



TRAINING
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TRENDS 2026

BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES ON MANAGING WORLD-CLASS TRAINING



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Reinforcing the Strategic Value of Learning

By Ken Taylor and _____
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Over the past several years, organizations have invested heavily in upskilling and reskilling to help employees adapt to rapid technological, economic and organizational change. The [latest data](#) suggests these efforts are working. The rate of skills disruption — once accelerating year over year — is starting to level off, signaling that companies are better equipped to manage ongoing transformation. Those that have maintained a consistent focus on developing their people are seeing measurable returns, from improved performance and retention to greater organizational resilience.

These outcomes confirm what learning and development (L&D) professionals have long understood: Training drives results. Yet even as the impact of learning becomes clearer, sustaining that investment is becoming more difficult. Economic uncertainty, budget constraints and shifting business priorities are forcing organizations to make tough decisions, and training initiatives are once again at risk of being deprioritized. Pulling back now could erode the gains that organizations have worked hard to achieve, leaving the workforce less agile and less prepared for future disruption.

That's what makes 2026 a pivotal year for L&D. The trends shaping the year ahead underscore not only where learning can have the greatest influence, but also how L&D can reinforce its strategic value across the business. By demonstrating clear connections between learning, performance and organizational outcomes, L&D leaders can ensure that training and development remains central to long-term success.

Keeping Training a Business Priority

The progress organizations have made in stabilizing skills change is no accident. It's the result of consistent investment in employee development. According to the [World Economic Forum](#), nearly 39% of workers' core skills are still expected to change by 2030, down from 44% in 2023. While this decline signals progress, it also illustrates how much work remains to be done.

Learning leaders now face a familiar challenge: keeping training a strategic business priority amid economic uncertainty, tighter budgets and competing demands. Reinforcing the value of learning requires moving beyond traditional participation or completion metrics and instead connecting learning outcomes directly to organizational performance. L&D professionals need to tell data-driven stories that demonstrate how training drives measurable business results like productivity gains or improved customer satisfaction.

To sustain momentum, L&D must [stay aligned with organizational goals](#). This means partnering with business leaders to identify skills gaps, define success measures and continuously communicate progress. Strategic alignment isn't a one-time effort; it's an ongoing dialogue that keeps learning visible, relevant and indispensable to the business.



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Navigating AI and the Authenticity of Skills

Artificial intelligence (AI) is here and it's part of daily work. While AI tools are helping employees improve efficiency and productivity, they're also changing how organizations define skills and evaluate performance. As tasks become increasingly augmented by technology, certain questions arise: What does it mean [to be skilled in an AI-enabled world](#)? And how can organizations ensure that human expertise remains central to success?

L&D has a critical role to play in addressing these questions. Beyond teaching technical fluency, learning programs must cultivate the judgment, ethical awareness and critical thinking skills employees need to use AI responsibly. The goal is to help employees work with technology, not depend on it.

For instance, an organization might train employees to use AI tools for drafting reports, while also training managers to assess how well those employees interpret insights and make independent decisions. Similarly, AI-assisted simulations can challenge employees to solve complex, real-world problems, ensuring that technology supports skills development rather than replacing it.

By embedding AI use and authentic skill building into training programs, L&D ensures that employees remain competent and adaptable as technology continues to reshape their work.

Strengthening the Manager's Role in Career Development

Employees increasingly look to their managers for guidance and support in advancing their careers, yet [LinkedIn Learning data](#) shows that manager-driven development support has declined year over year. Competing priorities and limited time often make career conversations sporadic or even nonexistent, leaving employees uncertain about growth opportunities and diminishing engagement.

L&D can close this gap by equipping managers with the tools, frameworks and confidence to lead meaningful development conversations. Programs that emphasize coaching, feedback and structured "career check-ins" can make these discussions more consistent and effective. For example, organizations might implement quarterly touchpoints supported by microlearning modules that help managers strengthen their ability to guide employees through career planning and skill growth.

Time pressures are unlikely to ease, but [L&D can help managers](#) make better use of the time they have, focusing on development activities that deliver the greatest impact. Strengthening the manager's role in career growth not only enhances engagement and retention but also builds a stronger internal talent pipeline, ensuring employees see a clear future within the organization.



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Engaging the Engaged to Drive Change

Employee engagement remains a persistent challenge. For only the second time in the past 12 years, [Gallup](#) reported a global decline in engagement in 2024, falling to 21%. In response, many organizations have focused on re-engaging disengaged employees. However, this focus overlooks a critical resource: the employees who are already highly engaged.

These individuals can be powerful catalysts for cultural transformation and learning adoption. When organizations empower them as champions through ambassador programs, innovation labs or peer-led learning, they can help drive enthusiasm and credibility across teams. Engaged employees can model desired behaviors, share success stories and inspire peers through authentic examples of how learning improves performance.

Inviting these internal champions to pilot new training programs or mentor others ensures that learning feels relevant and grounded in their real work. When learning is reinforced through peer influence rather than top-down messaging, it becomes more believable and more likely to last.

By channeling the energy of the already engaged, organizations can create a ripple effect that strengthens culture and sustains positive change.



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Reimagining the Learning Experience

Traditional, linear courses are no longer enough to meet the demands of today's workforce. Employees expect learning that is personalized, continuous and integrated into their day-to-day work. Advances in AI, adaptive learning platforms and immersive learning technologies are transforming development from an event-based activity into an ongoing experience.

Modern learning is increasingly embedded within work itself. Employees want support in the moment of need, when they're facing a new challenge or preparing for a task. For instance, a [digital coach](#) can provide employees with real-time guidance and recommend relevant content to help them solve a problem on the job.

Yet technology alone isn't the solution. Reimagining the learning experience also means creating a culture that values curiosity, experimentation and knowledge sharing. When organizations reward learning behaviors and provide [psychological safety](#) for trying new approaches, development becomes self-sustaining.

In this model, L&D's role evolves from content delivery to experience designer, curating ecosystems of tools, people and opportunities that make learning a natural part of work. Embedding learning in the flow of work strengthens skill retention and builds more adaptable and confident employees who are ready to meet changing business needs.

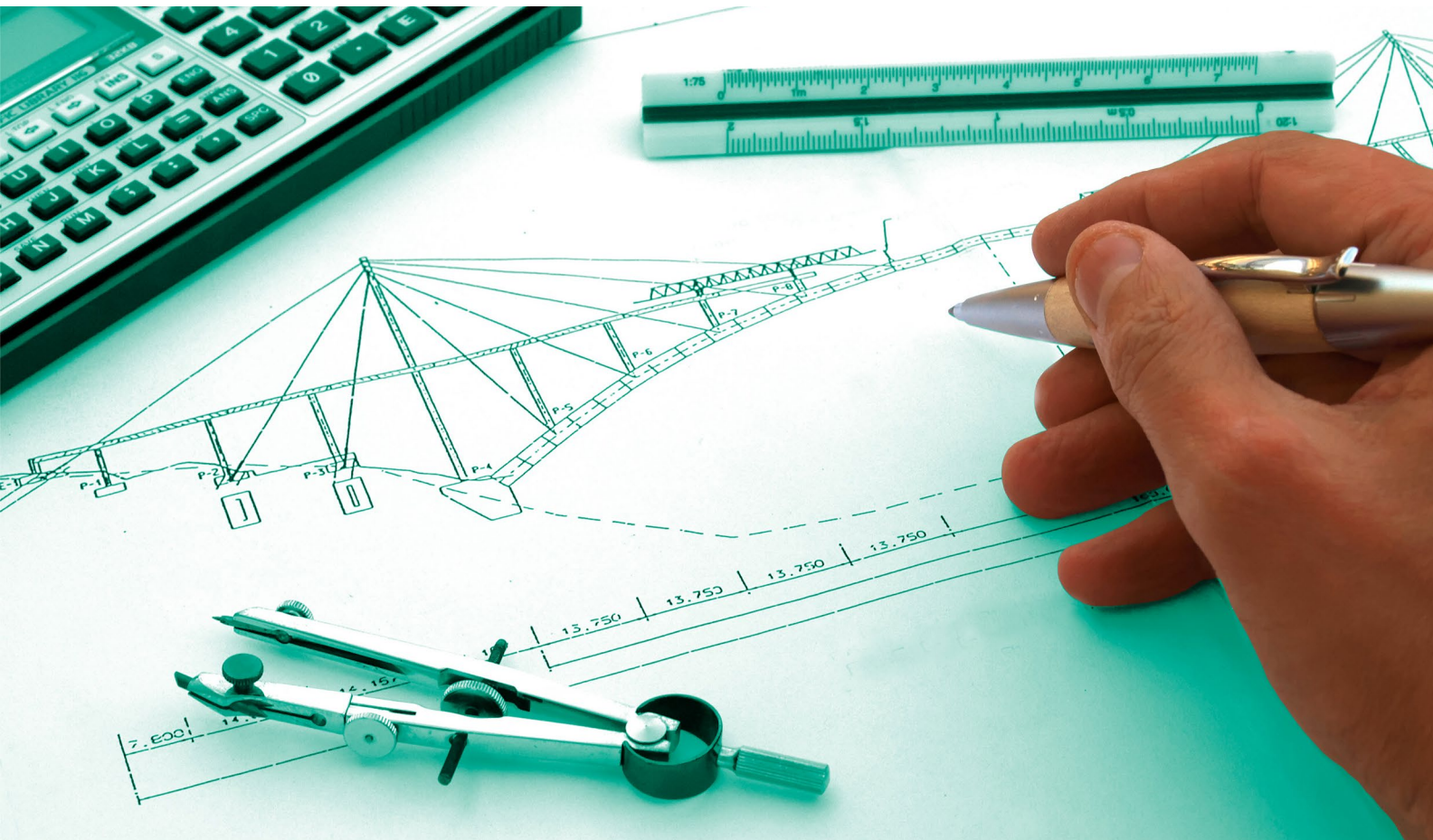
Market Overview

The market demand for training products and services is expected to shrink slightly in 2026. The growing use of AI tools is naturally reducing the cost of developing and delivering effective learning solutions. While our most recent Training Industry pulse data indicates that learning leaders anticipate modest budget increases, we are seeing a large portion of those budgets being spent on the increasing costs of internal activities, such as slightly higher compensation, logistics and event space costs.

The one area of continued growth is learning technologies. New features and innovative applications, including AI-driven coaching and mentoring, are driving higher prices and sustaining momentum in this segment of the market.

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