EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although business leaders may not equate excitement with the topic of instructional design, perhaps they should. *Instructional Design Now: A New Age of Learning and Beyond*, a collaboration of the Association for Talent Development (ATD) and the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp), explores a learning landscape rich in emerging opportunities, populated by professionals eager to create and unleash content that drives employee development and organizational performance.

A century ago, education systems and instructional design (ID) were shaped by the concepts of scientific investigation and empirical knowledge. Fifty years later, instructional systems, as well as their components and properties, were revealed in the writings of Robert Gagne, James Finn, and others (McNeil 2014). Today, instructional design is at the core of an organizational learning industry that finds itself inundated with new tools, technologies, and approaches.

Many instructional design professionals seem to find this atmosphere exhilarating and challenging. “So many tools and resources allow for better design and greater creativity,” explained a training and workforce development director working in state government. On the other hand, a public-sector learning program manager admitted difficulty “keeping up with the pace of technology and having the skills necessary to successfully develop for that environment.”

Instructional design appears to be retaining many traditional touches, despite the constant challenges from evolving technologies, corporate expansions taking employees’ learning needs global, and perennial struggles for funding and support. Live, instructor-led classrooms are still widely used in organizations, and other personal-touch learning methods, such as face-to-face coaching and mentoring, continue to produce effective results.

But ATD and i4cp found that instructional designers don’t rate their profession’s overall efforts as highly as they might. Only about half of surveyed design and learning practitioners characterized their ID efforts as effective in helping to meet organizational business objectives. Far fewer believed that their instructional design was highly effective at addressing learning needs.

The diverse influences on instructional design today raise many interesting questions. Does formal education still play a valuable role in preparing designers for the challenges of the workplace? Are most organizations embracing high-tech options, such as mobile learning, social learning, and MOOCs? Which of the newer tools and approaches produce better learning results for companies? And what can instructional designers expect the next few years to bring?
With those questions in mind, ATD and i4cp gathered insights from instructional designers and learning professionals worldwide to assess the current and anticipated future states of ID and its contributions to business success.

David Berz, head of instructional design at the business-focused social network LinkedIn, captures the essence of ID, crediting it with making the difference that drives “a better learning experience. In my group, we call ourselves the learning experience team because we don’t believe in just designing a training course or a workshop. We’re trying to create real experiences for people—to meet them where they are. So they aren’t just taking training, they are actually living it, experiencing it, and being excited about it.” Worthy aspirations for instructional designers everywhere.

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This is an exciting time for practitioners of instructional design (ID). Technological advances and evolving learning delivery methods present a dazzling array of possibilities to support designers in their quests to engage learners with content that enhances performance on every level, from the individual to the organizational. As one learning professional in a national healthcare association succinctly put it, “ID is exploding—growing exponentially.”

While there are many definitions of instructional design, perhaps none conveys the essence of the knowledge and capabilities that design professionals bring to their field more than this long-established one from Utah State University (Merrill et al. 1966):

> Instructional design is a technology which incorporates known and verified learning strategies into instructional experiences which make the acquisition of knowledge and skill more efficient, effective, and appealing.

### A Half-Decade’s Journey for ID

ATD and i4cp’s earlier collaborative endeavor on research into instructional design examined the field and offered suggestions for design professionals as they prepared for the future. Instructional Systems Design: Today and in the Future (2010) reported volatility in organizational learning, complicated by ongoing technological advances and globalization.

Those factors remain in the mix for ID today. However, new ATD/i4cp research indicates that design professionals have taken to heart some of the 2010 study’s findings, including the position that ID must become faster, more strategic, global, and tech-savvy. Other key points from the 2010 study included:

- Emerging learning methodologies would challenge designers to craft multifaceted content.
- Predicted growth in social media would expand its use in learning.
- Budget constraints and staffing issues would pose as stumbling blocks for ID.
- Measurement capabilities would be increasingly necessary to capture and communicate the value of ID and the learning assets designers created.
- Efforts would be required of instructional designers to get organizational stakeholders onboard with new learning mechanisms.