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The New Learning Organization:
BUILDING A VIRTUAL TRAINING PRACTICE

Now that working and learning virtually is continuing longer than originally expected, leaders need to **develop a new virtual training strategy**, one that extends beyond simple conversions and considers shifting the entire virtual strategy from a mode of surviving to thriving.

Every challenge in the business world comes with a choice, but it also comes with an opportunity—are you going to survive or thrive? When COVID-19 hit, organizations around the world had to quickly shift their operating models. One of our clients, for example, had to abruptly move 85% of their workforce to virtual operations. Other companies we're working with have stopped all in-person training. No doubt, your organization experienced the same overnight shift to one degree or another.

In fact, a Stanford study released in June 2020 reported that, nationwide, 42% of Americans are working full time from home. And Stanford, along with most business analysts, predicts that this trend will continue long after COVID-19 is gone, with some working virtually permanently, some working on-site, and some taking a hybrid approach.

So how does this **impact your learning** organization and training delivery?

Are your **virtual training capabilities** comprehensive enough to support a work-from-home (WFH) workforce?

And what choice are you prepared to make—will you merely **survive this shift**, or will you use it to move to the next level?

Organizationally, we are seeing four strategies and best-practice approaches that are proving highly effective as learning organizations dive deeper into the virtual training space:

- Charting a survive, revive, and thrive roadmap
- Developing a virtual training technology and content strategy
- Building a multidisciplinary team of virtual training specialists
- Establishing a virtual academy

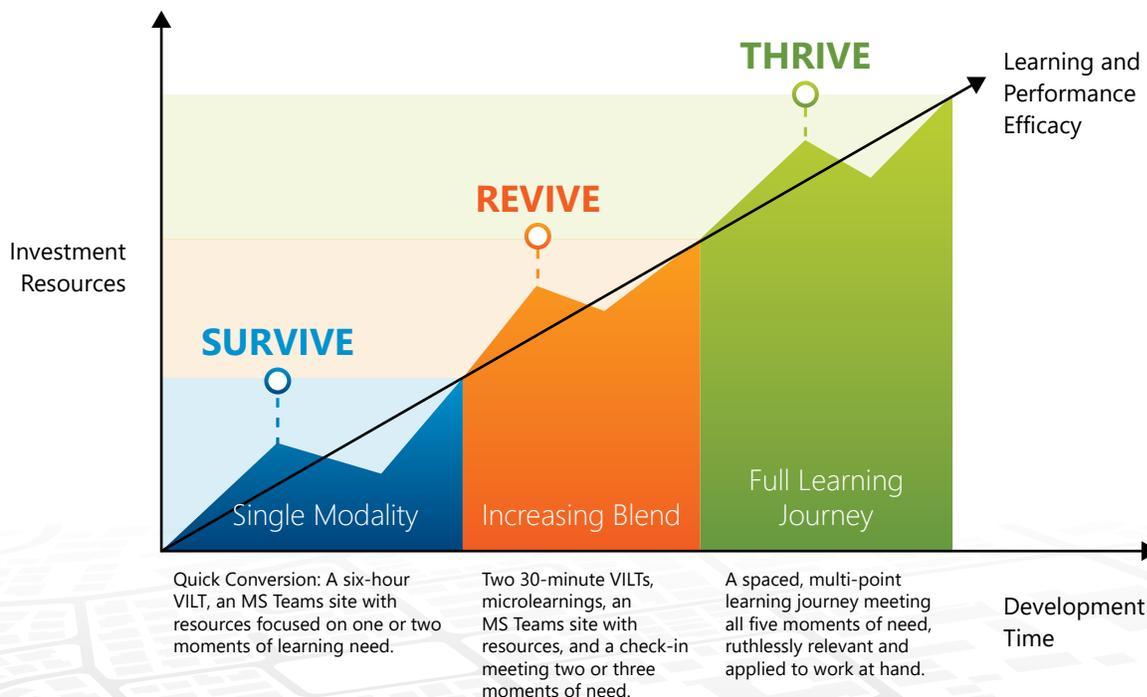" 42% of Americans are working full time from home. "

CHART a Survive, Revive, and Thrive ROADMAP

What's Needed to Structure a Virtual Strategy

At the base level, surviving in this new normal means bringing virtual instructor-led training (VILT) specialists on board to design and deliver virtual training. Thriving includes also having a structured content strategy and the power of a virtual academy behind you. Revive is the launching point from creativity to truly implementing innovation within programs and learning strategies.

The three approaches are part of a continuum and most organizations will probably find themselves in some form of survive or revive since it's tough to implement full thrive strategies at the beginning of disruption. Ultimately, the first two approaches should be designed to leave organizations with a pathway to thrive.

The following graphic is an example of how this continuum can look for an eight-hour classroom-based ILT.

THRIVE

Learning and Performance Efficacy

REVIVE

Investment Resources

SURVIVE

Single Modality	Increasing Blend	Full Learning Journey
Quick Conversion: A six-hour VILT, an MS Teams site with resources focused on one or two moments of learning need.	Two 30-minute VILTs, microlearnings, an MS Teams site with resources, and a check-in meeting two or three moments of need.	A spaced, multi-point learning journey meeting all five moments of need, ruthlessly relevant and applied to work at hand.

Development Time

What's critical to remember about each of these approaches is that they can be accomplished as part of long-term goals. All too often, we see companies implement a survive strategy of quick conversions that don't account for future needs. When charted correctly, each approach can be implemented depending on the current resources available and still set up learning teams for future success without repeating work and increasing costs.

Survive

This is essentially the method to address immediate needs and complications with accessibility in mind. VILT is the most direct method for conversion from ILT. In this approach, turnaround times are short, and content is prioritized and often reduced while focusing on critical areas to improve engagement.
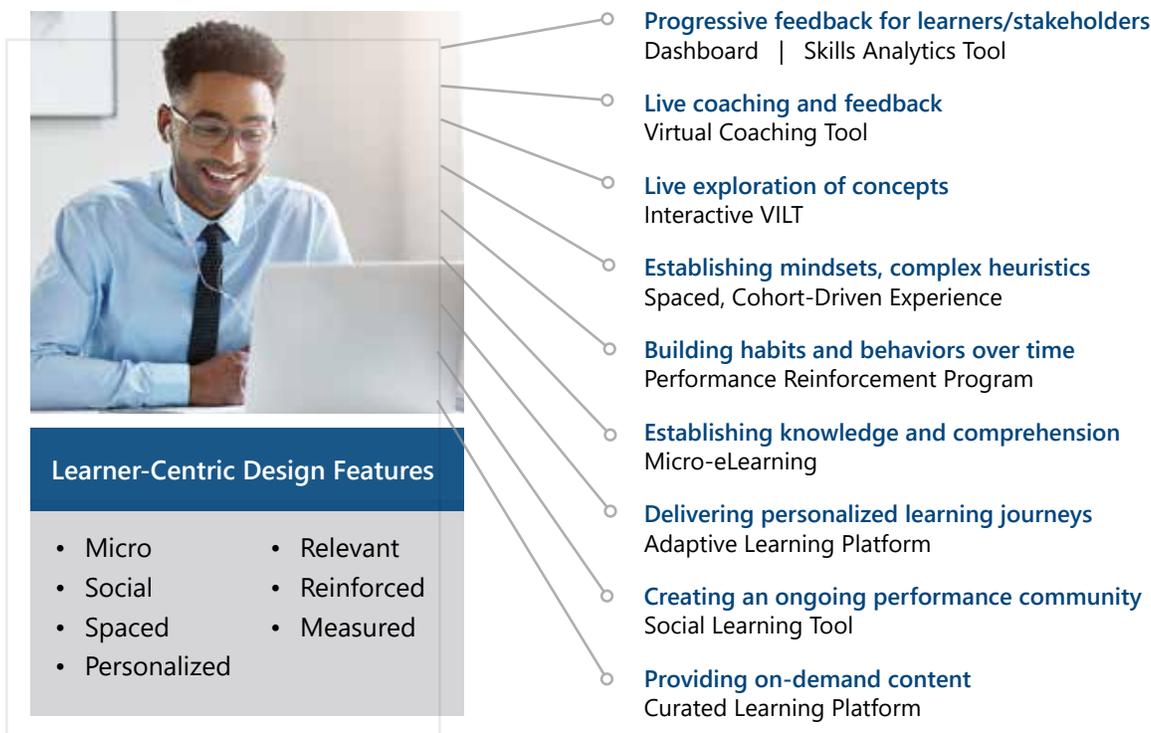
Revive

The step beyond survival is prioritizing and redesigning learning with a balance of available resources measured against what is most effective for the effort while reaching learners at more than one moment of need. This approach often looks different for every organization.

Thrive

This is a blended development approach with the ultimate goal of creating truly engaging and collaborative learning experiences that support employees long term. It includes ideation strategies such as design thinking and hackathon sessions along with modern learning consulting. This approach brings together a calculated mix of technologies and content from multiple sources into a holistic learning enterprise experience and is designed to reach learners at a range of moments of need.

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Modern Thrive Strategies for Digital Learning Journeys

Learner-Centric Design Features

- Micro
- Social
- Spaced
- Personalized
- Relevant
- Reinforced
- Measured

Progressive feedback for learners/stakeholders
Dashboard | Skills Analytics Tool

Live coaching and feedback
Virtual Coaching Tool

Live exploration of concepts
Interactive VILT

Establishing mindsets, complex heuristics
Spaced, Cohort-Driven Experience

Building habits and behaviors over time
Performance Reinforcement Program

Establishing knowledge and comprehension
Micro-eLearning

Delivering personalized learning journeys
Adaptive Learning Platform

Creating an ongoing performance community
Social Learning Tool

Providing on-demand content
Curated Learning Platform

DEVELOPING a Virtual Training Technology and Content Strategy

Technology Alone Will Not Help Your Virtual Training Thrive

Technology is important. It's helping solve old problems in new ways. But, at the same time, new problems are emerging. Technology by itself doesn't drive the engagement and impact learning teams need to achieve. The right mix of technologies needs to be selected and implemented with the right content solutions with careful consideration for your virtual training strategy.

We've seen many companies implement technologies with low impact. Our analysis finds it is usually due to a combination of core challenges:

- Simple conversions failing to account for virtual delivery and learner needs
- Low adoption and engagement from virtual programs lacking cohesion
- Complex systems causing both backend and user confusion
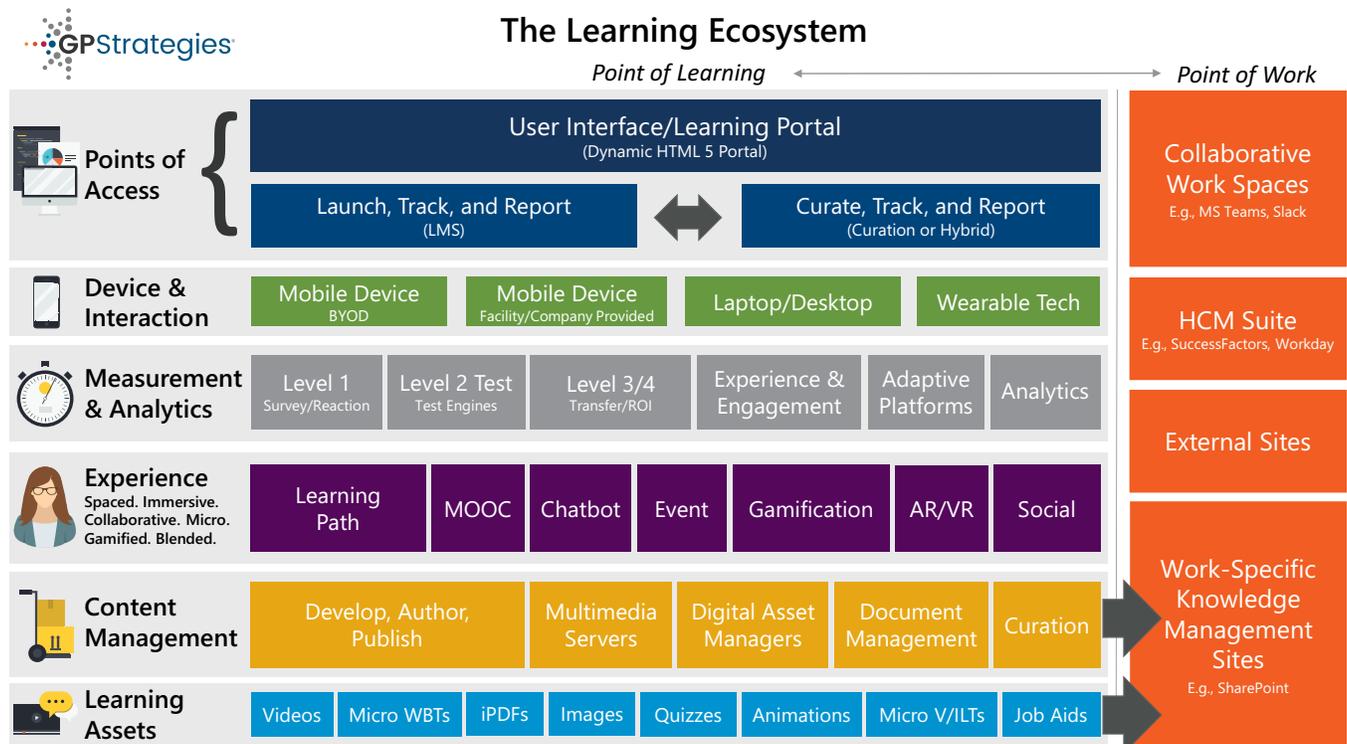- Content not distributed, mapped, or presented in an effective learner journey

Creating a Virtual Learning Ecosystem

Learning organizations need to be prepared to interact with a wide range of platforms. They should also consider platform-independent virtual training modalities and create a blended approach, such as interactive PDFs, video, and podcasts.

The selection and content choices should be mapped to a learner journey designed to meet specific goals for each program.

> " Technology is important. It's helping solve old problems in new ways. "

The following graphic is a sample of a learning ecosystem we've used to illustrate this point. It isn't about choosing everything on this map, but about selecting some elements that will create the learning experience you're hoping to create.

The Learning Ecosystem

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Point of Learning ←——————————————→ *Point of Work*

Points of Access	User Interface/Learning Portal (Dynamic HTML 5 Portal)						Collaborative Work Spaces E.g., MS Teams, Slack
	Launch, Track, and Report (LMS)		⬄	Curate, Track, and Report (Curation or Hybrid)			
Device & Interaction	Mobile Device BYOD	Mobile Device Facility/Company Provided	Laptop/Desktop		Wearable Tech		HCM Suite E.g., SuccessFactors, Workday
Measurement & Analytics	Level 1 Survey/Reaction	Level 2 Test Test Engines	Level 3/4 Transfer/ROI	Experience & Engagement	Adaptive Platforms	Analytics	External Sites
Experience Spaced. Immersive. Collaborative. Micro. Gamified. Blended.	Learning Path	MOOC	Chatbot	Event	Gamification	AR/VR	Social	Work-Specific Knowledge Management Sites E.g., SharePoint
Content Management	Develop, Author, Publish		Multimedia Servers	Digital Asset Managers	Document Management	Curation	
Learning Assets	Videos	Micro WBTs	iPDFs	Images	Quizzes	Animations	Micro V/ILTs	Job Aids	

Developing Your Content Engagement Strategy

Not everything needs to be recreated from scratch. GP Strategies® recommends developing a strategy where you can repurpose existing content from inside or outside the organization (borrow), acquire content that matches your needs (buy), and then create what you cannot find elsewhere (build). Each approach has its strengths and drawbacks, and it is important to ensure that, whatever strategies you use, your virtual designers create a seamless user experience.

BUILDING a Multidisciplinary Team of Virtual Training Specialists

## Filling the Need for Virtual Trainers, Designers, and Producers

The new normal calls for more than just converting existing content to virtual formats. It calls for a sustainable virtual program populated with specialists in virtual training or VILT. As with any modality, its effectiveness hinges on how well you understand the modality and how it conveys to your learners. It also depends on how well you know the platforms and technologies. Specialists can make all the difference. The following are key virtual training delivery roles with their individual strengths:

- **Digital Learning Consultants:** Design with modern learning principles to ensure learning programs are engaging and impactful to both the individual and the organization.
- **Virtual Facilitators:** Deliver learning for a virtual audience to drive connections and engagement.
- **Virtual Producers:** Support facilitators through hosting and technical tasks during live events.
- **Moderators:** Assist with content and communication for semi-synchronous experience over time.
- **Social Community Managers:** Work with participants to support continued learning and keep discussion flowing by curating content, managing multiple micro-experiences, and measuring engagement.

But that doesn't mean you have to redesign from the ground up. Instead, offer ways to upskill your people, such as onboarding and train-the-trainer sessions, to virtualize your trainers' delivery and style. Just this basic move can change the quality and stickiness of your virtual sessions, especially when designed by a virtual designer and facilitated by a virtual producer.

Establishing Your Virtual Academy

Giving your virtual efforts the foundational structure, organizational strength, and curricular consistency of a well-run digital or virtual academy is key in the new normal. It's critical to identify the emerging roles in your organization to support this new modern approach. Once identified, these roles will need the tools, templates, and learning experiences to take on new skills and job functions. By design, the academy should adapt and adjust as roles continue to evolve.
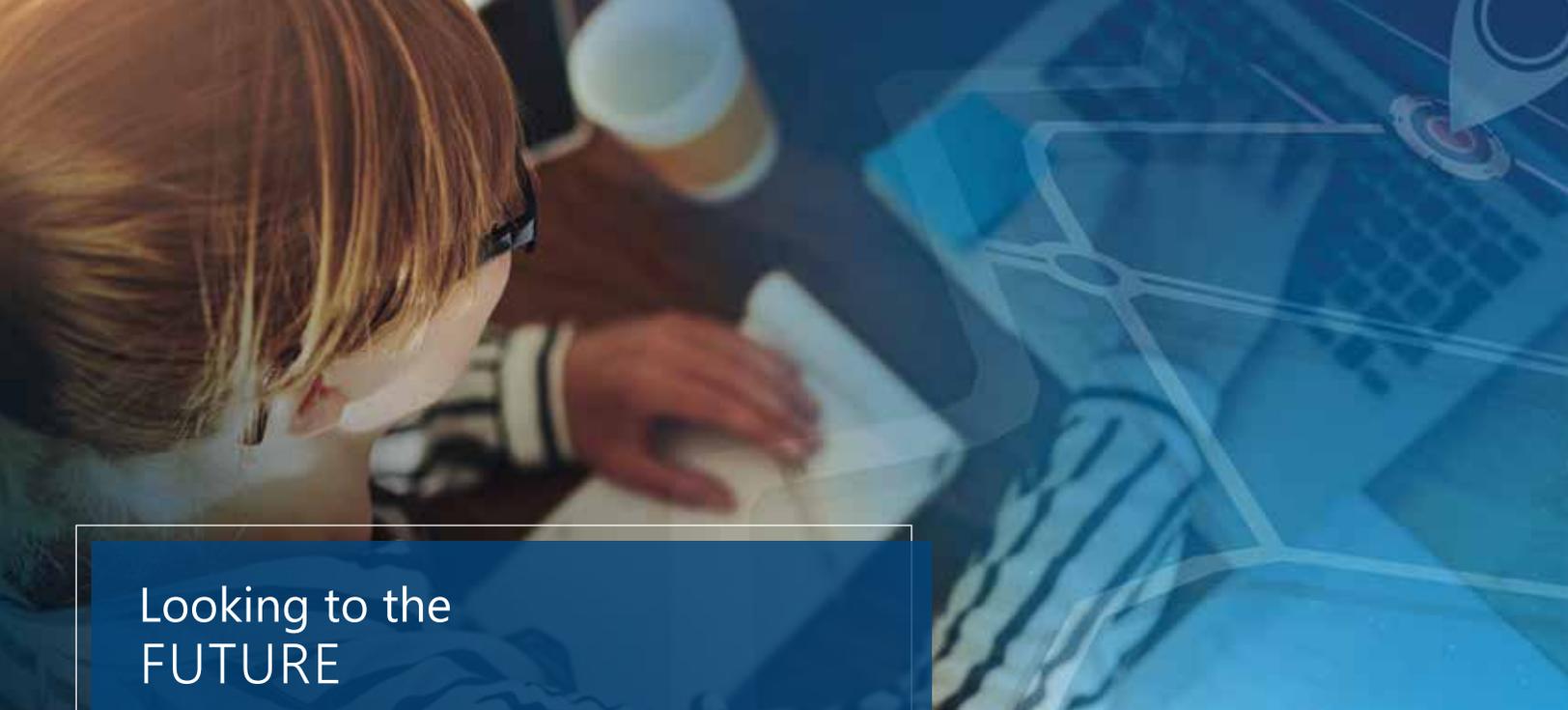
Looking to the FUTURE

When virtual training began, it was a smart way to reach distributed and mobile workforces. Over the years, it became the perfect way to incorporate training and lifelong learning into the day. Now that a large percentage of workers will be working from home for the foreseeable future—some permanently—it is becoming the bread and butter of our industry. This is not just a momentary need in the industry. It's an opportunity to bring your learning organization into a new era of development, innovation, and effectiveness.
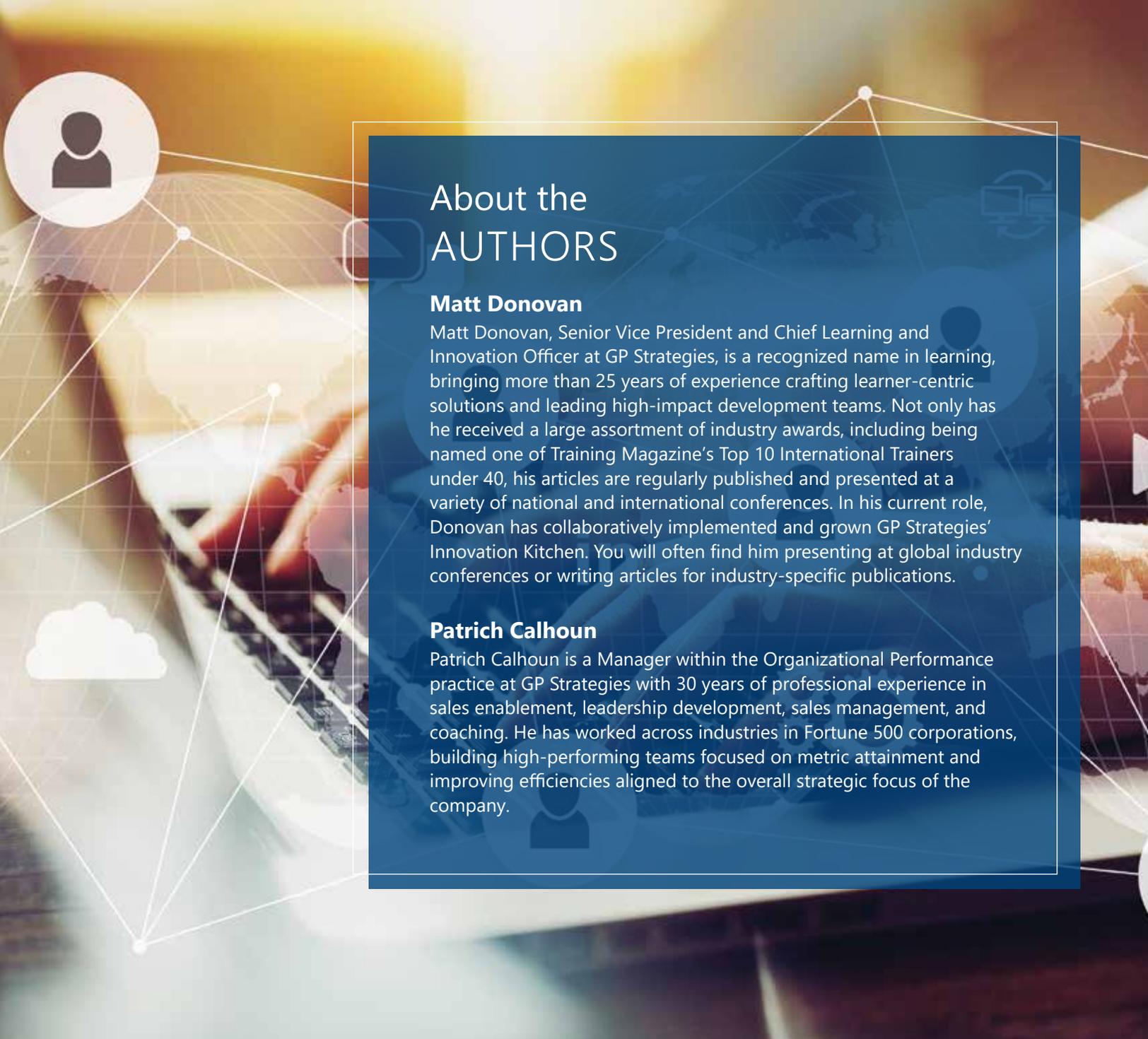
About the AUTHORS

Matt Donovan

Matt Donovan, Senior Vice President and Chief Learning and Innovation Officer at GP Strategies, is a recognized name in learning, bringing more than 25 years of experience crafting learner-centric solutions and leading high-impact development teams. Not only has he received a large assortment of industry awards, including being named one of Training Magazine's Top 10 International Trainers under 40, his articles are regularly published and presented at a variety of national and international conferences. In his current role, Donovan has collaboratively implemented and grown GP Strategies' Innovation Kitchen. You will often find him presenting at global industry conferences or writing articles for industry-specific publications.

Patrich Calhoun

Patrich Calhoun is a Manager within the Organizational Performance practice at GP Strategies with 30 years of professional experience in sales enablement, leadership development, sales management, and coaching. He has worked across industries in Fortune 500 corporations, building high-performing teams focused on metric attainment and improving efficiencies aligned to the overall strategic focus of the company.

About GP Strategies

GP Strategies has deep experience in virtual training, from design and delivery to platform selection and implementation, managed services, outsourcing, train-the-trainer sessions, and more. We get that these are disruptive times, and you may need help to accomplish the virtual aspects of your training practice. We can help you with strategizing your virtual approach all the way through to running your virtual academy. Why just survive? Let GP Strategies help you thrive!