

# The Voice of the Learner



## The Voice of the Learner: How Employees Learn in 2008

Employees today are learning how to do their jobs very differently! e-Learning, on-line Video, Social Networks and other Informal methods are now options for learning, in addition to more traditional Classes and On-The-Job Training (OJT).

A recent survey by The MASIE Center of 6,100 employees in companies around the world provides a profile of how employees currently learn at work and how their learning preferences are changing.

### Learning Methods:

- **Learning Independently:** The majority of employees today rely heavily on self-directed, ad hoc and asynchronous resources like e-Learning to learn for work. In a six-month period of time, 70% turned to reading, 58% searched the web and 58% participated in on-line e-Learning to gain new skills or information for their jobs.
- **YouTube-Type Learning:** Over 30% of respondents viewed a media segment for learning (like a YouTube video) on their computer screens; however, only 6% moved these segments to a portable device like an iPod or MP3 Player. Mostly, employees indicated that such technology was either not available or not used by their organizations.

### Employee/Learner Satisfaction:

- Employees appear satisfied with their ability to learn for work using technology (80%), but are generally less satisfied with the amount of time they have available to learn (48%). It seems that as options for learning have expanded, perceptions about the availability of time to learn have decreased. Employees have more learning methods available to them than ever, but have less time to pursue learning and/or feel overwhelmed with their options.

### Learner Preferences:

- **Learning Changes Ahead:** More than half of the employees sampled expect their preferences for how they learn for work to change in the next 2-3 years (54%).
- **High-Touch with High-Tech:** Learners appreciate high-touch experiences and indicated wanting more time to receive one-on-one mentoring, coaching or individual training as opposed to OJT or self-directed, ad hoc learning. This includes group discussions and the ability to directly interact with others at conferences and in classrooms within their own organizations. Quite a few learners look forward to or hope to get more one-on-one mentoring, coaching or individual training, despite the reality that employees report about having less time for training.

### **Job Rotation/Stretch Assignments:**

- **Let Us Stretch:** Job Rotation/Stretch Assignments are among the least frequently used learning methods selected only by 11% of employees, predominantly because the opportunities were not available to them. Half of employees that had not participated in a job rotation/stretch assignment indicated that those opportunities were either not available or not used by their organizations; yet, supporting data suggests that employees overwhelmingly want more of their time dedicated to those kinds of experiences.

### **Some Quotes from the Workplace:**

Here are a few of the quotes we received from the survey participants:

#### **“What I like most about how I am currently learning for work is...”**

‘Having a variety of delivery methods. Ten years ago it was one way or the highway!’

‘The ability to use digital technology for any-time, anywhere learning.’

‘I could plug in my Mp3 player in my car and learn while I wait uselessly in traffic.’

‘Freedom of delivery vehicle - in person, asynchronous, synch/live, anonymous, collaborative...’

‘The combination of in-person classes with online reinforcement.’

#### **“I would learn better in the future if...”**

‘I had more time to devote to specific tasks related to learning and advanced technology.’

‘I experienced more collaboration and discussions vs. reading and learning on my own.’

‘Time were permitted without outside pressure to complete learning.’

This survey was conducted by The MASIE Center & The Learning CONSORTIUM.

Yours in Learning,



Elliott Masie  
CEO & Chair  
The MASIE Center & Learning CONSORTIUM

## About the Voice of the Learner Project

Learning professionals can turn to any number of studies for information about how organizations deploy learning, but surprisingly, we hear very little about learning from the employee's perspective. Last year, The MASIE Center launched The "Voice" of the Learner initiative to spotlight how employees approach and access learning resources each day, and how they participate in learning activities at work. The project began last year with the administration of a poll of worldwide employees. The results have implications for how we design and deploy learning in organizations.

## About Our Voice of the Learner Poll

Using their previous six months as a reference period, the survey gathered information about how employees participate in learning activities at work. We asked employees to indicate the style of activities they used to gain work-related knowledge or skills (e.g. classes, on-line learning, on-the-job training and even new models like PodCasts). We captured the reasons the learning tools/methods were used or not used, and how learners spent the majority of their time learning for work. We also asked how satisfied employees are with the tools/methods they use to learn for work and how they feel they could learn better in the future.

## About Our Sample

As of July 3, 2008, we received 6,133 survey submissions across various industries and organizations from around the world. Participants include members from the following organizations/communities of practice:

- The MASIE Learning CONSORTIUM
- TRENDS Newsletter subscribers
- ASAE and the Association for Association Leadership
- The Society for Insurance Trainers and Educators (SITE)

Employees from Allstate, Nationwide, and Park Nicollet Health Services represent a proportionately larger percentage of our sample as these organizations chose to administer this survey within their own organizations for internal analysis as part of their membership benefits. Employees from a broad range of industries, roles, ages and tenure were surveyed. Here are some additional details:

- The range of 35-54 years of age represented the largest demographic group (61%).
- Professionals made up the largest portion of the sample (33%); 22% identified themselves as Managers, 11% as support staff, 10% were technical professionals.
- Financial Services had the largest industry representation (15%).
- One third of all participants had been with their organization between 5-10 years (33%).

## Implications

We are moving towards more learner-centric models of learning in which employees actively choose from a series of learning options for their specific inquiries and to solve problems. Given the choices, the unique needs and preferences of employees and the paramount need for alignment with business strategy, how can we best design learning to maximize employee and organizational performance? The answer is in the mix:

- **Make High-Impact Learning Convenient and Readily Available** – Our results suggest convenience plays a big part in tools/method selection. At the same time, connectivity to information and learning are more important than ever for organizations to successfully compete in the marketplace. Consider opportunities in your organization to make learning available quickly and easily: any time, anywhere. This includes checking your mobile/portable technology. It's possible that more learning would take place if more employees had access to learning on a portable device.

- **Foster Opportunities for Informal Learning** – Learners are increasingly turning to peers and colleagues for help with work-related inquiries and problem solving. Although not always tracked, these opportunities can provide context and have high impact for employees and their performance.
- **Enable Effective Web Searches** – Web searches represent one of the most readily-used learning methods in the workplace; yet, we rarely consider this when designing learning strategies. Nearly 60% of our sample relied on the web to learn for work, but most web searches at work are done ineffectively and often end in frustration. Instruction on Boolean searching, for example, could lead to more effective searching and learning.
- **Consider “Cafeteria” Models of Learning** – Content that is offered in multiple formats has the potential to reach learners in ways that better appeal to their individual preferences and availability.
- **Weave in High-Touch Experiences** – Adding employee-to-employee experiences (like classrooms, seminars, training with managers and job rotation/stretch assignments) would not eliminate the focus on self-directed learning (like reading and searching the web). Working them in strategically as learning options may have high impact for the employee.

## Respondent Profile

Below is a demographic profile of the 6,133 respondents as of July 3, 2008.

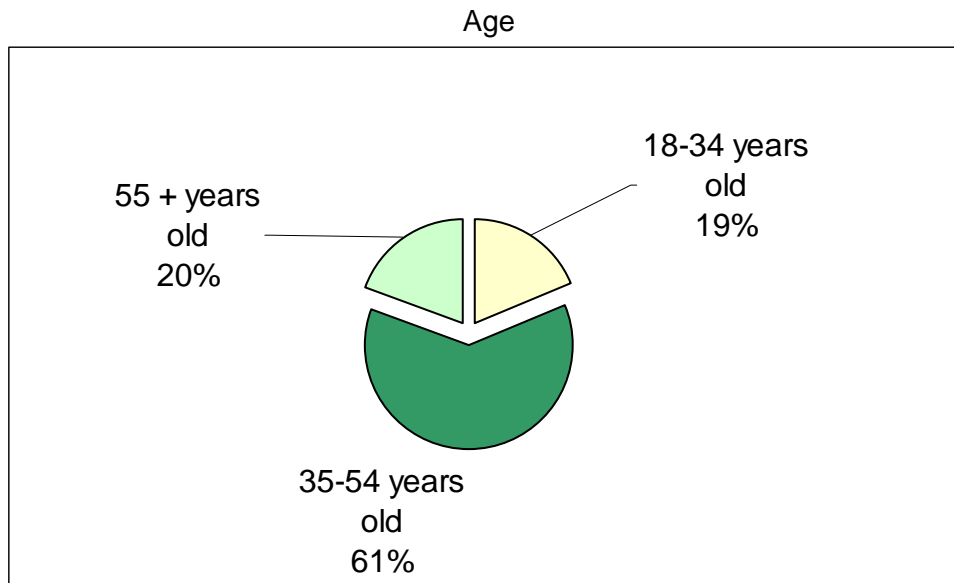


Figure 1 – Distribution of Survey Responses by Age

### Role in Organization

Managerial	22%
Clerical	4%
Professional	33%
Executive	7%
Technical	10%
Sales	3%
Service	6%
Support	11%
Other	4%

Figure 2 – Distribution of Survey Responses by Role

Time at Current Job

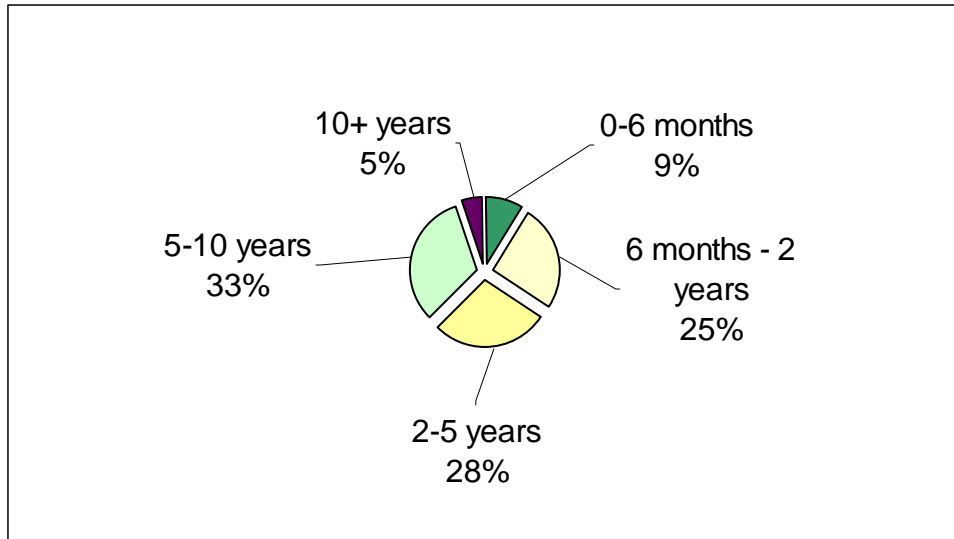


Figure 3 – Distribution of Survey Response by Job Tenure

Industry Breakdown

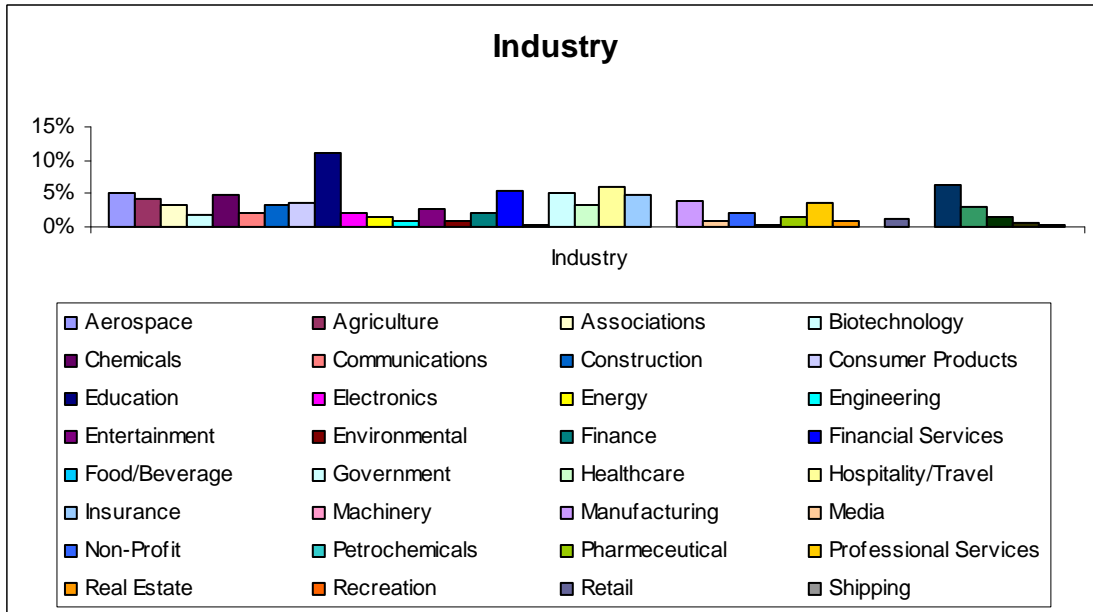


Figure 4 – Distribution of Survey Responses by Industry

### Learning Tools/Methods Used

Reading (70%), e-Learning courses (58%) and Searching the Web (58%) were the most commonly used options by our sample in the last six months. Job Rotation/Stretch Assignments (11%), University Courses (19%) and Short Media Segments viewed on an iPod/mp3 Player (6%) were the least commonly used options in that timeframe.

Figure 5 lists the learning tools/methods we included in our survey and the percentage of our sample that used each in the last six months to support themselves on the job.

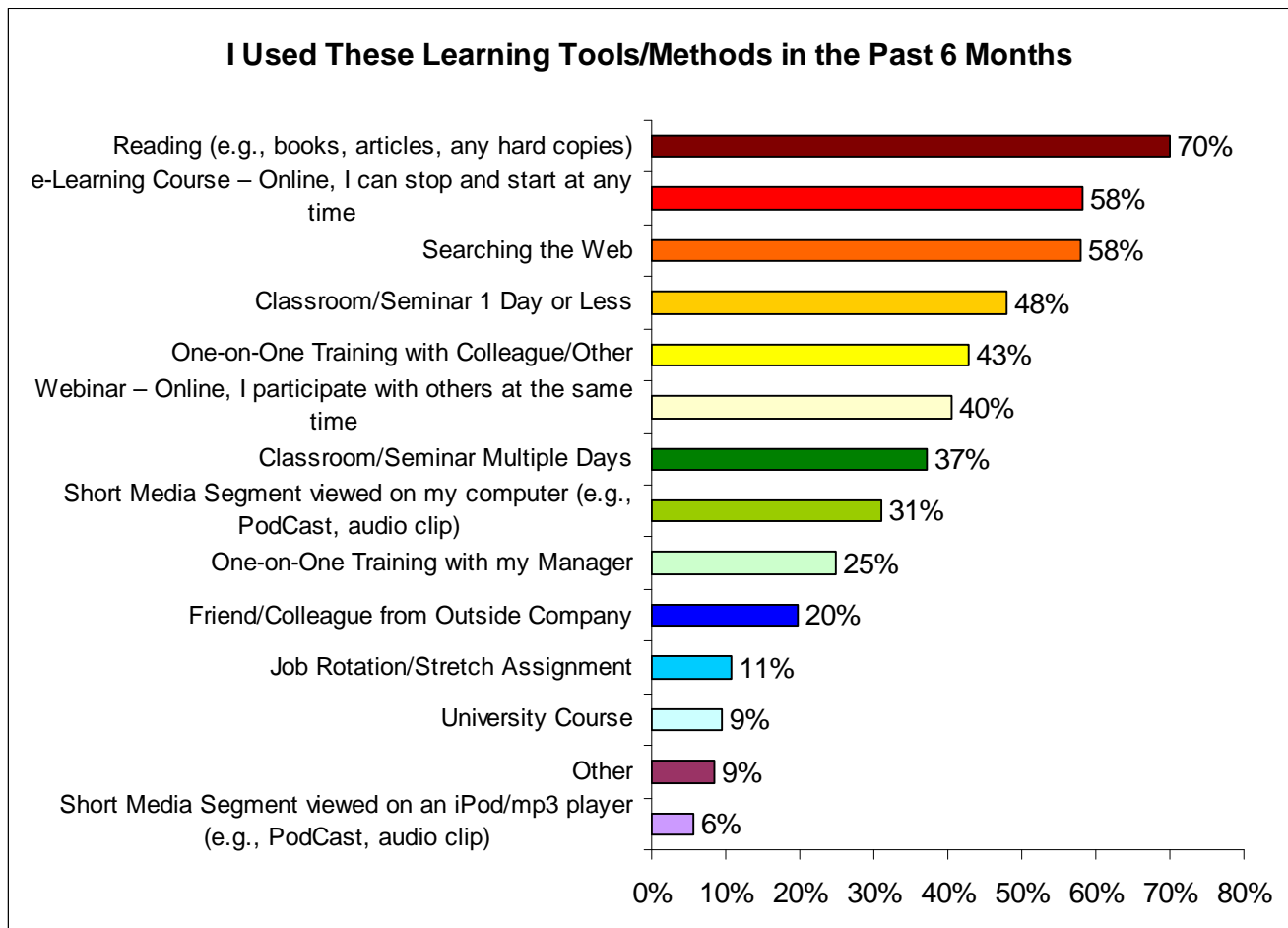


Figure 5 – Learning Tools/Methods Used in the Past 6 months

### Reason for Learning Tool/Method Usage

Below is a breakdown of the three most common and three least common learning tools/methods and why they were or were not selected by respondents in the last six months.

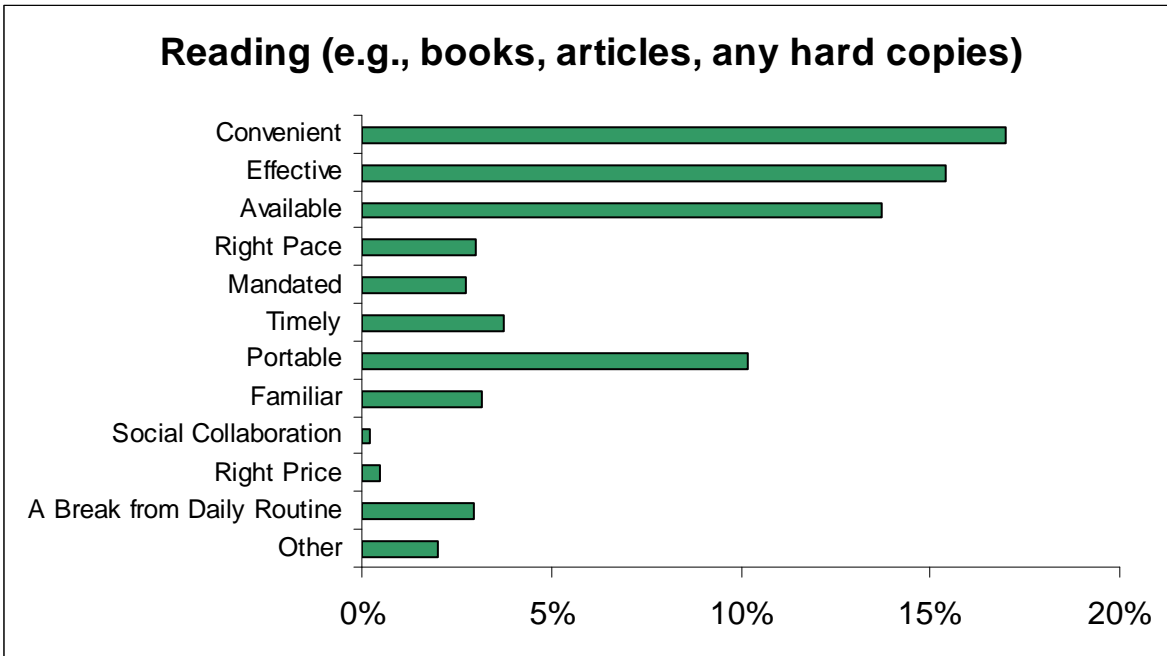


Figure 6 – Reasons Participants Used Reading to Learn for Work

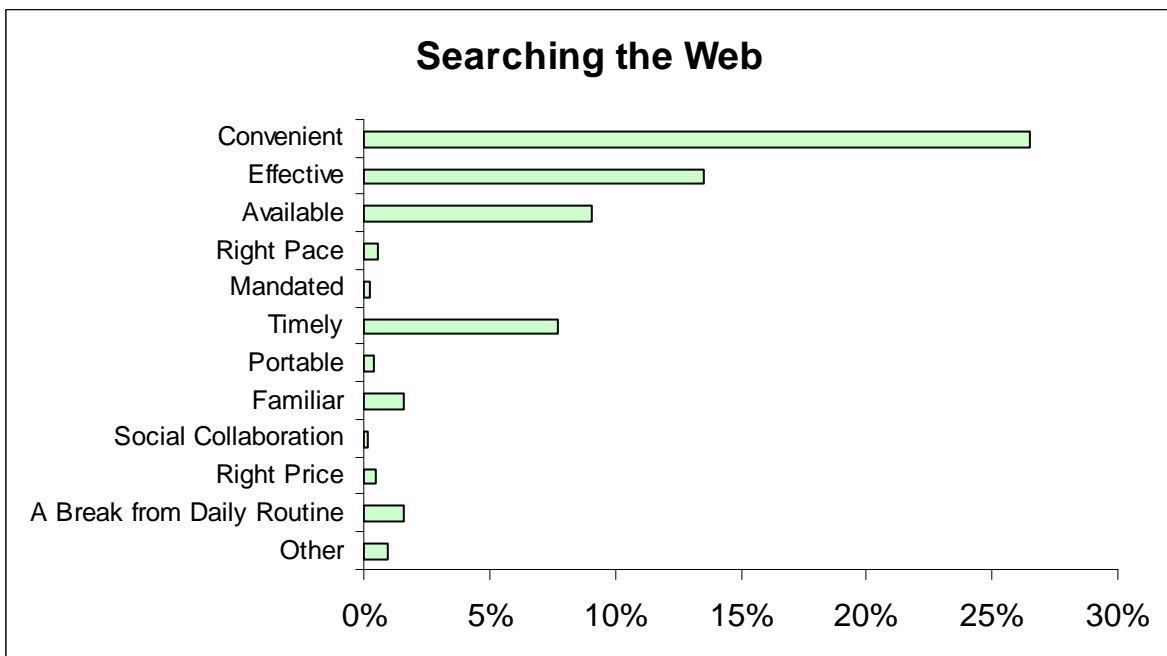


Figure 7 – Reasons Participants Used the Web to Learn for Work

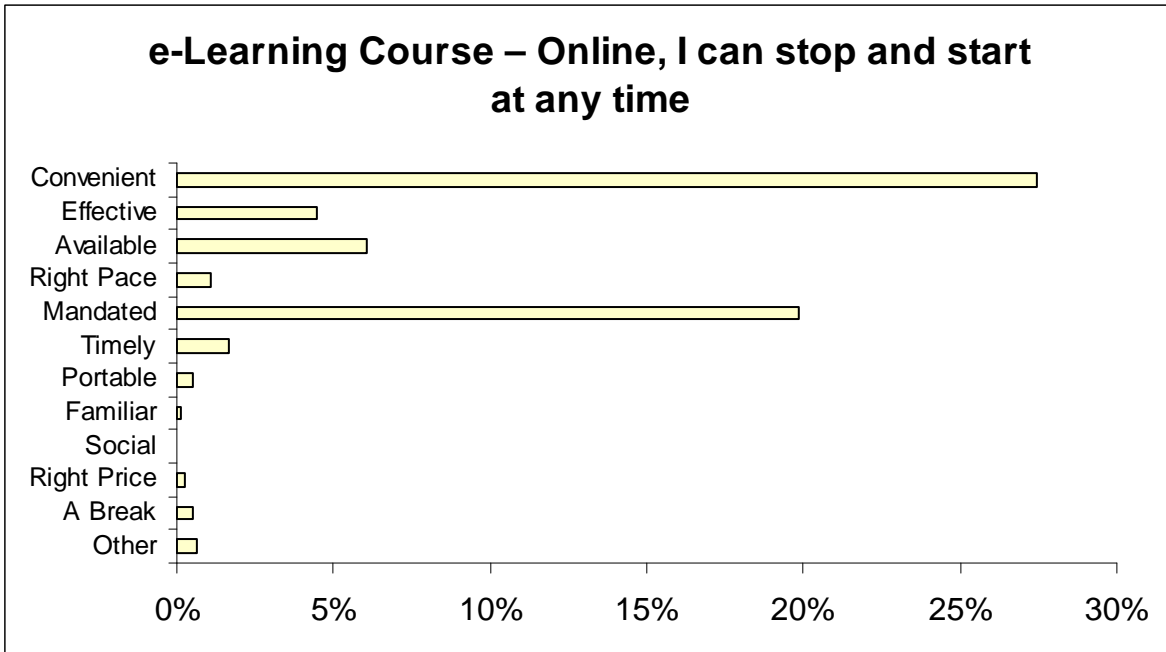


Figure 8 – Reasons Participants Used e-Learning to Learn for Work

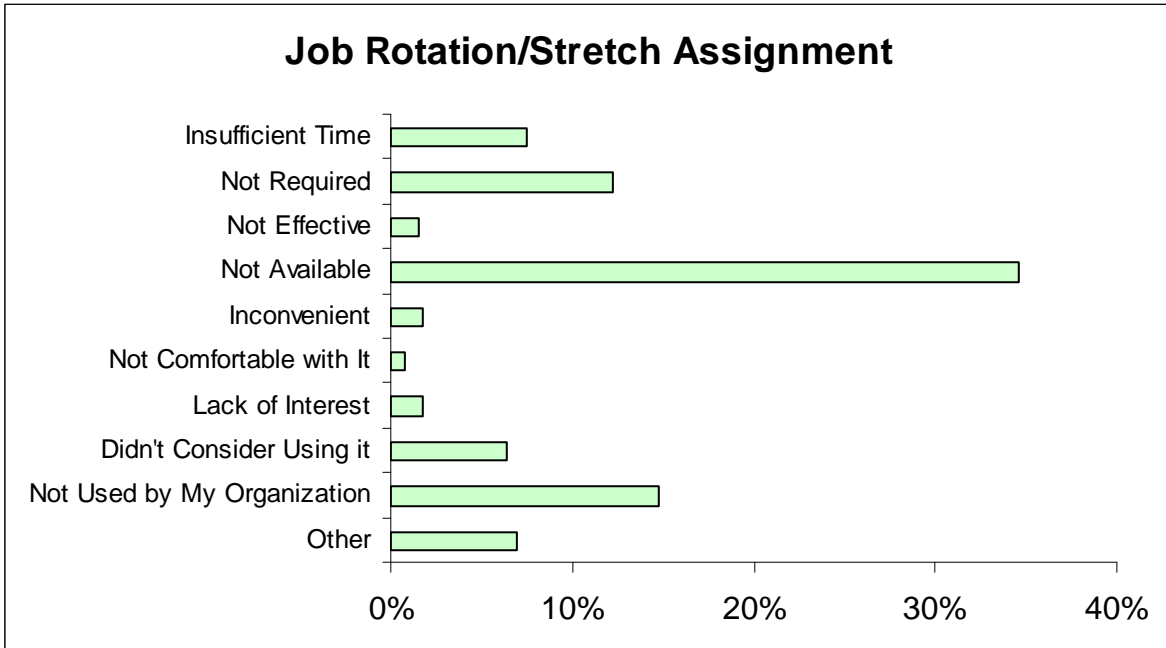


Figure 9 – Reasons Participants Did Not Use a Job Rotation/Stretch Assignment to Learn for Work

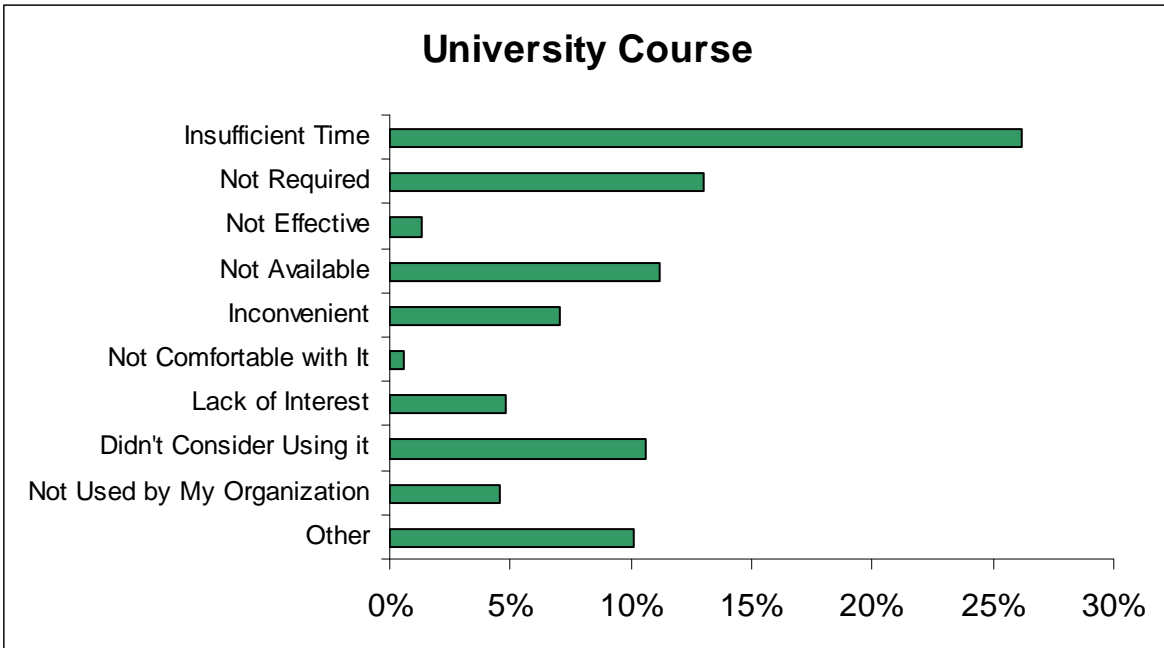


Figure 10 – Reasons Participants Did Not Use a University Course to Learn for Work

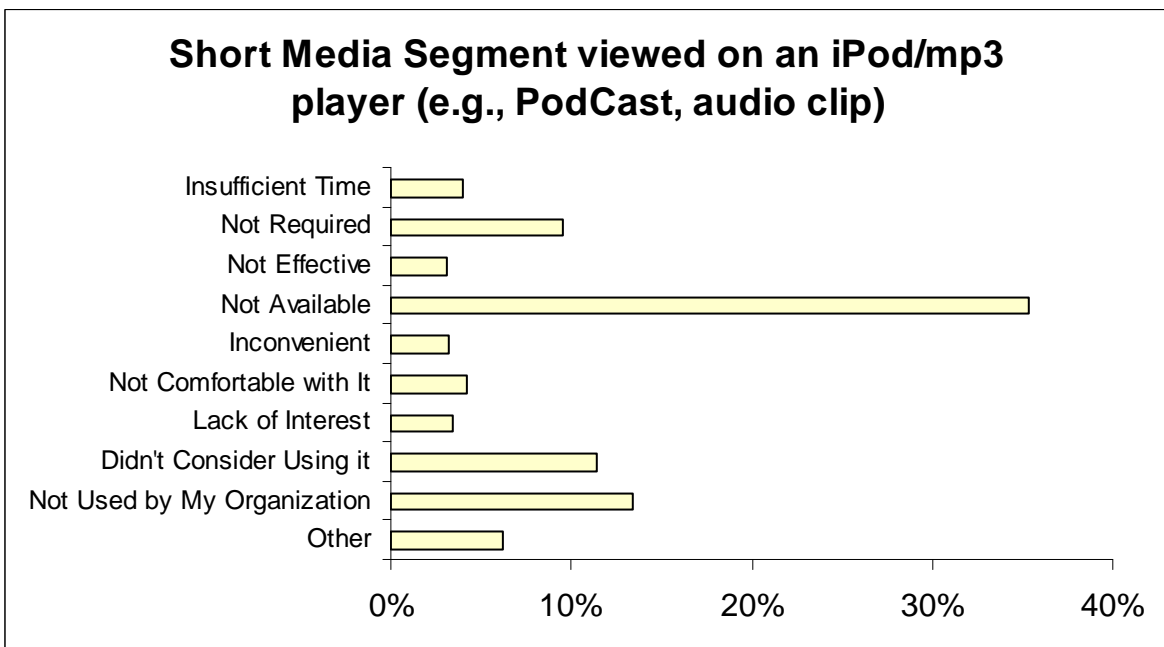


Figure 11 – Reasons Participants Did Not Use a Short Media Segment on aniPod/mp3 player to Learn for Work

**Learning Tools/Methods Selected By Demographic Profile**

### Learning Tool by Age Group Analysis

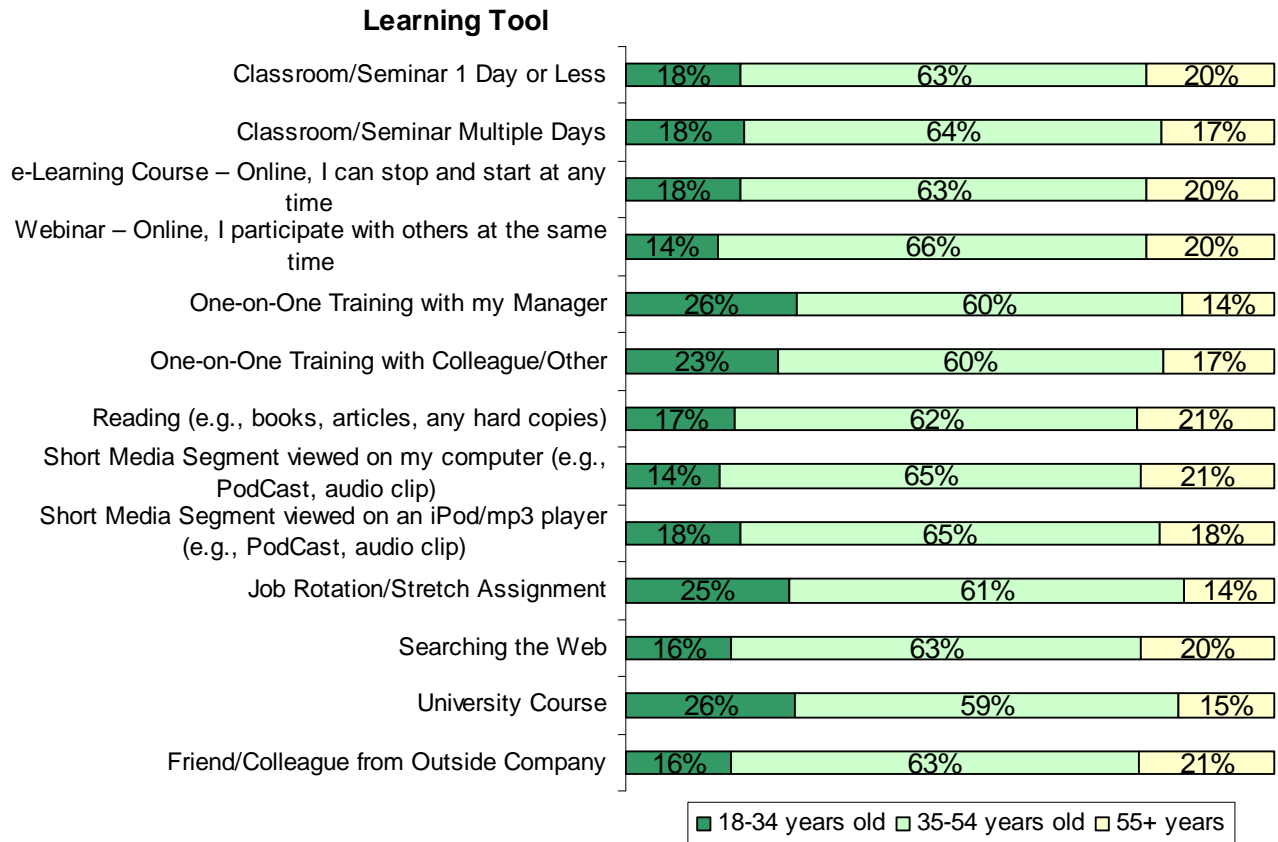


Figure 12 – How Participants Learned by Age Group

### Learning Tool by Role

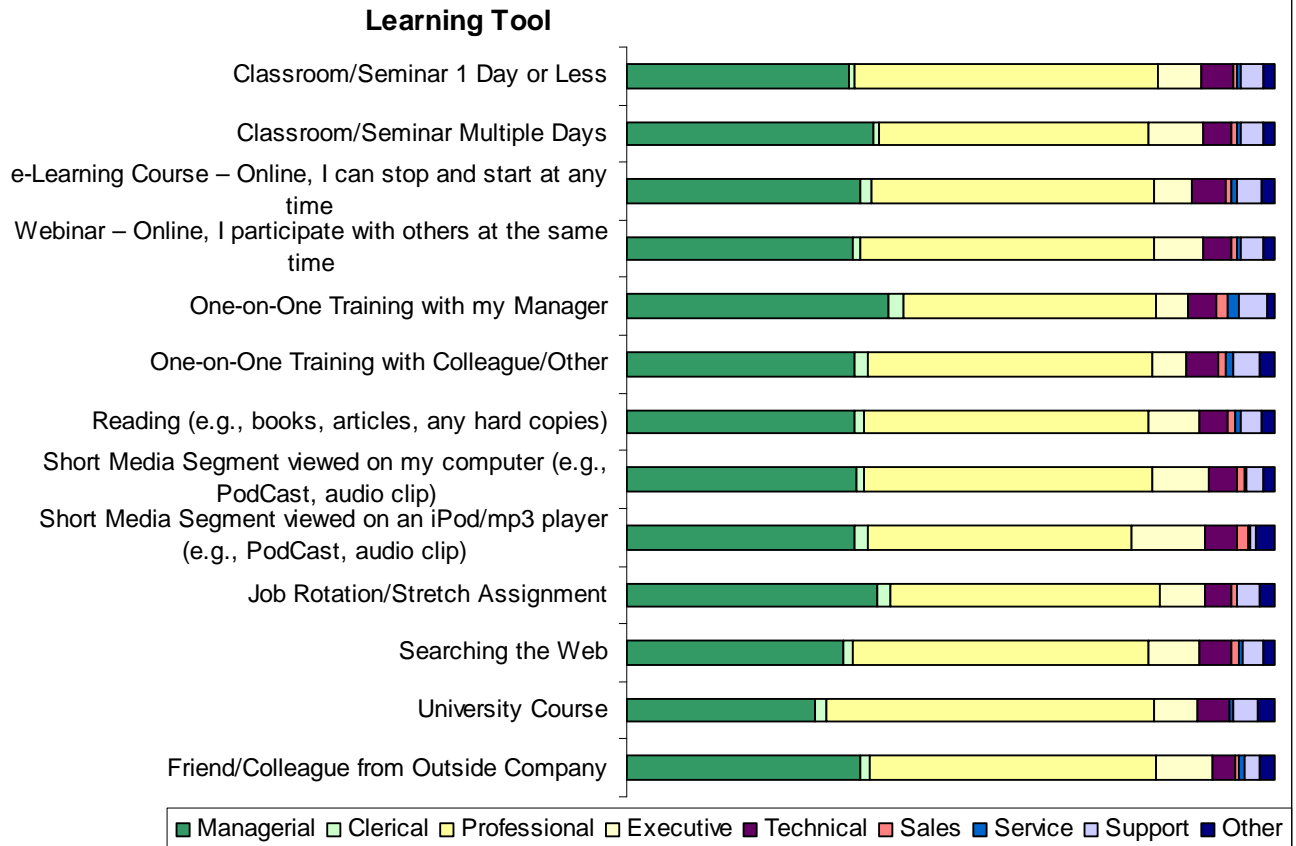


Figure 13 – How Participants Learned by Role

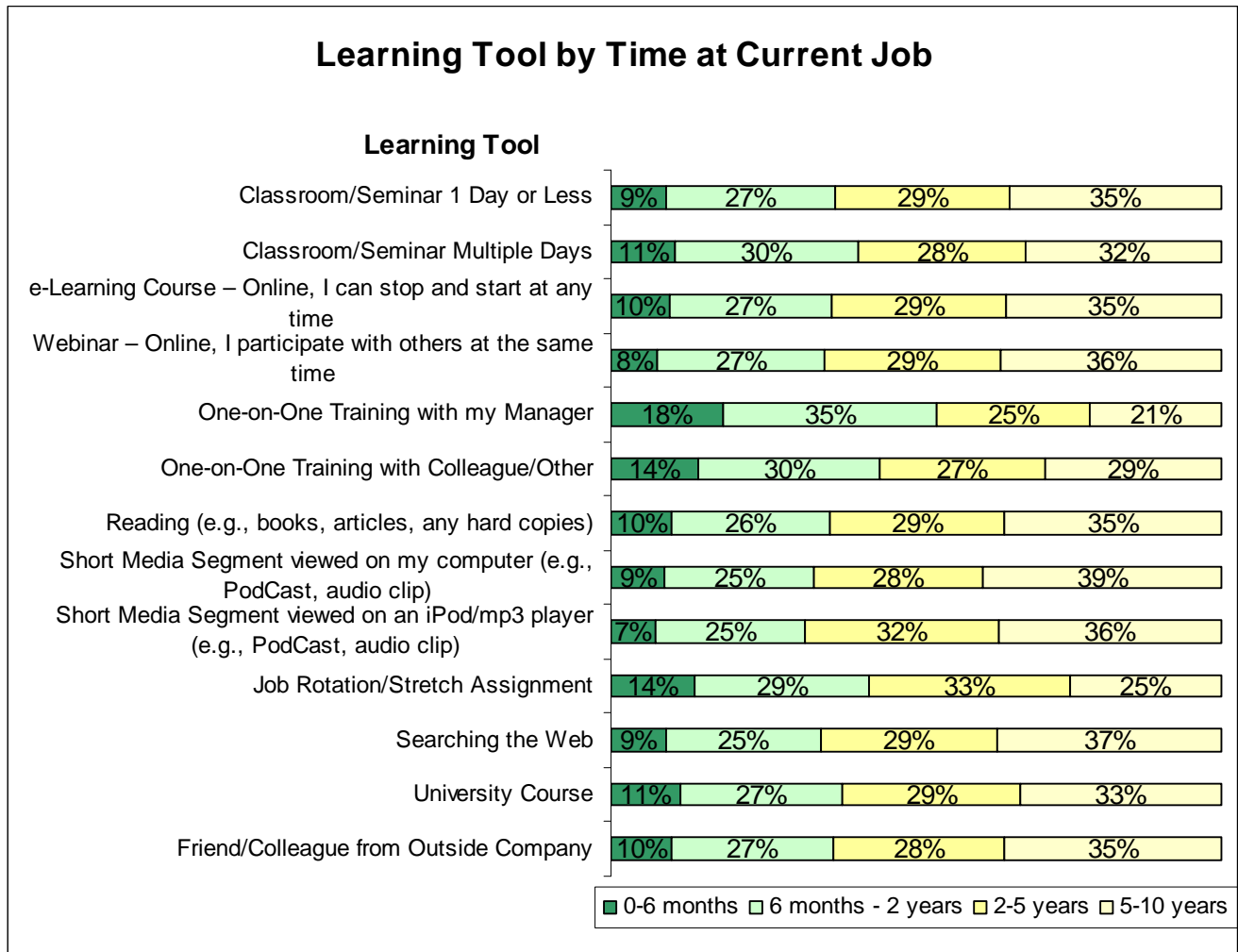


Figure 14 – How Participants Learned by Time at Current Job

### Actual and Ideal Time Spent Using Learning Tools/Methods

Participants ranked their top three learning tools/methods according to how much time they ACTUALLY spent using them to learn for work in the last six months. Tools/methods were ranked from most time spent in use (Rank 1) to least time spent in use (Rank 3).

Figure 15 shows how often employees assigned a tool/method as Rank 1, Rank 2 or Rank 3.

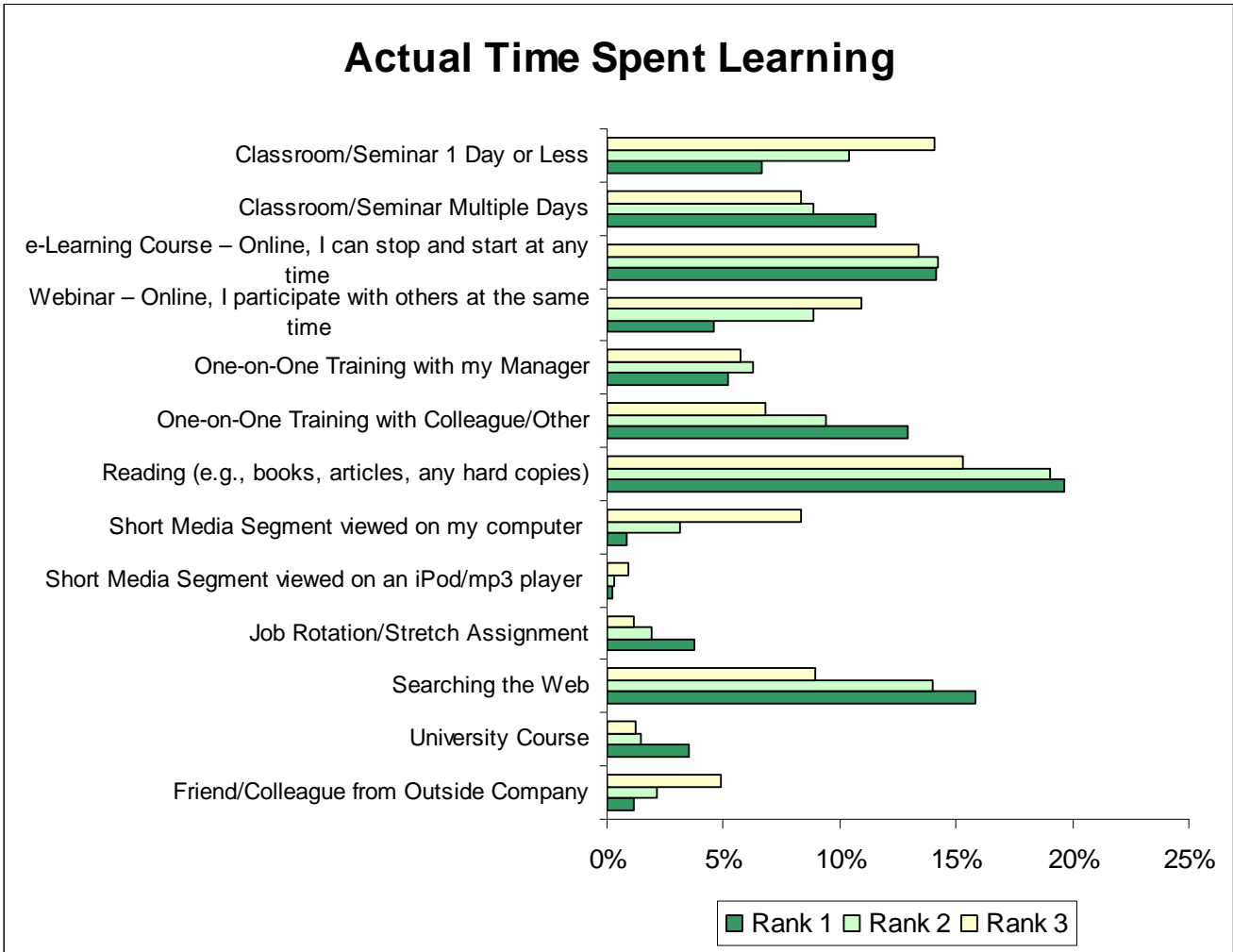


Figure 15 – Top 3 Learning Tools/Methods

Participants indicated their top three learning tools/methods according to how much time they IDEALLY want to spend using them to learn for work. Items were ranked from most time ideally spent in use (Rank 1) to least time ideally spent in use (Rank 3).

Figure 16 captures how often employees assigned an item as Rank 1, Rank 2 or Rank 3.

### Ideal Time Spent Learning

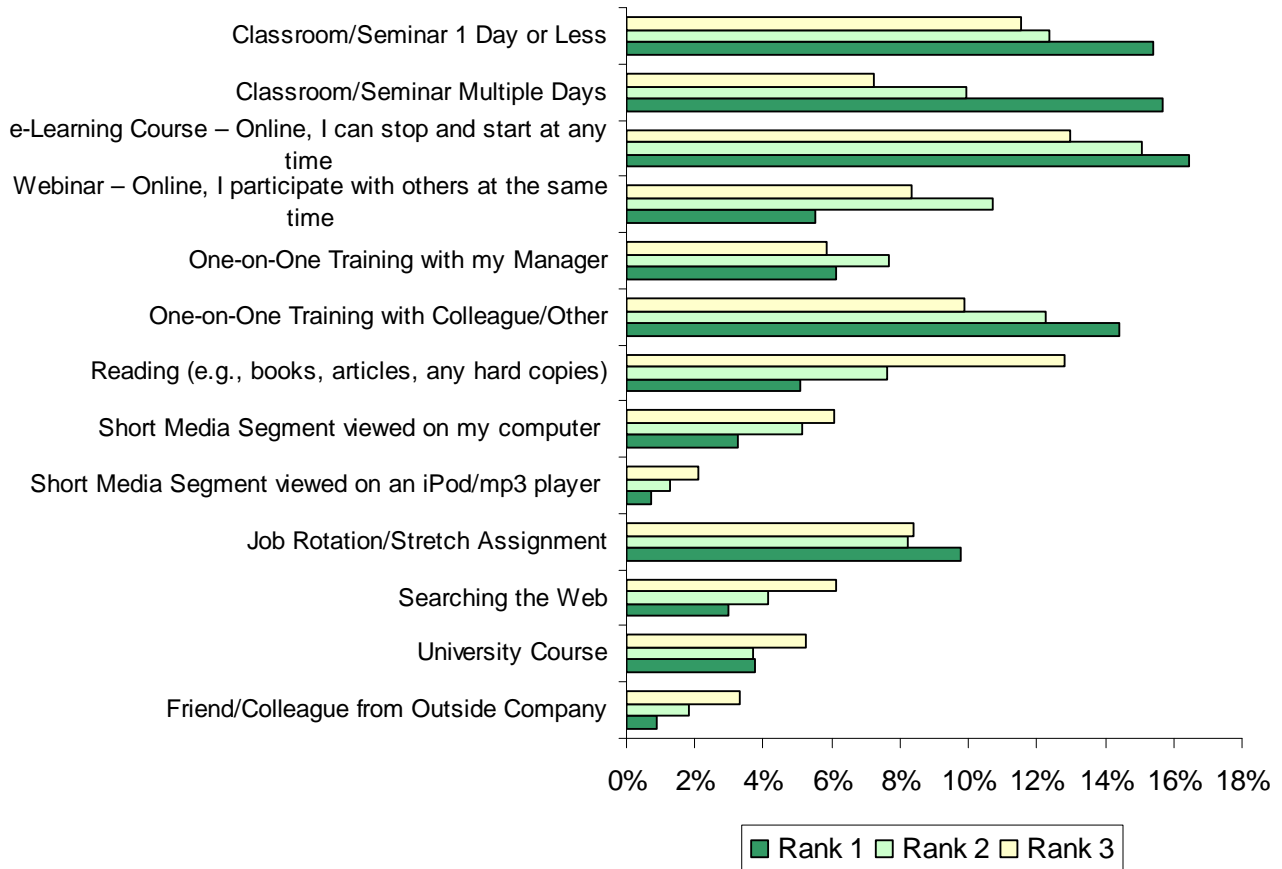


Figure 16 – Top 3 IDEAL Learning Tools/Methods

Figure 17 compares how employees ACTUALLY spend their time with how they IDEALLY want to spend their time learning for work.

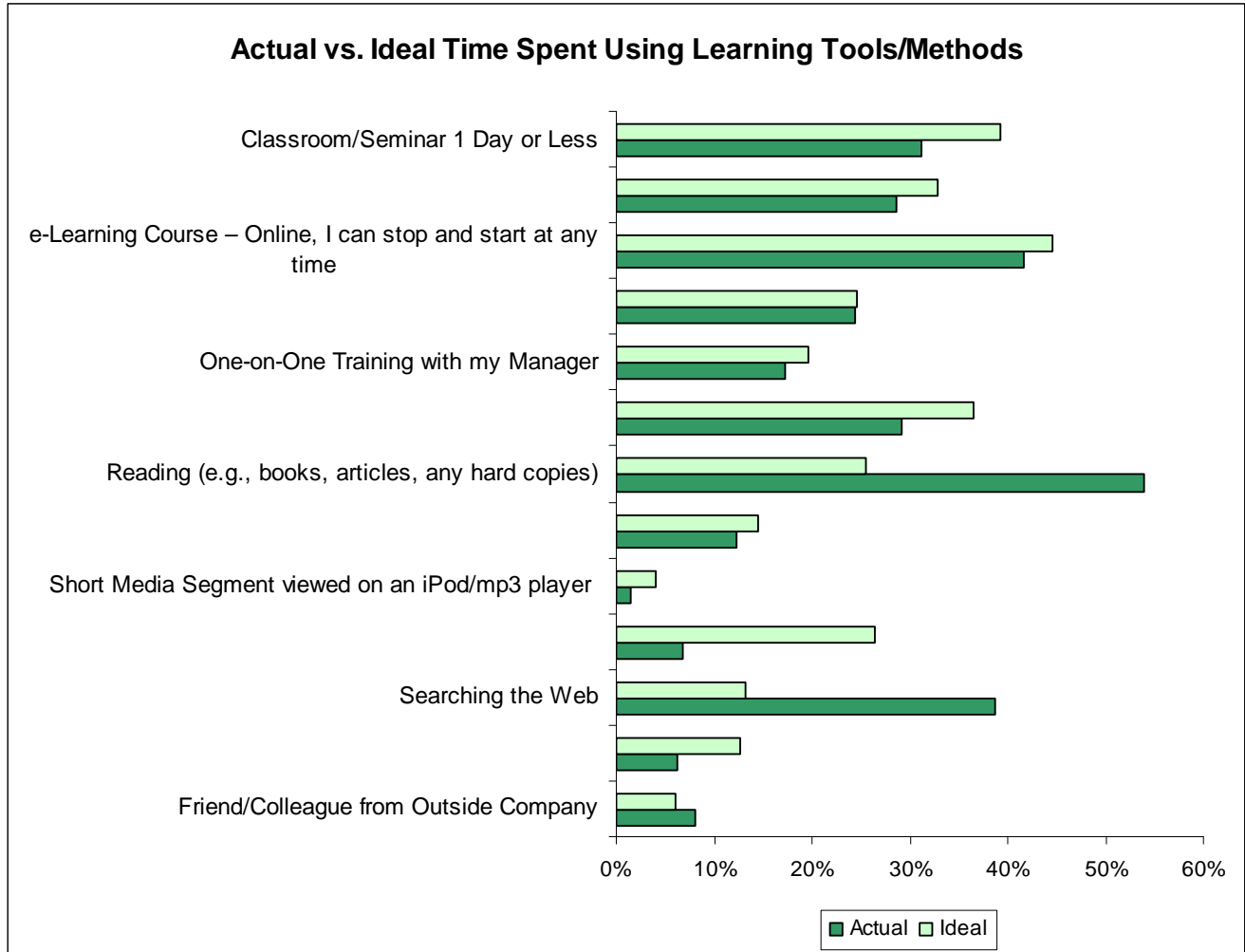


Figure 17 – Actual vs. Ideal Time Spent Using Learning Tools/Methods

**Learner Trends**

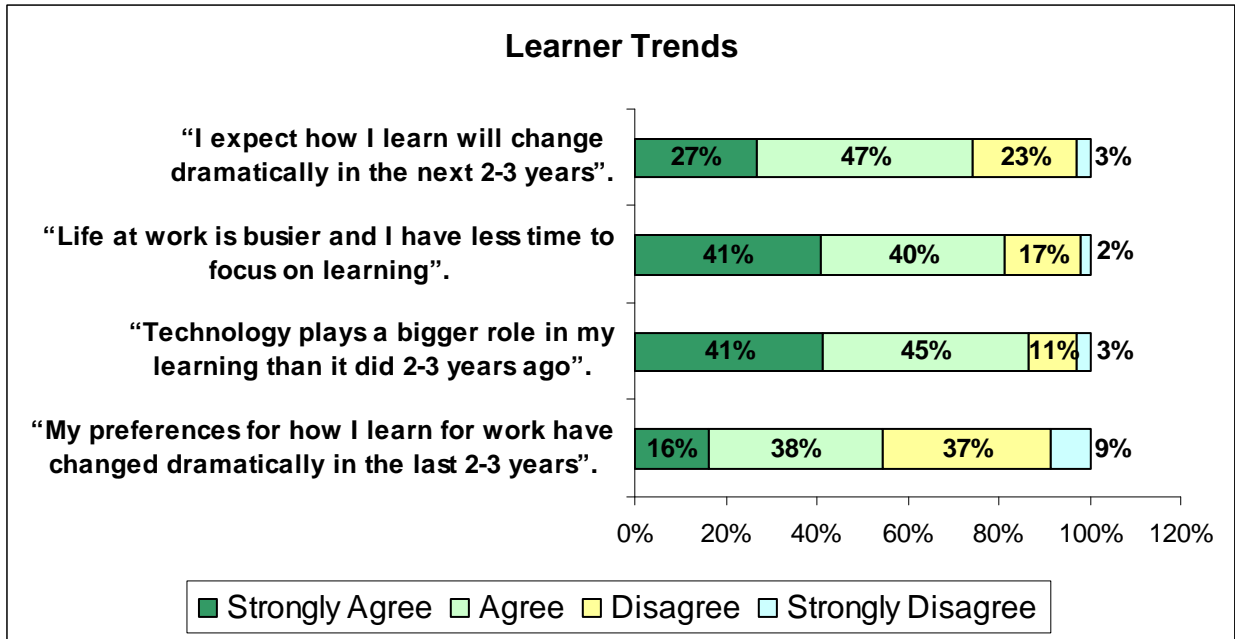


Figure 18 – Learner Trends

**Learner Satisfaction**

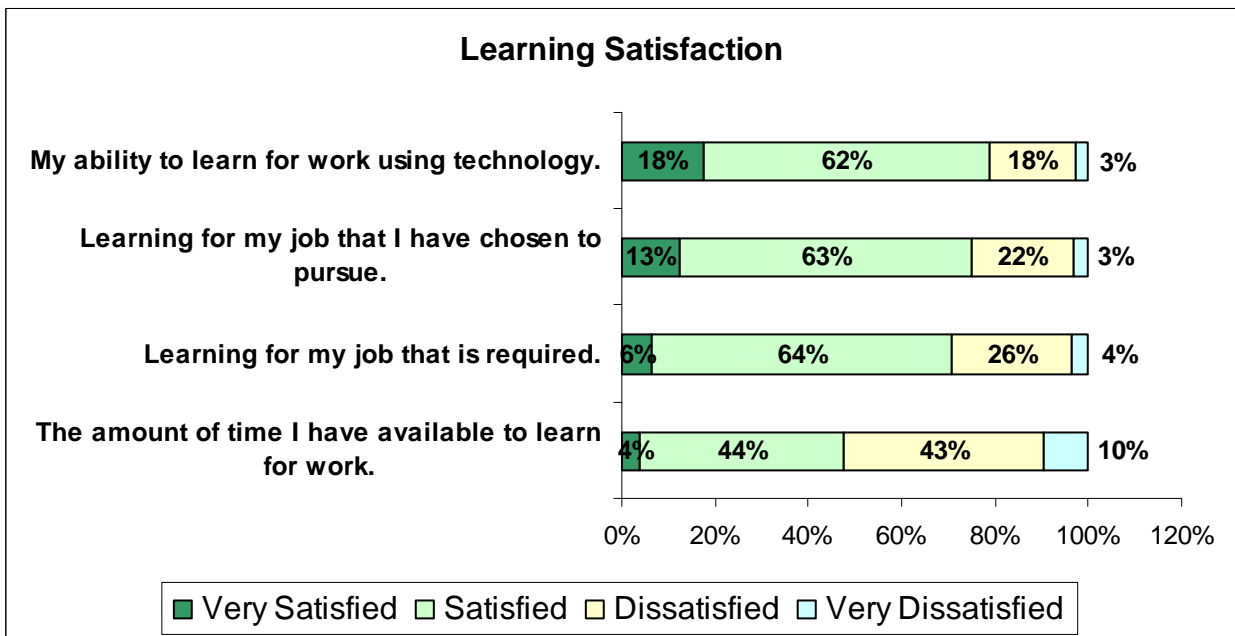


Figure 19 – Learner Satisfaction