

BUILD
EMPIRE

L&D TRENDS 2026



Introduction

Reflecting on 2025:

Last year, L&D focused heavily on immersive experiences, AI adoption, gamification, microlearning, and soft skills.

Organisations were embracing personalised learning and hybrid approaches, while employee well-being and DEI became integral to L&D strategies. These initiatives helped companies adapt to rapidly changing workplaces and prepare for digital-first, skills-driven growth.

Looking Ahead to 2026:

The L&D landscape in 2026 builds on these foundations but shifts toward outcome-driven, integrated, and community-focused learning experiences.

AI is becoming a hands-on assistant rather than just a recommendation engine, frontline and hybrid workers demand mobile-first experiences, and leadership development returns as a strategic priority.

In essence, 2026 is about learning that drives performance, engages communities, and adapts to the real world—with smarter technology, smarter measurement, and smarter people at the center.



Key takeaways

- ✓ AI is evolving. Keep your ear to the ground and don't be afraid to test out new tools. If they don't work, move on!
- ✓ Skills are still important, but they're downscaled. Instead of a rush to drive skills, L&D leaders are taking stock of what skills are actually essential and being more mindful with their development pathways.
- ✓ People are important. From community-led learning to a refocus on leadership, 2026 will see us attempt to put people back at the heart of L&D.



Trend #1

Address Skills Gaps with Integrated Platforms



What is it?

In 2026, we're realising that traditional LMSs are only going part way to close skills gaps.

Instead, integrated platforms that combine learning management, performance tracking, and skills analytics are becoming central. These platforms allow L&D teams to identify real-time skills gaps, map learning to organisational priorities, and track development over time.

The focus shifts from activity-based metrics (course completions) to skills outcomes—ensuring employees acquire the competencies needed to meet evolving challenges.

Key aspects of this trend:

- Integration across tools: LMS, LXP, performance management, and HR data combined for actionable insights.
- Skills analytics: Real-time identification of gaps and measurement of learning impact.
- Adaptive learning pathways: Courses and experiences recommended based on an employee's skills profile and organisational priorities.
- Future-focused planning: Organisations anticipate future skill needs, not just current gaps.



How to implement it

Audit current skills & systems

- Map existing skills across roles and teams.
- Evaluate your systems to see how they currently track skills and performance.

Define critical skills for the business

- Align skill definitions with organisational goals.
- Identify both immediate and future skills needs.

Select an integrated platform

- Choose a solution that combines learning, performance, and skills.
- Ensure it can ingest and connect data from other HR or operational systems.

Implement skills mapping and tracking

- Map courses, microlearning, and other experiences to each skill.
- Enable reporting to measure learning progress and outcomes, not just completions.

Design adaptive learning pathways

- Assign learning journeys that dynamically respond to the employee.
- Incorporate self-directed learning, social learning, and mentoring.

Review and iterate regularly

- Use analytics to refine pathways and close skills gaps.
- Continuously align learning initiatives with changing business priorities.

Trend #2

**Track outcomes,
not activities**



What is it?

For years, L&D success was measured through activity-based metrics: course completions, attendance numbers, hours spent learning.

But in 2026, these measurements no longer satisfy business needs. Organisations want to understand what learning actually achieved, not just what employees clicked on.

Outcome-focused measurement shifts attention to:

- Behaviour change
- Performance improvement
- Skill acquisition and demonstration
- Impact on business KPIs
- Reduction in risks or errors

By tracking what changes after learning occurs—not just whether training happened, you can prioritise the programmes that genuinely move the needle.



How to implement it?

Define success metrics before launch

- Start every new initiative by asking, “What should improve as a result of this training?”
- Identify metrics tied to behaviour, performance, or business goals.

Align with business stakeholders early

- Work with leaders to connect learning outcomes to operational or strategic KPIs.
- Clarify how results will be measured.

Use skills & performance data, not just LMS data

- Integrate your learning platform with performance management systems.
- Track real behaviour changes, not just course completions.

Introduce pre- and post-assessments

- Compare baseline skills/performance with post-training results. This makes improvement measurable.

Train managers to observe impact

- Provide tools and checklists so managers can recognise behaviour changes.

Report outcomes visually and accessibly

- Create dashboards showing KPI movement, skill growth, and performance improvement.
- Share insights regularly with to prove value and guide investment

Trend #3

Build Learning Journeys Not Catalogues



What is it?

The traditional “learning catalogue” approach aka presenting a long list of unrelated courses—has become overwhelming and ineffective. Learners don’t want endless content; they want clarity, direction, and relevance.

In 2026, organisations are transitioning to curated learning journeys that connect skills, objectives, and experiences into a meaningful path

Learning journeys allow you to serve the right content, at the right time, to the right people and solves the “too much content, not enough guidance” challenge and helps employees understand how learning fits into their career growth.



How to implement it

Identify Key Workforce Journeys

Begin by mapping out the critical experiences employees go through during their time in the organisation. These typically include onboarding, leadership development, compliance requirements, upskilling and reskilling initiatives, and transitions into new roles. Viewing learning through the lens of these journeys ensures training is connected to real business moments rather than delivered as isolated content.

Define Learning Outcomes for Each Journey

For every journey, specify the skills, behaviours, or capabilities learners must demonstrate at each stage. Clear outcomes provide direction for the design process and establish measurable expectations.

Curate Content with Purpose

Shift from accumulating as much material as possible to deliberately selecting what is essential. Choose content that directly supports the outcomes and remove anything that creates noise or redundancy.

Sequence the Learning Logically

Structure each journey so that learners progress in a coherent and supportive order. Start with foundational knowledge, and move gradually to practical application. Conclude with assessment or demonstration of capability.

Integrate Real Work into Learning

Strengthen the journey by embedding activities that reflect actual job demands. Assign projects that stretch skills, create opportunities for peer discussion, and incorporate mentoring or coaching where appropriate.

Use Automation to Guide Learners

Leverage automation to keep learners on track without requiring constant administrative oversight. Automated enrolments, reminder notifications, sequential nudges, and skill assessments help maintain momentum and ensure learners always know what to do next.

Measure, Review, and Refine

Evaluate each journey using indicators that go beyond completion rates. Look for evidence of behaviour change, performance improvements, and measurable skill growth..

Trend #4

Ramp Up Social Learning to Community Learning



Why is it trending?

Social learning has always been powerful, but in 2026 it evolves into community learning—structured, facilitated, and intentionally designed to bring people together.

Instead of informal chat threads or occasional peer feedback, organisations are building active learning communities where employees:

- Solve problems together
- Share insights, tips, and stories
- Co-create knowledge
- Mentor each other
- Discuss real work challenges
- Participate in role-based or interest-based groups

This shift recognises that employees learn more from one another than from any formal course. Community learning boosts belonging, accelerates knowledge-sharing, and creates a continuous learning culture.



How to implement it?

Create topic- or role-based communities

- Examples: Leadership Circle, New Managers Hub, Project Managers Network, Customer Success Community.

Assign community facilitators

- Champions or experts who spark discussions, host sessions, and encourage sharing.

Integrate communities into the learning platform

- Forums, groups, playlists, shared resources, collaborative tasks.

Provide prompts and challenges

- Weekly questions, problem-solving challenges, success story sharing.

Include community learning within journeys

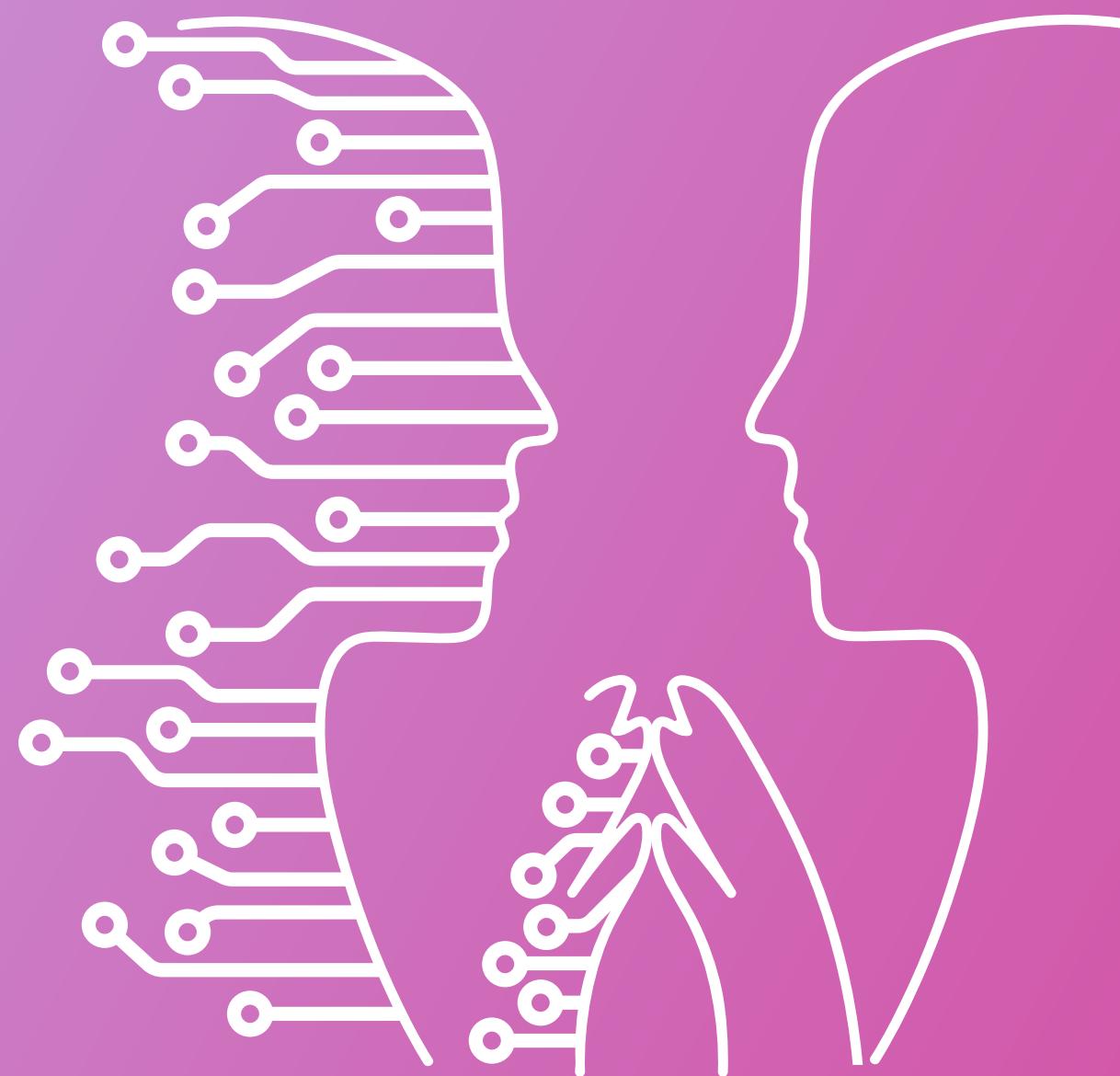
- “Discuss this topic in your community”
- “Share your learning from this module with your peer group”

Recognise and reward participation

- Acknowledgment, badges, leaderboards, shout-outs.

Trend #5

Integrate AI Agents Into Your Platform



What is it?

AI in L&D has moved beyond recommendations and content generation. In 2026, AI agents act as hands-on assistants, supporting learners and L&D teams directly.

AI agents can:

- Answer learner questions instantly
- Provide coaching or feedback
- Generate personalised learning pathways
- Help learners reflect on practice scenarios
- Offer real-time performance support
- Summarise learning content or documents
- Assist L&D teams with curation and content creation
- Automate administrative tasks

The rise of AI agents marks a shift toward self-service, always-on learning support, making learning more fluid and accessible.



How to implement it

Identify High-Value AI Use Cases

Start by pinpointing where AI can offer meaningful support. Typical opportunities include assisting new hires during onboarding, providing coaching during practice tasks, answering compliance questions, recommending relevant courses, and summarising complex content. Prioritising clear use cases keeps the implementation focused and practical.

Train the Agent With Organisation-Specific Knowledge

Populate the AI with your policies, documents, processes, and role expectations. This gives the agent the context it needs to provide relevant, reliable answers that reflect how your organisation actually works.

Pilot With a Single Group

Test the AI with one user group such as new starters or a specific department. Assess usage patterns, response quality, learner trust, and early impact on performance.

Scale in Stages

Once the pilot proves effective, progressively introduce the AI to additional functions, learning journeys, and user groups. Gradual scaling maintains quality and helps the organisation adapt comfortably to the new capability.



Trend #6

The Future of Skills Looks Dim?



What is it?

Despite years of talk about “skill-focused” L&D, many organisations still lack clarity on what skills do we actually need? How do we measure them? How do we track improvement?

In 2026, there is increasing recognition that the future of skills is uncertain—not because skills aren’t important, but because the frameworks and ownership models are unclear.

Complications include:

- Rapidly changing roles
- Conflicting skills frameworks
- Overwhelming skills taxonomies
- Outdated job descriptions
- Varying definitions of the same skill

This trend highlights a necessary sharpening of organisational focus: simplifying skills strategy, making skills data actionable, and aligning skill development with real performance needs.



How to implement it

Start With a Simplified Skills Framework

Begin by identifying a manageable set of core skills—typically 20 to 40—that truly drive performance in your organisation. A smaller, more focused framework makes implementation easier and increases clarity for learners, managers, and leaders.

Define Skills Through Observable Behaviours

Move beyond broad labels like “communication” or “leadership.” Describe each skill in terms of specific behaviours that demonstrate competency within your organisational context. Clear behavioural definitions make skills easier to teach, assess, and develop.

Map Skills to Roles and Learning Journeys

Create a skill profile for each role, outlining which skills are essential, which require advanced proficiency, and which are optional. Align these profiles with your learning journeys so employees can see exactly how skill development connects to their day-to-day work and long-term growth.

Use Assessments to Validate Skill Levels

Assess skills using multiple methods to build a well-rounded picture of capability. Combine self-assessments, manager input, practical exercises, and on-the-job evidence. This blended approach ensures skill levels are accurate and trusted.

Link Skills to Performance and Talent Processes

Ensure your skills framework is not theoretical. Integrate it into performance reviews, development plans, promotion pathways, and broader talent planning. When skills influence real decisions, they become meaningful to employees.

Review and Refresh Annually

Revisit the framework each year to ensure it remains aligned with organisational needs and evolving job demands. Regular updates keep the skill set relevant and prevent the framework from becoming stale or overly complex.

Trend #7

Mobile-Ready Frontline Working



What is it?

Frontline workers—retail, logistics, hospitality, healthcare, manufacturing—rarely sit at desks.

In 2026, organisations finally recognise that L&D must meet these workers where they are.

Mobile-ready learning allows frontline workers to:

- Access training on the job
- Complete microlearning in small windows of time
- Use mobile devices for guidance, checklists, or performance support
- Receive alerts and updates instantly
- Engage in interactive, bite-sized content

This trend ensures inclusive, accessible learning for employees who historically haven't been fully supported by traditional eLearning.



How to implement it?

Optimise all content for mobile-first delivery

- Short videos
- Quick guides
- Micro-quizzes
- Audio learning

Focus on just-in-time resources

Give frontline workers tools they can access when they need them most and make it easily accessible eg a QR code

Use push notifications

Send urgent updates, mandatory learning, or tips directly to their mobile app to keep learning front of mind.

Build a mobile-ready LMS

Your LMS will often not be accessible, or optimised for mobile. Take the time to find a provider that can offer you a mobile app for ease of learning.

Collect feedback directly from frontline staff

- What's working?
- What's missing?
- What's too time-consuming?

Track performance metrics, not completion

- Reduced errors
- Faster service
- Improved customer ratings

Trend #8

The Role of Roleplay in Learning



What is it?

Roleplay is returning as a powerful development tool—especially with AI enabling scalable, realistic scenario practice. In 2026, roleplay is no longer limited to classroom activities.

It is digital, repeatable, measurable, and accessible to everyone.

Organisations use roleplay for:

- Customer interactions
- Leadership conversations
- Sales negotiations
- Conflict management
- Performance feedback
- Safety scenarios

AI helps simulate real responses, adapting to what the learner says and offering feedback. This creates a safe environment to practice difficult conversations or high-risk tasks.



How to implement it

Identify High-Impact Scenarios for Practice

Begin by selecting situations where effective performance truly matters. These often include high-stakes conversations, customer interactions, risk-heavy tasks, and leadership challenges. Focusing on these scenarios ensures roleplay targets the moments where skill development has the greatest impact.

Select the Right Delivery Format

Choose formats that match your context, resources, and learning goals. Options include live roleplay sessions, AI-powered simulations, peer practice circles, and video-based scenario exercises. Blending formats can increase flexibility and accommodate different learning preferences.

Build Structured Scenarios and Clear Outcomes

Develop scripts that outline the situation, objectives, and expectations. Define what good performance looks like and specify the behaviours being assessed. Clear structure ensures roleplay is purposeful rather than improvisational or inconsistent.

Provide Immediate, Actionable Feedback

Feedback is essential for skill development. Use a mix of AI-generated insights, manager or coach evaluations, and peer reviews to help learners understand their strengths and improvement areas. Timely feedback accelerates growth and reinforces correct behaviours.

Enable Repeated Practice

Give learners opportunities to practise multiple times. Repetition helps them embed skills, build confidence, and gradually improve performance under realistic conditions. Encourage iteration rather than one-off attempts.

Measure Progress Over Time

Track learner improvement using scoring, behavioural tagging, and consistent assessment criteria. Monitoring progress makes development visible and helps identify where additional support or coaching may be needed.

Trend #9

A Refocus on Leadership



What is it?

After years of broad capability-building, leaders are again under the spotlight in 2026. With hybrid teams, rapidly changing markets, and rising expectations around wellbeing and culture, leadership capability is more critical than ever.

Key leadership needs include:

- Leading hybrid teams
- Coaching and developing people
- Managing wellbeing and burnout
- Making data-informed decisions
- Communicating with clarity
- Navigating constant change

Leadership development is shifting from one-off programmes to continuous, integrated journeys that support leaders throughout their careers.



How to implement it?

Define your leadership capability framework

Identify the behaviours and skills great leaders need in your organisation. Make a list and check it with stakeholders.

Segment leaders by level

- New leaders
- Mid-level managers
- Senior leaders
- Executive leadership

Create continuous leadership journeys

Combine workshops, coaching, roleplay, microlearning, and community learning to build journeys of content for your leadership teams that suit their working lives.

Integrate manager support tools

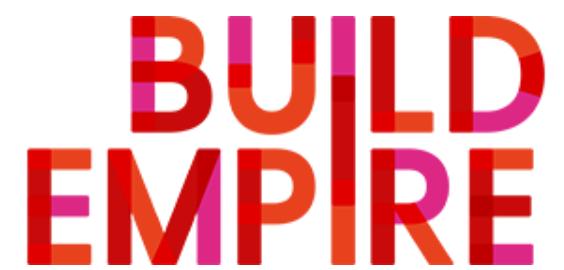
- Conversation guides
- Performance tools
- Wellbeing checklists
- Feedback templates

Use real-world projects as development activities

- Action learning
- Cross-functional projects
- Strategic assignments

Track leadership outcomes

- Team engagement
- Retention
- Performance improvements
- Leadership behaviour assessments



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