



Employee Resistance to Training

How to Get Buy-In and Motivate to Learn



Research

Employee Resistance to Training: How to Get Buy-In and Motivate to Learn

Any business that has ever initiated training is worried about employees' sometimes fierce resistance to it. We at iSpring aim to understand why employees might sabotage training and how to help companies that face this issue.

We're confident our research will help HR and L&D specialists get a solid grasp on employee resistance to training and remove roadblocks on the path to success.

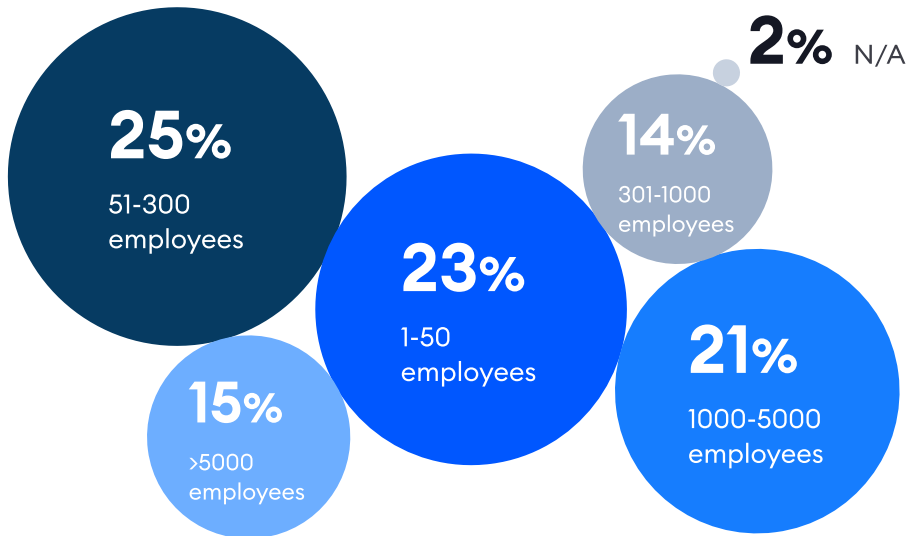
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- [The Why and The How of Corporate Training Endeavors](#)
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- [Achieving Employee Satisfaction: Increase Your Awareness](#)
- [Promoting the Idea of Training](#)
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- [Practical Insights for Training Managers and Employers](#)

The new research from iSpring aims to throw light on corporate practices in addressing employee resistance to training. Training professionals who represent L&D, Management, Education, HR, QA, and IT divisions were asked to take an online survey and answer 12 multiple-response questions about the ways they facilitate, track, and promote employee training in their companies.

The research covered respondents from the US and Canada (78%), and different countries worldwide (22%).

Here is the distribution of respondents by business size:



The sample included the following industries: Goods-Producing, Healthcare, BFSI, Services, Service-Providing, IT/Technology, Education, and Government.

Key Findings

- 25%** of employers think identified skills gaps are the #1 indicator that necessitates training.
- 62%** of L&D managers say they primarily work on training programs for customers, contractors, and suppliers.
- 73%** of HR managers name compliance as the core business area they want to improve with training.
- 81%** of employers say they mostly use online courses in training.
- 68%** leverage Zoom training sessions
- 34%** of respondents use employee satisfaction as a training metric.
- 21%** are positive that their employees don't resist training.
- 57%** keep traditional face-to-face learning in the workplace.
- 32%** of employers admit that their staff frequently neglects training because it doesn't correspond to self-perceived competence.
- 40%** of employers prefer to motivate employees to learn by awarding certificates of completion.

Research team



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Part 1

The Why and The How of Corporate Training Endeavors



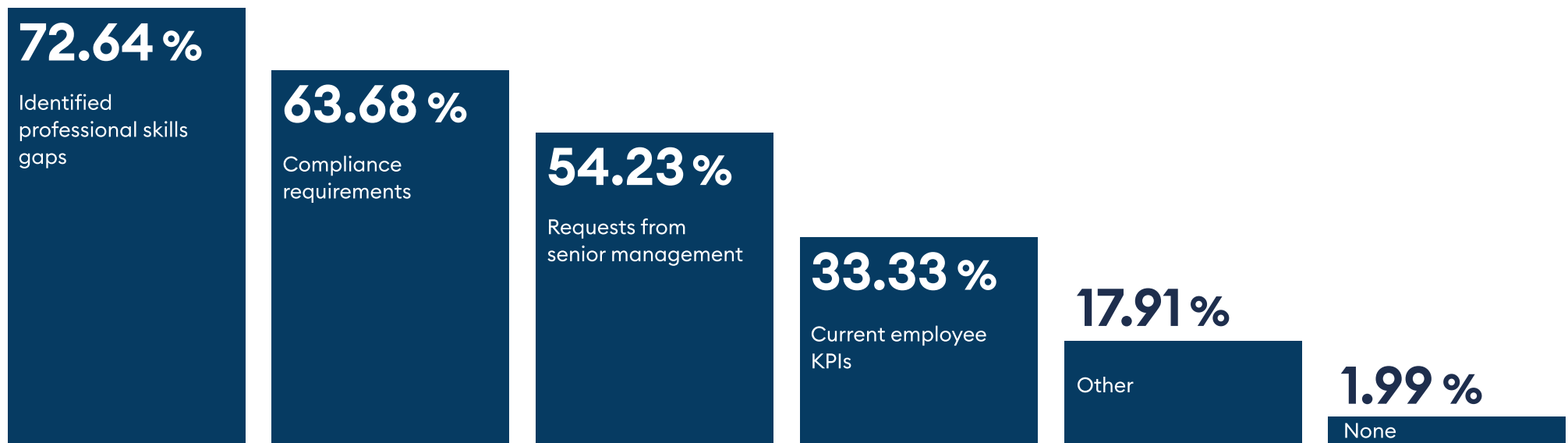
Bridging skill gaps is the primary reason for initiating training

Research suggests the rising importance of upskilling and reskilling programs in the workplace.

Almost 73% of respondents choose identified skills gaps as the #1 indicator that necessitates training. Violation of compliance requirements and requests from senior management are also among the most frequently selected responses.

Altogether, these figures show us that workplace training still starts as a formalized regulatory initiative, but is increasingly grounded in practice and pivots toward bridging real skills/ knowledge discrepancies that industries are facing.

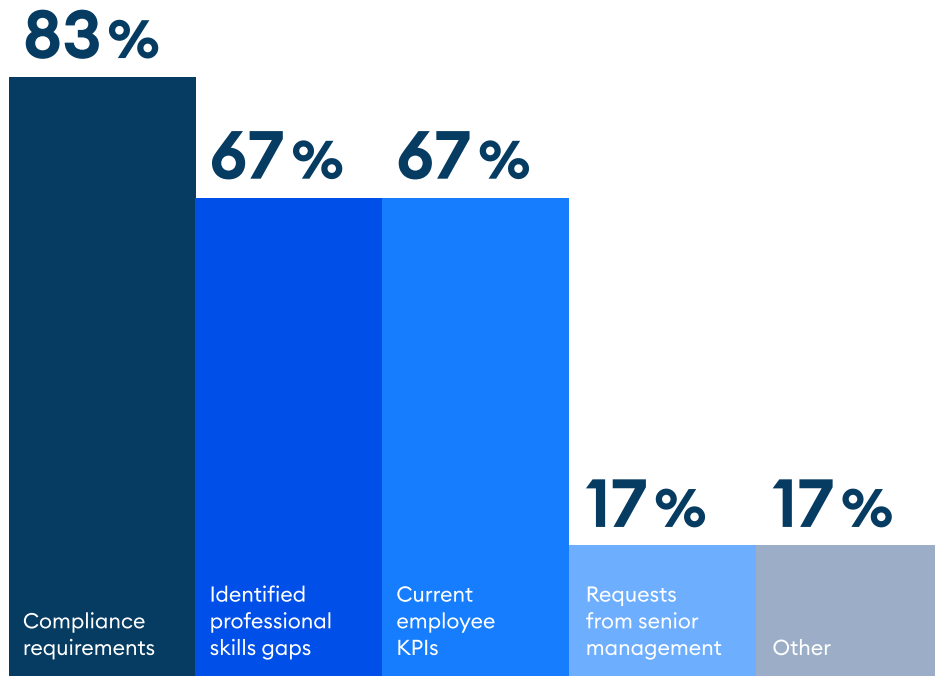
Motives for workplace training – % of total sample



Does compliance still matter? Definitely.

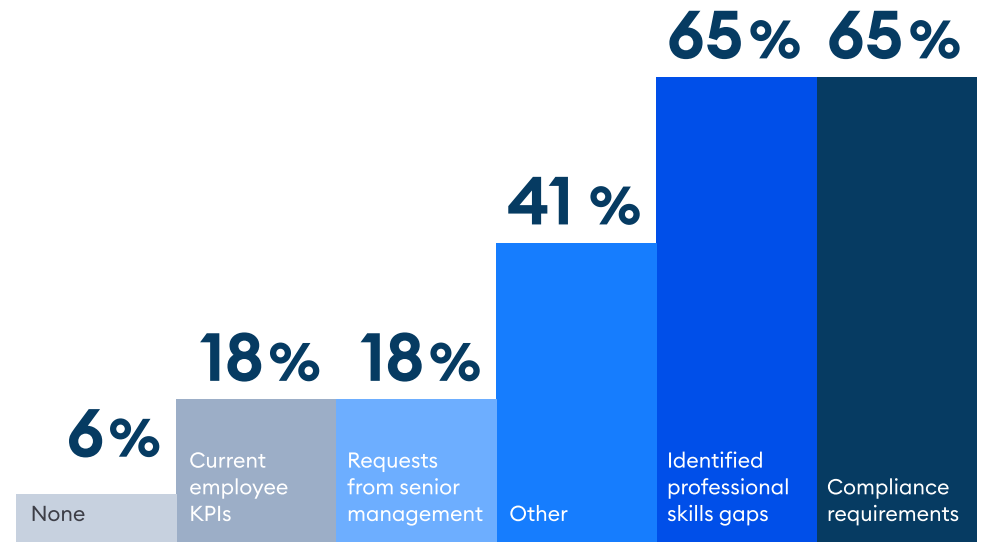
While skill gaps topped the list of motives for employee training for almost every category of respondents, compliance ranks first for quality and analytics specialists, and a number of industries.

Priority areas for improvement, Quality and Analytics, %



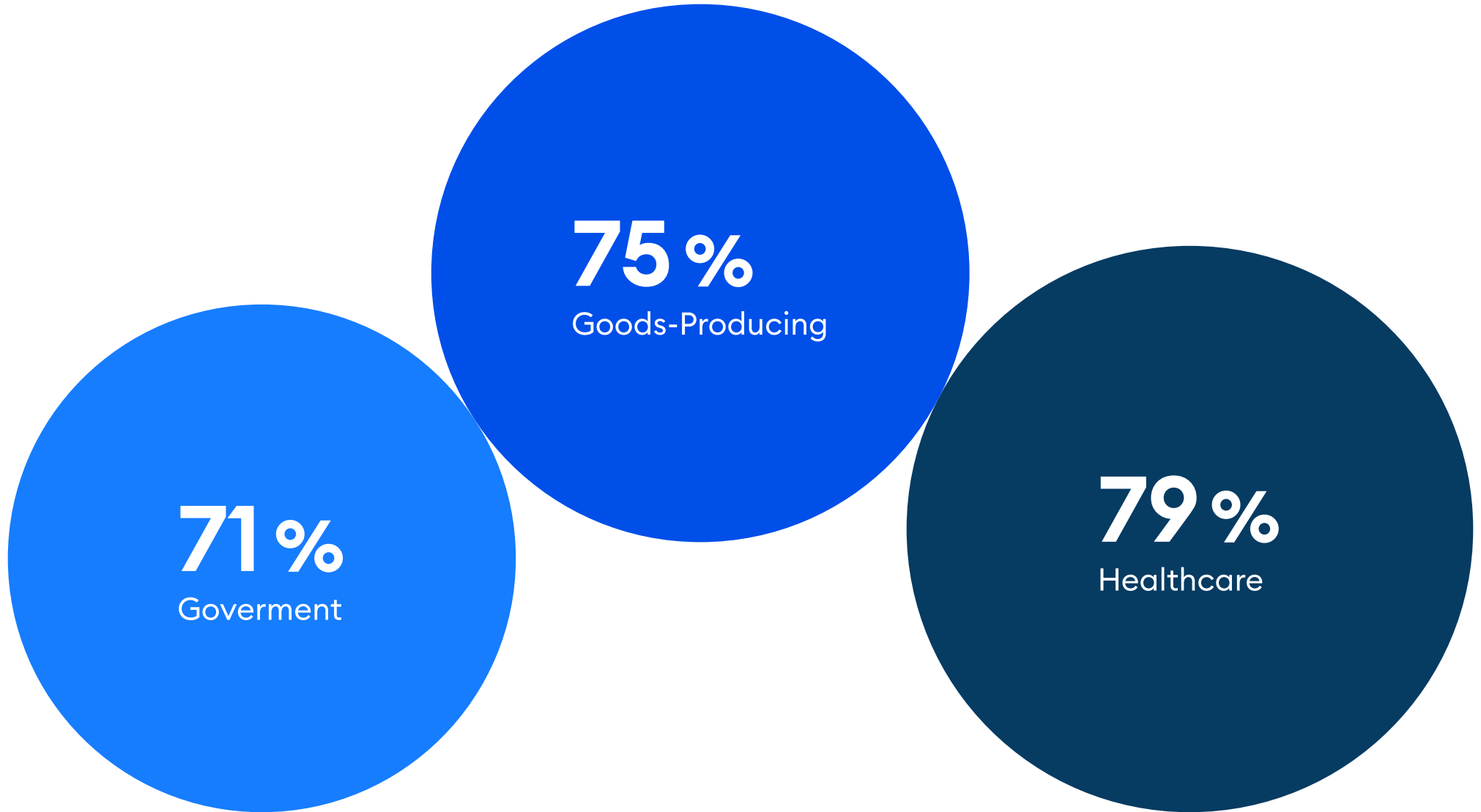
Interesting finds: respondents from the Education sector put compliance requirements on par with skill gaps when planning training.

Priority areas for improvement, Education, %



Compliance requirements

Among the industries that attach greater importance to compliance were Healthcare, Goods-Producing, and Government sectors.

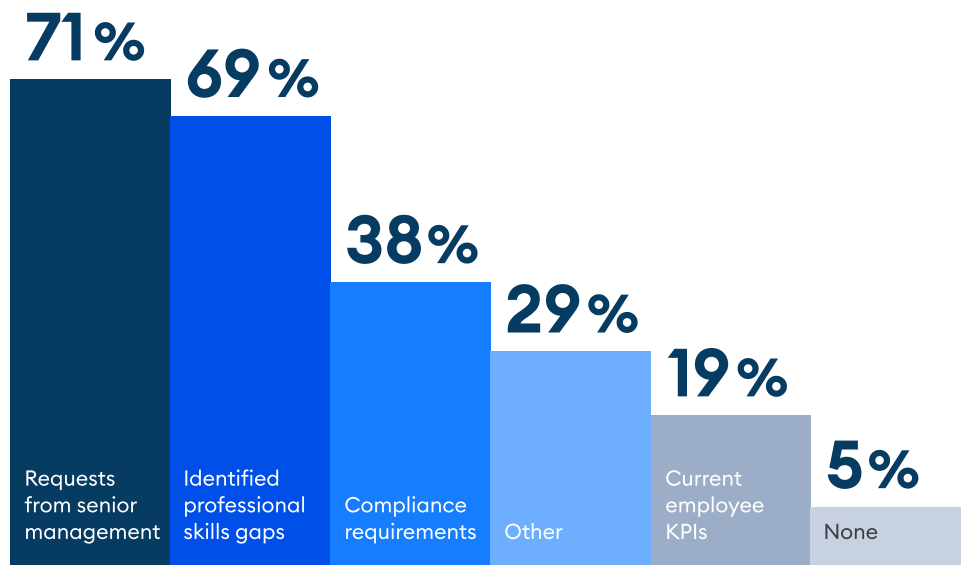


Senior management in IT and banking are more engaged in training initiatives

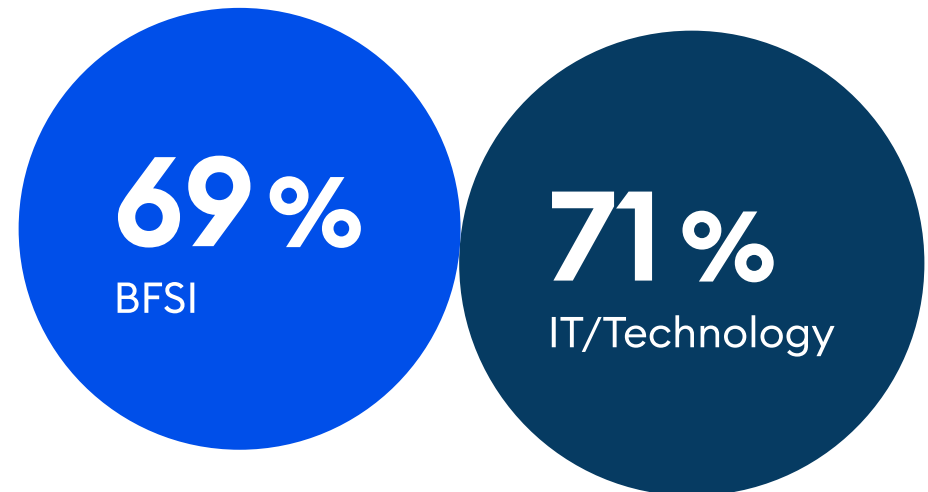
Research finds that requests from senior management are the #1 indicator to start employee training in the IT distribution.

Similarly, requests from senior management play an important role in training in the Banking sector.

Priority areas for improvement, IT industry, %



Requests from senior management

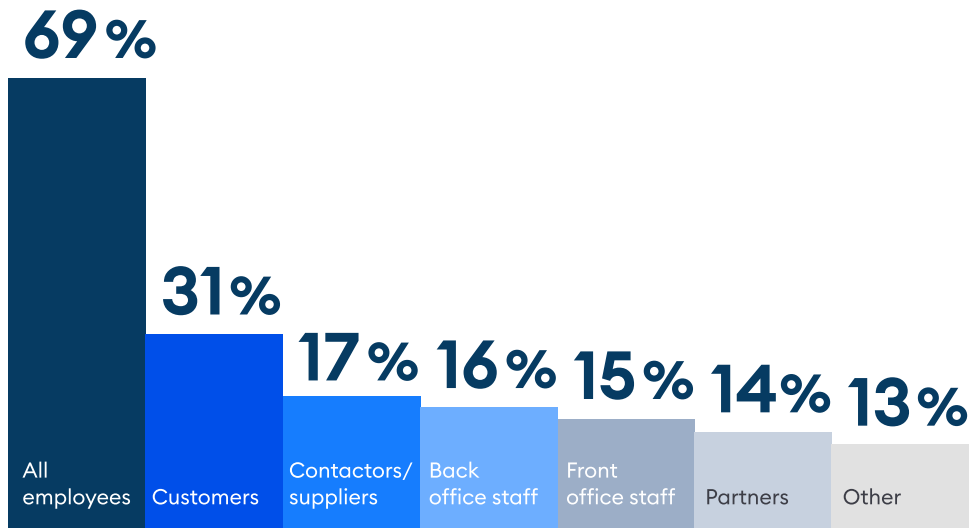


This may indicate that managers from these spheres are more involved in the training processes, and supervisors tend to show their interest in the success of training initiatives. It can be assumed that, in such companies, training is thoroughly integrated into business processes.

The coverage of training goes beyond employees

The majority of respondents say that their training projects cover a wider audience of learners, including all employees and sometimes extending to customers, contract suppliers, etc.

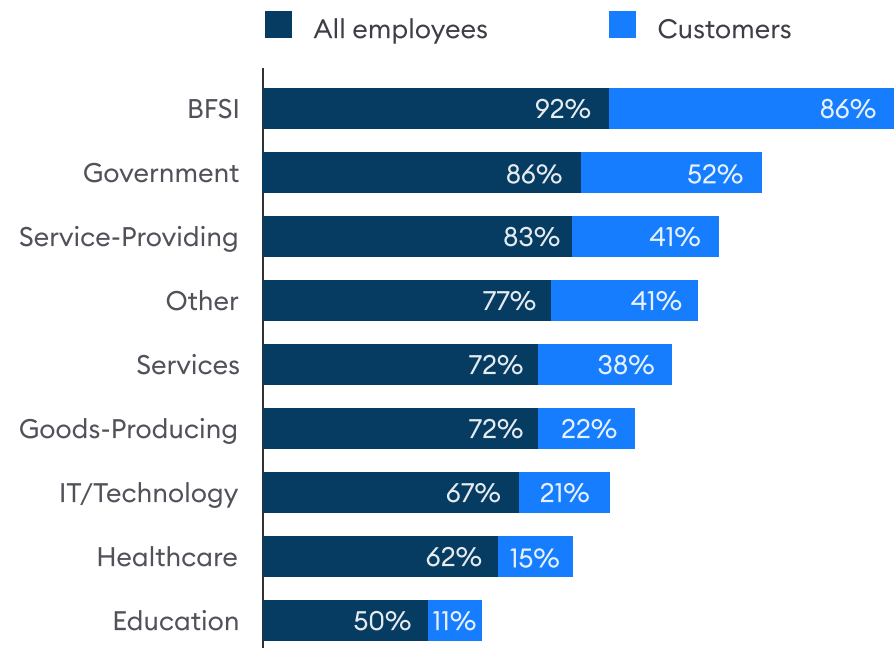
Who do you train, % of the total sample



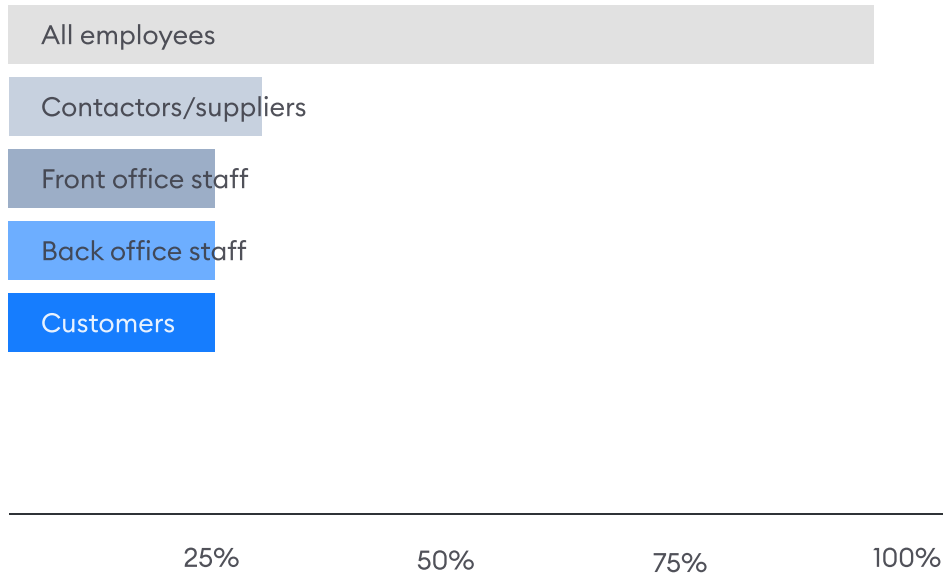
The second major training audience is customers, so customer education is gaining momentum, and it can be seen that the L&D function is expanding.

This is the distribution of answers across different industries:

Who do you train? Answer distribution across industries



Answer distribution among HR specialists

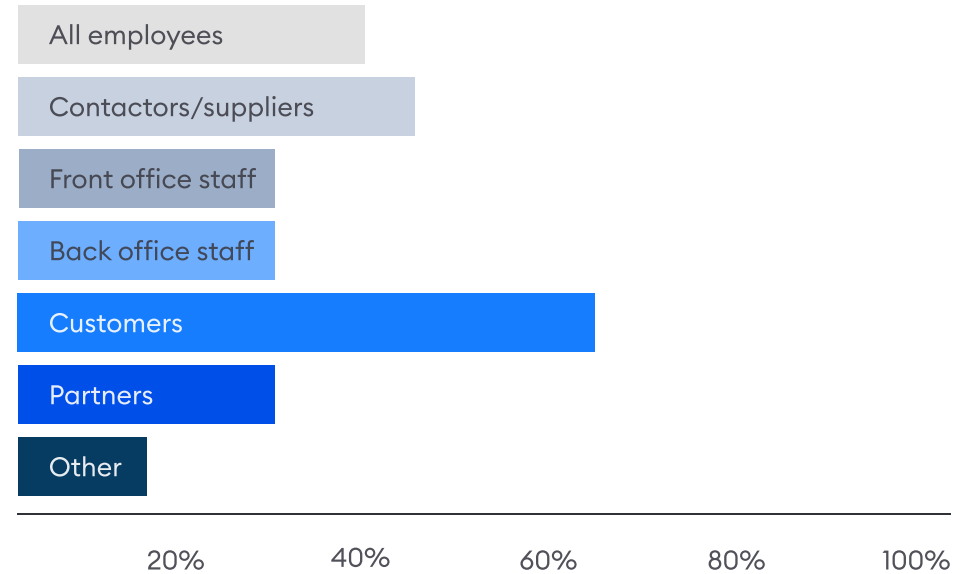


The broadest coverage of training (applying to all employees) is demonstrated by BFSI and Government spheres, while 86% of respondents from the Government sector asserted that they conduct customer training as well.

In terms of the principal training audience, the choices of HR and L&D specialists were different, as seen in the graph above.

HR pros (92% of them) are predictably focused on employee development and rarely pointed out other categories of learners.

Answer distribution among L&D specialists



In turn, 62% of L&D managers queried say they primarily work on training programs for customers, contractors, and suppliers.

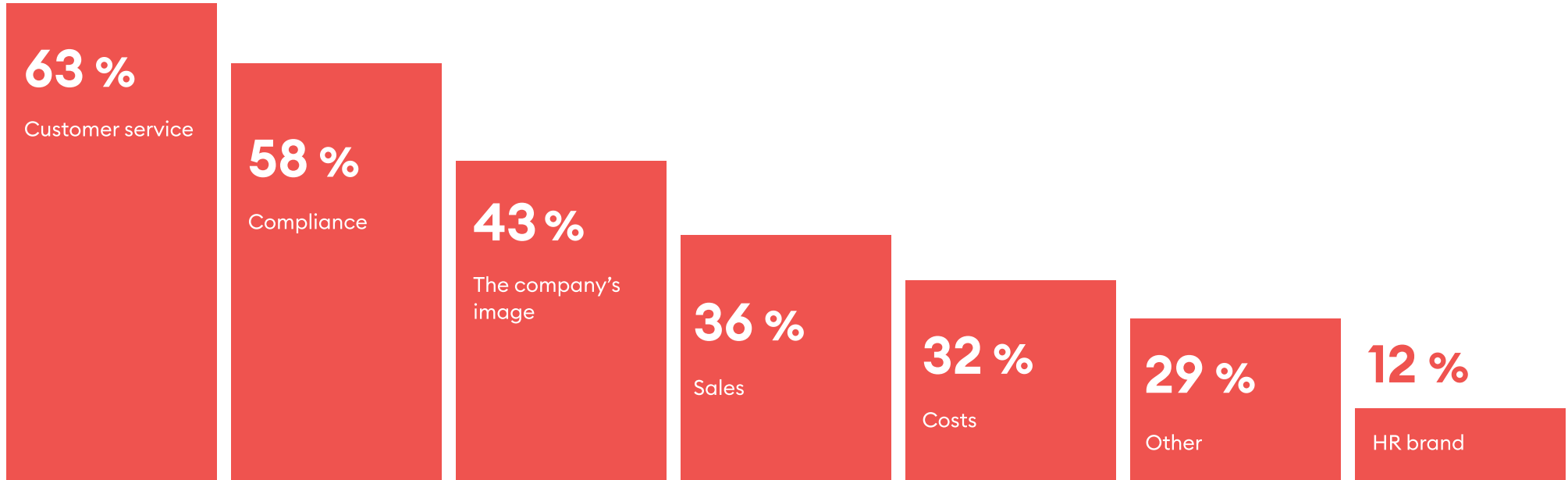
This also indicates the changing role of L&D in business processes and their pivot to new audiences. Consequently, the L&D function needs new approaches and technologies to cover new categories of learners and emerging needs.

Customer service is the most popular area for improvement

When asked which business areas they expect to improve with corporate training, respondents most frequently chose customer service and compliance.

71% of the respondents from the Government sector see customer service as a prioritized business area to improve with training.

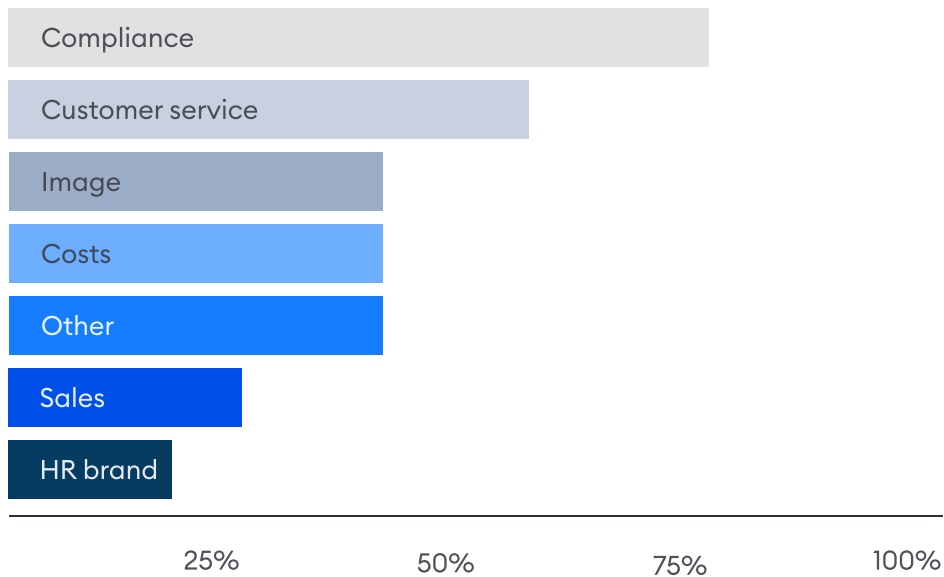
Priority areas for improvement, % of the total sample



But HR specialists still favor compliance

HR managers name compliance as the core business area they want to improve with training. In the sample, compliance is ahead of other business areas by a wide margin. Interestingly, customer service ranks second among the most frequently chosen responses. In other words, HR clearly sees their role and the importance of training for corporate compliance.

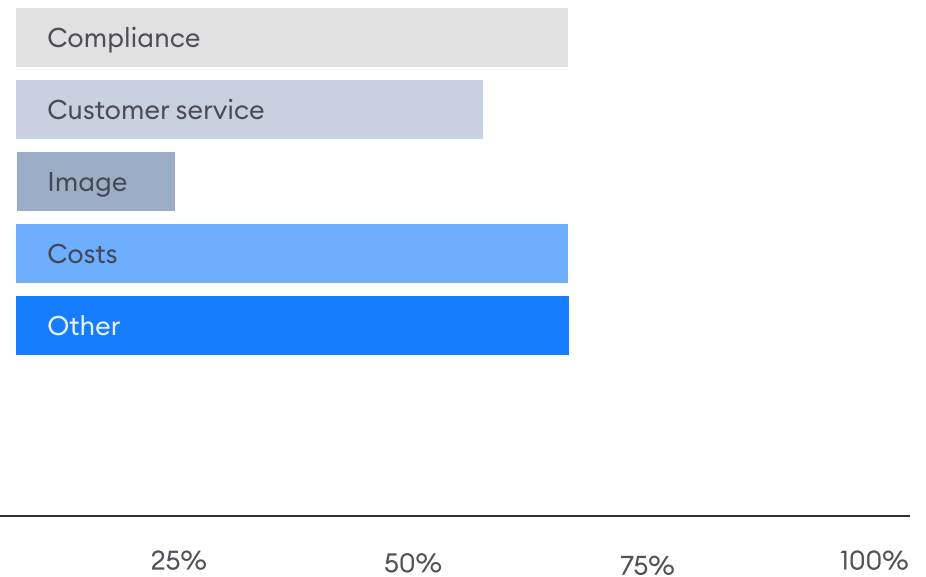
HR opinion



HR managers also recognize the importance of training for the company's image and, consequently, for employer attractiveness.

As a major response, costs or cost reduction gains prominence only among QA specialists, who put it on a par with compliance and other business areas that are not mentioned in the survey.

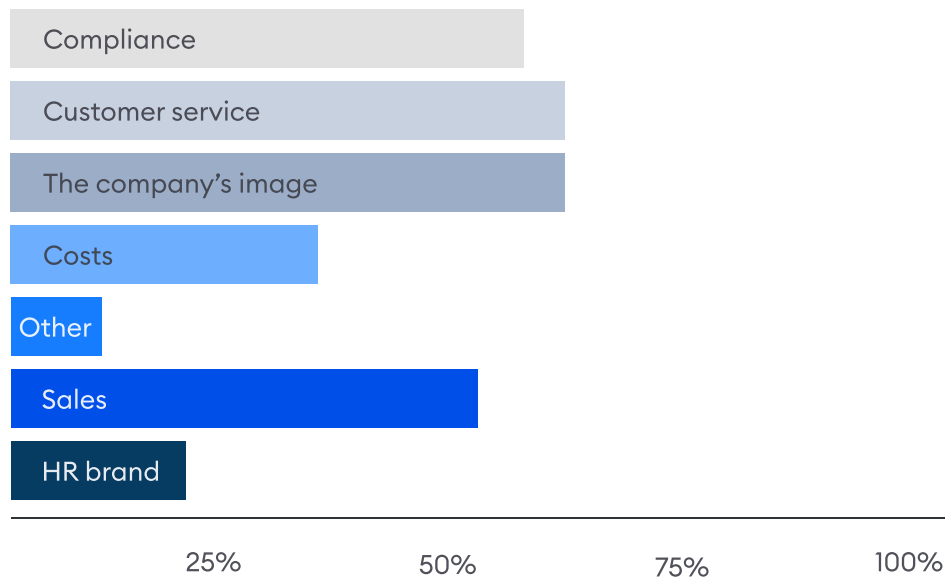
Quality and Analytics opinion



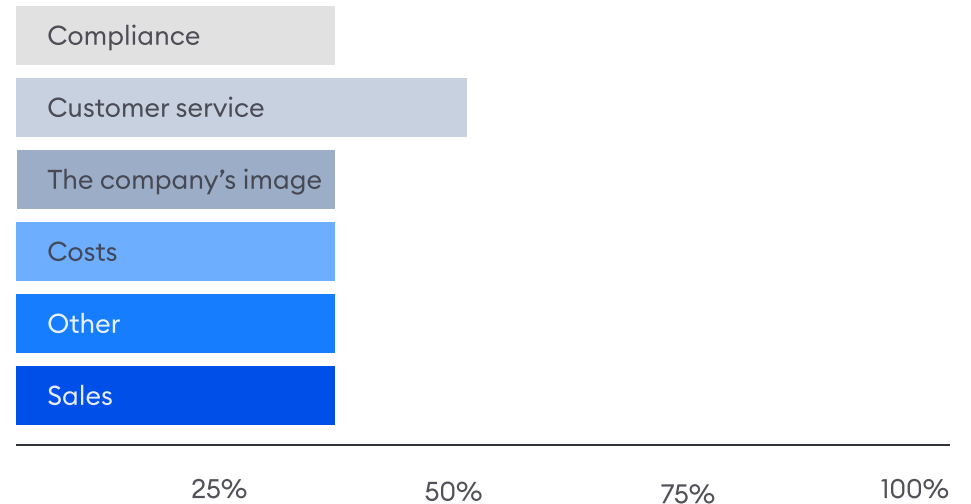
IT and service providers use training to enhance their brand

Respondents from Service-Providing and IT companies point out the importance of training for their image. This response either tied for first place with customer service (Service-Providing) or ranked second (IT), which may suggest that training has a far-reaching influence on brand image and reinforces it.

Priority areas of improvement, Service-Providing



Priority areas of improvement, IT/ Technology



Whichever business area you plan to improve with training, it's essential to map out the process in advance and protect your initiative from possible pitfalls and detours. If you want to reboot online training to drive results, feel free to submit a request for L&D Consulting from a trusted eLearning vendor.

With over 250 successful client cases under their belt, iSpring experts help organizations of any size launch effective eLearning programs within budget. L&D consulting from iSpring will help you accomplish even the most ambitious goals with onboarding, compliance, product knowledge, or customer service training, and avoid costly mistakes.

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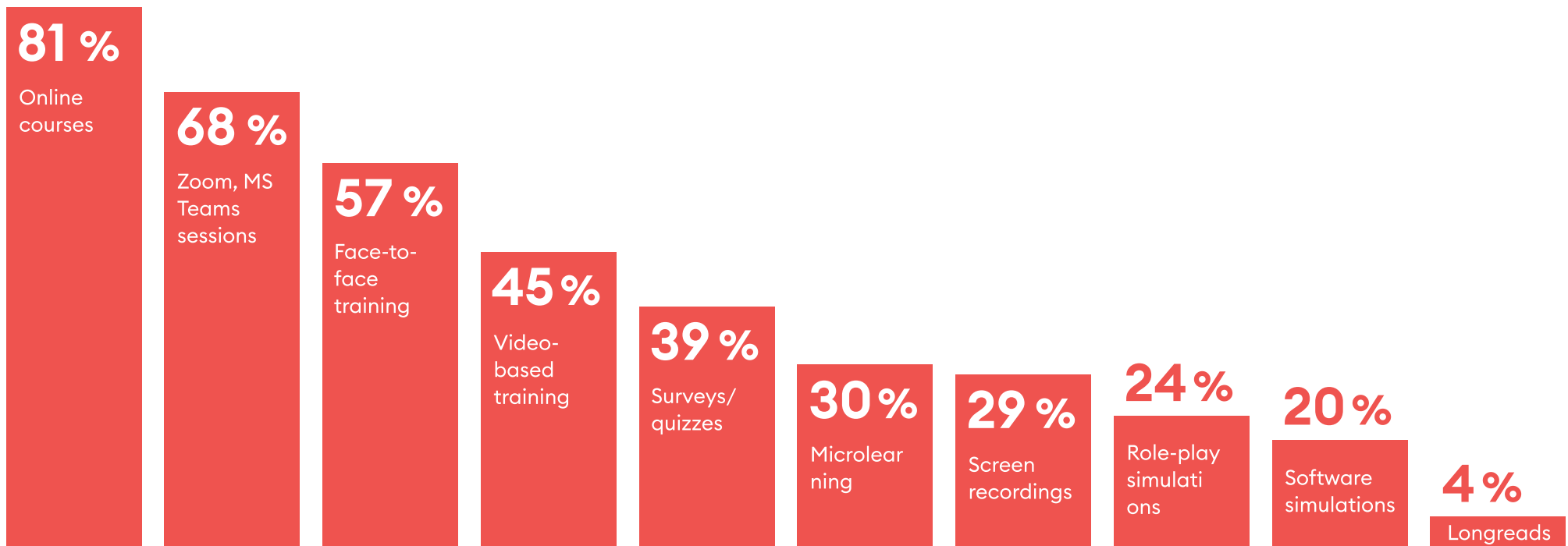
Part 2

Preferred Content Types and Formats of Learning

Blended learning is trending

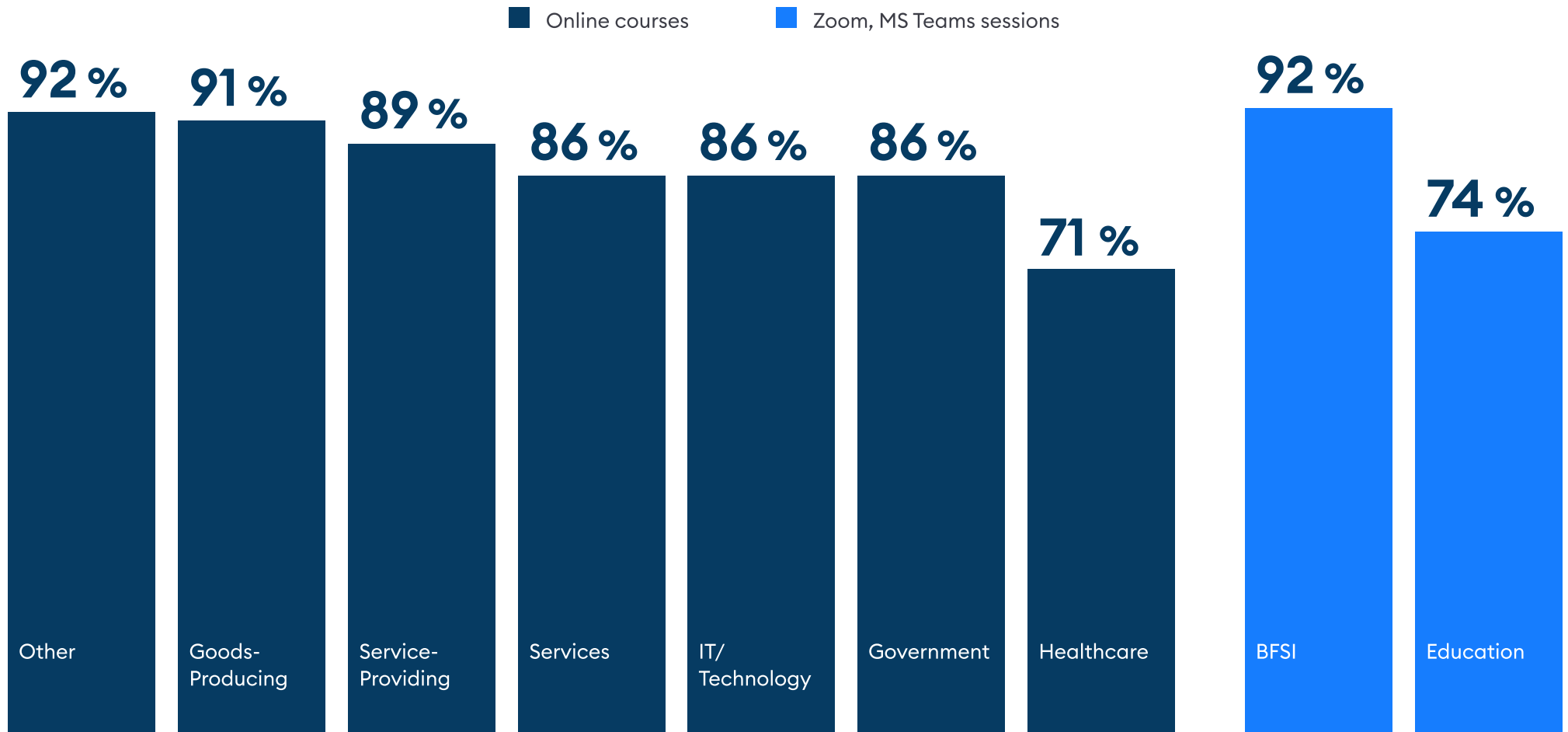
As for learning formats, 81% said they mostly use online courses in training. Nevertheless, 68% of respondents do leverage Zoom training sessions, and 57% continue to use traditional face-to-face learning in the workplace. These results suggest that companies prefer to combine various training activities and mix online and offline approaches in a blended format.

Types of training content, % of the total sample



Types of training content. Answer distribution across industries

Zoom and MS Teams training sessions are primary approaches for Banking/Finance and Education sectors.

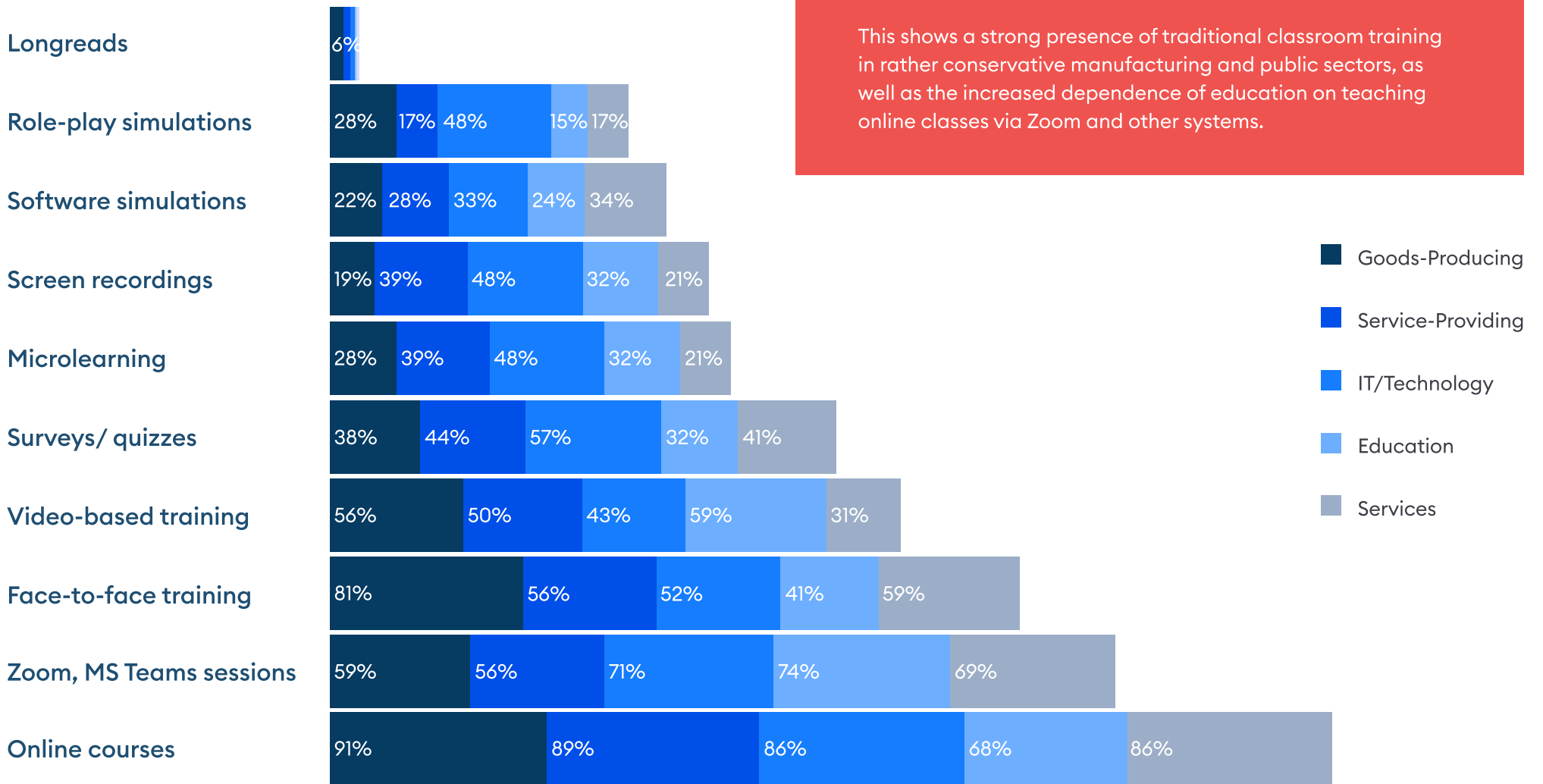


Most common types of training content in industries

Interactive role-plays gained recognition in IT (48%) and Services (34%).
 Similar results are demonstrated by microlearning in the same IT (same 48%) and Service-Providing companies (39%).



The summary table of training types and their shares across certain industries



Research shows that face-to-face training in the physical classroom has the lowest share in Education (41%) and the highest shares in the Goods-producing industry (81%) and Government organizations (71%).

This shows a strong presence of traditional classroom training in rather conservative manufacturing and public sectors, as well as the increased dependence of education on teaching online classes via Zoom and other systems.

It can be added that barely half of the respondents from various industries actually use surveys and quizzes in training. This may be an indicator that employers don't pay enough attention to assessments and tend to neglect this part of the training process. Consequently, they are not fully aware of how employees retain knowledge or about their possible difficulties in learning.

Engage learners with diverse training content

Interactive quizzes and knowledge checks, mini-games, and role-plays are indispensable for a fulfilling learning experience both in and out of the traditional classroom. If you blend online and offline training, it's advisable to give learners an opportunity to interact with the content, consolidate knowledge, and test how well they retained it.

You can easily transform your purely informational slide-based courses into meaningful eLearning content with iSpring Suite. This tool works in PowerPoint, so you can enhance your existing presentations with quizzes, role-plays, and training videos and make them into full-fledged online courses. iSpring Suite is a rapid and completely user-friendly tool, and your team can already create any number of courses with its help during the free trial.

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Part 3

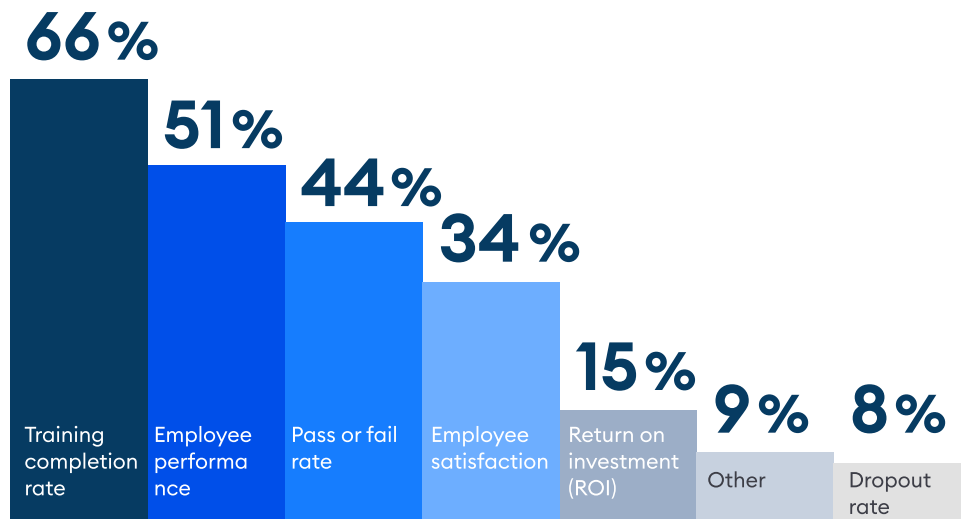
Achieving Employee Satisfaction: Increase Your Awareness



Training completion beats employee satisfaction

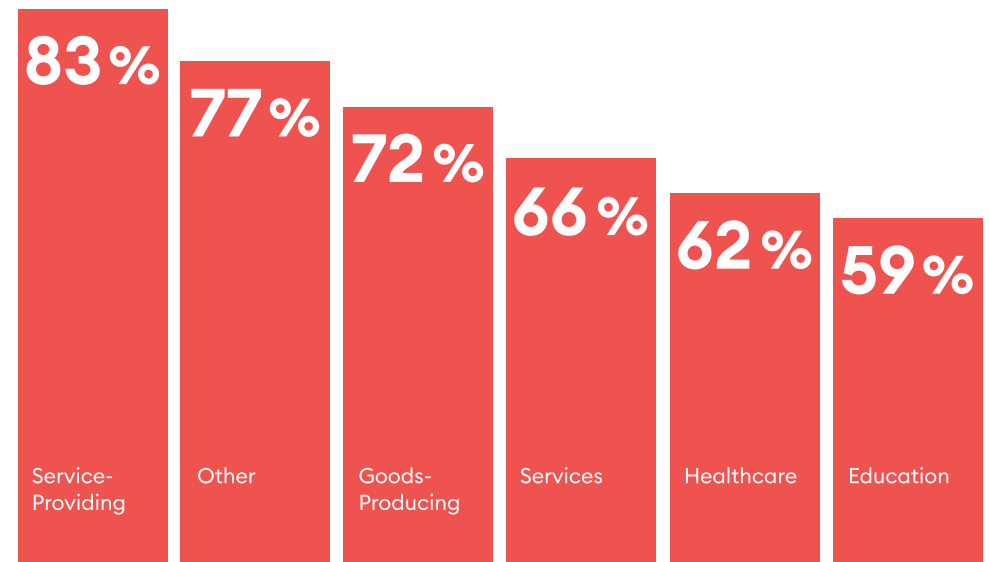
As for the most frequently used training metrics, employers prioritize the training completion rate (66% of all responses). 51% say that they usually look at employee performance as an indicator of training effectiveness. 44% monitor pass or fail rates – these are evidently respondents who use quizzes. Employee satisfaction is used by only 34% of the respondents.

Top training metrics, % of the total sample



The survey data shows that the training completion rate is among the most popular training metrics for Service-Providing, Goods-Producing, and Service industries, as well as for companies that don't attribute themselves to any of the industries listed in the survey.

Training completion rate



The fact that companies rarely consider employee satisfaction as a training metric should be a matter of concern. This can be an indicator that employers don't recognize the importance of feedback in training.

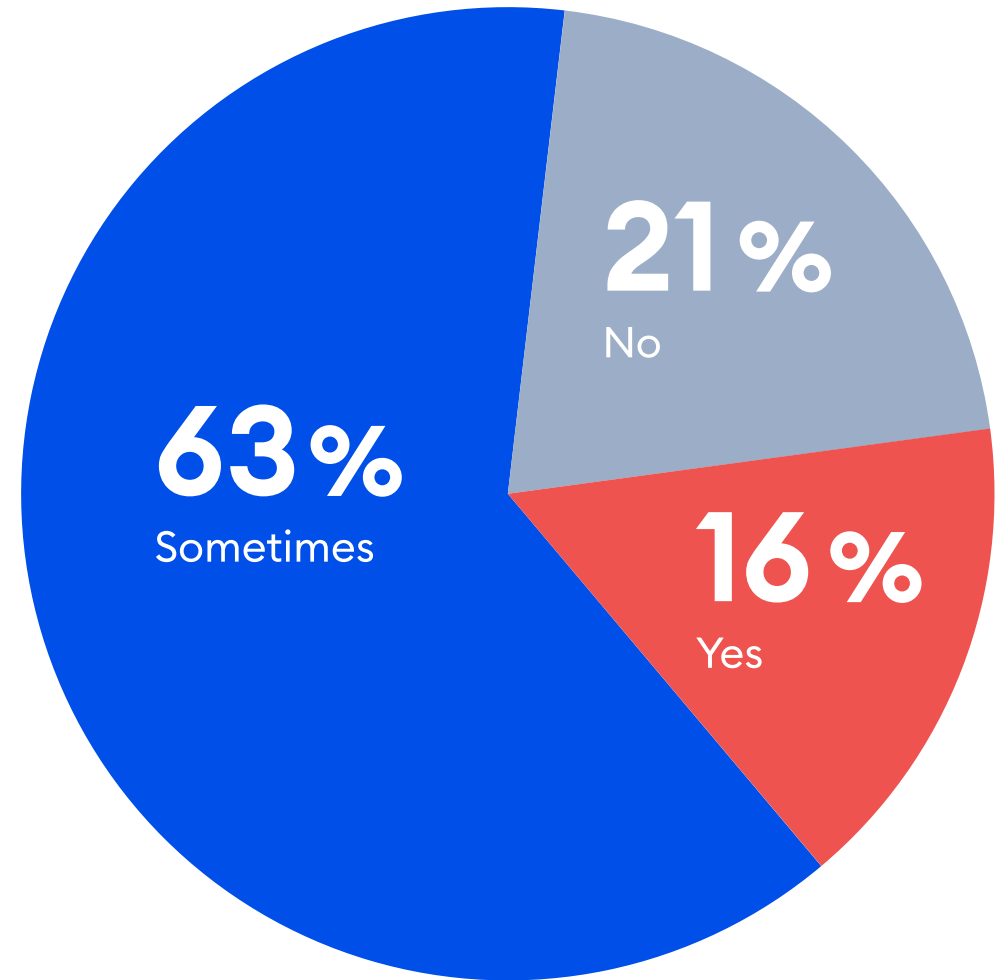
Another point is that return on investment is not a very popular training metric either, and the majority of respondents don't see it as a priority. This may signal a necessity to link training with business results or research the ways in which companies establish their training budgets.

Are you well informed about employees' actual perception of training?

When answering the question of whether or not their employees resist training, employers tend to demonstrate uncertainty or gravitate to the interim option. In every industry, respondents most frequently select the "Sometimes" response.

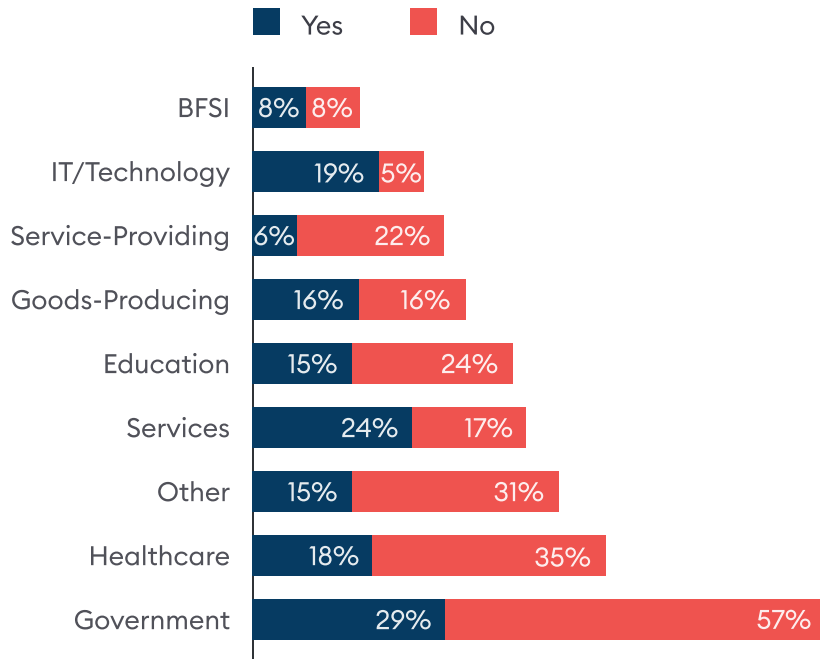
Do your employees resist training, % of the total sample

Only 21% are positive that their employees don't resist training in any way. Those who accept that there is indeed resistance account for 16%. A large percentage of uncertainty signifies a poor awareness of training output and a lack of established feedback loops, as well as a general lack of monitoring.



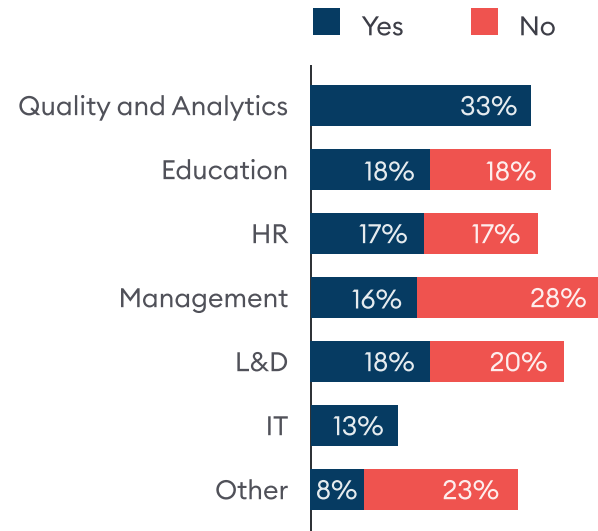
Proceeding with 'Yes' or 'No' replies, you can see their distribution across industries on the following graphs.

Do your employees resist training?



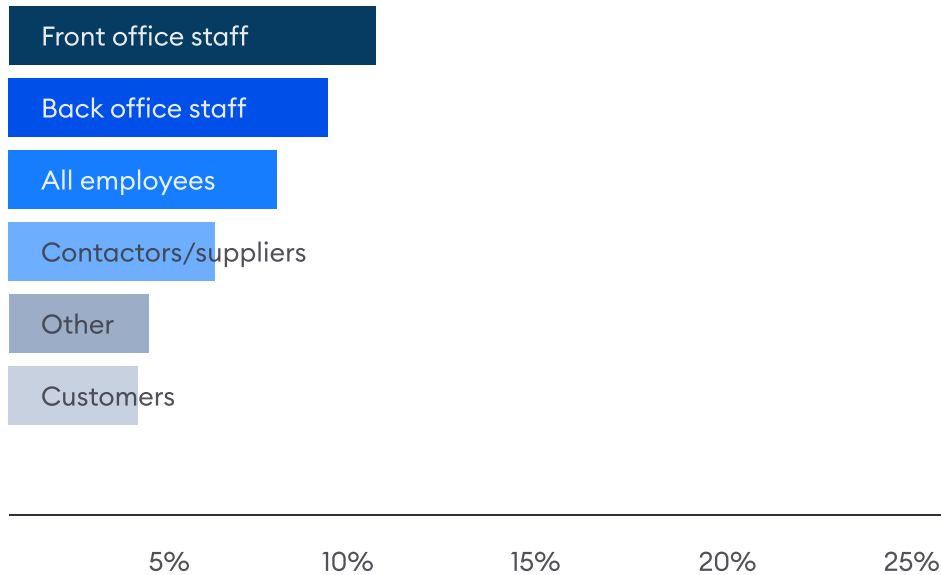
Those who most often say that learners don't resist training were respondents from Healthcare, Education, Government, and Service-Providing industries. On the other hand, Goods-Producing, BFSI, Services, and IT/Technology respondents are those who most often registered that there is a degree of resistance.

Do your employees resist training?



Comparing the answers across different positions, L&D pros, management, and Quality and Analytics specialists rarely say that their employees sabotage training. HR, Education, and IT specialists demonstrated the opposite.

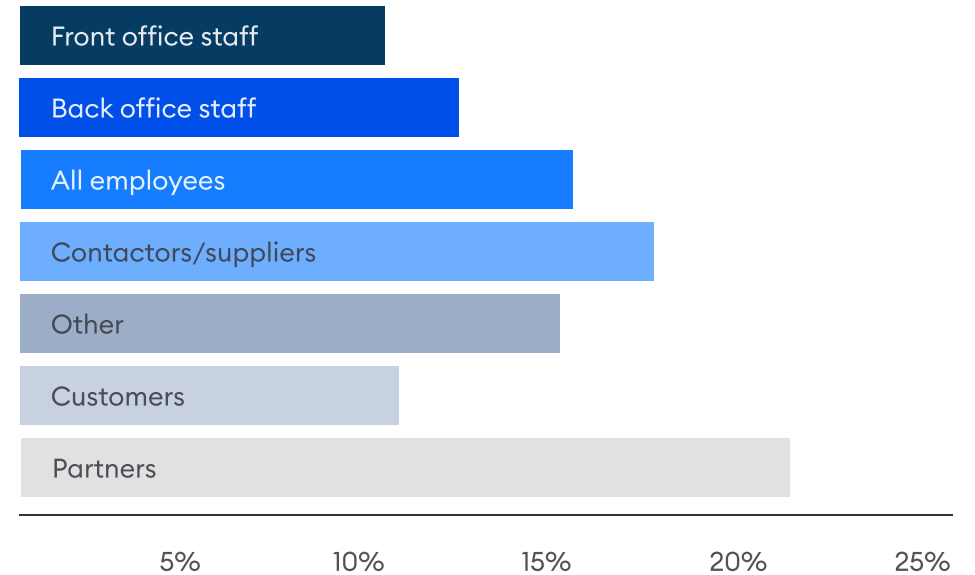
Training coverage of the BFSI industry



Whereas the highest rate of uncertainty is shown by the Banking sector, the lowest rate can be found in the Healthcare industry. The research suggests that Healthcare companies are more aware due to the fact that they have a broader training audience and a large pool of external learners.

When looking at the composition of training audiences in both industries, we can see that the Healthcare industry tends to train a wide range of partners and contractors. On the contrary, the BFSI sector is more focused on employee learning.

Training coverage in the healthcare industry



When the rate of external learners is so high, monitoring is a must, as the shared risks entail liability between several counterparts, and stakes are higher. This can be a factor that increases awareness.

As a rule, internal learners can have a more 'relaxed' attitude to training and skip it, especially if the course is optional. Unfortunately, reporting systems and feedback loops can be poorly established too, and this leads to a lot of guesswork.

Making excuses is the major sign of employee resistance to training

Our research shows that employee resistance to training manifests primarily as excuses as to why the employee is unable to complete a course or participate in a training session. Second on the list are employee complaints about their inability to focus during the training.

How employees show resistance, % of the total sample



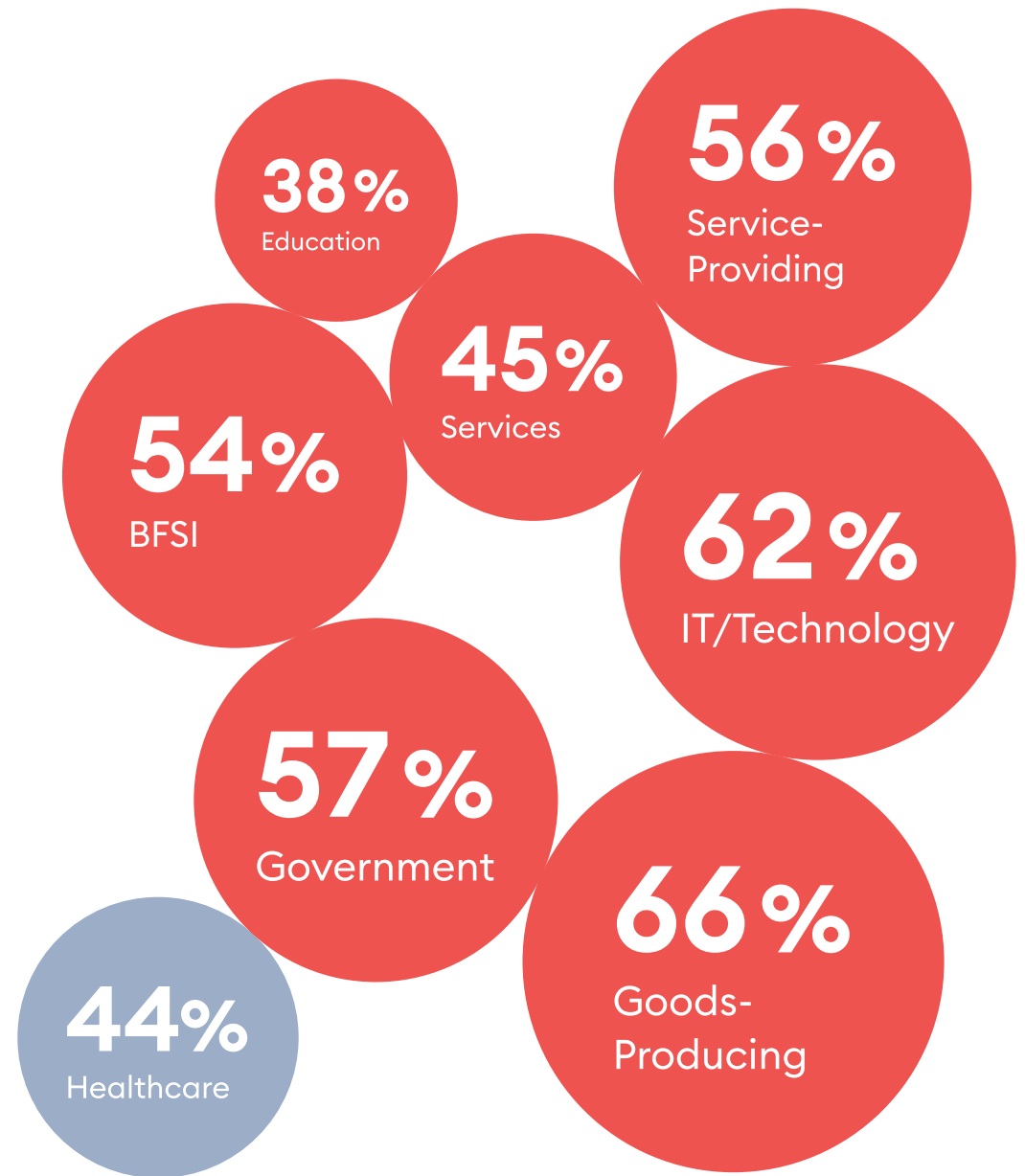
The response of “They look for reasons why they weren’t able to complete a course / come to the training” is most prevalent among Goods-Producing and IT/Technology industries and exceeded 50% of answers in each case. Remarkably, the “They’re not focused during the training” response is predominant in Healthcare.

Overall, this can indicate possible issues with training content delivery and its lack of feasibility. Making it convenient to consume and easy to access should be a top priority for employers. Plus, employees are likely to have trouble focusing if training is too rigid and doesn't fit into their daily schedule. They would embrace an opportunity to choose the time, place, and pace that suits them most.

Training specialists might find it helpful to look for more flexible ways to train employees and spread knowledge company wide.

● They look for reasons why they weren’t able to complete a course/ come to the training

● They’re not focused during the training



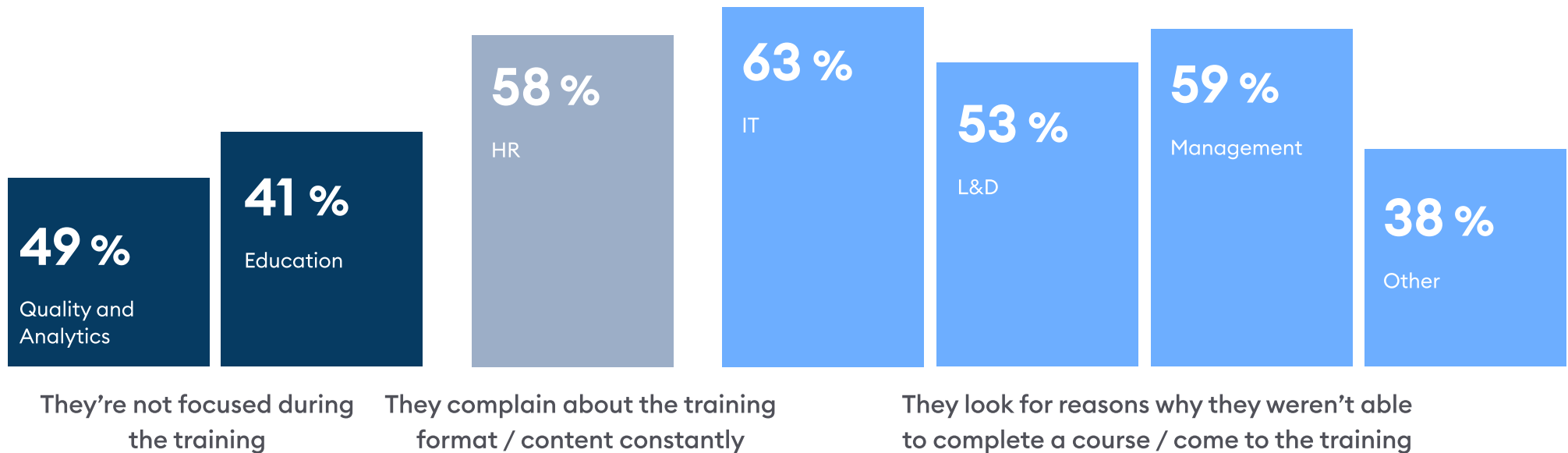
HR specialists: employees complain about the training format and content continuously

The "They complain about the training format and/or content constantly" response also has a significant share. It is most pronounced among HR specialists and may signal a need for a solid L&D function in the company.

While HR team members tend to wear too many different hats, corporate initiatives in learning and development require special attention. It can be more effective to leave these matters to L&D pros. They'll be able to revise the training program thoroughly and develop more engaging learning content using the principles of adult learning.

Other interesting finds on this matter:

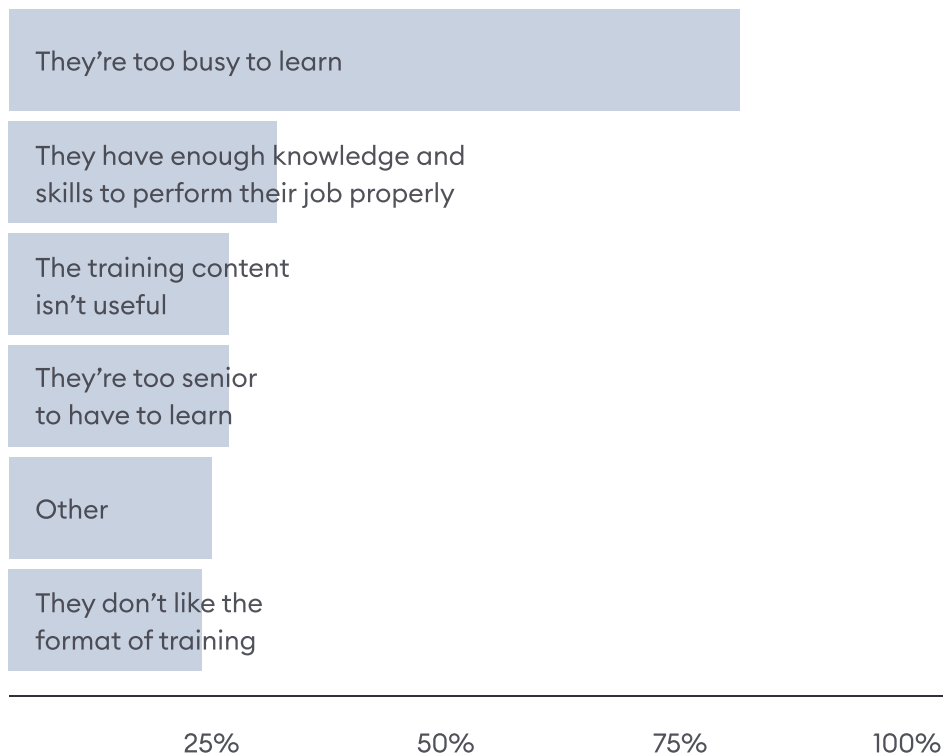
1. HR specialists are mostly irritated by employee complaints about training format or content.
2. Education, Quality and Analytics specialists say that employees highlight their lack of ability to focus.
3. Management, L&D, IT, and BFSI mostly mention excuses as a major form of resistance.



Employees say they lack time to train

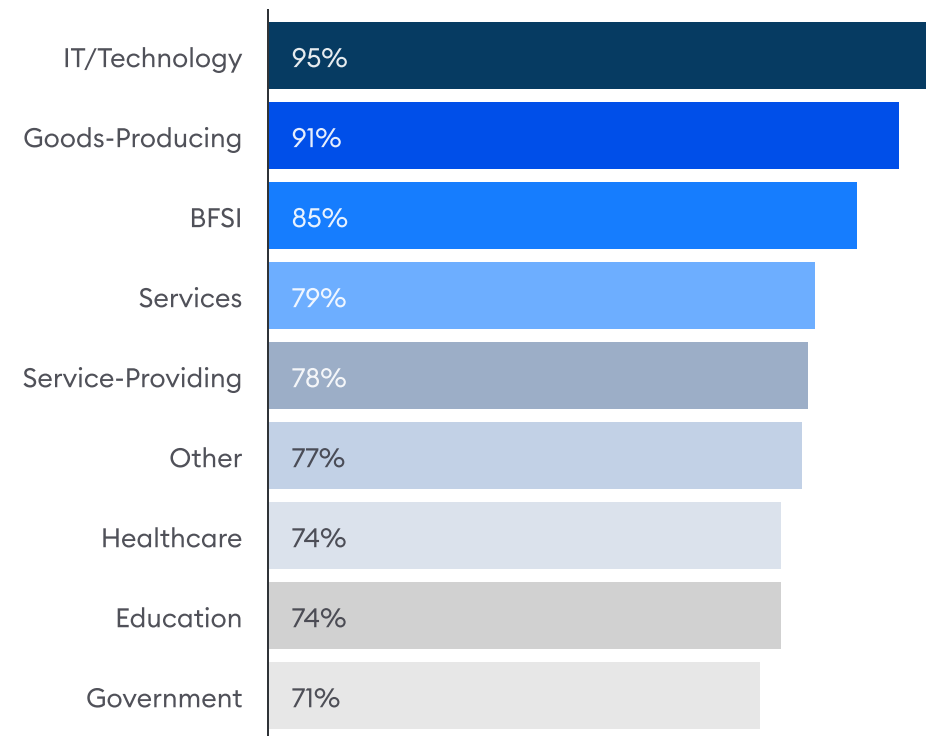
When asked how employees explain their unwillingness to learn, 81% of employers choose the “They're too busy to learn” response. Second on the list is the statement by employees that they already know the material and have all of the needed skills (32%).

Causes of employee’s reluctance to training, % of the total sample



This is most typical for IT, Goods-producing, and Banking sectors.

The 'They're too busy to learn' response: distribution by industry



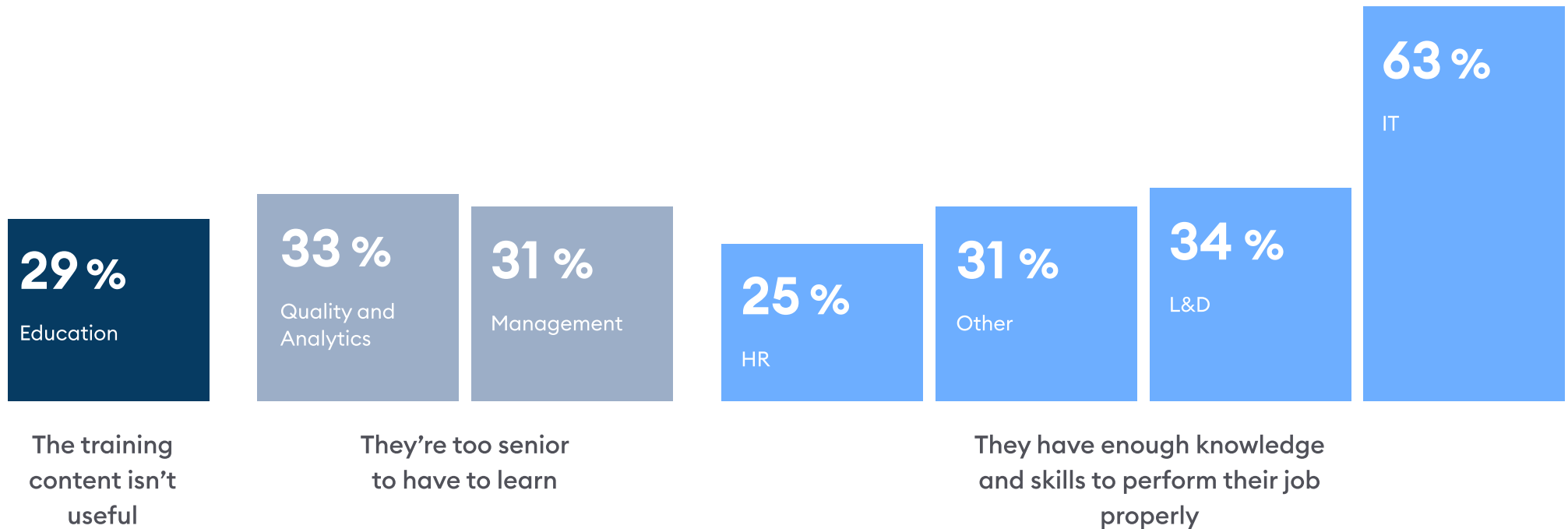
Training can be regarded as lacking value if it doesn't align with self-perceived competence

32% of employers admit that their staff frequently neglects training because they think they already have sufficient knowledge and skills. If employees claim that they know the material and have all the needed skills, we should question either their competence on the changing labor market or the relevance of the training materials.

Given that employers think of skill gaps as the primary reason for initiating training, it's an absolute must to assess existing training programs from the perspective of their accuracy and practical value.

The research shows that this discrepancy is particularly relevant for the IT sphere – this can be a signal of a need to make IT training courses go beyond purely technical competencies.

One of the remarkable findings is that employees in Education tend to think that training content is not useful enough. This shows us that employees would embrace training if it actually matched their needs.



Get a snapshot of employee training

Employers need a solution that will enable them to get a deeper insight into the training procedure and make the entire process more manageable. Consequently, you may want to think about finding a learning management system (LMS) to have everything in one place and track employee training in hard numbers.

If so, make sure you've added iSpring Learn LMS to the list and request a demo. It's a free session with an iSpring expert who will help you discover the features needed to get a better grasp on training and employees' reactions to it. For example, during the demo, you'll see customizable reporting and informative dashboards in action, and learn how to leverage them to identify employee resistance to training.

[Request a free demo →](#)



Part 4

Promoting the Idea of Training

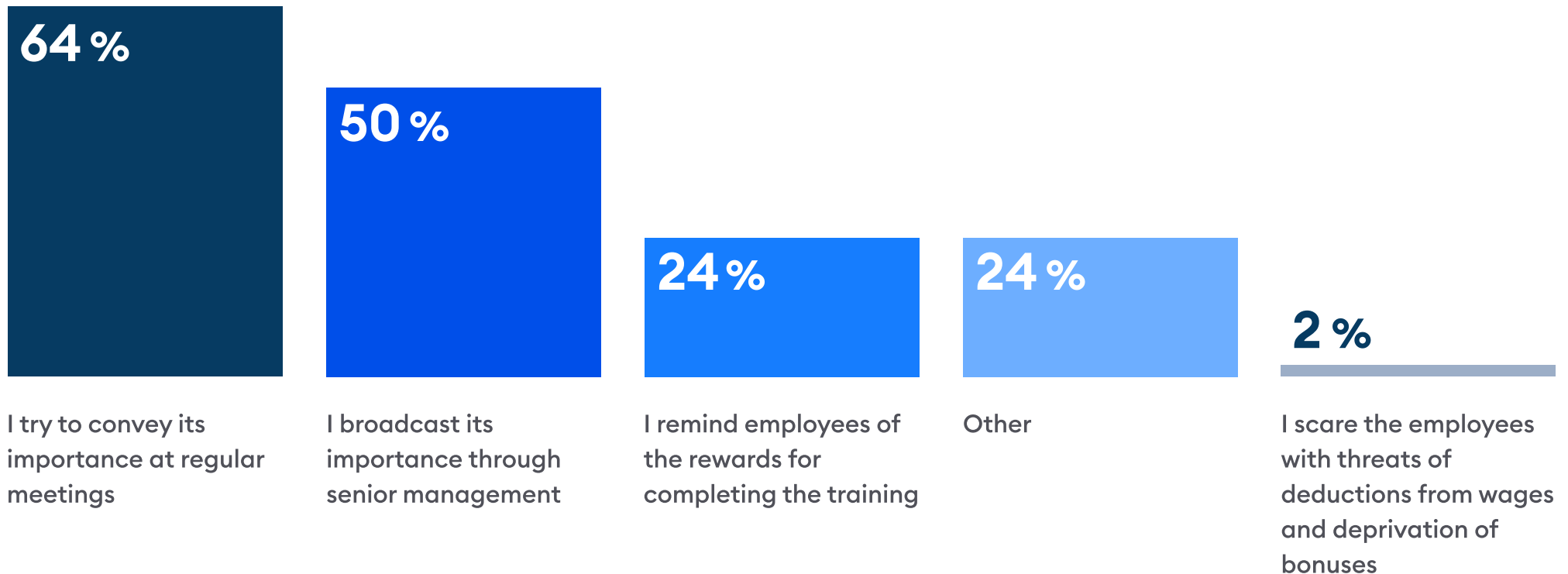


Training specialists prefer to convey the importance of training during personal meetings

64% of training specialists endeavor to convey the importance of training during staff meetings, which includes talking to senior managers about the necessity of training to transmit this idea to the employees.

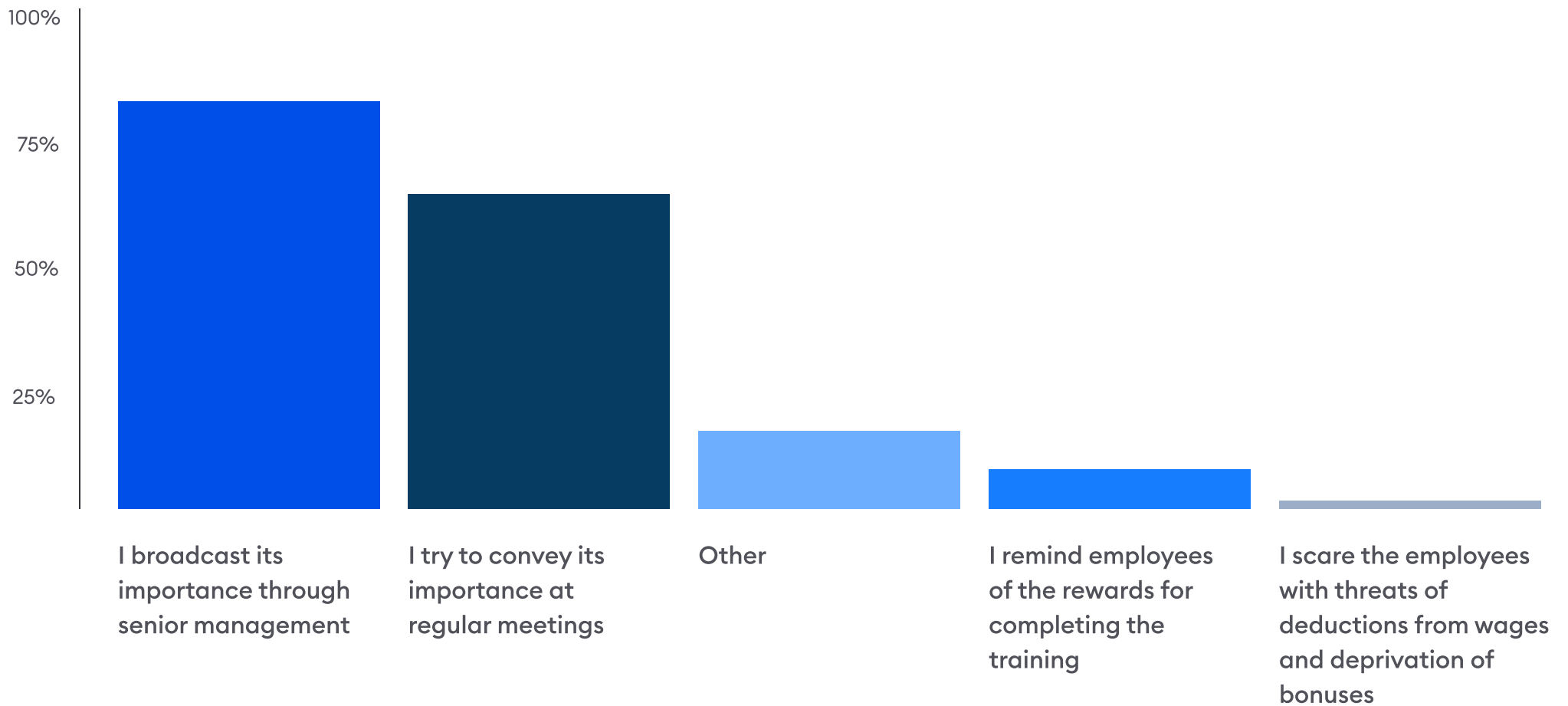
However, 2% of employers scare their staff with salary cuts if they don't participate in training.

How do you promote training, % of the total sample



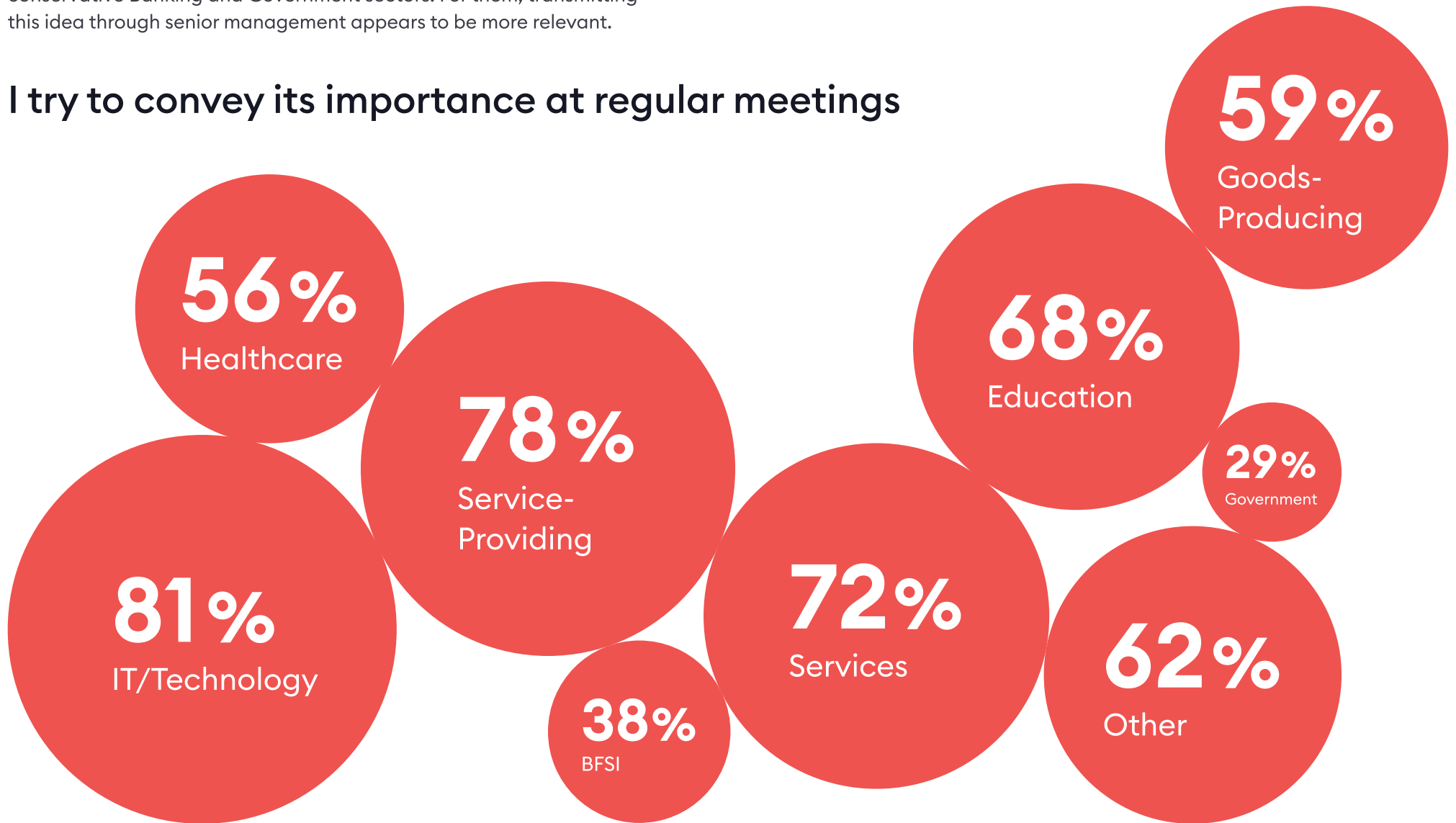
Among HR specialists, broadcasting the importance of training through senior management topped the list of training promotion initiatives – which is expected, because they have this leverage.

How do you promote training, HR perspective

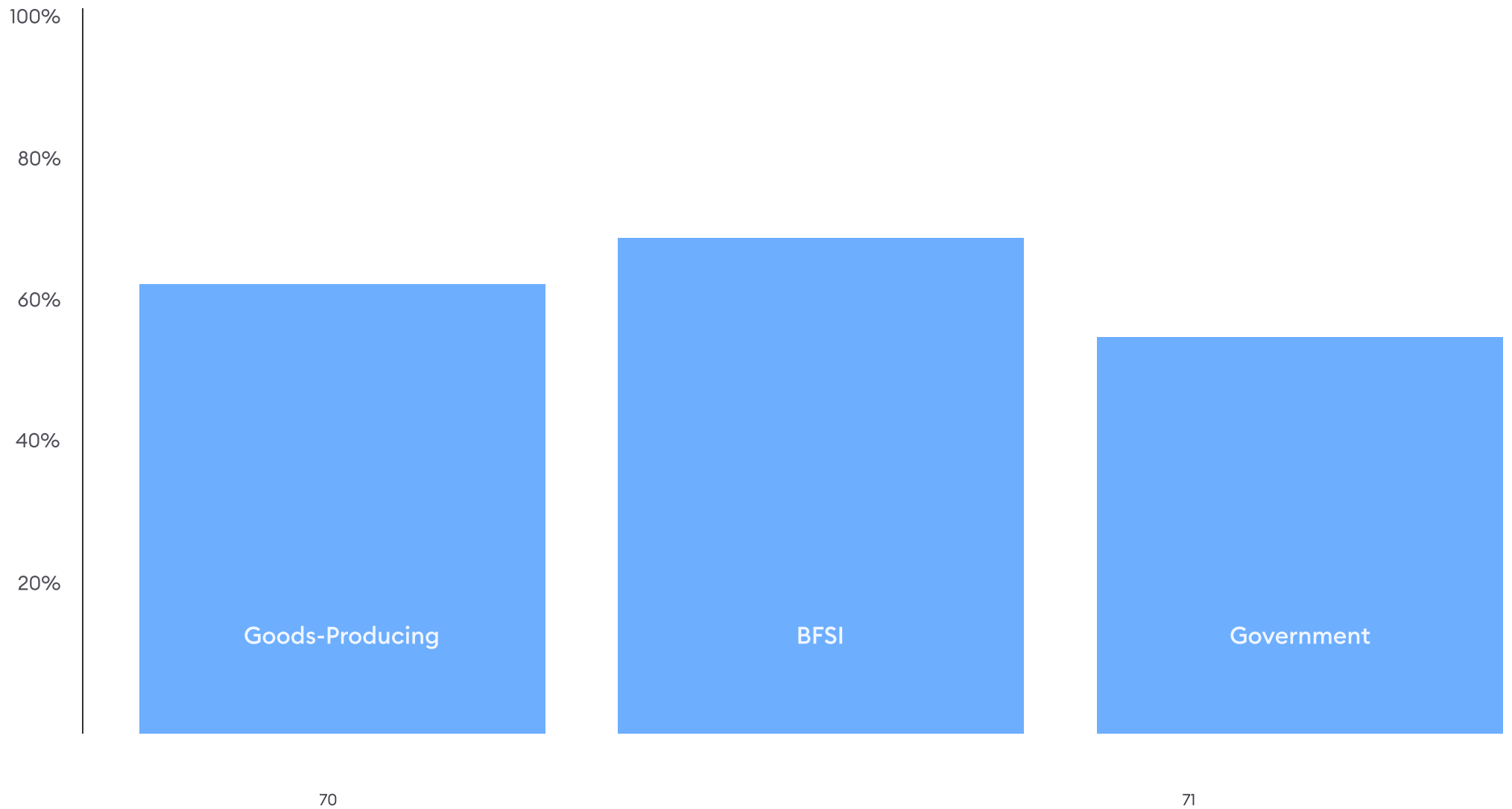


Promoting training during meetings is most popular in IT and Service-Providing industries and least common in presumably more conservative Banking and Government sectors. For them, transmitting this idea through senior management appears to be more relevant.

I try to convey its importance at regular meetings



I broadcast its importance through senior management



65 % of employers explain the why behind training in order to overcome resistance

Among the measures to overcome employee resistance to training, respondents mentioned:

65%

explaining how training is beneficial for their job

55%

giving employees enough time and resources to learn

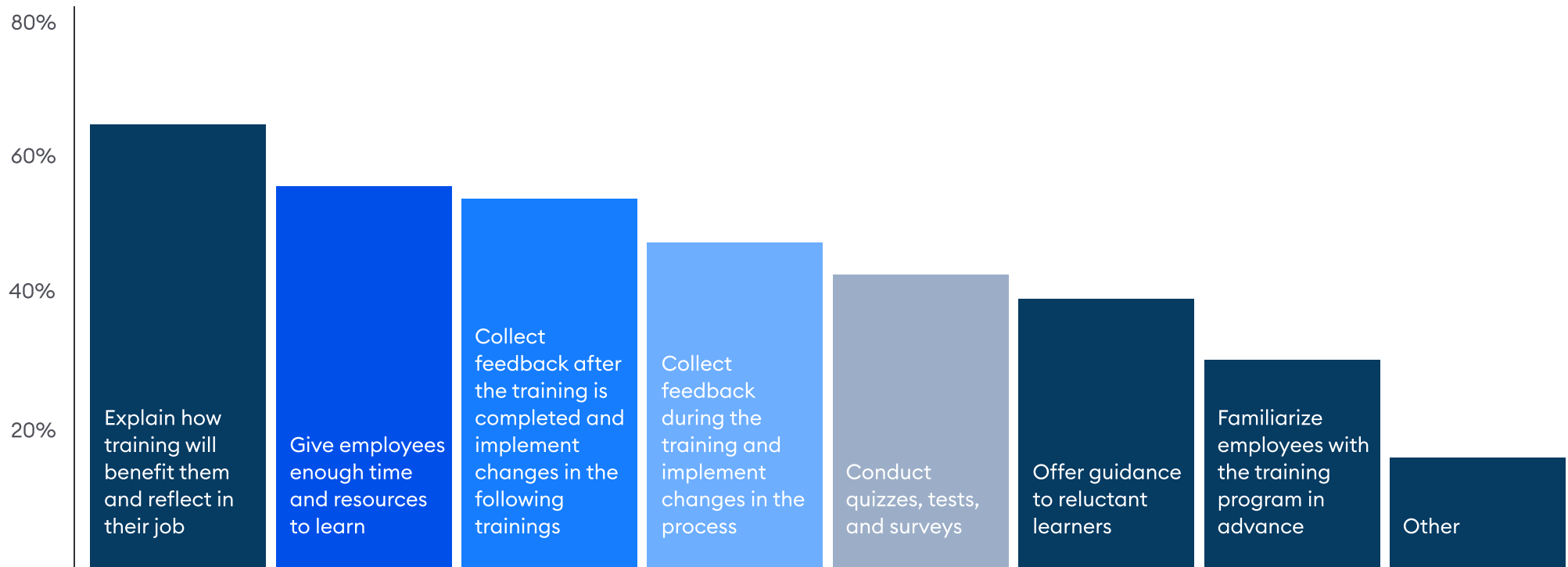
54%

collecting employee feedback afterwards to adjust training further

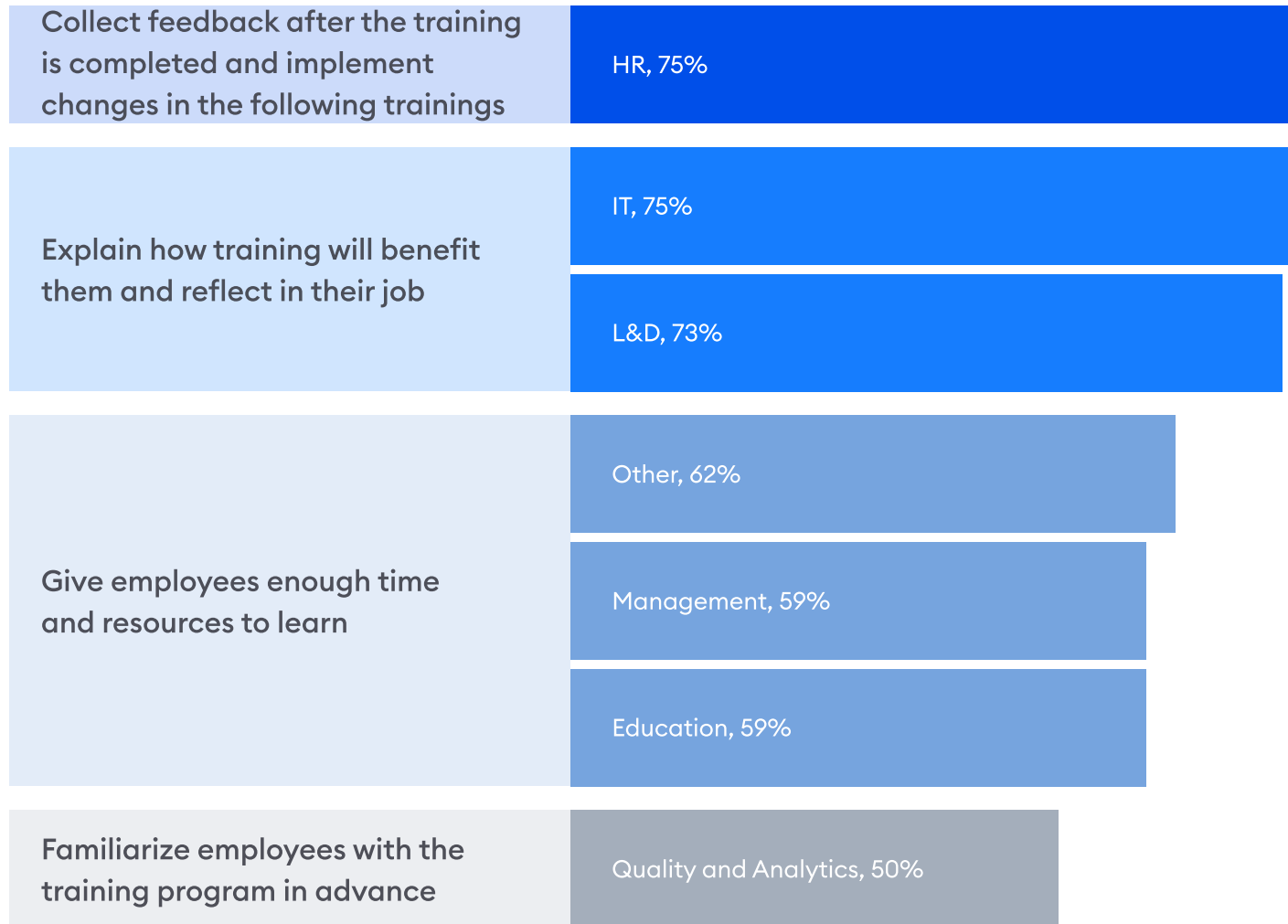
Measures to overcome resistance to training, % of the total sample

All in all, it can be assumed that employers do recognize the need to require training for employees and acknowledge their wants in this regard.

However, we can't be sure that employers can actually find the correct answer to the expected question, "What's in it for me?"

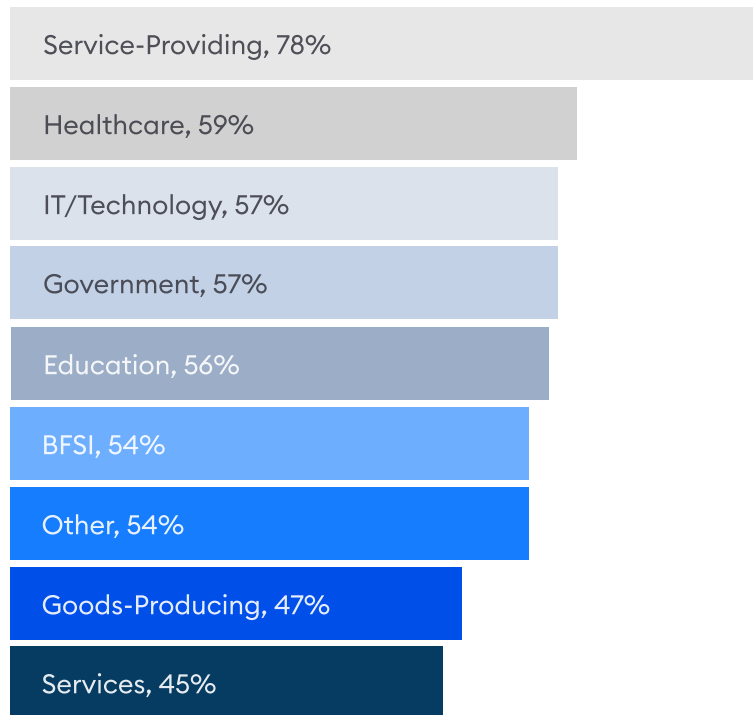


In particular, collecting feedback is mostly common among HR specialists, while showing the benefits of training is more prominent among L&D and IT specialists, as well as respondents in other roles.



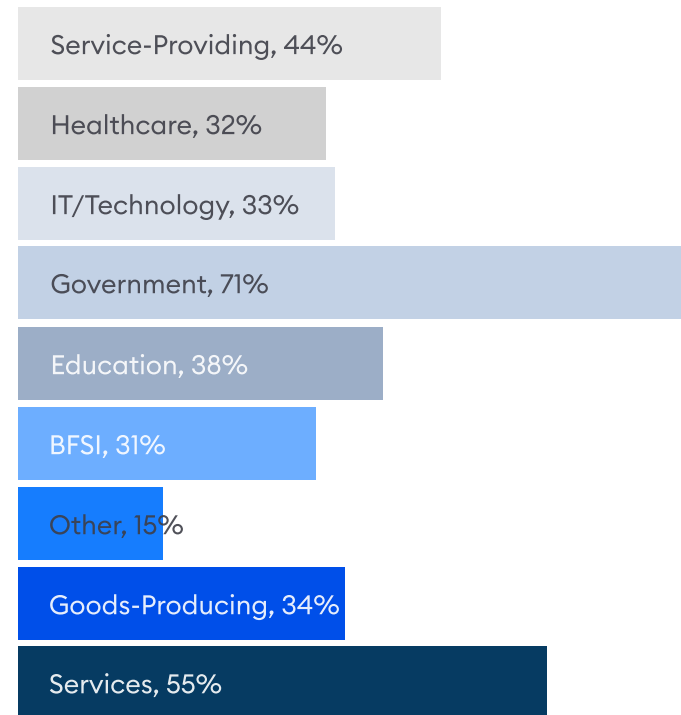
The response “giving employees enough time and resources to learn” is most noticeable in the Service-providing and Healthcare industries.

Give employees enough time and resources to learn



The latter corresponds with the fact that 44% of healthcare specialists complain of a lack of time and need flexibility when accessing training.

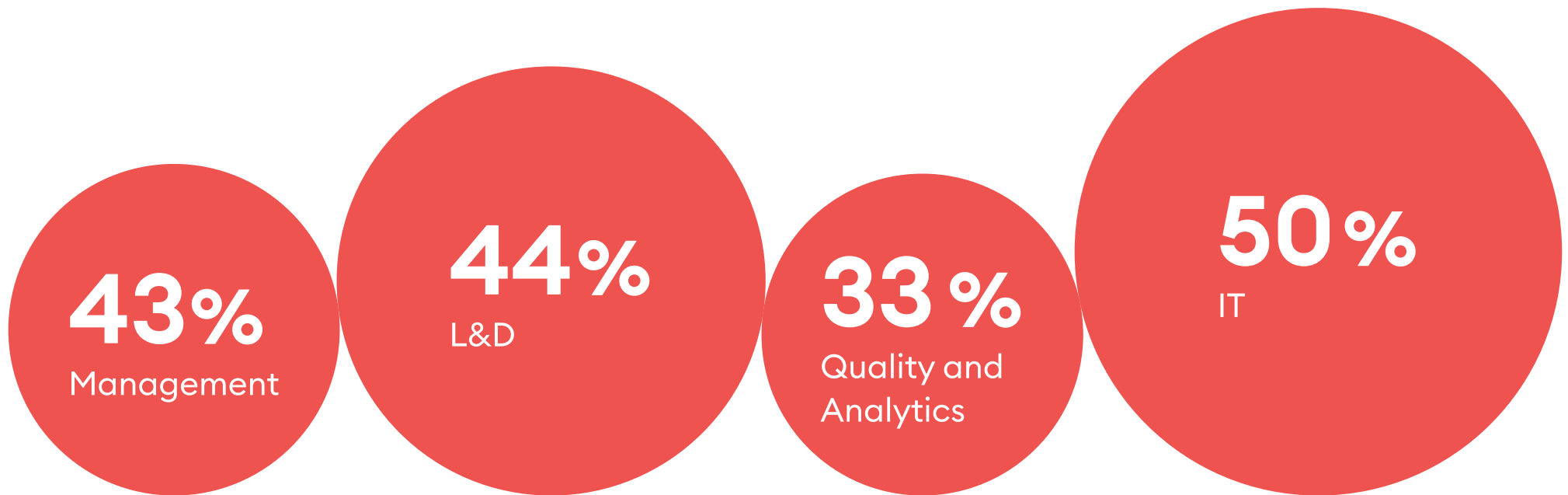
Offer guidance to reluctant learners



Certificates remain the principal way to motivate employees to embrace training

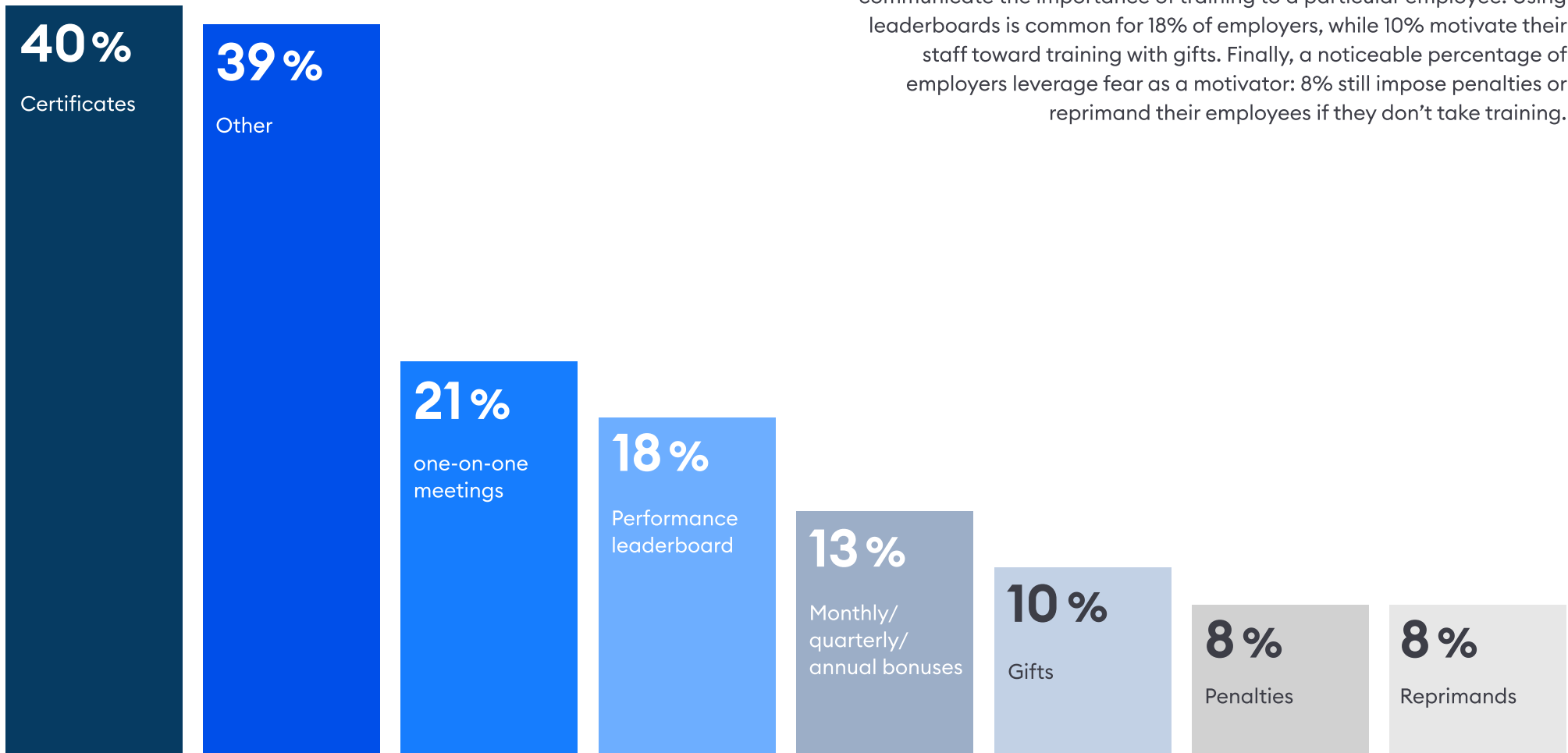
40% of the employers queried prefer to motivate employees to learn with certificates – this is justified by the long-standing credential-driven approach in organizations. Certificates are most popular among respondents from the IT, L&D, Quality Analytics, and Management divisions.

Who uses certificates to motivate employees



What incentives do you use to motivate employees to learn

Our research suggests that 21% of respondents conduct 1:1s to communicate the importance of training to a particular employee. Using leaderboards is common for 18% of employers, while 10% motivate their staff toward training with gifts. Finally, a noticeable percentage of employers leverage fear as a motivator: 8% still impose penalties or reprimand their employees if they don't take training.



Motivate employees smartly

If you prefer to motivate employees with certificates of completion or with leaderboards as well, you can do both with the iSpring Learn LMS. iSpring Learn can issue customizable certificates of completion automatically and compile dynamic leaderboards that display top performers. You also can maintain employee engagement by encouraging learners to leave comments and feedback on discussion boards and rate courses with stars. They can do this on mobile devices as well, via the handy iSpring Learn app for iOS or Android.

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Part 5

“What's in It for Me?”: Employers on What It Takes to Achieve Training Buy-in

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Going beyond dry statistics, let's give a voice to the training professionals who gave their input to this research. We think that their insights can make a great contribution.

It all starts
from the head

“It is important that leadership is onboard and leading the way. Without leadership buy-in, your efforts will be less effective in the long run and it will be more difficult to reduce training resistance.”

“Overcoming resistance is incredibly difficult when senior management isn't aligned with one another.”

“The most resistance comes from production supervisors who have tight KPI to respect and thus forbid their production employees to go to training sessions for fear this will affect their productivity negatively. The result is obviously to the contrary: we observe a lack of skill, knowledge, and know-how, which leads to errors and lower productivity.”

“Employee resistance is due to either supervisor pressure to complete work tasks (this is inappropriate and supervisors are gradually being reprimanded for this unhelpful behavior) or due to very poorly acted training 'videos!'”

Adequacy of training

“I have a lot of resistance to training mandated by compliance requirements which employees do not feel are central to their job functions.”

“When employees are aware that a training requirement is coming (scheduled well in advance) and they can plan for it. There is much less reluctance to complete the training without taking shortcuts when the topic is relevant, not repeating the exact same courses and information as last year, especially for recurring requirements.”

“I find that if they know the benefits for them (What’s in It for Me?), they’re less resistant.”

“If you can convey the importance and impact, aka, “What’s in it for me?” to each colleague, the reluctance decreases significantly. We’re still looking for ways to really ingrain continuous learning into the fiber of the organization and culture.”

The importance of WIIFM

‘You owe me’ vs. getting paid for training

“Treat people fairly; specifically, underachievers who feel underappreciated.”

“We remind them that the completion of training is a condition of employment.”

“As training is required by the business, we are now paying employees to complete it at home (which has helped a little bit).”

Overcoming survivorship bias

Collaboration with learners

“If learners are involved in the development process, it promotes greater acceptance of training.”

Learning in bursts

“We hear a lot about the courses being “too long” and they are “too busy”. So, we have tried to make smaller chunks of training to encourage participation.”

“Increasing eLearning interactivity and visual elements increases interest and reduces resistance.”

The WHY behind training

“It is all about how you frame why the training is important. Understand your employees’ “WHYs” and figure out how to weave the learning into purposeful outcomes.”

Practical Insights for Training Managers and Employers

Our research shows that, while many employers still opt for synchronous training sessions, their employees keep saying they're too busy for training or find it unfeasible to participate in it.

This can be fixed with more consumable training initiatives like microlearning, which would deliver portions of knowledge one piece at a time.

Keep it accessible and convenient for employees

If we presume that most of the workforce does have credentials and experience in their fields, synchronous training might not be the best option for them. Plus, in many cases, it is not employee, but *management* resistance to training. Managers are used to thinking that training eats up time and productivity, so companies should do their best to fit employee training into their operations smoothly.

Our research shows that employers don't demonstrate a clear understanding of employees' needs. They report that employees tend to skip training, make excuses, or refer to the lack of focus. But it's challenging for them to accept that the training format, as it is at present, doesn't address employee needs. Training is deemed to be either too intrusive or even unnecessary, and employees lack the motivation to do it. This raises the question of whether employers collect feedback and learn employee preferences, or if they act blindly.

Gain feedback and survey employee motivation

Discussing training needs with employees and gaining their opinion would help to remedy the situation and elaborate a training approach that is aligned with employee needs.

Practical Insights for Training Managers and Employers

iSpring's research demonstrates that respondents prioritize training completion rate and employee performance as core training metrics, and rarely go beyond pass or fail rates in quiz reporting. They also rarely use surveys and quizzes in training, which significantly limits indirect feedback options.

Given that employee satisfaction rates #4 on the list of most important training metrics, we can't be sure that training is balanced and employee opinion is taken into account. Indirectly, this is confirmed by the survey results regarding excuses employees use to avoid doing training.

Walk the talk and really pay attention to employee satisfaction

Employers who really need to see their business growing and employee performance improving cannot just run training in order to tick the box. They need to create real conditions for improved employee engagement in continuous learning in the workplace.

Ignite the desire to learn at the grassroots level

Our research shows that employers still opt for extrinsic motivation. They stimulate employees with rewards, or conversely, leverage fear by imposing penalties. Rewards are still good incentives, especially as a part of the gamification strategy. While giving recognition to those who excel in training, it's advisable to boost intrinsic motivation as well. Show how training can improve the way people work, and make it a part of advancement criteria.

About iSpring

iSpring Solutions is a US-based international software company focused on providing professional eLearning software and tools.

iSpring's signature products, the iSpring Suite authoring tool and the iSpring Learn LMS, help 59,000 clients worldwide reduce training costs and streamline training processes for better business performance.

 **iSpring suite**

 **iSpring learn**

iSpring L&D Consulting



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