

Learning in the flow of work, reimaged – what AI changes



The rules have changed. Has your learning strategy?

There's a question we often hear when we talk to L&D teams: "How do we get our people to use the training we create?"

It leads us to another question: "Are you creating and delivering training in a way that reflects how your people work and learn?"

Because the way people get answers at work has shifted again. First Google and YouTube were the go-to options. Now it's a conversation with an AI assistant that lives inside the tools employees are already using.

Your people aren't opening a new browser tab to find a training course when they hit a problem. They're typing a question into Microsoft Copilot or their company's AI assistant, and getting an answer in seconds, without ever leaving their workflow.

It goes further than faster answers, too. AI assistants can be prompted to reinforce learning over time when it's needed – right in the flow of work. For example, a nudge to a service agent to request that the customer completes a feedback form, or a reminder of the key questions to ask a prospect before an important sales call.

This is workplace learning today – and yet it's clear there's still some catching up to do. [Research from The Josh Bersin Company](#) found 74% of businesses can't keep up with their own demand for new skills, despite global corporate training spend exceeding \$400 billion annually.

"Our skills challenge at work is not one of "learning" or "training." Rather it's a problem of dynamically sharing information, enabling people to explore, question, and apply new ideas. The traditional pedagogical paradigm of "training" is holding us back."

Josh Bersin, 2026



Learning in the flow of work: an idea that's come of age

"Learning in the flow of work" isn't new. Josh Bersin coined the phrase in 2018, and the core idea is simple: instead of pulling people out of their work to train them, you bring the learning to them – right at the moment they need it, in the context where they'll use it.

Even then, the appetite was clear. As Bersin noted at the time, [LinkedIn data](#) gathered from over 4,000 L&D and business professionals showed that getting employees to make more time for learning was the number one challenge in improving workplace training. And 49% of respondents said they wanted to learn in the flow of work.

Eight years on, and Bersin's findings are more relevant than ever. His company's [recent research](#) found that 75% of companies still treat learning as a separate activity rather than as part of work, suggesting the gap between what employees need and what organisations deliver hasn't closed.

In-flow learning can play a big role in solving this. The idea has always made sense. What's different now is that the technology to deliver it properly has finally arrived, and it's moved faster than most organisations expected.



The original five learning formats. And the sixth that changes everything

In the first edition of this eBook, we mapped out five formats at the heart of learning in the flow of work:

1. **Self-directed learning:** where the learner chooses when and what they access.
2. **On-demand learning:** available any time, via an LMS or internal platform.
3. **Software support:** in-app guidance and digital adoption solutions that help people learn tools as they use them.
4. **Microlearning:** short, sharp bursts of focused content.
5. **Targeted learning:** specific answers to specific questions, not over-long courses.

All five are still valid. But there's a sixth now – and it changes the architecture entirely.

The sixth format: AI-assisted learning

AI agents are embedded inside the productivity tools your people already use. These include Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, Salesforce Einstein, and others that now deliver contextual guidance, answers, and resources directly inside those tools. These agents provide a conversational interface that understands what someone is doing and responds with exactly what they need, right now. Learning has moved from something learners go to, to something that comes to them.



Microsoft's 2025 Work Trend Index, drawing on data from 31,000 professionals across 31 countries, found that 47% of leaders list upskilling existing employees as a top workforce strategy for the next 12 to 18 months. Even more striking is the fact that 81% of business leaders expect AI agents to be moderately or extensively integrated into their company's AI strategy in the same timeframe.

This changes what businesses need from L&D. If your people can already get answers and guidance from an AI tool embedded in their workflow, the question of how to deliver in-flow learning has largely been answered by the technology. What matters now is whether your L&D strategy is designed to work with that, or whether it still treats AI-assisted learning as something separate from 'proper training'.



Speed and scale are the new urgency

Over the past decade, the big challenge for learning in the flow of work was access – ensuring training wasn't tied to a physical location as hybrid and remote working became the norm. Cloud-based LMS platforms, mobile-first content, and on-demand resources have largely solved that. The new urgency is something else entirely.

Organisations are navigating a period in which skills are changing faster than most workforce-planning frameworks were designed to handle. And it's not simply about replacing jobs with AI, with evidence that the number and type of roles will change. The World Economic Forum's 2025 [Future of Jobs Report](#) estimates that between 2025 and 2030, 170 million new roles will be created globally while 92 million will be displaced, a net gain of 78 million jobs but a scale of transformation that organisations need to prepare for.

For L&D, that scale of change demands a rethink. Structured training still has a critical role for onboarding, compliance, leadership development, and building deep expertise. But closing a skills gap of this magnitude requires something else, something that works alongside traditional training, meeting people in the flow of work, at the moment they need it.

This is why in-flow learning has moved from a nice-to-have to a business-critical capability, one fast enough to keep pace with the rate of change that AI transformation is driving through organisations.



Rethinking L&D's role in the AI era

When [Josh Bersin described](#) the problem with many learning platforms back in 2018, he drew a pointed contrast with entertainment services built to maximise consumption. In learning, he argued, the goal is different: "We don't want people to be 'addicted' to the learning platform, we want them to learn something, apply it, and then go back to work."

That's still the goal of in-flow learning. But in 2026, the change has come from the infrastructure for getting there.

From catalogues to capability

For years, the standard approach was for L&D teams to build (or buy) a library of courses, host them on an LMS, and hope that people would find the ones they needed at the right time. The LMS was the central infrastructure with everything orbiting around it.

That model is giving way to something more dynamic. AI-native learning platforms are moving away from 'browse the catalogue' towards 'tell me what you're trying to do, and I'll tell you what you need'.

Skills intelligence platforms, such as Docebo and CYPHER Learning, now analyse which skills people are developing and which gaps exist, serving relevant, personalised learning right when it's needed, rather than generic pathways built for everyone.



From content to consultancy

This changes the role of L&D. The traditional focus positioned the industry as a content-production function. In forward-thinking organisations, that job description is evolving.

Now the focus is pivoting towards performance consultancy: understanding business problems, assessing workforce capabilities, identifying where skills gaps create friction, and designing learning that's embedded in the workflow rather than bolted alongside it.

What this means for your L&D team

The skills your L&D team needs today include:

- Understanding AI learning tools and how to configure them
- Data literacy to measure and demonstrate impact
- Business partnership skills to tie learning to performance outcomes
- Instructional design expertise to ensure AI-served content is high quality and contextually appropriate



The challenges are real and can't be ignored

The original challenges haven't gone away

In-flow learning isn't the right tool for every situation and is no substitute for the kind of deep, sustained learning that complex topics require. If someone needs to become an expert in Articulate 360 or develop coaching skills, a series of in-app prompts won't get them there.

Peer-to-peer and in-class training still have a vital role. The danger comes when in-flow delivery is used as a justification to cut investment in deeper development, when the two should complement each other. Structured e-learning programmes build the foundations, while in-the-flow modules keep them fresh and applied.

The new challenges that come with AI

AI-driven in-flow learning brings with it a new set of challenges in 2026:

Content accuracy

Quality and trust of AI-generated content.

AI tools can generate plausible-sounding answers that are simply wrong. If people receive learning support from an embedded AI assistant that provides incorrect guidance, the consequences can be serious. L&D teams need governance processes that cover what AI draws on and how its outputs are validated.

Shallow learning

The risk of passive consumption.

One concern about AI-served learning is that it makes knowledge too easy to access, potentially reducing the cognitive effort that leads to lasting learning. If a concept is delivered so effortlessly that the learner doesn't even have to think to



apply it, there's a good chance it'll pass right through their short-term memory without sticking. L&D professionals need to design for engagement, not just effortless access.

Responsible use

Ethics and data governance.

Talk to any L&D leader about AI right now, and data governance comes up fast. It's a concern we hear constantly, and the research backs it up: Donald H. Taylor and Eglė Vinauskaitė's 2025 report, [AI in L&D: The Race for Impact](#), identifies data security and privacy as the biggest barrier to AI adoption in L&D.

Who owns data put into AI? How is it stored? What can it be used for? These are questions that L&D, IT, legal, and HR need to work through together, ideally before tools go live rather than after they're embedded.

The skills gap inside L&D

L&D team readiness.

Even where AI is being adopted, the pace often outstrips the team's ability to keep up. The same Taylor and Vinauskaitė report mentioned above found a lack of skills within L&D teams to be the third biggest barrier to AI adoption, behind data security and a mistrust of outputs. Without addressing this, even the best AI tools will be underused, and the gap between what's possible and what's delivered will keep widening.

A practical checklist before you deploy

Before rolling out any AI-assisted in-flow learning tool, ask:

- ✓ Where is this tool sourcing its content, and how is accuracy validated?
- ✓ What data is it collecting, and who has access to it?
- ✓ Does it integrate with our existing platforms, or does it create another silo?
- ✓ How will we measure its impact on performance, not just usage?

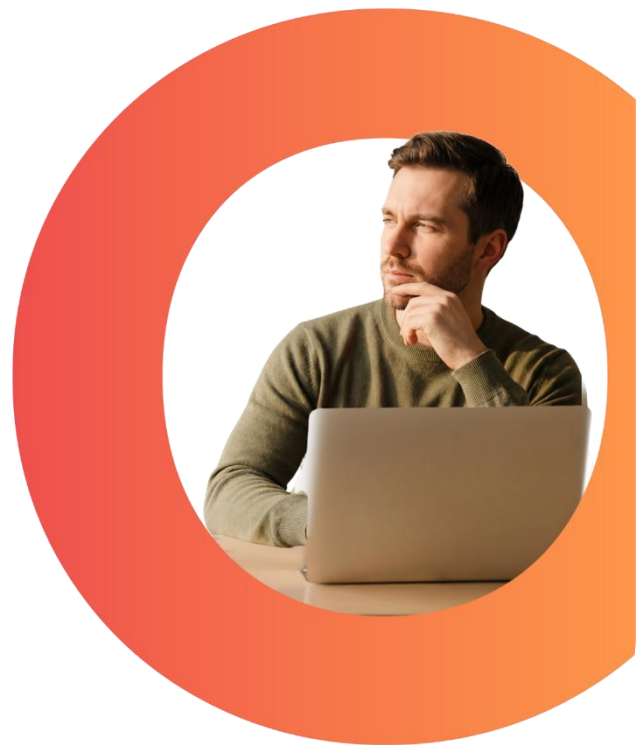


The framework: where to start, what to use, how to measure it

Start with the workflow, not the content

Most L&D teams start with the learning need and then work out how to deliver it. In an in-flow model, you start with the workflow instead. Where are the moments of need in your organisation? Where do people get stuck, slow down, or make mistakes? Where would a piece of targeted, timely guidance make the most difference?

Those are your priority intervention points. Build your in-flow learning around them, and you'll end up with something people use because it helps them, not because it's mandatory.



The five layers of effective in-flow learning

Sustainable in-flow learning doesn't rely on a single tool or format, but on multiple, complementary layers, each with its own way of proving it's working.

1. Embedded AI assistants

AI assistants embedded directly in your enterprise software – Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini – deliver contextual guidance and help right where people are



working, without them leaving the application. This is your first line of in-the-moment support.

Measure it by: *Reduction in support tickets or escalations, and time taken for users to complete key tasks independently before and after deployment.*

2. Conversational AI tools

ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, and Perplexity have become the default first port of call for employees who need a quick answer or guidance on how to approach something. L&D's role here is to build prompting confidence across the workforce so people get better outcomes from these tools, while ensuring a governance framework covers what employees share and when to trust the output. Without that, a valuable learning resource becomes an unmanaged one.

Measure it by: *This is the hardest layer to quantify, but a useful marker is reduction in time spent finding information and improvements in the quality of AI-assisted work outputs following prompting training.*

3. An AI-powered LMS or skills platform

Dynamic LMS platforms like CYPHER Learning understand what your people are working on, what skills they need to develop, and which resources are relevant. This reduces the risk of not finding the right course or content through ad hoc browsing, plus it develops a personalised journey for a richer learner experience.

Measure it by: *Speed-to-productivity for new joiners, and error rate reduction after a skills intervention.*

4. Communication and collaboration tools

Most communication platforms (think Teams and Slack) have built-in learning infrastructure, with features that can reinforce knowledge through automated micro and nanolearning nudges – short follow-up prompts that reinforce what someone has learned, sent at the moment it's likely to stick. Combined with peer-driven communities of practice for sharing tips and solving problems together,



these are powerful forms of in-flow learning that organisations significantly underestimate.

Measure it by: *Reduced time to solve common problems, fewer duplicate queries, and increased reuse of knowledge shared through communities of practice.*

5. Structured development for depth

Some skills can't be built in micro-bursts. Complex technical training and behavioural change programmes still need time and human interaction. Tools such as Articulate 360 are designed for exactly this: building the deep foundations that in-flow learning can then reinforce and keep fresh when people apply those skills at work. Structured and in-flow learning work best in tandem, as long as both are planned in from the start.

Measure it by: *Whether the behaviours and skills taught in structured programmes are showing up on the job. Examples include looking at reduced error rates and faster independent competency in the weeks following the programme.*



This is the future of learning for your organisation

When we published the first edition of this eBook in 2022, we concluded that learning in the flow of work was 'here to stay' in the L&D toolkit.

Fast-forward to 2026, and it's still the case, though a lot has changed. AI has placed in-flow learning right at the heart of L&D strategy. It's no longer a supplement to your LMS, or a nice-to-have addition to your learning catalogue. It's rapidly becoming a core pillar of workplace learning, and organisations that treat it as anything less are already losing ground.

It's a bigger question than L&D has typically been asked to answer, requiring a more strategic approach than the traditional model required. If you're a senior L&D professional or an executive responsible for talent and capability, here's what this means in practice:

- ✓ Audit your current in-flow learning touchpoints. Where are people already getting just-in-time support? What's working? What are the gaps?
- ✓ Map your AI tool landscape. Which AI-powered tools are your people already using, officially or otherwise? How are they being used for learning and problem-solving? Do you have governance around them?
- ✓ Identify your priority workflow intervention points. Where are the biggest performance gaps that targeted in-flow learning could address? Start there.
- ✓ Invest in your L&D team's own capabilities. They can't design for the future of workplace learning if they don't understand the tools and methods that define it.
- ✓ Redefine your success metrics. Agree with your business stakeholders which performance outcomes you're trying to shift and build your measurement framework around those.



- ✓ Treat in-flow learning as a strategy, not a supplement. Give it a budget line and an owner. Make sure there's a well-understood governance framework surrounding its use. It deserves the same rigour as any other business-critical investment.

There's now a perfect storm raging of AI capability, workforce skills urgency, and in-the-flow-of-work learning technology. This means the long-promised vision of learning that's seamless, personal, timely, and measurable is now achievable, at a scale that would have seemed out of the question five years ago.

Let's talk

From expert consultancy to proven solutions, find out how we can support your in-flow learning strategy.

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