ispring

GUIDEBOOK

iSpring Days 2026

Top strategies
for shaping the future
of people development
in challenging times

When business priorities keep changing, how can L&D stay useful, credible, and strategically relevant? This question was at the heart of **iSpring Days 2026**. The conference brought together L&D, HR, instructional design, and learning technology experts to explore a shared challenge **of creating direction when uncertainty has become the default.**

This guidebook distills the key ideas from the conference into hands-on takeaways you can share with your team and apply to your own learning projects.

Contents

Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Day 1

Session focus: Learning measurement, data strategy, stakeholder influence.

Strategic Use of Data to Increase Learning's Influence and Impact

Watch the full session on YouTube →

Based on the talk by Dr. Alaina Szlachta, Chief Data Strategist at By Design Development Solutions

L&D teams are often asked to prove value, but many are working with the wrong evidence. Completion rates, satisfaction scores, quiz results, and attendance numbers rarely show whether training solved a business problem or helped stakeholders make better decisions.

One way to approach this issue is by reframing learning data as a source of influence. If your L&D wants more credibility and leadership buy-in, learn how to start collecting the right evidence the right way.

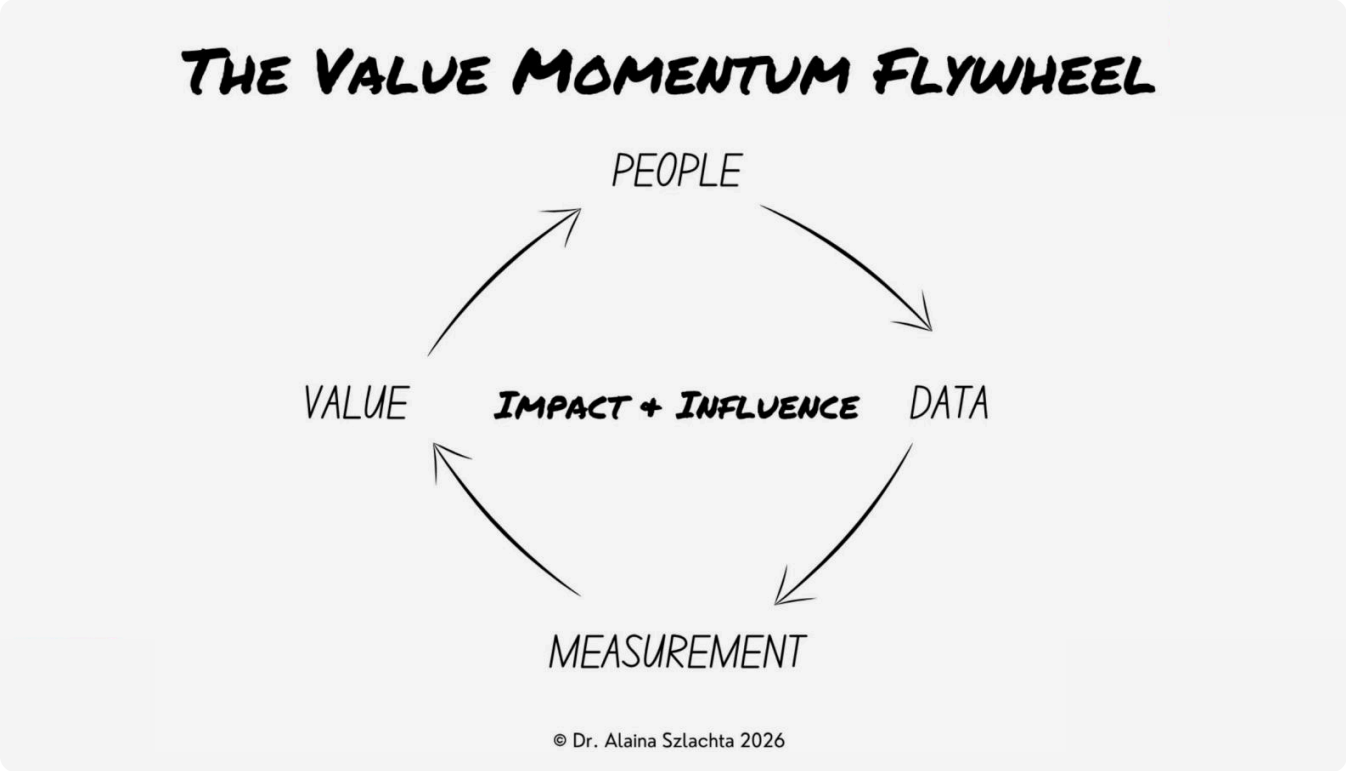
The problem

L&D works with a narrow view of data

When L&D only relies on easy-to-access metrics, it can show activity but not necessarily have an impact. Besides, the evidence they need is often scattered across:

- Conversations
- Systems
- Stakeholder relationships
- Workflows
- Departments

Without access to that broader evidence, L&D has to work from a partial view. The team may know what was delivered, but not enough about the original need, the performance context, the expectations, or the actual change that followed.

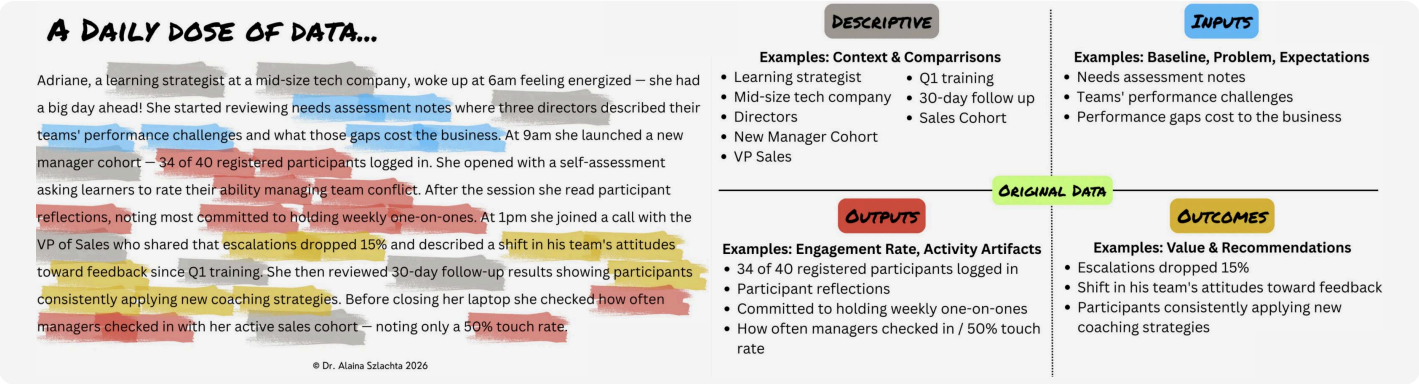


A stronger data practice connects four areas: **people, data, measurement, and value.** When these work together, L&D can turn disconnected information into a clearer value story that supports stronger influence within the business.

The solution

Broaden what counts as data

A useful learning measurement strategy separates data into four categories: descriptive data, input data, output data, and outcome data.



- **Descriptive data explains the context.**

  It may include the learner's role, department, experience level, time in role, location, team structure, or current organizational changes. This data helps L&D understand who the program serves and compare how different groups experience the same initiative.

- **Input data defines the problem.**

  This includes performance baselines, business challenges, stakeholder expectations, desired outcomes, and the cost of current performance gaps. Input data helps L&D avoid building training around assumptions.

- **Output data shows what happened during the program.**

  This may include attendance, completion rates, assessment results, participation in activities, learner reflections, and behavior commitments. Output data is useful, but it mostly proves engagement and activity.

- **Outcome data shows what changed after the program.**

  This is where L&D can connect learning to performance, behavior, business results, or stakeholder expectations. Outcome data might include reduced escalations, improved manager follow-through, higher adoption of a process, fewer errors, stronger sales behaviors, better customer interactions, or measurable progress toward solving the original problem.

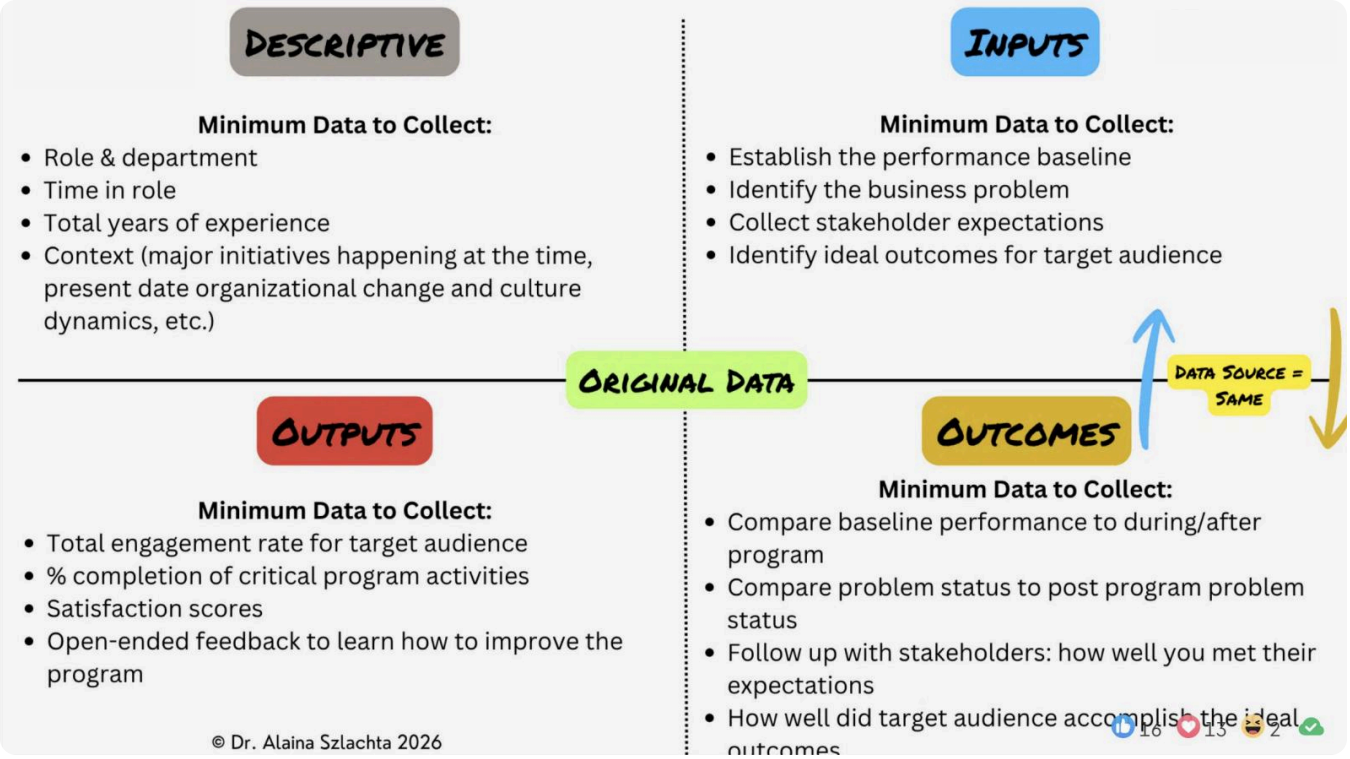
The most common mistake is using output data when stakeholders are asking for outcome evidence.

How to put this into practice

The strongest data often already exists within the organization's workflows. L&D needs to know where to look and what to ask to identify the most relevant data.

- **To establish a baseline,** look for performance data, department KPIs, technology data, or original assessments.
- **To identify the problem, ask:** How do we know there is a problem? What is that problem costing the business?
- **To understand outcomes,** look at the target audience's workflow, manager observations, and whether people are applying the expected behaviors.
- **To set expectations,** ask stakeholders what they need, what they expect, and what would make the initiative valuable for them.

With all this data in place, you can confidently produce the outcomes:



The takeaway

Tie outcomes to questions

L&D doesn't build influence by collecting more metrics for the sake of reporting. You need to connect the right evidence to the right questions.

- Context is data
- Expectations are data
- Reflections are data
- Manager observations are data
- Business problems are data
- Outcomes are data

When learning teams use this broader view, they can tell a stronger value story: who the program was for, what problem it addressed, what happened during the experience, what changed afterward, and why that change mattered. That's how L&D turns insight into influence.

Session focus: Performance consulting, diagnosing workplace performance gaps, and helping L&D move beyond training as the default solution.

Not Everything Is a Training Problem: Performance Consulting for Practitioners

Based on the talk by Tom McDowall, Founder and Principal Consultant at Evolve, speaker, and writer

Watch the full session on YouTube →

Performance consulting is the practice of looking beyond the training request to understand what is really affecting workplace performance. Instead of starting with what course a company should build, it starts with better questions:

- What is happening?
- What should be happening instead?
- What's getting in the way?
- Is training the right solution right now?

The following is expert advice on how to question whether training is the right solution, identify common non-learning barriers, and use a practical diagnostic lens before building another course.

The problem — Training becomes the default strategy

In many organizations, L&D is still viewed as the training team. The business identifies a performance issue, assumes a knowledge gap, and asks L&D to create a course, workshop, or eLearning module.

The risk here is that the solution may be polished, expensive, and entirely misaligned with the real cause.

Tom McDowall shares an example from a manufacturing environment in which error rates rose sharply after a holiday break. The assumption was that employees needed more practice. The organization had already considered a costly VR-based training solution.

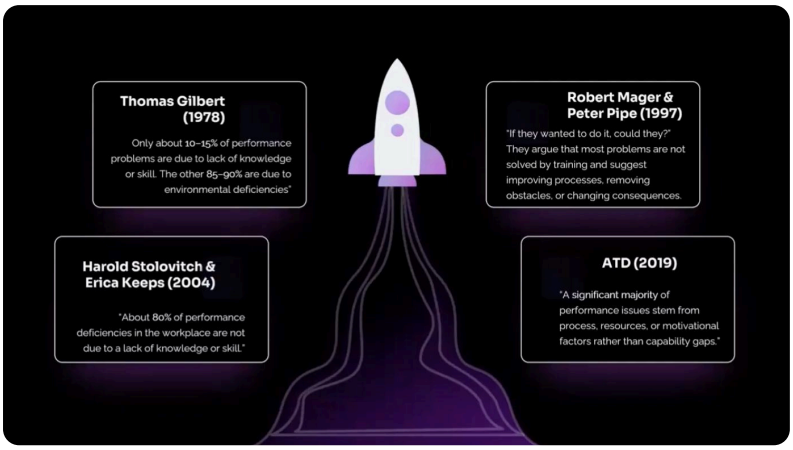
> **“After speaking with line managers, quality assurance teams, employees, and the person responsible for environmental changes, the real issue became clear: the lighting had changed. New LED lights had been installed much higher up than the previous bulbs, making detailed work harder to see. No training could fix that. The solution was better task lighting, and the error rate dropped.”**
>
> Tom McDowall

The lesson is simple: when the problem is environmental, training will not solve it.

The solution

Diagnose the performance system

A solid performance consulting approach looks at both the individual and the environment. Training sits mostly on the individual side because learning happens person by person. But many performance problems come from the setting they are in.



Thomas Gilbert’s Behavior Engineering Model is a good lens for this kind of diagnosis. It helps L&D examine several possible causes before jumping to training.

Information and expectations

Questions you need answers to:

- Do people know what is expected of them?
- Do they know what good looks like?
- Are standards, KPIs, and feedback loops clear and consistent?

This is often the first place to look. The most common non-learning factor behind performance issues is a lack of clarity. People may not know they are underperforming, or they may not know what they should do differently. Data-backed insights help reveal key gaps.

Resources and tools

Questions you need answers to:

- Do people have the tools, systems, and time they need?
- Are systems usable and accessible?
- Are tools available when needed?

A performance issue may arise from slow technology, missing equipment, or a confusing format.

Incentives and consequences

Questions you need answers to:

- Are the right behaviors rewarded?
- Are poor results addressed?
- Is the organization accidentally encouraging speed over quality, volume over care, or shortcuts over accuracy?

Metrics can drive the wrong behavior when they are misaligned. For example, a contact center may reward agents for clearing calls quickly while also expecting excellent customer service, accurate GDPR handling, and first-call resolution. If “calls cleared” becomes the main metric, agents may rush conversations, cut corners, or even end calls prematurely just to keep the number high. The metric improves, but the actual performance gets worse.

Process and environment

Questions you need answers to:

- Is the workflow logical?
- Are policies helping or hindering?
- Are there confusing steps, processes, or high-risk points where errors become more likely?

Sometimes the process itself makes good performance harder than it needs to be.

Knowledge and skills

Only after checking these factors should L&D ask:

- Do people know how to perform the task?
- Have they had a chance to practice?
- Are skill gaps showing up in specific areas?

This is a point where training may be the right answer, but it shouldn’t be the initial assumption.

Capacity

Questions you need answers to:

- Are people physically and mentally able to perform the task?
- Are fatigue, stress, overload, accessibility, or poor role fit getting in the way?

Some issues require HR, operations, IT, leadership, or accessibility support instead of a learning intervention.

The takeaway

Use training only when the problem is skill or knowledge

Before accepting a training request, ask what else could be causing the performance gap besides content. Are expectations clear? Are the tools working? Are incentives aligned? Is the process usable? Do people have the capacity to perform? After answering, you're in a better position to decide whether a learning solution is needed.

This diagnostic shift helps L&D move from order-taking to value creation and makes training stronger when content really is the answer.

Session focus: L&D measurement, creative data sources, impact storytelling, and stakeholder communication

Creative Ways to Measure L&D Wins

Watch the full session on YouTube →

Based on the talk by Dr. Heidi Kirby, Founder of Useful Stuff

Words like data, metrics, ROI, alignment, and research can feel intimidating for many L&D teams. They sound technical and far removed from the everyday work of designing useful learning experiences.

But measuring L&D wins doesn't always mean building complex dashboards or proving direct revenue impact. It starts with a simpler move: thinking of data as **information that shows whether what you created was successful or unsuccessful.**

Dr. Kirby shows how to make measurement more comprehensive by looking beyond completions and surveys, finding useful data in places your organization already tracks, and combining different signals into a stronger story of impact.

The problem

L&D defaults to the same metrics

L&D pros often rely on the metrics that are easiest to access:

- Completions
- Quiz scores
- Surveys
- Attendance

These can be useful, especially for logistics or compliance. But they don't always show whether learning helped people perform better, save time, adopt a tool, or solve a problem.

In a customer onboarding program, for example, completion rate may look like the obvious success metric. But it can quickly become misleading. Imagine the goal is to help new customers start using a product as quickly as possible. The learning program is optional; there is no certification requirement, and users have different levels of experience. In this context, forcing every customer to complete every lesson would not prove success but might slow them down instead.

A better measure would be whether customers can find what they need, return to useful resources when necessary, and move into the product with less support from onboarding managers.

The solution

Measure the outcome, not just the activity

Creative measurement begins by asking: **What specifically are we trying to achieve?**

For the customer onboarding program from the example above, the team would be better off measuring several things that better match the goal:

01 Looking at how much repetitive onboarding time was removed from onboarding managers' calendars.

02 Tracking whether customers returned to the learning content more than once, which suggested the content was useful as a resource.

03 Reviewing which lessons customers viewed.

04 Gathering feedback through voice-of-customer data instead of relying only on repeated end-of-course surveys.

Together, these data points tell a stronger story: **the program saved time, supported customer self-service, and helped users access the information they needed.**

The same logic applies to any L&D project. Start with the goal, then look for signals that show progress toward it.

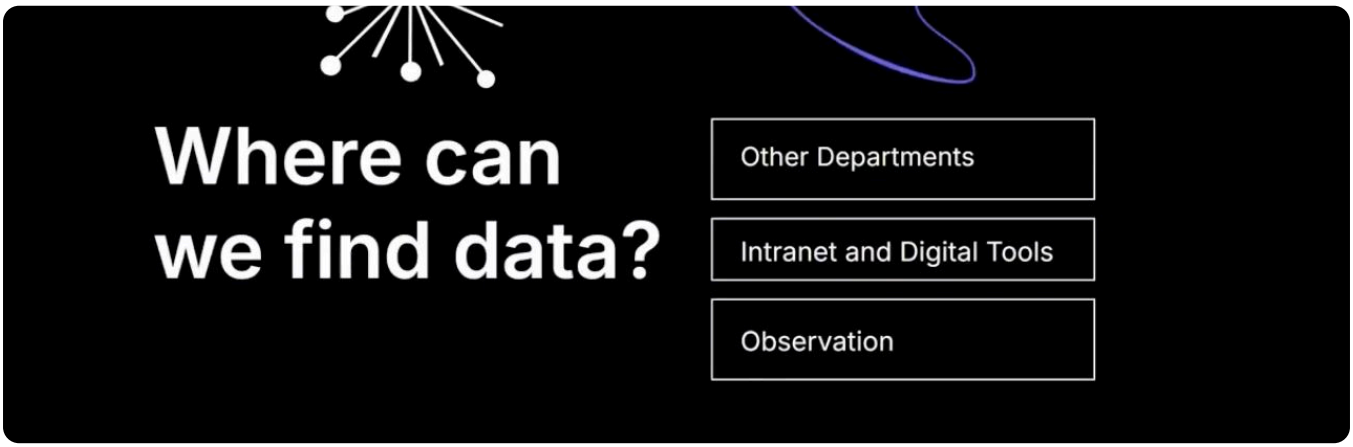
- **If the goal is faster onboarding**, look for time-to-productivity, manager check-ins, confidence in role, early performance indicators, and the amount of support new hires need.
- **If the goal is better tool adoption**, look for system usage, repeated task errors, help desk requests, workflow completion, and whether people return to job aids or support materials.
- **If the goal is stronger leadership behavior**, look for manager feedback, employee comments, quality of one-on-ones, follow-through on commitments, and signs that teams are applying the expected behaviors.

Where to find better data

One reason L&D teams fall back on completions and surveys is that better measurement can feel out of reach. The usual obstacles are real enough: the company doesn't collect data, leadership "just wants it done," or there's no extra time or budget for evaluation.

But in many cases, the data does exist. It is simply outside the LMS, owned by another team, or not labeled as learning data.

Useful data often already exists outside the LMS. Other departments may be tracking information that can help L&D measure impact more effectively.



- HR may have onboarding, retention, engagement, or performance data.
- Customer support may have ticket trends and common pain points.
- Marketing may have video analytics, campaign engagement, or customer education content performance.
- IT may have help desk data and system usage patterns.
- Product teams may have adoption data, feature usage, or customer feedback.
- Quality assurance, operations, health and safety, and sales teams may all have evidence that connects learning to real work.

Observation is another source of data. Shadowing employees, reviewing workflows, listening to calls, reading meeting transcripts, or watching how people use a tool can reveal barriers that dashboards miss.

This is especially useful when leaders or SMEs think they already understand the problem. Seeing the work in context often gives L&D better evidence than relying only on secondhand explanations.

How to make data useful to stakeholders

A quiz score may matter to L&D, but it may not mean much to a sales leader, operations manager, or executive sponsor. A stronger story connects the learning project to the outcomes they care about:

- Time saved
- Smoother adoption
- Reduced support load
- Fewer errors
- Better customer experience, etc.

Don’t forget about qualitative data and direct feedback. A leader publicly saying that a training was valuable and should be used across the company can carry more influence than a basic course score. Manager feedback, customer comments, and learner stories can all help show impact when they are connected to the original goal.

The takeaway

Use the data you already have to tell a better impact story

No single metric can tell the entire story of training impact. Finding the information that shows whether the project achieved what was intended is far more important.

01 Define the learning outcome first.

02 Use existing data where possible.

03 Borrow evidence from other departments.

04 Observe the work.

05 Gather qualitative feedback.

Then combine those signals into a story that stakeholders can understand.

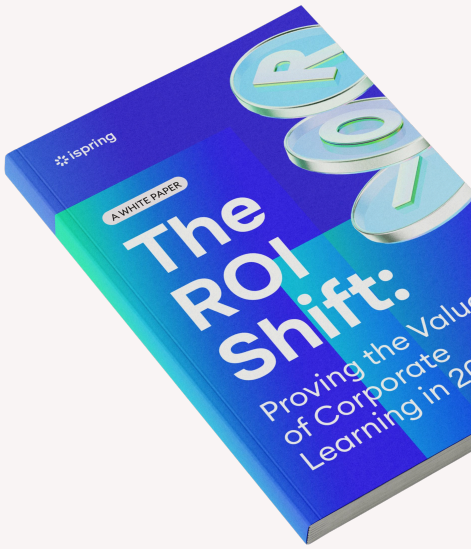
Go deeper into building your training impact story

Download iSpring’s “The ROI Shift” white paper for a 5-step roadmap to connect course design, learning programs, and L&D reporting to business KPIs.

You’ll also discover:

- Why L&D is seen as a cost center, and how to change that
- How to communicate ROI in stakeholder language
- How to assess impact beyond simplistic metrics

Download the free guide →



Session focus: Scenario-based learning, realistic workplace practice, decision-making, plausible distractors, and feedback design.

Scenario-Based Learning for Better Workplace Decisions

Based on the talk by Christy Tucker, an LXD Consultant

Watch the full session on YouTube →

Scenario-based learning gives people practice with the kinds of decisions they actually need to make on the job. In this section, you'll learn how to turn dry content into realistic practice, write choices that challenge learners, and use feedback to show the consequences of their decisions.

> **"Most skills people need to practice, and they need to practice things that are hard enough to make them think."**
>
> Christy Tucker

The problem

Training provides information, but not enough practice

A lot of workplace training still starts with information. Policies, definitions, process steps, regulations, or lengthy explanations of what employees need to know can be overwhelming.

The problem is that knowing the information is not the same as being able to use it.

- A manager may know the name of a communication technique but still struggles to respond well when managing conflict between employees.
- An employee may understand a policy but still make an incorrect decision when applying it in a real situation.

Traditional knowledge checks often fall short when it comes to application. They ask learners to identify, remember, or label information. But on the job, people rarely need to label the concept; they should be able to decide what to do next.

The solution

Build scenarios around real decisions

Strong scenarios begin with the desired behavior. Before building the scenario, ask:

- What should learners be able to do differently after this training?
- What does success look like in their day-to-day work?
- What is happening now that should not be happening?
- What is not happening that should?

This also means looking for mistakes, not just ideal examples. Subject matter experts often focus on what people should do correctly, **but scenario design needs the negative stories too:** common errors, confusing moments, places where people get stuck, and decisions that go wrong.

Those challenges become the decision points in the scenario. The mistakes become the answer choices.

A good scenario question should ask learners to make a decision in context. For example, a fact-based question about temporary disability accommodations can become a short scenario: an employee is having surgery and asks for two weeks off. What should the manager do? The answer choices may cover the same policy facts, but now the learner has to apply them in a realistic situation.

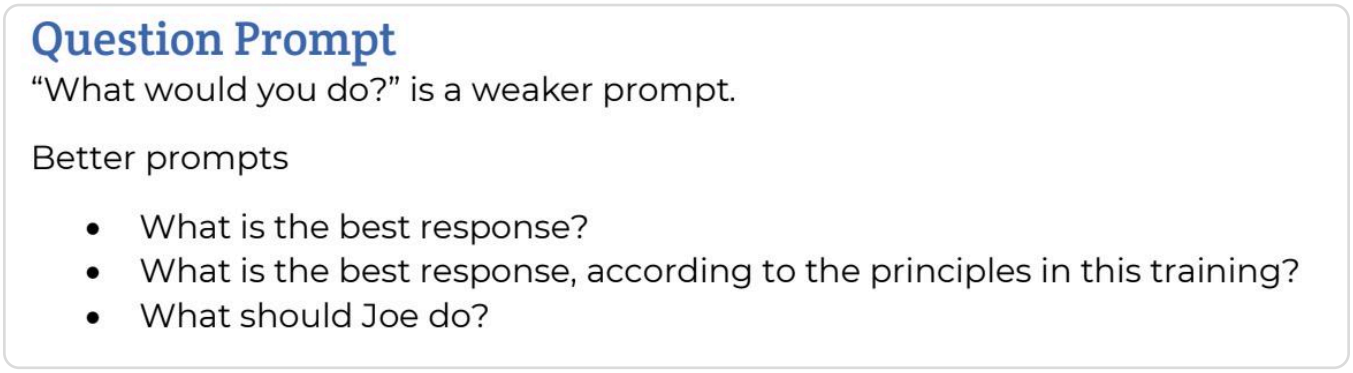
How to write choices that challenge learners

The incorrect answers in a scenario should not be obviously incorrect. **If learners can guess the correct answer without thinking, the scenario is not doing enough work.**

Good, plausible distractors come from real mistakes.

- They may be partially correct, such as asking a question in a difficult conversation, but asking a closed question when an open-ended one is needed.
- They may be the right step at the wrong time, such as setting a goal before the learner has gathered enough information.
- Or they may involve tradeoffs, where the learner has to weigh speed, cost, quality, risk, or customer experience.

One useful technique is to rewrite bad choices so they sound like something a real person might tell themselves. “Ignore the conflict and hope it goes away” is too obvious. “Give them space to resolve the issue on their own” is more tempting because it reflects a believable manager mindset.



The goal is not to trick learners but to make them think.

Use feedback to show consequences

Scenario feedback should do more than say “correct” or “incorrect.” Learners need to understand why their choice worked or failed.

There are two useful types of feedback.

- **Intrinsic feedback** shows the consequence inside the scenario: a customer becomes frustrated, a patient pulls back, an employee responds defensively, or a process breaks down.
- **Instructional feedback** gives direct coaching: why the choice was weak, where the learner got off track, and what to consider next time.

Use both types. Intrinsic feedback makes the scenario feel realistic, while instructional feedback helps learners correct their thinking.

The takeaway

Scenario-based learning is about giving learners realistic practice with decisions that affect workplace performance.

Start with what people need to do, find the mistakes they actually make, turn those mistakes into plausible choices, and use feedback to show why the decision is important.

Session focus: Stakeholder communication, protecting learning decisions, managing scope and feedback, and positioning L&D as a strategic partner.

Stakeholder Management: The Hard Part of L&D Work No One Talks About

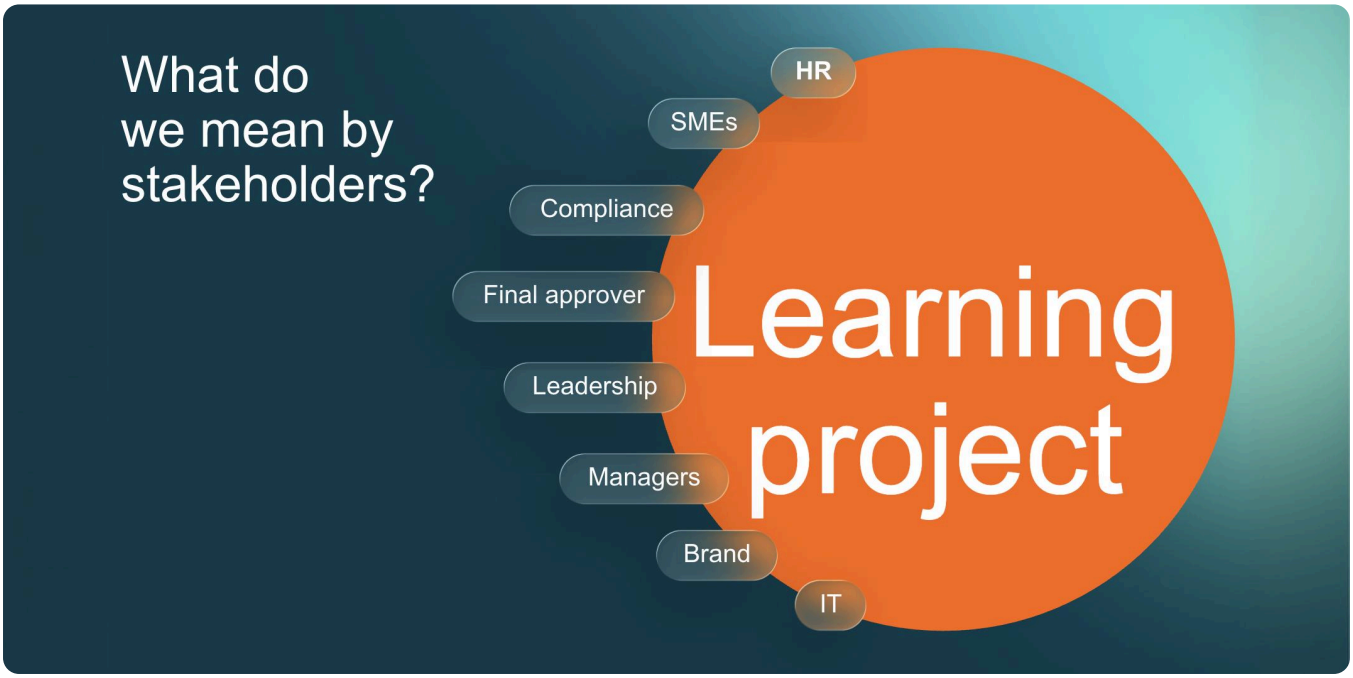
Based on the talk by Anna Poli, Senior Instructional Designer at iSpring

Watch the full session on YouTube →

Stakeholder management is one of the most difficult parts of L&D work. It sits between learning quality, business pressure, subject matter expertise, risk, and approval politics. Anna Poli explains how stakeholder requests can pull a learning project away from its purpose and how to keep decisions tied to the outcome instead of pressure, fear, or last-minute preferences.

The problem

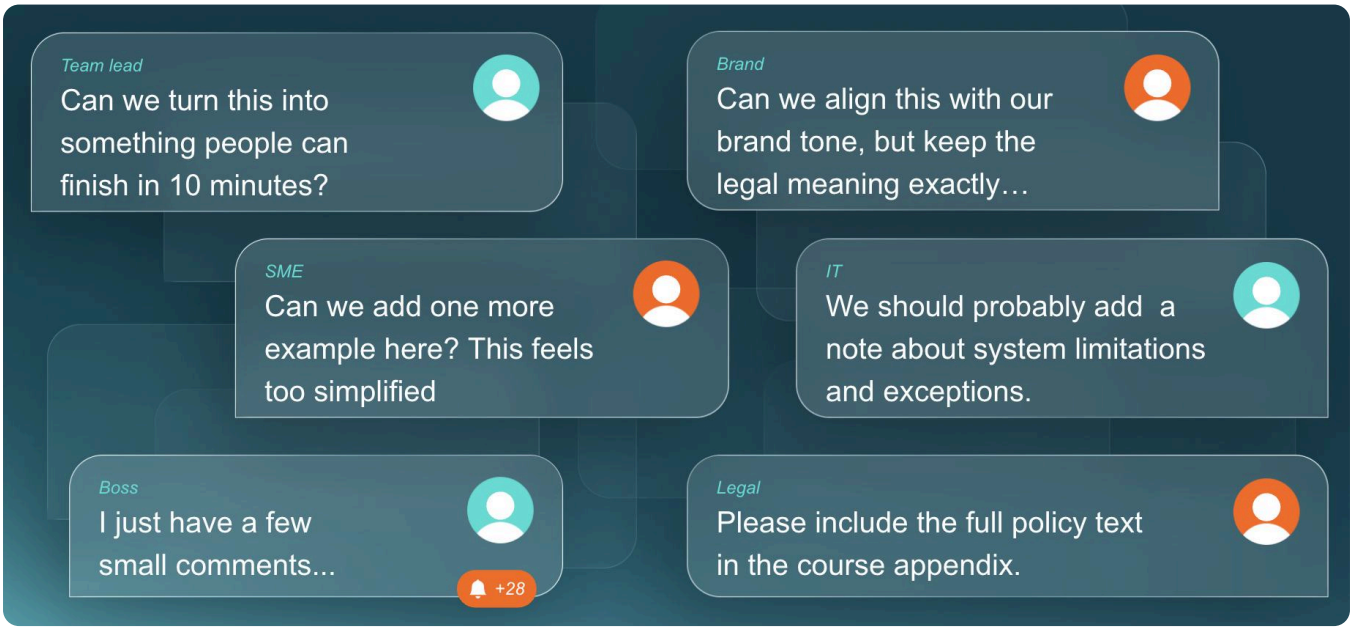
Stakeholder input can derail an entire project



Learning projects usually involve people with different stakes in the outcome: leadership, managers, subject matter experts, HR, compliance, legal, IT, brand teams, and final approvers. Each group sees the project through a different lens:

- Some care about business results
- Others prioritize accuracy
- Some assess risk
- Workload, brand consistency, and approvals are also in play

That's why stakeholder requests often sound reasonable when considered separately.



The issue is that every request has a cost.

- More content can make the course longer, heavier, and harder to retain.
- More review rounds can blur ownership.
- More priorities can quietly change what the course is supposed to achieve.

The solution

Look behind the request

Many stakeholder comments are not pure content requests. Think of them as signals.

- “Add more slides” may mean fear of leaving something out.
- “Cover every scenario” might signify fear of risk and accountability.
- “Make everyone retake it” can imply fear of being asked why nothing was done.
- “I want to review this again” might show fear of losing control.

When L&D understands the concern behind the request, the conversation immediately becomes more productive. Instead of arguing about a slide, **you can bring the discussion back to the purpose.**

Example:

> **“Before we add this, can we go back to the main goal of the training? I want to make sure it still supports the outcome we agreed on.”**

Or make the trade-off clear:

> **“If we add more detail here, we might reduce retention because the learner has to process too much at once.”**

This keeps collaboration intact while protecting the learning logic.

Watch for goal drift

Another common issue is vague goals that become unstable later. “Raise awareness,” “make sure everyone understands the policy,” or “align people on the process” may sound fine initially, but they don’t define success clearly enough.

As the project develops, new expectations appear. At this point, the team might treat the request as ordinary feedback, when the solution is actually being redirected.

Useful rule: **if a request changes what success looks like, treat it as a goal change, not a content change.**

Pause and say:

> **“It sounds like the project is aiming for something slightly different now. Can we align on that before we continue building?”**

This pause can save the project from turning into a single course trying to solve several unrelated problems.

Don’t absorb every comment as an instruction

In many L&D projects, the team carries responsibility without full authority:

- Goals are set elsewhere
- Constraints come from different departments
- Final decisions may be made by people outside the learning team

But when the course launches, L&D is still judged by whether it did or didn’t work. This is why not every stakeholder comment should become an immediate edit. **Some comments are decisions, while others are concerns, preferences, risks, or reactions.**

If L&D only executes requests, it eventually loses influence. A better move is to make instructional design thinking visible:

> **“I understand the concern. If we go in that direction, here’s what it changes.”**

This response shows the reasoning behind the design and helps stakeholders see the consequences of their choices.

Don’t let training become a magic fix

Sometimes stakeholder pressure originates from a stronger organizational habit: using training as the safest visible response to almost any problem.

But another course will not fix misaligned goals, unclear ownership, broken processes, or conflicting priorities. In those cases, training may support the change, but it cannot provide the complete solution.

Before discussing the format, ask harder questions:

01 What business problem are we solving?

02 What happens if we don't solve it?

03 What specifically should people start doing differently?

04 What is happening that we want to change?

05 How will success be measured, and by whom?

06 What would need to change besides training for this to work?

These questions help L&D protect itself from being held responsible for problems that training alone cannot solve.

The takeaway

Stakeholder management requires a balance: stay open enough to collaborate, but firm enough to protect the learning logic and the outcome the project is meant to support.

Map stakeholders early, ask tough questions before the course is built, and make trade-offs visible. And remember: every project shapes how L&D is perceived, whether as a course production service or as a partner that helps the business make better learning decisions.

Day 2

Session focus: AI agents in L&D, LMS workflow automation, AI literacy, personalized learning, content creation.

Building Smarter eLearning Workflows with AI Agents and LMSs

Based on the talk by David Hyeshik Yoon, Microsoft MVP, CEO of 2miles

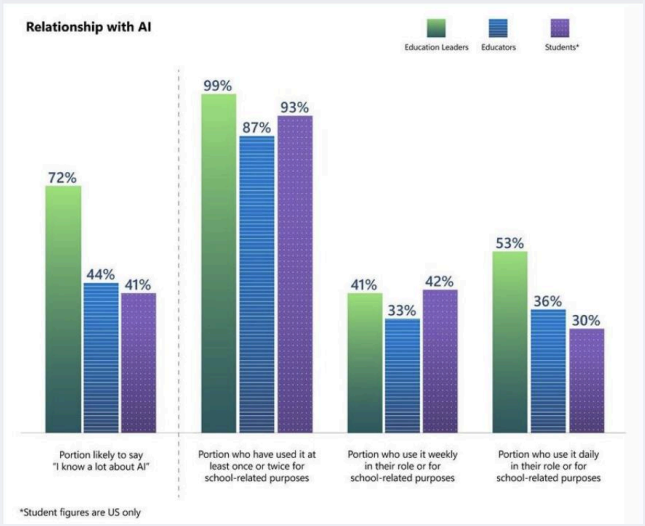
Watch the full session on YouTube →

AI agents are changing what L&D teams can automate, personalize, and measure inside learning ecosystems. Discover how AI agents can support eLearning workflows, where they create the most value, and why successful AI adoption depends less on the technology itself and more on helping people learn how to work with it.

The problem

AI tools are spreading faster than the understanding of AI

AI adoption is everywhere



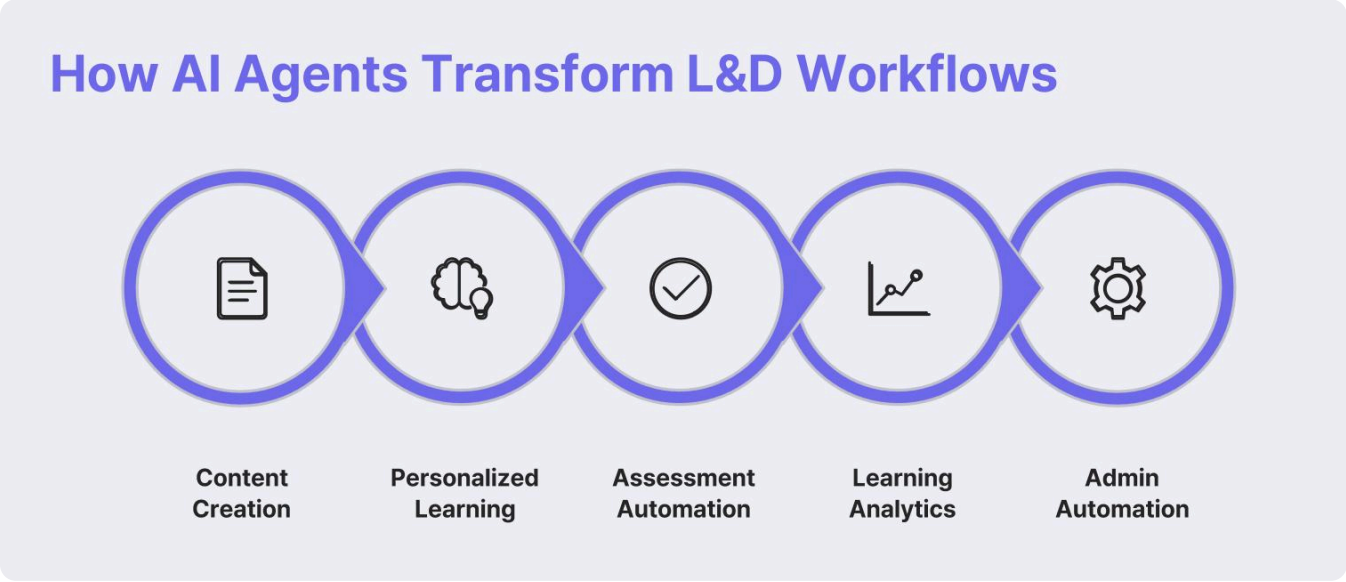
Many organizations are already experimenting with AI, yet adoption doesn't necessarily lead to meaningful results. 35% of companies are already using AI agents, while another 44% plan to do so. Yet only 5% of companies achieve meaningful outcomes from AI.

David points to a key gap: employees may have heard about AI agents, but they don't always know how to use them in actual work. So, the challenge for organizations is not to adopt as many AI tools as they can but to help employees use those tools to solve real problems.

This is especially important for L&D. If learning teams only teach people which buttons to click, they miss the big picture. **AI literacy now needs to include problem definition, tool use, workflow design, and outcome validation.**

The solution

Turn LMS workflows into intelligent learning systems



Traditional eLearning often relies on fixed courses, static content, and the same learning path for everyone. AI agents make a different model possible: learning that adapts to the learner, connects to business systems, and supports people while they work.

In an LMS environment, AI agents can help automate repetitive tasks, recommend content, generate assessments, analyze learning progress, and connect learning activity to other workplace systems.

These are five areas where AI agents can enhance L&D workflows:

01 **Content creation.**

AI agents can help generate course outlines, learning materials, quizzes, and supporting resources much faster. Work that once took days or weeks can often move into a much shorter production cycle.

02 **Personalized learning.**

Instead of giving everyone the same content, AI can recommend learning based on role, skill gaps, performance signals, or real-time needs.

03 **Assessment automation.**

AI can create and format quizzes automatically, reducing the need to manage question banks and spreadsheets manually.

04 **Learning analytics.**

AI can track progress, engagement, and understanding, then surface insights without waiting for manual reporting cycles.

05 **Admin automation.**

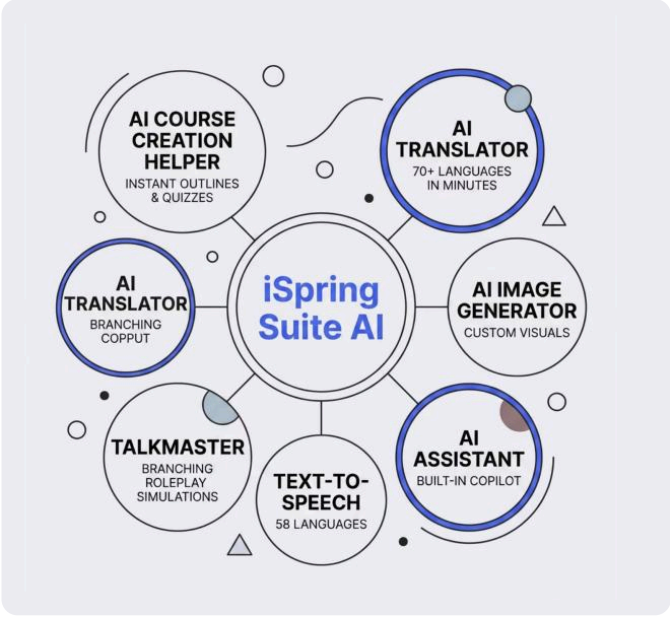
Enrollment, reminders, reporting, and assignment tasks can also be neatly automated, reducing L&D admin work by 60–80%.

Automating learning with iSpring Suite AI

The value becomes more specific when AI agents are used for repeatable production and everyday training tasks.

In iSpring Suite AI, this approach shows up across the course production workflow.

The AI course creation helper can generate course outlines and quizzes, helping teams move from a blank slide to a structured first draft faster. The AI assistant supports writing, rewriting, and refining content within the authoring process.



For multilingual training, AI translation helps localize course content into 70+ languages within minutes. Text-to-speech supports 58 languages, making it easier to create narrated courses without recording every voiceover manually. The AI image generator helps create custom visuals when stock images are too generic or off-brand.

For more interactive learning, tools like TalkMaster and branching simulations support role-play practice, while AI-supported workflows can speed up quiz creation and template-based production.

Try iSpring Suite AI for free

ispring lms

iSpring LMS now also features AI-powered course generation and takes AI assistance even further by including an assistant that answers questions about using the LMS. This helps reduce the time admins spend searching through documentation or waiting for support, so they can complete LMS tasks faster and keep training workflows moving.

Book a free demo of iSpring LMS

The takeaway

AI is best used for intelligent learning orchestration, not just speed

AI agents can speed up L&D, but speed alone is not the strategy.

The stronger opportunity is to move from static course delivery to intelligent learning orchestration: content, assessments, LMS data, reporting, and admin tasks working together through reusable AI workflows.

Start with one repeatable process: quiz creation, slide production, user reporting, enrollment, or course assignment. Define the workflow clearly, build or test an AI-assisted version, and measure whether it saves time, improves consistency, or gives learners faster support.

AI will not replace the human part of L&D. It will raise the value of human judgment, from choosing the right problem to deciding what learning is supposed to achieve.

Session focus: Human judgment in AI-assisted L&D, responsible AI workflows, quality control, learning transfer.

Discernment, Direction, and Quality: Human-Governed AI for L&D

Based on the talk by James Gilchrist, Director at Lighthouse L&D Consulting

Watch the full session on YouTube →

AI helps L&D and course developers complete numerous tasks much faster than before. James Gilchrist explains how to use this speed without letting it decide the learning goal, interpret the audience, judge quality, or approve work that still needs human review.

The problem

Faster output can look like progress but isn't always progress

AI arrives in L&D with a very tempting promise: faster outlines, faster drafts, faster production, and faster scaling. Some of this promise is real. AI does accelerate early work and makes experimentation easier. **However, faster is not automatically better:**

- A learning asset can be produced quickly and still fail to engage
- It can look polished but lack meaningful practice
- It can sound confident while missing the real context, tone, feedback, or transfer conditions that people need to apply learning at work

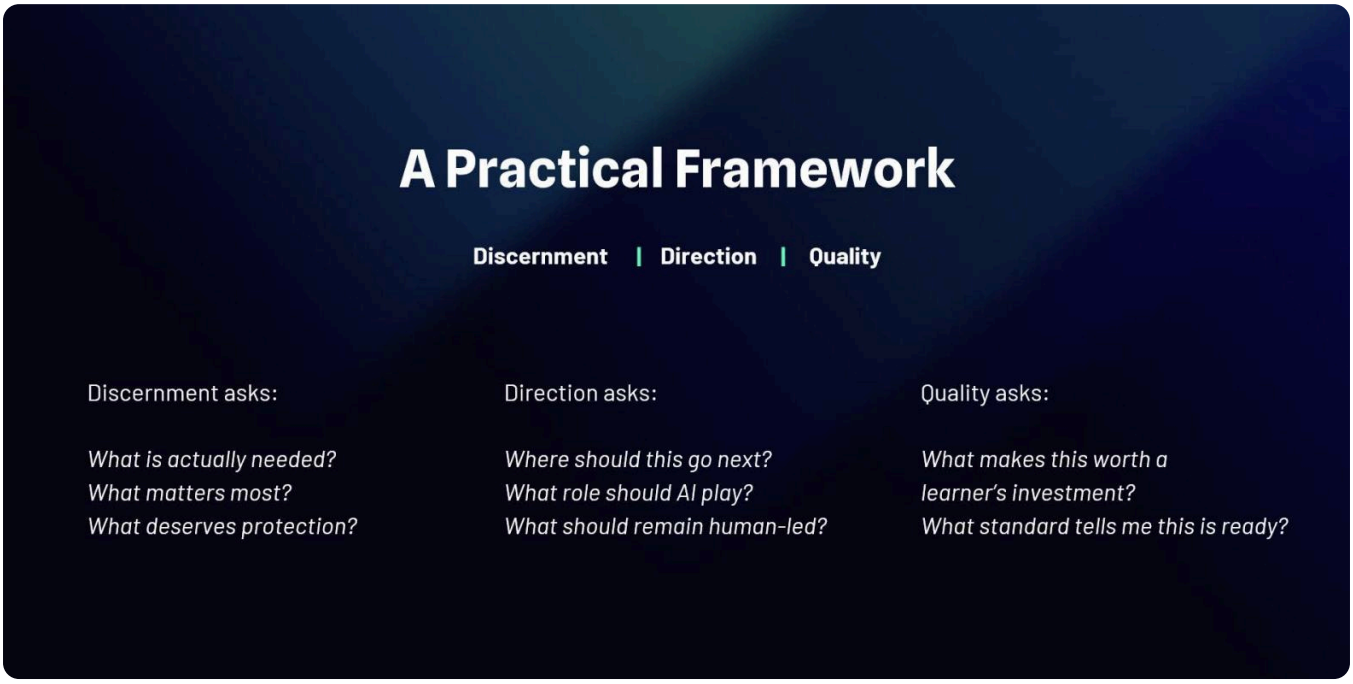
That being said, the problem is that teams start confusing more production with better learning.

That is why human governance matters. AI can generate, extend, and accelerate. But it doesn't reliably know what deserves protection, what compromises are acceptable, or whether an output still serves the purpose behind the learning experience.

The solution

Use the DDQ framework

A useful way to govern AI-assisted work is to keep three issues interconnected: **discernment, direction, and quality.**



01 **Discernment asks: What is really needed?**

Before using AI to build a course, module, job aid, scenario, or deck, L&D still needs to understand the real learning need.

Is the goal:

- Clearer communication?
- Better judgment?
- More confidence?
- Practice under pressure?
- Operational accuracy?
- Transfer to the job?

Until that's clear, AI can create the appearance of progress while moving the work in the wrong direction. Discernment protects the "why" before production begins.

02 Direction asks: What role should AI play?

Some tasks are a good match for AI acceleration. This includes summarizing, reformatting, transcribing, drafting first-pass structures, generating options, or creating variations for comparison.

Other tasks can be supported by AI but still need close human direction, like ideation, synthesis, scenario drafting, visual experimentation, tone refinement, and early structure.

And some work should remain clearly human led, such as:

- Interpreting learner needs
- Reading context
- Judging tone
- Recognizing ethical implications
- Protecting meaning
- Deciding what is ready to be trusted by another person

Direction keeps AI in a useful role instead of letting the tool steer the work.

03 Quality asks: Is this worth the learner's time?

Human review needs to ask:

- Does this create understanding?
- Does it support meaningful practice?
- Does it reflect the learner's context?
- Does it provide feedback, consequences, and opportunities for application?
- Does it help people transfer learning into action?

If the answer is no, the output is not ready, no matter how quickly it was produced.

How to apply discernment in real workflows

Human-governed AI doesn't mean avoiding AI altogether, of course. But you need to set clear boundaries before the work begins.

A team might decide:

- *"We use AI to accelerate first drafts, but not to define the learning goal."*
- *"We use AI to generate scenario options, but not to decide which one reflects the learner's reality."*
- *"We do not treat AI output as ready until it has been reviewed for context, accuracy, tone, and transfer."*
- *"Human review is required when the content involves judgment, ethics, risk, sensitive audiences, or high-stakes decisions."*

These rules protect the parts of L&D work that make the output trustworthy.

The takeaway

Let AI speed up the work, not lower the standard

AI can give L&D time, momentum, and creative range. Used well, it can free people from some of the blank-page struggle and repetitive drafting work.

The strongest AI-assisted processes keep the roles clear: AI supports the work, while humans define the need, guide the process, judge the output, and protect the learner's experience.

Session focus: AI-driven role change, preserving decision logic, workforce readiness, hidden judgment, AI oversight.

AI Will Change Work and L&D Must Preserve the Thinking Behind It

Based on the talk by Lynne McNamee, President at Lone Armadillo Learning

Watch the full session on YouTube →

> **“Don’t just teach the rule, teach what changes the rule.”**
>
> Lynne McNamee

As AI agents start handling routine tasks and handoffs, they can also hide the reasoning that used to be more apparent in the work itself. People may receive polished outputs without seeing the signals, exceptions, or escalation points behind them. See how L&D can capture this hidden decision logic and turn it into specific training assets: scenarios, checklists, and manager review tools.

The problem

AI automates the task and hides the thinking

Organizations are usually good at documenting processes through steps, systems, rules, required outputs, and standard workflows. All this documentation also helps AI tools automate and accelerate tasks. But a workflow is not the same as judgment, and that’s where problems may arise.

A workflow may show what happens first, second, and third. ✅

It may not show what an experienced employee notices when they decide a case is no longer routine, whom they notify, when they escalate, etc. ❌

Automation is already deeply ingrained in organizational processes, and entry-level tasks are being automated. New employees usually move directly into supervising AI outputs or handling exceptions without ever doing the foundational work manually.

This creates a major risk: **people may inherit the responsibility for harder decisions without the exposure that used to develop decision-making skills over time.** Besides, AI can blur the accountability lines, generate false data (hallucinate), and reward-hack its way to an outcome (optimizing for the target it was given while taking shortcuts that undermine the real intent of the work).

The solution

Capture decision logic

Start with the moments where the work stops being routine:

- Exceptions
- Escalations
- Weak handoffs
- Manager overrides
- AI outputs that need review
- Recurring confusion between teams

These are the points where hidden reasoning becomes visible, teachable, and reusable.

Five kinds of judgment L&D should look for

A simple way to organize decision logic
is to classify it into five categories:

- **Escalation**

  When does a decision need more authority, urgency, or attention?

- **Exceptions**

  When does the standard path no longer fit?

- **Timing and urgency**

  When does speed, delay, or sequence change the answer?

- **Notification and communication**

  Who needs to know what, and when?

- **Handoff judgment**

  What does the next person or team need to know to act well?

Example

If a logistics team uses AI to summarize shipment updates for other departments, L&D can turn the hidden judgment into a short review. Before an AI-generated update is sent, employees check it against three standards: urgency, exception, and downstream action.

A finished learning asset might look like this:

- **AI summary review checklist**

  Does the summary flag urgent shipments, changed delivery windows, missing documents, special handling, or customer-impacting delays?

- **Escalation criteria**

  Escalate when the AI output mentions customs delays, damaged goods, incomplete addresses, temperature-sensitive items, or any delivery risk affecting a key account.

- **Handoff standard**

  Every update sent to the next team must include what changed, why it matters, who is affected, and what action is needed next.

- **Scenario practice**

  Learners compare two AI-generated shipment summaries and decide which one is safe to forward, which one needs correction, and what context is missing.

Turn hidden reasoning into learning assets

Once decision-making patterns are captured, L&D can build structured learning support.

This might include:

- Scenario-based learning
- Branching practice
- Case libraries
- Decision catalogs
- Manager alignment sessions
- AI output review checklists
- Debriefing tools
- Discussion protocols, and more

So instead of only teaching “click here, then do this,” L&D can teach how to supervise AI-shaped work, when to challenge an output, what risk looks like, and how to preserve context across teams.

Start small. Pick one workflow where AI has changed the output or the handoff. Look for one place where context seems to be getting lost. Interview one experienced employee and ask what a newer person would miss. Then classify what you hear into the five judgment categories: escalation, exceptions, timing, notification, and handoff.

The takeaway Teach the judgment AI can’t expose

The next wave of workforce readiness will depend on whether organizations can make expert judgment visible before it disappears into automation. Teach the process when it is more important than cookie-cutter steps. When AI changes the work, reveal the thinking behind it.

For the business, this will lead to fewer broken handoffs, less rework, better escalation decisions, and safer human oversight of AI-shaped outputs. L&D can protect the decision quality that keeps work moving when the old learning-by-exposure path disappears.

Session focus: Manager enablement, new leader expectations, leadership confidence, self-directed development, feedback.

5 Practical Tools You and Your Leaders Can Use Today

Based on the talk by Bobby Powers, Director of Learning and Development at Jitasa

Watch the full session on YouTube →

New managers often step into the role with energy and good intentions, but very little actionable guidance. Here are five tools L&D teams can use to make expectations clearer, feedback more useful, leadership growth easier, and manager-employee relationships more transparent.

> **“Managers don’t know how they’re doing against whatever the expectations are.”**
>
> Bobby Powers

The problem

Managers are expected to lead before they know how to

Many managers are promoted because they were strong individual contributors. They know the work, understand the team, and have earned trust through performance. But management asks for a different skill set:

- Giving feedback
- Handling conflict
- Setting expectations
- Developing people
- Making judgment calls in uncomfortable situations

This major change can feel brutal, especially for first-time leaders. A new manager may suddenly be responsible for a team of 10, 20, or 50 people, while still trying to understand what good management even looks like.

A job description is not enough. Managers also need tools that explain what the company expects from leaders, how they can assess themselves, where they can go for help, and how they can build trust with their teams.

The solution

Build a simple manager support system

The strongest manager enablement doesn't rely on a single huge leadership course. It gives managers key tools they can return to when questions arise.

01 Define manager expectations beyond the job description

New leaders need to know what leadership looks like in your company.

A manager expectations tool works like leadership-specific core values. It can define what managers are expected to do around culture, feedback, accountability, communication, and team development.

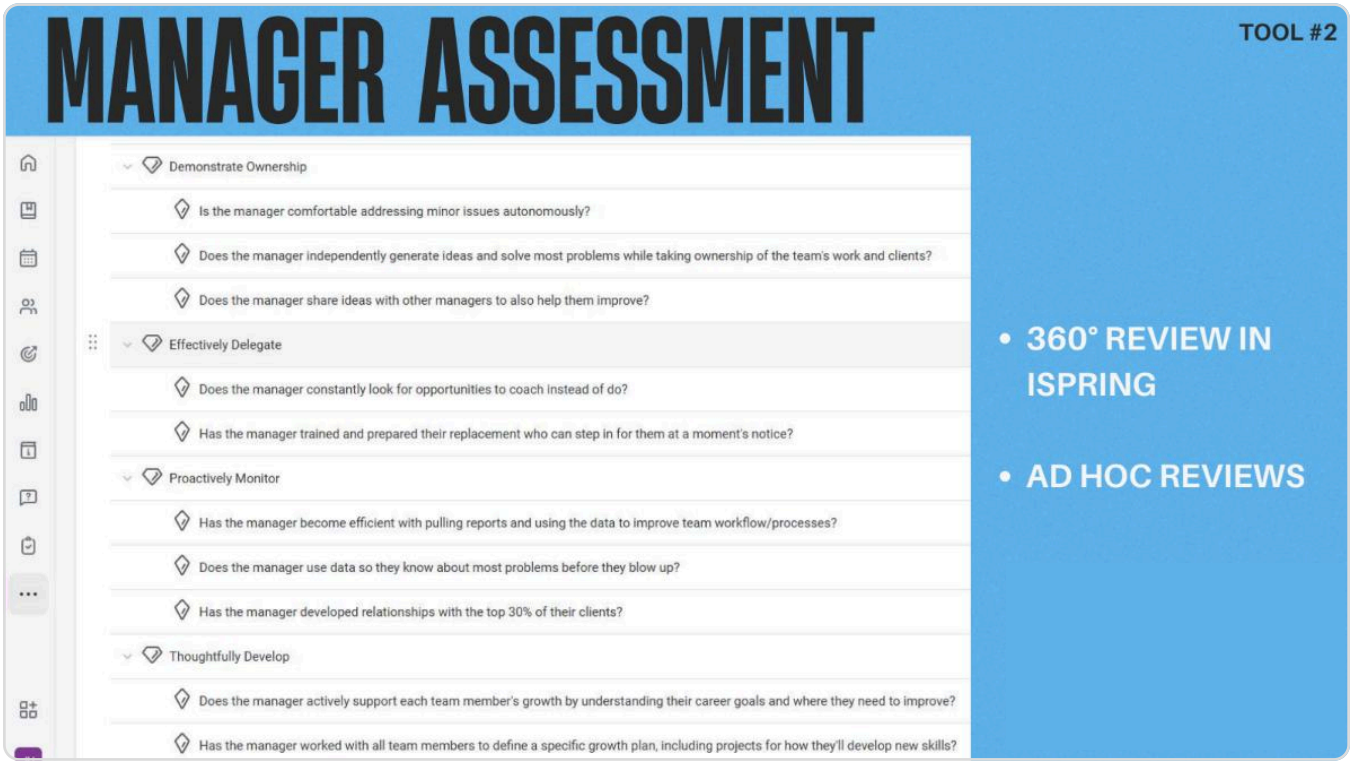
Of course, expectations can change according to manager tenure. A new manager should not be held to the same standard as someone who has been leading teams for several years. L&D can map expectations across levels, such as new managers, developing managers, and experienced managers.

Bottom line: give leaders a clear path at every stage and spell out detailed explanations.

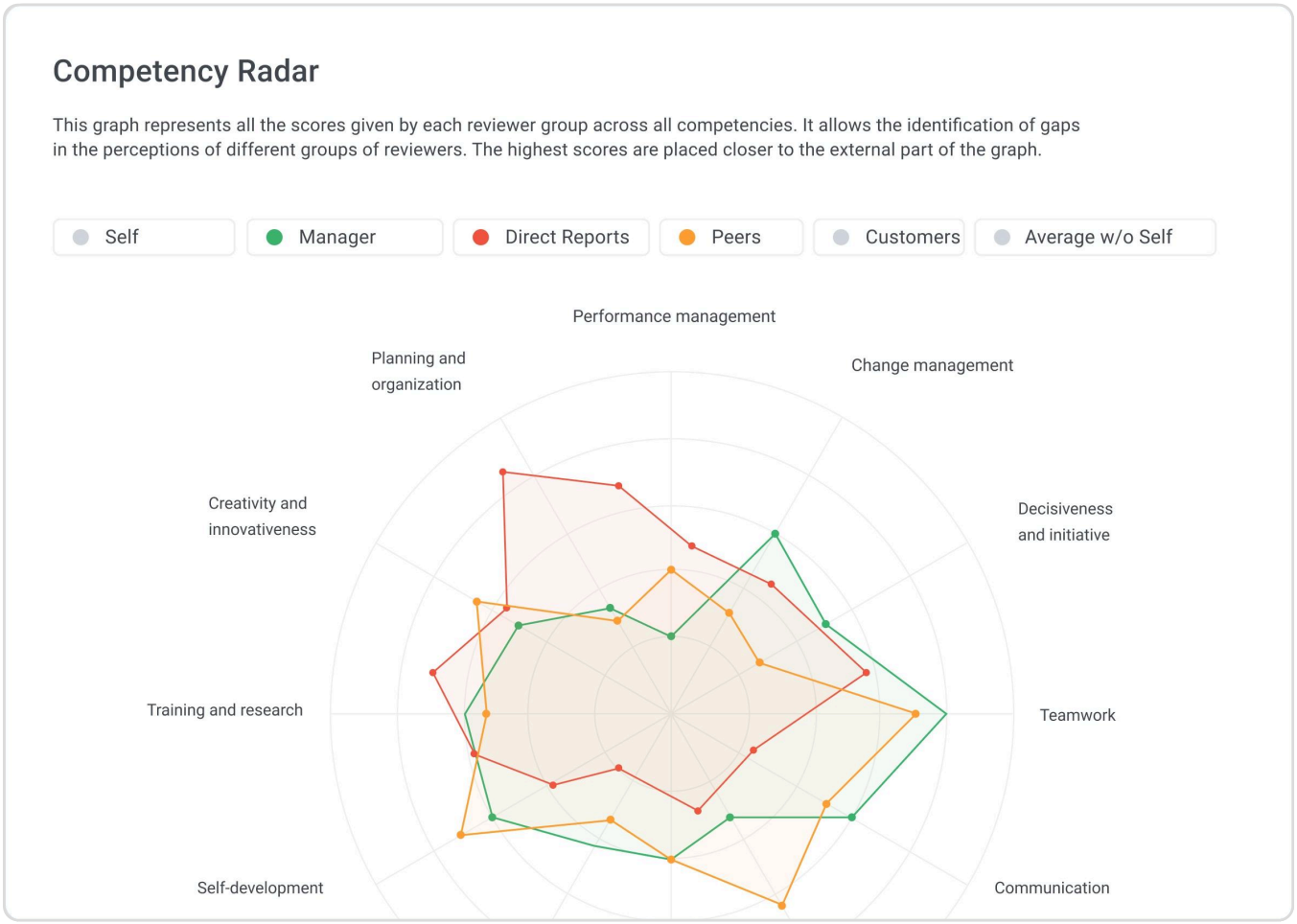
02 Assess managers against those expectations

Once expectations are clear, managers need to know how they're doing.

A manager assessment can be used during formal reviews, but it can also work as an ad hoc feedback tool when a leader is struggling. Instead of waiting for an annual review, L&D and HR can run a short assessment tied directly to manager expectations.



You can use **iSpring LMS** to run manager assessment cycles. 360-degree reviews are an excellent tool for this purpose. They collect feedback from multiple perspectives, such as direct reports, peers, supervisors, and the managers themselves. L&D and HR will have a fuller view of the leader's effectiveness and what support they might need.



This makes feedback more concrete. The conversation moves from vague comments to specific expectations that the manager can understand and work on.

03 Make space to talk about imposter syndrome

Many managers struggle with confidence after a promotion. They may feel unqualified, exposed, or worried that someone will discover they don't belong in the role.

That feeling is common. Bobby Powers cited research suggesting that around **80% of people experience imposter syndrome at some point.** Promotions are one of the moments when it often shows up.

L&D can help by naming it directly in manager training. **A useful exercise is to let leaders discuss what imposter syndrome feels like, how they respond to it, and what helps them move through it.**

- Some leaders benefit from challenging self-doubt with evidence: saved praise, project wins, or reminders of past success.
- Others benefit from observing the feeling without treating it as a fact, using it as a signal for growth rather than proof that they don't belong in their role.

The main value comes from normalization. When managers hear that respected leaders also feel this way, the shame drops, and the learning conversation becomes more honest.

04 Create a leadership learning list

Motivated managers often want to keep learning outside of formal training. Make it easier.

A leadership learning list can include:

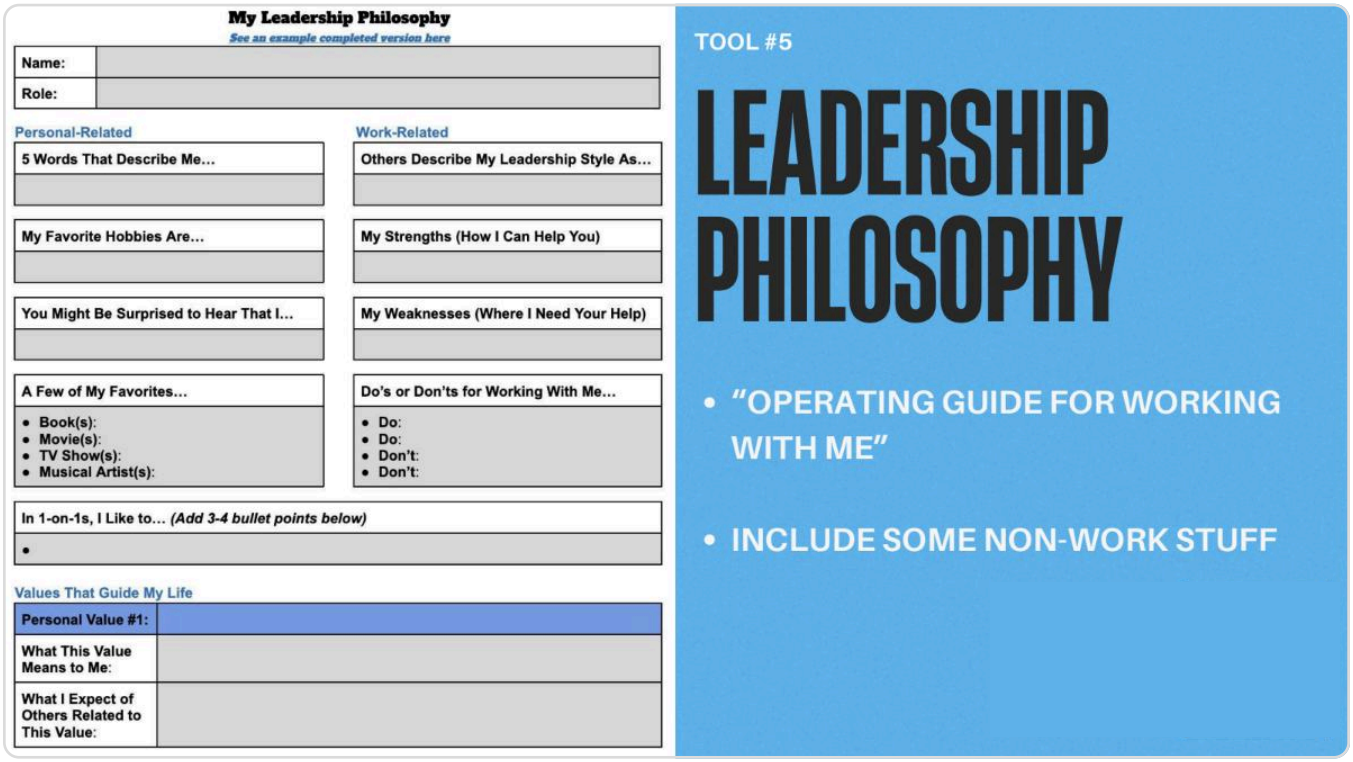
- Books and articles
- Podcasts
- Videos and TED talks
- Internal resources
- Guides organized by topic (delegation, feedback, coaching, conflict, accountability, communication, or decision-making)

This shouldn't replace self-directed discovery, but it gives managers a strong point of reference. Moreover, it helps L&D shape the learning culture by recommending resources that match the company's leadership philosophy.

05 Ask leaders to write a personal leadership philosophy

Employees want to understand how their manager works:

- What they care about
- How they communicate
- What frustrates them
- How they run one-on-ones
- What they value in a team



A personal leadership philosophy makes this visible. It can include work preferences, communication style, personal values, strengths, weaknesses, expectations, hobbies, and non-work context. This humanizes the manager and gives employees a better foundation for working together.

The same tool can also help aspiring managers reflect on their future leadership style. In hiring, it can even help candidates understand the culture before they join.

The takeaway Make management less mysterious

Managers need clear expectations, timely feedback, and simple ways to explain how they lead.

For L&D, the opportunity is multifaceted: build tools that managers can use before problems become performance issues. When leaders know what is expected, where they stand, where to learn, and how to communicate their style, management becomes less improvised and teams get stronger support.

Session focus: L&D career durability, role disruption, professional identity, human judgment in the age of AI, transferable capabilities.

Careers in Motion: Rethinking Growth, Relevance, and Direction in Modern L&D

Watch the full session on YouTube →

Based on the talk by David Kelly, L&D executive, advisor, speaker, and writer supporting the strategic intersection of learning and technology | Former Chairman and CEO, The Learning Guild

L&D careers are no longer defined by neat ladders, stable titles, or a single fixed area of expertise. This section shows how to rethink professional growth around durable value: the judgment, adaptability, business understanding, and problem-framing skills that travel with you even when tools, roles, and organizational needs change.

The problem

The old career assumptions are under pressure

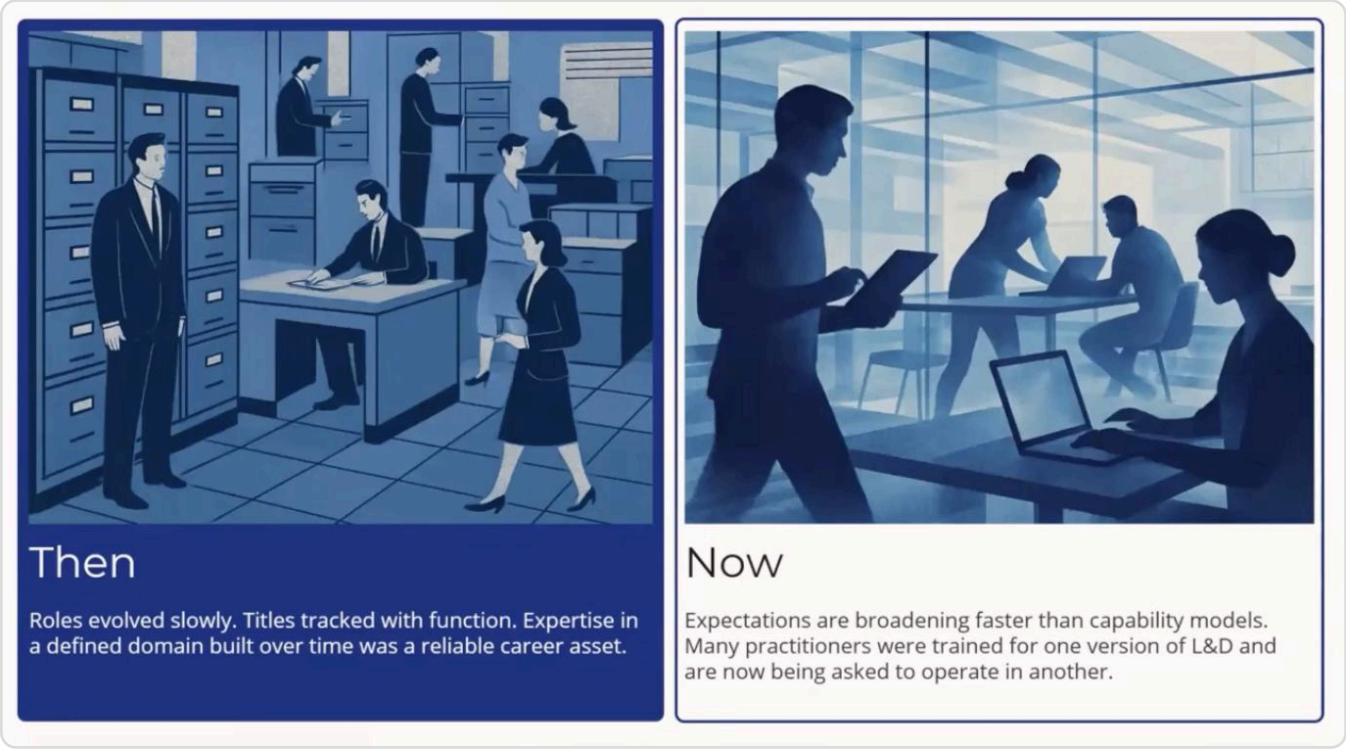
> **"What got us to this point in our careers may not be what we need to get us to the next stage of our careers."**
>
> David Kelly

Many L&D professionals built their careers around beliefs that used to feel reliable:

- Roles evolve gradually
- Titles describe the work
- Expertise stays valuable for a long time
- Career growth follows a clear path

These beliefs are no longer true – at least not entirely.

The work is changing faster than job titles can keep up with. An instructional designer may now be expected to design, develop, facilitate, analyze data, manage stakeholders, experiment with AI, support performance, and connect learning to business outcomes. **Two people with the same title may be doing completely different jobs in different organizations.**



That creates confusion. It also generates anxiety. People may still be doing strong work, but the ground underneath that work is shifting: technology is changing execution, organizations expect more visible business value, and L&D teams are being asked to operate across more functions with fewer fixed boundaries.

That's not to say that experience has lost value. The issue is that experience alone may not be enough if it stays tied to an older version of the field.

The solution

Separate your value from your title

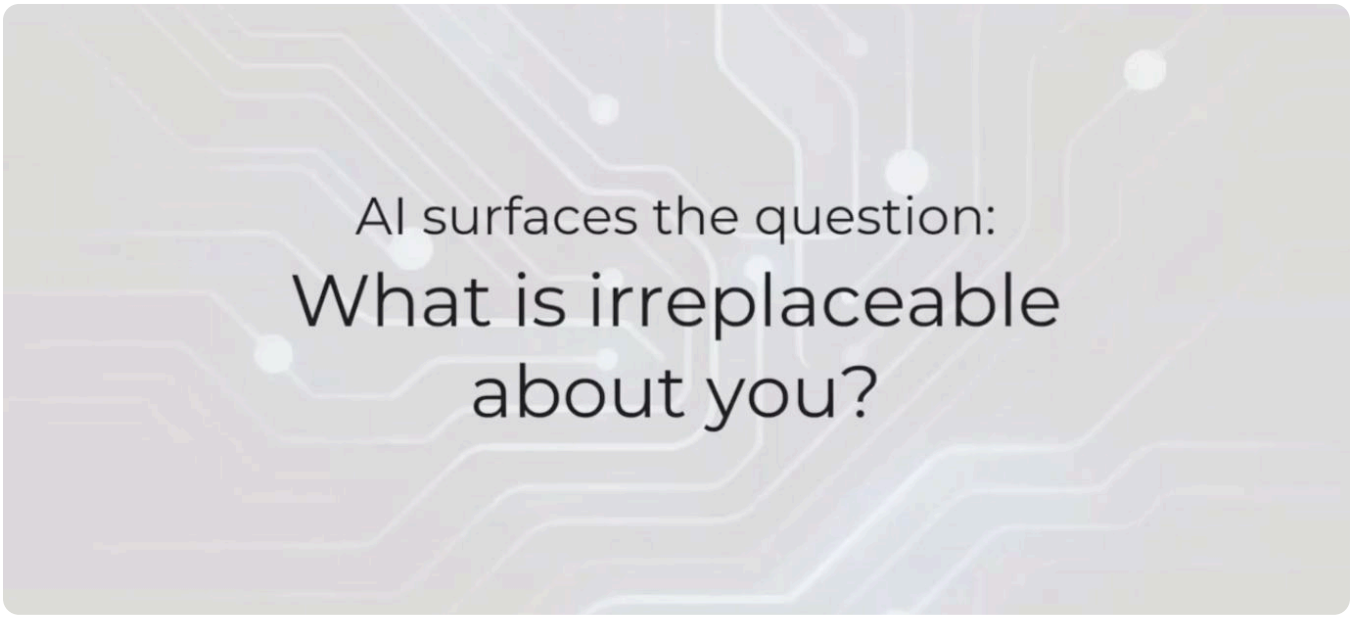
Career durability starts with a difficult but useful distinction: **what you do today is not the same as the value you bring.**

A role can disappear, a title can change, a tool can become outdated – you name it. But some capabilities travel across contexts:

- Strategic curiosity
- Business understanding
- Communication
- Systems thinking
- Learning agility
- Problem framing
- The ability to connect learning decisions to organizational needs

These are the assets that stand strong when the environment changes.

This strength is all the more important now as AI becomes more capable. If tools can make execution faster, easier, and cheaper, then human value becomes more visible in the parts that AI cannot own well, including judgment, context, perspective, ethical reasoning, and stakeholder understanding.



In other words, **future credibility in L&D will depend less on the volume of output and more on the quality of the decisions behind the output.**

Four trends to watch

Modern L&D careers are being reshaped by four major shifts:

01 **From content to performance**

Courses and assets still have a place, but owning content is not enough. L&D value increasingly comes from improving capability, supporting performance, and contributing to business movement.

02 **From role clarity to role fluidity**

Titles give an illusion of certainty. Greater value now often comes from moving across projects, functions, and contexts.

03 **From tool adoption to human judgment**

Using modern tools is a must, but the bigger question is what humans contribute when tools can accelerate execution.

04 **From role identity to contribution identity**

The more your identity depends on a title, the more destabilizing change becomes. At the same time, the more clearly you understand your transferable contribution, the easier it is to adapt.

Questions to ask yourself

Instead of looking for a fixed career roadmap, use questions that create clarity:

- What assumptions have I been making about career progression that may no longer apply?
- Is my professional identity too tied to a role, title, or familiar way of working?
- What part of my expertise is durable even if tools, org charts, and titles change?
- Am I known only for execution, or also for judgment, perspective, and problem framing?
- Where is the profession moving that I may be resisting, minimizing, or avoiding?
- If my current role disappeared tomorrow, what would I want people to say I uniquely bring to the table?

These questions help you separate temporary job duties from the strengths that still create value when the role changes.

The takeaway

Build career durability, not career certainty

Don’t try to predict every turn in the future of L&D. This kind of certainty simply doesn’t exist.

A stronger, more realistic goal is to build a professional self that can keep moving when the field changes. So, stay curious, understand the business, make your judgment visible, and translate your value into new contexts. Keep learning without losing sight of what makes your contribution meaningful.

The future of L&D will belong to those who can adapt.

Session focus: L&D decision-making, project prioritization, stakeholder risk.

All in on a Bad Hand: Exploring Options for L&D Departments That Don't Know When to Fold

Watch the full session on YouTube →

Based on the talk by Cara North, Learning and Development Leader, speaker, and author of Learning Experience Design Essentials | Founder of The Learning Camel

Some training projects look risky long before they launch, from the vague goal to the missing business measures. Still, the work continues. By the time the doubts become impossible to ignore, the team has already spent time, budget, learner attention, and political capital.

See how L&D can improve the quality of these decisions earlier, far before a weak request turns into a finished program that should not have been built.

The problem

L&D often keeps building after the warning signs appear

Capability is not always the issue. A good L&D team knows how to structure content, choose a format, build learning assets, and ship a program.

Decision-making is a much more complex factor because it raises tough questions:

- Should we build this at all?
- Should we stop?
- Are we solving a real problem, or just protecting someone's opinion?

Every training project is a bet.

L&D is wagering time, budget, learner attention, team capacity, and credibility. Time is especially expensive because learners can't get it back. Budget becomes harder to redirect once it is approved. Credibility is even harder to measure, but every forgettable or low-value program makes the next business conversation more difficult.

The uncomfortable truth is that a good decision can still produce a bad outcome, and a bad decision can still look successful. High completion rates, positive feedback, or stakeholder praise don't always mean the original decision was sound.

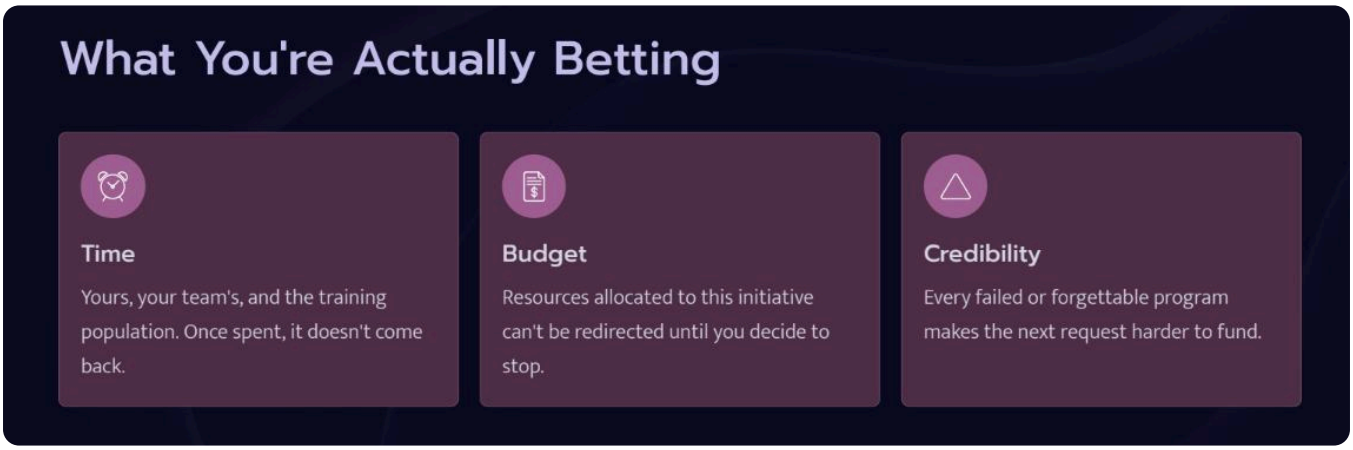
That's why L&D needs to judge not only what happened, but how the decision was made.

The solution

Improve the quality of the bet

L&D can't remove uncertainty. Business priorities change, stakeholders disagree, and hidden constraints emerge throughout a project. But teams can make better decisions in uncertain situations.

A useful place to start is by treating each project like a bet with three clear stakes:



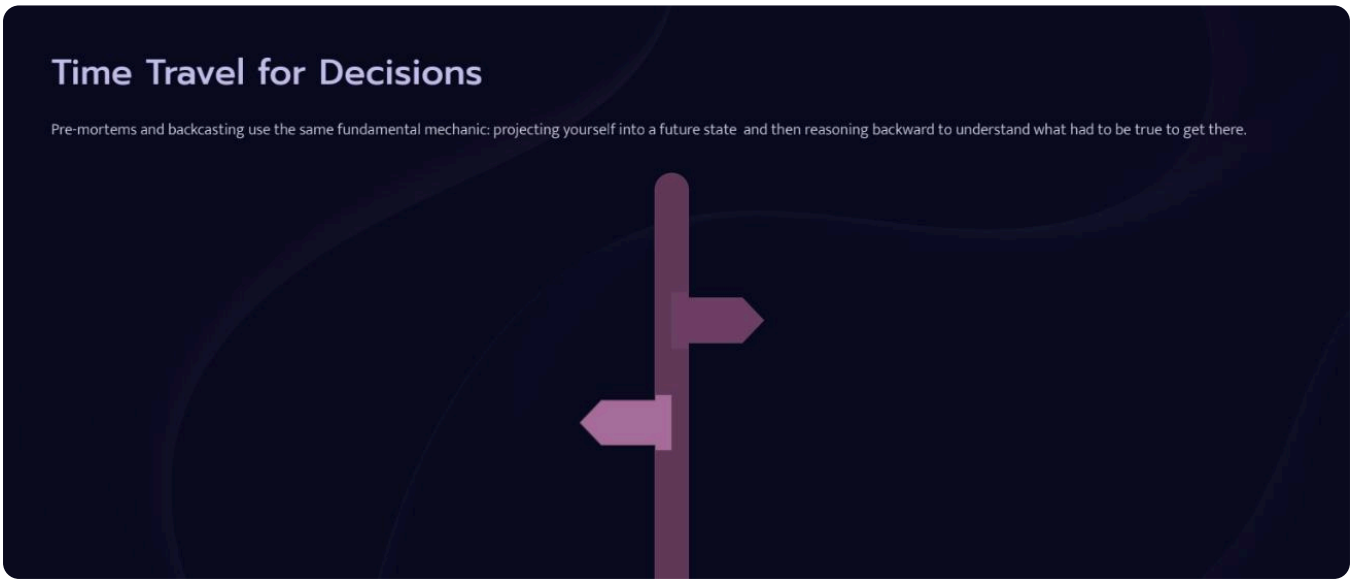
01 **Time.** Whose time are we spending: L&D's, stakeholders', managers', learners'?

02 **Budget.** What resources are we committing, and what will not get funded because of it?

03 **Credibility.** If this program is forgettable, unnecessary, or misaligned, what does it tell the business about L&D?

Use pre-mortems before weak assumptions become expensive

A pre-mortem asks the team to imagine the project has already failed and work backward from what went wrong.



Don’t take it as pessimism. It’s a safe way to surface risk before momentum takes over. Product teams use this kind of thinking to test assumptions early, and L&D can use it to strengthen project decisions.

Ask:

- What would make this fail six months from now?
- What system, stakeholder, or process could block success?
- What are we assuming that we have not validated?
- What signal would tell us this is no longer worth building?

Run this conversation with stakeholders, not just inside L&D. It helps reveal the risks that people already sense but may not voice openly.

Use backcasting to define what success requires

Backcasting does the opposite. Imagine the project succeeded six months from now, then work backward.

Ask:

- What did leadership do to support it?
- What did participants have access to?
- What did the environment allow?
- What changed outside the training itself?

After all, L&D cannot carry the entire outcome alone. If success depends on manager reinforcement, system changes, communication, opportunities to practice, or leadership visibility, those conditions need to be clear before launch.

Set stop criteria in time

Lots of weak projects continue because the team is already heavily invested.
Stop criteria prevent that.

Define in advance what would make the team pause, change direction, or stop. For example:

- Stakeholders stop engaging
- The project no longer aligns with a business measure
- The learners' needs cannot be clearly validated
- The expected impact does not justify the time required from the learner
- The environment will not support the behavior change

A simple test helps here. Ask: **if someone proposed this initiative today for the first time, would we still approve it?** If the answer is no, the project needs a serious rethink.

The takeaway

Protect L&D's credibility by making fewer bad bets

L&D impact is shaped both by what the team creates and by what it chooses not to waste time on.

Better decision-making means naming the bet, understanding stakeholder risk, testing assumptions early, running pre-mortems and backcasting, and setting stop criteria before momentum replaces judgment.

Your objective is to stop treating every request as a commitment and start protecting the time, budget, learner attention, and credibility that make L&D valuable.

Day 3

Session focus: Evidence-informed learning strategies, scenario-based learning, project-based learning, immersive learning, AI-supported design.

Learning Strategies That Actually Stick

Watch the full session on YouTube →

Based on the talk by Luke Anthony Hobson, Assistant Director of Instructional Design at MIT xPRO and Lecturer for the University of Miami's School of Education and Human Development, author, podcaster

> **"How learning works hasn't changed. Being able to do different types of learning strategies that are effective, especially for adults, hasn't changed either. But the way that we implement them and the way that we actually create them is certainly changing."**
>
> Luke Anthony Hobson

Discover how to use simulations, scenarios, projects, role-plays, and reflection to design learning that asks people to do more than absorb content. Learners should make decisions, test ideas, practice conversations, build toward real outcomes, and pause long enough to make the learning stick.

The problem

Learners don’t need more next-button training

Unfortunately, many learning experiences still operate like information dumps. The monotonous delivery forces learners to click through content, answer multiple-choice questions, and move on. This kind of learning may be easy to build and track, but it rarely creates the kind of experience that adults remember, discuss, or apply later.

A much stronger alternative is to design learning around action. Ask them to make decisions, solve problems, practice conversations, build something, or reflect on what they would do differently.

This becomes even more important in the context of AI. If learners can search, summarize, or generate basic information instantly, L&D needs to design experiences that go far beyond recall. The value gravitates toward practice, context, judgment, feedback, and application.

The solution

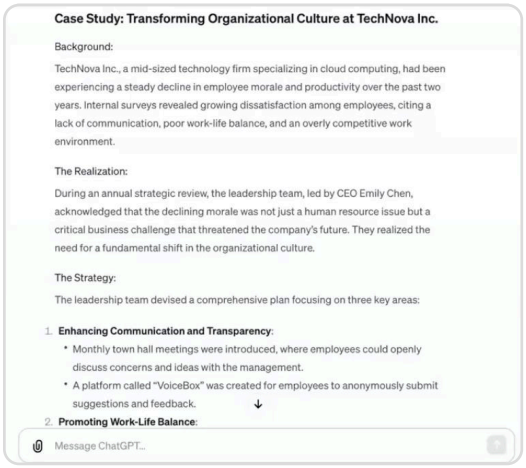
Bring the real world into the learning experience

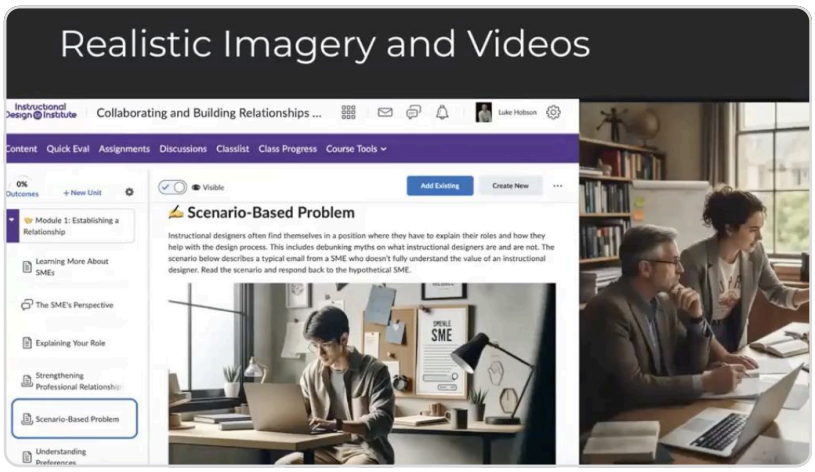
Effective learning strategies work because they make learners do something meaningful with the content.

01 **Simulations** let learners practice decisions in a safe environment. For example, a simulation where learners lead a change initiative can ask them to test different actions and see how quickly others adopt their idea. When a simulation is designed well, learners may choose to repeat it because they want to improve their results.

AI can now help teams create these simulations faster. Tools like Claude can generate branching scenario structures, realistic responses, score pages, and downloadable HTML simulations. The first version still needs human testing and revision, but AI can make simulation design more accessible than it used to be.

02 **Scenario-based learning** places learners inside a realistic situation and asks them to solve a problem. This is a great format choice when the goal is decision-making, not memorization. AI is good at drafting case studies, company profiles, characters, and supporting materials. Once again, a designer needs to check whether the scenario is realistic, challenging, and instructionally useful.

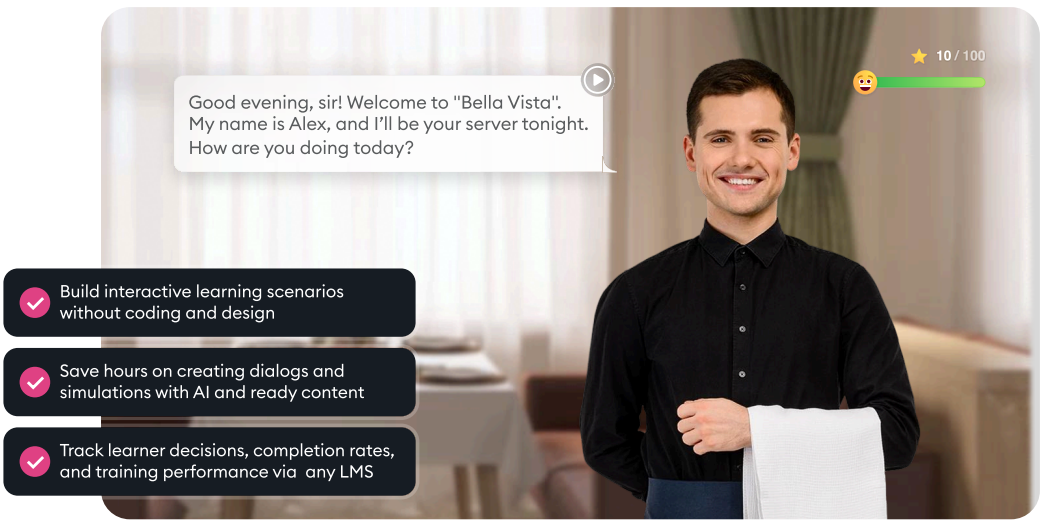




03 **Project-based learning** works well when the outcome is too complex to complete in a single step. Instead of asking learners to produce a final website, strategy, plan, or prototype all at once, break the work into milestones. Learners submit smaller pieces, receive feedback, revise, and build toward the final project.

04 **Role-play** helps learners practice moments that feel high-pressure in real life: negotiation, conflict, leadership conversations, interviews, sales calls, project management conversations, or salary discussions. For example, a financial planning course for young service members can include role-play scripts for buying a car, providing learners with sample phrases to use before they enter a stressful negotiation.

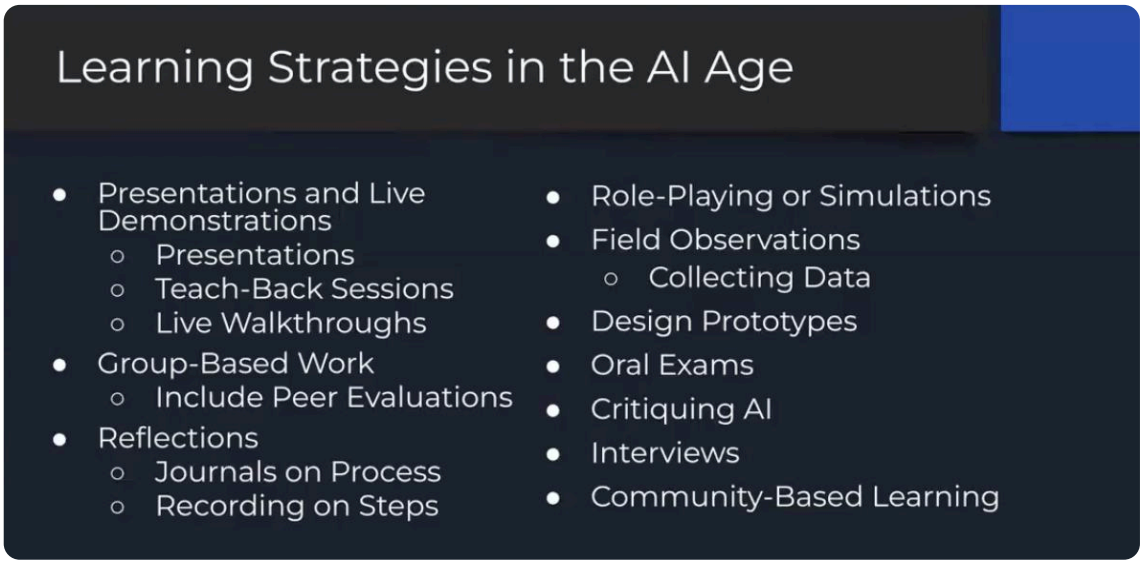
iSpring Suite AI allows you to create role-plays directly in the authoring workflow. You can build realistic dialogue simulations with branching choices, feedback, and different outcomes, so learners can practice what to say before they face the real conversation. It's the perfect choice for soft skills training, like customer service, sales, management, coaching, and compliance conversations.



05 **Reflection** helps learners stop and process what they have just experienced. A simple reflection prompt at the end of a module can ask:

- What was your most significant takeaway?
- How could you apply this?
- What would you do differently in a future situation?

As you can see, learners will not always pause on their own. **Good design creates a pause for them.**



Other learning strategies include peer evaluations, oral exams, community-based learning, and field observations or interviews that require learners to collect information from real people and real environments.

These approaches make learning more visible. Learners have to explain their reasoning, respond to feedback, apply ideas in context, and show the process behind their final answer.

The takeaway Make learning harder to fake

Weak assessments become easier to game thanks to AI. **Stronger learning asks people to do something AI cannot fully fake for them:**

- Present and demonstrate
- Explain their reasoning
- Reflect on experiences
- Critique AI output, and more

That is the real test of whether learning sticks. You need to make sure that people practice the kind of thinking and action that the work actually requires.

Session focus: Performance consulting, evidence-informed eLearning design, attention and cognitive load, visual design.

The Art and Science of eLearning

Watch the full session on YouTube →

Based on the talk by Mike Taylor, Learning designer, co-author of Think Like a Marketer, Train Like an L&D Pro

eLearning has become easier to produce, which makes it easier to underestimate. A clean template, a fast authoring tool, or an AI-generated draft can make course creation look like assembly work. The harder part is the design thinking behind it, like knowing when training is the right answer, how much content the learner can process, and how visuals shape understanding.

Mike Taylor breaks this craft into three essential questions to help creators design content around how people learn.

The problem

Course creation can look easier than it actually is

From the outside, eLearning seems straightforward. There are user-friendly authoring tools and numerous templates, and content generation can be outsourced to AI. But effective eLearning sits at the intersection of several disciplines:

- Instructional design
- Usability
- Storytelling
- Visual communication
- Learner psychology and more

In other words, technology is only one part of the work. A course can be visually appealing, interactive, and delivered quickly – and totally ineffective. If it solves the wrong problem, overloads learners, or presents information in a way that people can't process, no tool can help.

That's why the real craft of eLearning starts before the first slide takes shape.

The solution

Use three criteria before and during design

A simple but comprehensive ID framework includes three design criteria for every eLearning project. You can approach them as questions:

01 **Is training the right solution?**

When a stakeholder says, *"We need training, and we need it yesterday,"* the problem may already have been misdiagnosed. People underperform for many reasons: unclear expectations, poor feedback, outdated tools, missing resources, misaligned incentives, broken processes, lack of motivation, misaligned roles, or life circumstances.

Training mainly helps when the gap is knowledge or skill. If the real issue is unsatisfactory tools, unclear standards, or conflicting incentives, even excellent eLearning will not correct it.

A performance consulting mindset helps L&D pause before building and ask:

- Are expectations clear?
- Do people have the resources they need?
- Is good performance visible?
- Are people getting useful feedback?
- Is there an obstacle we can remove before creating training?

02 Are we designing it the right way?

If training is the right answer, the next question is whether the course is designed around how people learn.

People engage in eLearning for two broad reasons: **to remember applicable knowledge and to be able to do something.** But both are difficult when the course overwhelms working memory. Learners aren't waiting eagerly for another LMS assignment. They have deadlines, notifications, open browser tabs, and competing priorities. The course has to fight for attention.

Following this logic, the design needs to reduce overload and guide focus. Use these tips:

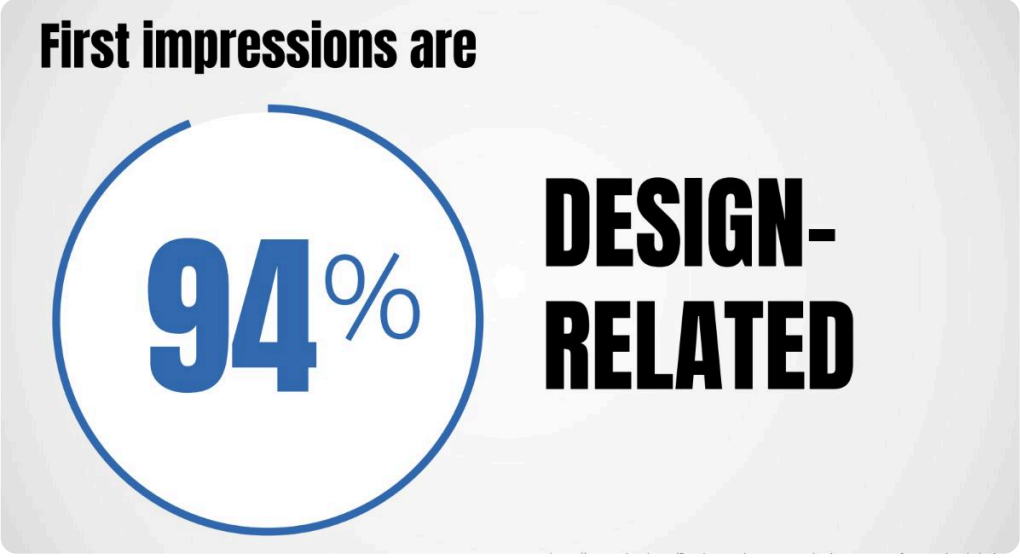
- Start with a hook: a problem, question, scenario, or moment of tension that gives learners a reason to care.
- Then, break the content into small, purposeful pieces.
- Cut what learners don't need.
- Replace long explanations with decisions, comparisons, practice, feedback, or simple support tools.

Sometimes, the best solution is not a full course. It may be a checklist, short demo, job aid, or quick reference. Other times, a larger course with practice and feedback is justified. Right-size the intervention instead of defaulting to a full eLearning module every time.

As Mike put it through John Medina's idea, too much training becomes *"lots of force-feeding and not enough digestion."* Exposure is not learning. Learners need time and structure to process, connect, and apply.

03 **Are we making it visually clear?**

Visual design affects attention, trust, usability, and credibility.



Good visuals show relationships, contrast, sequence, cause and effect, or abstract ideas that would be harder to process as text alone. Make sure your visuals carry meaning and don't just fill space. Use them to:

- Guide attention
- Reduce cognitive load
- Make key concepts more concrete

If the design creates unnecessary cognitive load, the learner spends mental energy decoding the course instead of processing the content.

The takeaway

Build courses only when they clearly add value

L&D shouldn't rush from request to production. First, confirm that training can help achieve specific goals. Then cut unnecessary content, create space for thinking and practice, and design the screen to facilitate processing the message.

Anyone can build a course now. L&D is there to make sure it's built to support people and help them develop the right skills in the right environment.

Session focus: Low-resource learning design, backward design, reusable assets, project management, LMS analytics.

Designing Impactful Learning Experiences with Limited Resources

Watch the full session on YouTube →

Based on the talk by Marina Arshavsky, Instructional Design Consultant and Educator, Founder of Your eLearning World

Limited resources don't automatically mean weaker learning. They force a different kind of design discipline with clearer priorities, tighter choices, and smarter use of what already exists. See how you can protect quality when time, budget, or team capacity is limited by using a simple framework: build, borrow, and buy.

The problem

Teams try to save time in the wrong place

When a learning request arrives with a short deadline or no budget, the pressure is usually to move straight into development. People are often pushed to turn to shortcuts and quickly convert the PowerPoints, create raw modules, publish the course, and move on.

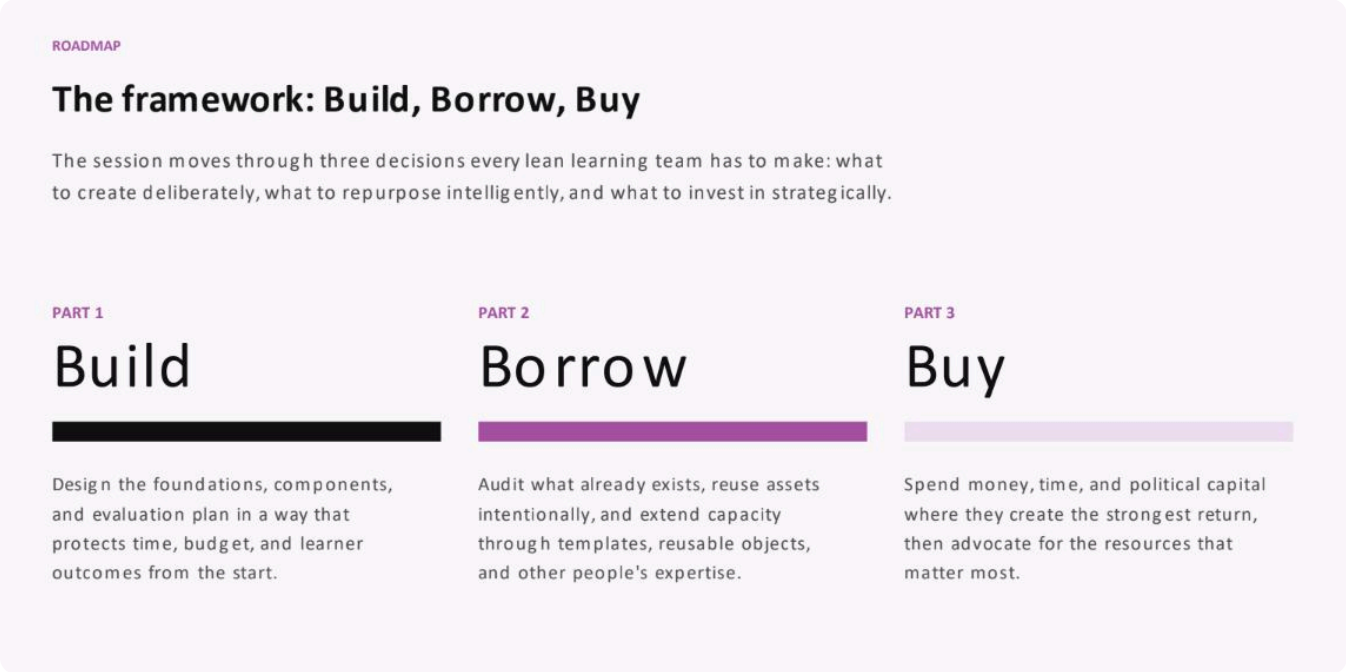
This forced process can be expensive because building a solution that doesn't match the real learning need is one of the biggest budget killers. If the course is aimed at the wrong outcome, every hour spent developing slides, visuals, interactions, and assessments ends up being wasted effort.

That's why the work that happens before development matters most, especially when resources are limited.

The solution

Build, borrow, and buy intentionally

A low-resource project needs a clear decision framework.



01 **Build** means designing the foundation properly: outcomes, evidence, structure, motivation, assessment, and evaluation.

02 **Borrow** is about reusing the resources that are already at hand, including slide decks, webinars, manuals, templates, SOPs, recordings, SME expertise, and reusable learning objects.

03 **Buy** means investments of various kinds. It can be time, money, tools, outside help, or political capital only where it creates the strongest return.

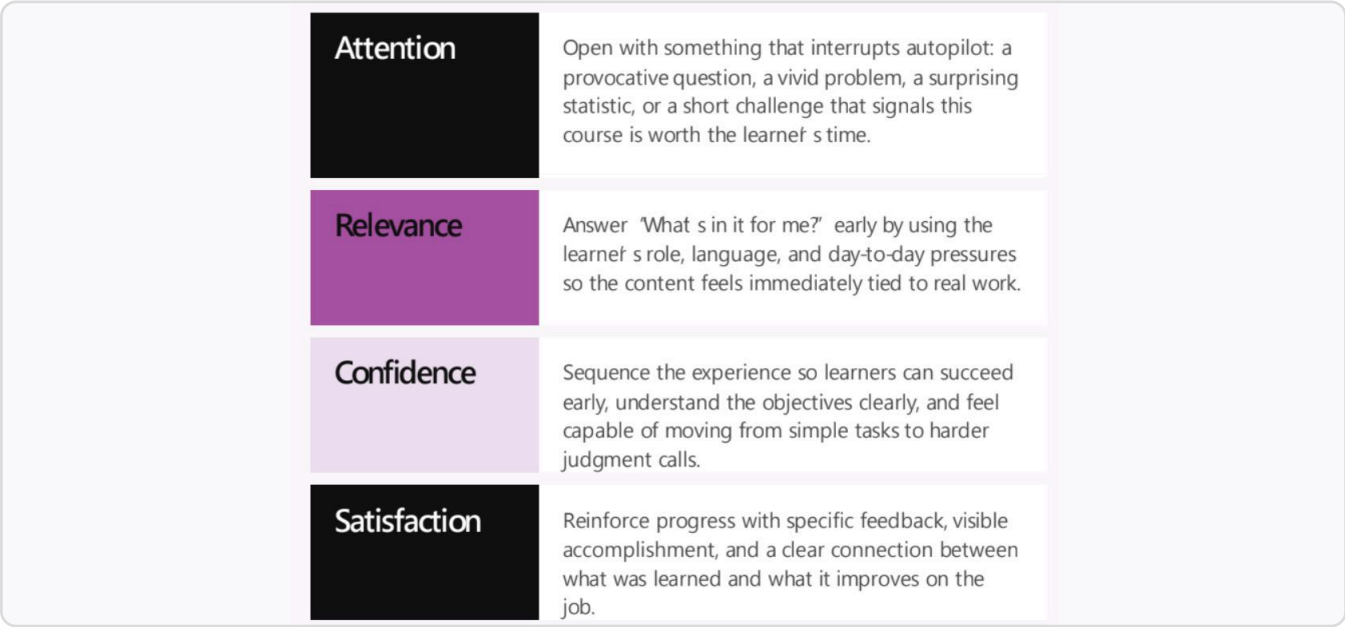
The point is to spend design effort where it protects the project from rework. The fact that you avoid overspending along the way is a nice extra.

Build: protect quality early on

Start with backward design. Define what learners must be able to do, what evidence will prove it, and only then what learning experience will support that result. This sequence forces every screen, activity, and asset to justify its place.

Motivation also needs to be designed from the start. Use Keller's ARCS model as a guide:

- Get attention with a challenge or problem.
- Make relevance clear through the learner's role and pressures.
- Build confidence through early success.
- Create satisfaction through feedback and visible progress.



Four documents can prevent expensive rework:

01 A **design document** to clarify the audience, scope, objectives, requirements, and approval points

02 A **script** to shape clear language

03 A **storyboard** for reviewing flow and interactions before production

04 A **prototype** for complex or nonlinear projects where stakeholders need to see and test the experience early on

Borrow: reuse what you have

Before building, audit existing materials across shared drives, LMS folders, SMEs, teams, and previous projects. Look for slide decks, webinars, manuals, SOPs, process demos, policy updates, and recordings. Then sort them by purpose, audience, freshness, and format.

Some assets should be retired, but others can become job aids, short modules, scenarios, assessments, or visuals:

- A webinar clip might become a microlearning asset
- An SOP might become a checklist
- A subject matter expert recording might become the basis for a scenario

Reusable learning assets are especially valuable when they are self-contained, tied to one clear objective, easy to tag, and maintained with owners, version notes, and review dates.

Buy: invest where it improves outcomes

Buying strategically goes beyond purchasing a tool. It can mean investing in project management, outside help, templates, media, or a workflow the team can actually sustain.

Good project management is one of the cheapest ways to protect quality.

- Plan the scope, stakeholders, timeline, responsibilities, and risks
- Track changes and budget
- Close the project by documenting lessons learned, archiving reusable assets, and recording outcomes so the next project starts smarter

When asking for resources, frame the request around business impact, like faster onboarding, fewer errors, better compliance, reduced rework, or stronger learner performance. **Don’t argue only for the cost of a tool.** Explain what the organization gains if the investment is approved.

The takeaway

Limited resources require sharper design choices

When resources are limited, don't cut analysis, design, or evaluation first. Optimize them. The easiest part to simplify is often development: choose scenarios, case studies, meaningful level-two interactions, and focused assessments instead of expensive custom simulations or decorative media.

Build the right foundation, borrow what already works, and buy only where the return is clear.

Session focus: Cultural intelligence in ID, adapting global learning experiences, low- and high-context communication, learner research.

Designing Culturally Intelligent Learning Experiences

Based on the talk by Hanane Anoua, Senior Learning and Development Partner

Watch the full session on YouTube →

> **"AI can give you the pictures. It can translate the content into different languages in one second. But AI cannot sit in Riyadh or Dubai to understand that a moment of silence means respect and not disengagement."**
>
> Hanane Anoua

Global learning can look localized yet miss the context. People now easily access content with translated courses, subtitles, and region-specific examples, but how do you ensure that learners read the situation the way you intended?

This section looks at the design choices that underpin localization, including communication style, trust-building, feedback, participation, facilitation, and the assumptions that L&D teams bring to global learning projects.

The problem

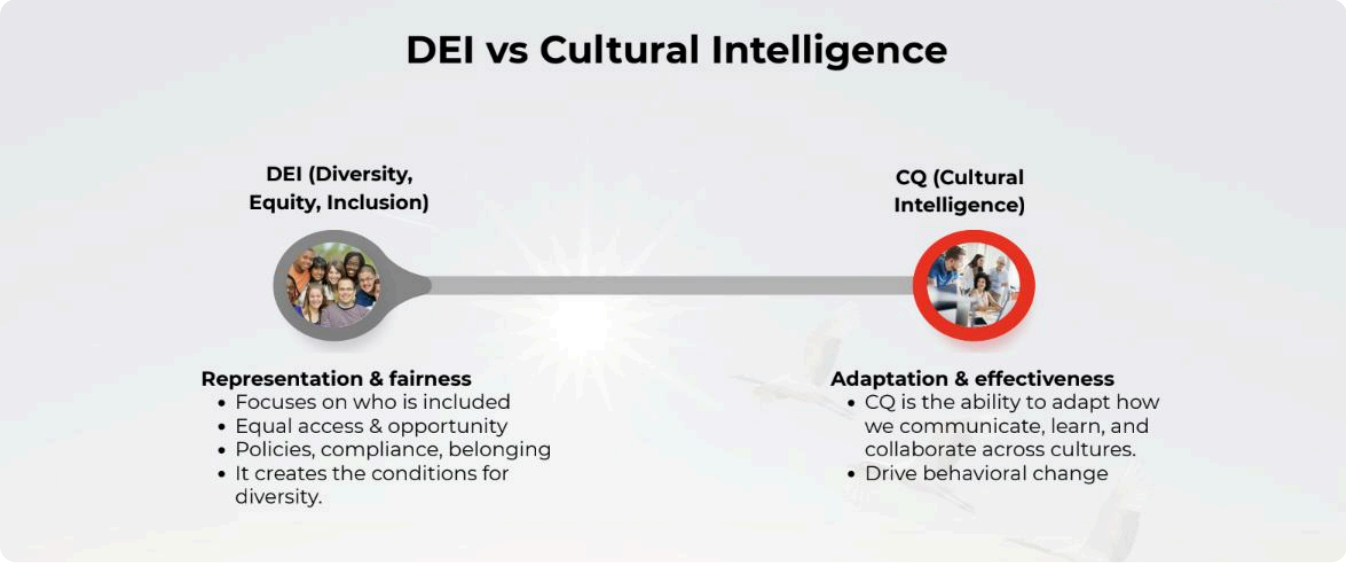
Global learning often stops at representation

Many global learning projects treat cultural adaptation as a simple checklist. You typically translate the course, add captions, use region-specific case studies, and include diverse visuals. These are useful steps, but they don't guarantee culturally intelligent learning.

The deeper issue is that learners bring more than different languages or locations to the process. They also bring different:

- Norms around communication
- Hierarchy
- Participation and feedback mechanisms
- Decision-making
- Psychological safety

For example, "speaking up" can signal engagement and ownership in one context. In another, challenging a senior leader publicly may feel disrespectful or risky. If a course assumes that active participation always looks like public debate, it may misread silence as disengagement when the learner is actually showing respect, caution, or cultural awareness.



That's why cultural intelligence is a key ingredient to globalized learning that complements DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion).

- DEI helps create representation, fairness, and access.
- Cultural intelligence helps L&D adapt communication, facilitation, and learning design so the experience can work across cultures.

The solution

Design with invisible cultural codes in mind

First, you need to understand the difference between low-context and high-context communication.

In **low-context cultures,** communication is usually more direct, explicit, and task-focused. Learners may expect clear objectives, step-by-step guidance, hands-on exercises, open discussion, practical takeaways, and direct feedback.

In **high-context cultures,** communication is often more indirect and relationship-based. Learners need more time to build trust with the facilitator, connect with the group, and understand the context before moving into debate. Storytelling, relational learning, group-based discussion, and private or written feedback may work better than public correction.

This framework is not a rulebook. People move between cultures, organizations have their own norms, and individual preferences vary. But it gives L&D a useful design lens. The question to ask is: **How will this audience receive the experience?**

Use the DIVE framework before scaling

01 **Discover who the learners are.** Go beyond country, geography, or language. Look at communication norms, values, beliefs, expectations, hierarchy, feedback preferences, and what good participation looks like for this audience.

02 **Identify assumptions in the design.** Every design carries assumptions. A request like *“we need people to speak up more”* already assumes that public speaking is the right behavior. Before building courses, ask whether the desired behavior fits the cultural context or needs to be adapted.

03 **Validate with learners.** Don't rely only on stakeholders. Run listening sessions with learners. Ask what an ideal learning experience looks like for them, how they prefer feedback, what makes participation safe, and what kinds of examples feel relevant.

04 **Execute with flexibility.** Culturally intelligent design doesn't always require separate courses for every country. You can build one learning architecture and adapt the facilitation, discussion prompts, examples, manager reinforcement, assessment format, and support materials locally.

The takeaway Go global, act local

Global learning is effective when you design a strong core experience and then adapt the parts that shape trust, participation, interpretation, and behavior change.

For the business, this reduces the risk of rolling out training that looks inclusive but fails to make an impact. When done correctly, globalized learning can improve engagement, increase psychological safety, support behavior change, and help global teams collaborate with fewer misunderstandings.