to thrive in a digital economy and stay competitive.

"We're looking at more than half our world's economy being driven directly from digital or digitally transformed organizations in almost the blink of an eye," says John Baker, President and CEO of D2L.

"Having spoken with more than 1,000 CEOs from across the country, it's clear that businesses will need to help empower their employees to update their skills easily, quickly and frequently to stay current in this new digital economy."

John Baker
President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

D2L has long been a champion of professional development and corporate learning. Its D2L Brightspace platform helps organizations around the world build, deliver, and manage courses and content for thousands of employees. However, with the ever-widening skills gap, D2L saw the opportunity to help organizations access training opportunities where the institutional knowledge didn't already exist.

D2L Wave was created to help businesses prepare for the future of work by tackling the skills and talent gap. A free-to-use upskilling platform, D2L Wave supports organizational growth by encouraging lifelong learning and professional development in the workforce. The platform offers employees access to a vast range of high-quality programs and courses from accredited education partners, specifically designed for working professionals. Employers pay only for the courses that employees take.

"Employees want to refresh their skills and stay current in a professional environment that changes quickly and constantly. At the same time, businesses need their employees to help lead the transformation efforts and capture the growth opportunities—upskilling is a critical priority for companies to build the skills they need for the future of work," says Baker. "D2L Wave helps tackle both of those challenges and beautifully aligns career growth with business growth."

Solution

Learning how to drive adoption

Within D2L's own organization, employee skills development is seen as critical to helping the company stay ahead of its competition. However, D2L was facing the same challenges as many other corporations when it came to encouraging the adoption of external professional development opportunities. Employees at D2L typically had to use their own initiative to find an appropriate education provider, register for a course, pay the tuition fees up front and then submit a claim for reimbursement. This created a high barrier to entry. Meanwhile, the company's leaders had little visibility into or influence over the skills that their teams were learning.

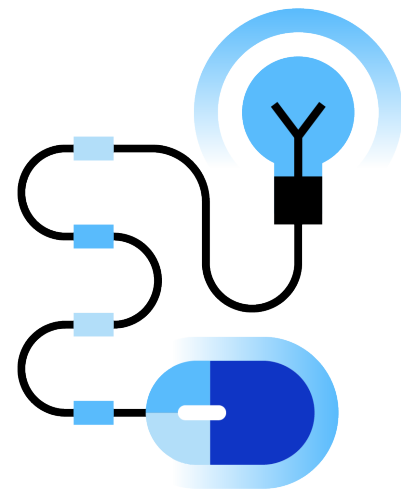
To address these issues, D2L decided to test out the D2L Wave platform by adopting it internally and using it to support its own employees' professional development journeys. In doing so, the company learned important lessons about encouraging workplace learning and gained insight into how the skill demand across the organization compared to the perceived skill shortage at D2L.

Yvonne Bell, SVP of People and Culture, was initially skeptical. She explains, "We already had a lot on our plate with the pandemic, and I didn't want to add rolling out a new program to my teams' workload. But when we started looking at returning to the office and how we could manage professional development through virtual training, we saw how D2L Wave would open up content that we could never have accessed or developed on our own."

In particular, the platform's support for micro-credentials was a major factor in its adoption. "You don't have to go to a university for a full term," adds Bell. "You can take these really short courses and earn certificates really quickly. And people love that."

Meanwhile, for Chief Technology Officer Nick Oddson, the standout feature was ease of access. "With D2L Wave, it becomes incredibly easy for my team to quickly find a course or program offered by a credible institution. Rather than searching the internet and digging through available options, my team can quickly narrow down professional development pathways that match their career goals and fit into their busy lives. It's the first place they look when they want to grow their skills," he says.

To make continued education with D2L Wave a priority, the company realized it had to make time for employees to learn. "We believe in professional development and that upskilling is key to our future. If people aren't focusing on learning because they're unable to spend the time learning at home, we give them "Wave Days"—which is paid time at work to pursue learning," says Baker.



Result

Making professional development easy

D2L believes strongly in its commitment to employee lifelong learning. The company provides \$4,000 per employee each year to spend on professional development, helping each individual gain new skills that align with the company's business goals.

Nearly a year after adopting D2L Wave, D2L has seen its employees' uptake of professional development rise to two times the Canadian national average. Of the company's 1,100 employees, 22% have registered for at least one course. More than half of these employees have already completed their first course and signed up for the next one, becoming repeat users of the platform.

One of the key advantages of D2L Wave is its ease of use for learners, the company's learning and development team and its senior leaders. "The old methods we used for managing external professional development—like spreadsheets, emails and ad hoc approvals—created headaches for both employees and the company and signaled that learning is unimportant," Baker says. "With D2L Wave, all the feedback has been positive, and it's been a joy to watch the excitement build around it. It's exceeded our expectations."

D2L Wave provides a seamless user experience with workflows that guide employees through the catalog of courses and programs that they can request approval to take. It gives them visibility into their own professional development budget and allows them to register directly with the education provider once their request has been approved. The platform also tracks the courses or programs that each employee has requested, registered for and completed, giving managers immediate insight into what their employees are learning and where any skills gaps may exist.

"D2L Wave gives employees access to the best courses to help them achieve their goals," says Baker. "It also gives me insight into what makes the greatest impact on our people. I can see what kind of learning is in demand across my organization. Then I can nudge leaders to encourage our people to make time and invest in growing these specific skills."

D2L Wave enables employers to shape and influence the course of their employees' professional development without micromanaging them. By providing a tailored, curated selection of courses and programs from top-tier education providers, D2L Wave helps identify the in-demand skills that benefit both employees and their companies.

Bell concludes, "From an employer's perspective, D2L Wave is a tool that we can use to understand what the skill demands and gaps are in our organization while showing employees that we really believe what we say about professional development. Professional development can be a big factor in retention, and it's a great recruiting tool too. By investing in our employees, we are also investing in our own success and growth as a company."

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