

The human still defines L&D in 2026

2026 L&D Impact Survey Highlights

AI is reshaping the agenda. Economic pressure is real. But what the 2026 survey makes clear is that the function's greatest opportunity – and expectation – lies in human capability. The businesses that thrive will be those that develop people, not just technology

86%

UK respondents cite core people-management skills as the #1 priority

72%

Respondents want leaders who can grow, reskill and retain talent

71%

of organizations identify AI, digital fluency and data skills as a critical capability

The challenge

Digital transformation and AI top business challenges (47%). But L&D is also contending with burned-out, time-poor employees, engagement gaps, and persistent retention pressures. Time and capacity remain the dominant L&D challenge year on year.

The response

Capability development has grown 28% YoY as the primary driver of L&D strategy. Practitioners are doubling down on flexible, human-centred learning – in-person, blended, coaching – to build the skills organizations need most: communication, EQ, adaptability, and leadership.

In-demand capabilities

1

AI & Digital Capability

- Data literacy
- Automation
- Digital Fluency

2

Human & soft skills

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Emotional intelligence
- Empathy

3

Adaptability & Change

- Flexibility
- Resilience
- Growth Mindset



"Our organization has not yet built a self-sustaining leadership pipeline with the capability, confidence, appetite, and system-level support needed for future leadership roles."

How is L&D working with AI

AI is piloted in pockets of the organisation but not scaled.

60%

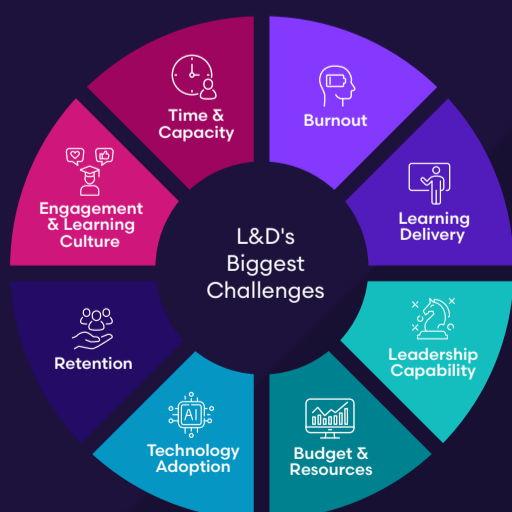
Our people don't have the skills & support to use AI confidently and effectively.

56%

Strongly agree AI is being adopted in the right place, with strong stakeholder buy in.

ONLY 10%

How organizations have dealt with these L&D challenges.



Increased training volume/access
More structured expansion via programs, academies, and curated learning offers.



Learning approach
More intentional move toward "learning in the flow of work" and blended strategies.



Management Enablement
Use of coaching, mentoring, and manager encouragement, but less systematic.



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