



WHITE PAPER

# Today's Workplace **Learning and Development Forecast**

Explore the future of workplace learning and development, where innovative strategies like microlearning will redefine how we acquire skills today and in the future. This shift highlights practical knowledge while proactively responding to future demands.

# AI's Impact on the Future of Learning & Development

No forecast would be complete without recognizing the profound influence of artificial intelligence on our work and personal lives today and beyond. This influence can be daunting! The fear of the unknown often surpasses common fears like snakes, heights, or public speaking.

Despite the global buzz surrounding AI, individual interactions remain relatively limited. By 2030, however, [experts predict that AI will integrate seamlessly into our daily lives](#) as if we are interacting with another person. It will have numerous purposes, from personal assistance and legal advice to accounting and even therapy.



“AI will be **absolutely pervasive and absolutely seamless** in its integration with every life.”

**Andrew Tutt**,  
author of “An FDA for Algorithms” and an expert in law

## The Impact of Automation on Jobs

This shift presents a significant change in how we view and use technology. According to [The World Economic Forum](#), **automation will transform approximately 50% of jobs by 2030; however, it is projected that only about 5% of positions will be eliminated.** This suggests that while automation will reshape the workforce, the focus will be on adaptation rather than downsizing.

## A Shift Toward Upskilling Workers

The ongoing concern is not the downsizing of the workforce, but the pressing need for employers to upskill their employees to keep pace with the ever-evolving technology. Organizations are actively integrating AI into their ecosystem. Employees are not waiting for the green light. They are taking the initiative and advancing in their skills.

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Organizations are **actively integrating AI into their ecosystems.**

# Redefining the Modern Worker and the Skills-Based Concept

In the past workers were married to specific job titles and job descriptions. **However, in the “new” evolving workplace employees are seen as individuals with a diverse range of technical and soft skills.** Organizations are adapting to this by creating a fluid workforce, allowing for these individuals to move throughout the organization on different assignments to maintain an ongoing strategic advantage.



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## The Shift from Fixed Roles

Think about the employee journey of someone who began their career in the 1990s, tied to a defined role and a list of job responsibilities. Promotions were linked to these responsibilities. In contrast, **today’s workforce will prioritize job roles based on immediate business needs, responsiveness, and adaptability.**

## The Importance of Soft Skill Building

To thrive in this new workplace environment, skill building will become crucial—not just in technical areas, but also in being open-minded and adaptable. While familiarity with new tools and technologies is essential, **the [soft skills](#) that enable agility and responsiveness will be vital.**

## Corporate Cultural Integration of Skills-Based Talent

Is your organization embracing a skills-based talent philosophy? This approach could range from being an integral part of your culture to an area still under exploration.

To achieve a skills-based talent ecosystem, it's essential to evaluate whether the right skills, data, and technology are available within your organization. Key decisions made without thorough data analysis can lead to major mistakes. As learning and development leaders, it's vital to access relevant data and reassess the technology tools used in HR and learning initiatives.

Some organizations are shifting away from traditional job title-based compensation, instead rewarding employees' growing skill sets. Workers who are engaged in [ongoing learning](#) and are increasingly taking on new responsibilities will receive recognition and appropriate compensation.

A significant 77% of leaders agree that organizations should prioritize upskilling. **However, only 5% strongly believe they are investing adequately to keep up with the evolving workforce landscape.**

Global Insights Study –  
Deloitte, 2022

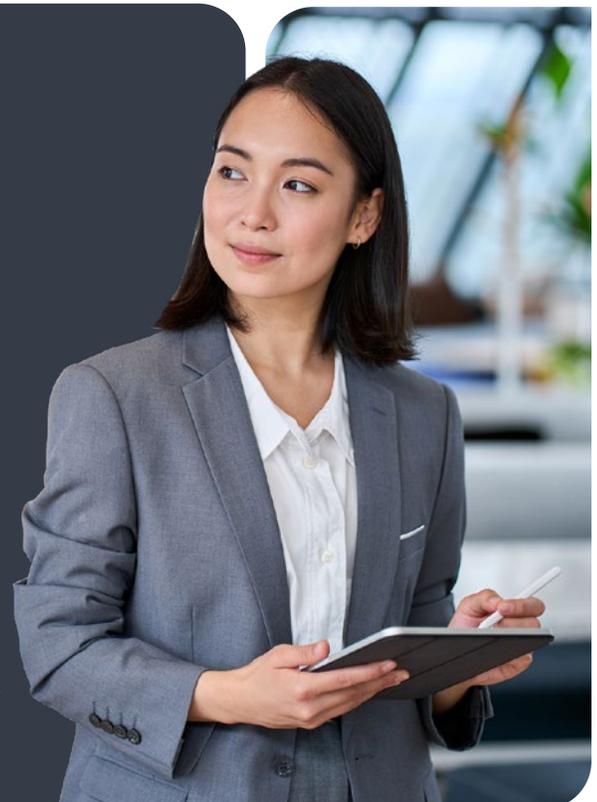
### The Rapid Rise of the Skills-Based Organization

**Skills Mapping:** Identifying capabilities and skill gaps across the workforce.

**Dynamic Role:** Roles become more fluid, based on their skills rather than fixed job descriptions.

**Continuous Learning:** Heavy emphasis on professional development to enhance skills and adapt to changing demands.

**Data-Driven Decisions:** Using data to access skills and performance, guiding hiring, training, and project assignments.





IBM created an AI tool to predict optimal sales teams using the skills and traits of individuals, **estimating win probabilities based on team composition.**

SHRM 2024



# The Skills-Based Organization in Motion

## IBM as a Case Study

IBM is a perfect example of a skills-based organization. **They developed a sophisticated AI system that determines employee skills and proficiency levels from their digital footprints.** This innovative approach allows for better identification of skills and learning opportunities for each employee.

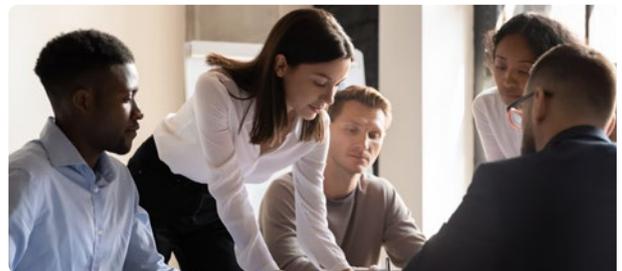
## The Role of Digital Footprints

Every interaction within organizational computer systems generates a digital footprint. Currently, this data is underutilized. It does not provide insights into employee learning opportunities, skill gaps, or prioritizing [learning pathways](#). Future advancements in technology and tools will bridge this gap.

## Google's Project Aristotle

In 2012, Google undertook Project Aristotle to identify what factors lead to exceptional team performance. This extensive two-plus-year project challenged several initial hypotheses, such as the belief that top teams comprised only the most tenured or highly rated individuals or those who spent time together outside of work. However, the findings revealed that the most effective teams fostered an environment of [psychological safety](#). Meaning an intangible quality based upon soft skills that enables team members to speak up, ask questions, take risks, and be open.

Data plays a critical role in optimizing both individual and team performance. **Organizations are now tasked with evolving into skills-based ecosystems.** This new workplace environment is expected to begin in the near future.



# Professional Skills Development... The New Pension Plan!

## Investing in Learning Opportunities

While not a direct monetary reward, the opportunity for [ongoing learning significantly influences employee retention and engagement](#). People are more likely to remain with organizations that prioritize their growth and development daily.

**More than 8 in 10 HR managers** believe training is beneficial to attract (83%) and retain (86%) talent.

**48% of employees** agree that training opportunities were a factor in choosing their current company.

**More than 76%** say they are more likely to stay with a company that offers continuous training.

[SHRM's 2022 Learning and Development Trends Research](#)



## Creating a Learning Culture

Forward-thinking organizations are increasingly focused on fostering a strong [learning culture](#).

Recognizing this commitment adds great value to an organization with a skills-based focus.



## Shifting Mindsets

In this evolving workplace environment, the past mentality of “It’s not my job responsibility” is shifting to a different approach. Employees will be encouraged to leverage their diverse skills every day. **This will allow leaders to use talent when and where needed, leading to greater upward mobility for employees and a sense of control over their career ambitions, moving beyond rigid job titles.**

Forward-thinking organizations are increasingly focused on **fostering a strong learning culture.**

## Evolving Roles in HR and Learning & Development

The roles of HR leaders, learning and development professionals, and talent leaders are changing significantly. **They’re spending less time on routine tasks and more time creating and building connections among internal and external key resources.**



## Historical Context

A good comparison to these changes occurring in learning and development is the evolution of accounting in the last 60 years. Years ago, accountants relied heavily on calculators and adding machines. New tools like Excel required them to reinvent their roles leading to more intellectual and less repetitive work.



# New Responsibilities for L&D Professionals

In the not-so-distant past, learning professionals invested extensive time in creating long or multi-modal courses. In today's new environment, they'll act more like "capabilities architects," curating content to design a learning ecosystem tailored to the individual employee.

## Key Responsibilities of the Capabilities Architect:

- Having a clear vision of learning to fulfill business objectives
- Design learning experiences solving for the business
- Build learning into the overall employee experience



## The Role of AI

AI is positioned to disrupt and enhance corporation organizational functions. [HSI Blue Ocean Brain](#) clients have reported a shift from traditional Learning Management Systems (LMS) to incorporating Learning Experience Platforms (LXP) and a variety of content partners. **This integration allows for a more cohesive and intuitive learning experience**, similar to streaming services like Netflix or Hulu, where AI can suggest relevant content based on individual employee needs.

## Focus on Quality Content

Leaders can focus on finding high-quality content without getting bogged down by logistical challenges that used to take up their time.

# Future Learning Forecast

Our workplace learning and development forecast presents key focus areas for future learning based on insights from [HSI Blue Ocean Brain](#) clients worldwide with in-depth research studies.

## The Need for Ongoing Learning and the Importance of Soft Skills

Technical and [hard skills](#) will remain important but they'll become outdated quickly with a half-life of about five years. This means that as soon as employees learn a new tool, process, or technology, they'll soon be learning something else new.

[Soft skills](#) will continue to be highly valuable now and in the future.



**The most valuable skills of the future are uniquely human - soft skills.** Technical and hard skills have a half-life of approximately five years.

# The Knowledge Economy

The concept of the knowledge economy, which has been around for numerous decades, emphasizes the importance of cognitive skills and analytical thinking in the [decision-making process](#). In this type of work environment, employees share their knowledge in various interactions, such as in meetings or conversations.

## Focus on Soft Skills

Organizations are increasingly prioritizing [soft skills training](#), which, along with recognizing [succession planning and training](#), is critical to retain the years of employees' organizational and industry knowledge.

## Shifts in the AI-Infused Knowledge Economy

As the knowledge economy changes in an AI-driven world, the focus is moving away from only relying on long-preserved knowledge. Now, it focuses on the ability to adapt to new situations, including:

- **Design Thinking:** [The ability to propose creative solutions](#).
- **Negotiation Skills:** Reading the room and [negotiating effectively](#) on the fly.

## Trending “Power Skills”

These “power skills” are essential for success in learning and development. The key question for organizations is how to identify and develop employees with these emerging power skills.

### Power Skills

- Complex Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking
- Communication
- Emotional Intelligence
- Focus
- Empathy
- Flexibility

# All Possible Knowledge

## Understanding the Knowledge Pie

The framework for addressing knowledge challenges is coined the knowledge pie. It illustrates different aspects of an employee's knowledge base.

**What the Employee Knows:** The blue pie piece represents all that the employee knows, encompassing their existing body of knowledge. Sharing this knowledge with coworkers is crucial for collective growth.

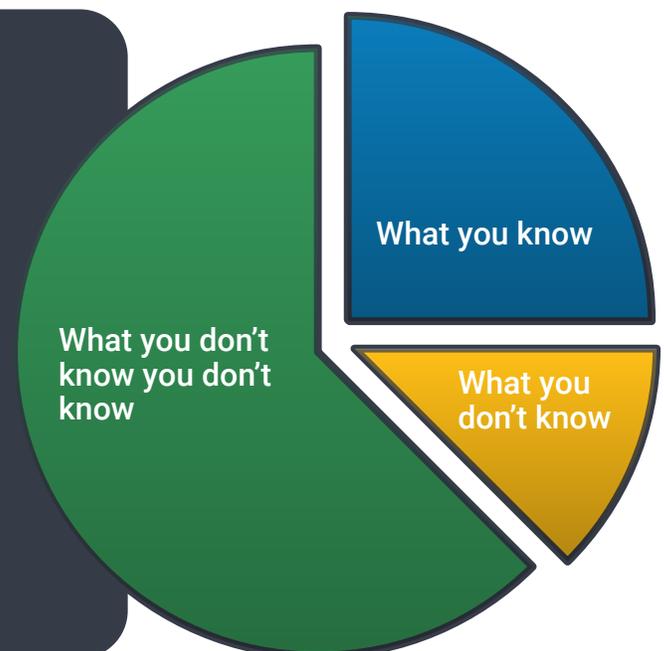
**Knowledge the Employee Knows They Don't Have:** This piece (not necessarily large in amount) signifies what the employee is aware they are lacking. For example, if the employee recognizes that they don't know how to navigate a new HR system, they'll actively seek training or talk with a coworker to learn the HR system. Many employees are now relying on tools such as ChatGPT or Gemini to quickly access basic information.

**Unconscious Knowledge Gaps:** The green pie piece represents what the employee does not even realize they don't know. Wisdom comes with the employee recognizing the knowledge gap, especially in their need for [soft skills training in certain competencies](#).

"I think what we're going to see is **a lot more creative ways to serve up content** that solves for this green pie piece."

**Claire Herring**

HSI Blue Ocean Brain Chief Learning Officer,  
writer, and international speaker





Effective leadership requires building **self and social awareness, including emotional intelligence,** amongst all employees.



# Impact of Leadership Styles

Leadership styles significantly impact team dynamics and the organization's culture. For instance, an overbearing leader who dominates every meeting may quickly stop anyone else from talking. This in turn causes team members to [disengage](#).

## Addressing Interpersonal Skills

Some employees may struggle with interpersonal skills, such as interrupting coworkers or lacking [emotional intelligence](#). In today's workplace, **effective leadership requires building self and [social awareness](#), including emotional intelligence,** amongst all employees.

## Future Learning Ecosystems

As organizations navigate these challenges, the integration of learning systems, whether LMS or LXP, will be critical. AI-enabled solutions will play a significant role in providing innovative ways to address knowledge gaps.

# Creating Meaningful Connections in the Workplace

## Google and the Power of the Bump

During Google's formative years, their leaders recognized that many of their engineers did not mix with other coworkers outside of their team. To build meaningful connections, Google leaders strategically designed the office space. Two of their innovative ideas included:



**Cafeteria Delays:** Keeping the cafeteria line running slightly slower (60 seconds to 3 minutes) to encourage engineers to interact while in line waiting for their lunch.



**Close Table Proximity:** Arranging cafeteria tables closely together to promote conversations among all employees regardless of what department they were in.

# Facilitating Learning Interactions by Bumping into Learning Opportunities

The underlying lesson is to help employees “bump into” learning opportunities. This can be achieved through personalized learning journeys or by integrating cultural messaging that reinforces [a company’s core values](#).

For instance, if teamwork is a core value, it should be evident in the learning ecosystem reminding employees of its importance.

## Share Learning Across Your Digital Ecosystem

Organizations will increasingly have the ability to integrate content across various platforms within their digital ecosystems. This requires close collaboration between L&D and HR to ensure that content is refreshed regularly with microlearning videos or learning moments that align with cultural learning goals.

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## Enhancing Employee Experience

To create a positive employee experience, it's essential to identify all possible touchpoints where learning can be discovered, including internal communications and leadership channels.

## Cultural Values and Learning Priorities

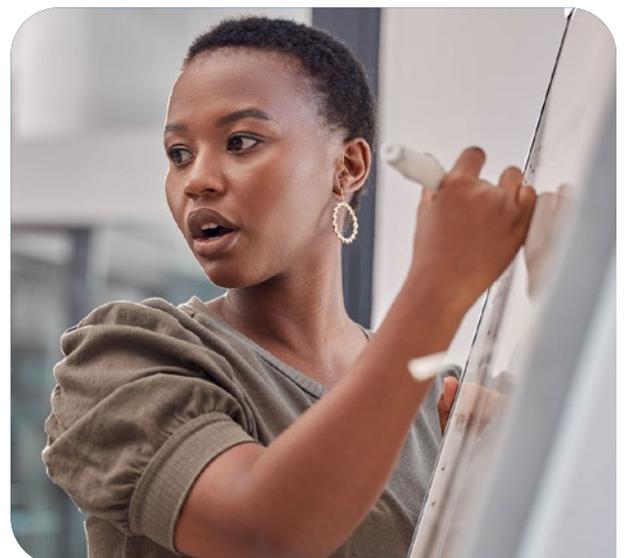
Focusing on key concepts, such as a [growth mindset](#), can enhance the learning ecosystem.

By proactively sharing relevant content through various communication channels, employees can receive tailored learning opportunities that parallel with their needs.

## Blended Learning Approach

While online content is critical, there's a strong desire for [webinars](#). A blended learning approach — combining curated digital content with webinars — recognizes that employees have diverse learning preferences.

Focusing on key concepts, such as growth mindset, **can enhance the learning ecosystem.**



# Big Disconnect Between What Science Knows and What Business Does

## Understanding Microlearning and Alignment with Scientific Learning Principles

There remains a notable disconnect between established scientific insights on learning and the practices implemented within many organizations. This misalignment varies across different companies, impacting their approach to employee development.

As a microlearning company, HSI Blue Ocean Brain aligns closely with scientific research that explains how people absorb and retain information most effectively. To enhance the user experience, it's crucial to apply this scientific mindset in building learning ecosystems. This approach isn't about reducing time investment and resources but rather about creating an optimal user experience. Science tells us that learners can effectively retain only four to five key concepts at any given time.

The Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve is a mathematical model that depicts the rate at which people lose information over time.

The curve illustrates that people quickly forget information shortly after learning it, but the rate of forgetting slows down and eventually stabilizes.

## The Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve and Understanding Learning Retention

The concept of the [Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve](#) shows that occasional training, such as annual courses, is ineffective in helping employees apply their new knowledge. When learners first come across new information, the forgetting curve indicates that without opportunities for interaction, practice, or reinforcement, retention decreases sharply.

# Building a Robust Learning Ecosystem

To improve retention, organizations should work on providing opportunities to share content on similar topics in different ways. For example, to support [psychological safety](#) in teams year-round, employees should get quick tips, reminders, and discussion starters that promote everyday situations instead of just relying on a single training session.

## The Surprise Factor: Engagement Through Surprise

Science emphasizes the importance of the “surprise factor” in learning. The average working adult checks their phone about 80 times a day, driven by the desire to stay informed, be “surprised,” learn, connect, and enjoy friendships.



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## The Need for Novelty

In a world filled with information and technology, we've developed a sophisticated sense of what captures our attention. Fresh and varied content is essential for engagement.

## Evaluating Learning Tools

Organizations should assess their learning tools from the employees' perspectives:

- How intuitive and relevant are the tools?
- Are there chances for unexpected or casual interactions with learning materials?
- Is the learning content regularly shared?

## Fostering Connection

**Employees seek connection, recognition, and opportunities for growth.** By creating a learning environment that prioritizes surprise and engagement, organizations can encourage employees to work harder and remain loyal, aligning with the idea that [professional skills development](#) is the new pension.



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**connection,  
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# Actions to Consider Right Now

Here are several ways to start your employees on the learning journey to acquire the skills they need today and in the future:

## Assess Engagement and User Experience

- Evaluate real engagement with existing learning content.
- Grade the overall user experience across the learning ecosystem.
- Identify gaps in content, such as resilience and remote work skills.

## Align Learning with Strategic Priorities

- Encourage your L&D team to create content that supports strategic goals and unique employee needs.
- Choose learning materials that reinforce your organization's mission and core values.
- Incorporate webinars to inspire growth mindsets.
- Design specific learning journeys to cultivate strong leadership behaviors.

## Importance of DEI Integration

- DEI should be embedded throughout the learning ecosystem, not treated as a standalone program. This integration fosters a culture of inclusion and belonging.
- Create a psychologically safe culture, using DEI best practices, to improve business outcomes and team performance.

## Optimize Learning Platforms

- Consider how various learning platforms can be integrated into a cohesive learning experience.
- Focus on creating a seamless user experience that minimizes clicks and enhances content accessibility.

## Gain Buy-In from Senior Leaders

- Demonstrate your knowledge and share other organizations' case studies.
- Provide actionable timelines for progress and measure results.
- Involve leaders early and encourage their participation in company-wide learning events to foster support for L&D initiatives.

# HSI Blue Ocean Brain Can Help

HSI Blue Ocean Brain offers fresh microlearning content daily, aligning with client learning initiatives like refining soft skills, building a growth mindset culture, developing leadership, and guiding the DEI journey.

[Contact us](#) for a consultation and kickstart your employees' learning journey today! Equip them with the essential skills they need now and for the future!



## About HSI



HSI is your single-source partner for EHS, Compliance, and Professional Development solutions. HSI provides integrated e-learning content, training solutions, and cloud-based software designed to enable your business to improve safety, operations, and employee development. Across all industries, HSI helps safety managers, and technical employees, human resources, first responders, and operational leaders train and develop their workforce, keep workers safe, and meet regulatory and operational compliance requirements. HSI's focus is on training, software, and services for safety and compliance, workforce development, industrial skills, and emergency care. HSI is a unique partner that offers a suite of cloud-based software solutions including learning management, safety management, chemical SDS management, and more, integrated with content and training so businesses can not only monitor and manage multiple workflows in one system, but train employees via one partner.

For more information, visit [hsi.com](https://www.hsi.com)