INTELLIGENT ENTERPRISE LEADERS ALLIANCE

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FEATURING

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THE NEW ERA OF CORPORATE LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

- Designing Your Organization's AI Literacy Roadmap
- The Evidence-Based Principles That Turn Learning into Lasting Behavior
- The Skills-Informed Organization Is Impossible Without AI

STRATEGIC PARTNERS:

Training Orchestra

SCHOOX

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L&D's Strategic Role in the Age of AI

Learning and Development is entering one of the most transformative moments in its history. The rapid rise of AI as a workplace capability is redefining how people learn, how leaders lead, and how organizations build the skills required for the future. What began as experimentation with generative AI tools has evolved into a new era. AI now acts as a capability amplifier, enabling personalization, accelerating skill acquisition, and reshaping how learning ecosystems operate.

Across industries, organizations are rethinking what it means to support employee growth. They are shifting from static programs to dynamic, adaptive learning systems that respond to real-time needs. Yet despite this momentum, many L&D teams still struggle to translate AI enthusiasm into measurable business impact.

Research from IELA surveys reveals a clear pattern: as AI adoption accelerates, organizations are evolving their maturity, operating models, and leadership capabilities to keep pace. The momentum is unmistakable. L&D teams are moving from experimentation toward intentional, integrated AI-enabled learning systems, turning early curiosity into meaningful progress. What once felt like a gap between ambition and execution is now narrowing as organizations gain clarity and capability in how they use AI to build their future workforce.

Many organizations are beginning their learning transformation by reexamining their purpose and sharpening their vision for what learning can become. Instead of simply deploying tools, more L&D leaders are redefining the learner experience, focusing on the capabilities they want to strengthen and the business outcomes that matter most. With a clear vision, L&D becomes a strategic engine that guides decision-making.

Megan Kashtan

Senior Research Analyst/Editor, IELA

Additionally, AI is transforming how organizations understand and develop skills. For the first time, companies can connect learning, performance, and capability needs in real time. Skills are becoming the language of the business, and AI is making that possible through adaptive learning pathways and predictive insights. However, this shift also introduces new challenges, like understanding workforce anxieties and managing declining employee engagement. In a time of layoffs, restructuring, and economic volatility, delivering meaningful learning experiences requires empathy, communication, and trust.

The role of leadership is changing too. As AI transforms work, leaders need to balance rapid technological advances with human-centered decision-making. They must guide teams through uncertainty, embrace new mindsets, and recognize where human judgment complements machine intelligence. Emotional intelligence and communication are now essential leadership skills, not just soft skills, but strategic ones. AI highlights the importance of these skills instead of replacing them.

Ultimately, the future of L&D will not be defined by tools, but by the organizations that approach learning with intentionality, operational maturity, and a deep understanding of human potential. Those that succeed will treat AI as a force that amplifies the power of great learning design and clear strategy.

IELA is proud to present "The New Era of Corporate L&D," a publication that builds on our previous research and explores the vital connection between AI, strategy, and workforce development. Leading learning experts, researchers, associations, and practitioners share insights on how AI is transforming capability development, leadership readiness, training operations, and the future of the L&D function.
Featured topics include:

- AI as a Capability Amplifier: Redefining Personalized Learning and Development
- Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Multigenerational Communication in Today's Workplace
- The Real Promise of AI for L&D
- How AI Roleplays Drive Real Skill Development
- The Future of Learning and Development Is Business-First
- Training Operations: The Missing Link in L&D Strategy
- The Skills-Informed Organization Is Impossible Without AI
- Rethinking AI Literacy in Corporate L&D

The pace of change in L&D is accelerating, and this is the moment for organizations to prepare. The shift toward AI-enabled, skills-based, business-first learning is already underway. Those who understand how to integrate AI responsibly, personalize development at scale, and strengthen leadership for an AI-driven world will shape the next era of workforce transformation.

This publication offers practical guidance, research-backed insights, and forward-looking strategies to help organizations navigate this new landscape with clarity and confidence. The future of L&D is here, and it is more strategic and human-centered than ever before.

Methodology & Demographics

To understand how Learning & Development leaders are adjusting their strategies for the future, IELA conducted two comprehensive surveys over the past year. The first survey, conducted between April and June 2025, analyzed drivers of cultural change as well as the current state and impact of AI implementation, forming the basis of our June 2025 Market Study: The Future of Corporate Learning & Development. The second, more recent survey was conducted from October to November 2025 and aimed to identify any changes over the past six months and explore emerging trends for 2026. This report focuses largely on the progression of trends between the two surveys and will refer to the April 2025 study as IELA's 2025 survey and to the October 2025 study as IELA's 2026 survey.

Example respondent job titles:

- Chief Learning Officer
- SVP, Learning and Organizational Development
- Vice President
- Sr. Director L&D
- Sr. Director Learning
- Sr Director, Employee Experience, Diversity & Inclusion
- Director of Learning & Development
- Director of Learning
- Director, Talent Management
- Executive Director
- North America Director, Workforce Development
- Sr. Manager, L&D Delivery
- Learning and Development Manager
- Strategic Learning Partner, Enterprise Portfolio
- Training Manager

Key Findings

1. Culture change is accelerating across organizations. The percentage of respondents reporting an organizational culture change increased from 61% to 67%, with leaders citing restructures, post-acquisition integration, and shifts in learning roles as major drivers.

2. The share of respondents embedding learning into the flow of work increased from 39% to 59%, reflecting a shift toward just-in-time skill development.

3. AI readiness and literacy are now front-line priorities. Corporate AI training adoption rose from 17% to 52%, and embedding AI into ongoing development increased from 17% to 31%.

4. Internal mobility is declining as a strategic priority. Organizational focus on mobility, upskilling, and reskilling to support movement fell from 43% to 28%, likely due to restructures and economic uncertainty.

5. L&D teams now consider AI features highly important when selecting a vendor, with an average rating of 8/10.

6. Organizations operating at the Strategic Stage of LearnOps maturity jumped from 35% to 52%, with 7% reaching the Predictive Stage.

7. Organizations reporting a culture of continuous learning increased sharply from 26% to 45%.

8. Reported gains in AI-driven operational efficiency increased from 13% to 41%, and success in insights/decision-making rose from 4% to 21%.However, perceived AI effectiveness for employee engagement declined (26% to 17%) amid broader drops in engagement.

The L&D Function in Transformation

The past year has brought a significant shift in how organizations approach strategy, and the L&D function is no exception. AI adoption is the clear driver of most of these changes, with its ever-evolving capabilities sparking shifts in how organizations operate key business functions. L&D professionals have moved quickly to update learning materials and rethink operations, both to enhance the effectiveness of learning programs and to ensure that employees are AI-ready. At the same time, economic volatility and layoffs are impacting employee engagement, and the workforce feels pressure to continue to adapt quickly but faces anxiety about job security.

These developments are transforming the L&D landscape and catapulting L&D into a new era. Organizations are shifting from viewing learning as a supportive function to seeing it as a key driver of business success. The L&D team now leads cultural change and improves organizational adaptability in response to AI's impact on the workplace. According to IELA's 2025 survey on the future of corporate learning and development, 61% of respondents said their organization was adopting a culture change; this increased to 67% in the survey for 2026. Instead of working in isolation and needing to justify its value, L&D is now part of the overall organizational strategy from the beginning. In the AI era, this means preparing learning professionals to promote AI literacy throughout the organization and to integrate AI into all learning activities and experiences.

Additional statistics gleaned from IELA's research also illuminate the shifting learning culture. The percentage of respondents actively preparing their workforce for the future rose from 35% to 41%. Those who reported having a true culture of continuous learning jumped from 26% to 45%, a notable shift that reflects growing organizational commitment to skill-building. At the same time, learning is slowly becoming more of a priority. In 2025, 57% said learning was encouraged but not always prioritized; in 2026, that number dropped to 52%. Even more telling, the share of respondents who said their organization had minimal focus on learning fell from 9% to zero, signaling that nearly all organizations are at least paying attention to workforce development.

Another notable trend is the increasing adoption of learning in the flow of work. The percentage of organizations reporting that they embrace learning as part of day-to-day work grew from 39% in 2025 to 59% in 2026. This shift reflects a broader understanding that formal training alone is no longer sufficient; employees need access to just-in-time learning that can be applied immediately to their tasks. By embedding learning into everyday workflows, organizations are making development more relevant, actionable, and effective, while also helping employees build skills without disrupting productivity. This approach aligns closely with the move toward L&D as a strategic business partner.

Organizational Culture in Flux

The rapid pace of cultural change within organizations is shaping the L&D landscape. When asked whether they were currently experiencing a culture shift, 67% of respondents said yes, and their explanations reveal just how varied and profound these transitions are.

Some teams are managing major reorganizations, including shifts from contractor-heavy models to fully staffed internal teams. Others are reexamining the role and identity of learning designers, aiming to foster cultures that are more collaborative and aligned with new ways of working. Several respondents mentioned executive turnover, post-acquisition culture blending, and large-scale global realignment efforts as sources of ongoing change.

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A few noted that culture is "always evolving," but for many, the scale of change today feels especially significant. One respondent described the focus as "building learning into the fabric of our work," signaling a push to embed development more deeply throughout the organization.

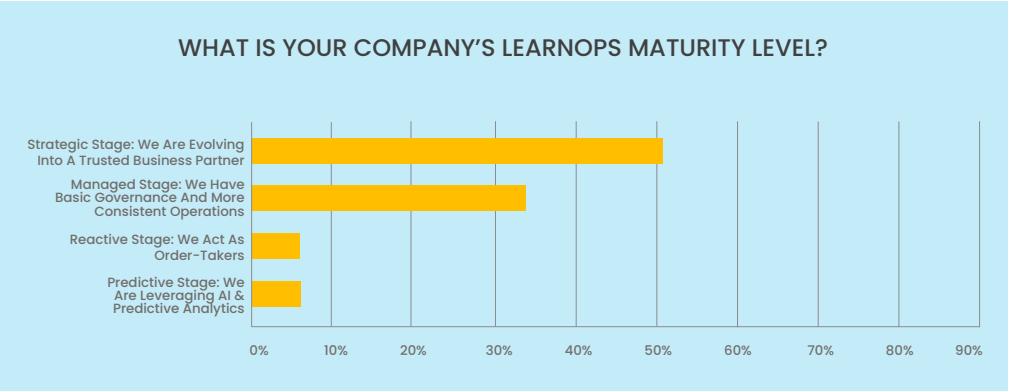
Taken together, these responses suggest that L&D leaders are doing their work amid shifting ground, managing not just programs and technologies, but the cultural recalibration required to support new strategies, structures, and expectations.

A Surprising Drop in Focus on Internal Mobility

The one area moving in the opposite direction is internal mobility. The percentage of organizations emphasizing upskilling and reskilling to support internal movement dropped sharply, from 43% to 28%. Several factors may be driving this trend. Economic uncertainty and ongoing waves of restructuring appear to be shifting attention away from mobility pathways and toward workforce stability. In many organizations, the priority has become retaining essential talent, protecting critical roles, and maintaining productivity, rather than enabling transitions, promotions, or lateral moves. It may also reflect the early impact of AI, as companies pause to reassess which roles are evolving, which are at risk, and where new capabilities will be most needed before investing in internal movement again.

Psychological Safety: Belief Outpaces Implementation

While nearly nine out of ten respondents agree that psychological safety is essential for learning, development, and growth, far fewer say their organizations are truly embracing it. In fact, the percentage of leaders who report having a culture that supports psychological safety actually declined year to year, from 26% to 21%. This gap suggests a growing recognition of the importance of psychological safety, but also the reality that organizations are struggling to operationalize it. Competing priorities, pressure to move fast, and the uncertainty brought on by AI-driven change may all be making it harder for teams to create the trust and openness needed for effective learning. The result is a tension between what leaders believe and what their cultures currently support.



From the Managed Stage to the Strategic Stage

In IELA's 2025 survey on the future of corporate learning and development, 52% of respondents reported that their company's LearnOps maturity level was at the Managed Stage, while only 35% had advanced to the Strategic Stage. At that time, L&D was still largely functioning as a supportive partner, organized, consistent, and aligned with business needs, but not yet embedded in core decision-making.

Our updated survey for 2026 tells a very different story. The percentage of organizations operating at the Managed Stage dropped significantly to 34%, while those in the Strategic Stage surged to 52%. Even more noteworthy, 7% of respondents reported reaching the Predictive Stage, where learning functions use predictive analytics and AI-driven insights to guide workforce decisions before capability gaps emerge.

This upward shift reflects a broader movement: L&D is now actively shaping business strategy. Organizations are looking to L&D to anticipate future skill needs and partner with the business in navigating AI-driven transformation. The rise in Strategic and Predictive maturity levels shows that L&D teams are becoming not just implementers, but orchestrators, utilizing technology and business alignment to help chart their organization's path forward.

The Next Wave of AI in Learning

IELA's research offers an in-depth look at how AI is driving major workplace changes. By the end of 2025, we're well into the "AI Revolution." We have incorporated generative AI into our daily routines and are becoming familiar with autonomous systems and agentic AI. As organizations adapt to these changes, they are shifting from testing AI to actively implementing AI-enabled workflows. AI tools are now a fundamental part of how people work.

This shift has transformed how L&D professionals engage with AI. During 2023 and 2024, as AI tools were emerging, the emphasis was on utilizing them to enhance employee learning experiences. There was extensive discussion about employing generative AI for content creation. Now, use cases are becoming more advanced, shifting to providing real-time feedback, coaching, and personalized learning.

AI Literacy

In our 2025 survey of L&D professionals on the future of corporate learning, compared with the pre-2026 version,

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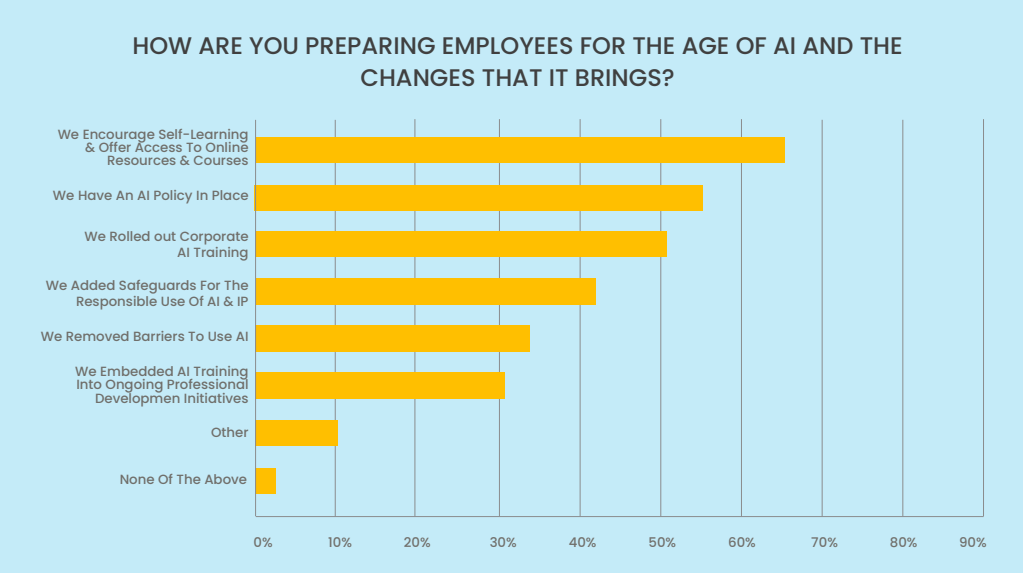

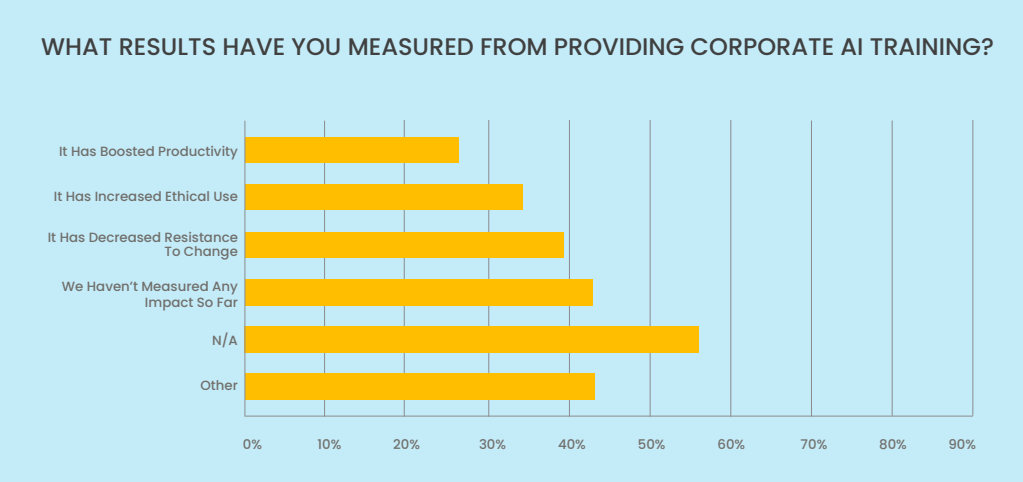

there were notable differences in AI usage. While the statistics stayed relatively static in certain selected categories, "We encourage self-learning and offer access to online resources and courses," and "We have an AI policy in place", there were significant changes in other categories that are important to note.

Mainly, the data indicates that there is a much greater focus on ensuring employees are equipped with the knowledge it takes to properly leverage AI within their roles. First, the percentage of respondents who said they encourage self-learning and offer access to online resources and courses rose from 57% to 66%. Additionally, the percentage of respondents who embedded AI training into ongoing professional development initiatives increased from 17% to 31%. Most notably, there was a significant shift in the percentage of respondents who had rolled out corporate AI training, rising from 17% to 52%.

As AI becomes more integrated into daily life, these increases are understandable. Since AI is now part of nearly everything we do, companies that don't train their employees on AI will quickly fall behind. Leaders are seizing the chance to implement AI training before it's too late.

AI-Driven Learning

L&D leaders continue to focus on ensuring AI literacy among employees and integrating AI into learning programs for improved effectiveness and ROI. When asked about their top priorities regarding AI in the next twelve months, the top three responses were supporting company-wide AI readiness (59%), leveraging AI to enhance personalized employee development and career planning (55%), and developing an AI strategy for L&D (38%).

Interestingly, the percentage of respondents prioritizing building an AI strategy for L&D dropped from 48% in our mid-2025 survey to 38%, while the percentage supporting company-wide AI-readiness increased from 43% to 59%. These trends suggest that learning leaders may have moved beyond the initial stage of developing an AI strategy to focusing on more advanced aspects. For example, there was a significant rise in those prioritizing the use of AI to enhance personalized employee development and career pathing, from 30% in 2025 to 55% in 2026. Learning professionals are progressing from early content creation and course development to creating truly customizable, personalized learning paths.

Respondents' explanations of where they were six months ago compared to today align well with this data. Overall, they reported being further along, having made some progress, or being slightly more advanced than they were half a year ago. Some of this progress includes establishing or developing internal AI-powered learning tools. L&D departments are transitioning from initial implementation to further developing more targeted AI-powered learning methodologies. Additionally, AI is a top consideration when learning professionals evaluate vendors. On a scale of 1-10, the average importance rating for AI features when choosing a solution provider was 8.

The Effects of AI Implementation

There are clearly shifts happening in the adoption of AI, but what effects are they having? In IELA's 2025 survey, 46%

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of respondents had not yet measured success from their AI efforts. By the survey for 2026, this number dropped to 38%. Although this is not a large change, it is still meaningful and shows that more L&D professionals are effectively assessing the impact of AI. For those who have evaluated AI success, the ways in which success was measured also changed.

While in 2025, only 13% of respondents reported measurable success from leveraging AI for operational efficiency, in the survey for 2026, that number increased to 41%. AI's effectiveness for decision-making and insights also grew significantly, from 4% to 21%.

Key Economic Considerations

Despite the benefits observed from AI implementation, the survey also revealed that AI's effectiveness in promoting employee engagement declined, dropping from 26% to 17%. Several potential explanations exist. First, overall employee engagement appears to be decreasing. Gallup's State of the Global Workforce 2025 report indicated that global employee engagement fell from 23% in 2024 to 21%. In the United States, engagement decreased to 31%, with 17% actively disengaged. IELA's data, acknowledging that it specifically measured AI's impact on employee engagement rather than engagement levels in general, suggests that employee engagement may have declined even further in 2025.

Considering the ongoing economic and labor market uncertainties, it is understandable that employee disengagement is rising as workers worry about their job security and future prospects. The increasing number of layoffs creates a climate of fear within the workforce. Employees who see colleagues affected by layoffs or worry about their own roles experience higher stress levels, which then decreases engagement. Additionally, the global debate about the impact of artificial intelligence on employment further heightens these concerns. It follows that AI-powered employee engagement efforts may face challenges, with both engagement declining and fears about AI's effects intensifying.

All of this data demonstrates that the L&D function is in a transition phase with AI. It's shifting from experimentation to implementation, with many companies moving from initial AI testing to integrating it into workflows. As AI becomes increasingly central to the workplace, L&D leaders will need to keep adapting to ensure learning programs support this ongoing shift.

Beyond these shifting priorities, the data suggests that L&D teams are becoming more intentional and selective in where they deploy AI. Early experimentation, typically centered on content generation, automation, and efficiency, has begun to evolve into targeted use cases tied to long-term workforce strategy. The sharp rise in interest around personalized development and career planning reflects this evolution. L&D leaders are recognizing that AI's highest value lies not merely in speeding up existing work, but in enabling new forms of learning that weren't feasible before, such as skills forecasting and adaptive pathways.

These capabilities signal a move from using AI as an operational tool to using it as a strategic capability-builder within the organization.

There is also evidence that L&D is starting to integrate AI into the broader talent ecosystem. As organizations begin linking AI-enabled learning tools with performance management, workforce planning, and leadership development, learning becomes more intertwined with business strategy. This closely aligns with the larger trend of L&D moving from a support role to a strategic partner. Learning professionals are no longer just implementing AI; they're also aligning it with long-term capability needs, succession planning, and organizational design. This integration points to a future where AI isn't simply embedded within learning programs, but where learning itself becomes a core lever for navigating AI-driven transformation.

Another key insight from the data is the increasing recognition that AI maturity is more than just a technological journey; it's a cultural one. The rise in company-wide AI readiness as a top priority indicates that organizations are dealing with the human aspects of adaptation, such as change management, communication, and trust. As AI becomes more integrated into workflows, employees need clarity about how it affects their roles, development opportunities, and job security. L&D is increasingly seen as the department responsible for leading this cultural shift, equipping teams with the mindsets and skills necessary to work confidently alongside AI. This emphasizes L&D's role not just as a skills provider but also as a driver of organizational resilience and adaptability.

Finally, the increased emphasis on evaluating AI's impact, paired with clear gains in operational efficiency and insights, shows that L&D is beginning to mature in how it measures value. The days of experimenting without structure are fading. Instead, teams are setting clearer objectives, building assessment frameworks, and using data to understand what's working and what's not. This focus on measurement will be critical as organizations expand their AI investments. It will enable L&D leaders to make stronger business cases and demonstrate the tangible benefits of AI-enabled learning. As this maturity continues to grow, we can expect AI initiatives to become more aligned with broader enterprise goals.

Leadership Skills for an AI-Driven Workforce

As AI becomes deeply embedded in organizational workflows, leadership capabilities are emerging as a critical success factor. In an AI-enabled world, technology-ready, human-centered leadership is more important than ever. Leaders are now responsible for guiding teams through rapid technological change, ensuring transparency around how AI is used, and fostering

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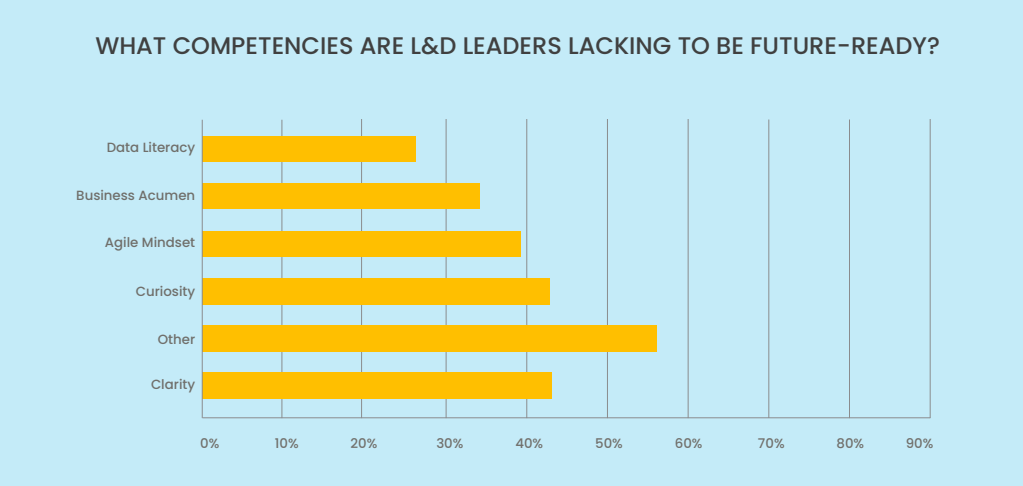

trust in systems that can feel disruptive. They must navigate the balance between automation and human judgment, helping employees build confidence and adapt skills in an environment where work is increasingly augmented by machines.

The data shows leadership is becoming more equipped to face the future. When asked which skills L&D leaders themselves are lacking to be fully future-ready, respondents reported notable decreases across several categories: business acumen fell from 61% to 48%, data literacy declined from 61% to 52%, and curiosity dropped sharply from 52% to just 14%. These declines suggest progress, as fewer leaders reporting a deficit indicates growing confidence or improved capabilities.

However, it's important to remain aware of these skills and to continuously cultivate them. As AI literacy rises and AI-driven systems take on more routine analysis, there could be less awareness of the skill gaps that remain, with people assuming that access to AI tools reduces the need for traditional capabilities like data fluency or strategic business insight. Yet these are precisely the skills leaders will need most in an AI-led environment. AI does not replace the ability to interpret data, connect insights to business objectives, or make informed strategic decisions; it amplifies the need for those capabilities.

At the same time, the majority of respondents say they are prioritizing the development of leadership skills needed to navigate the age of AI, with a strong emphasis on "human skills." Organizations increasingly recognize that leadership differentiation in the AI era will hinge less on technical mastery and more on capabilities like emotional intelligence, communication, adaptability, ethical judgment, and the ability to lead teams through ambiguity. As AI takes on more analytical and operational tasks, human-centered leadership becomes the strategic differentiator, especially in high-uncertainty environments where trust, transparency, and stability are essential.

Taken together, these findings show that leadership development is becoming a core part of an organization's AI strategy rather than an add-on. The shift from Managed to Strategic LearnOps maturity reinforces this point: as L&D becomes a more integral player in shaping workforce transformation, leadership skills, particularly those that enable informed decision-making, are foundational to ensuring that AI adoption creates value rather than confusion, and that employees feel supported rather than displaced.

Conclusion: L&D at the Center of the Next Era of Work

The 2026 data makes one thing unmistakably clear: L&D is becoming the operating system for how organizations adapt. As AI reshapes every aspect of work, L&D is stepping into a more strategic role, guiding skill development, culture, leadership, and organizational alignment.

The shifts in LearnOps maturity, the rapid rise of learning in the flow of work, the expansion of AI literacy initiatives, and the deepening integration of AI into learning programs all point to an L&D function that is maturing quickly. At the same time, challenges remain: internal mobility is contracting, and psychological safety is proving harder to operationalize.

But the overall story is one of accelerated progress. Organizations are investing more intentionally in continuous learning cultures, preparing employees for AI-enabled roles, and turning to L&D to guide them through uncertainty. Learning teams are gaining confidence in analytics, AI strategy, personalization, and change management. They are becoming orchestrators of organizational readiness.

Looking ahead, L&D will play a decisive role in shaping the next era of work. The opportunity, and the responsibility, is to continue evolving from program creators to strategic partners who influence workforce transformation at the highest levels. As AI continues to advance and business conditions remain volatile, the organizations that thrive will be those that treat learning as a core strategic lever. And L&D leaders will be the ones positioned to turn that ambition into reality.

Building Creative, Curious, Future-Ready Learning with AI

Interview with
Kelly Stuart-Johnson
Global Head of Learning, VML

Kelly Stuart Johnson is Global Head of Learning at VML, a global creative powerhouse serving 26,000 employees in 50+ markets. Named 2025 CLO of the Year by Better Work Media Group and winner of Brandon Hall's Gold Award for Best Learning Leader, she is responsible for breakthrough programs like "Open Everydai," which protected a $300 million AI investment with a $3,000 internally-developed solution.

In what ways can L&D professionals use AI to spark creativity and innovation in program design, rather than just efficiency and automation?

AI removes technical barriers that used to limit the solutions learning teams could consider, whether due to budget, time, or lack of technical skill. An example: VML set out to become the #1 user of WPP Open (our proprietary AI operating system) across the WPP network. At a moment when many L&D teams are thinking about AI awareness, we needed behavior change on a global scale for 26,000 people. A small part of the VML population was using WPP Open, and almost no one was using it every day. They needed step-by-step training that didn't exist yet.

Watching the chat during live, hands-on demos helped us realize something. If we could build self-paced walkthroughs for everyday tasks that everyone in an agency has to do, like analyzing data to gain insights, taking meeting notes, and creating follow-up emails, we could create a foundation for organic experimentation.

To build these walkthroughs, we needed an expensive enterprise solution or we could create a pixel-perfect replica of WPP Open using commercial eLearning software with JavaScript enhancements. We didn't know JavaScript, but we knew WPP Open could teach us.

We built five fully interactive walkthroughs using only the consumer tools we'd already invested in, plus the coding that AI helped us learn and execute. Within eight weeks of launch, VML became the #1 user of WPP Open across the network, a position we still hold. We turned a $3,000 investment in eLearning tools into a solution that helps protect a $300 million investment in AI.

How can L&D teams balance the use of AI-generated content with maintaining accuracy, inclusivity, and organizational voice?

A 2023 Harvard Business School/BCG study showed AI elevates low performers (43% improvement) more than top performers (17% improvement). This means inexperienced or overextended teams can produce good work, but good AI content lacks the character and informed perspective that makes truly great learning. An example is VML's "Hi" series. Hi teaches the human skills that make us irreplaceable while showing leaders how to use AI to create time for more human work. AI doesn't generate Hi's content, but we use it to create practice opportunities at scale through simulations.

How can organizations use AI to identify emerging skill gaps and build more adaptive, future-ready learning ecosystems?

Organizations are using AI to predict needed skills by analyzing performance data. But AI only finds patterns in what you're already measuring, and what matters for future readiness doesn't show up there.

In his January 2025 World Economic Forum interview, Adam Grant said, "The future does not belong to the fact collectors; it actually belongs to the dot connectors." How do you measure whether someone can synthesize across unrelated information? Or know when to push back on a request that won't solve the actual problem? These capabilities determine whether learning creates change or checks boxes.

AI's gift to us is making iteration faster. We can build simulations, track who practices and whether their behavior changes, then adjust based on what we learn. The most effective L&D teams will be those that can run experiments and interpret signals. If you're organized around annual planning and vendor management, AI won't fix that. The shift is working more like product designers—building, measuring, learning, iterating—than curriculum developers executing a plan.

What role can L&D play in helping employees develop the curiosity, agility, and digital confidence needed to thrive in an AI-driven workplace?

Instead of training people on "how to be curious," build opportunities to practice curiosity in low-stakes environments. Give them a problem they care about solving and space to experiment. One pattern we've seen: managers will practice difficult conversations with AI simulations dozens of times when they won't practice them in workshops. When people can fail privately and try again immediately, they engage differently.

The bigger shift is helping people think like scientists: forming hypotheses, running experiments, and updating beliefs based on evidence. Most training says, "Here's the right way." What we need more of is "Here are three approaches that might work. Go try them and come back with what you learned." L&D's role isn't to build curiosity, agility, and digital confidence directly. It's to design systems where those qualities become necessary for success, then give people enough support and safety to develop them through practice.

AI as a Capability Amplifier: Redefining Personalized Learning and Development

Interview with
Adam Hickman Ph.D.
Vice President, Learning, Organizational and Employee Development, Partners Affiliate of Walt Disney

How are you currently using AI to tailor learning paths or recommend content for employees?

At Partners, we've been very intentional in using AI not just as a content curator, but as a capability amplifier. Our system draws from role architecture, skill inventories, performance conversations, and even engagement feedback to design learning journeys unique to each employee. For example, if a manager identifies "developing team resilience" as a goal, the AI engine recommends micro-learning, coaching guides, and peer scenarios that match their specific context, all mapped back to our capability model. It also adapts as employees progress. If someone completes a module on emotional regulation, the AI might next surface a learning challenge or reflective exercise tied to their team's current engagement themes. It's less about pushing content and more about pulling relevance. We're moving from a catalog mentality to an ecosystem mindset; where data, learning, and performance all live in the same conversation.

What opportunities does personalization through AI open up for L&D teams?

Personalization fundamentally shifts the role of L&D from being a producer of programs to an orchestrator of experiences. AI lets us scale what used to be reserved for executive coaching, contextual learning, moment-based feedback, and goal-linked growth. It also allows for real-time agility. When market trends shift or member expectations evolve, the AI model can instantly surface new development paths aligned to those emerging needs. That's how learning becomes a competitive advantage, not a lagging response. For our L&D team, personalization through AI has opened capacity. We spend less time maintaining content libraries and more time enabling leaders to coach, reflect, and reinforce learning on the job. It transforms L&D from transactional to transformational.

How are you measuring the impact of AI-driven personalization on learning outcomes or engagement?

We measure in three categories: **engagement, application, and enablement.**

- **Engagement** captures activity, time spent, return visits, social sharing, and completion rates. It helps us understand what resonates.
- **Application** evaluates behavioral change through post-learning reflection prompts, pulse surveys, and manager feedback loops.
- **Enablement** connects learning to performance outcomes, like improved service metrics, faster onboarding, or reduced regrettable attrition.

We've learned that personalization drives higher stickiness. Employees spend more time in their learning path when it feels relevant and responsive to their growth. But the real metric isn't how many courses are completed, it's whether those insights show up in team meetings, performance check-ins, and business results.

How do you ensure AI-powered recommendations align with both employee goals and business priorities?

Alignment comes from architecture. Every recommendation generated by AI must trace back to our organizational capability model, which defines what great performance looks like at Partners. We start with the business strategy, what the credit union must deliver to members, and cascade that into leadership and functional capabilities. Then we tag our learning assets to those capabilities, ensuring every recommendation is not just personalized, but purposeful. If someone wants to grow in "leading change," the AI engine pulls content tied to that capability, not just general leadership topics. It's how we keep employee aspiration aligned with enterprise execution, the sweet spot of organizational learning.

How can leaders and managers complement AI-personalized learning with coaching and feedback?

AI can recommend what to learn next; managers bring the why and how. The greatest unlock happens when a leader uses those AI prompts to start real conversations:

- "What stood out to you in that module?"
- "How might you apply that on your next project?"
- "What did you learn that we can use as a team?"

This is where AI meets humanity. Managers make personalization meaningful through coaching and feedback loops that connect learning to lived experience. In a sense, AI builds the map, but leaders help employees travel it. We coach managers at Partners to use these insights as catalysts for connection, not control. The goal isn't to manage learning, but to magnify it.

How do you see AI-driven personalization evolving over the next few years?

We're moving toward adaptive learning ecosystems platforms that don't just recommend content, but evolve dynamically based on behavior, collaboration data, and even wellness metrics. Imagine a system that knows when a learner is overloaded and pauses recommendations, or that nudges reflection when engagement dips.

The future of personalization isn't just smarter algorithms; it's more empathetic intelligence. It will blend cognitive science, behavioral data, and human context to deliver not just learning, but growth in the moment that matters most. We'll also see tighter integration between AI and internal talent systems, using predictive analytics to identify emerging skill gaps and recommending learning long before performance drops. That's when AI moves from reactive to proactive, from learning to foresight.

What advice would you give to organizations just beginning to explore AI-based learning personalization?

Start small but design for scale. Begin with one high-impact moment, like onboarding, manager readiness, or career mobility, and let AI personalize that experience. Use it to learn how your data behaves, where your systems intersect, and how employees respond. Invest as much in trust as in technology. AI in learning works best when employees believe it serves their growth, not just company goals. Transparency about how recommendations are made builds that confidence. And finally, don't chase tools, chase outcomes. The real power of AI is unlocked when it helps people perform better, feel more connected, and see a future for themselves in the organization.

How AI Roleplays Drive Real Skill Development

Interview with
Philippe Riveron
Chairman & Global Alliances/
Co-Founder, Edflex

What exactly is an AI Roleplay, and why should L&D care?

At Edflex, we strongly believe in a blended learning approach where digital formats like videos, podcasts, and courses come together with live, instructor-led experiences. AI Roleplays take that blend to the next level by empowering learners to practice real-world conversations like pitching a client, handling feedback, leading a meeting, or managing difficult conversations with instant, human-like responses. This is where learners reach levels 5 and 6 of Bloom's taxonomy, turning knowledge into real, demonstrated skill.

Why are AI Roleplays such a breakthrough for corporate learning?

AI Roleplays finally solve the gap between "I get it" and "I can do it." Most training stops at knowledge transfer, but AI Roleplays push learners to apply that knowledge in context. It's active, adaptive, and measurable. Organizations can train thousands at once, see how skills evolve, and connect learning directly to performance metrics. It's not just a more fun way to learn, but it's transformative for ROI and culture.

There's a lot of noise in the AI training space. What sets Edflex apart?

We're not here to build another shiny AI gadget. We're using AI to reimagine how people practice their work. At Edflex, the magic happens where pedagogy meets innovation so that each scenario feels authentic, like learners are actually in the moment, not just clicking through mandatory content.

What's next for Edflex and AI in learning?

The next big thing is around customization. Our AI Roleplays are evolving to reflect each client's culture, solutions, and way of work so that every scenario feels authentic and relevant. We're also adding more instructor-led features to strengthen the blended learning experience in a trusted, secure environment. Every scenario is grounded in solid pedagogy and curated from our expert-verified content to keep our AI solution safe, credible, and focused on real skill growth.

edflex

Can AI Coaching Truly Build Empathy and Emotional Intelligence?

Interview with
Elliott Masie
Author, Producer, and President of
The MASIE Center

Elliott Masie is one of the life long innovators in the EdTech and eLearning space. He is the Chair of MASIE Learning Foundation and also a Tony Nominated Broadway Producer.

How can we leverage AI to boost Empathy and Emotional Intelligence in the workplace?

I think when we look at AI, it's akin to a LEGO block. Powerful, sometimes overwhelming, and something to plug into in the worlds of learning, development, HR, or business. I think it's important to focus on that process. When doing work, whether we realize it or not, AI is increasingly part of that process. Be authentic about where and what knowledge is being delivered to the learner.

Do you think that an AI coach could help someone develop better empathy and emotional intelligence?

I think AI has a really interesting role, but I don't want to oversimplify it. I don't want to overhype it. For example, someone said to me, "Well, you can become a better speaker with an AI tutor." I've been working on that all my life, and I've seen people spend a fortune trying to become better speakers, but they often fail because they lack a strong self-concept, because they had a parent who broke them down along the way, or because they're not mentally prepared for it. So, I want to clarify that the coaching component doesn't necessarily imply behavioral change. If I want to change, AI can certainly assist that process, but it won't make me want to change or manipulate me into changing if I'm not naturally motivated to do so.

How do we ensure we strike the right balance between human intuition and AI-driven insight when we're developing empathy or soft skills?

It's a tough one. It's really difficult, partly because we can't fully understand the scope of human programming related to empathetic levels within AI. I have friends who work at companies focused on how to make learners feel motivated and respected and on how to present things effectively. They have that. I would love to see their empathetic algorithms. When we work with emotional algorithms in AI, we tend to get better at recognizing our own empathetic algorithms. For instance, what's the algorithm for telling someone to stop, or asking why they're doing that? Or saying, "tell me more," or "that's interesting, but that's not really what we're talking about," you know? So, I think this is where we'll see significant growth, which I would call the front end of AI.

I had this conversation with some folks from a religious group, and they showed a lot of interest in AI. I told them that what they need is this front end—so they can have AI integrated in a way that aligns with their values as a religion, possibly using biblical metaphors or other methods that reflect their empathetic perspectives and beliefs. This approach would work whether someone is part of a religion, a fraternity, a sorority, or even just a passionate music fan. I know people who, as soon as I mention SpongeBob, get excited—I'm a producer, and they immediately relate everything to SpongeBob. I think if I tailored messages around SpongeBob, it might even help change their behavior. Do you see what I'm getting at? These are algorithms, created by people or by AI, and the question is, how do we look at them? I actually think we need to give the end user tools to frame it the way they want, within a larger structure.

How does AI-driven personalized learning fit into this?

There's extensive research that goes back a long way, not just ten years but a century or more, which ultimately says, "you want to teach me what I want to know." Suppose I just moved to New York, and you were teaching me what to do there. You could say Elliott used to work here or there, or attended this kind of school, and AI can use that data to personalize how I learn. And it can go even further. For example, I grew up in Mexico and Egypt. At what point does AI introduce some metaphors for me in Egyptian or in Spanish? Because I have to tell you, I learn best in my native language, but officially, they want me to learn in my work language. Nothing is better than having a confused learner, then switching to their preferred language and seeing their eyes light up as they suddenly process it differently.

AI Literacy in Action: Building Trust, Skills, and Culture for the AI-Enabled Workplace

Interview with
Naveen Murarka
AI Faculty and Subject Matter Expert,
American Management Association

Naveen Murarka is an AI Specialist focused on technology, engineering, and strategic business solutions. He has helped global organizations translate emerging AI capabilities into practical applications that drive measurable business value. Naveen brings a unique perspective that bridges the technical and the human sides of AI adoption—helping leaders navigate change, build trust, and apply AI responsibly.

What does true AI literacy look like in today's workplace, beyond just knowing how to use tools like ChatGPT or Copilot?

AI literacy is evolving beyond what AI tool we use. While that is a start, organizations must move beyond how AI works to how individuals work effectively with AI as part of day-to-day literacy, focusing on 1) trust and 2) decision-making. AI relies on its data inputs, and therefore, organizations need to build trust and confidence that data inputs are clean and correct, enabling AI to introduce efficiencies, insights, or new product offerings. Equally important is decision-making and knowing when, why, and how to incorporate AI, which is integral to establishing an AI-forward company. The impact on the organization of AI-driven solutions rests on developing well-thought-out approaches, including when to challenge, accept, or adapt these AI outputs. The organizations that will become AI literate are those that promote hands-on tools experience while facilitating trust and decision-making through open communication between leaders, managers, and individual contributors.

How can teams learn to distinguish between productive AI use and "AI noise" that adds complexity without value?

First, as an individual at any level, those who are successful define Key Perfor-

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mance Indicators (KPIs) to establish clear success criteria for their organization, down to the simplest workflow. There must be a continuous review of those KPIs to enable pivots from existing paths that aren't producing the desired results, ensuring the targeted AI use is beneficial and productive. Pulling from the Agile development mindset, we need to focus on the value created and the impact on the business organization over and beyond a checkbox indicating that we are using an AI tool. For most companies, we must rely on our critical thinking skills, defining a systematic framework for integration of AI tools, and supporting smaller quick wins using pilots and smaller efforts to introduce an AI data-driven approach delivering value.

What strategies can leaders use to ensure that, as AI reshapes roles and workflows, employees continue to feel valued and empowered in their human strengths?

As we look at various generations, there is one generation that has witnessed the introduction of the calculator, computer, internet, smartphone, and now AI. There are certainly those who may be scared about what this new technology, at what might be considered the most impactful scale, will bring, but ultimately, just as in previous technical advancements, the human drive continues to motivate us as individuals. Leaders need to use their soft skills to frame AI as an enabler and use AI to everyone's advantage. This advantage can come in many forms, including creativity, critical thinking, and empathy, beyond the baseline technical capabilities offered by AI.

In an age of constant AI change, how can leaders cultivate a culture of continuous learning and adaptability across the organization?

AI continues to advance daily with the quickest global adoption of a technology capability than any other innovation in recent years. The key is to apply an iterative, continuous learning mindset to include consistent training in all forms (microlearning, courses, peer-to-peer sessions, industry exchanges, and more). More importantly, failure needs to be looked at as an opportunity to identify what doesn't work with lessons pulled from that to continue towards supporting development. Clearly articulating the potential risks and establishing risk plans reduces fears and provides opportunities for adaptability across the organization, including those that might be seen as risk-averse.

What does responsible AI leadership look like when it comes to data quality, ownership, and governance, and how can leaders make those concepts tangible for their teams?

Leaders must move this conversation from technical AI use to driving organizational culture towards innovation through accountability. We must establish this mindset at all levels throughout the organization and must lead by example. As an example, AI runs on data, and everyone must safeguard their data inputs to ensure data is current, relevant, and accurate with a philosophy of data quality. When leadership prioritizes and continuously emphasizes this type of approach, team members will assume individual accountability, translating to responsible innovation and part of daily actions. Organizations that incorporate innovation and empowerment into their governance strategies can anticipate more rapid progress.

How can transparent communication and upskilling efforts help reduce anxiety about AI's impact on roles and career paths?

Transparent communication and upskilling can reduce anxiety by replacing fear with clarity and opportunity. Communication enables all members throughout the organization to move forward on their AI adoption journey together, celebrating successes while learning from any setbacks. Leaders can provide clarity through communication about the organization's vision and couple that with upskilling efforts. Job opportunities will continuously change, but unless you are at a leading technology firm, there is still time to upskill and adapt your skills to stay relevant and provide value, much like in previous technology advances. Establishing key AI literacy growth plans within the organization, coupled with organizational training and hands-on AI tool use, enables individuals to feel empowered to solve new business problems quickly and efficiently. Transparency and learning create that AI-literate culture where AI is viewed as a partner in their progress.

As AI continues to evolve, how can organizations ensure AI literacy keeps pace with technological change rather than falling behind it?

Organizations must adapt their culture to embrace the technology enhancements seen from AI. We must ensure AI literacy is integrated in all facets of the organization that touch employees in areas that make sense to include onboarding, performance frameworks, and continuous training. Several additional implementation examples, such as peer-to-peer learning, communities of practice, strategic leadership office hours, and others, accelerate the organization's culture shift to promote AI literacy. Ultimately, it is about establishing a framework and metrics that teams can execute against consistently to support that continuous learning goal.

About AMA

For over 100 years, American Management Association (AMA) has helped millions of professionals, through its world-class training and development programs, bring about positive change in their performance to improve business results. Learn more: amanet.org

Designing Your Organization's AI Literacy Roadmap

Interview with
Josh Bersin
Global Industry Analyst
and CEO, The Josh Bersin Company

How is AI reshaping what it means to be an effective leader in today's organizations?

Well, there are about three or four key differences for leaders in this world. One is the general rules and behaviors around using AI, because it's so easy to grab a chatbot, ask it questions, and walk into a meeting with information that may or may not be accurate. So, I think leaders need to establish the ground rules for how we will gather data. Where will we get our information from? Will we trust it or not? Will we develop internal tools ourselves? Most companies are now creating quite extensive internal tools to prevent people from going online and bringing in data that might be incorrect.

The second is creating an environment where people can reinvent their jobs or their work. The big ROI of AI isn't just about reading your emails a little faster or making a chart from a spreadsheet. It's about rethinking your workflow and maybe even building an agent to automate your personal tasks, then examining workflows across multiple jobs and automating much larger areas like customer experience, employee experience, recruiting, learning, and more. Only what we call "super managers" or "super leaders" promote that kind of experimentation.

The third point is respecting the fears and concerns people have about AI. Most research indicates that employee engagement is very low right now – people have heard all the stories about layoffs and AI replacing their jobs. They want to learn about AI and use it, but they aren't software engineers. Therefore, it's really up to the leader to create an environment where people aren't afraid of AI, but instead feel like they are working for a company that supports it.

The fourth step is just getting your hands dirty as a leader. You, as a leader, have to understand new technology yourself because it's so transformational in many areas of business and work.

When we talk about AI literacy, what does that really mean inside organizations — and what core skills or mindsets should it include?

Everyone who uses AI needs to understand that just because it provides a confident answer, it doesn't mean it's correct. You must apply a scientific approach to questioning the answers to ensure they are accurate. If you're a software engineer working on these systems, you'll spend a lot of time on data quality, ownership, and governance. Data quality has a huge impact on AI – even a small amount of polluted data can affect many queries people ask.

So, that's one technical skill. The second is understanding the depth and extensive capabilities of AI, rather than just using it as a search tool. Most people really under-utilize AI. Experimenting and learning from others how to build prompts and develop use cases that are quite comprehensive is the second skill, and that takes time. This isn't something you can learn from a single course. Aside from that, it's the skill of curiosity. These are non-deterministic systems, and the more curious people are, the more interesting applications they will come up with.

What are the most effective ways to help employees build AI fluency and confidence in using these tools in their everyday work?

There are three or four levels of training. The first involves fundamentals, where you probably need to take a course that simply explains the system, what it is, which version we're using, what we built, and what's available to you. It also covers how to get access to it and what information you should expect to find—and what you shouldn't.

There's use case development, and I think companies will need to decide on their own which use cases to promote or where to get that information. The third is providing people with hands-on practice. Then, there's teaching people how to build things — like how do you build an agent or create a GPT? There's also essential education based on your job and career. What will be the best opportunities to transform your role and career given what's happening in your area?

As AI continues to evolve at such a rapid pace, how can organizations ensure their people and their skills keep up?

Ideally, the way it should work is that the company should have a standardized toolset so employees aren't browsing the internet for any tools they can find. Instead, the company should roll out versions of that toolset and teach employees what's new every week or two. That's the approach we use. I know many large companies prefer that you do not put

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any internal data into an AI system unless it's supported by the company. These kinds of rules need to be established.

With AI taking on a larger role in decision-making, how can leaders maintain psychologically safe, human-centered workplaces that still value empathy and emotional intelligence?

I don't believe that stuff will disappear. I see AI as a tool. It's not taking over your job. It's replacing a large part of your routine tasks, but it's not replacing your thinking, emotions, relationships, design, creativity, or problem-solving skills. It's there to assist you. That's why we call it the super worker effect. If you're a salesperson, all these AI chatbots designed to be sales development reps have mostly failed. They don't really work. Human relationships remain more important. In recruiting, the human element—relationships, team alignment, skills, development, and coaching—still plays a key role.

However, as we discover what AI can do, we'll be jettisoning a lot of tasks we now see as routine or boring. For example, if you're a sales manager or even an HR person and you need to analyze employee data on sales or revenue bonuses, you no longer have to spend an entire day doing it. You've saved a day, and that doesn't make you any less human. You still need to decide what to do with the information and how the employees will respond to your decisions.

Every company is different. I prefer companies to enable their employees to reskill before resorting to layoffs. The problem with letting people go early is the psychological, unproductive fear that everyone remaining has survivor's syndrome, realizing half their department just got laid off. As a result, they enter survival mode. The other thing is, and we've done studies on this, the main ROI of AI is not cutting costs – it's increasing revenue. It's about creating better customer experiences and improving customer service.

How do you see AI literacy evolving over the next few years as AI tools become more agentic and autonomous?

It's kind of like people learning how to use the iPhone, or learning how to use web browsers, or learning how to use anything else that's new. There will be people that will ignore it, and they will just not learn it. And then there will be people who are hyper into it, and they will move. They will become high performers in every new technology. Those who are hands-on, creative, experimental, and curious will thrive. You don't have to be technical to use it because it speaks your language. But you have to be a learner. 800 million people a day use ChatGPT, so I think we're going to be in a world where AI literacy is standard.

What advice would you give to organizations that are just starting to build out their AI literacy strategy, and where should they start?

The number one thing isn't so much the literacy part, but establishing a standard platform for people to use so there's something to teach them. Then, I think there must be 10,000 courses on the internet on the basic fundamentals of AI, and depending on the platform, all of the vendors are building courses of their own that teach people how to use their tools. But you can't teach people how to build a cabinet until they build a cabinet. So you're not going to be able to do it until you've done it. A lot of literacy building is giving people projects – it's a lot of experimentation and sharing. That culture grows if you build it, and you won't have to do as much training, because people are teaching each other.

So a lot of the literacy building is giving people projects, hackathons, prompt-a-thons, sharing ideas, cajoling people to try new things, giving them an afternoon to play around, doing things in meetings, and showing people other things that you've done. It's a lot of experimentation and sharing, and that culture grows. If you build that kind of culture, you don't have to do as much training, because people are teaching each other.

Rethinking AI Literacy in Corporate L&D

By **Tom Whelan Ph.D.**
Director of Corporate Research,
Training Industry, Inc.

Tom Whelan, Ph.D., is the director of corporate research at Training Industry, Inc. He studied industrial-organizational psychology at North Carolina State University and has consulted with both corporate and government organizations on learning and assessment initiatives.

If you're feeling woefully behind on embracing artificial intelligence (AI) in your organization, you are not doomed. Using AI in employee training is still relatively nascent because it's still a "new" need. According to our research, only 35% of organizations have fully embraced AI in general.

But as AI continues to reshape the workplace, more organizations are making efforts to upskill their workforce in preparation to apply AI to day-to-day workflows. The problem is, many are making the same mistake: they are approaching AI training as a subset of digital skills or data literacy. While these are important for many roles, they are shortsighted for the broader AI conversation.

AI literacy is a multidimensional construct that includes critical thinking, ethical reasoning and the ability to collaborate with AI systems effectively. In other words, it's about preparing employees to think with AI, not just passively work with it. AI systems, especially generative AI, are probabilistic, context-sensitive, and often opaque. They require users to engage in judgment, not just execution.

This means employees must learn to ask better questions, evaluate AI-generated outputs critically, and understand when to trust or override its recommendations. These are cognitive and metacognitive skills, not technical ones. They require a shift in employee mindset from seeing AI as a black box to be mastered (otherwise our jobs are at risk), to a collaborator whose strengths and limitations must be understood.

AI Literacy ≠ IT Training

A common misconception is that AI training is a close relative of IT training. While technical teams certainly need deep expertise, the broader workforce needs something different: functional fluency. This includes understanding what AI can and cannot do, how it fits into business processes and, most importantly, how to use it responsibly. Because an uncomfortable truism of AI is that it bears zero of the consequences for its bad outputs — the employee shoulders that burden.

For example, a marketing analyst doesn't really need to know how to fine-tune a language model, but they do need to understand how generative AI can support campaign ideation, automate content creation or analyze customer sentiments. Similarly, a compliance officer must grasp how AI decisions are made to assess regulatory risks, even if they never read a line of code. But most importantly, when to use (and not use) these tools is a judgment that must be made in the flesh rather than in the cloud.

Chasing AI Literacy in L&D

A robust AI literacy framework should include:

- **Conceptual understanding:** What is AI? How does it work? What are its limitations?
- **Critical thinking:** How do we evaluate AI outputs? What biases might be embedded in the results we get?
- **Ethical awareness:** What are the implications of using AI in decision-making?
- **Collaborative competence:** How do we integrate AI into workflows and teams?
- **Change readiness:** How do we foster adaptability in the face of continuous AI evolution?

L&D training programs also must be contextualized and embedded in real-world scenarios, tailored to specific functions of the broader business. This improves perceived relevance and helps employees see AI as a practical enabler of work rather than an abstract concept that magically spits out text.

Finally, organizations must model the mindset they wish to instill. This means leaders should demonstrate curiosity, experimentation, and transparency in their own use of AI. Our data has shown that when stakeholders are behind AI transformation, employees largely follow suit. However, the flip side of that scenario also holds true: bad attitudes at the top tend to mirror the vibes on the ground floor.

Takeaways on AI Literacy

AI literacy is an imperative that must be thoughtfully defined and operationalized by L&D. As AI becomes embedded in more functions, the ability to leverage it effectively will differentiate high-performing organizations from the rest. That's not conjecture, our data backs this up: 50% of top-performing businesses were actively using AI. Further, these high performers tended to use it in more places to support training, and the learners inside these organizations tend to have a significantly more positive general attitude about AI and be more receptive to engaging with it in multiple forms for the purpose of training.

Business advantage will come from a workforce that is confident, curious and capable of thinking critically about how AI fits (and doesn't fit) into their work. In this sense, AI literacy is not the end goal, but a foundation to build upon in the coming years.

TRAINING INDUSTRY

Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Multigenerational Communication in Today's Workplace

By **Eric Jackson**
Head of Global Sales,
Becker Professional Education

Today's organizations face the challenge of connecting four distinct generations at once, each bringing unique communication preferences, standards, and norms. While this diversity is valuable, it can create friction that hinders collaboration and progress.

Effective communication across generations is essential for business success. Instead of rigid rules and topdown mandates, we recommend focusing on building emotional intelligence (EQ) which allows your team to recognize and manage emotions, understand others' feelings, and navigate relationships effectively. In a multigenerational workplace, strong EQ allows individuals to connect beyond surface differences to improve collaboration and communication throughout the organization.

The Five Domains of Emotional Intelligence for Better Communication

EQ consists of five key domains. Each plays a distinct, necessary role in bridging generational divides.

1. Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to recognize and understand your own emotions, drives, strengths, and limitations and how these inner states can impact others. Hallmarks include self-confidence, realistic self-assessment, and candid acceptance of personal weaknesses.

How it helps: Self-awareness helps employees see that communication may be shaped by habits or generational norms, and how these might affect colleagues from different backgrounds. By being honest with oneself and open to feedback, individuals can identify potential sources of conflict before they escalate.

Take action: Boost self-awareness by encouraging a daily five-minute reflection or journaling routine for yourself and your team. This can include noting situations that trigger an emotional response and how that response may have affected others on the team, especially those from different generations.

2. Self-Management

Self-management is the art of controlling emotions and impulses and acting with integrity. Those skilled in self-management keep disruptive emotions in check, think before reacting, and remain calm under stress.

How it helps: When generational tensions arise, self-management allows employees to pause, reflect, and respond thoughtfully rather than reactively. This creates space for constructive dialogue and sets a tone of professionalism and respect.

Take action: Have your team focus on giving others space to speak in meetings or group discussions, focusing on not interrupting or overtalking (whether they agree or disagree with the speaker).

3. Self-Motivation

Self-motivation is the drive to improve and achieve, spurred by internal passion rather than external rewards. Motivated individuals are optimistic, committed, and resilient, even when facing setbacks or changing circumstances.

How it helps: Self-motivated employees bridge differences in technology, workflow, or recognition by proactively overcoming communication barriers and fostering collaboration toward shared goals.

Take action: Help your team members set personal or team SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, TimeBound). Even if the goals aren't focused on communication, this practice creates a sense of progress and helps keep the team motivated.

4. Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand others' feelings and perspectives, recognize subtle social cues, and respond appropriately. It's essential for managing relationships and making thoughtful, inclusive decisions.

How it helps: Empathy creates a shared understanding to build trust across generations. For instance, it encourages patience with team members who need more time to adopt new technology and sensitivity to the need for flexible scheduling.

Take action: Try a simple "active listening" exercise in meetings: after one person shares an idea or concern, have another participant reflect back what they heard and how they believe that person feels. Rotate roles to encourage everyone to participate.

5. Social Skills

Social skills include clear communication, rapport-building, conflict management, and fostering teamwork. Individuals who excel in this area effectively manage relationships, understand group dynamics, and influence others for the team's benefit.

How it helps: In multigenerational teams, individuals with strong social skills can facilitate open discussions, help translate expectations between groups, and ensure all voices are heard. They are change agents who help teams navigate shifting demands and collaborate toward success.

Take action: Host monthly team-building sessions or practice conflict resolution techniques together to provide a safe space to develop trust, practice respectful communication, and build skills for navigating conflicts productively.

By enhancing these five domains within your organization, you empower stronger cross-generational communication with respect and understanding—a crucial foundation for collaborative, high performing teams.

At Becker, we help thousands of organizations upskill and train their teams. To see how we can support your team's growth, explore The Learning Compass— especially page 25 for details on personal development courses like Leading Through Emotional Intelligence.

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The Real Promise of AI for L&D

Interview with
Clark Quinn Ph.D.
Author, Speaker,
Executive Director, Quinnovation

Clark Quinn, Ph.D., is an internationally known keynote speaker, author of 7 books, and consultant via Quinnovation to corporations, government, education, and not-for-profits, with a track record of innovation. He also serves as Co-Director of the Learning Development Accelerator and Advisor to Elevator 9.

Many companies are excited about AI for L&D. From your perspective, what's the real opportunity versus the hype?

The view I've continued to believe and espouse is that adding tech to L&D only makes sense after you get the learning science right first. Tech-enabled bad design is still bad design. There's a lot of hype about how Generative AI will automate much of the content production we currently perform. Yet content production is one of the problems we face: doing more content dump faster is still content dump. A persistent superstition is that information will lead to behavior change, yet the evidence is clear that achieving new outcomes requires repeated, spaced, meaningful practice (and more). Until we get that right, no tech is going to help.

Once we do get design right, tech can assist. But no tech understands context, so we still need to embed the core decisions learners need to make into compelling practice. Generative AI can help dream up scenarios, but you'll want to own the core decisions and check AI outputs for accuracy.

How is leadership development evolving, and what skill gaps should L&D leaders be focusing on?

Leadership development is, as my colleague Matthew Richter notes, largely flawed for several reasons. It's full of "feel-good" things people like, but most of it isn't effective. I can't really say where it's going, but I can say it should be more specific, contextually grounded, and developed according to learning science. We should be identifying key skills, assessing folks against them, and providing ongoing development where needed. We should develop core evidence-based skills such as listening well, connecting with people emotionally, leading meetings, and identifying and addressing bias.

Where do you see the biggest gaps between how organizations design learning today and how people actually learn?

The main gap is the belief that we're logical and that when presented with new information, we'll change our ways. But as humans, that's not how we work. Research shows we're highly contextual and require spaced practice, feedback, and supportive environments to systematically change behavior. Yet most corporate learning focuses on information presentation. It's cheaper and looks like what we experienced in school, but it's horribly ineffective. We need emotional engagement, model-based concepts, contextually spread examples, and meaningful practice with feedback spaced over time.

How can L&D teams build effective learning programs while contending with budgetary and time constraints?

Ideally, we'd educate stakeholders and get resources to do what's needed. We also need to work smarter, to stop throwing courses at everything and look for cheaper alternatives. Look to community first (where others take responsibility), then job aids (where information is in the world), and reserve courses for what truly needs to be in the head.

In the short term, we may need stealth practices: rewriting multiple-choice questions into relevant mini-scenarios, writing content as models and examples, and creating emotionally engaging intros. Then, measure the impact and use that evidence to make the case for more. But we must understand how people really think, work, and learn before applying these measures.

What are some dos and don'ts for applying generative AI within learning programs?

Generative AI isn't revolutionary; it uses slightly improved algorithms at scale. It has problems with the ethics of its training data, environmental concerns, regular mistakes, and questionable business models. Other than that, it's fine! I've been a big AI supporter and would welcome it except for the hype. Be wary.

Used well, it can be a great thinking partner, surfacing domain ideas experts missed or helping you consider scenarios and wording you hadn't thought of. But it needs checking, whether by the SME on domain accuracy or by you on learning design. It will reliably argue for myths unless you correct it. Never trust it implicitly or completely.

What trends and opportunities do you hope to see revolutionizing the space in 2026?

I hope to see the cognitive and learning sciences revolutionize what we're doing. We have great technologies—virtual worlds, AR, AI—but design must come first ("if you get the design right, there are lots of ways to implement it; if you don't, it doesn't matter how you implement it"). I'd also like better underlying architecture, such as content models for flexible delivery, and a broader focus on supporting people not just in learning, but in doing. We have the tech—now we need the knowledge and the will. Fingers crossed.

Driving Adoption and Agility With L&D

Interview with
Arkesh Mishra
Head of People, Walmart US Tech,

From your perspective, what role should L&D play in helping organizations navigate constant change without overwhelming employees?

L&D should serve as the organization's air-traffic controller for change – mapping audiences, understanding impacts, and sequencing launches so teams don't exceed their "change load." That requires being intentional about what rolls out when and focusing on the outcomes that matter most. It also means shifting from large, one-time training events to minimum viable learning: short, job-embedded guides, checklists, and brief learning bursts that support work in real time. When managers are equipped with talk tracks, coaching prompts, and team practice plans, learning becomes part of the flow of work. Strong feedback loops, from pulse checks to help-desk data, allow quick iteration and help keep the learning library small, timely, and trusted.

AI adoption is creating rapid change across roles and workflows. How can L&D teams help employees build confidence rather than anxiety as AI tools roll out?

The most effective way to reduce anxiety is to start with clarity: what the AI tool will and won't do. L&D can then create safe, guided practice environments – sandboxes where employees can experiment and gradually move from "shadow mode" to "co-pilot" to "auto-pilot." Simple, role-based playbooks and prompt libraries give employees an easy on-ramp, while an AI Champion network and daily office hours provide fast support. At the same time, building AI literacy in ethics, privacy, and verification helps employees use tools responsibly. Normalizing quality checks, such as verifying sources and reviewing outputs for accuracy, ensures confidence grows alongside capability.

When major organizational shifts happen – new systems, restructures, new customer expectations – what are the most common mistakes you see leaders make in the learning and change-management process?

One common mistake is assuming a single "big bang" training moment can drive lasting change. Without spaced practice, reinforcement, and manager coaching, attendance rises but adoption doesn't. Leaders also sometimes launch training before processes or systems have stabilized, creating confusion and undermining trust. Another pitfall is failing to coordinate sequencing across teams; when multiple changes hit at once, priorities blur and messages conflict. And without a clear plan for retiring the old way of working, people often revert back. The most significant miss, though, is skipping frontline co-design - resulting in solutions that don't reflect real workflows or customer needs.

How can L&D leaders partner with HR, IT, and business leaders to embed change readiness into the culture?

Embedding readiness begins with shared ownership. L&D can help create a cross-functional change council that aligns roadmaps, reviews team-level change load, and ensures every initiative includes a learning and enablement workstream. Integrating L&D into IT release cycles and business planning processes makes learning part of how work gets delivered, not an add-on. A unified "Way We Change" playbook – with readiness checklists, templates, comms standards, and manager kits – ensures everyone operates from the same approach. And when HR, IT, and L&D share telemetry, ticket trends, and quality metrics, it becomes easier to identify where support is needed and where adoption is strongest.

How do you measure whether change-related learning efforts are working? What indicators signal that employees are not just trained, but truly adopting new behaviors?

Meaningful measurement looks beyond training completions to whether people are using the new way of working with confidence and quality. Early indicators include whether the right audiences were reached and whether the content felt useful in the moment. Adoption metrics – such as time to first successful task, depth of feature usage, and support patterns – help show how quickly employees are getting value. Over time, behavior shifts show up through workflow proficiency, reduced errors, and stronger quality audits. Ultimately, the best signals come from business outcomes: improved cycle time, fewer defects, better customer experience, or increased productivity tied directly to the change.

AI can personalize learning and simulate real-world change scenarios. Where do you see the biggest opportunities for AI-powered training in future change initiatives?

AI enables personalized, adaptive pathways that meet learners at their exact level of need. It can identify patterns in errors and tailor practice accordingly, while conversational simulators allow employees to rehearse customer or manager scenarios with immediate, targeted feedback. On-the-job copilots can surface step-by-step guidance in real time and automatically check work against policies, reducing errors and accelerating proficiency. AI can also help maintain learning content, generating summaries, updating versions, and supporting translation as processes evolve. When thoughtfully deployed with human oversight, AI can dramatically shorten the distance between learning, application, and measurable performance.

Looking ahead, what does a future-ready L&D function look like in a world where technology, customer expectations, and skill requirements are shifting faster than ever?

The future L&D function operates like a modern product organization – using discovery, roadmaps, sprints, and telemetry to continuously refine learning experiences. Its tech ecosystem blends skills intelligence, workflow-embedded guidance, analytics, and content systems grounded in open standards and strong model governance. The talent mix expands to include learning engineers, data analysts, UX writers, and business-embedded partners who co-design with frontline teams. Content becomes smaller, more curated, and versioned with clear ownership and SLAs. And above all, a manager-first enablement mindset creates a team culture that makes continuous learning part of everyday work.

Training Operations: The Missing Link in L&D Strategy

By **Stephan Pineau**
CEO, Training Orchestra

Stephan Pineau is the CEO of Training Orchestra, helping organizations improve the efficiency and scale of Instructor-Led and virtual training by optimizing and automating training operations with Training Management System technology.

There's no question that AI is reshaping how learners access knowledge and build skills. But when those skills need to be applied with confidence and accuracy – organizations still turn to instructor-led (ILT) and virtual Instructor-led training (vILT).

Human-led learning remains the most effective way to build the capabilities that drive performance. And as reliance on ILT and blended programs grows, so does the complexity required to deliver them well.

Training Is Essential – and Increasingly Complex

Behind every successful ILT program is an extensive layer of work: coordinating instructors, managing resources and capacities, securing rooms and virtual tools, and adjusting schedules across geographies – often with constant last-minute changes.

Every L&D leader knows the feeling: the missing instructor, the double-booked room, the rescheduled session that ripples across the calendar.

This complexity isn't administrative; it's operational. And when training operations break down, even the strongest training program can't deliver the outcomes organizations expect.

From Administration to Orchestration

To keep pace, leading organizations are shifting from manual administration to orchestrating the entire training operations ecosystem with a unified view of:

- Instructor expertise and availability
- Sessions, scheduling, and global demand
- Resources, constraints, and utilization
- Data and costs

When these elements are connected, training becomes scalable and far more strategic.

This is where modern Training Management Systems (TMS) become essential for centralizing moving parts, so teams can shift from manual coordination to proactive planning. And deliver ILT faster and more efficiently, while accelerating skill transfer at enterprise scale.

Building the Foundation for the Future: Data & AI

One of the most important advantages of modern training operations platforms is the data foundation. Centralized operational data helps organizations understand utilization, predict demand, optimize resources, and continuously improve.

And as organizations prepare for the future, this data becomes even more valuable – enabling leaders to use AI on top of this deep data to identify patterns, anticipate demand, and uncover efficiency opportunities that were impossible to see before.

A New Priority for Learning Leaders

Training has always relied on people. What's changing is how successful organizations support the complex work required to deliver it at scale.

Learn how Training Orchestra helps organizations orchestrate ILT at scale and build an operational foundation for lasting business impact.

Training Orchestra

Maintaining Control and Quality in Training Programs in the AI Era

Interview with
David James
Podcast Host, Speaker, and
CEO, 360Learning

How can L&D leaders maintain control and quality of their training programs in the AI era?

AI presents a major opportunity for L&D to rethink how we operate. For decades, L&D teams have been small groups supporting enormous organizational needs, which pushed us into a top-down model: large systems, huge content libraries, and a constant struggle to generate interest in what we produced.

AI changes that completely. If we try to use AI simply to fill content gaps or replicate the old model, we're playing a losing game. Instead, we need to step back and ask: What are we actually here to do? At our core, L&D exists to improve performance, address capability breakdowns, and close skills gaps—things we've traditionally struggled to reach because of limited resources.

Quality comes from focusing on real business problems. By spending more time on analysis and ensuring every intervention is laser-focused on performance, capability, or skill requirements, we create solutions that truly matter. If a program doesn't address a real challenge, it becomes just another piece of content in an already overwhelming sea of content. In the AI era, quality is defined by relevance and impact, not volume.

How can L&D balance technology-driven learning with preserving the human connection in instructor-led training?

It all starts with understanding the problem you're solving. When you don't define the problem, you end up debating modalities—classroom vs. digital—without any real rationale.

When you understand the issue through both data and evidence (what's happening, why it's happening, and what's preventing people from performing), the right modality becomes clear. The Five Moments of Need framework shows that the closer learning is to the moment of apply, the more impact it has. By contrast, "just in case" classroom training is often the least effective because it's removed from the work and poorly timed.

That doesn't mean we eliminate instructor-led training. We use it for what humans do best—high-value interactions, collaboration, and connection. When I was at Disney, we'd send executives to multi-day leadership programs. Almost every time, they'd say the most valuable part was the networking, not the content. That's the human connection worth preserving.

We should use digital tools and AI to get as close as possible to the work for knowledge transfer, and reserve in-person sessions for experiences that truly require people to be together.

What is the single most important AI skill L&D professionals need to develop to stay ahead?

AI literacy is now table stakes in L&D. It's not enough to dabble—L&D professionals need to understand how to build and deploy AI agents. If Josh Bersin is correct and up to 63% of operational L&D work can be automated, we should be using AI to remove administrative burden so we can focus on high-value work.

The most important human skill becomes consulting and analysis: understanding business problems, identifying performance gaps, and designing targeted interventions. We should then ask AI: How can you take the busy work off my plate so I can focus on this?

If L&D doesn't skill itself up in AI, we risk being overwhelmed by operational tasks instead of contributing strategically.

How is AI being used to increase collaboration within the L&D function?

360Learning is a great example of this, because their platform is built around collaborative learning. The key is to anchor collaboration to real business problems—not generic content.

Here's how AI enhances collaboration:

1. **Skills mapping** shows precisely what each role requires and where gaps exist.
2. **AI generates a first draft** of solutions or content targeted at specific gaps.
3. **Subject matter experts validate and refine** those solutions.
4. **Learners collaborate** around applying that knowledge in context.

This means everyone has fingerprints on the learning solution—SMEs, learners, managers—not just L&D. AI removes L&D as the bottleneck and creates a more dynamic, participatory learning ecosystem.

Generic collaboration around generic content is useless. Collaboration becomes powerful only when it's tied to actual skills gaps and performance needs.

Skills-based learning is a major topic in L&D. What does it actually mean in practice, and what benefits does it bring?

Traditional L&D is topic-based—communication skills, presentation skills, time management, and so on. Skills-based learning flips that completely.

It starts with the individual and their role:

- What skills are required for your job?
- What level of proficiency is needed?
- Where are your gaps?
- What's the shortest path to close them?

Employees only have 10–15 minutes a day to develop. With a skills-based model, that time is spent directly addressing a specific capability they need in their role, not browsing through generic content libraries.

For organizations, skills mapping provides visibility into the current level of capability across the entire workforce. You can see which critical skills exist, which are missing, and where you're vulnerable. AI makes this even more powerful—skills maps become dynamic and adjust automatically as roles evolve.

Traditional L&D is like navigating an idealized map. Skills-based learning shows the real terrain—potholes, obstacles, and all—and guides employees through it.

What strategies help organizations sustain a skills-based learning strategy long-term?

The hardest part is the beginning—mapping roles, conducting assessments, and creating accurate skills data. For large organizations, this can be significant upfront effort.

But once the foundation is in place, the model sustains itself because conversations change. Instead of vague recommendations ("You should take an Excel course"), managers can say:

- "Here's where you are."
- "Here's where you need to be."
- "Here's the specific skill you need to work on next."

This brings clarity and accountability that never existed before. In the old model, people could attend a course and choose not to apply it, with little accountability. Skills-based learning removes that opt-out. Progress becomes visible.

It's a new organizational muscle. High performers thrive quickly, while others grow into it gradually. But the structure—specificity, transparency, and alignment to real work—keeps the strategy alive.

The Future of Learning and Development is Business-First

By **Lefteris Ntouanoglou**
CEO and Founder, Schoox

Lefteris founded Schoox to disrupt the learning and talent development market by creating a mobile-first, learner-driven solution. As President and CEO, he has guided the company's rapid growth and continuous innovation. A seasoned technology leader, he holds a PhD in Diffractive Optics and an MBA, combining deep technical expertise with strategic vision.

Businesses often view learning and development (L&D) as a cost center rather than a strategic partner for improved business performance. But that mindset must change. True transformation can only occur when organizations adopt a business-first approach to L&D, where every training initiative can demonstrate impact on business performance.

The Problem: L&D Exists in a Silo

A siloed approach to L&D presents a critical risk. L&D teams often track completions and assessment scores, but rarely connect learning to larger organizational goals. More training won't solve this issue. The solution lies in establishing stronger connections between training content, the skills your people need, and business goals. It's about delivering targeted, strategic learning that improves the metrics most important to the organization.

Redefining Business-First L&D

A business-first approach begins with one question: What does our company want to achieve? Whether the answer is to increase revenue, improve the customer experience, or something else, your L&D strategy should demonstrate an ability to continuously improve employee performance to achieve company performance goals. Success requires close collaboration between learning leaders and operational teams. When learning becomes an engine for achieving performance goals, organizations view L&D as a profit multiplier rather than a cost center.

From Vision to Reality: The Schoox Learning Impact Suite

For years, we've helped organizations connect learning to business outcomes through skill-based development, which is why we're particularly familiar with the challenges and limitations of traditional learning approaches. Manually mapping skills to jobs, identifying L&D needs, and creating training content for large frontline workforces is a monumental task that requires large teams and even larger budgets.

We built the Schoox Learning Impact Suite to make business-first L&D achievable at scale. With AI as the connective tissue, our platform empowers L&D teams to deploy strategic, targeted training programs and measure their impact on performance objectives.

With AI-native tools like skills mapping and clustering, training gap analysis, and micro-assessments, L&D leaders can accomplish tasks that once took months in minutes. The Learning Impact Suite is specifically engineered to keep a "human in the loop" by automating work such as sifting through thousands of courses to find relevant content, while ensuring critical human checkpoints to edit, add, or delete AI-generated outputs along the way.

The Learning Impact Suite helps L&D leaders accomplish four critical tasks:

1. Identify the most relevant skills for every job.
2. Map how those skills impact business metrics to reveal where better training can have the greatest effect.
3. Quantify the business impact of improving those skills, for example, by demonstrating how a food safety course can reduce waste.
4. Generate training plans with purpose-built content to help employees build specific skills.

Our AI models don't rely on vague projections. Instead, they provide practical, data-informed performance improvements based on business goals. For instance, improvements in menu knowledge and upselling skills can increase average check sizes at one restaurant location and compound when rolled out to hundreds of servers across the enterprise. The result is a more transparent conversation between L&D and business leadership about the value of improving the skills of existing team members.

The Future: Smarter, Faster, and More Connected Learning

The Schoox Learning Impact Suite represents a significant leap toward our mission to change how enterprises train their frontline workforces and develop their people. The next step is to equip these organizations to create a powerful feedback loop: better training leads to better performance, which generates better data and leads to more impactful training.

Over time, this creates a virtuous improvement cycle—training becomes more targeted, business and employee performance improve, and new data refines the process. It's a flywheel effect that allows organizations to generate and fine-tune learning content at incredible speed. Companies that embrace this level of automation will move faster, adapt better, and outperform competitors who rely on outdated approaches to learning and development.

Unlocking Human Potential

When we founded Schoox, our goal was to help organizations leverage learning differently by connecting it to something bigger than checkboxes and compliance. Today, with innovations like the Learning Impact Suite, that vision is finally within reach.

SCHOOX

Rethinking Learning Innovation, Business Impact, and the Role of AI in L&D

Interview with
Laura Overton
Author, Speaker, Learning Changemaker

How can L&D leaders determine whether they even need an LMS?

In the book I've co-authored with Michelle Ockers, *The L&D Leader*, we talk about three core principles. The first is absolutely key here: *tuning in*.

"Tuning in" means understanding what's a priority for the business and for individuals. One example is Coles, the retail chain in Australia. They had an LMS, but frontline employees couldn't access it in any meaningful way—no desk, no computer. Through tuning in, they realized that mobile access was essential. The phone became the route into learning.

But in some companies, phones are not allowed on the shop floor. So the principle is: *your environment, culture, permissions, and norms matter*. What works for a bank won't work for a retailer. Tuning in helps you decide whether an LMS helps your unique organization take one step closer to better performance or gets in the way.

What about evaluating vendors? How do leaders ensure the technology they pick actually supports business impact?

One of the biggest issues is that L&D often doesn't look for business impact. They look for learning efficiency. LMS vendors can absolutely help you become more efficient—push out more stuff, save money, and manage things. But if you approach technology facing "learning first," you're signaling to the business that you're a cost center.

A business-first mindset is essential. So, when evaluating vendors, you want to ask:

- *Do they understand our business reality?*
- *Are they focused only on features, or on our broader learning ecosystem?*
- *Do they make it simple for individuals to access what they need in the moment they need it?*

It starts with our own mindset. We have to decide that business value, not learning activity, is the priority.

Turning to AI-enabled learning—are there best practices for evaluating its effectiveness?

I've been in L&D long enough to remember when the Internet arrived, when social media arrived, when mobile arrived. We always asked: "What is Internet learning?" "What is mobile learning?" Now it's "What is AI learning?"

The real question is: *How does this technology help people change behavior?*

Learning science tells us what works: practice, reflection, spaced repetition, relevance, coaching. AI gives us opportunities to scale all of that. We can't scale coaching as humans, but AI can help us do that. We can't scale perfectly timed, personalized reflection prompts, but AI can. If we see ourselves as "producers of content," AI will just help us produce more content. But if we see ourselves as "enablers of learning," AI opens up entirely new capabilities. Ultimately, effectiveness will come down to how we, the learning professionals, choose to use the tools.

You had a strong reaction to gamification—what's your take on its role in behavior change?

My silence usually tells you that the evidence for gamification driving business results is thin. Games can be fun—I'm on day 560-something of Duolingo Spanish! I don't want to lose my streak. But do I speak Spanish? No. I can recognize more words, but that's about it.

Gamification works when it taps into relevance and learning science—when it motivates someone because the content truly matters to their job or career. But the "game" alone doesn't correlate with impact.

What do high-performing L&D teams do differently when it comes to relevance and listening to learners?

The highest-performing teams tune in deeply to their learners. They talk to them. They involve them in design. They cull content that isn't relevant anymore. They remove things from libraries that people say are confusing.

Relevance is the number one factor in engagement, not design. Design can be beautiful, but if it's not relevant, I'm not going to use it. You can give me a PDF with bullet points. If it helps me solve today's problem, you're my hero.

What are the biggest mistakes L&D leaders make when measuring impact?

They focus on learning value rather than business value. Business value is co-created. It's messy. It means working with line managers, identifying real performance problems, and improving step by step. During COVID, everyone rolled up their sleeves to solve the same business problem. No one asked, "Why is L&D here?" That's what business alignment looks like.

Designing Learning That Truly Changes Behavior

Interview with
Julie Dirksen
Author, Speaker, and Learning Strategy Consultant

How can L&D teams better design learning programs so that people actually learn and retain information — not just get through a course?

I think the big challenge right now is that a lot of people in our field have had "creating content" as their primary job — e-learning, written content, slide decks, and so on. And now, with the advent of AI, content is getting fast and relatively inexpensive to create. So, the question becomes: What is the continued role for learning designers?

For me, the big issue going forward is understanding the efficacy of what we're putting out there. When we talk about real skill development, we have to ask: What else needs to be present besides good learning content?

A huge piece of that is practice design: how can we create better and more opportunities for people to actually practice the skills or tasks they need to do? Historically, as an industry, we've been weak here because so much emphasis was on getting introductory material out there.

Now that the price point for content creation comes way down through AI tools, my earnest wish is that we finally invest in the things we never had time or resources for: primarily, high-quality practice.

With all this in mind, do you think AI is replacing entry-level instructional designers, or is it just changing their role?

I don't know for sure — I haven't seen solid data yet — but I have to believe that in some places it is replacing them. And that is a real concern. We're going to see this in almost every industry, where from a short-term business perspective, the temptation to replace entry-level people with AI is huge. But long-term, it's problematic.

Right now, the vast majority of genuinely productive AI scenarios involve someone who already knows how to do their job using AI to do things faster. Coding is a great example: you still need a skilled coder to take AI output that's maybe 80% correct and do the last 20%. That last 20% is high-level judgment.

Same with instructional design. You can ask: Do I recognize what's good or bad about this lesson plan the AI created for me? That requires expertise and psychological stamina, frankly. Not everyone has the ability or temperament for deep, attentive review work. So, if we cut off the entry-level pipeline, where do future experts come from? That's the concern.

For those whose roles aren't replaced, how do you see their work changing with generative AI?

There are a few scenarios. One is: I already know how to do my job, so now I'll do it faster and more efficiently. The optimistic version is that this frees up time to do the things we never had time to do — better versions of projects, follow-up materials, evaluation, and research. But the concern is that instead, organizations will say, "Well, we don't need a team of four anymore; one person with AI can do it." Then we're just doing the same things faster with fewer people, not doing more things better.

How do you determine what behavioral changes learners actually need to make, and how do you measure whether those changes were successful?

This is fascinating because people think they know the behaviors they're targeting, and then when you try to pin them down, it gets fuzzy. Take "customer focus." What does that actually mean in behavioral terms? Is it greeting the customer? Tone of voice? Explaining what happens next? Any of those could be it.

Skills like problem solving, customer satisfaction, or even responding to a customer call aren't single skills; they're a whole slew of different skills combined. Technical skills, interpersonal skills, procedural knowledge — it all merges.

I often use something I call the photo or video test: If I took a photo of someone demonstrating this skill, what would I see them doing? If we can't describe observable behaviors, we can't design for them.

So moving from knowledge transfer to real behavioral change — is the practice component the key ingredient?

Practice and feedback are the most crucial things. Most learning technology assumes the base unit of learning is a piece of content — text, video, or image. But if you're serious about skill building, the base unit should be a learner action with feedback. Right now, the most typical feedback mechanism is "correct/incorrect" on a multiple-choice question. That's extremely limited.

To build expertise, people need exposure to case examples, they need to try things, and they need feedback — ideally, realistic, contextualized feedback. Otherwise, they can practice something many times and just get very efficient at doing it wrong.

The Evidence-Based Principles That Turn Learning into Lasting Behavior

Interview with
Michelle Ockers
Author, Podcast Host, Chief Learning Strategist, Learning Uncut

Michelle Ockers is co-author of The L&D Leader: Principles and practice for delivering business value and host of the Learning Uncut podcast, where she explores how L&D professionals create meaningful organisational impact.

What principles of cognitive science or behavioral psychology do you think L&D teams often overlook when designing for real-world skill application?

The challenge isn't that L&D teams overlook specific principles. It's that they're not applying learning science at all. In my book, The L&D Leader, co-authored with Laura Overton, we use research from the Learning Performance Benchmark to highlight a stark gap: by 2023, only 32% of L&D teams were actively applying new ideas from learning science to their practice.

Understanding how people learn is fundamental to effective L&D practice, yet most teams continue to rely primarily on experience and intuition. Research into learning spans neuroscience, cognitive science, behavioral science, and social science, with each offering evidence-based insights that can improve how we design for real-world application. These fields help us understand attention, memory, motivation, knowledge construction, and the importance of environment and culture in workplace learning.

The call to action is clear: develop sufficient knowledge of learning science to make informed decisions. This doesn't mean becoming cognitive scientists, but it does mean engaging with researchers and practitioners who translate research into practice. Question research claims, consider your context, and approach learning science with curiosity and critical thinking. Leaning into the scientific evidence of how memory works and how behaviors and habits develop is our unique differentiator as L&D professionals.

How can learning experiences be structured to move employees from awareness and understanding to consistent behavioral follow-through on the job?

As explored in The L&D Leader, the shift from knowing to doing requires intentional design across two interconnected areas: enabling learning that extends beyond the courses and content, and engaging the influencers who support behavioral change in the workplace.

For enabling learning, focus on four key approaches: supporting performance at the point of need, designing for engagement using learning science and storytelling, embedding mechanisms for ongoing behavioral reinforcement such as nudges through a mobile app, and encouraging connection, e.g., through communities of practice. These form an interconnected system that addresses real workplace needs.

Equally critical is engaging influencers. Line managers are the most influential voice in determining whether people engage with and apply learning, yet they're often unsupported. When managers have the resources, skills, and confidence to help team members apply their learning, new behaviors are much more likely to take root.

Beyond managers, activate your learning ecosystem by identifying champions who care about your outcomes. They can come from anywhere, from project managers to employees who want to make a difference. Even sceptics can become powerful advocates when you listen to their concerns and address them.

The pattern is clear: behavioral follow-through requires manager involvement, workplace champions, opportunities to practice embedded in real work, and ongoing support that extends well beyond the initial learning event.

What signals or metrics do you look for to know that a learning program is not just informative, but transformative?

Transformation starts when you collaborate with business leaders to agree on what success looks like. Marie Daniels, working with a global eye care company, demonstrated this by creating metrics dashboards that listed business indicators already tracked by the organization. She'd ask senior leaders, "What impact do you want this initiative to have?" and together they'd select the most meaningful metrics to monitor together.

Beyond formal metrics, watch for behavioral signals in how people engage with the program. Are managers proactively discussing application with their teams? Are participants sharing how they're using what they learned in their daily work? Do stakeholders seek updates on progress rather than waiting for reports? These conversations reveal whether behavior change is taking root and you're on the path to business value.

The clearest signal of transformation is when the conversation shifts from "How many people completed the training?" to "What changed in how work gets done?" When stakeholders start connecting learning initiatives to outcomes that matter to the business (such as productivity, quality, customer satisfaction, retention), you know you've moved beyond informative delivery to genuine impact.

The Skills-Informed Organization Is Impossible Without AI

A Future-of-Work Lens for L&D Leaders

By **Kason Morris**
Global Director, Future of Work and Skills Based Organization (SBO Strategy), Merck

For years, companies have talked about becoming "skills-based." It sounds strategic. It signals innovation. It looks great in an annual report. But here is the truth most organizations avoid. A skills-informed organization is impossible without AI. Not difficult. Not aspirational. Impossible.

Because skills do not sit still. Work does not sit still. People do not sit still. And most companies are still managing talent with models built for a world where stability was the norm and job descriptions rarely changed.

AI is not the disruption. AI is the **infrastructure** that makes skills visibility, validation, and velocity finally achievable at enterprise scale. And that gives L&D a once-in-a-generation chance to redefine its value.

The Old System Cannot Support the New Reality

Traditional L&D systems operate like Career 1.0 and Career 2.0 worlds—build content, push pathways, guide people up ladders. But today's workforce is operating in Career 3.0 and 4.0 patterns: spiral, transitory, multimodal, identity-driven.

LinkedIn data shows that job skill sets have already changed by about 25 percent since 2015 and are expected to shift by at least 65 percent by 2030. McKinsey reports the half-life of many technical skills is now under three years.

Static systems cannot manage dynamic environments. And here's the deeper problem: most organizations are trying to build skills strategies using data that is incomplete, outdated, or inaccurate. They know job titles and performance ratings. They do not know real capability.

You cannot build a skills-informed organization without **clean, connected, continuously refreshed talent data.**

AI Can Make Skills and Experience Visible in Real Time

In one large enterprise I supported, the challenge was not skill scarcity. It was skill blindness. They had thousands of employees with strong capabilities, but no system to see them, no method to validate them, and no strategy to redeploy them.

When we introduced an AI layer to analyze work artifacts, project histories, learning signals, behavioral indicators, and knowledge domains, an entirely different picture emerged. Untapped expertise surfaced. Transferable strengths became obvious. Capability clusters: hidden for years, they finally came into view.

And this matters. Skills are only one part of the equation. Real talent intelligence comes from understanding three things:

- **Skills**
- **Knowledge areas**
- **Experience patterns**

AI is the only way to synthesize that data at scale, with context and accuracy. Without it, organizations are guessing.

AI Can Strengthen Validation and Reduce Guesswork

Another enterprise attempted to validate manual skills across four business units. It took nine months, hundreds of hours, and delivered inconsistent results.

Once digital AI-assisted validation was introduced, it could perform portfolio scans, work-product evaluation, peer signals, and examine project contribution patterns; the timeline dropped to weeks, and accuracy improved dramatically.

The ripple effects were immediate:

- Learning became targeted instead of generic
- Mobility decisions became more confident
- Employees finally understood their transferable value
- Workforce planning shifted from reactive to strategic

AI did not just accelerate the process. AI made the process **possible**.

AI Can Accelerate Skill Acquisition and Learning Precision

This is where L&D's opportunity expands. AI collapses the distance between learning and performance:

- Personalized pathways based on real skill gaps
- Just-in-time guidance inside the workflow
- Simulations that build durable skills like decision-making and communication
- Copilots that reinforce new behaviors in real time
- Feedback loops that make learning continuous rather than episodic

In a recent pilot with a product organization, embedding an AI thinking companion improved speed-to-skill by 34 percent. Not because the people changed, but because the friction around learning disappeared.

Workers did not hunt for content. Content met them at the moment of need.

The Human Side: Agility as the Language of Modern Work

AI enables the skills system. Agility enables the human system. Employees no longer move in linear patterns. They evolve in cycles that blend skills, learning, identity, and lived experience. L&D must build capability systems that support:

- Transferability
- Optionality
- Identity expansion
- Skill compounding
- Real-time adaptation

AI amplifies this, but humans bring the judgment, empathy, creativity, and narrative intelligence that make capability meaningful.

What L&D Must Do Next

L&D's mandate is shifting. It is no longer to deliver content. It is to build the infrastructure for capability at scale. Three moves matter most.

1. **Build a dynamic talent intelligence layer powered by AI.** Combine skills, knowledge, experience, and work signals into one living model.
2. **Redesign learning as a responsive ecosystem.** Stop building courses; start building adaptive pathways tied to real work.
3. **Develop AI fluency, not tool dependence.** People do not need more tools. They need the ability to think with AI, learn through AI, and perform alongside AI.

The skills-informed organization will not emerge by accident. It will emerge from leaders who use AI to make talent visible, learning precise, and careers adaptive. This is the moment for L&D to lead.

Where AI and XR Converge: The Future of Adaptive, Immersive Learning

By **Dr. Christine Janssen**
Founder and CEO, Edstutia

Dr. Christine Janssen is the Founder and CEO of Edstutia, an award-winning virtual learning platform designed for adult learners in both higher education and in the workplace. By leveraging the power of virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI), the Edstutia platform takes experiential learning to a whole new level for optimal engagement and outcomes. Prior to Edstutia, Dr. Janssen was a Clinical Associate Professor and the Director of Entrepreneurship for twelve years in the Gabelli School of Business at Fordham University.

Where do you see AI intersecting with AR/VR for learning—for example, real-time feedback, adaptive simulations, or AI-generated environments?

The melding of XR with AI is already in full swing, which is creating more personalized and immersive learning experiences. For example, we at Edstutia enable learners to dive into VR on our virtual platform and then utilize AI-engineered avatars to create highly personalized roleplaying scenarios. A learner can practice de-escalating a difficult situation or conversation in an authentic environment (such as a boardroom) by debating with an avatar that has a personality and an attitude in addition to custom demographics. Because roleplays are based on prompts and contextual parameters, it is not a typical scripted or branched scenario. This kind of interaction is much more realistic, and when paired with practice and coaching, this type of learning prepares the learner for the unknown, leading to better problem-solving and communication skills.

Another great example is learning new languages in VR with AI bots who act as mentors to guide learners in real time. With VR, learners can be transported all over the world to refine their language and skills in authentic environments. Using adaptive learning tools on progressive platforms such as Docebo or ClearCompany will of course evolve in step with the learner and how well they are grasping the material. Translate this to a professional environment and imagine being able to prepare employees for new global assignments to fully understand cultural nuances and smoothly assimilate because they have the benefit of experiencing things through immersion beforehand.

As AR/VR technologies become more accessible, what barriers still slow adoption in enterprise L&D, and what's most likely to change in the next 12–18 months?

From my experience, the biggest barriers to technology adoption are two-fold: 1) fear of change or the unknown, and 2) misunderstanding of what emerging technologies can and cannot do for L&D.

Learning leaders are used to using certain methods, modes, and platforms. Sure, online learning has become mainstream as a delivery format and is both cost effective and convenient. But what is often missing are engaging learning modes such as collaboration, demonstration, and experiential. Online learning is usually still one-way communication with pre-recorded videos and basic quizzes that test recall more than deep understanding. That is not progressive, nor does it result in optimal outcomes. This is where technologies such as VR and AI come in. They open up so many possibilities and options to truly engage learners with personalized learning experiences that are relevant and sticky.

In order to get L&D professionals on board with new tech, they need to become students themselves and learn as much as possible to update their toolkits. From my personal experience, this needs to be paired with change management techniques to help people not only unlearn and relearn, but to have agency in the entire adoption process.

Dr. Yogini Joglekar and I recently wrote a book that addresses this exact topic. We learned through countless client meetings and conversations that in order for learning leaders to change their behavior, they first need to change their mindsets about what's possible for the future of learning. *"There Is No Box: Rewiring Your Mindset About Learning"* is available on Amazon.

There are also some great courses and programs offered at leading universities such as MIT and Purdue that focus on the application of AI and data science. These programs are pretty extensive and help people understand what AI can and cannot do. Knowledge like this is really helpful to inform what kinds of learning systems and tools to adopt and what kind of learner data you want to capture.

What I envision happening over the next couple of years is not only more and faster integration of AI into L&D, but the convergence of multiple technologies including VR, cloud/edge computing, robotics, 5G, and the Internet of Things. Knowing that this is what stands before us, the best thing learning professionals can do is plan for the long term and set themselves and their systems up to be flexible versus hastily investing in shiny new things.

How are companies creating meaningful learning experiences in virtual spaces—beyond just "digital classrooms"? What design principles actually make these environments engaging?

The beauty of virtual reality is that learning goes from a one- or two-dimensional interface with passive or one-way acquisition of knowledge to a 3D, fully immersive experience. Because VR allows for more realistic hands-on application and 'learning by doing', the environments and interactions are much more engaging and meaningful for learners. Combining experiential learning with emerging technologies such as VR and AI allows for a personalized, adaptive learning journey that reinforces retention and bridges the gap between theory and real-world application.

Performance Improvement in the Age of AI: Solving Tomorrow's Organizational Challenges Today

By **Kasi Guillot, Ed.D.**
ISPI Board Member - Director of Academic Programs and Performance Improvement Initiatives (PI2) for Community Outreach, Editor in Chief – Performance Improvement Journal

Technology is transforming the workplace faster than at any point in history. Artificial intelligence, automation, and data analytics are no longer distant possibilities, they are embedded in nearly every process, from recruitment and onboarding to customer engagement and supply chain management. Yet, while the tools have advanced rapidly, many organizations are still struggling to harness their potential effectively.

The challenge is not simply technological, it's performance based. The question is no longer "Can we implement AI?" Instead, it is "Can we use AI to meaningfully improve performance?" This is where the field of Human Performance Improvement (HPI) becomes indispensable.

AI is changing the nature of work at every level. Routine tasks are being automated, decision-making is increasingly data-driven, and employees are expected to adapt continuously to new systems and workflows. The organizations that thrive in this environment are not necessarily those with the most advanced technology, but those that know how to align human capability, organizational processes, and technology toward shared goals.

The workplace of the AI era demands adaptability, collaboration, and evidence-based problem solving. Employees need to understand not only what technology can do, but why and how it should be applied to drive measurable results. That alignment between strategy, systems, and human capability lies at the heart of performance improvement.

Performance improvement provides the bridge between technological innovation and organizational effectiveness. It helps leaders move beyond surface-level fixes to identify the root causes of challenges, whether those stem from unclear expectations, lack of feedback, inadequate training, or misaligned incentives.

In the context of AI adoption, this approach is critical. Many organizations rush to deploy AI tools without fully understanding the performance ecosystem they are entering. Without clear problem definition, metrics, and evaluation strategies, these initiatives can lead to wasted investment, employee frustration, and inconsistent results.

Performance improvement frameworks, like those championed by the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI), offer a systematic approach to ensuring technology supports, rather than disrupts, human and organizational success. They enable professionals to analyze gaps, design evidence-based interventions, and evaluate results against measurable outcomes.

Recognizing the need to connect technological capability with human and organizational performance, ISPI developed the AI for Performance Improvement (AI4PI) framework, an innovative model that integrates the principles of HPI with emerging practices in artificial intelligence.

The AI4PI framework helps practitioners move through a logical, evidence-based sequence of activities: framing AI problems accurately, assessing feasibility, managing risks, orchestrating model deployment, and evaluating impact. Each stage aligns with ISPI's long-standing standards of performance improvement, ensuring that every AI initiative is ethical, data-informed, and results-oriented.

By combining systems thinking, data literacy, and performance analysis, AI4PI positions AI not as a standalone tool, but as an enabler of improved decision-making, efficiency, and learning. It provides organizations with a structure to adopt AI responsibly and with clear business outcomes in mind.

To make the framework actionable, ISPI created the AI4PI Learning Journey—a modular learning experience that guides participants through each step of integrating AI into performance improvement practice. The Learning Journey includes microlearning modules, case studies, and applied scenarios that help professionals translate theory into workplace impact.

For those seeking formal recognition, ISPI offers the Certified AI for Performance Improvement Technician (CAIT) certification pathway. This credential validates the learner's ability to apply AI4PI methods to real-world challenges, bridging the gap between technical literacy and performance consulting expertise.

What makes the AI4PI Learning Journey and CAIT certification unique is their alignment with ISPI's Standards of Performance Improvement. Rather than teaching AI in isolation, these programs emphasize why and how AI should be implemented to close performance gaps, improve outcomes, and uphold ethical practice. Together, they represent one of the first professional pathways dedicated to AI literacy through the lens of performance improvement.

As AI reshapes the workplace, the most valuable skills are becoming distinctly human: critical thinking, ethical reasoning, empathy, creativity, and systems thinking. Performance improvement provides a structured pathway to nurture these skills while aligning them with organizational strategy.

When HPI principles guide AI adoption, technology becomes a catalyst for transformation rather than a source of disruption. This synergy, where humans and intelligent systems co-create performance solutions, is the essence of ISPI's AI4PI vision.

As organizations navigate this era of rapid technological change, embracing performance improvement is no longer optional, it is essential. The convergence of AI and HPI represents one of the most exciting frontiers for professionals committed to evidence-based, ethical, and results-driven practice.

Through the AI4PI framework, Learning Journey, and CAIT certification, ISPI is providing the roadmap to help individuals and organizations adapt, innovate, and thrive. By uniting AI literacy with the rigor of performance improvement, ISPI is helping organizations not only adapt to the future of work but lead it.

In the age of AI, performance improvement remains our most powerful tool for helping people and organizations do their best work.

Spotlight Panel

Van Jones
CNN Host, Emmy Award-winning Producer, and Co-Founder, Rapport

We're hearing more about a growing crisis around employee emotional well-being. From your perspective, what's driving this, and how is it showing up inside organizations today?

Change is hard on humans. And people face major change now, at every turn. Politics is insane. People are scared economically. A.I. is breathing down everyone's neck. It takes a toll. On top of that, it is hard to manage a company that is becoming a "3D" workplace: diverse socially, divided politically and distributed over multiple locations. And today's managers? They're screwed. They don't have tools to handle this stuff. Annual surveys aren't enough. DEI is out. We need new technology tools to help today's managers build winning teams – under these conditions. That's what I have been working on at RAPPORT.CO.

How does fostering psychological safety and supporting employee well-being contribute to building a stronger culture of learning across an organization?

It's hard to learn when you don't feel safe. It's hard to flourish when you don't feel seen. For thousands of years, humans were basically tribal: my group versus yours. Now people who look different, pray different, vote different, live different are expected to work together. A diverse team should be able to outperform a non-diverse team. The challenge is how to recruit great talent and ensure high-performance collaboration across lines of difference.

AI is transforming so many aspects of work. How can AI be used responsibly to actually improve employee well-being?

Too often, artificial intelligence is used to distract and divide people. To replace the very humans who created all that data. Or spy on people at work and basically turn people into robots. That's why people hate A.I. But there's a better way. Our tech company uses A.I. to help humans become more human at work. We use A.I. to increase EQ. And when EQ rises, everything else rises: trust, team loyalty, and performance.

Arianna Huffington
Founder and CEO, Thrive Global

What steps are you seeing successful companies taking today to boost engagement?

Certainly, with the many partners Thrive Global is working with, what we're seeing, first, is a mindset shift. Leaders at successful companies realize that well-being isn't a warm and fuzzy benefit for a perk, but rather an essential strategic priority that's directly tied to business metrics. It's a competitive advantage – if your company isn't using it, one of your competitors likely is. And next, what these leaders want are tools to embed well-being directly into the fabric of company culture and the workflow itself. You can't boost engagement among employees who are burned out. So embedding well-being into the workflow becomes both a productivity and an engagement multiplier. At the same time, we know that the more personalized nudges and Microsteps are, the more successful they will be. And through hyper-personalization, this is something that AI is uniquely positioned to do. So I'm optimistic not just about AI to improve productivity in the workplace, but also well-being in the workplace.

What role do microhabits play in driving long-term behavioral change among employees?

We know that behavior change is difficult. But it's absolutely possible when it's done right. And the core of that is starting small. That's why Thrive Global's behavior change platform is based on Microsteps, which are incremental, too-small-to-fail daily steps people can take that cumulatively become healthier habits. As the science on behavior change clearly shows, this is the way to maximize the effectiveness of behavior change.

And so we have hundreds and hundreds of Microsteps on all five behaviors and we give them to employees by meeting them where they are, on Teams, on Slack, on the web or on mobile. With our Thrive AI Health Coach, we'll be able to give employees Microsteps in real time as they need them.

And we reinforce Microsteps with the power of storytelling and community. Storytelling is one of the most powerful behavior change tools. It's stories that truly move us — stories of people overcoming obstacles, building healthy habits, or just making small changes that over time will have a big impact. When we see others who have done what we want to do, that's a story that we can relate to. That's why we also highlight and celebrate new role models of success.

Mark Cuban
Businessman & Television Personality

In what ways are you currently seeing employees successfully leverage AI to enhance their on-the-job performance?

A lot of times, it can be as simple as a typing hack. "Please write a marketing plan, geared towards selling to Gen Z

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consumers, who live in the city of Pittsburgh and have purchased the following products already." It won't give you a perfect response. But it will give you the outline of something, and you can customize it for your company.

What are you personally most excited about with AI and its impact on the future of work?

The fact that the technology will continue to improve and that any worker in any position, if they learn how to use AI, can benefit.

Lefteris Ntouanoglou
President and CEO, Schoox

What are some of the most common challenges you see organizations facing with frontline training today, and what's holding many of them back from real progress?

Most organizations are stuck in a cycle of buying thousands of training courses that fail to move the needle on business performance. The skills employees need are evolving faster than traditional content can keep up, and learning teams can't create or curate enough training to match the pace of change. The result: workers aren't gaining the skills that matter most. What's needed is a smarter, outcome-driven approach. With AI, organizations can now generate and personalize learning tied to real business goals—developing exactly the skills that drive growth, retention, and productivity, transitioning beyond training for compliance to measurable business impact.

Frontline employees often have limited time and access to learning. How can organizations make training more engaging, accessible, and meaningful for this audience?

Most frontline employees learn differently—they need quick, relevant training that is accessible in the flow of work. The key is shifting from long, one-size-fits-all courses to adaptive, personalized learning experiences that target the exact skills required for job performance. Leveraging AI, organizations can map business goals to frontline roles, automatically generate micro-lessons, and reinforce learning over time. This approach makes training meaningful and measurable—boosting engagement, reducing turnover, and closing skills gaps faster. When learning aligns with real-world tasks and outcomes, it becomes an engine for performance, not just compliance.

How can companies use learning analytics to better understand and improve the skills of their frontline teams?

AI and learning analytics are transforming workforce development from tracking completions to building real capability. Modern systems now personalize learning for every employee—combining purpose-built training with ongoing reinforcement, assessments, and coaching that strengthen skills over time. For frontline teams, AI tailors experiences to individual roles, learning styles, and performance data—making training more relevant, engaging, and fun through gamification and progress tracking. The result isn't just better-trained employees—it's measurable business impact. Companies see faster onboarding, higher retention, and improved productivity because employees are continuously developing the skills that drive business success.

Eric Jackson
Head of Global Sales, Becker Professional Education

How can learning experiences be designed to keep professionals engaged and motivated over time?

Professionals often view ongoing learning as a requirement rather than an opportunity, but engagement and motivation increase when experiences are relevant, adaptive, and well-supported.

Start by offering personalized learning pathways tailored to each individual's role, experience, and goals, ensuring skills development aligns with both personal ambitions and organizational needs. Incorporate diverse learning modalities—like live webcasts, on-demand courses, and in-person sessions—to accommodate different preferences and busy schedules.

Most importantly, provide support for your team as they go through learning. For learning experiences to feel more like an opportunity to grow, it's necessary to provide learners with continuous insights into their progress. While personalization is essential, avoid isolation by fostering community through structured coaching, cohort-based programs, facilitated group sessions, and interactive discussion boards. This approach positions learning as a meaningful opportunity for professional growth, creating a culture where continuous development is celebrated and supported across the organization.

How can L&D teams better connect certification and credentialing to real career growth?

Professional certifications gain significance when professionals can connect the credential to career advancement and when employers can clearly interpret the capabilities those credentials represent. L&D teams can bridge this gap by creating visibility, alignment, and momentum around certification programs.

Consider mapping credentials to specific job roles, career milestones, and promotion pathways to show how each certification supports upward mobility. Leverage key metrics such as pass rates, retention, and role readiness to quantify the value of certification, such as how

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certified employees advance more quickly. Positioning credentials as integral to a continuous learning journey through exam prep, credentialing and specialization, and CPE reinforces their importance while employee programs with coaching, accountability, and dedicated study time further drive success.

Finally, communicating the value of certification to both learners and managers, celebrating milestones, and connecting exam competencies to real-world tasks and organizational goals ensures that certification is seen as a powerful tool for professional and organizational growth.

Stephan Pineau
CEO, Training Orchestra

What successful strategies have you seen top organizations use to address their skills challenges?

The most effective organizations aren't just identifying skill gaps, they're also making sure they can enable effective skill transfer.

Skills take the strongest hold when knowledge moves from an expert to a learner through high-quality instruction, practice, coaching and feedback. That's why ILT and vILT remain essential for technical, customer-facing, and leadership capabilities, among many others.

Where high performing organizations stand out is how they operationalize that transfer. They make instructor expertise visible, balance workloads thoughtfully, and ensure the right experts are matched to each course.

To do this efficiently at scale, many are moving beyond spreadsheets and manual processes to modern training management technology as the engine behind their skills transfer – to centralize scheduling, instructor skills, and resource coordination.

With stronger operational visibility, they can deliver ILT faster, more consistently, and with greater impact, turning skills strategies into real repeatable learning experiences.

Where do you see AI having the biggest impact on transforming learning strategies in the coming year?

What's often overlooked in the AI conversation is its potential to strengthen the behind-the-scenes intelligence of training. While much attention goes to personalized content, a real opportunity is in how AI can help L&D understand and anticipate the operational realities of ILT, vILT, and blended learning strategies – predicting demand, spotting patterns, and revealing where instructor capacity is stretched too thin, to name a few.

But AI can only do this when the underlying operational data is centralized, accurate, and structured.

Organizations that use modern training management technology already have this foundation – clear data on instructors, sessions, resources, and utilization. With that visibility in place, AI can surface insights that were previously hidden and support far better planning and decision-making.

In short, AI amplifies the value of centralized training operations data, helping L&D make smarter, more strategic choices about the human-led learning experiences that matter most.

Editorial Calendar 2025/2026

December

- Market Study: The New Era of Corporate Learning & Development
- Webinar: Beyond the Hype: Building Smarter, Resilient Supply Chains with AI

January

- Webinar: AI Meets EQ: How Leaders Are Practicing the Human Side of Performance

April

- Agentic AI Exchange

Appendix

Schoox

- Time for a New L&D Paradigm: AI Must Re-Architect Learning, Not Just Accelerate It
- Why L&D Hasn't Earned the CFO's Trust—Yet

Edflex

- AI Roleplay: Making Training Immersive with Role-Playing Games in 2026
- Train Today, Rule Tomorrow with Edflex

Rapport

- Rapport.co
- Rapport.co/iqpc

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