Are your learners *time poor?*

Is it stopping them learning?

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It's time to get strategic and tackle time pressured learning

We keep hearing how a 'lack of time' is impacting employees' engagement with learning – but is that really the whole story and what are the best organisations doing to tackle this important and growing issue?

Key messages:

- **The #1 reason employees feel held back from learning is lack of time.**

- **Asking whether people are truly busier now (or not) misses the point –** people feel it, believe they are, and know it won't get better on its own.

- **Continual learning is more important than ever –** the half-life of skills is now less than 5 years (LSE) creating short and longer terms skills gaps.

- **'Busyness' is a cultural and leadership issue.** Are your leaders part of the problem?

- **It's time to get strategic and break the cycle –** innovating to boost time and impact, rekindling the magic of learning.

Read on to unpack what's really going on and discover practical strategies.

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Increasing time pressure – what's really going on?

"45 % of workers report their workload has signifcantly increased."

(PwC's Global Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey 2024)

"88% of executives identify workload pressures as one of their top challenges."

(Lynda Gratton, LSE, 2023)

Many feel busier now than ever before.

Research suggests there are a combination of factors at play - including increased work demands, information overload, changing lifestyles, societal, psychological and cultural shifts. Multiple competing obligations and expectations can be draining and makes you feel a lack of choice and control. Time hasn't reduced, but it certainly feels like it has sometimes!

'Time poverty' and 'burnout' are intertwined as both stem from an imbalance between demand and resources. Burnout doesn't happen overnight, but its effects can be far-reaching. Understanding the signs and causes is the first step toward prevention and recovery.

77% of employees have experienced burnout and **70% of executives** consider leaving their jobs due to stress (Deloitte)

48% of workers globally are currently experiencing burnout, underscoring the urgency to rethink work (BCG)

On average, workers spend 28% of their week on emails plus 35% in meetings leaving little time for meaningful work (McKinsey).

"Time poverty is a subjective sense of being overwhelmed due to constantly feeling rushed or pressured, like one is always running out of time."

(Travers, 2024)

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Whether people are truly busier now (or not) misses the point – people feel it, believe they are. It's a complex issue and is not likely to improve on its own.

'Busyness' is a multifaceted issue making it hard to tackle as an individual. Simple time management tools aren't the answer. The societal, social and psychological factors are wide ranging, each contributing to a growing sense of the 'feeling of busyness'.

|			
Societal status	Society can glorify busyness; equating it with success or importance, making it difficult to step back without judgement.	**Lack of boundaries**	Difficulty in saying no or setting limits can lead to chronic busyness.
Sense of achievement	Completing tasks, even minor ones, releases dopamine, creating a rewarding cycle to keep doing more.	**Denial of limitations**	Many underestimate their limits, leading to over-scheduling and unrealistic expectations.
Avoidance mechanism	Staying busy can help avoid confronting deeper emotional or personal issues. A distraction from uncomfortable feelings.	**Habitual patterns**	Over time, busyness becomes a habit, making it hard to break free from the cycle.
Fear of missing out (FOMO)	The desire to be involved can lead to over-commitment as people fear being overlooked.	**Hero complex**	Overworking can be seen as heroic, feeling indispensable by taking on extra responsibilities.

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Being aware of these factors, and their impact on our individual performance, can help us to **adjust and monitor our behaviour and output**. Identifying productivity killers and reflecting on how to work smarter and not harder, can support effective prioritisation on activities which truly deliver value.

Recognising the driving forces behind why we fall into these traps can also support us to reclaim our time. Here are a couple of examples:
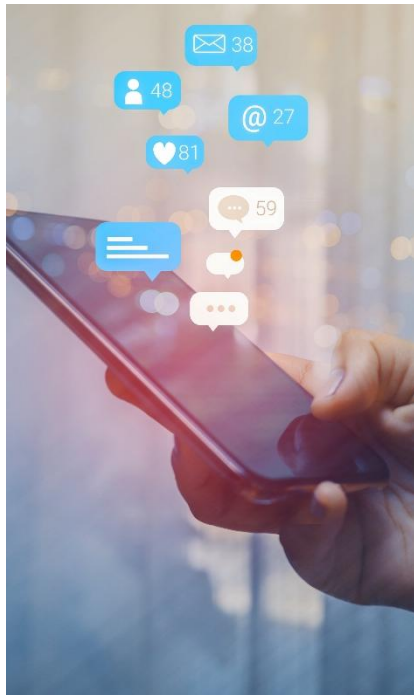
Social media platforms

Today, social media platforms can influence perceived available time. For many, they are addictive and can take up time! They are designed to deliver dopamine hits, through different stimuli types, notification, rewards, interaction and content – so, being aware of these tactics can help and setting boundaries is important to addressing habitual negative patterns from forming.
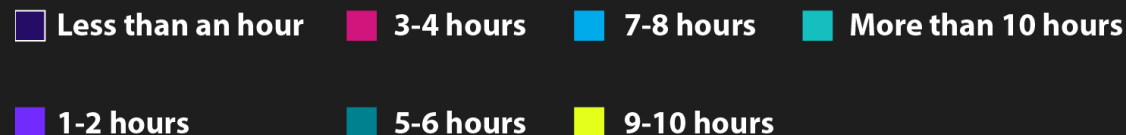
Apparent busyness

Staying occupied with tasks within one's job description but disconnected from the organisation's core mission and goals—can often be driven by a desire for status or a sense of heroism, rather than a focus on meaningful results. This can lead to poor decision-making and the creation of self-serving schedules. Taking a step back to prioritise smarter work aligned with organisational needs is key to driving real impact.

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Whilst a lack of time is the top reason employees give for missing out on learning *(Forbes, 2024),* **many people** *are* **spending time learning,** often in their own time.

Learning hours per week for Gen Z

SURVEY QUESTION

On average, how much time do you spend learning in a week? [Responses from students removed from this graph.]

6%	19%	24%	19%	12%	8%	12%

- ◼ Less than an hour
- ◼ 3-4 hours
- ◼ 7-8 hours
- ◼ More than 10 hours
- ◼ 1-2 hours
- ◼ 5-6 hours
- ◼ 9-10 hours

For all generations, the top 5 motivations are:

1 Personal growth and self-improvement

2 To increase earning potential

3 Personal interest in the subject matter

4 Enjoyment in learning something new

5 To stay competitive in their job or industry

(Source: Udemy, 2025)

This insight is reinforced by LinkedIn Learning's 2024 workplace learning report, that highlighted 53% of Gen Z respondents value learning as a way to progress their careers, compared to just 37% of those born before 1996.

We know that motivation can only be part of this complex issue, so what are organisations doing to tackle it?

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A strategic and coherent response

Whether (or not) your people are learning is a **critical business issue** – one that requires a strategic, innovative, and coherent response.

Tackling three interacting aspects in parallel boosts your chance of success and avoids wasting even more time!
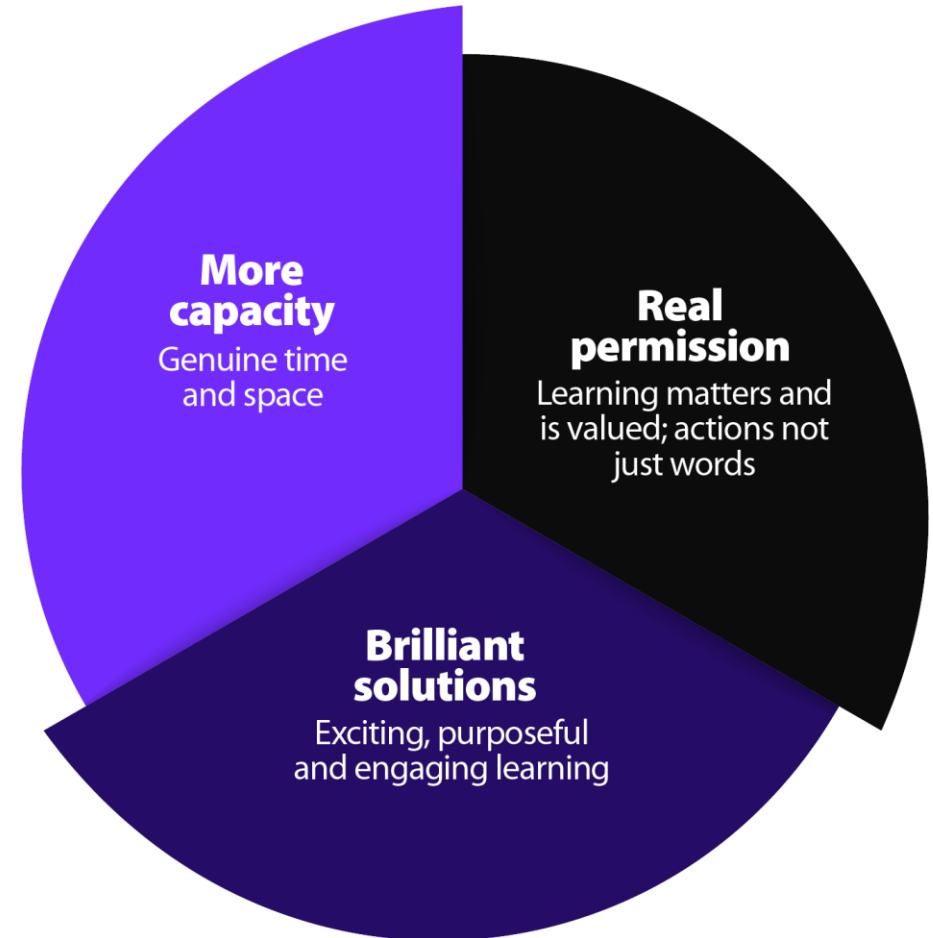
More capacity

Real permission

Brilliant solutions

Without more time and encouragement your stimulating design will miss the mark. Even with more time, poorly designed learning which doesn't highlight what's in it for learners will likely frustrate or send them elsewhere.

Leaders also play a pivotal role in creating conditions that support intrinsic motivation, Dan Pink's motivational theory, Autonomy, Mastery, Purpose, highlights that when leaders adopt a more nuanced understanding of human motivation, it can reinforce our innate human desire to improve and grow.

"Mastery is a mindset: It requires the capacity to see your abilities not as finite, but as infinitely improvable."

(Pink)

More capacity
Genuine time and space

Real permission
Learning matters and is valued; actions not just words

Brilliant solutions
Exciting, purposeful and engaging learning

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1. Creating more capacity – time and space

Constant distractions are taking away our time, a study developed by *Harvard Business Review (2022)* found workers switch between different apps and websites **nearly 1,200 times each day.**

In the article, '*Beware a Culture of Busyness'* (Waytz, 2023), suggested strategies to move away from this fixation include rewarding output, not activity; eliminating low-value work to make time for 'deep work'; forcing people off the clock, allowing time for their minds to wander creativity; and building slack into your systems. Here are some learning related examples.

"We must never become too busy sawing to take time to sharpen the saw."

(Covey)

Hemsley/ Google

Take people off the clock

- 'Hemsley Spaces' is a company-wide initiative where all the team have half a day a week to dedicate to something learning related, that will help each individual develop and grow.

- Google empowers its employees with learning and research time most notably the "20% time" policy, which encourages them to dedicate 20% of their work week to personal projects of interest.

Global finance

Bitesize modules just in time

- Short, focused activities that can be completed in minutes and reinforce key activities within the business cycle. Ensures close attention to the most important learning takeaways.

- Providing training resources exactly when needed – using technology prompts, timely conversation cards, or part of a change project.

Global engineering & cosmetics

Limit distractions

- Digital timeout, requesting Managers and Leaders dedicate their full attention and time by switching off emails and notifications.

- Running immersive and off grid activities, allowing learners to connect in person and make space for personal reflection, action planning and collaboration.

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2. Give real permission – showing learning is valued and makes a difference

Approval and permission are strong forces associated with social systems – including organisations. Remaining in a social system is fundamentally about survival and the need to play by the expectations of the system is ingrained. Leaders and managers set the tone for what is OK, what isn't, and what is valued. What they pay attention to matters more than what they say.

"Organisations provide the possibility of inclusion and belonging, but also the risk of separation and exclusion"
(Walker)

"Leaders as learners, not knowers. Leaders with a learner or growth mindset model and help their organisation avoid perfectionism and foster healthy striving."

(Brown)

International insurer

Role modelling leaders

- Senior leaders host 'lunch and learn' session where they share their own learning experiences.

- Leaders who regularly ask their teams "what have you learned this week" – in 1:1s, meetings, site visits etc.

Leading retailer

Link to career progression

- The Chairman required future Executives to have a breadth of experiences: 2 businesses, 2 functions and 2 different leadership contexts (e.g. setting up a business, a turnaround, a large operation) 2+2+2.

Global manufacturing

Visible financial support

- Link the learning budget directly to a strategic business priority – report on progress and change in business performance metrics as part of business highlight reports.

- Offering budgets for external courses or conferences encourages employees to invest in their development.

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3. Craft brilliant solutions

If people are starting a learning activity, but not completing it, alarm bells should be ringing. Unfortunately, there is a lot of poorly designed learning around. For example, research from MIT shows that 'massive open online courses' (MOOCs) having a staggering 80 to 90% dropout rate. To achieve maximum transformational power and realise true behavioral change, we recommend following a structured and proven learning model, such as our Hemsley "4e" learning methodology: excite, engage, embed and evolve.

Excite

- Pre-programme momentum. CEO video, digital teasers, reviews / testimonials.
- Provide meaning. What's in it for me? How does it help the organisation? Show impact on career progression, performance, wellbeing, pay, achieving goals.
- Make learning fun. New opportunities, experiences, stretch assignments.
- Boost confidence. Counter limiting beliefs, address concerns.

Engage

- Flexible learning options. Multiple formats for different styles. Anytime, anywhere.
- Enhance networks. Build connections across regions / units / functions.
- Personalize & in the flow. Build on prior learning. Use real-world challenges for relevance. Deliver learning opportunities in the flow of work.
- Learn together. 20 mins in a team meeting. Peer coaching. Social community learning.

Embed

- Action learning & Performance Boosters. Support application through real world practical activities.
- Continue connection. Build on the momentum from collective energy and shared insights.
- Celebrate progress. Awards, recognition, feedback, ceremonies.
- Manager check-ins. Boosting value, support, accountability, new habits.

Evolve

- Measure progress. Monitor engagement through data insights and individual progress assessments.
- Report on success. Analyse data against expected skill, behvaioural changes and business impact metrics, adjusting as required to improve future outcomes.
- Review contextual changes. Has the system or environment changed and will this have an impact on outcomes?

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Conclusion

Time and workload pressures are undoubtedly a major issue facing organisations, leaders and individuals. It's vital that learning and people development teams respond strategically and innovatively – carving out more time and space; ensuring there is real permission and commitment; and offering creative learning solutions which are crafted into coherent and engaging experiences, which limit distractions' and promote, individual and organisational benefits.

It's a challenging time, but as we all know that's when we learn most and can be most innovative.

"**Necessity is the mother of invention**"

(Plato)

Further reading

A Psychologist Explains The Concept Of 'Time Poverty'—And Offers 4 Fixes (Travers, 2024)

Beware a Culture of Busyness (Waytz, HBR, 2023)

Dare to Lead, Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts (Brown, 2018)

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (Covey 30th Anniversary Edition, 2020)

How Do Gen Z Employees Learn? A Guide for Employers of Young Professionals (Southern New Hampshire University 2019)

How Much Time and Energy Do We Waste Toggling Between Applications? (Murty et al HBR 2022)

PwC's Global Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey 2024

The Real Reason Employees Disengage From Training (Training Industry, 2023)

Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us (Pink, 2009)

Walker, Laura (2019) Dancing with fear and confidence. MPwr Publishing.