THE L&D SURVEY SERIES

AI in L&D

2025:THE RACE FOR IMPACT

In association with

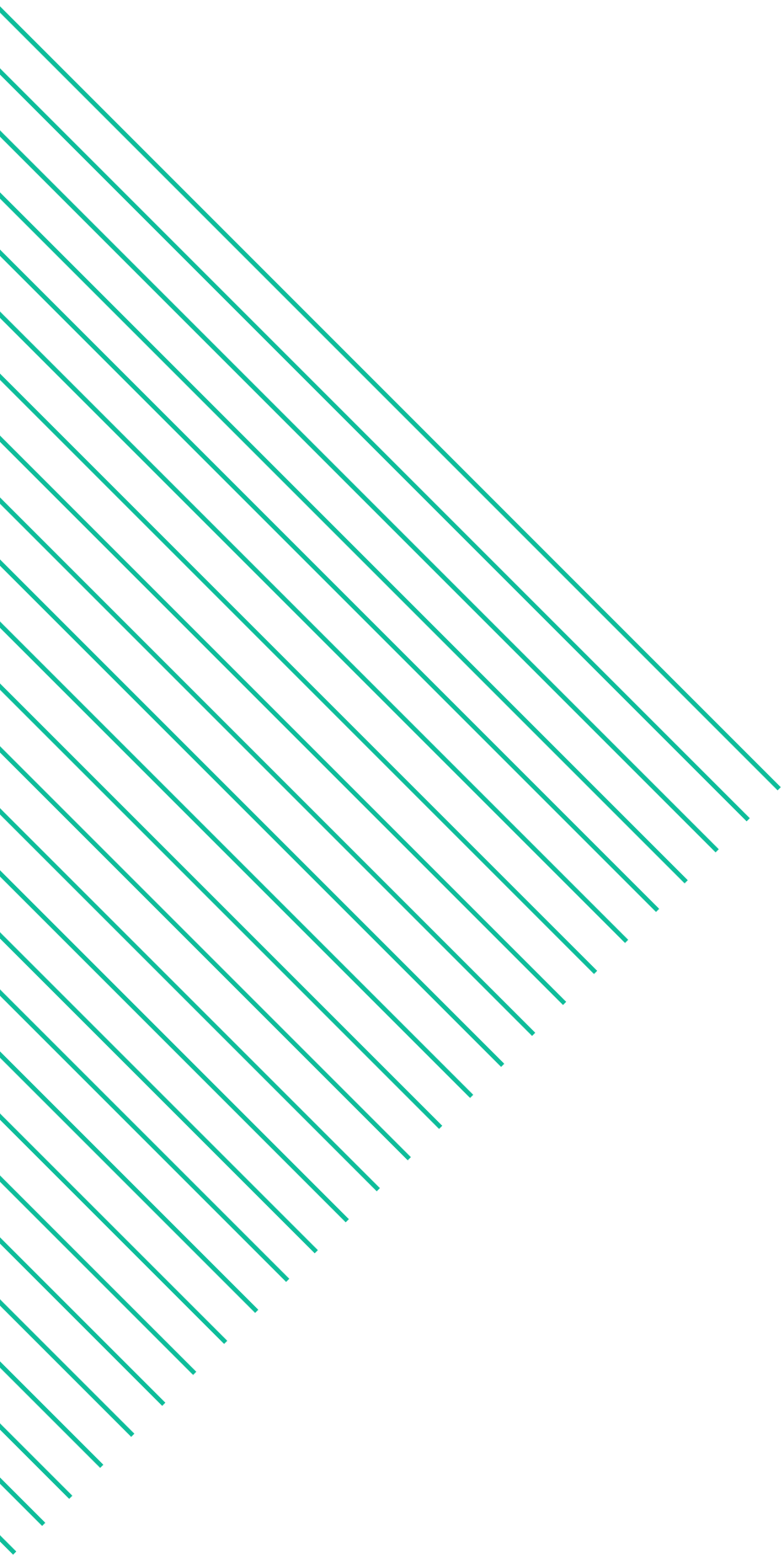
OpenSesame

AI in L&D:

The Race for Impact

By **Donald H Taylor** and **Eglė Vinauskaitė**

September 2025



Introduction

Key findings of this research

This is our third annual report on L&D's use of AI and our fourth in total since the launch of ChatGPT. Having followed L&D's attitude to AI over that period, it is clear there has been a major change in the past 12 months.

From small things, such as the words people use to describe their use of AI, to the growing complexity of the case studies we feature in this report, everything suggests an inflexion point.

For the first time, over half the respondents to our survey now say they are actively using AI. We would surely expect this: any valuable new technology will attract more users over time. What has changed is what people are doing with it. While the greatest single use of AI remains the production of learning content, our case studies show a core of L&D practitioners going well beyond that, imagining a new role for the profession, one with a wider range and more strategic influence across the organisation.

We discuss these new approaches in detail at the end of the report, in L&D's future in an AI world, where we describe three new and radically different ways of imagining the role of the L&D department, all made possible with AI. These possible futures are not speculation; they are based on our extensive research over three years and on talking with the people doing the work. They are happening now.

It is inspiring to consider new futures, but AI is not a neutral technology. While it allows L&D to pursue a larger role with more impact, it also erodes the foundations of our traditional work. It is now simple for anyone in the organisation to create learning content.

This content looks smart and can be created several orders of magnitude faster than using traditional methods. Is it all as good as the output of the best instructional designers? No, but in many cases, it is good enough. In addition – and this is crucial – it is also far, far cheaper.

We look to the work featured in our case studies and 'snapshots' (short case studies) to inspire us to find new ways of supporting learning at work.

This is our longest report yet. That reflects the amount of work now being done with AI. You may want to start by reading the conclusion, the final section and then the case studies and snapshots in that order.

If you decide to create a summary using an AI tool, please remember that it is always worth going to the original source when you can make time for it. Here, this means taking time to read the thoughts of the people who completed the survey and those who have shared their experiences in the case studies.

We would like to thank OpenSesame, The Regis Company and Speexx for sponsoring the report.

Donald H Taylor
Eglė Vinauskaitė

About the authors

Donald H Taylor

Donald is the founder and lead researcher of the L&D Survey Series. His annual L&D Global Sentiment Survey, started in 2014, explores L&D trends from over 100 countries. With Eglė Vinauskaitė, he has published four reports on AI in L&D since 2023. He has chaired the Learning Technologies Conference in London since 2000 and writes and speaks worldwide about L&D and learning technologies.

He works with London-based VC firm Emerge Venture Partners, and advises several EdTech start-ups. The author of Learning Technologies in the Workplace, Donald is a graduate of Oxford University and the recipient of an honorary doctorate from London's Middlesex University.

Follow on LinkedIn

Eglė Vinauskaitė

Named one of HR's Most Influential Thinkers in 2025, Egle Vinauskaite is the award-winning director of Nodes, a studio focused on the people side of AI adoption. Over the years, she has worked with some of the biggest brands on upskilling and organisational change programmes, and advised on how AI can support scalable learning and performance, boost L&D operations, and prepare organisations for enterprise-wide AI adoption.

Her work has earned recognition across the industry: she has been a finalist in several leading awards and won the Rising Star Award from the Learning and Performance Institute. Egle holds an M.Ed. from Harvard University.

Follow on LinkedIn

Contents

About the report

A report in three acts

This report has three parts. The first examines the results of a global survey of over 600 L&D practitioners from 53 countries. We split this into quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The second part is a collection of case studies exploring in detail how organisations are using AI. In this year's report, there are two types of case studies: in-depth studies and AI use snapshots. This allows us to cover a wide range of use cases and reflects the increased, broader use of AI in L&D.

In part three, we explore the implications of how AI is now being used and suggest three possible futures for L&D. These each represent a radical change from where we are now because they move L&D away from its traditional role centred on producing and delivering content.

Throughout the report, where permission has been given, quotes are attributed. If a quote is not attributed, permission has been given to use the quote anonymously.

You will see some vendors mentioned. We do not benefit from this, financially or otherwise. Also, the mention of a vendor is not necessarily a recommendation. The goal of this report is to help the L&D community imagine what can be done with AI and how to do it. After careful consideration, we decided that being specific about the tools used would make the case studies more practical and help our colleagues understand the resources involved in technology rollouts of this kind.

Caveats around the survey data

When considering the survey part of this report, please also consider these caveats around the data set and the interpretation of results.

Respondents are likely to be more tech-savvy than most

Most respondents choose to contribute after seeing an invitation on social media or email. They are, therefore, a self-selecting group. Because they are contacted – and answer – electronically, respondents are certainly users of technology, and probably more likely to feel positively about technology than the general population. This method of canvassing votes excludes many, particularly those who are not active on social media.

Year-on-year comparisons may be unsound

Numbers of respondents have grown, year-on-year. The 2023 survey was anonymous, but we know there is little overlap between those voting in 2025 and in 2024. This could lead to variations between surveys arising from changes in the make-up of the surveyed population, rather than changes in the views of the wider L&D practitioner population.

About the survey

What did we ask? Who answered?

We ran a nine-question survey between 27 June and 31 August 2025. The survey repeated some questions from previous surveys for the AI in L&D reports for 2023 and 2024, allowing us to draw comparisons over time.

The first two questions were optional and asked about personal details and where people worked.

They were followed by four questions asking about:

- Q3 their progress using AI in L&D (multiple choice, optional)
- Q4 how they were using AI (free text, obligatory)
- Q5 their current or near-term planned use of AI (multiple choice, optional)
- Q6 barriers experienced in using AI (multiple choice, optional)
- Q7 how much L&D was involved in organisational AI adoption (multiple choice, optional).

The final two questions allowed respondents to comment further and to say whether they were happy to be quoted in this report.

The survey was publicised via a combination of social media (largely LinkedIn) and email newsletters. The 606 respondents were self-selecting. As such, they are unlikely to be representative of the overall population of L&D practitioners. They are more likely than most to have strong opinions about AI, and to have experienced working with it.

All but two respondents answered the question 'Which best describes where you do most of your work?' with the majority working on an L&D team in the workplace.

The survey tool used, Survey Monkey, provides IP addresses. These showed respondents were split across the United Kingdom (21%); the rest of Europe (29%); North and Central America (13%); South America (12%), and the South-west Pacific (15%) – this being largely made up of responses from Australia.

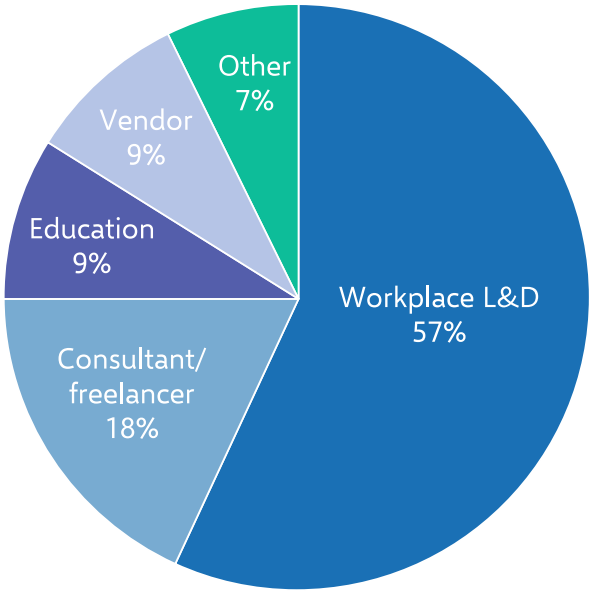


Figure 1: Where respondents worked

A turning point

This year L&D passed an inflexion point, with over half of survey respondents now saying they use AI.

Question 3 asked respondents 'How would you describe your progress in using Artificial Intelligence in workplace L&D?'

Six multiple-choice answers were provided. The wording was identical to the 2024 survey, and very close to that of 2023:

A. Our organisation has no intention of using AI as part of L&D

B. Our organisation has not begun exploring the role of AI in L&D

C. Our organisation has experimented with AI tools in L&D, but has not implemented anything

D. Our organisation is currently piloting the use of AI in L&D

E. Our organisation is using AI in some parts of our work in L&D

F. Our organisation is using AI extensively as an integral part of our work in L&D

The six answers can be grouped into three phases:

A, B – Pre-use

C, D – Pre-implementation, experimenting or piloting

E, F – Using AI in some way

	2023	2024	2025
Pre-use	9%	19%	10%
Experimenting	49%	41%	36%
Using	42%	40%	54%

Figure 2: Progress in using AI in L&D: 2023 to 2025

As can be seen in Figure 2, there has been a large increase (14%) in the proportion of respondents using AI in L&D this year, rather than experimenting or piloting its use.

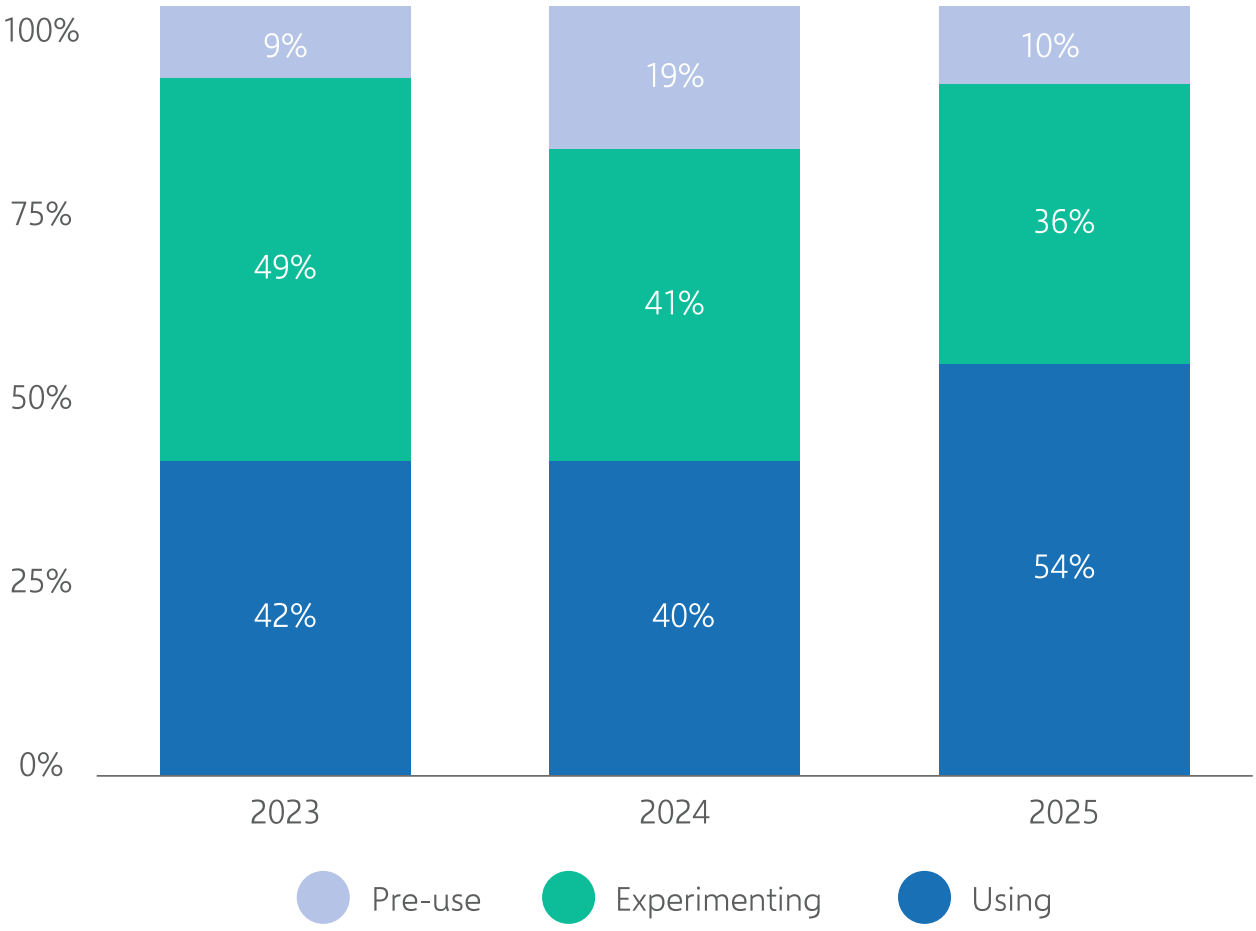


Figure 3: The Implementation Inflexion

This increase is vividly seen in Figure 3, where the share of people in Pre-use and Experimenting dip significantly in 2025, while the proportion of those in the Using group surges. This turning point seems significant. For the first time, more than 50% of respondents report that they use AI, almost as if it has moved from being a novelty to part of the L&D tool kit. This shift is big enough for us to give it a name: the Implementation Inflexion.

Why did people feel more confident describing themselves as using AI? One possible explanation is that the survey, which gathered more responses than ever before this year, simply attracted a greater number of people using AI.

The growth in the share of AI users could also be due to another factor. There may be a certain amount of social proof at work here: people see success stories of the use of AI and start to put it to work themselves. These people may move straight from Pre-use to Using without going through the Experimenting phase.

This Implementation Inflexion point marks a key moment in the adoption of AI by L&D. Our surveyed L&D practitioners are now saying they are using it, and it is difficult to imagine the direction of travel being reversed. The question now is not 'Will AI be adopted by L&D practitioners?' but rather 'What are they using it for?' Answering that question is the focus of the remainder of this report.

How L&D is using AI: Part 1

The big picture

While content and design dominate again, there is nuance in the use of data analysis and translation.

We asked 'How are you using AI right now or planning to use it in the next 3 months?' Respondents could select any number of options from a list of 15, in randomised order. The list was a repeat of the list we used in our interim survey in March 2024, with the addition of 'Learning experience' as an option. In the box to the right are the 15 options, grouped by category (the categories were not shown on the survey). For more on the categories, see How L&D is using AI: part 3.

Figure 4 shows the votes for each option by category. The Content and design category takes three of the top four places. This dominance of content development is unsurprising, as it is the most natural application of generative tools. In many cases, this still means creating courses more quickly through basic prompt-driven workflows. However, we also saw clear signs of progress: many respondents described more sophisticated uses within the content development process, including richer learner interactions, AI-powered design reviews, and even copilots that support designers in developing more robust programmes. As detailed later in the report, these examples show that, in quite a few teams, AI in content and design has already moved well beyond the basics.

On average, respondents chose 4.9 of the 15 options available, while in the March 2024 survey, they chose 3.1 of the 14 options. This is a significant increase, and supports the idea that AI is now being used for a wider range of activities by individuals, as well as across the L&D profession as a whole.

Content and design

1. Creating learning content (text, audio, video, images)
2. Learning design tasks (course outlines, learning activities, scripting, etc)
3. User research (writing interview scripts and surveys, personas, analysis, etc)
4. Researching subject matter
5. Translation

Operations and other

6. Administrative tasks (summaries, reports, emails, internal comms, etc)
7. Other

Strategy and insight

8. Qualitative data analysis (eg analysing words provided in feedback)
9. Quantitative data analysis (eg analysing change in KPIs)
10. Skills management (skills intelligence tools, talent marketplaces, etc)

Workforce enablement

11. Learning experience (AI as in-training guide, tutor, or exercise partner)
12. Skills practice (eg via AI coaching, conversational bots)
13. Learning personalisation (content curation, adaptive learning, etc)
14. Performance support (eg AI assistants providing employees with immediate help)

No use

15. None of the above

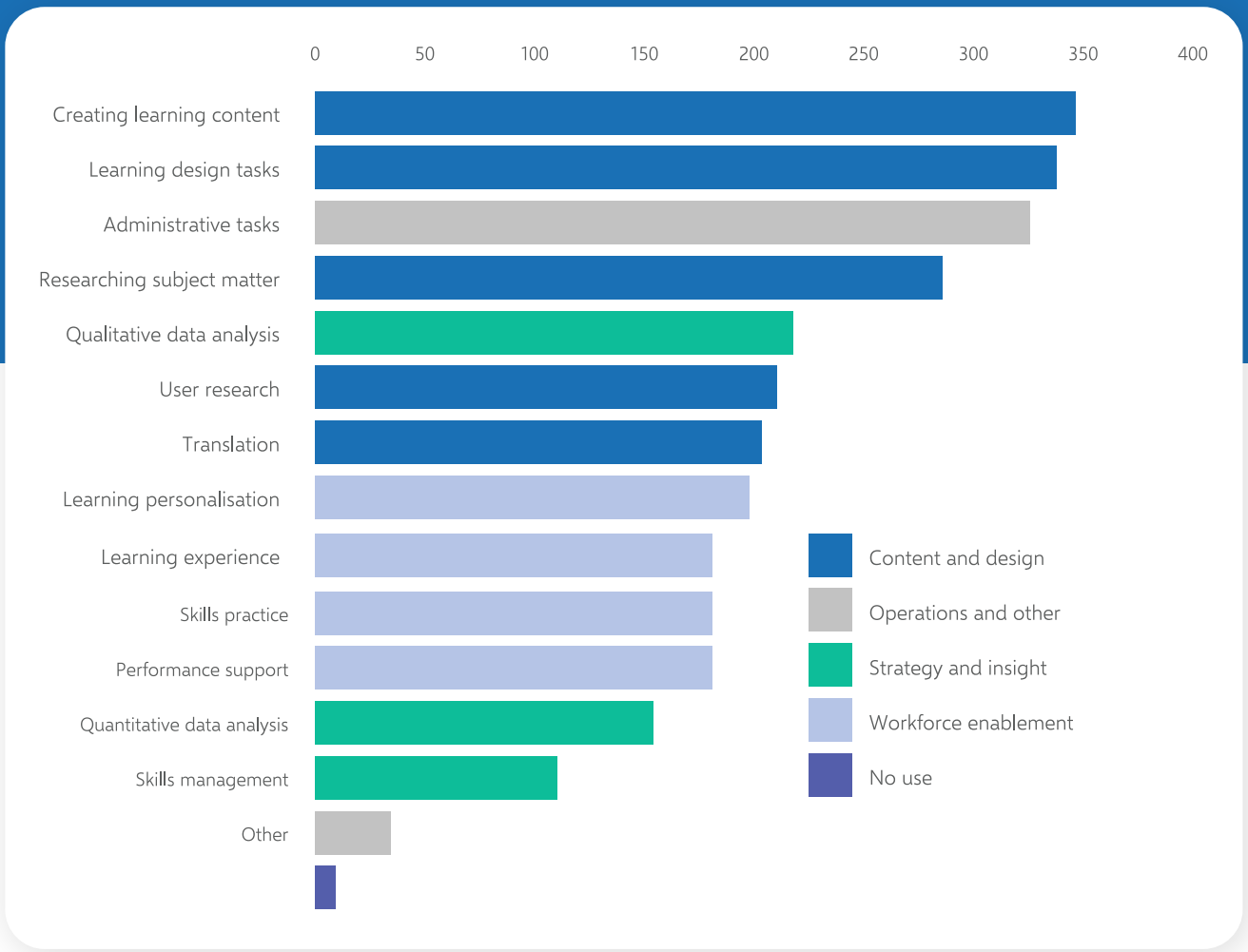


Figure 4: Uses of AI in L&D by category

It was not just the number of votes that changed between our surveys in March 2024 and August 2025. The relative positions changed as well, as seen in Figure 5, which shows the rankings of the options in the two surveys. The right-hand column indicates the direction of change of rankings year-on-year, with significant changes circled.

The use of AI for administrative tasks has risen from #4 in the March 2024 survey to #3 this year. This shift likely reflects both greater acceptance of AI and growing skill in using it, as these tasks often involve straightforward, time-saving applications embedded in daily workflows. Since the March 2024 survey, the widespread adoption of Microsoft Copilot has also played a role, putting AI directly into email and document writing.

Another stand-out result in this comparison is the increase in popularity this year of 'Qualitative data analysis', up from #8 in 2024 to #5 this year. This aligns with the general finding that AI is being used in more sophisticated ways.

Uses of AI in L&D	2025	2024	Δ
Creating learning content	1	2	↑
Learning design tasks	2	1	↓
Administrative tasks	3	4	↑
Researching subject matter	4	3	↓
Qualitative data analysis	5	8	⊕
User research	6	6	↔
Translation	7	7	↔
Learning personalisation	8	5	⊖
Learning experience	9	new	n/a
Skills practice	10	9	↓
Performance support	11	10	↓
Quantitative data analysis	12	11	↓
Skills management	13	12	↓
Other	14	13	↓
None of the above	15	14	↓
n=	**606**	**420**	

Figure 5: Uses ranked in Mar '24 and Aug '25

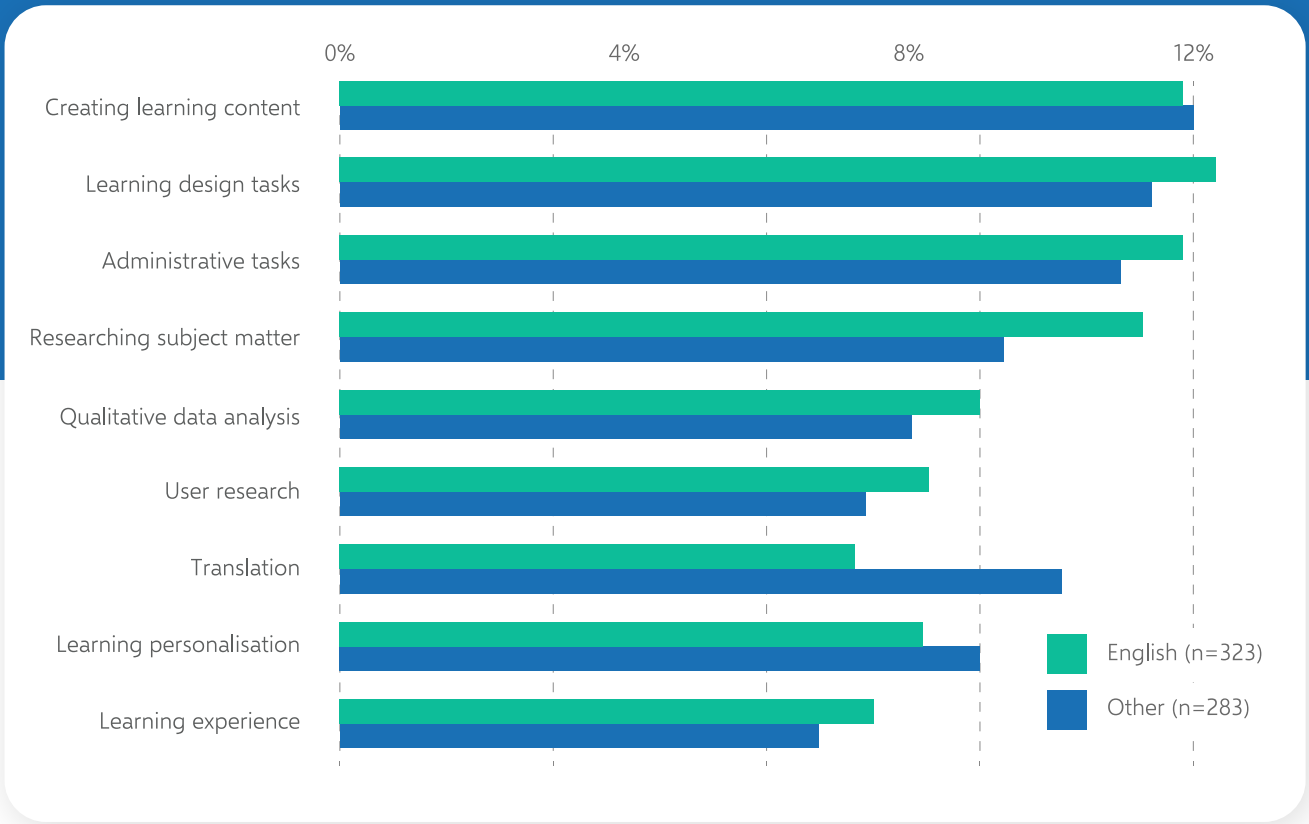


Figure 6: Key uses by language

Less easily understood is the fall in the ranking of 'Learning personalisation', down from #5 to #8. One explanation is that the new option of 'Learning experience' took some of the votes that might have gone to 'Learning personalisation'. It is also possible that respondents' understanding of 'personalisation' has changed. For a further discussion of this, see How L&D is using AI: part 3.

With votes spread across 53 countries and five different work groups, we were excited to explore whether respondents working in different places had different uses for AI. That excitement was short-lived. The results were astonishingly consistent. Whether the respondent was a freelancer in the United States or an Australian educator, the way they used AI corresponded to the distribution seen in Figure 4.

Only in one area was a clear difference apparent. Figure 6 shows voting for the most popular nine uses of AI according to whether the respondent's country was English-speaking or not.

Several things stand out in this chart. First, the voting for 'Creating learning content' is almost identical between Anglophone and non-Anglophone countries.

Second, there are considerable gaps between the two groups in the options ranked #3, #4 and #5, with respondents from English-speaking countries voting notably more strongly for 'Administrative tasks', 'Researching subject matter' and 'Qualitative data analysis'. This is probably caused by the dominance of the English language in the tools used for administration and in the data used for research.

By far the greatest difference between the two groups, however, is in the use of AI for translation. This was ranked far higher in the non-English speaking world (#4) than in the Anglophone world (#11). This low ranking in the English-speaking world was due to respondents in the UK (which ranked it #11) and Australia (#12), while the USA ranked it at #7.

How L&D is using AI: Part 2

Looking closer

Respondents' answers reveal a definite trend towards more complex uses of AI in L&D.

As well as the optional multiple-choice question on how L&D is using AI, the survey's sole obligatory question also asked about use: 'Please share how you're using AI in your work.' We asked respondents to provide as much detail as they could, or write 'n/a' if they were not using AI at all. This is the same question we have asked in the previous three annual reports.

Respondents were generous in sharing their activities, writing a total of some 20,000 words. These answers represent a valuable resource, both as a snapshot of how L&D is using AI now and a picture of how those uses have changed over the three years we have asked the question.

We analysed these answers in two ways. In the next section, we take a qualitative look at what people are doing with AI today.

In this section, we use a quantitative approach to examine how patterns of AI use have shifted over time.

For this analysis, we check the occurrence of 90 'word stems' in each response. A 'word stem' is a part of a word. Counting occurrences of 'analy' includes uses of 'analysis', 'analyse' and further derivations. 'Skill' includes 'skill', 'reskill', 'skilling' and so on. We count the number of responses a word stem appears in and then rank the word stems accordingly: which appeared in the greatest number of responses, and which in the fewest.

Rankings	2023	2024	2025
content	1	1	1
generat	2	2	2
learn	3	4	3
creat	4	3	4
analy	28	8	5
develop	14	7	6
design	27	17	7
tool	9	9	8
data	37	13	9
research	53	19	10

Figure 7: Rankings of word stems, 2023-2025

Figure 7 shows the 10 word stems that occurred in most comments in 2025. We then looked at how many comments used the word stems in previous annual reports. The results reflect the patterns we see elsewhere in our research. Most obviously, the emphasis on content creation seen in Figure 5 is echoed here by the continued presence in the top four positions of 'content', 'generat' and 'creat'.

Below the top four positions, however, there is considerable change. Note the rapid rise of 'analy', 'data' and 'research', reflecting how L&D increasingly sees AI as an analytical tool with value beyond content creation.

Meanwhile, 'develop' and 'design' have also risen from lower rankings to reach this year's top 10. In the survey, 'Design' is usually associated with content creation, but in a larger sense. It is often found in the phrases 'learning experience design' and 'learning design', rather than referring to the design of a particular course or piece of content.

Similarly, in the survey, 'Develop' seldom seems to be used around learning content creation. The most common use is in association with personal plans and skills, as here:

... personal development goals...

... personalised development plans...

... developing a ground-breaking platform...

... organisational development function...

... track skill development at scale...

Overall, then, the word stems occurring most often in 2025 reflect L&D's continued focus on content, an increased interest in AI for analysis and research, as well as a sense that L&D is using it for larger goals than creating individual learning assets.

If these are the implications of the most popular terms used by L&D, what can we learn from the words that have fallen out of favour?

See Figure 8: Word stems falling the most in rankings from 2023 to 2025.

As explained above, we count the number of responses in which a word stem and rank them according to which appear in the most or fewest comments. Figure 8 shows which word stems dropped furthest down these rankings between 2023 and 2025.

Only one of these word stems was highly ranked in 2023: 'chatgpt'. Ranked #13 in 2023, it has since fallen to #35. This is understandable; the excitement around the generative AI tool was still palpable in 2023, one year after its release. It has since clearly moved from novelty to business-as-usual. It appears from the table that the same can be said for other words used to describe ChatGPT: 'generative' and 'chatbot' have declined. Also, not shown in Figure 8, 'chat' and 'gpt' have fallen too.

It's notable how the use of AI has shifted in just a few years. In 2023, respondents were clearly using it to create learning objectives and write lesson outlines and scripts. Figure 8 shows how terms associated with these activities are less commonly cited now than they were in 2023.

These counts of word frequency all add to the sense that the Implementation Inflexion marks not just a wider use of AI, but an increased sophistication in its use.

Rankings	2023	2024	2025
curat	31	66	71
objective	39	56	74
generative	45	59	80
outlin	26	29	54
chatbot	41	69	67
script	24	27	45
chatgpt	13	23	35
subject	67	72	86
audio	50	79	69
conversation	47	52	62

Figure 8: Biggest ranking drops, 2023–2025

Barriers to using AI

What stands in the way of L&D using AI?

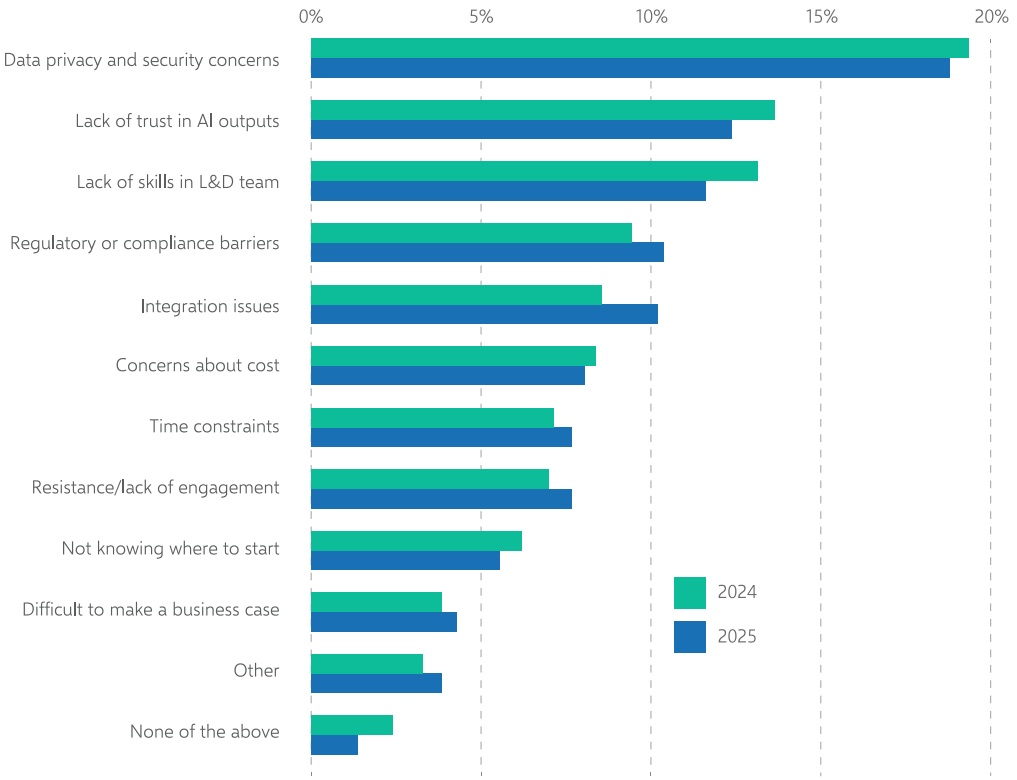


Figure 9: Barriers to using AI, 2024 and 2025

In question 6, respondents were asked 'What barriers, if any, are you experiencing in your work with AI?'. They could choose any number of responses from a list of 12. Despite the increased number of people answering this year's survey (606 versus 420 in 2024), the answers are similar, ranking in the same order over both years.

The same issues stand out, with distrust dominating. As shown in Figure 9, the two most selected answers accounted for over 30% of all votes: 'Data privacy and security concerns' and 'Lack of trust in AI outputs'. This is only slightly less than last year, and suggests that AI vendors have yet to win the hearts and minds of users. Indeed, in the next section, Beyond the numbers, distrust runs like marbling through many of the comments.

It is also notable that 'Lack of skills in L&D team' remains the third most cited barrier, even though it has fallen since last year. This suggests progress – more teams have gained confidence and competence with AI – but its high ranking this year shows how uneven that progress is. Many practitioners are moving ahead with implementation, while others continue to feel underprepared, leaving a visible skills gap across the field.

A similar pattern can be seen with trust. The share of respondents citing 'Lack of trust in AI outputs' as a barrier has also slightly declined since last year. This reinforces the link between competence and confidence: as practitioners gain skills, they are better able to judge AI's strengths and limitations, and in turn more willing to trust its outputs.

Interestingly, cost concerns and time constraints remain almost unchanged from last year, suggesting these are evergreen barriers that persist despite wider adoption. This may show that AI is not yet widely regarded as a time or cost saver – at least not in ways that consistently outweigh the investment of effort, money and attention required to make it work.

We have long suspected that the balance of answers to this question would alter as L&D's use of AI changed. Although the order of results has not yet changed, it is notable that the options ranked fourth and fifth on this list are the only ones to have increased their share of the vote this year.

We suspect this is for the same reason. Practitioners will come up against both 'Regulatory or compliance barriers' (up 1.3% this year) and 'Integration issues' (up 1.8%) when they attempt sophisticated implementations that require access to more data and work across different systems. As L&D's use increasingly involves people and systems from outside the L&D department, we can expect these barriers to be felt more keenly.

Others that we suspect are likely to feature more strongly next year are 'Resistance/lack of engagement' and 'Difficult to make a business case', both of which slightly increased their share of the vote this year.

Respondents also used the 'Other' option to expand on the barriers they faced, offering more detail and context in their own words.

Barrier: strategy, process and planning

One common theme expressed in the barriers section was the impact of poor planning on implementing AI.

''Our L&D teams are very interested in AI, and many of us use some tools or are part of the implementation pilot, but we don't have any kind of roadmap or schedule with tasks to do in this area. It's uncoordinated. In the company, the implementation of AI looks like a project with a schedule, but we are not involved at that level.''

''[AI use] is not organisation-led, it is team-led. The use varies person to person, but generally, Copilot is being used to help form document structures and help with idea generation, but we lack frameworks and consistency across the team. We also haven't identified a way to measure the positive impacts of using AI.''

''We've started trying a more focused approach; rather than just doing lots of different experiments we have focused on using it extensively to review our physical in-person learning programmes.''

''AI as expected is a hot topic across all areas/ departments of our organisation. Everyone is exploring and enthusiastic, however as an organisation there are internal processes – and this is what is delaying us in L&D to pursuing our specific applications.''

''One challenge we're experiencing is the absence of a clear top-down strategic direction for digital transformation and AI adoption. While there are passionate, grassroots efforts -particularly within L&D – it's difficult for these to gain meaningful traction or scale without visible leadership backing or a unifying vision.''

Barrier: rollout considerations

Just as poor planning was a concern for some respondents, so too was the practical side of rolling out an implementation.

"The basic understanding of good AI use is seriously lacking. People do not know what a good use case is and how to use agile principles to scale, which is leading to unnecessarily poor results."

"So much opportunity, but need to balance time spent on research/understanding against getting the current job done!"

"I've had as many failures as successes, where 'bad' AI has slowed down a process it was hoped to speed up. This is mainly due to the poor quality and unreliability of the output, which often fills in gaps with incorrect information. I still have major trust issues..."

"My biggest challenge is convincing the company's leadership that the 'pilot small and then scale' approach does not work in a learning model where the volume of data is critical for building the tool's knowledge. In addition, the idea that AI continuously learns from real data creates distrust and insecurity regarding information security."

Barrier: moral/ethical, environmental or cognitive concerns

A number of respondents expressed the view that they don't use AI on principle, or use it hesitantly and with reservations. The following examples highlight their concerns.

"We've applied AI as safely as we know how, but it's very difficult to manage – employees (remote) have access to ChatGPT and often blur the line between giving it proprietary or internal information. It's still a struggle. I also see my team resorting to giving AI creative tasks that they used to do – and the results are not always as good. Yes, they may be faster, but they aren't as polished or professional as they could have been if we just did the task ourselves."

"I am thoroughly underwhelmed by the performance and widespread lowering of 'good enough' standards that AI produces."

"I continue to be shocked and disappointed by how apathy, uncritical engagement and assumptions surrounding the inevitability of the use of AI are driving its uptake...the environmental cost is rarely if ever mentioned...and how it will disproportionately affect, as usual, members of the Global Majority who are already most affected by our rapidly escalating environmental disaster...I am not a Luddite, I can see that such technology will have important applications but I do not believe that we are being honest enough with ourselves about the issues."

"I worry about cognitive debt. If the learning team is a key driver in rolling out AI, how do we factor in people not learning the depth of skill required for their role? I believe in autonomy but many will take the 'easy' way out. For example, AI helps them build a client deck but in front of the client, they can't answer the question to the depth required because they don't have the skills. I worry about the debt in myself in a world/firm that keeps telling me to go faster!! More is not more."

"I don't use generative AI. I know how LLMs work, so I'm aware they don't make for reliable research partners, and I've read up on the MIT research and other studies that evidence it leads to loss of creativity (prevalence of 'curation mode' over 'creative mode') and cognitive decline. That's not even taking into account the ethical and environmental issues, of which there are many. In any case, our clients, too, have serious qualms about its usage (in terms of privacy, copyright and equity)."

"We sort of have a split, where some people are very keen to experiment with AI, and others are opposed for ethical reasons (environmental costs, violations of intellectual property rights, job replacement, etc.)"

Beyond the numbers

What did respondents really think of AI and its use?

General thoughts

Three years into the wide availability of generative AI tools, many respondents have expressed more nuanced views about AI, the opportunity it offers and the reality on the ground. Going beyond AI as a tool, many volunteered their views about the value of AI in L&D and what it means for the function in general.

''As we become more involved in AI adoption the L&D brand/value is increasing.''

''I whole-heartedly agree...about how L&D needs to move beyond just using AI for task-based work. We need to start using it as a tool to inform our strategy as a department and as an organization.''

''Until L&D is clear on how AI affects learning, they are flying blind.'

''What helps is reframing the conversation. Instead of speaking about Artificial Intelligence, I speak of AI & C: Augmented Intelligence and Craftsmanship. This framing resonates much more with professionals. They no longer feel threatened but instead see how their craftsmanship is essential – how AI can strengthen, not replace, their role in designing effective and meaningful learning experiences and performance support.''

''AI unquestionably offers L&D an unprecedented juncture to shift to performance-based learning, and therefore realise the much-posted nirvana of clearly demonstrating purpose and value. The biggest single challenge is a collective recognition of this opportunity by L&D, HR, technology and business leadership. If the vision and opportunity is not understood, L&D will be reduced to transaction use. Worse still, employees will intuitively realise those opportunities by themselves, thus creating an existential crisis because of a missed opportunity.''

''IMHO, any team that isn't engineering or sales (making stuff to sell or selling stuff) is a possible target for downsizing. AI is an excuse (for the most part) for execs to shrink their workforce, as the productivity gains are not there YET. And it behoves everyone, L&D especially, to build a better boat that will ride the wave of AI. When execs see L&D teams as proactively building a better boat for the company and sailing the company to 'the promised land,' then L&D becomes the company's pathway to the future.''

''AI has become the go-to technology for companies and L&D are required to embed that in their learning. But effective use and value creation is still not justified against business outcomes. There have to be more case studies and success cases on AI in learning that has translated to business effectiveness.''

Personal implications/reflections

For some, AI sparked big picture thoughts – positive and negative – around AI's usefulness now and in the future.

''I thought this was another Metaverse moment but I'm actually quite impressed with what AI can do. It can be a great companion for day-to-day tasks.''

''The rate of change in tools and LLMs has forced me to restructure my own development. Shelf life for knowledge in the AI space keeps getting shorter.''

''[I use AI] as a source of general loathing and frustration with the hype versus reality. As a trojan horse to get companies to invest in development of staff: if you put 'AI Adoption' in the proposal it'll get funded.''

''The biggest issue I have/see is [AI] actually integrating in ways that are useful to me. I don't need help writing emails, I need help managing a bulging inbox, but most agentic AI can't help with that nitty gritty.''

''I have come to accept that hallucinations are part of AI and quite enjoy the unexpected. I am still a bit nervous about letting AI free, on its own, to operate within courses. I still feel the need for human oversight, especially when it comes to content development.''

Adoption

Several respondents shared a view of AI adoption being undermined either by leadership (a lack of it or micromanagement) or a lack of consultation. The saddest quote is the last, where an L&D team was unable to take part in an AI adoption programme, even when they were consulted.

''I would describe it as a hot potato...there is no central strategy and everyone is playing 'not me' in terms of leading – it should be a whole business cross function approach but it's defaulting to learning but there is no defined strategy or best practice uses or expectations – mainly because of the pace of updates, evolution.''

''Our business has developed an org wide AI strategy (led by the IT team), however that team thinks they can do it all (change management, upskilling, etc) and aren't considering the vast culture and capability changes needed to be successful and therefore are not engaging with the right areas across the business to make this a reality.''

''I'm the sole person in an 800p organisation that is busy educating my colleagues on AI – we have a 12p data team and a 30p IT team who are all still busy 'outlining our AI vision'.''

''The AI adoption team asked for support but L&D either didn't have capacity or skills to support so they have gone ahead without us.''

How L&D is using AI: Part 3

Deep in the detail

What did respondents share in their free-text answers to the question of how they are using AI?

Key differences this year

Compared with this time last year, AI use in 2025 can be summed up as 'similar, but more'. Content creation remains the most common application, as generative AI naturally lends itself to producing a wide range of material. The real change lies elsewhere: last year, only a smaller group of early adopters were testing wider, more varied uses. This year, those uses have spread much more broadly.

In practice, this shift shows up in several ways.

Podcasts as a new modality

Podcasts barely registered in last year's responses. This year, they have emerged as a distinct modality in the learning designer's toolbox, supported by tools such as NotebookLM that can turn documents into audio episodes. Their rise shows how AI can introduce entirely new formats, not just make existing ones more efficient.

From process to interaction

AI is no longer limited to the internal process of content development. It can now support users directly, most visibly in two ways. The first is through virtual assistants embedded in e-learning courses that signpost resources, answer questions and support comprehension. The second is adaptive AI-generated feedback that responds to a learner's input, moving beyond static multiple-choice questions with canned replies.

AI role plays going mainstream

AI role plays let people practise conversations in natural language, get feedback on their performance and try again. Last year, they were mainly seen in pilots. This year, they have become far more common, boosted by out-of-the-box availability in learning platforms and content libraries, as well as a surge of new vendors offering them.

Changing definition of personalisation

Personalisation was one of the earliest uses of AI in L&D, well before generative AI. Until recently, it was mostly seen as content curation through recommendations or as adaptive learning, with the latter now mentioned far less often. At the same time, personalisation is taking on new meaning, with AI being used to create personal development plans, act as a coach and rewrite and contextualise content for specific roles.

Analytics on the rise

Analytics has grown rapidly since the arrival of generative AI. In 2023, only a handful of respondents mentioned using AI for analysis. Last year, that number increased tenfold; this year it has tripled again. Although the most common use remains sentiment analysis of open-text survey feedback, AI for analytics is clearly emerging as a major growth area within L&D.

Thought partnership becomes the norm

Thought partnership is one of the AI uses that began to appear last year and has grown sharply since. Its defining feature is the two-way exchange between human and AI – more a dialogue than a prompt followed by output. AI is now being used as a sounding board and sparring partner across all levels of L&D work, from learning design through to strategic decision-making.

Custom building takes root

Some learning professionals have started to build their own tools, using coding – often AI-assisted – as well as no-code platforms. These tools range from custom learning interactions to administration and content development tools. While still a relatively small use of AI, it looks like a seed for future growth, much as last year's small-scale uses have since become widespread.

Overview of AI use

This section looks at the range of AI uses reported in the survey. Over the past two years, responses tended to fall into two broad camps: AI for learning experience design and AI for everything else, largely because use of AI for content development was so overwhelming. In line with this year's shift towards more varied and creative applications, we have organised them into four domains of value:

1. AI for content and design
2. AI for operations
3. AI for strategy and insight
4. AI for workforce enablement

The pages that follow set out the wide range of uses we heard about within each of these domains.

1. AI for content & design

Content research

L&D professionals are widely using AI to get up to speed with the topics they need to provide training on. The ways they apply AI in this area can be grouped into several themes:

Information gathering: Deep research on a topic, including market research and academic sources, to map the required content and identify the concepts, theories and skills involved. AI can also suggest specific content to include, which is later fleshed out by humans. This information is then used to augment and enrich existing content with input from other sources, find background resources or generate FAQs.

Content synthesis and analysis: Organising, summarising and analysing large amounts of information from different sources, such as existing content, internal documents, research papers, articles from the web and examples of best practice. This also includes comparative checks, such as identifying inconsistencies between professional codes or conducting historical and factual cross-checks.

Content gap analysis: Identifying areas where existing materials do not fully cover the required content, skills or knowledge, and highlighting where new material needs to be developed.

SME session preparation: Rapid content research and synthesis to anticipate the input of subject matter experts (SMEs), prepare draft materials for them to validate and come in with sharper questions for the discussion.

Team session follow-up: Transcribing and summarising design workshops and content discussions to capture decisions, record key points and create a reference for future work.

> *''[There is] a slight shift in the role/relationship between ID [Instructional Designer] and SME, where the ID is using AI to anticipate the SME's content/views and then have the SME validate – rather than starting with the SME.''*
>
> *''[We use AI] to test, validate and expand our assumptions and hypotheses with other findings from the marketplace.''*

User research

Use of AI for user research has grown significantly compared with previous years. In the past, only a handful of responses mentioned research to understand the end users of learning programmes. Today, it is being applied in several ways:

Research preparation: Structuring research plans and developing survey or interview questions for areas such as skills gap analysis and individual needs.

Findings synthesis: Analysing inputs and collating themes from interview transcripts (with learners, SMEs or stakeholders), diagnostic forms, case studies and surveys. This also sometimes involves creating user personas.

Needs and performance analysis: Using inputs such as workshop and focus group transcripts, surveys, personas, performance assessment data, standard operating procedures (SOPs) and other content to define the scope and objectives for a programme or course. AI helps connect the dots across these sources, identify skills and behaviours needed for success and shape targeted development programmes.

> *''[We're] using AI to upload global stakeholder discussions on learning from multiple learning partners to analyse and identify global trends.''*
>
> *''[I'm] using ChatGPT to inspire surveys for learning impact, skills gap analysis and understanding individual needs.''*

Learning design

For the tasks below, respondents reported using a mix of approaches: general-purpose AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude, Gemini and NotebookLM); Large Language Model (LLM) features embedded in authoring tools; design tools and LMS/LXP, and, less often, custom AI tools developed internally.

Learning design strategy

Learning outcomes: Generating learning outcomes, sometimes by uploading documents such as company policies and asking the AI to extract outcomes or behaviours for different roles. In some cases, this also includes creating rubrics.

High-level design: Producing course outlines, session plans and learning journeys. These can be developed around performance outcomes or skills, or built from required documentation and content.

Structure: Using AI to suggest and organise the logical structure of content and learning experiences – from individual modules and e-learning courses to sessions, decks, academies and full syllabi. It is often used as a launch pad to create an initial design, giving teams a starting point rather than a blank page.

Drafting workshops: Creating complete workshop designs with facilitation guides, outlines and breakout sessions, including scripts, activities, case studies and frameworks for use in live sessions.

Design feedback: Reviewing draft designs to highlight gaps or disconnections and suggest improvements to strengthen delivery. AI is also used to map content against internal talent or design standards; test engagement strategies with different personas; check how well methodologies are applied, and advise on how to make training more impactful and keep learners engaged in live virtual sessions.

Advice on theory: Drawing on learning theory, instructional design methodologies, facilitation approaches and L&D industry trends, AI is often set up as an assistant that can advise on optimal learning design strategies, techniques and processes, including the formats, pacing and sequencing of the learning experience, giving designers a foundation of theory and evidence to build on.

> *''I am using Claude to help with background and sometimes structure; also for advice on optimal approaches, timing, etc. Still requires a lot of re-work – use it mainly as a thought provoker rather than an 'answer' or solution.''*
>
> *''We've actually developed a series of GPT Assistants that are programmed to output very specific things from input, eg Learning Outcomes, High Level Designs, Scenario storyboards, etc. Yesterday I used a JavaScript buddy who is designed to help with JavaScript in Storyline specifically.''I am using Claude to help with background and sometimes structure; also for advice on optimal approaches, timing, etc. Still requires a lot of re-work – use it mainly as a thought provoker rather than an 'answer' or solution.''*
>
> *''We've actually developed a series of GPT Assistants that are programmed to output very specific things from input, eg Learning Outcomes, High Level Designs, Scenario storyboards, etc. Yesterday I used a JavaScript buddy who is designed to help with JavaScript in Storyline specifically.''*
>
> *''...everything from the logical and rational structuring of the training – pointing out disconnections or gaps in understanding and identifying improvements that can make the delivery more impactful – to the co-creation of interactive dynamics and activities.''*

Learning design tactics

Storyboards, scenarios and case studies: Creating storyboards and scenarios to support different uses, such as depicting real-world situations, branching e-learning, scenario-based workshop activities or sets of industry examples for tutors. AI is also used to create case studies tailored to a specific organisation or industry, as well as fictional ones designed to illustrate key points.

Learning materials: Creating or reimagining a wide range of resources, including workbooks, study materials and teaching materials; slides and presentations; toolkits and guides (such as leadership or how-to guides); checklists and tip sheets; handouts and discussion questions for roundtables, as well as summaries, roundups and other reference resources.

Learning activities: Creating new activities for workshops, group work or digital formats, or amending existing activities to suit the needs of different audiences.

Assessments: Creating knowledge-check questions and quizzes with feedback wording. This also covers competency-based self-assessment questions, reflective questions and validation of items to ensure balanced answer options and appropriate difficulty levels. AI is further used to support the evaluation of student assignments.

Coaching support: Generating coaching questions to guide sessions, producing blueprints and notes to structure the conversation and summarising coaching notes afterwards to align with goals and support reflection.

Processes and tools: Producing mock-ups to help learning designers communicate ideas clearly with developers, getting guidance on how to use different

tools, and using AI to refine processes – both by improving existing AI-enabled workflows and by creating new ones.

> *''I use it as a creative co-thinker, to create first drafts of lesson outlines. The generated output isn't always reliable, of course, but it gives me good directions in knowing what's essential about a topic for students.''*
>
> *''After scoping with stakeholders, putting the first version of design into AI to generate the next level of detailed design, including slides, workbooks and learning artefacts.''*
>
> *''We experimented with using AI to develop outlines and storyboards for courses ... We were able to edit the outline with minimal effort. We fed the outline into the AI tools and found that the effort required to edit the AI storyboards to improve quality and interactivity was the same or greater than developing the course from scratch or starting with open-source course material.''*
>
> *''Amazing tool for going from content to course draft – but it must be treated as a tool, not a creator.''*

AI in the learning experience

Learning support bots: Embedded AI-powered assistants embedded in the course. Examples include:

- Virtual chatbots acting as learning assistants in online courses, offering on-demand guidance, answering questions and signposting to support
- AI tutors integrated into e-learning via API calls, supporting learners through dialogue that helps them work things out rather than just giving answers
- Chatbots for Q&A and FAQs

Dynamic feedback: AI-generated feedback that adapts to user input instead of relying on pre-set responses. Examples include:

- Interactive scenarios, such as dialogue-based or branching activities, where AI adapts feedback to learner choices
- Case studies, where AI assesses learner solutions and provides tailored feedback
- Essay assignments, with AI used for marking and generating comments
- Project work, where learners create outputs (eg a proposal) and collaborate with AI to refine and improve them

AI-led training: A much rarer use case, mentioned only a couple of times, where AI itself delivers structured lessons on different topics, powered by a custom content library and proprietary prompts. While still uncommon, it may gain more traction in the future.

> *''Using AI in the course is an area I am finding more exciting than using AI in the learning material development process.''*

Content development

Text-based content

Writing and editing support: While generating content of all kinds remains the top use of generative AI, a notable number of respondents specifically highlighted that they do not use AI to write content from scratch and only use it for refinement. Common uses include:

- Supporting drafting tasks such as rewriting, filling out topics and producing scripts
- Polishing text through proofreading, rewording, simplifying and shortening for readability
- Refreshing material with new perspectives, improving quality and relevance, and ensuring a consistent writing style
- Refining key points for courses or speaking points for presentations
- Reviewing and critiquing draft content to improve clarity, coherence and overall quality

Summarising and distillation: Condensing complex or lengthy material into more accessible formats. Common uses include:

- Transcribing recordings of videos, podcasts, webinars or live events, which can then be summarised or repurposed into other formats
- Summarising long documents, books, recordings and podcasts, and querying them to pull out specific answers or insights
- Creating FAQs from larger bodies of information
- Producing classroom training summaries that distil key messages

Repurposing and adaptation: AI is often used to reshape existing material for new formats, audiences or contexts. Common uses include:

- Repurposing content across formats, such as turning material into decks, scripts, toolkits or bite-sized content, for example, generating draft course content from a workshop transcript
- Adapting content for different audiences by level of seniority, proficiency or client context, including support for those who are struggling
- Testing and adjusting language and tone, from checking against different personas to refining tone for contexts such as internal learner-facing use versus external marketing

Accessibility and compliance: Generating alt text,

automatic captioning, and auditing materials against Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

Translation and localisation: Translation, sometimes but not always followed by human checking, and localisation

''[AI is] generally breaking the back of the workload of content creation.''

''Since English is not my native language, AI is the best tutor to improve my writing in English. I learned a lot. I avoid using AI to automatically do my research or writing. Instead, I work and collaborate with it as a partner to develop research and writing.''

''[I use AI] for generating content that I already know. It just speeds things up. Eg leadership development programme – programme overview generated in about a day as opposed to 2-4 weeks. I haven't used it at all to find out things I don't know.''

''It is extremely important in base-level content creation and making sure we hit the right demographic. HOWEVER, it still needs (and should always need) human interaction to make content unique and tailored to Clients.''

''We started with content generation, but have so far found this to be unreliable. We are now prioritising AI to help with our workflows.''

Multimedia content

Video creation: AI makes video content more affordable by lowering production costs, speeding up updates and making it easier to create content in multiple languages:

- Video avatars, used as presenters or characters in scenarios, either fictional or custom-generated from photos. They appear in contexts such as online prework before workshops, virtual learning guides, explainer videos and role-play scenarios.
- Animations created with AI tools that generate animated sequences from text prompts (text-to-video)
- Video editing and production support, including drafting videos for later manual editing
- Generating creative films and b-roll, reducing the need for traditional filming
- Visual storyboarding for video projects

Audio creation: AI is opening up new ways to use audio in learning, with a rise in uptake this year:

- Podcasts created from documents, presentations or other content
- AI voiceovers (text-to-speech), providing natural-sounding narration in multiple languages with consistent audio quality
- AI dubbing to produce multilingual versions of existing content
- Voice cloning to replicate a specific person's voice for narration without repeated recording
- One-off but notable mentions included creating training songs and helping select music for creative videos

Image creation: AI is used to generate and adapt visuals when stock images or existing assets aren't enough:

- Creating illustrative images for courses and presentation decks
- Editing and modifying photos or images with AI
- Using AI-based graphic design tools to support design workflows and create visual learning assets
- Producing visual aids such as infographics, diagrams and icons
- Generating first-draft imagery or colour palette ideas, later refined with standard design tools
- Designing visual templates, such as layouts for courses, documents and presentation decks
- Accelerating briefs and generating brand guidelines for specific programmes

In summary, multimedia uses are similar to last year but are more common. A key shift has been the integration of synthetic audio and video tools into the authoring platforms that learning designers already use, making them more readily accessible than standalone products.

At the same time, respondents pointed to limitations. For image tools, outputs were sometimes described as 'not usable' or producing 'mixed results.' There were similar concerns about avatars: 'implementing, but not convinced this is a great idea' and '[using it] with a very strong human oversight.'

''My process includes AI-powered storyboarding to conceptualise and structure visual narratives, allowing me to rapidly prototype ideas and create detailed visual foundations for complex projects.''

''[We're] exploring text-to-cinematic capabilities to create movie-style videos for program trailers (currently underway) and eventually longer-form cinematic experiences as the technology matures.''

''For example, [we're] using AI to generate a transcript of a meeting with an SME, then getting AI to help draft a video script based on the transcript, then using AI-generated voiceover for the video.''

''We've not found the gen AI image-making tools to be that useful yet, we find the outputs aren't of a good enough standard.''

''In my learning design work, I've used AI text-to-speech for audio narration and I've experimented with the AI avatars, but starting early (over a year ago) kind of backfired because the execs weren't impressed with the initial results of AI avatars, so even though they've come a long way, the higher ups are wary of it.''My process includes AI-powered storyboarding to conceptualise and structure visual narratives, allowing me to rapidly prototype ideas and create detailed visual foundations for complex projects.''

''[We're] exploring text-to-cinematic capabilities to create movie-style videos for program trailers (currently underway) and eventually longer-form cinematic experiences as the technology matures.''

''For example, [we're] using AI to generate a transcript of a meeting with an SME, then getting AI to help draft a video script based on the transcript, then using AI-generated voiceover for the video.''

''We've not found the gen AI image-making tools to be that useful yet, we find the outputs aren't of a good enough standard.''

''In my learning design work, I've used AI text-to-speech for audio narration and I've experimented with the AI avatars, but starting early (over a year ago) kind of backfired because the execs weren't impressed with the initial results of AI avatars, so even though they've come a long way, the higher ups are wary of it.''

2. AI for operations

Personal productivity

AI is widely used to ease writing-heavy tasks, helping individuals manage communication, documents and reports more efficiently:

Written communication: Taking notes, transcribing meetings, summarising action items, consolidating points across similar meetings, polishing emails and speeding up the development of presentation slides

Document analysis: Summarising long reports and research papers, searching within documents and interpreting complex text

Report writing: Structuring documents and framing ideas, drafting and proofreading, creating conclusions, reviewing reports, producing summaries across multiple documents and drafting reports for different teams

Administrative tasks

Using AI for routine but essential tasks that keep programmes and operations running smoothly:

Learning briefs: Summarising requirements for programmes into short scoping documents

Course descriptions: Drafting clear short descriptions and synopses, or refreshing existing ones to keep them relevant and up to date

Employee research: Creating interview scripts and surveys, and analysing survey results and interview data

Recruitment: Writing job descriptions; analysing interview transcripts, selection data and CVs, and preparing for interviews

Policies and legal: Creating and updating policies, procedures and statements of work; sourcing legal information; comparing documents such as legal texts, professional codes and organisational policies to check for overlap or misalignment; summarising policy papers and consultations, and refining internal documents, user guides and internal FAQs

Custom automations: Using automation platforms (eg Copilot Studio, Power Automate, n8n) to streamline workflows and operational processes. Examples mentioned include bots that remind employees about pending training; automating parts of document-related processes; automations in project planning tools, and chatbots to manage internal queries

Tech support: Creating and analysing spreadsheets; writing formulas; enabling advanced Excel functions; getting support with tools such as Power BI or SAP reporting; reviewing code;, troubleshooting technical issues, and researching new specialist tools

Communications and marketing

AI use in communications (comms) has grown to the point where it warrants its own category. Key uses are:

Comms writing: Drafting and refining programme invitations, welcome messages, event blurbs and launch emails; writing instructions, announcements and internal comms around L&D initiatives

Campaigns and strategy: Producing newsletters, marketing materials and promotional messages; helping plan longer-term communication strategies; and designing campaigns, including messaging and sequencing

Content and assets: Preparing posts, images and related materials for blogs, webinars and events, as well as suggesting ideas for marketing posts, titles and visuals

''I use ChatGPT as a productivity partner – structuring strategies, preparing presentations, and exploring culture and marketing frameworks. I also rely on customised agents (eg personal coach, culture consultant, marketing strategist) that extend its utility into both professional and personal contexts.''

''We use ChatGPT to help with refining language for our comms around our programme and webinar offerings.''

''I have a couple of personas in Chat and always use them to create communication and try to engage my audience.''

Business support

Unlike other categories that focus directly on learning, this one reflects how L&D is using AI for broader business support. It covers two broad areas: interfacing with the wider business through strategy and communication, and managing the business side of work through project and process management. These uses cluster into four main areas:

Business documents

- Writing and shaping strategic business cases
- Preparing and reviewing internal and external proposals
- Assisting with awards submissions

Stakeholder communication

- Drafting executive summaries and briefings
- Designing presentations for stakeholders
- Adjusting tone and context when communicating with stakeholders across the business, including colleagues, business units and clients

Project management

- Drafting project plans, schedules, Gantt charts and risks, assumptions, issues, and dependencies (RAID) matrices
- Supporting project development and progress reporting
- Providing tools such as situation, complication, question, and answer (SCQA) analysis, root cause analysis and communication plans

Process improvement

- Mapping and improving processes, such as how business units request training from L&D, how quality control is carried out, and how weekly reporting is automated.

In addition to these four areas, there are also vendor-specific uses of AI for business support. Some respondents noted applying it to research prospective clients as well as to carry out product–market fit analysis. Others highlighted its role in supporting lead generation and broader business development activities, alongside developing tender responses and completing requests for proposals (RFPs) and scope documents.

''[We're] using custom GPTs for specific clients to speed up the creation of design documents and outlines.''

''I use it to help with my tone when contacting stakeholders across the business.''

''We have even created client bots that are trained to quality control our work in the style of our clients (i.e. we tell them our clients' particular pet peeves and it looks out for them/suggests alternatives when necessary).''

Custom development

While still a niche use, some teams are using AI for coding, no-code prototyping and rapid minimal viable product (MVP) development. What makes this significant is that tasks which once required specialist skills are now within reach of non-technical L&D practitioners. These capabilities will probably be increasingly used to design custom learning interactions, but a new, important use is emerging: building entirely new tools, or adapting existing ones, to support L&D's own operations. This shift offers a glimpse into a future where L&D teams have far greater autonomy to create solutions that streamline workflows and unlock new capabilities.

''[We're] using Claude extensively for coding – adding features to Moodle such as a button to indicate students have wifi connectivity during exams, coding interactive knowledge checks by seeding Claude with course PowerPoints.''

''My colleague is training on an app called Replit, and he is using this to create custom dashboards for our team, we've frequently tried to use tools like Monday or other task tracking tools, but they don't fit what our team needs, so by having access to this Replit too, we can use AI to build the exact dashboard and tracker that we need, while moving away from Google Sheets and other spreadsheet trackers.''

3. AI for strategy & insight

Learning strategy

Rarely mentioned in this area in previous years, AI is now being used for a growing range of strategy-focused activities:

Skills/competency frameworks: Defining the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed within a role family or career path, such as leadership or sales

Skills/competency mapping: Creating skills maps and matrices that define the skills required for different roles or functions, and using AI to run gap analyses that highlight shortfalls

Training architecture: Designing the overall blueprint of programmes and pathways so that all learning is aligned with defined skills and competencies

Training plans: Turning gap analysis into actionable plans that guide how to build priority skills/competencies over time

Trends analysis: Reviewing market and industry trends to inform L&D strategy and plan appropriate action

Strategy and goal-setting: Drafting strategic documents such as OKRs or team 'North Stars' and using AI to generate ideas that inspire or guide strategy development.

''I write prompts to let AI help me find L&D topics, approaches, structures... to support internal L&D policy/ strategy.''

''Our performance management uses AI to find strengths and areas of growth. This, in turn, drives our company-wide and individual training/instruction.''

''AI tools are also supporting our internal capability work, particularly the development and refinement of behavioural frameworks like CLEAR (leadership framework). These tools assist with benchmarking, phrasing and aligning competencies to business values and role types – especially valuable in a lean L&D team environment.''

''...we're using this opportunity to promote the L&D team across the business – Chat GPT has been instrumental in acting as a 'coach' to tease out our strategic plan, and also to plan for comms and a schedule of work over the next 6 months.''

''We have an implementation agent ...it knows about ADKAR, behavioral science, etc. and helps us in making good implementation plans that will work with real people.''

Skills intelligence

Previously limited to a few large organisations using specialist platforms, this remains one of the rarer use cases. It is now appearing more often, as smaller teams turn to general-purpose AI tools to achieve similar outcomes. Skills intelligence uses include:

Skills taxonomies: Creating or refining structured lists of skills to standardise how they are defined and compared across roles

Skills analysis and generation: Analysing role profiles, job descriptions or self-assessments to clarify required skills, and generating draft skill definitions for expert review

Skills inferencing: Identifying the skills employees already have by analysing data such as their profiles, CVs and work history

Skills-to-content mapping: Tagging learning content and opportunities with the skills they help build, making resources easier to find and recommend

''We have used AI to help create skills matrices by analysing JDs and then pulling out the top 10 skills.''

Evaluation and analytics

AI use here is still mostly focused on qualitative feedback, but there is growing application in quantitative data analysis and reporting as well:

Quantitative analysis: Analysing large datasets to track training impact and ROI; KPIs; course uptake and participation; survey ratings; quiz results, and statistical trends across learner cohorts to generate actionable insights

Automated reporting: Generating dashboards and visualisations for stakeholders, and automating the production of evaluation reports to save time and standardise outputs

Data management: Carrying out basic preparation tasks such as classifying unstructured data or extracting keywords from SCORM files for later use in personalised learning within LMSs

Feedback analysis: Summarising course and survey feedback; interpreting data to identify recurring themes and hidden gaps, and applying sentiment analysis to capture tone and learner reactions

Qualitative inputs: Reviewing and analysing workshop outputs and interview transcripts to extract insights that inform programme adjustments and capability needs

''We use Copilot frequently to analyse data patterns and unearth trends...and other routine admin duties that free up time to be spent 'telling our story' to stakeholders rather than forever manipulating data to understand the current picture.''

''[I'm] developing linked course surveys, leveraging the learning-transfer evaluation model (LTEM) method, and building the analysis framework and tools for when I have the data.''

Thought partnership

First noted last year as an emerging use, AI as a thought partner has now become a widely adopted practice. As mentioned earlier in the report, this is commonly applied to tactical learning design tasks, but this year, many respondents also highlighted its role in strategic thinking and decision-making, with AI acting as a true strategic collaborator.

Thought provoker: Using AI to spark new directions when feeling stuck – less about answers and more about nudging thinking forward. Respondents described turning to AI when they needed inspiration, a fresh angle or a way to break out of a mental block and avoid starting from a blank page.

Sparring partner: Engaging AI as a partner to organise and test ideas in a two-way conversation – helping to structure thoughts; surface relevant considerations; prompt reflection on challenges; question assumptions, and support problem-solving, including through design-thinking techniques to co-create more innovative solutions.

Sounding board: Using AI for feedback and critique on work-in-progress. Common uses included reviewing draft strategies; stress-testing programme ideas, and acting as a reviewer that offers alternative viewpoints. Respondents highlighted the value of having AI check concepts, challenge biases, add overlooked insights and push teams to refine and strengthen their work.

''As the sole L&D specialist in my organization, I leverage AI as a creative and analytical partner across multiple areas of learning and development.''

''[I use AI to] follow up on written work (I like to use my own brain first, and supply with AI, where needed. Not a fan of starting in AI).''

''In all the creative aspects of my job, AI makes a draft version first, then the human mind comes into play.''

''I've been using it more and more for problem solving. I'm finding that it's a great debate tool, especially when you're not quite sure of the question you need to ask.''

''It supports us in exploring new ideas and mapping out possible solutions and outcomes before we commit to piloting them. This means we can make better informed decisions, test possibilities more efficiently and create space for innovation in how we grow and support our people.''

''AI acts as a sounding board...The value lies not just in speed but in providing different perspectives that can challenge assumptions. Together, these uses have made AI more of a partner in decision-making and problem-solving rather than just a convenience tool.''

4. AI for workforce enablement

Skill development

This is one of the most widely catered for areas of AI use, with tools and approaches appearing across almost every corner of the learning ecosystem. Respondents reported AI for skill building delivered through multiple channels, including: integrations in authoring tools; features within LMSs and LXPs;, standalone coaches (vendor-built or custom GPTs), and add-ons to existing content libraries.

Role-play simulations: AI-powered simulations are being used to help people build specific skills through individualised, scenario-based conversational practice. Respondents highlighted applications ranging from preparing for difficult conversations, such as giving feedback or handling resistance, to practising coaching dialogues, sales pitching and objection handling, questioning techniques for counselling or sensitive discussions, and even training for process changes.

AI coaching: Often used in leadership programmes, AI acts as a coach to help employees reflect on their behaviours, set goals and translate abstract people-management concepts into practical actions. These AI coaches are frequently aligned with internal leadership or other competency frameworks.

Teaching assistants: Built around instructor-led programmes, these AI tools are used before or after training to extend learning beyond the classroom. They provide guided practice, reflection prompts and interactive support that help participants apply what they learn and reinforce key concepts.

Self-guided prompts: Instead of providing a full AI coach, some organisations equip employees with targeted prompts they can use themselves. These include personal coaching prompts, as well as prompts for developing specific capabilities, for example, analysing meeting transcripts to provide feedback and strengthen communication skills.

''We've created a GPT Assistant via API and will integrate it into Storyline, so the learner gets role-play practice with this specifically programmed GPT. They can choose the personality, and choose the topic of conversation in order to practice their leadership skill of coaching.''

''We're using AI communication coaching for our Partners to practice real-life conversations with the aim of building confidence, refining their pitch and practising objection handling.''

''...we are testing IA agents and low- or no-code platforms to create games and leadership mentors that interact with local leadership in a personalized way.''

''In specialized settings like pediatric oncology, we use AI to prepare professionals for sensitive conversations. For instance, an AI-based knowledge assistant helps staff prepare discussions with parents from different cultural backgrounds, including support for medical terminology and intercultural communication.''

''[We're piloting] an AI-based coaching platform aligned with our Behavioural Competency Framework. The tool supports employees in reflecting on behaviours, setting goals, and accessing development support on demand. It also helps bring clarity to abstract behavioural expectations – something our internal feedback highlighted as a challenge.''

Personalisation

Traditionally, personalisation in learning has meant content curation and adaptive pathways. While these remain common, this year respondents also described broader uses, from tailoring learning design itself to generating individual development plans.

Pathways and content curation: Using AI to recommend content, curate resources and build personalised pathways, often within LXPs. This also includes adaptive learning, though noted far less frequently than in previous years.

Personalised design: Contextualising and reworking the learning materials into personalised journeys by tailoring outputs to roles, personas or skill levels. This used to be nearly impossible to do at scale, but AI now makes it feasible – typically through internally built AI tools.

Individual development plans: A new and fast-emerging use, where AI generates personalised development goals and plans based on capability frameworks or performance reviews, often through custom GPTs or employee experience platforms.

''We are currently developing AI-powered agents to create more dynamic and personalized learning. Within the next 1-3 months, we will deploy a 'Development Coach' to facilitate role-playing exercises, conduct Q&A activities, and help users create personalized Learning Plans.''

Flow-of-work support

This is still one of the rarest uses of AI in L&D, but one with huge potential benefits. The aim is to provide instant performance support at the point of need – a long-standing ambition for L&D.

At the high end, this requires building a searchable knowledge base with clean data and the right infrastructure, which is complex, costly and often outside L&D's direct remit. At the simpler end, AI can power assistants with preset content that helps employees with common queries, such as understanding policies, using IT tools or navigating organisational support. Moving beyond these basics, more sophisticated applications are starting to emerge: assistants that guide frontline workers, sales teams and customer service staff directly in their day-to-day work.

''From empowering our call center representatives with AI that can instantly mine information for faster resolutions, to deploying intelligent chatbots that serve our members 24/7, we are smartly weaving AI into the fabric of our operations to build a more efficient and responsive future.''

''Employees use a voice assistant on their phone to receive step-by-step task guidance during work. This ensures hands-free, real-time support without interrupting workflow.''

''At this moment, we are piloting an AI chatbot for workplace learning in elderly care, within our care homes. The chatbot answers questions about illnesses, but also about things like injecting or medications.''

AI Agents

Over the past year, the terms 'AI agents' and 'agentic AI' have been used extensively in the industry, often interchangeably and sometimes loosely. To be precise: AI agents are AI systems designed to pursue a goal with varying degrees of autonomy, including planning steps and taking actions without needing constant human prompts. Agentic AI is the capability that powers this behaviour – a capability built on technical and design features such as autonomy logic, tool integration, memory, and reasoning that give an AI system the ability to be goal-directed and adaptive.

Although our survey did not specifically ask about AI agents, some respondents mentioned them when describing how they are using AI. In total, we received fewer than 15 mentions of either AI agents or agentic AI. Of these, only three responses described features that are commonly associated with genuine AI agents: autonomy in decision-making, tool use and workflow orchestration and integration across environments.

The remaining mentions were probably AI assistants in disguise, because the way their use was described suggested that the AI was still reactive. In these cases, the systems waited for a specific instruction and then generated an output, even if that output felt rich and highly contextual. For example, some guided designers through an instructional design model, generated course summaries, marked essays or provided answers to routine queries. These are all valuable capabilities, but they do not demonstrate autonomy: the ability to continue pursuing a goal by executing next steps without further human instruction.

This distinction matters because the term 'AI agent' is increasingly applied to systems that are essentially advanced assistants. As a result, the label is being stretched to cover tools that are not truly agentic, creating confusion in the market and leaving organisations vulnerable to hype.

10 brief stories of inventive uses of AI in L&D

AI Snapshots

After pages of examples organised by category, it can be easy to lose sight of the individual stories behind them. This section zooms in on a handful of uses that stood out, not because they're the biggest or most complex, but because they show AI being applied in creative and purposeful ways.

Each snapshot captures a single use in a bit more depth than the lists above. They are not long enough to become full case studies, but rich enough to hopefully spark ideas and give you an 'aha moment'. They span different categories of AI use, showing how teams are experimenting, adapting tools and finding inventive ways to put AI into practice.

Ditte Trineke S. Fuglsang
Learning and Development Partner
Systematic

Strategy copilot

We have made our own strategy agent on Claude that helps us in several ways. It knows our learning strategy, and it knows our learning foundation (learning theories, how we like to design, about how to be a trusted learning advisor, etc).

Whenever we have a meeting with an internal stakeholder or have to make a decision, we have it help us in the process: prepare for meetings, question our thoughts and make sure that we consider the most relevant factors.

Jinani Muhammad
Senior Manager, AI Integration and Digital Training, **International Aviation Technical College at Riyadh**

Virtual teammate

We built Zayd, a custom-built AI agent, to function as a virtual team member within the project management system we use in L&D.

Zayd can be assigned specific tasks just like human colleagues, as long as they suit AI assistance. For example, when tasked with creating image banks for courses, Zayd communicates through task comments to clarify the project brief, ideates through subject and styling and creates a diverse set of brand-aligned images, up to 50 images at a time.

The AI maintains human-in-the-loop workflows, where team members review and approve Zayd's outputs before final implementation, allowing Zayd to contribute to projects in a safe and reliable way.

James Moore
Founder
Communicate Moore

Brain-friendly explanations

Ever asked ChatGPT to explain something tricky, like inflation or quantum computing? You probably got a wall of jargon or a vague summary that only made sense after a few prompt tweaks. I built the custom GPT ExplAIn AI to deliver clear, memorable explanations for complex topics that work whether you're learning something new or teaching it to someone else.

The tool applies cognitive science principles to structure learning content: it begins with a real, relatable example, builds to the more abstract idea and only introduces jargon when it helps. Users can input challenging topics and receive explanations designed to click the first time, because ExplAIn AI is built to match how the brain learns.

Richard Kerridge
Strategist, Education Services
Hewlett Packard Enterprise

Real-time feedback

We are in the late stages of deploying Lyceum Learning's ELLIE AI Assistant to provide real-time feedback on lesson objective achievement for both students and instructors during training sessions. Before each instructor-led class, course materials are uploaded to the platform and instructors plan AI-driven chat session prompts targeting specific learning objectives within each module.

During breakout sessions, learners interact directly with ELLIE, which adapts its conversational approach based on individual responses and engagement patterns. The AI monitors interactions and generates immediate feedback on learning objective progress and student sentiment. Instructors receive this data in real-time, enabling them to provide targeted individual support or adjust session pace and delivery methods on the spot to improve learning outcomes.

James Woodward
Head of Learning and Development
Public sector

L&D trends finder

We used the Copilot Studio agent builder to build an AI agent that delivers on-demand industry trends and insights to stimulate new thinking, discussion and roadmap planning. The L&D Trends Finder agent functions as an L&D Executive Assistant, trained on knowledge from industry websites, organisational websites and external platforms with specific organisational and regulatory context.

The agent can find the latest trends, innovative ideas in the field, current best practices, case studies, thought leader insights and relevant conferences. The team incorporates insights into regular meetings to inform L&D roadmap development, team upskilling, procurement forecasting and spend focus. Additionally, stakeholder discussions, design and content review roadmaps, and opportunities to declutter the learning portfolio are addressed.

Nic Weatherill
Innovation Lead
Data Literacy Academy

Data literacy coaching

Data Literacy Academy Coach was built to provide personalised AI tuition that adapts data literacy teaching to learner-specific context, acting as an extension of Data Literacy Academy pedagogy. It can do this through finely-tuned behavioural instructions supported by a distilled knowledge base, initially prototyped in the OpenAI GPT environment and now deployed on both of our learning platforms.

Coach tailors its approach based on learners' confidence levels, roles, and industries, prompting reflection on how data concepts manifest in their business reality. It facilitates critical thinking by guiding learners to solve real-world problems rather than regurgitating answers. This contextual approach creates individualised learning experiences where professionals develop practical data skills relevant to their specific work environments.

Marjolijn Geluk
Leandro Gomes da Silva
Ex-Loop Earplugs

Personal development planning

We created a custom GPT called Tony to help employees build comprehensive personal development plans. Employees upload their performance reviews and feedback from managers, peers and direct reports into the system. Tony is pre-loaded with company strategy, job frameworks, competencies, values and annual objectives.

The AI prompts users for their job role, level and preferred focus areas for the next six to twelve months. Based on this information, Tony generates a draft personal development plan tailored to their specific needs and timeline. Employees can then work with Tony to refine goals and receive suggestions for actionable steps to achieve their objectives. This streamlined approach has significantly increased PDP uploads to Lattice, the company's performance management system.

Lawrence Jacobson
Head of eLearning
Growth In Motion

Personalised feedback

We are creating an AI-driven system to deliver personalised feedback throughout learning courses by capturing and analysing all learner interactions.

Participants engage with AI agents powered by ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude during course activities, receiving immediate responses to questions and essay submissions. Each interaction is stored in custom databases using n8n workflows. At course milestones, the system retrieves previous interactions to generate combined feedback highlighting individual strengths and improvement areas. Copilot Studio orchestrates the agent interactions whilst ElevenLabs and HeyGen handle multimedia elements.

The accumulated interaction data enables increasingly sophisticated feedback as learners progress. Upon completion, participants receive comprehensive course reports summarising their learning journey and performance patterns based on their stored interaction history.

Derek Mitchell
Director of People Analytics & AI
Gallus Insight

Impact measurement

We built a custom LLM agnostic model called GROWTH to redefine impact measurement and accelerate workforce capability development. The system integrates organisational learning data, including performance metrics, training records and engagement insights, to generate concise, contextual overviews that capture collective knowledge. These overviews personalise learner experiences by automatically integrating with adaptive learning platforms. They also serve as structured training sets that continuously refine other AI models.

The approach creates a self-reinforcing ecosystem where AI curates, simplifies and scales expertise across the organisation. Teams use the generated insights to align learning initiatives with evolving business priorities and accelerate upskilling programmes through data-driven personalisation.

Joanna Smith
Managing Director
Pukeko Learning Solutions

JavaScript coding

We created a GPT Assistant to provide JavaScript support for Articulate Storyline development. The assistant is prompted to act as both a JavaScript expert and Storyline specialist, generating appropriate code based on user-described requirements. When team members need JavaScript functionality for their modules, they describe their use case to the assistant, which produces working code and explains it at a beginner level to build user understanding.

This approach works particularly well since none of the team has formal JavaScript training. We're now enabled to implement advanced interactive features in our e-learning modules without requiring extensive coding knowledge or external development resources.

Detailed stories of AI put to use in L&D

Case studies: AI in L&D

In this section of the report, you'll find case studies that take a closer look at AI in action, showcasing more complex implementations in L&D and the lessons learned along the way. These examples stand out because they move beyond simple pilots, showing AI embedded into real programmes and systems: supporting skill development, enabling performance on the job and helping organisations tackle challenges at scale.

AI already has more power than most L&D teams make use of today. The real barrier isn't capability but imagination: being able to picture how it can solve real problems. We hope these case studies make the possibilities concrete, showing both the potential of advanced applications and what it takes to bring them to life.

To gather the case studies in this report, we reached out to the learning leaders after hearing about their work. We want to thank them for sharing their stories and acknowledge the effort it took to create something new without a playbook. With AI, there are few best practices to lean on; these teams had to chart their own path and bring their solutions to life for the first time.

We hope you find these case studies useful and illuminating.

CASE STUDY 1 *Scaling conversational skills*

Microsoft

Eileen Mackey Downing, Senior Learning Manager, Microsoft Worldwide Learning

Context and journey

Microsoft is a global leader in software, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and hardware products, employing more than 200,000 people across 190 countries. This case study focuses on Microsoft Worldwide Learning's Sales Skilling team. The team supports 35,000 customer- and partner-facing employees globally, equipping them with the skills needed to navigate solution-focused relationships with customers.

The learning community has long recognised the value of role play. Practising out loud strengthens retention, builds confidence and makes new knowledge easier to apply in practice. Yet the reality rarely lives up to the promise. Traditional role plays are often awkward, embarrassing and difficult to organise. They require time, suitable partners and a willingness to step into uncomfortable scenarios.

At Microsoft, the scale challenge was even sharper. With tens of thousands of field staff, it was not feasible to arrange role plays consistently outside occasional small in-person gatherings. When they did take place, outcomes varied: human partners brought bias, differed in quality, and may have drifted from Microsoft's go-to-market strategy. In practice, role plays were one-off exercises rather than a reliable way of developing skills.

The team had been experimenting with AI-powered simulations since 2022, refining the approach as the technology matured. As the work progressed, enablement leaders brought a clear request: employees needed to build confidence in customer conversations about new technology and solutions – both in what they were saying and how they were saying it.

AI simulations proved uniquely suited to this challenge. They offered a scalable, psychologically safe space to practise out loud, receive consistent feedback and refine skills without relying on a manager or colleague. Delivered with an external vendor, Second Nature, the broader lesson was clear: AI is often the preferred conversation partner – safe, consistent and on demand.

However, for AI simulations to be effective, they had to be set up properly. Early discovery processes were time-consuming; too many stakeholders, long meetings and sprawling slide decks made it hard to pin down a clear goal. These were replaced by a streamlined intake process of 11 standardised questions. Crucially, the process was asynchronous: the requesting enablement leader gathered input, secured consensus and then sent back concise answers. The questions were designed to define both the customer persona and the learner's goal, such as:

- **Learning goal –** What do you want the target audience to be able to talk about fluently and confidently with customers? Write one sentence in clear, simple language (not copy or marketing language).
- **Customer persona –** What plausible circumstance could have resulted in the conversation we are going to create? For example, how is it that the seller would find themselves on this call?
- **Evaluation focus –** What would you like the learner to be evaluated on? Please list up to five topics.

Once the answers came in, the team used Copilot to build prompts, which were pasted directly into the app's course creator tool. The tool then created the conversation using generative AI. The process was efficient enough to produce about 50 courses, each powered by two systems: The Persona system, which defines the AI customer's role, industry, concerns and style; and The Evaluator system, which measures how well the learner demonstrated the desired behaviours. In effect, the discovery questions became the blueprint for both the customer character and the assessment criteria.

Each course went through multiple feedback cycles. It was first tested by the enablement leader who had requested the course, followed by user testing with target audiences across regions, with two or three refinement rounds in total. Watching learners take the simulations live proved especially valuable, helping the team spot moments of confusion and fine-tune the experience until it felt natural.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- **Safe space:** The biggest surprise was how strongly learners valued having a private place to try something new. The ability to practise out loud, away from peers and managers, and then receive detailed, thorough feedback emerged as the number one benefit of the simulations.
- **Validation:** The scoring system sparked a lot of enthusiasm. Teams compared results at global events, turning practice into a competition and even asking for more simulations – rare in corporate training.
- **Feedback:** Even veterans with 10–15 years' experience valued pinpointed tips, such as remembering to confirm a customer's concerns before moving to solutions.
- **Customisation:** Learners were less engaged with generic scenarios. Even if the skill technically applied across contexts, they wanted simulations set in familiar roles, industries and concerns to feel credible and worth engaging in.
- **Localisation and accessibility:** The most common request was to have the courses available in languages other than English, particularly in countries where English is not the language in which business is conducted. In addition, because AI voice simulations are a new medium, new accessibility issues arose. For example, learners with stutters found the spoken role play excessively challenging. This was later addressed by adding options such as text-based role play.
- **Data and privacy concerns:** Learners worried about recording their voice and whether managers might hear their stumbles. Clear assurances were vital. Managers had no access to recordings; only course completion data were stored, and biometric data was tightly secured and regularly deleted.

Alongside these practical lessons, several higher-level insights proved critical:

- **Start early with compliance:** Approvals for data governance, security and responsible AI were a marathon, not a sprint. Even in a tech-forward company, compliance teams were still figuring out how to handle such a new technology. Starting early was the main reason the team was ready to launch these learning experiences when the technology and demand converged.
- **User testing is essential:** With generative AI, no one can predict every output. Watching learners in action uncovered issues – from speech pacing to accessibility gaps – that no checklist would catch, and was the key to making the experience truly global.
- **Launch strategies matter:** The same course could succeed or fail in terms of consumption numbers depending on how it was launched. Two tactics proved effective: adding simulations to quarterly skilling plans and executive communication, where promotion by senior leaders drove immediate spikes in adoption. If it's not prioritised by leadership, it's not going to be prioritised by learners.

What began as an experiment is now a core learning modality, showing how AI can turn role play from an awkward one-off into a scalable, safe and effective way to build real conversational confidence.

> *"This is the first kind of scalable skilling where we are asking people to actually produce something – their conversation – rather than just consume content. And everyone recognises the power of that."*

CASE STUDY 2

Skill development with AI-enabled feedback loops

ServiceNow

Shellie Grieve, Head of Learning Innovation and Emerging Technology

Context and journey

ServiceNow, a Fortune 500 software company, provides a cloud-based platform that helps large enterprises manage digital workflows across their organisations. Its L&D function is substantial, with 700 staff supporting 30,000 employees, millions of customer end users and a global partner network.

The Certified Master Architect (CMA) is ServiceNow's flagship expert certification. Its graduates serve as elite strategic advisors who work with customers' senior executives on the most complex ServiceNow implementations – guiding multi-million-dollar projects, sequencing the rollout of products, and ensuring customers realise maximum value.

Admission is highly selective. Applicants must have at least five years' experience on large-scale projects, hold multiple ServiceNow certifications and commit around 250 hours over the programme. It is open only to internal employees and approved implementation partners.

Before COVID-19, CMA ran for six months with three in-person events -start, midpoint, and end – and virtual learning in between. Learners completed a group mock exam at the midpoint and one individual presentation later, which were the only two formal feedback opportunities across the programme.

When lockdowns hit, the in-person events moved online, stretching the course to 36 weeks of Zoom-heavy delivery. Engagement fell, pass rates dropped, and facilitators were left with just one feedback point where peers rarely offered critique, plus a lengthy manual review process. A single mock exam could mean 40+ hours of delivery and weeks spent repeating the same core feedback to participant after participant.

The model was exhausting to run, frustrating to experience and unable to scale. A complete rethink was needed.

Shellie Grieve had already trialled a new approach on the Certified Technical Architect programme. The takeaway was clear: technology alone wouldn't fix the problems. The programme needed to be rebuilt around the key elements of effective learning: practice, feedback and reflection, applied continuously rather than at a few set points. In CMA, she applied this principle end-to-end, with AI making it possible to deliver these elements at scale.

The AI acted as a skill assessment coach. Participants recorded short, scenario-based video presentations, framed as if speaking to a C-suite client, and the system analysed their delivery, assessing pace, pitch, pauses, filler words and overall tone. It returned clear, objective feedback within minutes, showing exactly where they had engaged well and where they could improve.

As Grieve explains, 'You could have ten different architects propose ten solutions, and all of them would work. The skill is in defending your choice, explaining to the customer why you've taken that path, and winning their confidence.'

This redesign combined core learning design changes with AI's capabilities to make them scalable:

- **Shortened and restructured:** The new approach reduced the programme from 36 to 20 weeks, moving from group projects to individual scenarios to the final exam, with AI ensuring consistent quality and instant feedback in the faster cycle.
- **Multiplied and diversified feedback:** Two formal feedback points were expanded to 14 presentations, each analysed by AI alongside instructor scoring, structured rubrics and peer comments.
- **Turned seminars into application points:** Subject matter expert sessions were used as launchpads for immediate group work and submissions, with AI feedback allowing learners to act on new skills straight away.
- **Built structured peer learning:** Each learner was required to review two other teams' work and see alternative approaches to identical problems, while AI balanced subjective peer input with consistent, objective analysis.
- **Accelerated improvement cycles:** Weekly AI-generated feedback meant learners could make adjustments and see measurable progress in their very next submission, reinforcing motivation and skill development.

To enable this, ServiceNow used Bongo as part of its platform for cohort-based learning, embedding AI-powered assessment into the natural rhythm of the CMA programme.

Impact

The redesigned, AI-enabled CMA delivered:

- 30% higher pass rates through frequent, actionable feedback.
- 39% less administration time, freeing facilitators for higher-value coaching.
- A reduction in programme length from 36 to 20 weeks while maintaining rigour.
- 2× cohort capacity with no increase in headcount.
- ~$1 million annual revenue uplift from higher throughout.

Beyond the metrics, the qualitative shift was equally important. Learners spotted habits such as filler words or rushed delivery and, with clear data to guide them, made rapid progress that felt tangible and motivating.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- **Redesign before technology:** A common pitfall when adopting new platforms is to 'lift and shift' an existing programme, expecting technology to improve outcomes without rethinking the learning design. CMA's success came from doing the opposite: rebuilding the programme so that interactive practice and feedback loops were baked into its structure, then using AI to make them scalable.
- **Design with impact in mind:** CMA was built with a clear definition of success from the start. This meant setting measurable outcomes, identifying checkpoints for continuous improvement and ensuring every activity had a clear purpose. The result was a repeatable framework now used to launch other programmes, scaling from two expert tracks to 17 internal programmes in under a year.
- **Upskill instructional designers for interactive delivery:** Many instructional designers are used to static, one-way content. Pausing at the start of a project to show the capabilities of interactive platforms – discussion forums, time-stamped peer reviews, layered feedback – helps them design for active participation and peer learning instead of defaulting to content broadcast.

Next steps

- **Scale AI-enabled learning through a reusable service model:** Extend CMA's AI feedback approach to 21 programmes via a shared model that integrates the cohort platform into a ServiceNow University. Learners would benefit from a seamless, white-labelled experience, while the system manages payments, prerequisites and enrolments in one place: a setup proven in CMA and now being scaled company-wide.
- **Automate with ServiceNow agents:** Use ServiceNow's own agents to handle enrolment, progress tracking and issue management, cutting manual work and showcasing the platform's capabilities.

> *"People were getting feedback on things that nobody had ever told them in their professional lives. We saw extraordinary growth in as little as two weeks. Someone might completely fail in week one, take on feedback, and by week three deliver a dramatically stronger performance."*

CASE STUDY 3 *Blending AI and learning science*

TTEC

Dr Dominik Rus, Global Head of Learning & Development Innovation and Technology

Context and journey

TTEC is one of the world's largest business process outsourcing (BPO) companies, specialising in customer service and support. Almost 60,000 associates in 25+ countries handle millions of interactions each year on behalf of global clients, across voice, social media, messaging and email in more than 50 languages.

Training is uniquely critical to this model. Associates must quickly master each client's policies, products, systems and call flows, with contractual penalties if performance targets aren't met within a certain time period – and bonuses paid if they are achieved faster. Annual turnover, though one of the lowest in the industry, means that the L&D team trains thousands of new hires every year. On top of this, clients typically supply content-heavy curricula that are not grounded in learning science and do little to develop skills. This means that L&D is left to redesign, enhance, or supplement the training programmes to ensure that the associates are prepared once they go live with customers.

To address this, TTEC's leadership defined speed to proficiency as the key lever for AI investment. In 2021, a cross-functional team set out to build an AI-enabled learning ecosystem spanning learning discovery, design, delivery and performance support – positioning TTEC as a model for aligning learning science and AI with business performance.

AI-enabled practice: RealSkill

The first priority was more and better-quality practice that goes beyond role play. New hire surveys consistently highlighted the same concern: new associates did not feel confident handling real conversations and/or using client systems after training. They were required to master three demanding areas:

1. Policies, procedures and products of the client organisation.
2. Call flow: the conversation patterns associates must follow, which can be highly demanding and often require certifications in areas such as insurance or healthcare.
3. The client's often complex systems (sometimes multiple systems for the same line of business).

Historically, practice meant branching scenarios, reviewing scripts and facilitator-led role-play. Associates worked through hundreds of pages of 'if the customer says X, respond with Y' scenarios. This approach was time-consuming, inflexible and failed to prepare associates for the unpredictability of real-life conversations.

As a response to this, TTEC implemented **RealSkill,** an AI-enabled conversational and system practice environment built on an award-winning platform and further customised with TTEC's own learning framework, which includes a proprietary design framework, skills taxonomies, terminology and branding. The result is a solution that combines technology with a proprietary approach to how practice is embedded in training.

RealSkill provides two forms of practice. Associates rehearse conversations with AI tutors capable of lifelike dialogue, handling digressions, unexpected questions or off-topic comments, then redirecting back to the problem. This realism proved critical to preparing associates for complex, high-stakes interactions. In parallel, associates practise in a software sandbox, learning to navigate the client's systems while managing the conversation flow.

The approach to practice is grounded in learning science by emphasising hands-on, deliberate and spaced practice rather than crammed role plays with generic comments. Associates also engage repeatedly with AI tutors that provide precise, skills- and behaviours-based feedback. Practice is broken down into individual call flow steps and micro-skills, each rehearsed multiple times across the learning journey until they become automatic and associates are ready to perform with confidence.

AI-enabled design: the Learning Wizards Suite

The second priority was curriculum design. TTEC's 100-plus instructional designers face constant demand to create, update and maintain training programmes. To relieve this pressure, Dominik's team built the **Learning Wizards Suite,** an ecosystem of three chatbots that automate learning needs assessment and design workflows. This ecosystem combines a full-stack AI platform with knowledge graph and retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) capabilities, TTEC's proprietary learning and design frameworks and bespoke advanced prompting grounded in learning science.

After curating 50+ research papers on how people learn to build the knowledge graph that underpins the Wizards, the team – made up of technologists with engineering and computer science backgrounds, upskilled in learning science and UX design – shaped the solution, which comprises:

Taxonomy Wizard turns business metrics into the skills and behaviours associates must master for each programme. Clients usually know the numbers they want to shift, for example, average handle time, customer satisfaction or first call resolution, but not the skills and behaviours behind them. The Wizard closes that gap by taking the metrics and drawing on TTEC's knowledge graph to generate the skills required, each broken down into observable and coachable behaviours. For example, if the goal is better customer satisfaction, 'empathy' is translated into concrete actions such as customer acknowledgement, non-judgment and friendliness.

Discovery Wizard takes the output of the Taxonomy Wizard and, together with the proprietary needs assessment form, turns the instructions into a learning blueprint – an optimised curriculum structure with the required assets and instructional methods, grounded in learning science principles. For example, it might suggest adding distributed role-play exercises, short quizzes and guided reflection points at specific stages of the programme based on the forgetting curve. A 'human in the loop' process ensures quality, with learning experience designers validating recommendations and refining prompts as needed. Work that once took a week is now completed in a single business day.

Curriculum Wizard takes the outputs of the Taxonomy and Discovery Wizards and builds a complete end-to-end curriculum. It produces more than 15 types of learning assets: activity scripts, facilitator guides and assessments; quick reference guides; collaborative exercises; full scripts for e-learning courses, and full production instructions for videos, including scripting, lighting, and staging. The output is text-based rather than multimodal, allowing designers to copy and paste it into authoring tools. Human validation remains essential, with TTEC's design evaluators reviewing each output to ensure accuracy and alignment.

Together, the Wizards shift TTEC and its clients from content-heavy training towards skills- and behaviour-based design at scale.

AI-enabled performance support: TTEC Perform

The final strand of the ecosystem is performance support. **TTEC Perform,** based on an award-winning coaching and performance platform and integrated with RealSkill and the Wizards, gives team leads both a single view of their people and clear direction on where to intervene. Each morning, they can log in to see associates ranked by performance metrics, with AI recommendations highlighting actions such as recognising high performers or coaching specific skills. For example, if customer satisfaction scores point to a lack of empathy, the system directs team leads to focus on behaviours such as acknowledgement or friendliness. Team leads can then trigger a linked 10–15-minute RealSkill practice journey, embedding targeted rehearsal directly into daily workflows.

Perform combines coaching, performance and engagement data with skill-based learning interventions, creating a tightly integrated performance ecosystem.

Impact

The **Learning Wizards Suite** has transformed curriculum design. Discovery Wizard cuts analysis time from a week to a single day, while Taxonomy Wizard reduced taxonomy design from 2-3 days to just 2-3 hours, both with near-perfect accuracy. Curriculum Wizard brought 3-7x efficiency gains, and external evaluators consistently rated its outputs higher in quality than human equivalents. In practice, this means instructional designers can now handle far larger pipelines and deliver them in weeks rather than months, without sacrificing rigour or consistency.

With **RealSkill,** TTEC has seen enormous business results. Training attrition has fallen by 30%; associates' average handle time has dropped by 20% and certification time has shortened by 75%, saving $200,000 annually.

TTEC Perform has further improved operations results. Associate retention rose 12%; average handle time fell by 6–8%; compliance accuracy hit 100% within 60 days; the Net Promoter Score rose by two points, and sales conversion increased by 10%.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- **No perfect tool:** Don't waste time searching for the perfect system. Find the closest fit, then shape it to your needs. At TTEC, that meant stripping back interfaces, rebuilding workflows and hard-wiring skills taxonomies into systems never designed for learning. Off-the-shelf platforms only became fit for purpose once they were reshaped around TTEC's own learning frameworks and ways of working.
- **Find the right partner:** In the past, the choice was binary: buy vs build. With AI, a middle ground has emerged. TTEC partners with agile startups willing to customise their products, then layers on proprietary frameworks and models. This keeps speed high while allowing the team to modify tools and platforms without the need for custom engineering or heavy development.
- **Upskill in learning science:** The team began as computer scientists and technologists, but were rigorously trained in learning, behaviour, interaction and multimedia design. That grounding ensured every technical solution was built on the fundamentals of how people learn, turning technologists into genuine learning innovators.

Next steps

- **Fine-tuning advanced prompting:** The 60+ unique prompts in the three Wizards are constantly evolving based on the feedback from TTEC's Learning Solutioning, Design and Training Delivery teams to ensure high-quality output.
- **Advancing from chatbots to agents:** The Wizard suite, currently built as AI chatbots, is being evolved into fully agentic AI systems capable of autonomously executing needs assessment, skills taxonomy creation and learning design tasks.
- **Expanding platform integrations:** Deeper links between the Wizards, RealSkill, and Perform are planned to further streamline learning, practice, coaching, and engagement.

> *"The secret sauce isn't AI itself but the learning and skills frameworks we embed into it: our knowledge, our experience, the science of learning and human behaviour change. AI does the magic, but only after you put that in. We are science-first, AI-second."*

CASE STUDY 4 *Context-led learning in the flow of work*

KPMG UK

Ian Barnwell, Chief Learning Officer
Mark McCarney, Director of Learning Technology

Context and journey

KPMG UK, one of the leading professional services firms, employs over 10,000 people in the UK across multiple service lines. As offices reopened post-pandemic, the firm took the opportunity to critically review its learning provision. During lockdown, much had pivoted to virtual delivery – but there was no clear view on whether the experience had been optimal.

To address this, KPMG UK's internal learning team collaborated with its client-facing technology team – an uncommon approach in professional services.

Before defining solutions, the team conducted extensive research, including three years' analysis of global people survey results (with five learning-related questions), Voice of the Customer sessions to capture learner expectations, and hundreds of face-to-face interviews across grades, service lines, and roles. This work uncovered six key problem statements.

From the learner's point of view, the experience felt cluttered and disjointed. Content was spread across multiple platforms, with no single place to start, leaving people unsure where to look for what they needed. Although materials were tailored for different audiences, the systems couldn't surface them in a targeted way because they knew too little about each user. They also lacked a sense of organisational context, like someone's grade, service line, capability, career stage, or current engagement, which meant recommendations often missed the mark.

From the business perspective, the fragmented system made it hard to get clear, meaningful insight into what people were learning. Leaders were working with incomplete data, which led to duplication, extra costs, and poor value for money. There was also no quick way to push out new priorities when the landscape changed.

The annual learning needs analysis set direction once a year, but if client demand shifted – for example, urgent need for a skill the firm didn't have in volume – there was no simple way to cascade that change and start upskilling at pace.

The answer was KPMG Spark: an AI-powered learning and skills coach built directly into Teams, where KPMG employees already spend much of their day. It acts as a single point of entry for learning and has two core personas:

1. **The learning and skills coach,** which uses a conversational interface to draw out a user's learning needs and search across all connected content sources. A typical exchange might start with, 'Hi Spark, I'm a new manager in our advisory business. I'm struggling with X, Y, Z.' KPMG Spark prompts the user to narrow their focus and then offers to recommend relevant learning. Results appear as cards within Teams, which can be filtered by content provider, duration, format, level, or whether the source is internal or external. With single sign-on in place, users can open the content in one click, without leaving Teams.
2. **The query resolution assistant,** which deals with frequently asked questions and transactional requests directly within Teams, including opening tickets when needed. It has been trained on internal FAQs and managed learning service data, particularly from KPMG's large graduate and apprentice populations. The goal is for Spark to resolve between 50 and 60 per cent of queries without human intervention, providing round-the-clock support compared to the current mailbox system, which is only staffed during business hours.

However, KPMG Spark does more than deliver recommendations – it generates bottom-up learning demand data. It comes through in several ways:

- **Trend analysis –** highlights what people are searching for, clicking on, and consuming, enabling leaders to challenge their own assumptions about priorities.
- **Sentiment and theme analysis –** uses AI to identify recurring topics in conversations.
- **Content gaps –** alerts the learning team when demand emerges for topics with no content, prompting a decision to build, buy, or ignore.
- **Targeted promotion –** uses Teams' broadcast and promoted content features to push learning to highly specific audiences, aligned to business events such as quarterly performance conversations.

This creates a true closed loop: bottom-up demand directly informing top-down strategy, in contrast to the usual annual needs-analysis cycle where leaders set priorities largely on forecasts and assumptions. Ian described it as 'fundamentally changing how we think about supply and demand for learning.'

Building KPMG Spark

KPMG Spark is powered by an agentic AI framework – a system that chains multiple 'tool calls' to handle specialised tasks. The framework integrates with Azure AI and uses Databricks to ingest, normalise, cleanse, and tag content against KPMG's skills taxonomy. Using another KPMG's internal AI tool, this taxonomy was reduced from 230,000 unvalidated skills to 1,028 validated skills, each with five mapped adjacent skills to aid discovery.

The development of KPMG Spark followed agile product principles, with the team moving quickly from early ideas to tested features while navigating KPMG's governance requirements. Key stages included:

1. **Proof of concept –** quickly validated that conversational AI could meet learner needs better than keyword search.
2. **Proof of value –** confirmed both technical feasibility (can we access and process the data?) and desirability (do users value the output?).
3. **Two-week sprints –** run by a 15–20 person core team including software engineers, data scientists, data engineers, QE specialists, product managers, delivery managers, and business stakeholders.
4. **Multi-phase pilots –** starting with Ian's learning team as testers, due to their deep knowledge of the content catalogue.
5. **User feedback loops –** conversation histories, click-through tracking, thumbs up/down, focus groups, and surveys informed iteration.

It took 12 months to go from tool selection to getting KPMG Spark into users' hands, with the timeline shaped in part by the need to work within KPMG's global technology governance. By proving value early, the team avoided months of building in isolation, validating features with real users and refining them long before full deployment.

Impact

- **Adoption:** early adoption is edging towards 30% by the end of September, above typical rates for non-mandatory enterprise tools.
- **Efficiency gains:** the query resolution persona is expected to resolve 50–60% of learner queries instantly, reducing mailbox workload and offering 24/7 coverage.
- **Client value:** Now part of KPMG's external learning offer, Spark builds on its internal success to deliver greater value and a sharper learning experience for clients.

Beyond these metrics, Spark represents a paradigm shift in how learning is accessed and designed at KPMG. Embedding it in Teams has brought learning into the flow of work, replacing the old model of logging out and navigating multiple systems with instant, in-context access between meetings. Ian describes this as 'a race to the top' – using AI to elevate the user experience rather than cut costs or reduce headcount.

This shift is also reshaping ways of working. New roles – including a business product owner, product managers, data quality leads, and catalogue owners – now support KPMG Spark's evolution. A joint ownership model pairs the business lead in Ian's team with a technical lead in Mark's, keeping development aligned to business priorities. Culturally, 'How will Spark find this?' has become a standard commissioning question, influencing programme design from the outset.

> *"Using AI for content creation doesn't bring huge cost savings. KPMG Spark solves a completely different set of problems – using conversation to capture the full context of a person's need and surface answers they'd never have been able to find before."*

Challenges and lessons learnt

- **Data quality was the primary barrier:** Content spanning 9–10 years, across LMS, LXP, SharePoint, and other repositories, was never designed for ingestion by a conversational AI. Early KPMG Spark recommendations included retired items, other-language content, and assets without objectives. Tooling plus dedicated human resources were required for a large-scale content cleanse and for embedding better metadata practices into BAU.
- **Choosing conversation-first was the best decision:** This added vital context, producing richer recommendations than keyword search could offer – for example, 'I'm nervous presenting to senior executives' yields better matches than searching for 'presentation skills'.
- **Putting KPMG Spark in the right channel:** Embedding in Teams meant employees could access it within seconds (some interacting as frequently as every six minutes) instead of logging into an LMS every few weeks. The Teams integration also enabled native sharing, notifications, and targeted broadcasts.
- **Leaving decisions late:** Usually, people prefer to make design and feature decisions early. However, the KPMG Spark team deliberately pushed them as late as possible within agile sprints to gather as much feedback as they could.

Next steps

- **Expand personas:** Add capabilities such as booking courses directly from the LMS and creating long-term development pathways from user goals and playlists.
- **Scale adoption:** Embed KPMG Spark into more service lines and capability groups; integrate into additional enterprise systems.
- **Deepen analytics:** Use bottom-up demand data to challenge and complement the annual learning needs analysis, and trigger new content commissioning when repeated searches return no results.
- **Broaden 24/7 service:** Extend query resolution coverage and link to more client-managed services.

Fundamentally changing the way the L&D function operates

Case studies: L&D transformation

This year, we're introducing a new section: case studies of L&D transformation. Three years in, as AI is being used across our industry more extensively than ever, the question is no longer just 'what can AI do in L&D?' The question is 'what happens next for L&D itself?'

These case studies explore how AI is reshaping the role and image of L&D teams in a world where employees can generate their own content, use AI to clarify and explore ideas and even create their own performance support tools. They highlight how learning leaders are responding to this shift, and how AI is driving changes in how teams work, support employees and define their value to the business.

CASE STUDY 5

Empowering employees to drive performance support

Leyton

James Swift, Director of Talent Development

Context and journey

Leyton is an international consulting firm with 3,000 employees in 16 countries, specialising in helping businesses leverage financial incentives. The work is highly technical and always sensitive: every client engagement relies on accurate data and strict compliance.

That means that when Leyton set out to explore AI in 2014, confidentiality was the core requirement. From the outset, the company decided to build its own closed ecosystem, creating a technology hub and hiring data scientists and machine learning specialists to develop secure tools that would stay entirely in-house.

The development first focused on efficiency. Leyton built baseline technologies such as voice agents and an internal Digibot platform – a user-friendly system that allows you to connect databases, set prompts and create custom AI-powered tools. Once those foundations were in place, attention turned to performance support, asking how the same technologies could help people do their jobs better.

This was where the L&D team became involved. At Leyton, L&D has a broad remit and 'owns the role': it defines what each role is and what it requires, sets the competencies and standards and ensures employees have the tools, systems and training needed to succeed.

That means that any new technology which changes how work is done falls within L&D's scope. The team assesses how a tool affects skills, how it fits with existing systems and whether it should be integrated into day-to-day practice. Those decisions are made in partnership with senior leadership and IT, but L&D plays the central role in determining what ultimately becomes part of 'how we do the job' at Leyton.

The real turning point came when Digibot was made available to the wider business. Because the platform is so easy to use, employees began creating their own role-specific tools, from bots that replicated best practice and gave employees feedback to ones that supported managers with HR decisions. These weren't centrally commissioned projects but grassroots solutions, built by people who understand the day-to-day challenges of their roles better than anyone else.

For L&D, the insight was decisive: if you give employees access to the raw technology and the skills to use it, they will come up with better ideas – and better performance support tools – than L&D ever could.

The new L&D model

That insight reshaped the function. L&D realised they needed to let go of centralised control and step into a different role – as an orchestrator of the performance support ecosystem. In practice, this means creating the environment for innovation to flourish, spotting where employees are building real value and then making sure those tools scale across the organisation. The value is now delivered in three ways:

1. Creating the conditions for innovation

Performance support innovators can come from anywhere in the business. That means every employee needs a baseline understanding of how AI works and the confidence to use it. L&D puts the foundations in place: clear guidelines on issues such as GDPR and customer data, basic training to explain how the tools function and hands-on workshops for those who want to go further. Most importantly, they give access to everyone. The message is simple: 'Here are the tools. This is how they work. This is what you can do with them.' From there, employees are encouraged to experiment and have a play.

2. Identifying the breakthroughs

Innovation often starts small – three people in a corner of the business using their AI tool to make work easier. L&D's role is to spot those breakthroughs and bring them to light. That means staying close to the ground: being on the front line, talking directly to staff, observing how tools are used and gathering informal case studies. One employee, for example, built a bot that cut 30 minutes from a task they repeated ten times a week, a small fix that quickly became a business case.

3. Scaling what works

Spotting good tools is only the first step; without visibility, they risk remaining hidden in individual teams. L&D's job is to make sure the strongest ideas are captured and turned into workflow. At Leyton, the team has the ecosystem across all levels of the business to play this role.

The process is hands-on. L&D meets with business leaders, demonstrates the tool, and works through the hierarchy to secure agreement on rollout. Acting as a 'guide on the side,' the team helps shape the launch plan and involves managers in the discussion on how to embed the tool into the workflow. Once there's agreement, they update role guidance, weave the tool into new joiner programmes and create quick reference guides or videos where needed. Finally, they track adoption and feed usage data back through managers to show what's working and where more support is required.

The result is that a grassroots idea – whether coming from a consultant, a manager, or a frontline employee – moves from experiment to performance solution at company scale. Under L&D's new orchestrator role, what starts in one corner of the business becomes part of how the whole company works.

Employees across Leyton have now built more than 70 Digibots, each addressing real challenges in their day-to-day work. These tools aren't abstract pilots: they're live, practical solutions that save time, guide decisions and improve how work gets done.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- **Building a culture of trust:** A core enabler of Leyton's approach is cultural: employees need to feel trusted to experiment and confident that using AI in their work is not just permitted but encouraged. That also requires focused time: space in the day to try things out, test ideas and see what sticks. Without trust and time, innovation stalls.
- **Finding what really matters:** When everyone is building, not every idea is a breakthrough. The challenge is to spot the tools that genuinely change the way work is done. That means being close to the ground, speaking to people directly rather than relying on managers and following up in conversation rather than through surveys: 'How are you using this tool? Has it helped you? What's different now?' It's only through that kind of engagement that tinkering can be separated from solutions worth scaling.
- **Context before content:** Most companies lag on concrete AI guidelines; without them, upskilling is wasted effort. There's no point just teaching people what AI is and what it does. To make training meaningful, each organisation has to create its own guidelines, grounded in its context: its market, leadership priorities and risk profile. And those rules have to be crystal clear. People need to know what really matters, whether it's customer data, privacy or another priority. Just as importantly, they need best practice examples that show what 'good' looks like in day-to-day work.

> *"The reality is that no matter how well learning is integrated into your ecosystem, your employees are going to know more about what they need than you."*

CASE STUDY 6 *From training to transformation*

mci group

Avinash Chandarana, Chief Learning and Transformation Officer

Context and journey

mci group is a global events and communications company with 60 offices in 30 countries and 1,700 employees. Its services range from association management and congresses to corporate meetings and digital communications. Despite its global scale, the learning team is lean: just four people supporting the whole organisation.

The centralised L&D model created heavy dependency on this small unit. Every new programme, whether for onboarding or upskilling, passed through them. Delays became a drag on business performance, local relevance was inconsistent, and bottlenecks limited the team's ability to scale effectively across mci group's portfolio of solutions and diverse markets.

Over the past decade, L&D had set a vision to move towards a more federated model. This was reinforced by successful initiatives such as in-person Academies, a highly successful global mentorship programme, the DNA framework, local learning weeks, and the Performance Architects network. An intrapreneurial approach, including early experimentation with AI years before it became mainstream, helped evolve the function and demonstrate its ability to innovate. Consistently delivering on these initiatives built trust and credibility internally, while also opening consulting opportunities with clients. Together, these achievements led the CEO and Global Management Team to recognise L&D as a core engine of change and business transformation.

Building on this foundation, the team accelerated the shift by implementing *switchai,* an AI-powered platform introduced in AI in L&D: From Talk to Action (April 2024). Its authoring and personalisation features allow local offices to build and adapt content in their own languages, reducing dependency on central support and shifting ownership of learning closer to the front line.

Adoption has been strongest in the larger offices, where teams create localised content tailored to their business needs. Content authors report time savings of around 75%, with the 10 largest offices already running their own initiatives independently. Fifteen have launched dedicated TeamSpaces within *switchai.* The opportunity ahead is to build on this momentum across all offices so that every team can benefit from the same speed, relevance, and empowerment.

This shift raised a broader question: if local teams can now create and manage much of their own learning, what purpose does the global L&D team serve?

The new L&D model

Decentralisation marked the point where learning at mci group moved from fragmented, low-impact delivery to a dynamic ecosystem. But it wasn't just the rollout of *switchai* that made this possible; it was also the processes and culture that surrounded it.

One enabler is a deliberate trust-based approach to quality. Instead of policing every asset, the team gave subject matter experts light guidance on using *switchai* and then trusted them to design what was relevant. The principle was simple: when professionals invest their own time to create learning alongside their day job, it will be relevant and valued. This choice of empowerment over control has accelerated both speed and ownership, with the global team stepping in only when feedback is requested.

Another is the layer of Performance Architects, employees in roles such as sales or project management, who are passionate about learning. Typically with an architect in each of the five largest offices, they extend the reach

of the global team by spotting local pain points and business needs and by keeping programmes grounded in reality. Acting as an 'extended front office' for L&D, they not only provide visibility and growth for volunteers but also ensure that learning is tied directly to business outcomes.

Global L&D, meanwhile, has concentrated its efforts on three areas:

1. Transformation

L&D's role was formally elevated when Avinash became Chief Learning & Transformation Officer, joining the Global Management Team and the newly created Business Transformation Committee alongside the CIO, CMO, CPO and Chief Strategy Officer. This made learning an equal partner in steering the business and driving transformation.

With this positioning, L&D is brought into strategy much earlier. A Digital Transformation Manager, appointed under the CIO, works closely with the team on AI adoption and alignment, strengthening the link between capability building and the wider technology agenda. Avinash's team is now directly involved in major initiatives: supporting the CMO on brand architecture and embedding refreshed values in daily practice; enabling the Race to 2030 'double on digital' ambition; guiding change management through job redesign, and prioritising consultative skills to strengthen revenue growth and account management.

This integration shows how L&D can shape not only people development but also commercial growth and organisational culture.

2. Global initiatives

While local teams now create much of their own learning, certain programmes remain global to ensure consistency across the organisation. These include a leadership skills framework with structured pathways and assessments for every level of management; a GenAI Readiness programme that reached 90% completion in just six weeks; interactive compliance modules on ethics and sustainability, and the DNA framework, a digital skills assessment that produces a 'DQ score' for each employee and links directly to tailored pathways in *switchai.*

The success of these initiatives has raised expectations. As Avinash explains, 'After the strong response to GenAI Readiness, demand has only grown on us to create more globally relevant programmes.' This reputation for delivering high-quality global learning has increased both internal pull from business leaders and external recognition with clients, further positioning L&D as a value driver beyond the back office.

3. Performance consulting

The performance consultant's role is to work with the business to identify gaps and recommend the right interventions; learning is one tool among many to drive results. Avinash's team had already been moving in this direction, but decentralisation has given them the capacity to go further. They now act as consultants to internal stakeholders, supporting managing directors, local HR and performance architects, and working with key clients inside the business. The approach also extends externally: Avinash led a strategic retreat for the board of a global association, reviewing its education strategy and advising on technology, skills and future direction – the start of a new client consulting line.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- **Stakeholder alignment:** Success in transformation depends on who is at the table. Working hand in hand with the CIO, COO, and CMO – while also maintaining a direct line of communication with the CEO – means that L&D is not just heard but integrated into decision-making. Having these leaders as allies gives the function both speed and weight, making alignment with them the single most important lesson.
- **Partner relationship:** Technology is only as strong as the partner behind it. The team has found a vendor that is both proactive and responsive, often pushing out new features faster than expected. That constant pace of innovation, combined with a close working relationship, creates momentum that L&D alone could not generate. Choosing a partner who brings this kind of energy and collaboration is a critical enabler of success.
- **Trust and empowerment:** Beyond stakeholders and technology, perhaps the biggest lesson has been cultural: trust and empowerment drive speed and relevance far more effectively than governance ever could. By consistently delivering on promises, experimenting early with AI and extending expertise into client consulting, mci group has shown how a lean L&D team can punch above its weight. The result is a function that not only enables change internally but also drives value at the front line of the business. For other L&D leaders, the message is clear: the opportunity is not just to support the business, but to help transform it.

> *"I always ask my team the same question: what value do we bring? If we're not adding value, we shouldn't be doing what we're doing."*

L&D's future in an AI world

AI is a double-edged sword. It makes a new future possible for L&D, but also threatens the profession's traditional role.

The tag line for this report is 'The race for impact'. If we were inclined to melodrama, we might have chosen 'The moment of truth', because the evidence shows we have reached a seminal point for L&D professionals.

More than half the respondents to our survey say they are now using AI rather than experimenting with it. And since our first report in 2023, those uses have shifted. From an initial obsession with tools and fast content production, the scope has widened. L&D is now working with skills, organisational capability and more, extending itself well beyond single courses.

Coupled with this increasing confidence and sophistication of use comes an unpleasant truth: it is possible for anyone to create courses and learning content more easily than ever. The materials may not always match the quality of those produced by L&D professionals, but they are orders of magnitude cheaper, available faster and often do a good enough job. Because they are so cheap and easily produced, they are also super-abundant.

AI has not only given L&D the tools to generate greater impact and influence; it has removed the barriers to conducting its traditional role. This is why we are now at a seminal moment for L&D. The cost and perceived value of content have plummeted. Producing more of it, faster, is not the value-add it once was.

A new model and a new role

Over the past year, we have spoken with countless organisations facing this challenge. Based on those conversations, our own observations of the industry and the case studies shared in this report, we introduce here a model that captures the directions taken by some in the industry and which others might want to follow.

The Transformation Triangle (Figure 10) shows the three destinations we have identified for L&D departments shifting their focus away from content production. Whichever of the three new models the L&D departments move to, each is focused on the goal of improved individual and organisational performance. Crucially, staying in place is not an option, because the centre of the triangle, Content-focused L&D, is the very model being disrupted. Unless L&D departments make a deliberate choice to either reassert their expertise (Skills Authority), reposition as transformation partners (Enablement Partner), or reforge into a new multidisciplinary function (Adaptation Engine), they risk sliding into irrelevance and eventually disappearing.

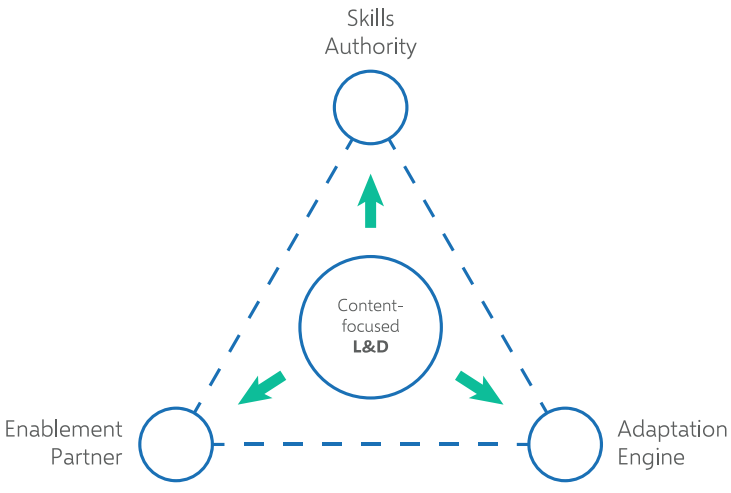


Figure 10: The Transformation Triangle

Skills Authority

L&D stays relevant by making skills a core business currency and applying deep learning expertise to build them at scale.

In this model, decisions about performance are grounded in an organisation-wide, shared language of skills, recognising skills as one of the core resources that enable the business to deliver on its aims. This is how L&D earns its authority: by becoming the custodian of that resource and the expert in how to grow it. Without this, skills frameworks remain abstract inventories and L&D risks falling back into its historic weakness: producing content rather than supporting performance. By professionalising around both skills intelligence and learning science, L&D secures a role the business cannot do without.

In practice, the Skills Authority model is built on three foundations:

1. **Centralised custodianship:** L&D acts as the steward of both skills and learning standards, defining frameworks, setting benchmarks and ensuring consistency in how capability is understood and developed.
2. **Deep expertise in learning and upskilling:** L&D applies evidence-based methods to translate business requirements into interventions that genuinely build capability – producing content not as an end in itself, but as a vehicle for practice and interactions that drive measurable impact.
3. **A robust and connected skills infrastructure:** Systems and processes that do more than generate skills profiles or recommend content. They help the organisation track, predict and develop critical capabilities at scale. At the core is a common language of skills, applied in performance discussions, career development and workforce planning, ensuring skills shape decisions across the entire talent lifecycle.

Enablement Partner

L&D shifts from owning content to empowering experts in the business, positioning itself as a partner in transformation and change.

In this model, L&D decentralises ownership of both content and training delivery, enabling subject-matter experts and business units to design solutions grounded in their local context. The value of the central team lies not in direct delivery, but in equipping others with the tools, guardrails and practices to do so effectively. By shifting from sole creator to enabler, L&D can take a more strategic view of performance and capability, elevating local expertise, linking efforts across the organisation and multiplying the impact of what already works.

Its authority comes not from custodianship but from its ability to empower, connect and amplify the expertise already present in the business.

Note that this is not simply a decentralised training model. What makes the Enablement Partner approach possible today is AI: it lowers the barriers for those outside L&D to create. Generative tools allow local experts to capture and share their knowledge in ways that were previously out of reach, while also opening the door to new forms of support that go beyond content. From lightweight automations to tailored workflow aids, AI enables people closest to the work to design resources that improve performance in their own context.

For this model to succeed, three enablers must come together. First are the **technical systems:** tools and platforms that make it simple for experts to create and share solutions. Second are the **operational processes** that support, connect and legitimise local efforts, so that decentralisation doesn't fragment into silos. And third is **culture:** the Enablement Partner model can only thrive in a high-trust environment, where the competence and innovation of local experts are recognised and where trust between the business and L&D is firmly established.

When these conditions are absent, decentralisation risks sliding either into chaos, with fragmented and conflicting efforts, or into tokenism, where experts are encouraged to create but aren't given the systems, visibility or support to ensure their solutions take hold across the organisation. When they are present, the central team can step confidently into its role as enabler and connector, while the organisation benefits from development that is more contextual, responsive and widely owned.

Adaptation Engine

L&D is no longer a standalone function but part of a multidisciplinary team that addresses business challenges holistically and builds adaptability across the organisation.

In this model, L&D undergoes the most radical change: learning expertise is absorbed into blended teams, where it becomes one skill set among many. The crucial difference is that L&D no longer approaches challenges by carving out the 'learning slice' of a wider problem. Instead, its expertise is applied in combination with others – design, technology, operations, organisational development – to shape end-to-end solutions. The lens is no longer 'what is the learning response,' but 'what mix of interventions will solve this challenge,' with learning as just one element of a broader response.

The exact shape of these teams depends on where the centre of gravity lies. In some organisations, L&D is absorbed into a broader function tackling performance and culture challenges; in others, it is embedded in technology-led groups focused on how humans, systems and AI work together, or in operational excellence teams working to streamline processes. In each case, learning expertise becomes one strand of a wider capability, contributing alongside others as part of a joined-up approach to how people work and grow: an engine for the organisation's ability to adapt as challenges and conditions change.

For this model to succeed, three conditions must align. First is a **redefinition of L&D itself:** no longer a standalone function, but one discipline embedded within a broader, multidisciplinary engine. Second is a **redesign of roles and skills,** where today's homogenous L&D teams give way to groups that combine learning specialists with entirely new profiles – technologists, designers, analysts – working side by side. Third is a mandate to **solve problems end-to-end,** with adaptability recognised as a strategic goal and learning treated as one lever among many. Without these enablers, the Adaptation Engine risks being nothing more than traditional L&D in new clothes. With them, it represents the most radical but also potentially the most future-proof evolution of learning.

In the mix

These are not definite destinations. They are variations of possible futures for L&D. In practice, elements can mix. An Enablement Partner may want to understand the skills of employees; an Adaptive Engine may still use the distributed abilities of the team to create skills development programmes. Business or technology shifts may also push a team closer to another approach. Yet at any given point, the anchor is the operating model: centralised custodianship, decentralised enablement or absorption into a wider multidisciplinary team. Practices can blur across boundaries, but legitimacy rests on one of these.

The Triangle, then, is both a snapshot of today's choices and a reminder that those choices will keep moving as the world around them changes. What all these futures share is two things: they are made possible by the computational power of AI, and they are far removed from the traditional L&D department's focus on creating and delivering training materials.

This is not to say that training is dead. There will always be a role for getting people up to speed in areas where they know nothing, or where safety is paramount, or for helping people keep up in a fast-changing world of work. What has changed is the range of ways to develop human performance beyond training, and who is best placed to do it.

Making the choice

This, then, is the choice facing L&D. It can stay focused on training as its main concern or it can head to one of these three areas of focus: skills, enablement or adaptation. L&D leaders should be aware that organisations benefit hugely if they can get the best out of their people, and that has a profound implication. If the L&D department does not take advantage of today's approaches to performance support and skills development, someone else in the organisation will.

And here is where our current situation differs from previous technical changes: AI is not neutral. *The power that gives L&D new ways to work also destroys its traditional home of learning content production.* Failing to change will confine L&D to an ever-shrinking domain, unable to assert its value in the face of a tide of indifferent AI-produced materials.

Conclusion

Our previous reports have stressed that in this period of technically-led change, L&D practitioners face a choice. The traditional, content-centred approach no longer provides enough value. The choice is stark: change or face irrelevance.

This year, it is clear from our research that many practitioners have made their choice. No longer captivated by AI's ability to speed up content production, they are turning to uses only possible at scale with AI's processing and reasoning power: role-play simulations for conversational practice, deeper learning personalisation and interactivity, and analytics or thought-partnership that inform L&D's strategic decisions.

These innovations have been produced in response to their organisations' particular needs, but they are also a sensible reaction to changes that spread well beyond the field of L&D. The world of knowledge work is changing, to a large extent driven by new technology, and by AI in particular.

For a clue as to what might happen next, we can draw lessons from the Industrial Revolution, and from the story of one group in particular: the handloom weavers.

Handloom weavers created cloth from yarn, working at their looms, often in their own homes. The arrival of powered looms, capable of carrying out this work at scale in factories, made this work – sometimes routine, sometimes highly skilled – uneconomic. The weavers' wages collapsed. In 15 years at the beginning of the 19th Century, the average wages of a weaver more than halved. Other factors played a role in this – war, trade and politics – and there were short periods of recovery, but the overall trend was downwards. From 1770 to 1870, the number of handloom weavers fell from 400,000 to 10,000, and their status slipped from prosperity to poverty. Tellingly, many weavers continued to work at their looms as things worsened. Some hoped for things to improve. For others, their identity was too tied up in their work to quit, even when it made no financial sense.

The parallel is clear. Like the weavers, L&D's 'traditional' work – learning content development – is a skilled, time-consuming activity, large parts of which are vulnerable to automation. But the handloom weavers didn't just disappear; they found new work, often in factories, and often with a new set of skills, just as successful L&D practitioners are now working with analytics, skills and strategic workforce planning.

We cannot yet gauge the full impact of AI on L&D, but evidence suggests it will not be all good. In its 2025 L&D **Work and Salary Report**[1], UK recruitment agency Blue Eskimo mentions that candidates are taking longer to find new roles. For those in work, salaries have largely risen at levels below inflation. Anecdotal evidence from the US echoes this.

The currently disruption in L&D and elsewhere brings to mind the words of Irish poet WB Yeats:

> *Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world*

Yeats was describing the turmoil of Europe after the First World War, but the words also resonate strongly today, describing the bewilderment we feel when certainty disappears from our world and a new order has not yet emerged.

Amid the bewilderment, however, there is good news. Some L&D practitioners in our survey are only beginning to explore new ways of working. Others, particularly those in our case studies, are already advancing towards the three destinations in the Transformation Triangle. Together, they remind us that the future of L&D will not be determined by AI, but by the willingness of its leaders to act boldly and embrace change.

[1] **https://bit.ly/BlueE-2025**

Resources

The Global Sentiment Survey 2025

Published: February 2025

In this survey, L&D professionals from about 100 countries shared their views on what challenged and excited them about L&D in the year ahead.

Scan QR code to view

AI in L&D: Intention and Reality

Published: October 2024

The third report on the progress of AI in L&D established an essential fact: experimenting with AI for internal use did not guarantee progressing to more complex uses.

Scan QR code to view

AI in L&D: From Talk to Action

Published: April 2024

This report explored how organisations were moving beyond theoretical discussions of AI in L&D towards tangible steps to implementation.

Scan QR code to view

AI in L&D: The State of Play

Published: November 2023

This report took an in-depth look at how AI was beginning to transform L&D by the end of 2023, one year on from the launch of ChatGPT.

Scan QR code to view

Sponsors

OpenSesame

OpenSesame provides 50,000+ courses from leading publishers, with AI tools that identify skill gaps and deliver personalised learning paths. Its intuitive course builder enables bespoke training without design expertise, while translation into 75+ languages supports global teams. L&D leaders trust OpenSesame to scale learning, measure impact, and drive career development.

Speexx

Speexx is a Time Magazine Top Edtech company and the leading platform for people development in the digital workplace. Built on the latest technology and supported by a global network of top trainers and coaches, it provides corporate language training, business coaching, mentoring, and skills assessment to large organizations.

The Regis Company

The Regis Company delivers AI-powered personalized skills practice solutions that enable learners and organizations to maximize their value. The company's SimGate platform is the first cross-over platform purpose-built for both Skill Development and Skill Validation through immersive, experiential learning environments. Regis Company serves enterprise clients across healthcare, consulting, manufacturing, and other industries. For more information, visit www.regiscompany.com.

For more on this research please go to:
https://donaldhtaylor.co.uk/the-research-base/

When citing this report,
please refer to AI in L&D 2025: The Race for Impact

AI in L&D 2025 v 1.0

www.donaldhtaylor.co.uk
www.nodes.works