Trend Report: Leadership, Training, and Talent Development

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Introduction

In a context of ongoing transformation driven by globalization, technological disruption, generational diversity, and evolving employee expectations, People Operations is playing an increasingly strategic role across organizations in all sectors. This study consolidates insights from several companies operating both in Spain and internationally, aiming to identify common patterns, emerging challenges, and distinctive approaches to leadership, talent development, and the evolution of corporate training.

The companies participating in the study—all of which operate internationally and have complex organizational structures—employ between 1,000 and over 100,000 people and have a presence in Europe, America, and Asia. The companies represent a wide range of business models—from century-old, family-owned groups to multinationals listed on the IBEX 35—all sharing a common denominator: a strong focus on innovation, internal talent development, and cultural transformation. The sectors represented include infrastructure, financial services, tourism, food, retail, restaurant and catering, pharmaceuticals, security, technology, telecommunications, media, and legal.

Based on conversations with executives from People Operations, as well as those responsible for Talent and Training, this report highlights the key trends, concerns, and areas of action shaping the agenda for talent development and the evolution of leadership within organizations.

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2. Executive Summary

The Spanish corporate market is at a critical juncture, marked by a clear need to align business strategy with cultural evolution and leadership development. The organizations analyzed face a set of common challenges: accelerating digitalization, retaining key talent, redefining the role of leadership, and building more adaptive organizational cultures. At the same time, distinct trends and approaches are emerging that are specific to the Spanish context.
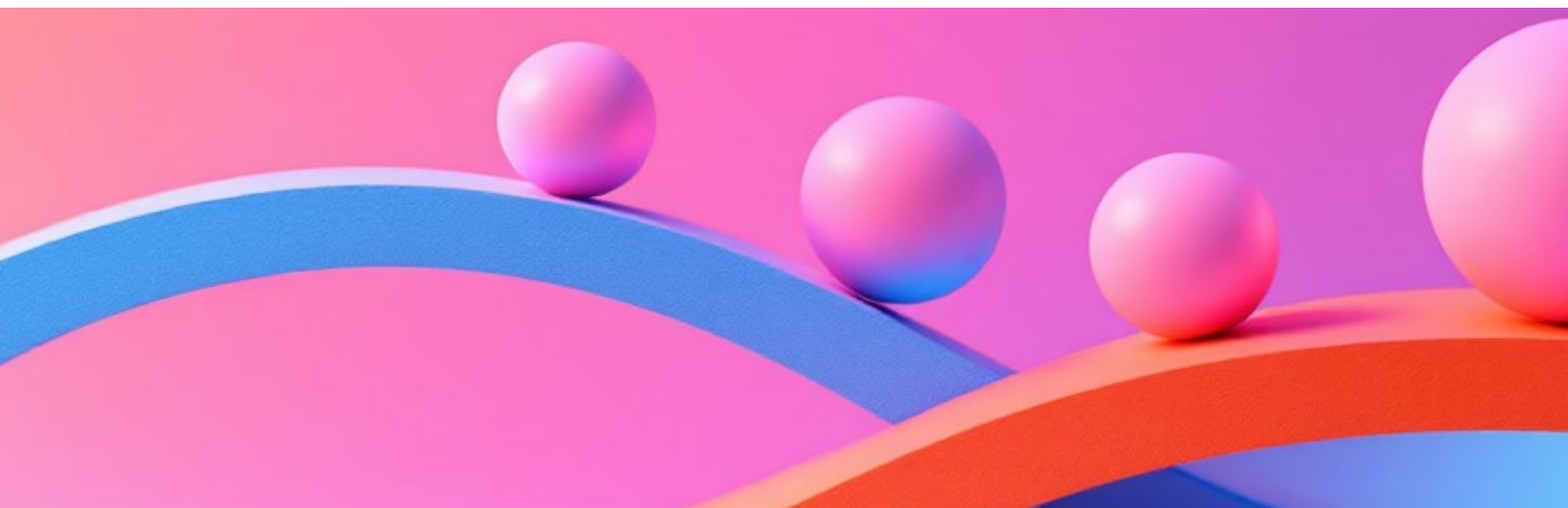
Differentiating Aspects of the Spanish Market

- **A strong emphasis on introspective leadership,** incorporating emotional and personal development components. Programs commonly focus on self-awareness, identifying internal barriers, and defining personal and professional goals. This approach aligns with a work culture in which the relational and human dimension remains central.

- **Widespread use of independent consultants and in-house solutions,** rather than prestigious business schools. The search for flexibility, proximity, and adaptability often outweighs the importance of the institutional brand.

- **Increasing resistance to overly academic or standardized training models,** in favor of approaches that prioritize practical applicability, shared experience, and alignment with operational realities.

- **A strong culture of promoting from within and developing resources tailored to individuals who grow inside the organization,** with long-term talent pathways built on trust rather than formal succession systems.

Emerging and Differentiating Trends

- **Introspective leadership with a strong emotional focus.** It is uncommon to find such a high concentration of leadership programs centered on personal purpose, emotional management, and inner transformation in other European markets. This preference reflects a significant cultural distinction.

- **A certain skepticism toward traditional business schools.** Many organizations express reluctance to collaborate with established academic institutions, favoring more flexible providers or in-house solutions. This pattern is less commonly observed in other European countries.

- **Development rooted in relationships and trust.** Rather than formal succession models, professional growth is often supported by internal career paths grounded in experience and a shared culture.

- **A "craft" approach to training design.** Unique learning pathways are created for each group, with a strong focus on personalization and alignment with everyday challenges, even when resources are limited.

- **Demand for emotionally relevant training.** Organizations expect not only operational impact but also experiences that connect employees to the corporate purpose, foster deep reflection, and strengthen human bonds.

Spanish companies show greater reluctance to collaborate with established academic institutions than their European counterparts, favoring more flexible providers or in-house solutions.

Shared Trends at European and Global Levels

- **Artificial intelligence** is beginning to transform talent-related processes, from recruitment to personalized learning. According to McKinsey (2024), 60% of European companies are already using AI in their HR practices.

- Increased demand for **leadership programs with an emotional, inclusive, and transformational approach.** According to HBR (2023), emotionally intelligent leadership is one of the five critical factors for retaining talent in the post-pandemic context.

- Consolidation of **more flexible, hybrid, and modular learning models** with a high degree of personalization. The "pull" approach—driven by individual motivation—is gaining ground over the traditional "push" model of mandatory training.

- Growing focus on the **ROI (Return on Investment) of training.** Organizations are increasingly seeking clear evidence of its impact on business performance, productivity, and employee engagement.

WHAT IS, AND WILL BE, EXPECTED OF A BUSINESS SCHOOL?

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The study reveals a clear expectation for business schools: to combine conceptual depth with adaptability and a nuanced understanding of the complexities of the Spanish context, while maintaining a strong international perspective. The following are particularly valued:

- **The ability to design highly personalized programs that are closely aligned with business needs.**

- **An experiential, transformative, and emotionally relevant training approach.**

- **Cultural proximity and empathy with the human and organizational dynamics of the Spanish context.**

3. Strategic Challenges and Priorities

The organizations participating in the study are operating in a volatile and demanding environment, where external factors such as globalization, digitalization, sustainability, generational shifts, and regulatory pressure intersect with internal needs for organizational transformation, cultural evolution, and talent development. The main challenges and strategic priorities identified are summarized below.

1. Alignment Between Business Strategy and Cultural Transformation

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges is the need to align people development with the strategic evolution of the business, especially in contexts of structural change, digital transformation, or international growth. To achieve this, **many organizations are driving cultural transformation processes that require reviewing the leadership model, redefining shared values, and mobilizing new behaviors.** This type of transformation not only affects program design but also requires greater influence from People Operations in the overall strategy, adopting a more cross-cutting and less function-specific approach.

2. Attracting and Retaining Critical Talent

Another recurring challenge is the difficulty of attracting and retaining strategic talent, particularly candidates with technological, commercial, digital, or high-potential profiles. Companies highlight that **expectations have shifted, especially among younger generations, who prioritize flexibility, rapid career advancement, and a cultural environment aligned with their values.** Additionally, some companies are facing a costly internal talent drain, prompting

them to redesign their value propositions, loyalty programs, and career paths to adapt to this new reality. Others acknowledge a growing difficulty in attracting young professionals to traditional career models, which are no longer as appealing as more flexible or purpose-driven environments. In response, some organizations are launching targeted campaigns for senior talent or undertaking a complete overhaul of career and training plans to improve retention.

3. Generational Diversity and Succession Management

Generational diversity and the coexistence of different leadership styles are also identified as cross-cutting challenges. **Younger generations are increasingly demanding greater meaning, well-being, and autonomy, challenging more hierarchical or physically present management models.** Some companies are revisiting their organizational structures to better align with these new expectations, even conducting specific analyses of younger employees' motivations and barriers to adapt to their needs. At the same time, there is a growing need to prepare for a generational transition in management and strategic roles, particularly in sectors with established talent and long-standing organizational structures.

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4. Integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The digitalization of People Operations and the adoption of artificial intelligence tools are becoming increasingly relevant as key drivers of transformation. Several organizations are leveraging AI to personalize training and development, enhance the employee experience, and automate processes such as recruitment, performance analysis, and training. These initiatives, although at varying stages of maturity, reflect a **profound shift in how the department's role is perceived: more data-driven, more business-oriented, and increasingly central to talent sustainability.** The integration of AI presents a challenge that extends beyond the technical sphere, raising ethical, cultural, and leadership dilemmas that must be addressed strategically.

5. Balance Between Internationalization and Cultural Alignment

In companies with a strong global presence, international expansion requires maintaining a unified culture while preserving local autonomy. The challenge lies in **building a shared identity across multicultural and diverse environments, while allowing for a degree of operational flexibility.** This involves developing context-sensitive global leadership, adapting career models to regional realities, and adopting a glocal approach to training and development.

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4. Leaders' Perceptions

Discussions with leaders have yielded valuable insights into the main challenges they face in managing talent within their organizations. What follows is a summary of their perspectives, grouped into five key areas: leadership and talent development; training strategy and evolution; value and impact of leadership training; learning culture and development experience; and recommendations for business schools.
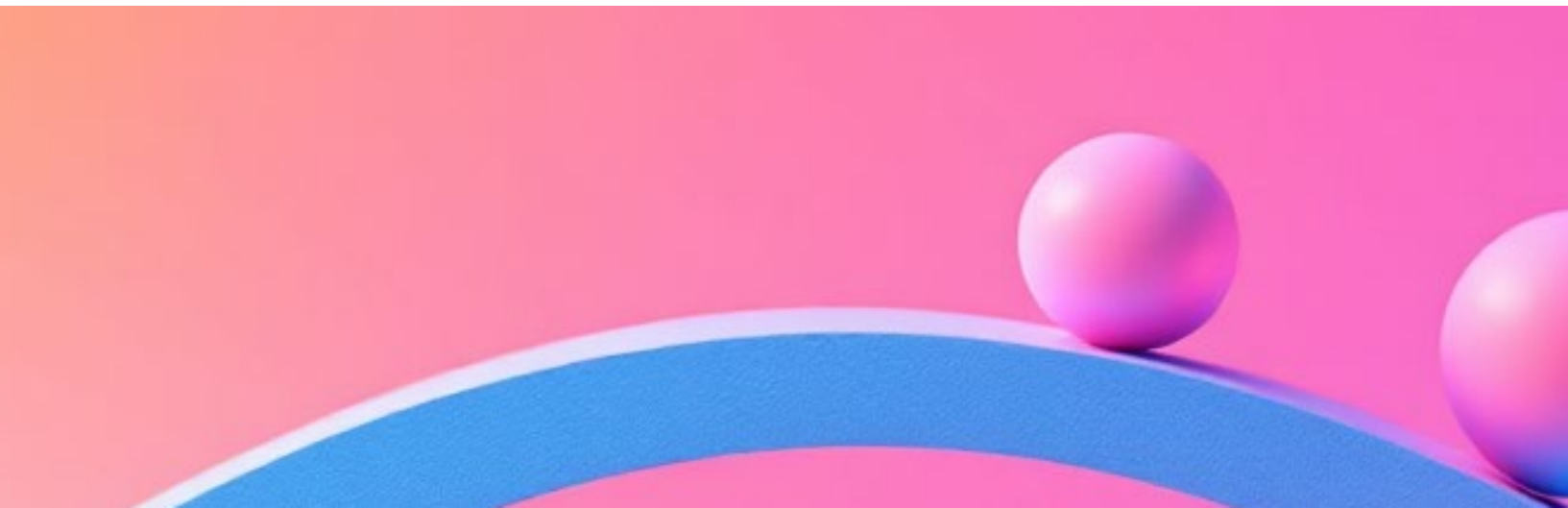
1. Leadership and Talent Development

IN BRIEF

1 A shift away from traditional management styles based on control and authority.

2 Growing demand for more experiential, practical, and personalized programs.

3 Introspective and humanistic leadership models connected to self-awareness.

Leadership is one of the most important levers for sustaining the cultural and strategic transformation organizations are undergoing. There is broad consensus among companies that developing human-centered leadership— capable of adapting to change and staying closely aligned with the business—is a key priority for addressing both current and future challenges.

One of the most established methodologies is the segmentation of programs by leadership level. Most organizations **structure their programs into distinct pathways based on role and responsibility**, from individual contributors to functional leaders and top executives. This approach enables the development of specific skills at each stage, ensuring a consistent growth experience and reinforcing internal mobility.

In parallel, a more transformative, empathetic, and purpose-driven leadership model is gaining ground, marking a departure from traditional management styles centered on control or technical authority. The ability to manage people, lead change, influence, communicate, and provide meaning is increasingly valued. In this context, many organizations are redefining their leadership models to align these behaviors with their culture and strategy.

At the same time, the trend toward more experiential, practical, and personalized programs continues to gain momentum. Most companies now rely on **tools such as individual coaching, mentoring, 360-degree assessments, job rotations, and offsite activities** to promote deep learning and strengthen interpersonal connections. Programs that enable leaders to reflect on their leadership style, align with their values, and explore alternative approaches to leadership are especially valued.

The **development of female leadership** remains a high priority on many organizational agendas. Specific programs are being promoted that integrate individual reflection, increase visibility of internal talent, and address structural or cultural barriers. The most advanced organizations approach this challenge from the ground up, engaging both women and men and connecting inclusive leadership with the organizational model.

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Another consistent focus is the **emphasis on internal talent development and a cross-cutting business perspective.** Internal mobility, succession programs, functional or geographic rotations, and early leadership opportunities are actively promoted. This approach not only nurtures the leadership pipeline but also helps dismantle silos, foster a global perspective, and enhance employee loyalty.

Conversely, some companies acknowledge that their current leadership programs are diminishing in impact. Models that are overly academic, lengthy, or disconnected from business realities tend to disengage participants. This has led to comprehensive reviews of formats and content, as well as a reevaluation of the choice of training partners.

Finally, some companies are advocating for **more introspective and humanistic leadership models,** where leader development is closely tied to self-awareness, personal integrity, and the capacity to foster psychologically safe environments. Humanistic leadership emphasizes flexibility, adaptability, and the manner in which results are achieved, always aligned with the organization's core values. Though not yet widespread, this approach is starting to gain traction in sectors with a strong human focus.

Leadership programs that are overly academic, lengthy, or disconnected from business realities tend to alienate participants, prompting thorough reviews and potential reconsideration of the training partner.

4.2. Training Strategy and Evolution

IN BRIEF

1 The need to align training with strategic challenges and key development milestones.

2 Agile, flexible, and user-centered training models focused on the emotional component.

3 Practical and experiential training that combines external and internal trainers.

Across all the organizations analyzed, training is no longer viewed as a supplementary activity, but rather as a critical lever for driving organizational change. Training design is increasingly aligned with the employee lifecycle to support professional development, accelerate performance, and strengthen organizational culture.

A consistent theme across organizations is the need to align training with strategic challenges and critical development milestones. Many companies are redesigning their training offerings to ensure that the content has a direct impact on day-to-day work, addresses real business priorities, and is connected to career and performance plans.

The prevailing trend is toward a more agile, flexible, and user-centered training model, where individuals take an active role in their own development. **Employees are increasingly encouraged to take ownership of their learning journey, selecting formats, topics, and timing based on their role and objectives.** This proactive approach—moving away from formal, standardized models—is essential for sustaining motivation and addressing the needs of an increasingly diverse workforce.

Along the same lines, new initiatives are being explored to provide leaders with a 360-degree view of the business, helping them understand how their decisions impact other areas and contribute to value creation. This cross-cutting perspective is seen as essential for developing leaders who are strategically aligned and capable of operating with a global mindset.

The combination of external and internal trainers has proven to be an effective formula, balancing corporate perspective with external insight. **External speakers bring vision, trends, and innovation, while internal trainers are closely connected to the organization's realities, foster a sense of belonging, and spark cultural dialogue.** This combination enriches the learning experience by incorporating trends, benchmarking, and real-world cases.

At the same time, practical and experiential training continues to gain ground over more theoretical or generic approaches. Learning that

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In many organizations, **training focused on emotional management and well-being is gaining prominence as an integral part of comprehensive leadership development.** It is widely recognized that demanding work environments require leaders capable of self-management and effectively managing their teams' emotions, particularly in high-pressure or change situations. Some companies have implemented targeted programs to train managers in psychological well-being, active listening, and early detection of stress signals. These initiatives reinforce the notion that emotional care is a vital leadership skill, essential for fostering safe, sustainable, and more engaged environments.

In organizations with a longstanding tradition of training, **a new challenge is emerging: sustaining the interest of professionals who have already participated in multiple programs.** In such cases, it becomes even more crucial to explore new formats, personalize content, and create meaningful experiences that prevent saturation and stimulate a continued desire to learn. In sectors characterized by high turnover or operational pressure, training is tailored to the business, with content that is more digital, concise, gamified, and directly applicable to daily work.

In contrast, corporate and leadership profiles seek more immersive and strategic programs that integrate business perspective, culture, and personal development.

The emotional component is equally important: programs that resonate with professionals' values, reinforce purpose, and create memorable experiences are highly valued. Some companies have even designed development pathways that incorporate highly experiential activities, aimed at strengthening pride in belonging and fostering lasting bonds among participants.

Additionally, organizations are beginning to apply **technology and artificial intelligence to anticipate and personalize training needs, recommending relevant content, identifying gaps, and designing individualized learning journeys.** Although still in its early stages, this evolution points to a more proactive, contextual, and impact-driven training model, where learning is not merely provided on demand but strategically planned and guided by intelligent design.

Finally, the idea that "not everything should be addressed through training" is gaining traction. Leading organizations are redefining their role, recognizing that many development needs are more effectively met through communities of practice, business exposure, cross-functional projects, and peer learning.

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4.3. Value and Impact of Leadership Training

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1 Academic credentials are losing relevance to measurable business impact.

2 Networked learning strengthens cross-functionality, alignment, and a shared culture.

3 There is a growing risk of "training fatigue" caused by an overload of programs lacking clear results.

One of the most persistent challenges in training is assessing its true impact beyond immediate participant satisfaction. While all organizations acknowledge the strategic importance of leadership development, few have structured methods in place to evaluate its tangible contribution to business outcomes.

The most commonly used metric remains participant feedback at the end of the program, often measured through indicators such as NPS, overall satisfaction, or perceived usefulness. However, more and more companies are aiming to move beyond simple "I liked it" responses, seeking indicators related to real-world application, skill development, and career progression following the training.

Some organizations link their leadership programs to succession planning or internal mobility strategies, using these data as indirect indicators of effectiveness. Additional methods include manager observation, tracking performance-related KPIs, and analyzing the results of tools such as 360-degree evaluations.

In the most advanced cases, impact is measured by a leader's involvement in strategic projects or improvements in team engagement and morale.

The most widely recognized value of leadership training lies in its ability to foster reflection, shift mindsets, and strengthen connections to the organizational culture. When a program disrupts routine, connects with a leader's purpose, and sparks a meaningful experience, its impact goes far beyond technical learning. That is why many organizations emphasize that **the true return on a program isn't always captured in numbers, but in the shift in conversations, behaviors, and decisions that follow.**

Another highly valued benefit is the impact of networked learning. Leadership programs often serve as spaces to build community, share experiences, and strengthen connections across different areas of the organization. This impact, while intangible, strengthens cross-functionality, alignment, and a shared organizational culture.

Finally, some companies acknowledge a growing risk of "training fatigue" among leaders who have already taken part in multiple programs and are beginning to question the added value of new initiatives. In these cases, the impact relies less on the content itself and more on the innovation of the format, the relevance to the organizational context, and the overall quality of the experience.

In summary, the return on leadership training is increasingly assessed by its connection to the business, its influence on people, and its capacity to drive cultural change, rather than by academic metrics or attendance figures alone.

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4.4. Learning Culture and Development Experience

IN BRIEF

1	Learning as an integral part of the employee experience.
2	Integration of skills acquired through practical experience and performance-related programs.
3	A multichannel and personalized approach that broadens learning opportunities.

In many organizations, internal promotion is considered a key pathway for talent development and a cornerstone of the learning culture. It is viewed as a means of recognizing commitment, fostering loyalty, and ensuring that those assuming new responsibilities have a deep understanding of the business from within.

This approach fosters the development of sustainable career paths, supported by potential identification processes, functional mobility, and targeted training for new roles. At the same time, some organizations are investing in **reskilling initiatives to retrain employees in at-risk positions, equipping them with capabilities in emerging areas** such as cybersecurity,

sustainability, and data management, thereby ensuring their continued relevance and alignment with the future needs of the business.

Additionally, most of the companies analyzed have a well-established and increasingly strategic learning culture. People development is viewed as a shared responsibility, embedded in daily operations rather than a one-time event or an activity detached from the business. Learning is regarded as an integral part of the employee experience, with a holistic approach that spans from onboarding to key career milestones. Companies strive to embed learning into the natural flow of work, rather than treating it as an external obligation or something disconnected from the organization's purpose.

Learning is increasingly aligned directly with strategy and the business, fostering the integration of acquired skills through job rotation, functional training, cross-functional projects, and performance-linked development programs. This alignment ensures that training has a tangible impact on day-to-day work and strengthens employees' ability to contribute to the organization's overall value.

People Operations acts as a facilitator of development, creating ecosystems that enable growth through multiple channels: digital content, mentoring, peer learning, business exposure, and personalized support. This multichannel approach expands learning opportunities and allows for better adaptation

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to individual needs. There is also an effort to tailor the development experience by designing specific learning paths according to profile, career stage, or role type. In operational or high-turnover environments, the focus is on providing accessible, concise, and practical resources, while for strategic profiles, the emphasis is on deeper, leadership-focused experiences.

Finally, leadership is recognized as a key driver of a learning culture. **When leaders act as role models and actively promote development conversations within their teams, the culture is reinforced, and learning becomes an integral part of everyday work.** In this regard, many organizations are explicitly integrating development as a core dimension within their performance and leadership models.

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4.5. Recommendations for Business Schools

IN BRIEF

1   A clear trend toward genuine personalization and partners who truly embrace the company culture.

2   The ideal partner combines institutional prestige with top-tier faculty.

3   Strong demand for experiential, practical, and transformative formats that break away from conventional training.

Most organizations agree that the ideal training partner offers much more than academic content; they seek strategic collaboration marked by adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and genuine business insight.

Personalization is one of the most frequently highlighted aspects, with programs that are truly tailor-made. **Organizations especially value partners who actively engage, listen carefully, co-create, and show a deep understanding of the company's culture from within.** It's not just about adapting content — it's about fully embracing the company's reality and speaking its language.

The ideal partner should combine institutional prestige with a renowned faculty capable of balancing academic rigor, applied research, and an educational approach. These qualities are especially valued in organizations with highly skilled professionals who have already been exposed to top-tier educational institutions. In these environments, expectations are high: **employees seek training experiences that are surprising, challenging, and truly impactful.**

What makes the real difference is not the institution itself, but the individuals who represent it. For this reason, trainers who combine academic expertise, business insight, and industry knowledge are particularly valued. Beyond teaching skills, they must relate to participants' realities and understand the unique challenges of the industry where the organization operates.

The partner's ability to anticipate needs and offer innovative proposals—moving beyond traditional leadership topics to address emerging strategic capabilities—is highly valued. Likewise, they are expected to introduce new conversations, spark critical thinking, and foster strategic reflection.

In terms of experience design, organizations prioritize experiential, practical, and transformative formats over conventional training. They seek programs that foster emotional connection, encourage interaction, spark critical reflection, and support the integration of new mindsets and behaviors.

> Trainers with a balanced blend of academic credentials, business insight, and sector-specific expertise are highly valued.

Finally, organizations value training partners with global operational capacity and local sensitivity. They expect trainers who can adapt to different cultures, languages, and learning styles. For companies with a global presence, it is essential to ensure a consistent learning experience while maintaining the flexibility to adapt to each context.

Companies seek programs that foster emotional connection with participants, encourage interaction, spark critical reflection, and support the integration of new mindsets and behaviors.

5. General Conclusions

The analysis based on conversations with leaders in People Operations, Talent Management, and Training reveals a turning point in how organizations approach talent development. In a context of constant transformation, people have become the most critical asset for sustaining competitiveness. It is not structures, processes, or even technology that make the difference, but leadership, the capacity to learn, and a genuine commitment to developing the people who make up the organization.
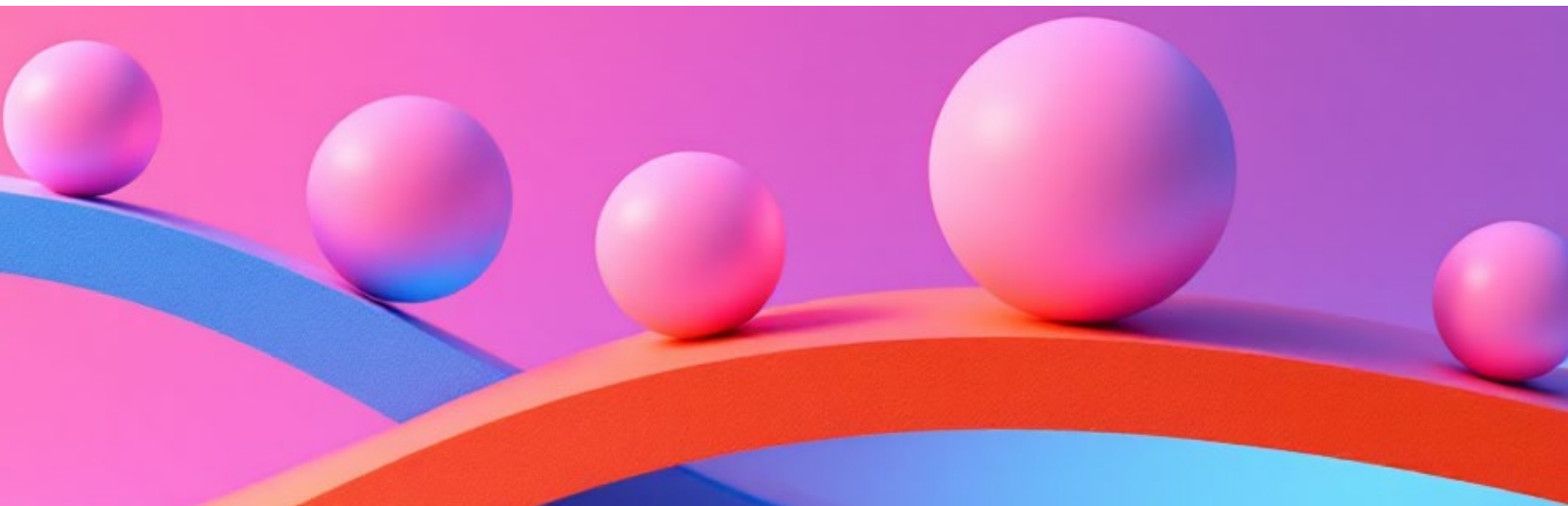
Far from traditional views, training is no longer considered an auxiliary function but a strategic tool closely connected to culture, business, and performance. Learning is now seen as a continuous, personalized experience integrated into daily work, designed to be proactive, flexible, and context-sensitive. Many organizations have started enabling employees to create their own development paths within a common framework aligned with business priorities.

This approach addresses not only generational and technological adaptation but also the demands of an increasingly complex and demanding organizational environment. In this scenario, leaders are expected not only to execute but also to inspire, transform, and guide. The evolution of leadership is clear: organizations seek profiles that can mobilize people, read the context, lead by example, and provide emotional support to their teams. For this reason, training in well-being, emotional management, and inclusive leadership is gaining momentum.

Alongside these changes, new demands are also emerging for training partners. They are expected to have a deep understanding of the business, translate strategic needs into transformative experiences, and anticipate future challenges with innovative proposals and relevant content. While institutional prestige matters, organizations prioritize the quality of the team, its adaptability, and the authenticity of the partnership. The difference is not made by the partner's name, but by the people who represent it.

In short, this study shows that companies are redefining how they grow and lead with a more human vision, one that is deeply connected to purpose and committed to the sustainability of talent. A commitment to humanistic leadership is taking hold, placing people at the center—not out of idealism, but as an essential condition for mobilizing capabilities, managing complexity, and generating real value in a demanding environment. Learning, leading, and evolving are no longer optional—they have become organizational imperatives. Those who successfully integrate these three elements in a coherent, cross-cutting, and impactful manner will be better prepared to face what lies ahead.

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