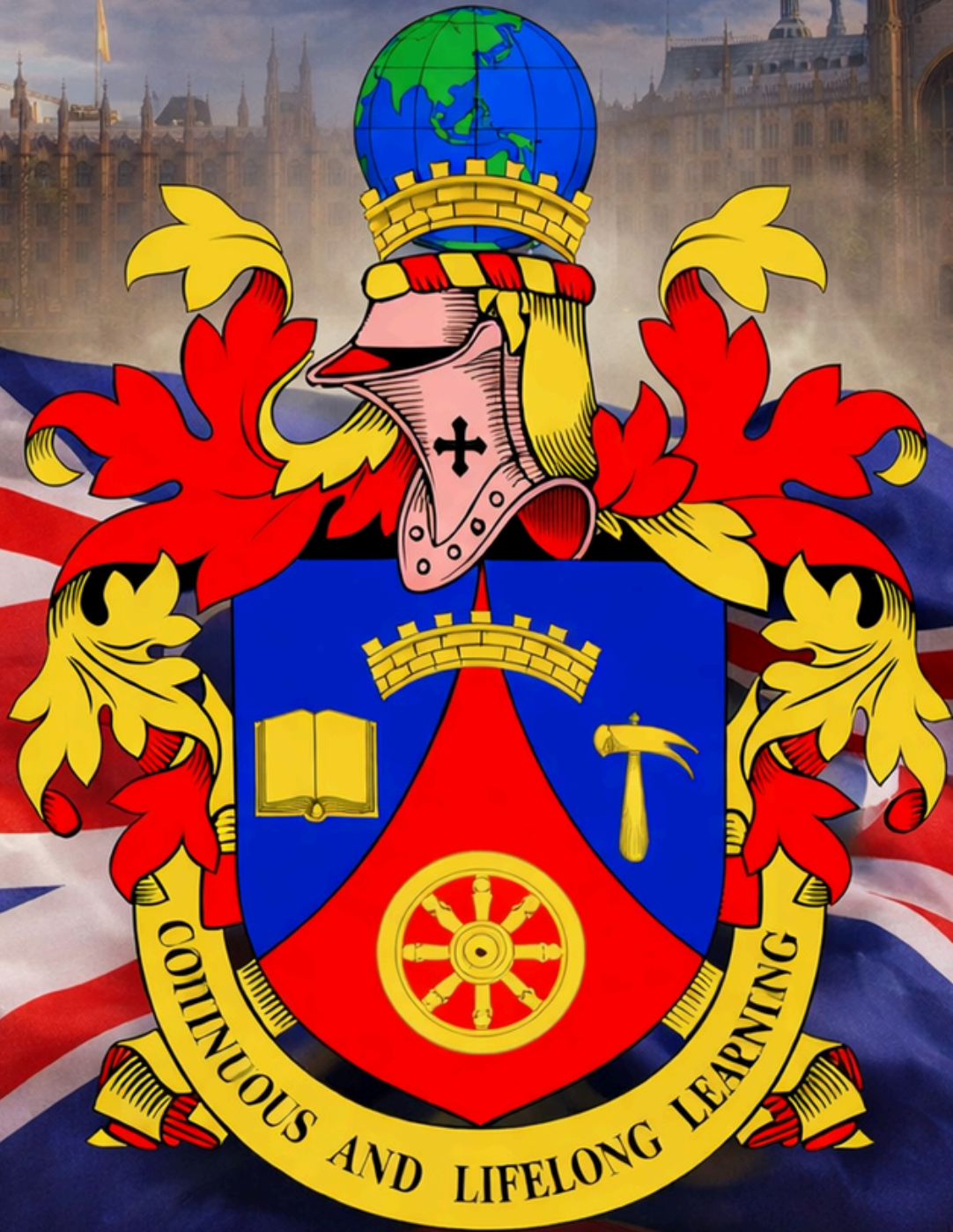


THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

◆◆◆
(IJPD)



PUBLISHED BY:

THE OXBRIDGE INSTITUTE OF PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT-UK (OIPD)

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 1 JAN – MAR 2026



I-nternational J-ournal of P-rofessional D-evelopment (IJPD)

Published by:

The Oxbridge

Institute of

Professional

Development-UK

(OIPD)

Volume 7 Number 1

Jan – Mar 2026

CONTENTS

	page
EDITORIAL AND NEWS	
• Message from the Chief Editor	2
• News & Views	3
REGULAR FEATURES – ARTICLES	
1. What Worries Me About Teachers’ Use of AI	20
2. Assessing the Impact of Life Skills Education: Indicators, Innovation, and Verification Approaches	22
3. Building an Agile Workforce Through Upskilling	27
4. An Unconventional Seating Plan Designed to Benefit Focus and Learning	29
5. Wellness is the Secret Engine of Learning Efficacy (Part 1)	31
6. The Neuro-Learning Playbook (Part 2)	34
7. Guardianship in Leadership: What We Forgot to Teach About Human Skills	36
8. From Uncertainty to Upside: Talent Development’s Role in Building Resilient Leaders	38
9. Don’t fear AI: use it to shape the future of HR	40
10. Practical Ways Managers Can Build A Coaching Culture	41
11. HR Strategies To Identify Emergent Skills Before You Need Them	43
12. A Sample Portfolio Report on a ‘Late Developer’. We will call him ‘Johnny’	45
SPECIAL FEATURE ARTICLE	
Three Perspectives on HR Professionals: Their Learning & Development	52
ABOUT OIPD MEMBERSHIP	
1. Twelve Facts about OIPD (UK)	61
2. Twenty Benefits of Membership	62
3. Membership, Grades & Awards Fee Guide	63
4. Flow Chart of Steps to become an OIPD member	65
5. Membership Application Form	66
6. OIPD in a Nutshell	67
EDITORIAL BOARD:	
Chief Editor	- Prof. Dr Peter Shephard
Cultural Editor	- Dr Asma Abdullah
Associate Editors	- Prof. Dr Cameron Richards & Prof. Dr Talam V. Rao
Media Consultant	- Gopal Kolandai
Production Manager	- Wan Faridah
CORRESPONDENTS:	
United Kingdom & Europe	- Prof. Dr Peter Ng (UK)
Middle East/North Africa	- Prof. Dr Amr Sadiq (Egypt)
South Africa	- Dr Godfrey Paison (Zimbabwe)
North-East Asia	- Jimmy Leong (Japan)
South-East Asia	- Prof. Dr Andal Krishnan (Singapore)
Australasia	- Dr Suresh Marcandan (Australia)
North America	- Dr Jeannette Vos (USA)
Central & South America	- Dr Will Fastiggi (Brazil)

Message from your Chief Editor



Exciting times ahead – visit one of the oldest universities in the modern world, attend our **Global Oxbridge Forum 2026** – network with Learning Leaders –

and learn more about how we can advance **“Competency-Based Recognition of Experiential Learning.”** Yes, at OIPD’s Summer Summit at the **University of Cambridge, UK, on Saturday, 08 August 2026 (08/08/26)**. An easy date to remember. For details, the full brochure is in the ‘News and Views’ on the next page.

Following this, we have our usual range of short articles, which we are sure you will find one or more of value to you. While there is no theme for this Issue, there are more articles on learning, learning methodologies, skills development, and the use of relevant technology.

Several articles in this issue are related to learning. Still, negative stress ‘inhibits’ learning as the stress produces the hormone – cortisol – which is increased in the Hippocampus, the memory seat in our brain. So, ‘Learning Leaders’, Facilitators, Lecturers, Teachers, and Trainers all need to remove or protect the learners from stress. including, in fact, Parents! I am sure you will find the article on: **Wellness: The Engine of Learning Efficacy**, very useful.

We already know from many research studies that organizations with high talent loss have low levels of employee engagement as well as inadequate

opportunities for personal growth, learning, and development. Now, when we add engagement strategies for enhancing learning specifically, we provide a way of lowering employee turnover and increasing employee morale and their personal productivity, resulting in greater job satisfaction.

Now there are many other articles to provide a rich source for your professional development, but I do want to finish telling you about another exciting research project. We are partnering with the **World Research Union, which, by the way, has a conference in Berlin, on Nov 6-7 2026**. (more on that in our next issue of IJPD). This research project will be on our summit’s sub-theme, **“Bridging Experience and Recognition in a competency-based world”**. This topic will contribute to and complement the OIPD Global Summit that I mentioned in my opening paragraph. So please, please, study this write-up on the next page. And remember to circulate this journal among your professional colleagues and friends.

And, in closing, Happy and Productive Reading.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Shephard', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Prof. Dr Peter Shephard
Executive Chairman, OIPD and Chief
Editor, IJPD

NEWS & VIEWS

OXBRIDGE INSTITUTE
OF PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT (OIPD)

The Oxbridge Forum 2026

Advancing Competency-Based
Recognition of Experiential Learning

*Bridging Experience and Recognition in a
Competency-Driven World*

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY, UNITED KINGDOM

AUG | 08TH | 2026

www.oipd.org.uk



OXBRIDGE
INSTITUTE
OF PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT,
(OIPD), UK

THEME

**Advancing
Competency-Based
Recognition of
Experiential Learning**

Bridging Experience and
Recognition in a Competency-
Driven World

OBJECTIVE

"The global shift toward skills and competencies has reached a critical point. The challenge is no longer whether experiential learning should be recognised, but ****how it can be consistently validated, trusted, and valued across contexts, sectors, and borders.**"

**Join Us in the
Oxbridge Forum**

The Oxbridge Forum 2026 brings together global thought leaders, practitioners, and policymakers to advance the recognition of experiential learning through competency-based approaches.

Centered on the theme "Advancing Competency-Based Recognition of Experiential Learning," the Forum explores how real-world experience can be meaningfully evaluated, recognised, and valued in shaping talent, leadership, and sustainable progress in a rapidly evolving world.

A GATHERING OF

100+

ATTENDEES

FROM OVER

20

COUNTRIES

FEATURING

12

EXPERT SPEAKERS

This summit precedes OIPD's annual Award Ceremony and Dinner* to which all Summit delegates are invited. It commences with a Networking Cocktail hour and a Gala Dinner.

www.oipd.org.uk

The Oxbridge Forum 2026



Advancing Competency-Based Recognition of Experiential Learning

Bridging Experience and Recognition
in a Competency-Driven World

STRENGTHENING ALLIANCES

To strengthen alliances and foster collaboration in advancing alternative credentialing, shared learning pathways, and cross-border recognition of skills and experience.

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

To facilitate the exchange of ideas and knowledge to identify challenges and co-create innovative solutions for advancing recognition of prior learning and unlocking future opportunities through alternative credentials.

GLOBAL COLLABORATION

To foster global collaboration and a shared sense of purpose in advancing inclusive recognition systems and building pathways for cross-border credential portability and lifelong learning.

Join us in exploring emerging trends, proven practices, and innovative frameworks in alternative credentialing to advance recognition of experiential learning and drive inclusive educational transformation.

Don't miss this opportunity to engage in a global dialogue on the future of credentialing, recognition of learning, and inclusive access to opportunity.

www.oipd.org.uk

secretariat@oipd.org.uk

FORUM SCHEDULE

AGENDA

OPENING SESSION – WELCOME ADDRESS BY:

OIPD Patron, Prof Kevin D Couling, Lord of Cowlinge

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUMMIT'S THEME AND OBJECTIVES BY

OIPD Chairman, Prof Dr Peter Shephard.

TOPICS & SESSIONS

SESSION 1: RETHINKING APEL & RPL: THE EVOLVING PRACTICE OF RECOGNITION

SESSION 2: DEFINING COMPETENCE: FROM THEORY TO REAL-WORLD APPLICATION

SESSION 3: ASSESSING WHAT MATTERS: EVALUATING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

SESSION 4: TRUST AND CREDIBILITY IN COMPETENCY RECOGNITION

SESSION 5. INCLUSIVE RECOGNITION: EXPANDING ACCESS THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

CLOSING

Closing remarks by OIPD's Chairman and Patron.

Opportunities for attendees to connect, share insights, and build professional networks.

Carefully curated topics will evolve as areas of priority emerge and the Summit will record key takeaways and recommend actions all can implement in their eco-system and communities.

Summit outcomes will feature strategies for building resilient talent ecosystems that can thrive amidst disruption as well as leveraging AI to enhance workforce agility, remote collaboration, and talent mobility.

www.oipd.org.uk

Conferment of Awards

The Conferment of Awards marks a proud moment in scholars journey of excellence — a celebration of achievement, perseverance, and professional growth.

On this special occasion, OIPD recognizes the individuals who have successfully completed their certification programs, demonstrating exceptional commitment, skill, and determination in their chosen fields.



**The Oxbridge
Forum 2026**



**Oxbridge Professional
Awards**

Each scholar will have navigated through a rigorous learning and assessment journey, mastering industry-relevant competencies and embodying the values of integrity, innovation, and leadership.

Your success is a testament not only to the personal dedication but also to the collective support of mentors, trainers, peers, and the learning community.

As scholars step forward with their newly earned credentials, we are confident scholars will continue to uphold the highest standards of professionalism and inspire others along the way.

**We extend our warmest
congratulations to all award
recipients.**

**May this achievement be the
foundation for even greater
success in your career and life.**

About Cambridge

A city where knowledge is not only preserved—but continually redefined.

A GLOBAL CENTRE OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE

Cambridge is one of the world's most renowned centres of academic excellence, celebrated for its intellectual heritage, scholarly rigour, and enduring contribution to global knowledge.

Home to the prestigious University of Cambridge, the city has shaped generations of thinkers, leaders, and innovators across disciplines—making it a fitting setting for global dialogue on learning, competence, and recognition.

With its rich academic traditions and forward-looking outlook, Cambridge offers an environment where ideas are challenged, knowledge is advanced, and meaningful progress is cultivated—aligning seamlessly with the purpose of The Oxbridge Forum 2026.

INVITATIONS



Educational Institutions

Education Institutions can be a partner to the summit with speakers and students. Institutions logo will be published in all promo materials.



Corporates and Recruitment Agencies

Corporate heads, human resource leaders, and recruitment agencies can join as speakers and participants. Organization logo will be published in all promo materials.



Edutech & Training Institutions

Education service providers, assessment providers and training institutions can join as a partner. Organization logo will be published in all promo materials.



Non-Profit Organizations

Non-Profit organizations, research organizations and international bodies with sector relevancy can join as a partner and with speakers. Organization logo will be published in all promo materials.

Invitation for Delegates & Summit Partners:

Join us in the Oxbridge Forum as a Delegate, Speaker, Institution Partner or Event Partner

Delegates, International keynote speakers and panelists are invited to participate to showcase expertise, research, and innovative concepts relevant to the theme of the summit.

- Subject Matter Experts, Industry Practitioners, Organisation Heads, education, industry development leaders
- University Heads, Professors, Deans, Career Center Heads, HR Experts
- CEOs, HR Leaders, Subject Matter Experts, Verification Agency Heads, Profile Writers
- Experts from Professional Trainers, Coaches, Consultants and Skill Testers

Don't miss this opportunity to be a part of a global conversation that will shape the future of work.

Summit Fees

Summit Fee: £250 (Non Member)
Early Bird Fees: £165 (Before 30th April 2026)
Special Members Rate: £195

For Registrations, Speaker Opportunities, University Partnerships, Event Partnerships and Media Partnerships

Contact Us

OXBRIDGE INSTITUTE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (OIPD), UK

(Established by The Oxbridge Trust, UK Registration: XCTRUST80159755)

Registered Office: Royal Arsenal Gatehouse, 1 Hastings Street, Thamesmead West, London SE18 6AR, United Kingdom.

Email Us: secretariat@oipd.org.uk | Call/Whatsapp: UK Office: +447714291665



www.oipd.org.uk

The following few articles are contributions from OIPD members. Thank you!

The 70:20:10 Learning and Development Model

From LinkedIn Learning, forwarded by an OIPD doctoral candidate, Sunda Raju.

Most people think learning happens in a workshop or a classroom... but that's only 10% of how people actually learn.

The 70:20:10 model breaks learning down very clearly:

- 70% comes from real, hands-on experience — doing the job, solving problems, making mistakes, reflecting, and trying again
- 20% comes from learning with others — coaching, mentoring, feedback, observation, collaboration
- 10% comes from formal learning — courses, training sessions, certifications, CPD

What does this look like in practice, especially in schools?

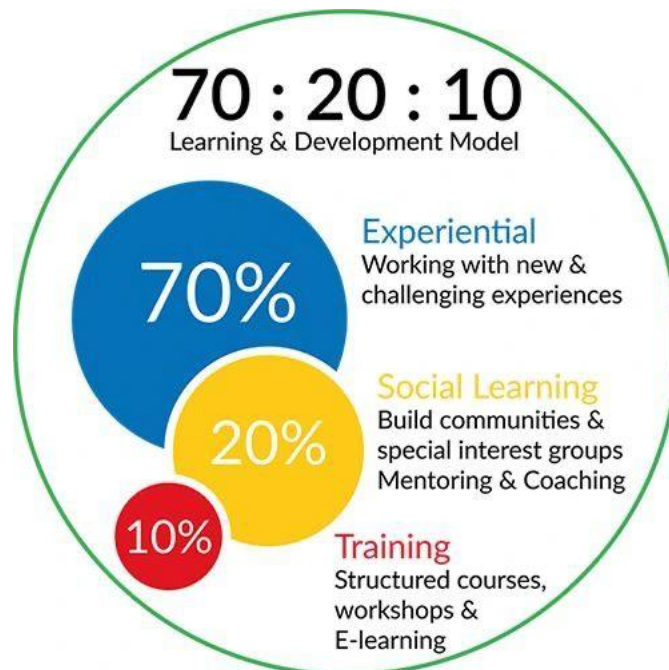
- 70% – A teacher learns classroom management by teaching daily, handling real situations, and reflecting on what worked, and adjusting strategies

- 20% – Learning happens through peer observations, department discussions, coaching conversations, and feedback from colleagues or leaders
- 10% – Workshops, safeguarding training, curriculum updates and subject-specific CPD provide the theory and structure

The key takeaway is this: formal training alone doesn't create effective practitioners. Experience, supported by reflection and feedback, does.

If we want meaningful professional growth, schools need to design opportunities for all three — not just the 10%.

Where do you think most learning really happens in your workplace?



Life-long Learning and Longevity - Contributed by Dr Lee Kwang Meng

The research suggests that "lifelong learning" may be the number one social factor for predicting if you'll live a good, long life!

And sure, anything you challenge your brain with counts.

However, you **double the benefit** when you challenge your brain with new *health* insights.

That's because, in addition to the learning itself, you can put what you learn into action to improve your health and life satisfaction even more!

Vitamin D and Longevity

The standout result was this: Vitamin D slowed telomere shortening. Participants taking vitamin D lost about 140 fewer DNA base pairs over four years compared to those taking a placebo. Here's why that matters:

- On average, telomeres shorten by around 25-27 base pairs per year as we age.
- So, preserving 140 base pairs could be roughly equivalent to slowing age-related telomere loss by nearly 3 years.

In plain language: their cells looked "younger" than they otherwise might have. However, the study found that Omega-3 didn't show the same effect as vitamin D on the telomeres. While omega-3s still have other health benefits, they didn't significantly change telomere shortening in this trial.

So, the important question: how might vitamin D do this? Well, it's still a bit of a mystery. Scientists don't

yet know the exact mechanism, but there are good ideas:

- Vitamin D plays a role in immune regulation and DNA repair.
- Vitamin D can reduce inflammation and oxidative stress, both of which accelerate telomere loss.
- Vitamin D binds to specific receptors (VDR) on cells that influence how genes work.

Think of vitamin D as a helpful nutrient nudging your cells toward better maintenance, meaning less wear and tear at the DNA ends. But before you rush to the pharmacy, let's be clear, this doesn't mean vitamin D is the key to the fountain of youth. Yet. Yes, telomere shortening was slowed, but we don't know whether that definitely means:

- Longer life.
- Fewer age-related diseases.
- Better real-world health outcomes.

That link is plausible and supported by other observational studies, but it's not confirmed as cause-and-effect yet. The effect size was modest. The benefit was statistically significant, but not huge. It's interesting and encouraging, but not dramatic. And the study was specific to healthy, older adults. Most participants already had reasonably good vitamin D levels. The results might differ in younger people or those with severe deficiency. So what could this mean in everyday language, right now?

Vitamin D supplementation may protect a piece of your cellular machinery that matters for aging.

The effect, though modest, is comparable to three fewer years of cellular aging over four years.



The Rope Model For Learning Reinforcement Contributed by Dr. Pricilla Jihen

Applying the acronym **ROPE** in Experiential learning and skills development:

R – Recall

O – Observe

P – Practise

E – Evaluate

This model is used as a **structured approach to skill development and experiential learning**. Here's what each element represents:

1. **Recall** – Learners recall prior knowledge or experiences related to the new topic. This activates existing mental frameworks and connects new learning to prior knowledge.
2. **Observe** – Learners watch demonstrations, examples, or models of the skill or concept being introduced, gaining a clear understanding of correct methods or applications.

3. **Practise** – Learners engage in guided or independent practice, applying the new knowledge or skill through active participation, exercises, or simulations.
4. **Evaluate** – Learners (and coaches/trainers) assess performance, identify areas for improvement, and reflect on learning outcomes to consolidate understanding.

Often used as an early stage of the *Reflective Learning* process. It is also part of the 'Experiential Learning' model (Do/Reflect/Theorise/Act – or Redo, but after improving or changing the processes).

This is a form of '*Kaizen*' (Continuous Improvement).

The **ROPE model** is often used in **vocational, competency-based, and andragogical (adult learning)** contexts because it supports active, reflective, and applied learning.

It can be part of *Immersive Learning*, and learners need to repeat back what they have learned. *Repetition* (or practise) and appropriate '*Spacing*' is one of the core components of '*Reinforcing*' memory and *Recall*.

As Prof John Medina, author of *Brain Rules* and *9 Principles of Learning*, says: "*Repeat to Remember and Remember to Repeat.*"



Active Listening: To use or not to use AI? That is the Question!

By Prof. Dr. Pierre Berger. Senior Research Fellow, OIPD Europe.

Should we use AI to provide guidelines for skill development? Or is that only making our brains lazy? I have been running interpersonal communication skills training programs for decades and have spent countless hours of preparation time. Reading umpteen books, even going through that classic training program, *Effective Listening Skills*, by Xerox Learning Systems, and paying for the rights to use their materials.

I was asked the other day, "What are some critical skills required to be an effective leadership coach? Apart from formulating the usual terminology – like empathising, having a clear purpose and goals, exhibiting passion for an inspiring vision, and applying Socio-Emotional Intelligence (SEI). But one essential attribute found to exist in all successful people was "Active Listening with Empathy." As we may know, listening and Questioning are two core skills needed to be effective as a coach.

I connected the dots and decided to ask ChatGPT to give me a breakdown of the micro-skills for a session on Active Listening. Here is their answer.

Active listening is a crucial skill for effective communication, coaching, and leadership. Here are some key **Active Listening** skills you can develop among your coachees:

1. Give Full Attention

- Maintain eye contact and face the speaker.
- Minimize distractions (put away devices, avoid multitasking).
- Show openness with body language (nod, lean slightly forward).

2. Show That You're Listening

- Use verbal affirmations: "I see," "That makes sense," "Go on."
- Mirror emotions subtly to show empathy.
- Encourage the speaker with minimal encouragers like "Hmm," "Uh-huh."

3. Reflect & Paraphrase

- Repeat back key points to confirm your understanding:
 - "So, what you're saying is..."
 - "If, I understand correctly, you mean..."

4. Ask Open-Ended Questions

- Encourage deeper thinking with questions like:
 - *"Can you tell me more about that?"*
 - *"What do you mean by...?"*
 - *"How did that make you feel?"*

5. Avoid Interrupting & Judgment

- Allow the speaker to finish their thoughts before responding.
- Suspend personal biases and judgment.
- Respond thoughtfully rather than reacting impulsively.

6. Clarify & Summarize

- Check for accuracy by summarizing:
 - *"Let me make sure I got this right—you're saying that...?"*
- Clarify ambiguities by asking for examples or explanations.

7. Be Aware of Nonverbal Cues

- Observe body language, tone, and expressions for unspoken emotions.
- Match tone appropriately to the situation.

8. Respond Empathetically

- Validate feelings: *"That sounds really challenging."*
- Show support without fixing the problem: *"I can see why that's frustrating."*

Here are some **practical exercises** to develop **Active Listening** skills among your coachees:

1. The "Repeat & Paraphrase" Exercise

✔ **Objective:** Improve understanding and retention.

◆ **How to do it:**

- Pair up participants.
- Speaker A talks about a topic for 2 minutes.
- Listener B **paraphrases** what they heard in their own words.
- Speaker A gives feedback on accuracy.
- Switch roles.

✦ **Tip:** Encourage paraphrasing instead of word-for-word repetition.

2. The "Summarize & Clarify" Challenge

✔ **Objective:** Strengthen summarizing and clarifying skills.

◆ **How to do it:**

- One person tells a **short story** (real or made-up).
- The listener summarizes the key points in **one sentence**.
- The speaker corrects or adds missing details.

✦ **Variation:** Have a third person act as an observer to give feedback on accuracy.

3. The "Silent Listening" Exercise

✔ **Objective:** Train patience and non-verbal engagement.

◆ **How to do it:**

- The listener **must not speak** for 2 minutes—just **listen**.
- Use **eye contact, nodding, and facial expressions** to show engagement.
- After 2 minutes, the listener reflects back on **emotions and key points**.

✦ **Tip:** Helps control the urge to interrupt or offer solutions.

4. The "Open-Ended Questions" Drill

✔ **Objective:** Improve curiosity and depth in conversations.

◆ **How to do it:**

- Partner A shares an experience.
- Partner B must only ask **open-ended** questions (no yes/no questions).
- Examples:
 - *"What was that experience like for you?"*
 - *"How did you feel about that?"*
 - *"What did you learn from it?"*

✦ **Tip:** This helps shift from "problem-solving" to "deep listening."

5. "Spot the Assumptions" Activity

✔ **Objective:** Reduce bias and improve neutral listening.

◆ **How to do it:**

- The speaker shares a **personal situation**.
- The listener **writes down** assumptions they made while listening.
- Both discuss which assumptions were **accurate or misleading**.

✦ **Tip:** This increases awareness of unconscious biases in listening.

6. The "Empathy Listening" Exercise

✔ **Objective:** Build emotional connection.

◆ **How to do it:**

- The speaker shares a **challenging personal experience**.
- The listener responds **only with empathy** (no solutions or judgments).
- Examples:
 - *"That sounds really tough."*
 - *"I can imagine how that felt."*

✦ **Tip:** Helps develop deep, supportive listening without rushing to "fix" the issue.

7. The "Tone & Body Language" Role-Play

✔ **Objective:** Recognize non-verbal communication.

◆ **How to do it:**

- One person **tells a simple story** using different **tones and body language** (happy, sad, anxious, excited).
- The listener must interpret the **emotion behind the words**.
- Discuss how tone and body language affect **perception**.

✦ **Tip:** Shows how **"how you say it"** matters as much as **"what you say."**

Here's a **structured coaching session** to develop **Active Listening Skills** among your coachees. The session lasts **90 minutes** and includes practical exercises, debriefs, and reflections.

✦ **Coaching Session: Developing Active Listening Skills**

🕒 **Duration:** 90 minutes

🎯 **Objective:** Equip coachees with active listening techniques to improve their communication and coaching skills.

◆ SESSION AGENDA

Time	Activity	Description
0 - 10 min	Introduction & Warm-up	Icebreaker on personal listening habits.
10 - 20 min	The Power of Active Listening	Discuss key listening skills & their impact.
20 - 40 min	Practical Exercise 1: Silent Listening	Focus on non-verbal engagement.
40 - 60 min	Practical Exercise 2: Paraphrase & Summarize	Improve information retention.
60 - 75 min	Practical Exercise 3: Empathy Listening	Strengthen emotional connection.
75 - 90 min	Reflection & Action Plan	Personal insights & future commitment.

1 Introduction & Warm-up (10 min)

✓ Activity: *Listening Self-Assessment*

- Ask each coachee: "On a scale of 1-10, how good a listener are you?"
- Discuss **common listening challenges** (e.g., distractions, interrupting, problem-solving too quickly).

✦ **Key Takeaway:** Recognizing personal listening habits helps set the foundation for improvement.

2 The Power of Active Listening (10 min)

✓ Brief Discussion:

- Explain **7 Key Active Listening Skills** (Attention, Body Language, Paraphrasing, Clarifying, Open-Ended Questions, Empathy, and Avoiding Judgment).
- Share **real-life scenarios** where active listening can make a difference (e.g., coaching, leadership, personal relationships).

✦ **Key Takeaway:** Listening is a skill that can **transform** communication.

3 Practical Exercise 1: Silent Listening (20 min)

✓ Objective: Train patience and presence in listening.

◆ Instructions:

- Pair up participants.
- One person **shares a personal challenge** (2 minutes).
- The listener **must not speak**—only use eye contact, nodding, and facial expressions.
- After 2 minutes, the listener **summarizes emotions and key points**.

◆ Debrief:

- **Speaker:** "How did it feel to be truly listened to?"
- **Listener:** "What was challenging about staying silent?"

✦ **Key Takeaway:** Sometimes, the best response is **just being present**.

4 Practical Exercise 2: Paraphrase & Summarize (20 min)

✓ Objective: Improve listening accuracy and retention.

◆ Instructions:

- Speaker A tells a **short story or work-related situation** (2 minutes).
- Listener B **paraphrases** the story in their own words.
- The speaker provides **feedback** on accuracy.

- Switch roles.

◆ **Debrief:**

- Did the paraphrasing **capture the main idea**?
- What phrases helped make the speaker feel understood?

✦ **Key Takeaway:** Rephrasing what someone says **builds trust and prevents misinterpretation.**

5 Practical Exercise 3: Empathy Listening (15 min)

✓ **Objective:** Respond with empathy instead of solutions.

◆ **Instructions:**

- Speaker A shares a **real or hypothetical emotional situation** (e.g., stress at work, personal struggle).
- Listener B **responds only with empathy** (no advice or solutions). Examples:
 - *"That sounds really frustrating."*
 - *"I can imagine how that must feel."*
 - *"That must have been tough for you."*
- Switch roles.

◆ **Debrief:**

- How did it feel to receive **empathy instead of solutions**?
- What made responses feel **genuine or forced**?

✦ **Key Takeaway:** **Empathy** strengthens relationships more than **quick fixes.**

6 Reflection & Action Plan (15 min)

✓ **Discussion Questions:**

- *What is your biggest takeaway from today's session?*
- *Which skill do you want to practice more?*
- *How will you apply active listening in your daily conversations?*

✓ **Personal Commitment:**

Each coachee writes down:

- **One active listening skill to practice this week.**
- **One person they will consciously listen to.**

✦ **Final Message:** Active listening is a **lifelong skill** that improves communication, leadership, and relationships.

🚀 **ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR LONG-TERM PRACTICE**

- ✓ **Daily Reflection:** Ask yourself, *"Did I really listen today?"*
- ✓ **"Pause Before Replying" Rule:** Take 3 seconds before responding.
- ✓ **Buddy System:** Pair up and **hold each other accountable** for better listening

My Conclusion. This was produced by ChatGPT in a couple of minutes, allowing them to ask me some questions, with me just politely saying "Yes, please, and continue. Now, I could have produced all the above after days of research, let alone the added effort of trying to format it logically and coherently. And as a Professional, time saved is money saved. QED! And, has that made my brain a bit more lazy? Maybe! But it saved me a lot of stress!

"Time saved is money saved when using AI, but it may make my brain lazier."

Impact Over Activity: Achieving High-Value Outcomes with Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence

By Prof. Dr. Evone Botros, Senior Research Fellow, Oxbridge Institute of Professional Development (OIPD), UK

Abstract

Productivity in contemporary knowledge economies is increasingly measured by impact rather than activity. Organizations must deliver higher-value results while maintaining compliance, governance, accuracy, and infrastructure reliability. Artificial intelligence (AI) offers new capabilities for accelerating insight generation, improving workflow efficiency, and increasing the visibility of professional contributions. However, the integration of AI must be guided by human-centered principles to ensure ethical alignment, reliable outputs, and sustainable value creation. This article explores how professionals and institutions can achieve faster and clearer outcomes without compromising governance. It proposes a framework for human-AI collaboration that integrates infrastructure reliability, domain intelligence, and responsible leadership.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, productivity, governance, human-centered AI, leadership*

From Activity to Impact

For decades, productivity was measured through visible activity such as hours worked and tasks completed. In modern digital environments, these measures are no longer sufficient. Organizations increasingly evaluate impact: the ability to generate meaningful outcomes and solve complex problems efficiently.

Digital convergence has reshaped professional work by integrating data systems, communication platforms, and intelligent tools. As Botros (2021) notes, technological convergence enables distributed collaboration and expands the cognitive capacity of professionals working within digital environments.

Artificial Intelligence as a Visibility Engine

Artificial intelligence improves the visibility of knowledge work. AI systems can process

large volumes of information, identify patterns, and transform raw data into actionable insight. This capability allows organizations to better recognize which processes create genuine value.

Human-centered AI systems are designed to augment human capabilities rather than replace them (Botros, 2022). When professionals collaborate effectively with AI tools, their work becomes more transparent, measurable, and strategically relevant.

Governance, Compliance, and Responsible Innovation

The speed of AI-driven systems must be balanced with strong governance. International organizations such as UNESCO and the OECD emphasize transparency, accountability, and fairness in the deployment of AI systems. These frameworks highlight the importance of regulatory oversight, ethical safeguards, and institutional responsibility.

Governance structures allow organizations to innovate while maintaining public trust and institutional integrity.

Accuracy and Infrastructure Reliability

AI systems depend heavily on reliable data, robust infrastructure, and expert oversight. Without these foundations, algorithmic outputs may become inaccurate or misleading. Human expertise, therefore, remains essential. Emotional intelligence, professional judgment, and contextual understanding enable leaders to evaluate AI-generated insights responsibly (Botros, 2024).

Human-Centered Leadership in the AI Era

Leadership in AI-augmented environments requires adaptive thinking. While AI technologies can optimize processes and identify patterns, human leaders remain responsible for ethical reasoning and long-term strategic decisions. Botros (2025) emphasizes that adaptability represents a key form of intelligence in the AI era. Leaders who

combine technological awareness with human-centered values are best positioned to guide institutions through digital transformation.

Conclusion

The transition from activity-based productivity to impact-driven performance reflects a broader transformation within digital

economies. Artificial intelligence enables organizations to work faster and more intelligently, but sustainable value emerges only when innovation is supported by governance, accuracy, and human expertise.

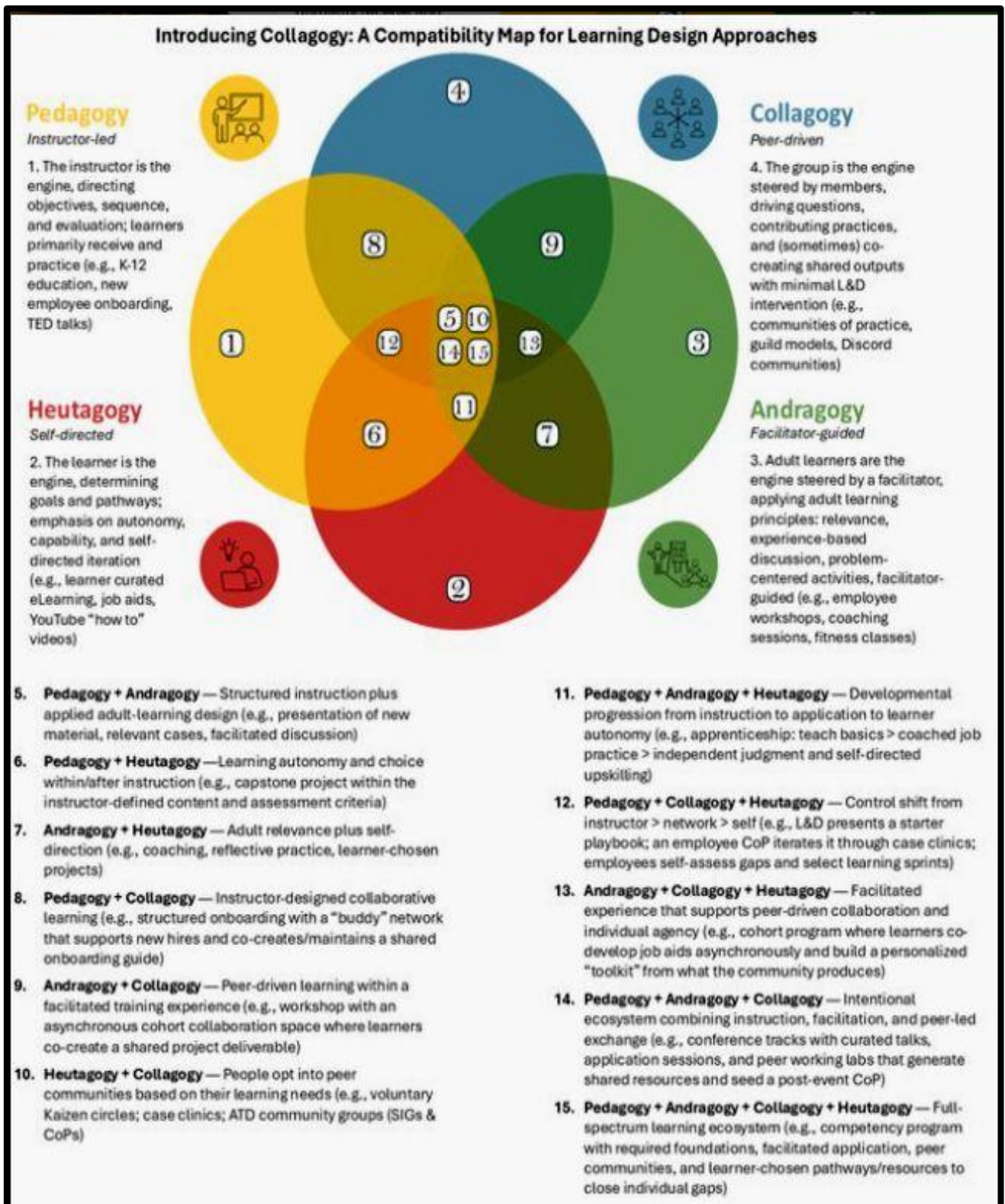
Human-AI collaboration, therefore, represents the future of responsible professional practice.

References

- Botros, E. (2021). Digital convergence and the future workforce. *Journal of Applied Innovation*.
- Botros, E. (2022). Human-centered AI: Building systems that empower. *Oxford Leadership Review*.
- Botros, E. (2024). Emotional intelligence and the rise of AI-augmented leadership. *Leadership Quarterly*.
- Botros, E. (2024). Higher education in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. *Global Learning Journal*.
- Botros, E. (2024). Empowering professionals through generative learning. *Journal of Professional Development (JPD)*, 6(4).
- Botros, E. (2025). Reimagining future readiness: Leadership and learning in the age of AI. Oxford: OIPD Press.
- Botros, E. (2025). Reframing pedagogy for a digital future. *Oxbridge Institute of Professional Development (OIPD)*.
- Botros, E. (2025). Generative AI and the human mind: Towards ethical co-creation. *Oxbridge Institute of Professional Development (OIPD)*.
- Botros, E. (2025). The power to adapt: The true measure of intelligence in the AI era. *International Journal of Professional Development (IJPD)*.
- Botros, E. (2025). Humanity in the age of artificial intelligence: The role of long-term initiatives and models. *AI and Society Review*.
- Brynjolfsson, E., & McAfee, A. (2017). *Machine, platform, crowd: Harnessing our digital future*. W.W. Norton.
- Floridi, L., et al. (2018). *AI4People—An ethical framework for a good AI society*. *Minds and Machines*.
- Kaplan, A., & Haenlein, M. (2019). *Siri, Siri in my hand: Who's the fairest in the land?* *Business Horizons*.
- Russell, S. (2019). *Human compatible: Artificial intelligence and the problem of control*. Viking.
- Tegmark, M. (2017). *Life 3.0: Being human in the age of artificial intelligence*. Knopf.
- UNESCO. (2021). *Recommendation on the ethics of artificial intelligence*. Paris: UNESCO.
- OECD. (2024). *Principles for trustworthy artificial intelligence*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Author & Contact

© Prof. Dr. Evone Botros | All Rights Reserved
 Senior Research Fellow, Oxbridge Institute of Professional Development (OIPD), UK
 Fellow of the Royal Society of Great Britain
 Email: evonmatta@gmail.com
 Phone: +20 122 730 3510
 Website: www.oipd.org.uk



Contributed by Dr. Lee Kwan Meng, an active member of the 'Plaza Learning Circle,' which was established by two OIPD Board Advisory members in 2020

REGULAR FEATURE ARTICLES

What Worries Me About Teachers' Use of AI

By Marcus Luther



A high school teacher reflects on how adult choices around AI use—particularly their approaches to transparency and focus on efficiency—can affect classroom culture.

When I'm asked what I'm most concerned about with AI as a high school English teacher, my answer for the past year has had absolutely nothing to do with students.

It's the adults.

Since the public launch of ChatGPT during the 2022–23 school year, many of the headlines have focused on what students were doing with it: Articles on students cheating their way through college and the end of critical thinking in the classroom have been shared among educators.

I can only speak for myself, but this does not track with what I'm hearing and experiencing.

Our classroom this year looks and feels very much like our classroom four years ago. Students are discussing their readings thoughtfully and pushing themselves to grow authentically as writers, and aside from a handful of incidents with students making poor choices—choices, I'd add, that a handful of students would make even before AI tools were around—the classroom continues to be a good place, a place that I'm very proud of and grateful to be in.

Talking with students and watching what's happening beyond the classroom, though? I'm really concerned about the decisions adults are making around AI.

And there are three patterns I've seen developing around adult choices that have very real consequences for students. I write this with humility, given the rapid pace of change in this technology, but I also write this with purpose, as I believe that missteps moving forward can end up setting us back.

Lack of Transparency About AI Use

I'm typically quite open-minded as a teacher about people using different approaches in different contexts, but there are some values that should be universal—and one of those is a commitment to transparency around our practices.

Unfortunately, the normalization of AI usage by teachers and educators has somehow sidestepped this commitment. In a 2024 survey by *EducationWeek*, 80 percent of educators said it was not necessary to disclose their use of AI in planning lessons to students and families, and 48 percent said this was the case even when using AI for grading and feedback.

There is nuance across different uses of AI—for example, using it to brainstorm for a new unit is quite different, in my view, from outsourcing all your grading and feedback—but I find the overall trend deeply concerning. As a teacher, I've often told students that if they are unsure of whether something is OK to use in their work, there is an easy solution: *Ask if it's OK.*

“When you aren’t willing to be open with what you used,” I’ve said to students countless times over the years, “you’re sort of telling on yourself.” The surveys referenced above demonstrate that a lot of educators are telling on themselves by not disclosing their AI use.

Transparency builds trust, not to mention valuable opportunities for conversation and better understanding of one another. Isn’t this the *exact* thing we need to prioritize right now in our schools, and in education more broadly?

Regardless of your perspective on AI, there should be some easy things we all can agree on—and I believe a commitment to transparency has to be one of those easy things, especially with our students and families.

Disconnect Between AI Norms for Adults and for Students

Near the end of the last school year, I asked students to share their views on AI usage for both students and teachers alike—first in a survey and then in an online discussion among themselves.

The results were quite fascinating, but one of the clearest takeaways for me was how frustrated students were at the notion of teachers using AI themselves while prohibiting students from using it.

In the words of one sophomore, “It’s just another way that teachers are being hypocrites.”

Once again, I acknowledge the nuance in different usages of AI by teachers. I teach in a high school, and policies for student AI use should probably be different in elementary and middle schools. That said, if you are a high school teacher and believe it is 100 percent OK to be using AI extensively in your work but not at all OK for your students, at minimum I would suggest not only being transparent about that choice with students but continually touching base with how your students feel about this disconnect. David Cutler, a journalism and history teacher, is transparent with students about why he uses AI and why he doesn’t allow them to use it in the writing process, and he writes that “students value that openness.”

Beyond student perception, I believe part of our work as teachers is to be academic role models for students, and there is a ton of value in walking the walk as much as possible alongside them. For example, if I expect students to be able to craft an essay with zero support from AI, there is a ton of value in me going through the same process in crafting exemplar essays beforehand.

The other point I’d offer based on many conversations with students: We do not get to control how students perceive our actions as teachers. There are many students in our classrooms right now with a sceptical or negative view of the use of AI for myriad reasons, even when we are open with them about our process and rationale.

So yes, I believe we need to hold ourselves and other educators accountable to a standard of transparency around AI use. I also believe we need to be mindful of how students may be perceiving adult use of AI, particularly if they are not being allowed to use it themselves.

The Cost of Prioritizing Efficiency

The final consideration I want to raise here is one I bring up with utmost generosity, as I fully recognize how teachers are systematically under-resourced when it comes to the time we need to fully do our jobs. The vast majority of AI usage by teachers has been justified as a tool not for improving the depth and quality of our work, but rather for the single, understandable purpose of saving time.

If I am honest, there is a part of me that worries considerably about the long-term impact for the teaching profession of using AI rather than addressing deeper labor concerns, but I want to instead focus here on a consequence that is here-and-now: the real costs that can result from prioritizing efficiency as a teacher.

First of all, time spent on something as a teacher sends a signal to students about how much we value it—and *lack of time spent* similarly sends the opposite signal. This is one of the reasons I am so against the use of AI-generated feedback for student writing: How can I ask them to care about their own writing if I do not invest my time in reading and responding to it?

There is also real value in the time we spend doing our work. It takes considerable time as an English teacher to thoughtfully read essays and craft meaningful feedback, yes, but the end result is that I have a deep, authentic understanding of what my students need individually and collectively as writers—the foundation, I believe, of what can be truly transformational work in the classroom.

Finally, I often hear teachers remark that our current education system too often pushes students into a transactional experience, one that limits the value of learning for the sake of learning. I agree with this! Yet when we teachers prioritize efficiency for ourselves, how can we expect students not to do the same?

We're at a Crossroads Right Now With AI

We are at a moment of considerable disagreement over what to do with AI in our classrooms with students, in our work as teachers, and in society at-large. As a result, I imagine there are a number of people reading this who might disagree with these points. Completely fair, and I believe that we need to

continue talking with and learning from each other—and with our students, I'd add, as Brett Vogelsinger lays out here.

While this piece is framed as a list of potential consequences, given the crossroads we are with AI I think it can also be read as a list of questions for educators exploring AI in their own work:

- Are you being transparent with students and families about your use of AI?
- If you are using AI but prohibiting students from doing so, how do they feel about it?
- If you are using AI to save time, are there any downsides of prioritizing efficiency?

All of us work in our own contexts and, particularly at this moment, it is going to be difficult to arrive at any type of consensus when it comes to the use of AI by adults in education.

Whatever direction we move with AI, though, we as educators need to be mindful of the potential consequences of our choices, as they impact classrooms beyond our own and, most importantly, our students.



Assessing the Impact of Life Skills Education: Indicators, Innovation, and Verification Approaches. *Courtesy the World Economic Forum (WEF)*

Abstract

Life Skills Education (LSE) has emerged as a pivotal component of lifelong learning and employability development, particularly within adult and community learning frameworks. As economies evolve under the forces of technology, global interdependence, and demographic change, individuals require a blend of cognitive, emotional, and social competencies to remain resilient and productive. Despite widespread acceptance of life skills as essential for employability and wellbeing, measuring and verifying their impact remains a persistent challenge. This paper explores the assessment of LSE through three interconnected dimensions: (1) defining and selecting meaningful impact indicators, (2) leveraging innovative methods and

technologies for assessment, and (3) developing verification systems to validate outcomes. Drawing from the andragogical perspective, the paper integrates key insights from the World Economic Forum (WEF), OECD, UNESCO, and ILO frameworks to propose a multidimensional model for assessing impact across individual, institutional, and societal levels. It concludes that a blended, participatory, and evidence-informed approach—anchored in innovation and verification—can strengthen the credibility and transformative potential of Life Skills Education in today's dynamic labour and learning environments.

Keywords: *Life Skills Education, Andragogy, Employability, Indicators, Innovation,*

Verification, World Economic Forum, Lifelong Learning

1. Introduction

Life Skills Education (LSE) has become an essential foundation for adult learning and employability in the 21st century. Rapid technological advancement, automation, and the shifting nature of work have prompted global calls for skills that extend beyond technical competence to include adaptability, communication, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2023). The concept of “life skills” reflects a holistic learning philosophy—combining cognitive, personal, and interpersonal competencies that enable individuals to navigate complex life and work environments.

Unlike pedagogy, which focuses on child learning, andragogy emphasizes the self-directed, experience-based, and problem-centered nature of adult learning (Knowles, 1984). Within this framework, Life Skills Education becomes a transformative process, equipping adults to learn continuously, manage change, and sustain employability in evolving social and economic contexts.

Despite its growing relevance, assessing the impact of LSE presents significant challenges. Life skills often manifest as behavioural and attitudinal changes that are not easily quantifiable. Traditional educational metrics—such as grades or completion rates—fail to capture nuanced outcomes such as confidence, empathy, collaboration, or resilience. Moreover, in the workplace, employers increasingly demand verifiable evidence of these competencies.

This paper addresses these challenges by exploring three key dimensions of impact assessment in Life Skills Education: (1) identifying measurable indicators; (2) embracing innovative assessment approaches; and (3) implementing verification mechanisms to ensure credibility. Drawing from global frameworks and andragogical principles, the discussion emphasizes that effective life skills assessment requires both rigor and relevance—balancing empirical validation with learner-centred engagement.

2. Conceptual Framework: Life Skills and the Andragogical Perspective

Life Skills Education derives from the recognition that success in life and work depends not solely on technical knowledge but on the ability to apply learning across diverse contexts. UNESCO (2021) defines life skills as “adaptive and positive behaviours that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” These skills align closely with the WEF’s Future of Jobs competencies—such as analytical thinking, creativity, resilience, leadership, and empathy (WEF, 2023).

From an andragogical standpoint, adults bring prior experiences, motivations, and self-concepts that shape how they learn (Knowles et al., 2015). LSE programs targeting adults must therefore emphasize experiential, reflective, and contextual learning—where participants connect skills training with real-life applications such as workplace performance, community participation, or personal wellbeing.

Conceptually, the impact of Life Skills Education can be assessed across three interrelated levels:

Individual Level: Behavioural and attitudinal transformations—such as enhanced confidence, adaptability, and interpersonal communication.

Institutional Level: Improved organizational culture, teamwork, and leadership within learning or workplace settings.

Societal Level: Broader contributions to employability, civic engagement, and social inclusion.

These layers of impact reinforce the view that LSE is not an isolated intervention but part of a lifelong learning ecosystem, contributing to economic productivity and social cohesion.

3. Indicators of Life Skills Impact

Indicators are the foundation of impact measurement. They translate abstract learning goals into observable and verifiable outcomes. Effective indicators in Life Skills Education must capture behavioural change, attitudinal development, and contextual application rather than rote knowledge.

3.1. Categories of Indicators

Cognitive Indicators:

- Improved decision-making and problem-solving ability.
- Strategic thinking and systems awareness.
- Application of knowledge in complex, ambiguous contexts.

Behavioural Indicators:

- Demonstrated adaptability and initiative in professional or community roles.
- Active participation in collaborative projects.
- Evidence of responsible risk-taking or innovation.

Affective (Emotional) Indicators:

- Growth in self-awareness, emotional regulation, and motivation.
- Positive attitude toward diversity and feedback.
- Enhanced resilience and stress management.

Social and Employability Indicators:

- Communication and teamwork effectiveness.
- Leadership and conflict resolution skills.
- Contribution to community or organizational goals.

Institutional Indicators:

- Integration of life skills in training curricula.
- Evidence of a continuous learning culture.
- Employer satisfaction with graduates' soft skills.

Societal Indicators:

- Employability rates and job retention.
- Entrepreneurship and innovation outcomes.
- Participation in civic and voluntary activities.

3.2. Challenges in Defining Indicators

While these indicators are conceptually robust, their measurement validity can be difficult to establish. Behavioural and affective outcomes are influenced by context, personality, and culture. Moreover, quantifying “empathy” or “leadership” risks oversimplifying complex human attributes. Hence, indicators must be triangulated through mixed methods—

combining quantitative tools (e.g., surveys, scoring rubrics) with qualitative evidence (e.g., reflections, interviews, peer assessments).

The OECD Learning Compass 2030 underscores this approach, advocating for the assessment of “transformative competencies” that enable learners to shape a better future (OECD, 2020). In this view, indicators should illuminate progress, not merely label performance.

4. Innovation in Assessing Life Skills Education

Innovation in assessment moves beyond testing to encompass authentic, participatory, and technology-enabled approaches that reflect how adults learn and demonstrate competence.

4.1. Experiential and Performance-Based Assessments

Adult learners thrive when assessments mirror real-world tasks. Project-based evaluations, case analyses, and community action projects enable participants to apply skills in context. For example, a workplace innovation challenge or a social entrepreneurship initiative can serve as both learning and assessment platforms. Rubrics then assess teamwork, creativity, and leadership within these experiences.

4.2. Reflective and Portfolio Approaches

Reflective journals, e-portfolios, and learning diaries allow learners to document growth over time. These tools embody the self-directed learning principle of andragogy, where learners take ownership of demonstrating competence. Facilitators can review portfolios for evidence of critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and values-based decision-making.

4.3. Digital and Data-Driven Innovations

Technology introduces new frontiers in life skills assessment.

AI-assisted analytics can analyze patterns in online collaboration, participation, and sentiment.

Gamified learning platforms can capture behavioural data—such as persistence, problem-solving speed, or cooperation.

Mobile-based reflection apps enable continuous feedback loops between facilitators and learners.

These tools expand data sources but require careful ethical governance to ensure privacy and fairness.

4.4. Participatory and Peer-Based Evaluation

Life Skills Education benefits from a co-created assessment, where learners and facilitators jointly define criteria. Peer assessment and 360-degree feedback models are increasingly used in corporate and community training to evaluate interpersonal effectiveness. Such approaches align with social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), which emphasizes learning through observation, interaction, and feedback.

4.5. Global and Regional Innovations

Across ASEAN and African regions, participatory evaluation has been successfully applied in community development training, where life skills outcomes—such as confidence or collective problem-solving—are assessed through storytelling and participatory rural appraisal (PRA). These methods recognize local narratives as legitimate evidence of learning impact.

5. Verification of Impact

Verification ensures that the claimed impacts of Life Skills Education are valid, reliable, and credible to stakeholders—learners, employers, and policymakers alike.

5.1. Levels of Verification

Internal Verification:

Cross-checking by facilitators and program coordinators.

Moderation of learner evidence through peer review or reflective audits.

External Verification:

- Independent evaluation by accreditation or quality assurance bodies.
- Third-party assessments aligned with national skills frameworks or industry standards (e.g., ILO skill verification mechanisms).

Triangulation:

- Combining self-reports, facilitator observations, and external measures to validate outcomes.
- Example: corroborating a learner's self-reported teamwork growth with peer feedback and performance records.

5.2. Models and Frameworks

Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model—reaction, learning, behaviour, and results—remains a practical structure for verifying LSE outcomes in training contexts.

The Theory of Change approach maps how inputs (training, mentorship) lead to short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes.

Logic Models provide a linear visualization linking resources, activities, outputs, and measurable impacts.

Verification is not merely bureaucratic; it strengthens accountability and learning credibility. For instance, organizations such as the WEF (2023) advocate transparent reporting of skills outcomes to enhance employability pathways.

5.3. Technological and Community-Based Verification

Digital verification tools—such as blockchain-based credentialing—are emerging to authenticate life skills achievements. Micro-credentials and digital badges can record verified skills such as communication, resilience, or leadership. Simultaneously, community-based verification through storytelling or participatory evaluation validates social impact, particularly in adult literacy and livelihood programs.

6. Challenges, Gaps, and Future Directions

Despite progress, several challenges persist in assessing and verifying the impact of Life Skills Education.

6.1. Key Challenges

Subjectivity: Life skills are inherently personal and context-dependent.

Cultural Variability: Definitions of “confidence” or “leadership” differ across societies.

Assessment Literacy: Facilitators often lack training in evaluating affective and behavioural learning outcomes.

Institutional Resistance: Systems oriented toward credentialing and exams may undervalue evidence of soft skills.

Funding and Time Constraints: Effective impact verification requires sustained investment and longitudinal tracking.

6.2. Gaps in Current Research and Practice

- Limited longitudinal studies linking LSE participation to long-term employability.
- Insufficient integration between education and labour market indicators.
- Lack of standardized global frameworks for measuring socio-emotional learning outcomes among adults.

6.3. Future Directions

- **Integrated Frameworks:** Align life skills indicators with employability and well-being metrics in national systems.
- **AI and Data Analytics:** Employ big data to analyze behavioural trends, with ethical safeguards.
- **Participatory Verification:** Engage learners and communities in defining and verifying outcomes.
- **Cross-sector Collaboration:** Combine expertise from education, psychology, labor economics, and data science.
- **Global Benchmarking:** Encourage harmonization of indicators through organizations like WEF, UNESCO, and ILO.
- The future of life skills assessment lies in integration, innovation, and inclusivity, ensuring that adult learning remains both measurable and meaningful.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Life Skills Education represents the human dimension of employability and lifelong learning. Its outcomes—adaptability, empathy, resilience, and creativity—are vital for individuals navigating uncertain futures. However, assessing and verifying these outcomes requires methods that are as dynamic as the skills themselves.

This paper has emphasized that meaningful assessment of Life Skills Education must balance structure and flexibility. Indicators provide focus, innovation provides relevance, and verification provides credibility. Together, they create a holistic model for evaluating impact at individual, institutional, and societal levels.

Key recommendations include:

- Embed mixed-method, multi-level assessment frameworks into adult learning systems.
- Foster collaboration among educators, employers, and policy agencies for common standards.
- Utilize digital and participatory innovations to capture nuanced behavioural change.
- Strengthen verification mechanisms—both formal and community-based—to validate real-world outcomes.
- Ultimately, assessing the impact of Life Skills Education is not merely about accountability; it is about affirming the human capacity to grow, adapt, and contribute in an era defined by transformation.

References

1. Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice-Hall.
2. Knowles, M. S. (1984). *The adult learner: A neglected species*. Gulf Publishing.
3. Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2015). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (8th ed.). Routledge.
4. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2020). *OECD learning compass 2030: A framework for student agency for the future*. OECD Publishing.
5. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2021). *Education for sustainable development: A roadmap*. UNESCO Publishing.
6. World Economic Forum (WEF). (2023). *The future of jobs report 2023*. WEF.
7. World Health Organization (WHO). (2020). *Skills-based health education and life skills: An overview*. WHO Press.

Building an Agile Workforce Through Upskilling

Courtesy of Will Clive, Pluralsight's Chief People Officer

Agility is most simply defined as the ability to move, think, and understand quickly, and in today's hyper-competitive, rapidly advancing business landscape, it's a critical characteristic of organizational success. Since 2000, more than half (52%) of Fortune 500 companies have gone bankrupt, been acquired or altogether ceased to exist due to an inability to be agile in the face of digital disruption. To avoid these pitfalls, organizations must cultivate the dexterity needed to survive and thrive in today's tech ecosystem — and that starts with people.

The Skills Development Imperative

Skills development is foundational to creating an agile workforce, especially as the effects of economic turbulence and workforce reductions trickle down to employees' day-to-day responsibilities. According to Pluralsight's 2023 State of Upskilling Report, 67% of tech managers say company reorganization has resulted in their teams taking on more responsibility, while 47% of technologists agree they have had to perform additional responsibilities outside of their primary job function.

"Employees and their teams are expected to be nimble, but often aren't given the proper education and support to succeed," said Will Clive, Chief People Officer at Pluralsight. "With business priorities and day-to-day responsibilities continuing to evolve and expand rapidly, companies need to invest in upskilling and reskilling to keep up."

Industry studies underscore the critical need for employee education. Pluralsight has a library of research on global tech skills development, which points to several relevant trends:

- **AI-Driven Uncertainty:** Pluralsight's The New Developer Report found that 45% of software developers experience fear and anxiety that their skill sets will become obsolete amid widespread AI adoption. As a result, 74% plan to upskill in AI-assisted coding.
- **Employee and Executive Misalignment:** According to Pluralsight's (<https://www.pluralsight.com/newsroom/pressreleases/pluralsight-sai-skills-report-finds-90-of-executives-don-t-com>) AI Skills Report, 80% of executives and 72% of IT practitioners agree that their organizations often invest in new technology without properly training employees to use it. Moreover, 90% of executives don't completely understand their teams' AI skill level and proficiency.

Although 85% of organizations are adopting multi-cloud strategies, only 9% of technologists have multi-cloud experience, according to Pluralsight's 2023 State of Cloud Report. The most glaring cloud skills gaps lie in data, analytics, engineering, and storage.

- **Skills Gaps:** Although 85% of organizations are adopting multi-cloud strategies, only 9% of technologists have multi-cloud experience, according to Pluralsight's 2023 State of Cloud Report. The most glaring cloud skills gaps lie in data, analytics, engineering, and storage.
- **Barriers to Upskilling:** In the 2023 State of Upskilling Report, Pluralsight found that lack of time and budget have remained the biggest barriers to upskilling over the past two years. And for technologists who do secure time and budget, 30% don't know where to focus their skills development, and 25% aren't sure which resources to leverage. "Companies are rightfully integrating growth-enabling technologies like AI and multi-cloud," Clive adds. "But without first creating an agile workforce via strategic upskilling initiatives, these technologies are unlikely to reach their full potential of value creation."

The Anatomy of an Upskilling Program

Deloitte found that companies that take a skills-based approach to their workforces are 63% more likely to achieve positive results in business areas spanning talent placement, innovation, and employee retention. Furthermore, organizations with agile workforces see significant benefits in employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and operational performance, according to McKinsey.

The value of upskilling is clear, but how do you do it effectively?

"An upskilling program isn't something to throw at the wall to see if it sticks," Clive said. "Sustainable cultures of continuous learning

are backed by strategy and constant iteration.”

When building a culture of continuous learning, leaders should consider the following guidelines:

1. **Align upskilling programs with organizational goals.** Upskilling programs not tied to larger business goals are likely to result in individual wins but not tangible business value. Collaborate across HR, L&D and technology leadership to determine upskilling goals aligned with the business’s trajectory and drill down on specific skills of focus. If you’re able to articulate how upskilling will propel organizational growth, you’re more likely to gain executive buy-in. Be sure to also establish KPIs to determine success and hold leadership accountable.
2. **Make resources accessible.** Once you have a strategic plan of action, make sure employees have the tools they need to support their learning journeys. This might include on-demand video content, customized instructor-led training or hands-on simulations. Learning isn’t one-size-fits-all, so be sure to stay attuned to employee feedback, customizing the breadth, depth and delivery of the curriculum as needed. Accompany your initiative with a strong communications plan to ensure employees know where and how to leverage upskilling resources.
3. **Build learning time into the week.** When learning is viewed as an extracurricular activity, it can easily slip down the priority list beneath tasks perceived as more urgent or important. To convey the message that

learning, too, is both urgent and important, schedule designated learning time for team members. This helps ensure employees make meaningful progress toward their goals.

4. **Assess the success of your initiative.** Ongoing evaluation of the KPIs established at the outset ensures your upskilling program delivers on its promises of 1) contributing to business objectives and 2) building an agile workforce. Measure the effectiveness of upskilling initiatives through skills assessments, surveys and postmortems.
5. **Be flexible in your approach.** Business priorities are constantly evolving, as are technological advancements. Although you don’t want to change too much too often and give your employees whiplash, be open to letting your upskilling program evolve and adapt. Stay apprised of which modules are gaining traction and which are falling flat, and adjust as needed.

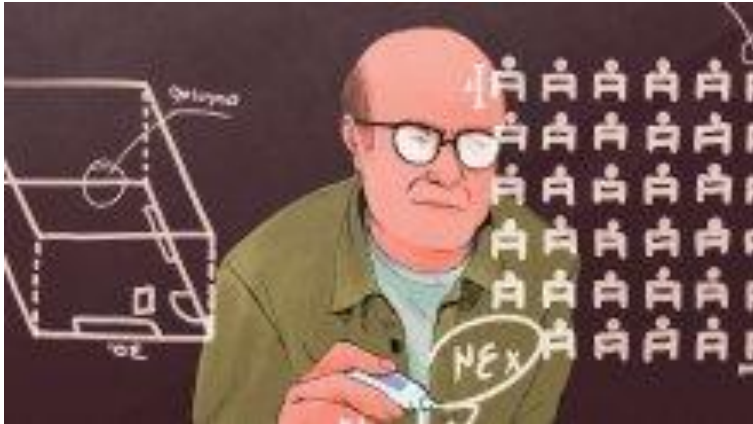
An Agile Future

Upskilling is not just an investment in individuals; it’s a strategic imperative for thriving businesses. As the pace of change accelerates, the key to dexterity lies in empowering teams with continuous learning opportunities. “New technology is critical to growth, but so are your people,” Clive said. “Without a highly skilled talent pool, new and shiny innovations are merely arrows without a bow — full of potential but unable to hit their mark.” *To learn about how Pluralsight can empower your organization with upskilling success, visit our website at [pluralsight.com](https://www.pluralsight.com)*

“Skills Gaps: Although 85% of organizations are adopting multi-cloud strategies, only 9% of technologists have multi-cloud experience. The most glaring cloud skills gaps lie in data, analytics,

An Unconventional Seating Plan Designed to Benefit Focus and Learning

By Tyler Rablin



After years of search and experimentation, this teacher finally hit on a room layout that allowed for efficient shifting between whole class, small group, and independent work.

I used to be an obsessive classroom rearranger—every six weeks or so I would find myself looking for a new desk arrangement that would improve some aspect of our work in the room. So when I finally found a desk arrangement that I didn't want to change for the rest of the year, I knew I was on to something good.

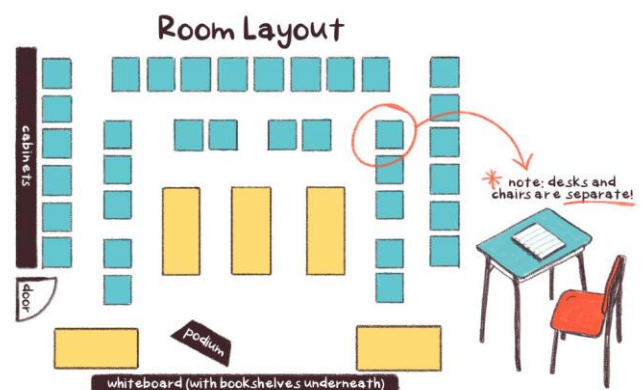
The idea started developing when I stumbled across an article about an Australian classroom arrangement based on three “archetypal learning spaces”: campfires, caves, and watering holes. Essentially, the idea is that students need a physical space to work independently (a cave), spaces to gather informally (campfires), and a space to gather as a whole to learn from an expert (the watering hole). Research on flexible seating has shown promise, but for many educators at the secondary level, creating this type of environment often runs into issues of space and cost. When I had 34 desks in a classroom that was around 35 feet by 30 feet, making those desks fit was my priority, not creating different zones around the room.

This is why I started playing with having students move their seats and desks to suit different tasks. We would practice with timers to go from rows to table groups and then back, but no matter how much we practiced, moving still always seemed to be more of a disruption than it was worth.

What I really wanted was to have students make small, quick moves so that shifting wouldn't take up the whole period, and the solution I created looked far from normal, judging by the look I got when my administrator walked into

my classroom one day and found the students facing away from me toward the outer walls. Before I explain, here's a quick diagram of the classroom design that made my classroom function so much better.

Essentially, I had a sort of horseshoe shape around the outside of the room, with a smaller horseshoe inside it (with gaps to facilitate movement). In the middle were a couple of tables, and then pressed against the front wall of the room were two more tables. (If you don't currently have tables, check with your custodians. They often know where the secret stashes are.) Now, my room wasn't very big, so to make space for an extra table, I ended up getting rid of my teacher desk. If that's not an option for you, there are still ways to make it work.



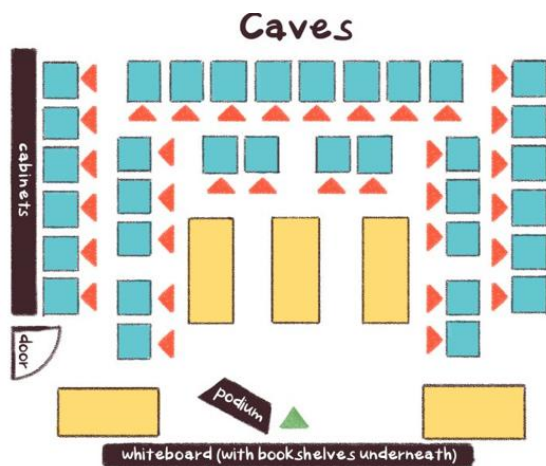
It’s also important to note that my students have chairs that are separate from the desks—if you have the one-piece desk-and-chair combo, this won’t work for you.

Instead of rearranging the room depending on the type of activity, I was able to keep the furniture the same with this layout and just have students move, depending on what we needed for a specific activity.

Independent Work: Caves

Individual work, in the Australian layout I mentioned, happens in “caves,” and students need minimal distractions to support focus. As an English teacher, I found the cave setup to be great for things like independent reading time or any sort of writing time. It also worked well for formal assessments.

The way it worked was that students would face out at the two horseshoes. It would look like this—and as I mentioned, the first time an admin walked in and saw it, they were initially baffled.



The orange triangles are student chairs pointing the direction each student is facing. The green triangle is the teacher’s chair.

As you can see, each student had their own desk but was facing outward. One benefit of orienting students this way in the digital age is that you are able to see their screens at a quick glance if they are working on computers. It’s also easy to see if they are attempting to hide a phone behind a screen or in a book.

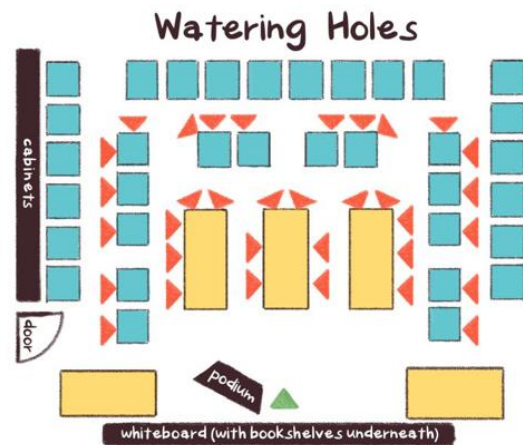
That’s great from a classroom management standpoint, but one of the biggest benefits I found was that this layout not only minimized

distractions but also acted as a physical cue to the students about the type of activity we were engaged in.

This was why I had struggled with permanent desk groups—I loved how they facilitated conversations, but when it was time to work independently, students were still grouped in a way that could be distracting. From the cave, switching to the watering hole was incredibly easy.

Whole Class Instruction: The Watering Hole

Watering holes are intended to be a place for everyone to come together. This works really well for things like mini-lessons, videos, and watching student presentations. Here’s what the watering hole looked like.



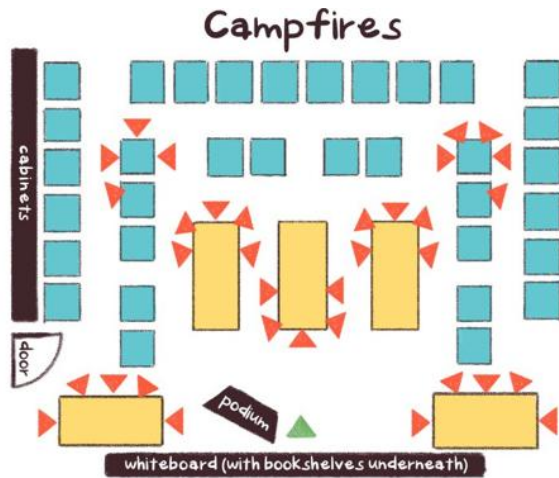
Instead of needing to move their desks to see the front of the room, most students just needed to spin around in their chairs. The outer row would use the inside horseshoe as their tables, and the inner horseshoe would flip around to the center tables.

There were a couple of things I really liked about the switch from caves to watering holes. For one, I would typically have students leave their devices on their original desks when they turned around, so the screen was no longer a distraction for them. And two, because of the way the room was laid out, when we all rotated in for the watering hole setup, we got closer together, which allowed me to use proximity a bit more for classroom management.

Small Group Work: Campfires

Finally, the campfire is the place for collaboration and connection, so this setup is intended to help facilitate small group work.

This is how that would typically look in this layout.



I would often number the different stations in the room, and students would be assigned a number and move to that spot. While I would try to have an extra chair or two at the stations, often students would have to bring their chair with them.

So with just a quick shift of some chairs—and no change to the desk positions—we could transition quickly from independent work to

whole group activities to small groups with minimal disruption and have clear physical cues to support the expectations of each space.

Maximum Flexibility

I really liked the way this design facilitated less-formal seating needs. For example, if I needed to conference with students or engage in some small group tutoring during independent work time, it was easy to do that at the tables, and with most students facing outward, the layout created a little bit of privacy for those interactions.

Additionally, students knew that they were allowed to move to the tables during independent work time if they needed to collaborate with a peer, as long as they checked with me. This collaboration would happen close to the middle of the room and out of sight of the other students, which allowed me to monitor things and minimize the distraction to those still working independently.

Overall, my goal was to ensure that the physical layout of the room facilitated the type of learning experience we were engaged in, and I found that the quick physical transitions helped students also transition mentally to each activity.



Wellness is the Secret Engine of Learning Efficacy (Part 1)

By Prof Dr. Pierre Berger, Senior Research Fellow, Oxbridge Institute of Professional Development (OIPD) UK

For Learning & Development (L&D) practitioners, the holy grail has always been "stickiness"—the elusive moment when a new concept transitions from a trainer's slide deck to a learner's long-term behaviour. We obsess over instructional design, gamification, and delivery styles. However, we often overlook the most critical piece of hardware in the room: the biological brain.

If the brain is the engine of learning, wellness is the high-octane fuel and regular maintenance that keeps it from seizing up. To maximize learning efficacy, we must view our learners not just as "minds to be filled," but as *biological and physiological systems that require holistic care.*

How Learning Takes Place: The Neural Dance

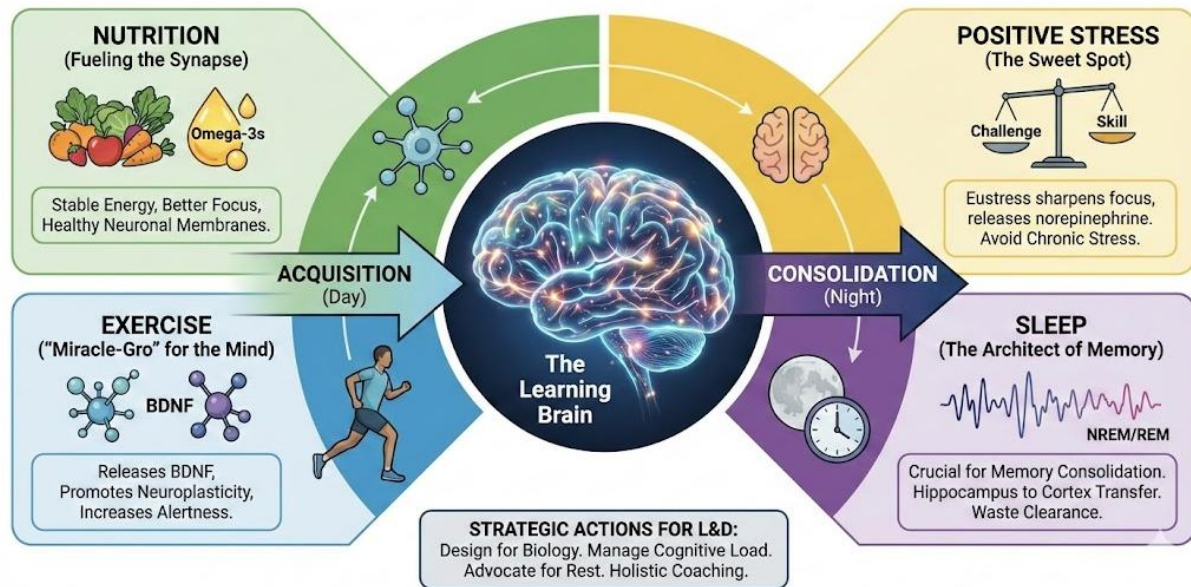
To understand why wellness matters, we must first look at the "machinery" of learning. At its core, learning is a physical process of neuroplasticity. *When we encounter new information, neurons in the brain fire electrical signals to one another across gaps called synapses.*

When we repeat a task or study a concept, these neural pathways strengthen—a phenomenon known as Long-Term Potentiation (LTP). Essentially, *"neurons that fire together, wire together."* However, this wiring is physically demanding. It requires oxygen, protein synthesis, energy (glucose),

and a conducive environment for active learning, like the *handwriting* of notes versus *keying them in* or *speaking/reading out loud*

(new research). If the brain suffers from low *wellness*, the neural connections remain weak, and information is lost before it can be stored.

Wellness: The Engine of Learning Efficacy



The Four Pillars of the Learning-Ready Brain

A healthy brain doesn't exist in a vacuum; it is the product of a *holistic integration of total wellness*.

For a coach or trainer, recognizing these four pillars is essential to engaging learners.

1. Nutrition: Fuelling the Synapses

The brain represents only 2% of our body weight, but consumes roughly 20% of our daily energy. Learning is metabolically expensive. *High-sugar diets lead to glucose spikes and crashes*, resulting in "brain fog" where focus evaporates. *Ultra-processed foods with hidden sugars and many toxic chemicals build up in the Brain*. Whereas a plant-based diet rich in protein, Omega-3 fatty acids, and antioxidants supports the function of neuronal membranes and efficient synaptic connections, making it easier for learning signals to pass throughout our neural networks. *There is a 'Gut-Brain' axis, and a healthy gut leads to a healthy brain*.

2. Exercise: "Miracle-Gro" for the Mind

Physical activity is perhaps the most potent "cognitive enhancer" available. Exercise

triggers the release of *Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF)*, a protein often described by neuroscientists as "*Miracle-Gro*" for the brain. BDNF supports the survival of existing neurons and encourages the growth of new ones. A learner who has had a brisk walk before a session is biologically more capable of absorbing information than one who has been sedentary all day. *We were made to move*, so exercise and correct breathing fuel the brain with more oxygen and relaxes the body to calm the whole nervous system (the Parasympathetic system). Rest & Relax.

"If the body moves, the brain grooves."

3. Positive Stress: The Sweet Spot of Arousal

Not all stress is "distress." In L&D, we aim for eustress (positive stress). When we are slightly challenged, the brain releases norepinephrine, which sharpens focus and increases alertness. *However, when wellness is low, learners tip into chronic stress*. This floods the brain with cortisol, which actually shrinks the hippocampus—the very part of the brain responsible for forming new memories. *We*

can say that excess stress kills learning and the formation of memory.

4. Sleep: The Architect of Memory

If there is one non-negotiable aspect for learning, it is sleep. We used to think of sleep as "downtime," but for the brain, it is a period of intense activity.

The Critical Role of Sleep in Memory Consolidation

For the L&D practitioner, understanding sleep is a game-changer. Learning actually happens in two stages: *acquisition (during the learning activities) and consolidation (during sleep).*

During the day, the hippocampus acts as a "temporary USB drive," capturing new information. But its capacity is limited. *During deep, Non-REM sleep, the brain moves those files from the hippocampus to the long-term memory storage* into related parts of the brain's cortex.

Furthermore, during REM sleep, the brain performs "integration." It connects new information to existing knowledge, *consolidating the insights and "aha" moments* that trainers strive for. Without quality sleep, the brain's "glymphatic system" cannot clear out metabolic waste. A sleep-deprived learner will be struggling—there's little capacity to consolidate anything new.

Summary and Strategic Conclusions

For trainers and coaches, the implications are clear: Wellness is not a luxury; it is a cognitive

prerequisite. A learner who is malnourished, sedentary, stressed, or sleep-deprived is biologically incapable of reaching peak performance, regardless of how "engaging" the content is. *We can only be highly motivated to learn if in a high mental and physical wellness state.*

Specific Conclusions for L&D Practitioners:

- ***Design for Biology and Physiology:*** Incorporate movement breaks to trigger BDNF release.
- ***Manage the Load:*** Respect the limits of the hippocampus by avoiding "information dumping" late in the day when cognitive fatigue can set in. But a review of learning just before sleep helps.
- ***Organize for Rest:*** If delivering a multi-day program, emphasize the importance of a full night of sleep between sessions rather than encouraging late-night sessions or "cramming" of new data.
- ***Holistic Training or Coaching:*** When striving for improved performance, start with the basics—sleep and stress management—before moving to complex skill acquisition.
- ***Ultimately, we must stop viewing "wellness" and "productivity" as competing interests.*** By fostering a culture of wellness, we aren't just making people feel better; we are building better brains, capable of faster learning and more enduring growth.

“Two memory enhancers: the handwriting of notes versus keying them in. And, speaking or reading out loud, rather than reading passively to yourself.”

Prof Pierre was a pioneer in the early growth and expansion of learning and Development (L&D) in Europe, and has been training and developing talent for over half a century. He now Certifies Trainers, Mentors, & Candidates for the OIPD Professional Doctorate. He has authored 8 books.

The Neuro-Learning Playbook (Part 2)

An executive summary for professional Learning & Development (L&D) practitioners, based on the previous article by Prof. Dr. Pierre Berger, Senior Research Fellow, OIPD UK.

Integrating Wellness & Cognitive Efficacy for Learning Success

1. THE FOUNDATION: Wellness and Learning Efficacy

The Neural Dance of Learning

At its core, learning is the physical process of **neuroplasticity**. When we learn, neurons fire across synapses, creating pathways. Repeated firing leads to Long-Term Potentiation (LTP)—the "wiring" of knowledge. This process is metabolically expensive and requires a healthy biological environment to succeed.

The Four Pillars of the Learning Brain

1. **Nutrition:** The brain consumes 20% of the body's energy. Stable glucose levels prevent "brain fog," while Omega-3s support neuronal membrane health.
2. **Exercise:** Physical activity releases **BDNF (Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor)**, essentially "Miracle-Gro" for the brain, promoting the growth of new neurons.
3. **Positive Stress (Eustress):** While chronic stress shrinks the hippocampus, a healthy challenge releases norepinephrine, sharpening focus and alertness.
4. **Sleep:** The architect of memory. Learning happens in two stages: *acquisition* (during the day) and *consolidation* (during sleep).

The Critical Role of Sleep

During deep NREM sleep, the brain moves information from the "temporary" hippocampus to the "long-term storage" of the cortex. During REM sleep, it integrates new ideas with old ones. Without quality sleep, the brain cannot "save" what was learned that day.

2. COACHING TOOLKIT: Reflective Questions

Use these during 1-on-1 sessions to bridge the gap between wellness and performance.

- **On Nutrition:** "When do you usually experience a drop in focus during the day? How does that align with your meal timing?"
- **On Movement:** "Think of your best 'Aha!' moment. Were you sitting at a desk, or were you moving/walking?"
- **On Stress:** "Does this new skill feel like an exciting challenge (Eustress) or a threat (Distress)?"
- **On Sleep:** "How clear is the 'file' in your head today? Do you feel last night's rest helped or hindered that clarity?"

3. LEARNER TOOLKIT: "Brain-Ready" Self-Assessment

Scale of 1 (Low) to 5 (High).

Category	Indicator	Score
Nutrition	I have consistent energy without a "sugar crash."	/5
Movement	I have moved my body/stretched in the last 4 hours.	/5
Stress	I feel a healthy level of "positive pressure" to learn.	/5
Sleep	I had 7–9 hours of quality sleep last night.	/5
TOTAL	Target Score: 16+ for High Bio-Availability	/20

4. TRAINER TOOLKIT: The "Biological Wall" Observation Checklist

Monitor these signs to diagnose if the room is losing its capacity to learn.

- **The Glazed Gaze:** Learners looking at the screen without blinking or reacting.
- **Fidgeting/Shifting:** Subconscious attempts to stimulate blood flow via movement.
- **The Delayed Response:** A 3-5 second lag when asking questions (sign of sleep debt).
- **The "Hedgehog" Response:** Defensive or unusually quiet behaviour (sign of Distress/Overload).

Real-Time Pivot Moves

- **The 90-Second Shake:** Have everyone stand and shake their limbs to flush the system with oxygen.
- **The Think-Pair-Share:** Move to peer-to-peer discussion to lower performance stress.
- **The Walk & Talk:** Take a discussion point outside for 10 minutes to trigger BDNF.

5. DESIGN TOOLKIT: The "Neuro-Flow" Agenda Template

Aligning your schedule with the brain's natural rhythms.

Time	Phase	Focus	Biological Benefit
09:00	The Priming	Deep Theory / Complex Concepts	Hippocampus is fresh; Cortisol is high.
10:30	BDNF* Break	Movement & Hydration	Sets the new neural connections.
11:00	Application	Gamification & Simulation	Uses Eustress to sharpen focus.
12:30	Refuel	Brain Food (Protein/Complex Carbs)	Stabilizes blood sugar; avoids the crash.
13:30	Oxygen Infusion	Hands-on / Social / Creative	Bypasses the post-lunch slump.
15:00	Fresh Air	Sunlight & Reflection	Regulates circadian rhythm for sleep.
16:00	Consolidation	Synthesis & Sleep Advocacy	Primes the brain to "save" info tonight.

Note. For different seasons and time zones, hours for accessing sunlight, and in sleep preparation, will differ.

BDNF * Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor. It is a protein that is essential for brain cells' health and helps neuroplasticity, learning, and memory. It is increased by body movement & exercise.

Final Implementation Note

Wellness is not a luxury; it is the **biological infrastructure** of learning. A learner who is malnourished, sedentary, or sleep-deprived is biologically incapable of peak performance. *Design Learning for the physiology of the Brain and Body, and the results will follow.*

“Sleep is the architect of memory. Learning happens in two stages: acquisition (during the day) and consolidation (during sleep).”

Guardianship in Leadership: What We Forgot to Teach About Human Skills

By Joseph A. Slota II



Management tells people what to do. Guardianship reminds them why it matters.

Data drives decisions, dashboards rule meetings, and algorithms predict performance, but none of these create trust. Organizations are spending millions on tools to measure engagement, yet most employees will tell you that engagement begins with something simpler: feeling genuinely cared for and watched over.

That feeling has a name: **guardianship**. And it is quietly disappearing from personal childhood development and leadership vocabulary. Why?

Where Guardianship Begins

I learned guardianship long before I held a title. In the row houses of Jersey City, adults didn't call it mentorship or leadership development. They called it looking out for your own. The block worked as one unit, and accountability was built into the culture.

Those street lessons later carried me from warehouse floors to corporate boardrooms and into roles leading finance and global supply chains for Fortune 50 companies. This role was transferred to Deloitte Consulting, where I served as the global leader of life sciences supply chain for more than 20 years.

When people know you care enough to protect their growth, they give you more than compliance. They give you commitment. In my legacy years, I am happy, not lonely. Why? Because I treated people well during my life.

The Business Case for Humanity

During my consulting years, I worked with leaders who had mastered processes but lacked presence. They could read a balance sheet faster than a heartbeat. What separated the exceptional ones wasn't intelligence or strategy. It was emotional guardianship, the instinct to anticipate, to teach, and to shield their teams during stressful moments.

Organizations that nurture this mindset consistently outperform peers in retention, trust scores, and customer loyalty. The logic is simple: People stay where they are seen.

Guardianship vs. Management

Management tells people what to do. Guardianship reminds them why it matters. It is not paternalism. It is a partnership. It is choosing accountability over apathy.

A guardian leader asks:

- Am I modelling the behaviours I expect?
- Am I protecting time for reflection and recovery?
- Do my people feel psychologically safe to tell me the truth?

These are not soft questions. They are strategic ones that prevent turnover, burnout, and disengagement long before surveys reveal the symptoms.

From the Streets to Global Seats: A Case Study in Translation

When I joined Johnson & Johnson's Baby Products Company in the early 1980s, we were a family inside a corporation.

Softball games after work, genuine collaboration, and the Credo that bound us together.

Decades later, as a life sciences supply chain leader from Deloitte serving major pharma and biotech companies, along with J&J again, I witnessed what happens when values endure: quality improves, crises are contained, and people rally behind purpose.

That continuity between community, corporation, and family is the through line of my book *From the Streets to Global Seats*. It is both memoir and blueprint, showing how childhood guardianship can evolve into executive-level leadership. It is two books in one, half memoir, half blueprint, real-life case studies that tie into the memoir, and the memoir into life after the hood.

Teaching What Cannot Be Taught

You cannot train empathy with a slide deck or cultivate it by modelling curiosity, patience, and courage. Learning and development teams can codify frameworks, but only leaders can embody.

Guardianship shows up when a manager checks on an employee's parent in the hospital, or when a senior executive shields a team from unnecessary politics.

These acts are not extra. They are essential. They teach culture through conduct.

Bridging the Generational Divide

Younger professionals crave autonomy but still need anchors. They are searching for mentors who do not dictate, but demonstrate. When they say they want balance, they are asking for the same guardianship my That continuity between community, corporation, and family is the through line of my book, *From the Streets to Global Seats*

If we reintroduce that principle into today's leadership playbooks, we will not just retain talent. We will restore trust.

A Call to Action for Talent Developers

For HR and talent leaders, the question is clear: Are we developing managers, the product of strong or weak guardianship in childhood development?

Are we, as leaders, serving as life guardians, or just playing by the book, or rules dictated from above?

To rebuild workplaces that last, we must teach leaders to:

- Listen before labelling.
- Measure outcomes, not hours.
- Model integrity when it costs something.
- Protect curiosity as fiercely as productivity.

Guardianship is not nostalgia. It is a strategy with a soul.

Conclusion: Humanity as a Competitive Advantage

Artificial intelligence may transform how we work, but only human intelligence, anchored in integrity and guardianship, will determine how we lead. The next great disruption in business will not be technological.

It will be moral: a return to leadership that safeguards both performance and people.

That is how we will bridge generations, restore trust, and prove that empathy and excellence can coexist on the same balance sheet.

“Teaching What Cannot Be Taught! You cannot train empathy with a slide deck or cultivate it by modelling curiosity, patience, and courage. It’s an Emotion”.

From Uncertainty to Upside: Talent Development's Role in Building Resilient Leaders (*Courtesy of the Association of Talent Development, USA*)

By Michelle Powers and Mary Olson-Menzel



As a Professional Development or L&D expert, you can embed the habits of clarity, communication, collaboration, and the building of a healthy, positive culture.

Chaos feels like a constant companion these days. For professionals in talent development, the rules have changed: What worked yesterday won't necessarily work today or tomorrow. Uncertainty, disruption, reductions in force, and market volatility have become the new normal.

But here's the good news: The same forces that threaten stability can also fuel our growth. So, how do we leverage chaos for opportunity among our teams, our companies, and ourselves?

That's where resilience comes into play, but not in the outdated sense of "bounce back and just push through." According to author Dr. Tasha Eurich in her book, *Shatterproof: How to Thrive in a World of Constant Chaos*, the concept of resilience has been packaged as an infinite well of resources from which we all may draw.

Dr. Eurich posits that becoming "shatterproof" means turning adversity into a launching pad for growth and pivoting to new possibilities: "becoming shatterproof doesn't mean never breaking—it means continually choosing to grow forward even in the face of devastating setbacks" (pg. 206).

For TD leaders seeking to push past resilience and toward becoming shatterproof, this means playing a vital role in helping others cope with constant change, equipping them to create value out of the chaos, and to grow forward when the terrain is shifting.

Why Resilience in the Workplace Matters Now

Research in a recent article from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) reflects: "a culture built on resilience and collaboration will contribute to organizational stability and preparedness when emergencies and disruptions occur." Leaders and their organizations must display resilience for the health and long-term viability of the business.

In TD terms, this means you're supporting others in building needed skills or competencies. You're cultivating individual mindsets and systems that optimize for agility, curiosity, and strategic advantage.

Creating Opportunity Out of Chaos

Chaos can feel like a paralyzing threat when unexpected. When processes are disrupted, roles shift, and "business as usual" breaks down, you have a chance to pause and re-align. As a TD leader:

- Seek stillness in the moments of chaos: When things are changing, ask: "What do we most need right now? How can our leaders best show up and support their teams?"
- Frame uncertainty as an invitation: Help others see change not only as risk but as an opening.
- Build "growth loops": These are small experiments in ambiguous environments, gathering learning rapidly and iterating.

As a TD expert, you can embed the habits of clarity, communication, collaboration, and

building a healthy, positive culture into your leadership development programming.

Navigating Uncertainty and Managing Doubt

Uncertainty naturally breeds doubt: “Can I lead through this?”, “Will my team be okay?”, “Will I still matter?” Rather than suppressing these questions, leaders can manage them strategically:

1. Self-awareness and reflection: Identify and embed reflection rituals for yourself and your leaders as part of your regular check-ins: What doubts are surfacing? What are we avoiding? What is this change highlighting?
2. Purpose and gratitude: Purpose anchors teams during volatility. Reminding people of the “why” reframes chaos as opportunity. Pair this with gratitude practices, such as regular intentional ways to thank people for a job well done or to celebrate big and small team wins, as a way to shift focus from threat to possibility.
3. Experimentation mindset: Encourage a “try, learn, adapt” approach: “What if we tried this? Here’s what we learned. Here’s what we’ll adjust.” This turns doubt into curiosity and prioritizes agility over perfection.

Action Steps for Talent Development Leaders

Here are concise, practical actions you can take now to build resilience, navigate uncertainty, and create opportunity in your organization:

- Prioritize reflection routines: For yourself and for leaders you serve, carve out 15

minutes weekly to ask: “What doubt surfaced this week? What needs are emerging? How can I use my skills to help?”

- Encourage purpose conversations: In your team meetings, anchor the work to “why we exist” and “how this change moves us toward our purpose and goals.”
- Launch small experiments: In times of upheaval, pick an experiment, lean in with curiosity, and treat it as learning. Then feed insights back quickly.
- Embrace gratitude: Begin or end group meetings by acknowledging triumphs or efforts under stress. Model vulnerability and growth: Show up as vulnerable and actively learning. Show the cracks you’ve faced and what you’re doing to grow.
- Model vulnerability and growth: Show up as vulnerable and actively learning. Show the cracks you’ve faced and what you’re doing to grow.

In a world that won’t calm down, your role as a talent-development leader is to help your team, your organization, and yourself not only survive but thrive. When you shift your mindset from resilience to proactive growth, helping people understand chaos as the backdrop for possibility, you transform uncertainty into an advantage. Reflecting on Dr. Tasha Eurich’s research, you build toward becoming shatterproof. The result is leaders who are resilient, curious, purpose-driven, and ready for whatever comes next.

About the Authors



Mary Olson-Menzel

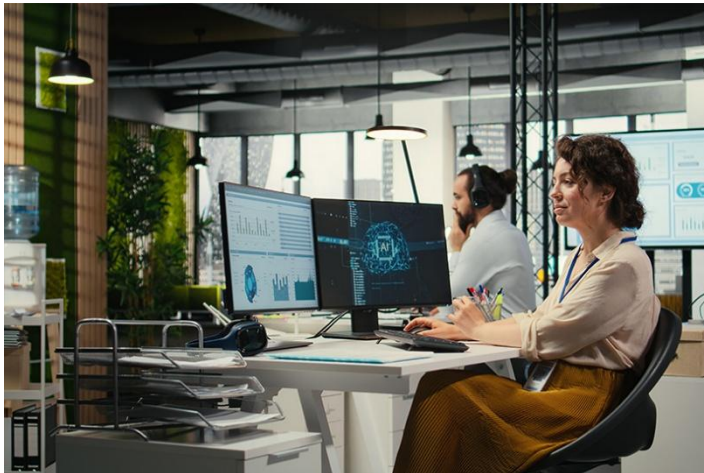
She has over 30 years of leadership across media, tech, healthcare, and many other industries globally. She is the Founder and CEO of MVP Executive Development, a national leadership, coaching, and organizational management consultancy in the USA.



Michelle Powers (MA/MBA)

She is a fractional chief of staff who partners with experienced executive coaches and nonprofit leaders in support of their needs for strategic planning, operations, marketing, communications, business development, and project management

Don't fear AI: Use it to shape the future of HR



AI isn't here to replace HR. It's here to change it... and that's good news.

Talking about artificial intelligence (AI) at work often sparks fear. For many, it signals that jobs will change or disappear. But for HR professionals, this disruption could open new opportunities rather than create threats.

Why AI feels scary right now

Change has always been uncomfortable, but AI feels different. Previous technological advances – the telephone, the internet, and email – eventually became familiar. AI is still largely unknown. That makes it unnerving:

- It performs advanced cognitive tasks, like writing and analysing.
- It improves continuously without obvious limits.
- It is less predictable than earlier tools.

The AI tools we use (ChatGPT, Gemini and Copilot) are curated for everyday use, giving only a glimpse of their full potential. That uncertainty explains why people worry about job security.

So, will AI take over jobs?

Simply put, yes – in some areas. But we've seen this play out before. During the Industrial Revolution, many people worried about their livelihoods because skills that had been valuable for generations suddenly weren't.

Those fears weren't irrational. Some jobs did disappear, and everyday life changed dramatically. But people adapted, as humans have done time and time again. Looking back, it's difficult to argue that the Industrial Revolution was simply a bad thing, particularly when it gave rise to labour laws, basic education

systems and some of the professions we see today, such as engineering and accountancy.

In fact, the profession we now call human resources emerged alongside industrialisation, as factories needed formal systems to hire large workforces, pay them accurately, enforce working hours, and comply with new labour regulations.

If we're working on the notion that technology transforms work, the AI disruption represents a similar moment in history. Yes, most HR jobs will change, and some admin-focused HR roles will disappear. But new roles will emerge that don't exist yet – and that's pretty exciting.

How will AI impact the future of HR?

At its core, AI is good at one thing: working with data. AI doesn't understand people; it understands people data. It can be used to process information at a scale that would be impossible for people to manage alone.

This will automate many traditional HR tasks:

- CV screening & shortlisting
- Interview scheduling
- Basic employee queries
- Compliance reporting
- Standardised performance reviews

Some HR roles will shrink, but people management cannot be automated. What AI does is shift the value of HR skills.

Where new HR jobs will be created

Human-centric roles – hard for AI to replicate:

- Employee experience & engagement design
- Conflict resolution & mediation
- Change management
- Leadership coaching & culture work
- Mental health, wellbeing, burnout prevention

AI hybrid roles – emerging job categories:

- HR analysts
- AI HR systems managers (tools, vendors, governance)
- Workforce planning & skills foresight
- AI ethics & fairness officers

Talent transformation roles – adapting workforce skills:

- L&D architects
- Internal mobility & career pathway designers
- Upskilling/Reskilling managers

The future of HR in an AI-driven workplace

HR professionals who see AI purely as a threat risk falling behind. Those who embrace it can redefine success in the profession and open new career paths. There's never been a better time to upskill.



Practical Ways Managers Can Build A Coaching Culture

Courtesy of Forbes Coaches Council Post

As more organizations embrace the concept of a coaching culture, people development is not left to the C-suite alone. Beyond balancing employee workloads and cascading executive communications, today's managers are more responsible for fostering both individual and collective goals, growth, ownership, and independent thinking across their teams.

While this cultural transformation can't happen overnight, small, intentional changes can help managers make a meaningful difference within a single quarter. Here, members of Forbes Coaching Council share practical actions managers can take to ensure team members feel guided and empowered, creating success multipliers all around for teams and the company.

Make Curiosity Your Default Leadership Style

The best thing a manager can do to promote and build a sustainable coaching culture is to ask lots of questions and make curiosity an anchor within their team and organization. The inclination to be a "fixer," or to tell instead of ask, squashes creativity and innovation. So, asking questions is the single most important thing that one can do to nurture an environment where coaching becomes second nature. - Michele Davenport, MOSAIC COACHING SOLUTIONS

Tailor Communications To Each Individual's Personality

Have your team take a personality assessment, then actually use it. Adjust how you give feedback, set goals, and run check-ins based on each person's personal preferences. When people feel seen and communicated with in ways that fit how they're wired, coaching is more effective. - Megan Malone, Truity

Use Coaching Skills To Enhance Your Primary Function

The reality is you can't "just coach" team members because of your role. You are also accountable for their performance and, unlike a pure business coach, have the right to hold them accountable for their performance. You can't ignore that. You can still, for example, use coaching skills to better understand their perspectives, to draw out their ideas and to show genuine interest in who they are. - Dr. Joel M. Rothaizer, MCC, ABPP, Clear Impact Consulting Group

Ask More Questions, Talk Less And Listen

Managing often includes telling someone what to do, giving direction and leading, and little time to explore what they are thinking. Coaching involves asking questions and listening more than talking. Coaching focuses on what the person being coached already knows and helps them get in touch with their own internal wisdom. It allows for much more agency, autonomy and self-efficacy. - Sunny Smith, Empowering Women Physicians

Stop Solving Your Employees' Problems For Them

Once a week, replace advising with this question: “What do you think is the best next step?” When you resist the urge to fix problems and instead use curiosity and listening to help your employees think through it themselves, they generate their own solutions and feel more ownership. Being coached empowers them to succeed. - Jamie Lewis Smith, Pixel Leadership Group, LLC

Stop Starting Conversations With Answers

If you want your team to feel coached—not just managed—stop starting conversations with answers. Start with one open, honest question and then have the discipline to listen. Resist the urge to fix, advise or redirect. Coaching begins when people feel seen, not corrected. Curiosity over control, presence over pressure and humility over expertise. - Jerry Colonna, Reboot

Schedule Dedicated Coaching-Focused One-On-Ones

It's simple: Hold a weekly or biweekly 15-minute coaching one-on-one, separate from status updates. Ask each of your direct reports, “What's the real challenge? What outcome matters most? What options are you considering? What support do you need from me?” End with one commitment and one capability to practice this week. Track it. When people feel ownership and growth, they feel coached, not managed. - David Ribott, Ribott Partners

Drive Individual Engagement With Open-Ended Questions

Leaders can incorporate coaching into their daily interactions by demonstrating genuine curiosity. Managers should ask open-ended questions to encourage engagement and provide timely feedback that supports desired behaviors. By understanding what matters most to each employee, leaders can meet individuals where they are and support them in progressing toward their goals. - Karen Tracy, Dr. Karen A Tracy, LLC

Clearly Signal When You're Coaching Instead Of Managing

To make your team feel genuinely coached, be intentional and open about when you are in the role of coach versus manager. While it sounds “corny,” consider an accessory like a “coaching

hat” or a background change on a virtual meeting—some way of signalling that you are advising as a coach, not a boss. Another option is to set up pure coaching meetings where you focus on learnings, insights, and future development. - Jill Helmer, Jill Helmer Consulting

Model Desired Skills And Behaviours In Everyday Interactions

Integrate coaching methods throughout the team and demonstrate the desired skills simultaneously. For example, set the tone of a meeting by using calming communication language to build a foundation of expectation for what is going to be discussed. - Michelle Martin Bonner, AMMEMPOWERMENT

Coach For Judgment, Not Answers

Replace advice with one standing question in every one-on-one: “What are you optimizing for right now?” Then shut up. Most people don't need fixing—they need help seeing their own trade-offs. When managers coach for judgment rather than answers, teams feel trusted rather than supervised. That shift builds thinking capacity, not dependency. - Alla Adam, Adam Impact Institute

Swap Status Updates For Growth Conversations

Management focuses on tasks and metrics. Coaching focuses on growth and ownership. One practical shift is to replace one monthly status update with a development conversation. Ask what they're learning, where they feel stretched and what capability they want to build this quarter. Then follow up accordingly. When growth conversations are consistent, people feel coached, not just evaluated. - Chantée L. Christian, My Best SHIFT

Delegate Real Decisions And Debrief After

Give one team member ownership of a meaningful decision this quarter—and stay out of it. Clarify the outcome, constraints and stakes, then let them think, recommend and execute. Debrief afterward: What did you notice? What would you adjust? People feel coached when their judgment expands, not when their manager talks more. - Yasir Hashmi, Yasir Hashmi Holdings

Create Space For Teams To Think Out Loud

Use your two ears and one mouth in that ratio. Simply talk less than the person you are talking to. One practical step this quarter: Create space for your team to think out loud. Don't interrupt, multitask or rush to solve problems. Just be present and listen. The more they talk, the more they process and learn. Coaching isn't giving answers; it's helping others find their own through thoughtful listening. - Alex Draper, DX Learning Solutions

Connect People's Aspirations To Their Daily Work

Get to know the people beyond the work. The simple question of asking, "What are your career aspirations?" and connecting that to the work and impact within the organization goes a long way toward kick-starting the "coaching" conversation. - Ed Brzychcy, Lead from the Front

Introduce Peer-Based Group Coaching Sessions

Shift from exclusive one-on-ones to regular group coaching sessions. Beyond one-on-one check-ins, facilitate open, peer-supported discussions where the team collectively explores questions like, "Biggest shared challenge right now?" "Lessons learned from recent wins or setbacks?" or, "How can we support each other's growth?" Guide the conversation lightly with powerful questions, encouraging peer feedback and accountability for team and personal commitments. - Samuel Rodrigues, Baxter Corporation

Build Psychological Safety Through Genuine Care



HR Strategies To Identify Emergent Skills Before You Need Them

As industries evolve and new technologies reshape how work gets done, the skills companies need can change faster than traditional hiring and training cycles can keep up. By the time a capability shows up on a job description or becomes widely discussed, many organizations are already scrambling to fill a gap.

To stay ahead, HR leaders need systems that help them anticipate talent needs before those emerging capabilities turn into urgent shortages. Here, Forbes Human Resources Council

A manager should show care and create a safe environment that opens the door for two-way communication. Coaches are experts at cultivating safe and supportive environments where they seek to listen to understand, not to respond. A good leader-as-coach should work to develop coaching skills and range to support team members individually and collectively. - Lauren Russell, UpwardMind

Coach To Your Standard, From Delegation To Completion

As a COO/CoS, the difference between being managed and coached is whether guidance changes the quality of the work. Coaching works when it happens throughout the process, from task delegation to completion. With clear checkpoints, you sit with people at key moments, talk through outcomes, and adjust together until they can deliver to standard without you. - Desiree Stapleton, Goal Accomplishment Made Easy

Turn Mistakes Into Co-Created Learning Moments

Instead of simply pointing out mistakes, ask open-ended questions to understand where the employee went wrong in their actions or thinking, and then help them get back on track by exploring how they think they'll reach the desired outcome. Approaching a meeting as a co-creative discussion will increase an employee's buy-in, ownership, and accountability. - Hanneke Antonelli, Hanneke Antonelli Coaching, Inc.

members share strategies for spotting developing skill trends and building the pipelines needed to meet future workforce demands.

1. Map Workflow Changes Quarterly With Your Frontline Teams

Partner with frontline teams to map workflow changes quarterly to spot skill gaps early. Monitor internal project requests and collaboration patterns to see which capabilities are increasingly sought. Create cross-functional

"skills scouts" who track industry shifts and competitor moves. Use internal mobility data to identify where employees struggle to transition, which reveals missing skills. - Jonathan Westover, Human Capital Innovations

2. Analyse Internal And External Data Alongside AI Trend Signals

HR can integrate workforce data, external labour market analytics, and AI trend signals to anticipate emerging skill demands. Through talent mapping and fusion roles—combining talent acquisition and talent management with emerging AI skills—HR can identify adjacent capabilities, forecast skill gaps early and give boards measurable indicators on talent supply, capability risk and workforce readiness. - Bernie Yong, Averis

3. Tag Real Projects And Roles With Corresponding Skills

Adopt a “skills sensing” system that pulls signals from real work, not just annual plans. Tag projects and roles with skills, track what skills show up in staffing requests, and combine that with learning platform data and manager check-ins each quarter. When patterns repeat across teams, HR can update the skills map and invest early, before gaps turn into shortages. - Smiti Bhatt Deorah, AdvantageClub.ai

4. Identify Where Work Starts To Break Down

HR can identify emerging skills by paying attention to where work starts to break down. New skill gaps show up first in repeated workflow bottlenecks, workarounds, escalation patterns, project data and growing dependence on outside vendors. When HR focuses its time on where work is actually breaking or slowing down, skills shortages become visible long before they turn into urgent hiring problems. - Dr. Timothy J. Giardino, myWorkforceAgents.ai

5. Look Beyond Current Roles And Assess Employee Skill Interest

Some of the greatest skills remain hidden because HR and management are looking specifically at the role individuals are in. This means there needs to be quarterly skill assessments to find out what interests employees, what new qualifications they may have acquired on their own and what they hope to develop. Job rotation programs are also ideal

for assessing who’s interested in something new. - Tiersa Smith-Hall, Impactful Imprints, Training & Consulting

6. Map Criticality, Scarcity And Time-To-Build Based On Demand Forecasts

Adopt a “skills intelligence system”—a shared skills taxonomy plus continuous signals from job reqs, projects, learning, performance, and market data. Forecast the demand six to 24 months from strategy, map heat (the intersection of criticality, scarcity, and time-to-build), then trigger actions—reskill pathways, internal gigs, targeted hiring, and partner pipelines—before gaps hit. - Sheena Minhas, ST Microelectronics

7. Look At Stretch Assignments To Identify 'Shadow Skills.'

Track “shadow skills“ through stretch work. Review who volunteers for cross-functional projects, crisis response teams or process redesign efforts. These patterns reveal emerging capabilities before they show up in job descriptions. Skill shortages rarely appear overnight; your internal mobility and project data often signal them first. - Nicole Brown, Ask Nikki HR

8. Base Your Talent Strategy On Your Business Goals

Reverse-engineer talent strategy from your business goals. What capabilities will you need in 18 months? For example, scaling enterprise sales now requires AI fluency. Use behavioral assessments to identify who has latent capacity for those skills, then upskill strategically. Why panic-hire at a 40% premium when the shortage hits? Build your bench proactively and invest the savings elsewhere. - Matt Poepsel, The Predictive Index

9. Keep Communication Flowing Between HR And Other Business Teams

Ensuring effective and ongoing communication between HR and functional business teams will support faster and more accurate identification of emerging skills requirements. Used in conjunction with AI skills mapping technology, organizations can gain a clear view of current and future skills gaps and optimize this insight to build capability at speed and scale. - Nelson Sivalingam’s ‘HowNow’.

10. Replace Static Job Descriptions With A Skills-First Model

To identify emergent skills before they become shortages, HR should adopt a dynamic skills intelligence system that uses AI to map existing internal capabilities against real-time industry trends. This approach replaces static job descriptions with a fluid skills-first model, ensuring the organization remains agile by developing adjacent capabilities in anticipation of market shifts. - Sherry Martin

11. Combine Traditional Workforce Planning And Talent Assessments With Modern HRIS Platforms

Traditional workforce planning and annual talent assessment are effective systems when combined with modern HRIS platforms. In addition, knowledge of a company's needs and observing the labour market and economic indicators is an efficient tool. Combining market intelligence with business people-planning would enable HR experts to build critical capabilities before shortages emerge. - Dr. Nara Ringrose, Cyclife UK Limited

12. Align Learning Initiatives With Strategic Business Direction

Impactful HR teams prioritize attentiveness over attempting clairvoyance. Focus upskilling efforts on roles critical to strategic direction, and align each learning initiative to where the organization is heading so capabilities grow in step with organizational priorities. A continuous learning culture and intentional employee listening help HR identify emerging skills before they become urgent. - Jennifer Rozon, McLean & Company

13. Analyse Your Employee Recognition Feedback For Peer-Validated Skills

Your recognition program is not just a way to surface stories of your values in action, but also a way to identify peer-validated skills. When recognition is personal, specific, and impact-oriented, it invariably includes the soft skills employees possess to help them perform at their best. This is an invaluable source of truth for organizations looking to mobilize talent. - David Bator, Achievers



A Sample Portfolio Report on a ‘Late Developer’. We will call him ‘Johnny.’

The Oxbridge Institute of Professional Development-UK (OIPD)

This illustrates one approach to writing a Portfolio Report. The use of a life story of experience that describes the ‘experiential learning’ and the resultant competencies developed to be analysed and written up for an OIPD Professional Specialist Doctorate (Dr.S)

Once I got the guidelines from OIPD on writing a professional portfolio, I decided to base it on my CV and highlight my professional learning and development from my life’s journey. I built it more around my parallel career as a musician. For this portfolio, I chose my **‘Specialist’** area to be on my role in **Team Leadership** and how I had built a band that was able to go on tour to many cities in many countries. The lessons learned from the **team bonding and resilient leadership yet** capitalizing on the talent and passion of the team members (not only the musicians, lyricists and stagehands, but the logistics and travel planners). I was fortunate to get some insight into Dr Jeannette Vos’s ‘Self-Learning tools’. My portfolio has to be around 12 to 15,000 words, and I found it quite easy to write, with the help of ChatGPT, as it was on my own ‘life’ story. Then, the Viva went smoothly, as I could answer all the questions with confidence, because they came from real experience and from the heart.

My Early Days and Learning How I Learn. My Self-Learning Tool No.1: Knowing How to Learn.

“For me, school was always about just getting through it. Reading, studying, or participating in school projects never motivated me. In high school, I was a B student, and in fact, I attended the highest math classes (calculus II,

trigonometry). Yet, I had no drive for studying or advancing myself through the formal teaching system. I was assessed as a ‘hands-on’ learner. Years later, when I did a ‘learning Styles’ assessment, I was confirmed as a visual and kinaesthetic learner. I just wanted to observe and then do for myself, rather than have someone explain or try to teach me (I call

it ‘Self-learning’). I needed to learn by myself by seeing and then doing! OIPD uses the term **Recognized Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)**

My Self-Learning Journey Continues. My Self-Learning Tool No. 2: Mastering NLP Techniques

I received my first Associate's degree in late 2009, at age 47. Before that, I guess you could call me an uneducated self-learner who had done fairly well in life. Since age 18, I had learned people skills on my own by working in retail sales and selling audio electronic systems for homes and cars. When I moved to New York in 1983, I applied for a sales job in retail. In the interview, the managers had their doubts that a laidback California kid could be successful selling in a neurotic market, such as New York. I used my mirror and matching skills (NLP techniques learned in a sales training course) along with other traits and attributes. Self-learning experiences allowed me to adapt to a different style of selling, without anyone telling me what to do. **“It doesn’t make sense to hire smart people and tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do”**— A quote by Steve Jobs.

My Self-Learning Tool No. 3: Applying Emotional Intelligence.

Skills learned here are what now is popularly called **‘Socio- emotional and inter-personal’** skills. Often learned in training workshops on **Emotional Intelligence or EQ**, which include being aware of your own emotions and those of others, and how these emotions interact. My **engagement** with a diverse range of customers and personality types allowed me to study their **body language and vocal tones** as I pitched my product features and benefits, and I quickly gauged whether they were interested in buying or not. Being able to read the emotions of others helped me transition later from sales into leadership. The New York sales experience was great and helped me mature, but I wanted to return to L. A., and so I did.

My Self-Learning Experiences as a Musician. My Self-Learning Tool No. 4: Know Your Talents.

I have always loved music, and when I was 10 years old, I bought a bass guitar and started playing simple songs, such as Deep Purple

(Smoke on the Water) and some of Black Sabbath's songs. I felt that rhythm and grooves were not natural to me and that I didn't have musical talent, so I played for only a short time. Years later, at age 22, I reconnected with my two best friends—both great musicians—Chris, who played drums and sang, and Mike, who played electric guitar. They encouraged me to buy a bass guitar, and then we started our own band. The first time I ever played bass was in a band environment. Both Chris and Mike had been musicians for over 10 years, and Chris was also a singer/songwriter and had played in many bands. **As a critical thinker and self-learner**, I decided to record all our rehearsals on audio cassette tape, as a reference of what I was playing and how we became a band. I still have those cassettes of every rehearsal we ever played. Now this was really a fun hobby, but it did not bring in any income. So, I still had to rely on selling for a living. **As I honed my selling skills in NYC, LA was easier.**

My role in selling. My Self-Learning Tool No. 5: Critical Thinking.

I soon mastered the East Coast art of persuasive sales. So, learning by experience allowed me to grow and increase my people skills and adapt to various environments. I soon became the top salesman in the retail chain. **Our critical thinking skills make us who we are.** As self-learners, our life experiences teach us to adjust and adapt. I believe that self-learning experiences are the key to thinking outside the box and to learning alternative ways to get the job done. We often develop critical thinking skills by trial and error—and mistakes are how we learn and grow. Later in my life journey, in a book, **‘Design Your Future’**, I contributed a complete chapter on the **adult self-learning experiences that led me into successful entrepreneurship—now my niche.** I outline various situations in which I accomplished amazing tasks by applying critical thinking skills. I use real-world examples from three different industries: entertainment (events and music), automotive, and education. I learnt how to use critical thinking skills to analyse problems, while applying two basic methodologies: SWOT (Strengths,

Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) and Lean Six Sigma DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, and Control).

Back to my world of music and the importance of commitment.

As the drummer and guitarist, I laid down the rhythm and melody. Our band set out to add lyrics to our songs, formatting them with verses and choruses. Chris and I pledged to write a song or two every week, and within seven rehearsals, we had enough songs to play our first show. Here, **the attitudes of team commitment and integrity (Do what you said you will do) are important in building trust & teamwork.**

My self-learning Tool No. 6.: Strengthen You Natural Talents

Another talent that became evident was my ability to write songs, lyrics and perform at live shows. As the years went on, I took bass lessons and incorporated new skills, techniques, and concepts into my songs. Yet, my first days with the band involved a learning curve of experiencing, learning, and using my audio cassette recordings as a study aid for the next rehearsal. Self-Learning, when emotional tragedies strike us in our lives, promises us many moments of trial and, later, tribulations when we overcome the tragedy. Here, I share a self-learning experience of relationships and emotions. As self-learners, we need to control our emotional state and to learn to control how our brain and its emotional function.

My Self-Learning Tool No 7: Managing our Mental State and Emotions.

My story illustrates this with a marriage gone wrong. I was married at 25 years old. Within five years, the band had regrouped, and a new band player ended up having an affair with my wife, which led to my divorce. Just before all that, the band had started a studio recording of our first album, with that new band member, whose name I won't mention, a vocalist who played guitar. Then, Chris went on the road to pursue an entrepreneurial endeavour, and Rob and I formed a new band. Whereas the first band had been a 1970s-style rock band, this new band was a pop/new wave band. We had a good following of fans that allowed us to play in all the big clubs in Hollywood. Every five to six weeks, we were playing with national acts at legendary Los Angeles clubs like The

Whisky A-Go-Go on the Sunset Strip. Now, I could see potential for earning more as a musician.

My Self-Learning Tool No. 8: Reasoning and Emotional Control.

The Main Competency: Co-create and share your own future. My friends encouraged me to buy a bass guitar when we formed our own band. The first time I ever played bass was in this new band environment. Chris and I pledged to write a song or two every week, and within seven rehearsals, we had enough material for our first show. By then, my marriage was on the rocks and getting me down. When the band members confronted me, they were concerned about the survival of the band and wondered what was going on in my mind. So, basically, I had two dilemmas: What is going to happen to my marriage? And what's going to happen to my band? As a self-learner,

I had learned how to face emotional situations by using logic and reason.

The logical side of me said: We do not have children and, if she wants to be with someone else, so be it. If she were happier with someone else, then I might as well move on, as well. Not having children made logic and reason a lot simpler, but the emotional side was hard to deal with.

The emotional side of such situations is always hard to manage, yet as self-learners, we need to understand that it is not a perfect world, and we have to play the hand that is dealt to us. When a situation comes up that we cannot handle, we can either focus on the negatives that the past has brought—or take control of the future by looking forward. In stressful situations, we tend to keep looking back at things in the past—and wish we had control of them now.

As critical thinkers, we need to manage our mental state and focus on things that we can control.

I know it is hard, yet it is a learning curve. Situations like this make us stronger and more confident in our lives. So, my logic and reasoning had me confronting the two issues: the marriage and the band. In California, divorce meant a 50/50 split, so for me, the stress of losing half my home and wealth due to my wife's unfaithfulness messed with my

psyche and made it difficult to manage my mental state. Yet, I realized that I must carefully consider what had happened and focus on determining a positive way forward, starting now.

My Self-Learning Tool No. 9: A Band Means Teamwork

At that time, I had become the number one retail salesman for the same audio chain that had trained me so well in the Big Apple. Every day at work, I needed to focus on my selling techniques. I could not let my emotions interfere with my persuasive sales ability. The money was good. I coped logically, step by step. First, I needed to find another guitarist who was a good player and a solid guy who could learn our set list and join the band. Having accomplished that, I could confront both my wife and her lover and move forward with my life. I had known my good friend Ross for many years—he was an awesome musician and a great guy in general. So, I told him the situation, gave him my rehearsal tapes, and asked him to let me know when he had the set list down. Ross was ready to play in three weeks.

Another Key Competency: **Complex thinking and non-thinking skills**. ‘Non-thinking’ means intuition or gut feel. I had two dilemmas: What is going to happen to my marriage? And what’s going to happen to my band? As a self-learner, I had learned how to face emotional situations using **logic and reason**. I learned to consider what has happened and to focus on determining a positive way forward intuitively.

Main Competency: Critical knowledge. Self-learning is what makes us who we are! I believe that real-world experience is the best learning tool, because we can grow from our mistakes and we can emulate successful people. We can seek to **redefine how to learn by using critical thinking** to figure out how we best relate to our own **preferred learning styles and what skills we still need to learn**.

At that point, I let the other two members of the band know that I had found a replacement for the guitarist. Ross came for band rehearsal prior to the next show and impressed us with his playing skills and knowledge of the songs. Then I invited the new guitarist, Ross, to load up his gear and join the band for Friday night

at a club on Sunset Strip. This difficult self-learning moment in my life involved love and emotions. By using logic and reason to deal with my issues, the learning experience made me stronger. To finish the story, the former guitarist and my ex-wife went off to Mexico together on what would have been my fifth anniversary cruise. The band did our first tour of Asia, which took us to Japan, Thailand, and Bangladesh.

The Recession of 2008. My Self-Learning Tool No.10: Continuously Identify Your Skills Gap.

Now, I would like to talk about my self-learning experience and education. Before the great recession, as director of business development for various luxury automotive companies, I wanted to trace different aspects of clients’ behaviour. In 2006, I used my Apple computer to develop software called Internet Report Manager. It ended up as a cool and useful software that other companies licensed from me. The software tracked 78 outcomes of a dealership’s e-commerce department. Doors opened for me to become a subject-matter expert in the industry. Anyhow, during the recession in 2009, the company gave me the option of going from a high-salaried executive to a minimum-wage position. I chose to go another route—unemployment. Unsure how long the recession would last, I applied my **critical thinking** skills. To form an automotive consultant company, at least on paper, would make it look as if I had no gaps in my employment history. During that period, President Obama created a program for isolated workers, those who had lost their jobs and had no formal education. The program paid for full tuition to community colleges and provided a small amount of money for books and living expenses.

The Entrepreneurial Traits of Opportunism, Optimism, Resilience, and Persistence

Taking advantage of the opportunity, I enrolled in a community college and started taking as many classes as I could toward an Associate degree. When I had left school at the age of 21, I had a 1.97 GPA (a C average) based on 23 units. I had done well in criminal justice courses, yet failed the others. Now, some years later, I had to overcome the effect of low marks in 23 units to move forward with

the remaining 37 units that I needed to obtain my degree. It was summertime, and I found out that by taking 22 units in eight weeks, I could get the job done quickly. I wrote to the dean, asking for his approval to take so many units.

Once he approved, my journey began. I wanted as much education as I could get on the government's dime before the program ended. What I did not know was how intense summer school would be. Most of the teachers were tough professors from the University of California, Irvine (UCI). I took all the core classes I needed to graduate: advanced math, writing, political science, and earth science with a lab. The classes were intense, consisting of four days a week, two hours or more per class. That meant attending eight hours of classes each day (plus homework) and really applying myself. I had to - I had taken on 16 weeks of work in an eight-week format. It was my first week in the writing class, and the university professor told me that I had a learning disability and that I was not going to pass. I came home nearly in tears. I felt so hurt. I thought that the teacher was telling me that I was stupid. **So, here, the ability to tolerate ambiguity and having the mindset of resilience becomes important.**

My Self-Learning Tool No. 11: Knowing Your Weaknesses

What I did not realize was that students, when diagnosed with a learning disability by a teacher, could receive special advantages (a longer time to take tests and special tutors). So, as you could imagine as a self-learner, I had to come up with my own ways of comprehending the writing assignments to get a passing grade. Despite the humiliation, I ended up passing with a respectable C. My political science teacher was also a university professor with high standards. She told us that our final exam would be a three-hour essay on one of eight topics, and that we needed to learn seven specific aspects of each topic. Before the final exam, I met a young college student who showed me how to memorize the eight topics and their seven key aspects using acronyms. When it came to the time for the final exam, and the professor announced the topic, I remembered the acronym and found that I could write on the topic for three hours. I received an A! In this case, my friend's self-

learning technique helped me to study and pass the exam.

My recurring problem is my memory. Growing up in the 1970s left my brain with some memorization issues, and I do not score well on tests. As a **critical thinker**, before I enrolled in a class, I checked the professor's syllabus to see how much of the grade I could control. Were marks weighted more on writing papers or on the final exam? For instance, if assignments, participation, and homework were worth at least 60 percent of the grade, I knew that I would be fine. In that case, I could control more than half my grade, and even if I were marginal on the exam, I would do well. So, I finally gained my bachelor's degree at an age well above the average. But I vowed never to go through that torture again!

A Professional Master's. My Self-Learning Tool No. 12: There are always Alternatives.

As I got older and hopefully wiser, I realized the importance of the need for **Continuous and Life-long Learning**. I started to have thoughts about getting a Doctoral award but realized also that I did not want to go back to University and yet I did not have a master's degree. I discovered that there was an alternative educational path. By specializing in an area that you have **mastered in your work-life**, it is possible to earn a **Professional Master's and a Doctorate by the 'Portfolio' approach**. I had developed a high level of competency in the areas of **persuasive communication**, sales, and marketing, especially with the use of **NLP techniques**. I managed to separate my professional career in sales from my talent and passion as a musician and a writer of lyrics. I did a Professional master's in marketing in 6 months by documenting all the successes I had in selling and how the various companies created a supportive infrastructure in brand management, advertising, and sales support.

Now, I have my Professional Doctorate.

My friends call me Dr Johnny, and I feel I deserve the recognition of my many years of toil, troubles, and a final tribulation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, self-learning is what makes us who we are! We can use **critical thinking skills**. We can figure out how we best relate to

our own learning styles (whether visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic) and how we adapt and learn different styles of self-teaching. We can grow from our mistakes, and we can emulate successful people. With **practise and feedback, we learn better and faster**. Personally, I don't think I would have had the value of such powerful 'experiential' learning if I had continued in academia. From the adage, '**Know Thyself**', I had always felt that I was not cut out for the academic approach to learning. Maybe my type of success came more from learning to be '**Street Smart**' and developing skills from the '**University of Hard Knocks**'. Great salespeople usually can become great leaders, but may not become great managers. I believe **leading and managing are very different**, and that **leading and selling are much more similar, as both are goal-focused, use emotional intelligence, and persuasive communication skills**. I hope I have illustrated some of this in my portfolio report.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

1. My Job Description as a Retail Salesperson

Job Responsibilities:

- Serves customers by helping them select products.
- Drives sales by engaging customers, suggestive selling, and sharing product knowledge.
- Greets and receives customers in a welcoming manner.
- Responds to customers' questions.
- Directs customers by escorting them to racks and counters.
- Provides outstanding customer service.
- Documents sales by creating or updating customer profile records.
- Manages financial transactions.
- Processes payments by totalling purchases, processing cheques, cash, or e-Wallet, or other credit or debit and loyalty cards.
- Alerts management of potential security issues.
- Assists with inventory, including receiving and stocking merchandise.
- Keeps clientele informed by notifying them of preferred customer sales and future merchandising or potential promotions.

2. Retail Salesperson's Specification.

Knowledge, Skill, and Attitudinal (KSA) competencies:

- Listening inter-actively and with empathy
- A customer service orientation and optimally satisfying their needs
- Questioning and probing skills (Open, reflective, and closed)
- Meeting and/or exceeding sales targets.
- Resilience, controlled patience, and persistence
- Mirroring or pacing the customer's body language and vocal tones
- Product knowledge (Knowing Features and Benefits)
- People skills (Inter-personal and Socio-Emotional Skills)
- Energy level and mental stamina
- Dependability, reliability, and integrity
- General math skills, especially numeracy
- Persuasive Verbal-Linguistic communication
- Job knowledge

3. Education and Experience

Requirements:

- High school diploma or GED
- 0-1 years of retail experience desired

Appendix B.

1. My Job as a Band Leader (There was no Job Description, so I list the Qualities, Traits and Competencies here)

- *It is the bandleader's responsibility to create processes and to continuously.* No tribe is complete without a trusted and respected Chief. The bandleader will ensure that the momentum of the band is continuously monitored and carried forward. They understand how best to harness each member's energy, motivation, and full talent recognition for the most efficient and effective progression of the band as-a-whole. I sum it up as **the 'Talent Management' of a high-performance team. Attracting, motivating, developing, rewarding, and retaining talented people.**
- It is often a rare occurrence to have extremely skilled musicians working together on the same project. If the band does not demonstrate a clearly defined or shared bandleader role, the **talented musicians will become frustrated at the lack of direction in the band and move**

on to other projects that have a more promising future. Collaborative teamwork comes from mutual trust and respect of each other and for their talented contributions to the team. The leader must **enable the team to celebrate its victories yet provide feedback for continuous improvement.** Crucial to a band's success is the ability to move forward and **attain tangible milestones** with plans in place to do so, along with alternative solutions when these milestones are not reached. The bandleader must understand why the milestones weren't accomplished in the first place and ensure that they are aware of the best possible next step to continue moving forward.

- When there is no bandleader or anyone taking accountability, there is no precedent and band morale takes a nosedive since nothing is being accomplished to **optimize practices to achieve the highest level of productivity possible.** They must do this with a dedication to upholding a sense of a shared destiny, where every voice is heard.
- In short: the bandleader puts the band's needs first, and not their own. They need to instill a shared vision and set of values that is exciting and inspirational.

2. Competencies (Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes) for my Band Leadership Visionary Leadership.

- Articulating and sharing an inspiring vision statement

Talent Management Skills

- Interviewing for talent, attitudes, and skillset
- Engaging employees to motivate
- Coaching and training to sharpen skills

Emotional Leadership and Communication

- Engaging with Emotional Intelligence and managing one's own emotions
- Listening with empathy, being open & receptive to feedback

Critical thinking, Problem Analysis, and Decision making

- Collecting factual data and using SWOT analysis and DMAIC processes
- Using logic & reason, yet respecting others' emotions and feelings
- Problem analysis using the above concepts before making collaborative decisions

Goal setting

- Provide tangible milestones
- Using the 'SMART' goal writing system

Creative thinking

- Continuously innovating

Coaching

- Using the 'GROW' mode
- Questioning Techniques & Listening with empathy (confirming, clarifying, and reflecting)
- Providing objective feedback

Productivity and Quality Management

- Listening to the customer and trying to meet their needs
- Using SWOT Analysis and 6 Sigma DMAIC tools and Kaizen (Continuous Improvement)

Attitudes and Values

- Collaboration
- High Achievement and Affiliation needs in motivation
- Optimism and opportunism
- Persistence, patience, and determination
- Resilience and tolerance for ambiguity
- Agility and flexibility, yet maintaining absolute integrity

I am indebted to Dr Jeannette Vos for sharing her 'Self-Learning' tools, which have since been published in her book. Dr Vos is on OIPD's International Board of Advisors.

SPECIAL FEATURE ARTICLE

Three Perspectives on HR Professionals: Their Learning & Development

By Jill Kayton and Tom Stevens, courtesy of Avado and the CIPM UK

Master the 5 common challenges faced by HR Career Professionals. Learn how to balance policy, build confidence, and explore the top 5 challenges in Adult learning. Adapted and modified for the IJPD

Introduction

A career in HR offers the opportunity to shape working lives, support organisational performance, and influence culture. But for people entering the profession for the first time, the realities of early HR work can feel unfamiliar. The role sits at the intersection of people, processes, and business needs, and that complexity often surprises new professionals the most.

At the same time, HR itself is changing. The CIPD People Profession: UK & Ireland Survey reports that more than **40% of HR professionals feel their roles are shifting significantly due to hybrid working and new technologies**. This means early-career HR professionals need to be prepared not just for the role as it exists today, but for the one they'll grow into.

The challenges outlined below reflect what many newcomers experience in their first year in HR, along with practical steps to prepare for them.



Perspective One: Securing the First HR Role in a Competitive Market

By Jill Kayton

Entry-level HR roles often attract a high number of applications. Many organisations expect candidates to have some understanding of HR processes, even for junior roles. This can make the first HR position harder to obtain than people expect.

Why this challenge exists

Hiring is Cautious: The CIPD Labour Market Outlook shows that only 57% of private-sector employers plan to recruit in the next quarter.

Skill Requirements: HR roles increasingly require digital confidence and an understanding of people data.

Demand for Practical Awareness: Organisations want candidates who can demonstrate practical awareness, not just interest.

How to prepare

Explore Core Responsibilities: Familiarise yourself with onboarding, absence management, basic employee relations, confidentiality best practices, and standard HR systems.

Observe and Learn: Actively observe people processes in your current workplace, even if you are not currently in an HR function.

Review Job Descriptions: Use current HR job descriptions as a roadmap to understand and address specific employer expectations before you apply.

Build Foundational Skills: Develop transferable skills critical to HR, such as structured communication, organisation, and handling sensitive information discreetly.

Preparing early helps you speak confidently about how HR works, which can differentiate you in a crowded applicant pool.

Balancing People and Policy (Empathy vs. Consistency)

Many early-career HR professionals are surprised by how often they must balance empathy with strict adherence to policy. HR frequently navigates sensitive issues where the right answer depends on context rather than pure procedure.

Typical scenarios

- An employee raises a concern privately but does not want formal action taken.
- A manager asks HR to support an informal conversation, but the policy requires a different approach.
- A seemingly simple flexible working request raises operational challenges.

Why this challenge exists

HR must be consistent, legally compliant, and fair, even when situations are nuanced. The CIPD Skills Development in the UK Workplace Factsheet highlights ethical judgement and communication as two of the most critical skills in modern organisations.

How to prepare

Master the Basics: Learn the foundational elements of UK employment law and internal company policies.

Practice Neutral Communication: Develop and practice neutral, structured communication to manage sensitive dialogue.

Study Case Applications: Read HR case studies to understand how policies are applied and adapted in the real world, not just how they are written.

Building Confidence and Credibility Quickly

HR professionals are often consulted for advice even when they are new to the role. Many early-career practitioners find the responsibility surprising, particularly when advising colleagues or managers who are more experienced.

Common early-career concerns

- Feeling unprepared to offer guidance.
- Worrying about giving incorrect information.
- Navigating conversations with senior staff.
- Managing unexpected or emotionally charged situations.

How to prepare

Achieve Process Clarity: Strengthen your understanding of core HR processes until you can explain them clearly and concisely without hesitation.

Shadow and Observe: Observe experienced HR colleagues to learn how they structure challenging conversations and manage ambiguity.

Document and Draft: Practice drafting foundational HR communications such as follow-up emails, guidance summaries, and meeting notes.

Seek Feedback Early: Proactively ask for feedback on your advice and communication style, as this is the fastest way to accelerate professional confidence. Credibility in HR comes from clarity, consistency, and preparation rather than seniority alone.

Translating Theory Into Practical Judgement

HR theory provides helpful frameworks, but real workplace situations rarely follow clean models. One of the biggest adjustments for early-career HR professionals is learning to apply judgment when situations are ambiguous.

Examples of the gap between theory and practice

- A performance issue may have roots in wellbeing, workload, or capability – each requiring a different approach.
- Engagement strategies that look effective in theory may face operational or cultural barriers.
- Recruitment processes may need to be adapted under time pressure or when candidate availability is limited.

What research shows

The CIPD Resourcing and Talent Planning Report found that fewer than 40% of organisations are actively identifying future skills gaps.

This means HR teams often operate with partial information, making practical judgment essential.

How to prepare

Contextualise Concepts: When learning HR concepts, constantly consider how they would realistically work in different organisational contexts (e.g., small non-profit vs. large tech company).

Follow Industry Examples: Study case studies and industry examples to see how broad principles are adapted and applied in real-world scenarios.

Embrace Ambiguity: Become comfortable with the idea that HR work often involves making sound decisions with imperfect or incomplete information.

Keeping Up With a Rapidly Changing Profession

The HR landscape continues to evolve due to technology, data analytics, AI, and hybrid work. Early-career professionals need to build a habit of continuous professional development.

Why staying current matters

Data-Driven Decisions: HR analytics increasingly influence strategic business decision-making, requiring data literacy.

Automation: AI tools are reshaping processes in recruitment, scheduling, and learning & development.

New Work Models: Hybrid and flexible working policies require ongoing, adaptive governance and management.

How to prepare

Follow Industry Leaders: Subscribe to CIPD research, reputable HR publications, and leading industry blogs.

Network Digitally: Attend relevant webinars, online events, or local networking sessions.

Understand Technology: Build a foundational understanding of how AI, digital tools, and HR tech are influencing workplace practices and productivity.

Continuous learning is the single most important factor for early-career HR professionals to remain relevant and effective in a fast-changing profession.

Career Accelerator: Successful Start in HR

The challenges that early-career HR professionals face are not signs of inexperience – they are inherent to a profession built on judgement, communication, and context. Preparing early, seeking out real-world insight, and developing confidence in people and process will help you step into your first HR role with clarity.

Practical HR Experience

Begin in roles like HR Assistant, HR Administrator, or Recruitment Coordinator. These positions expose you to real workplace challenges – managing employee queries, onboarding staff, and supporting key HR functions. Hands-on experience helps you apply theory to practice and builds confidence in managing people-related issues.

Leadership, Data, and Technology Skills

According to Lattice's 2026 State of People Strategy report, 73 % of HR professionals now influence business decisions, and over 40 % already use AI or analytics tools. Strengthen your digital literacy, analytical thinking, and change management abilities to stand out as a data-savvy, strategic HR professional.

Career Progression and Continuous Learning

Once you've built experience and credibility, apply for HR Manager or HR Business Partner positions. Gartner's 2026 HR Priorities report shows that the most successful HR leaders are those who continuously upskill – particularly in technology, people analytics, and organisational agility.

Career Outlook for HR Managers

The career outlook for HR Managers in 2026 remains strong. As organisations adapt to hybrid work models, digital tools, and new workforce expectations, demand for skilled HR professionals continues to grow.

Here are some of the key trends shaping the profession:

- Bigger HR budgets – many organisations are investing more in people strategy, leadership development, and employee wellbeing.

- Expanding HR teams – most HR departments expect to grow their teams, particularly in areas such as data, diversity, and employee experience.
- Greater focus on qualifications – professionals with CIPD-accredited training and digital HR skills are increasingly sought after.
- More accountability – HR Managers are being asked to show measurable results through engagement, performance, and retention outcomes.
- While opportunities are expanding, the expectations of HR leaders are also rising. Success in this field now depends on combining strong interpersonal skills with strategic awareness and confidence in using data and technology.



Perspective 2: How to become an HR Manager in 2026

By Jill Kayton

Explore what it takes to become an HR Manager in 2026. Discover the key skills, qualifications, and steps to build a successful career in human resource management.

Human resource management is changing faster than ever. In 2026, HR teams across the UK are working with bigger budgets and greater expectations, as organisations demand clear results from their people strategies. Research from Personnel Today shows that most HR leaders in the UK and Europe have seen their budgets rise, but they are now being measured more closely on engagement, wellbeing, and productivity outcomes.

At the same time, HR is becoming more strategic. According to Lattice's 2026 State of People Strategy Report, 73% of HR professionals now play an active role in shaping business decisions, and almost half say their teams are already using AI tools in daily HR work. This shift means HR Managers need both people skills and digital awareness – combining empathy, data literacy, and leadership to create better workplaces.

If you're planning to progress your career in HR, this guide explains the qualifications, skills, and experience that employers look for.

What Does an HR Manager Do?

The HR Manager role sits at the centre of how an organisation supports, develops, and retains its people.

It's a varied position that combines day-to-day operations with long-term planning. Typical responsibilities include:

- Supporting performance management and reward systems
- Recruiting and onboarding new employees
- Managing employee relations and wellbeing
- Overseeing learning and development programmes
- Ensuring compliance with employment law and company policies

However, recent research shows that this role continues to change... According to Gartner's 2026 Top Priorities for HR Leaders, HR Managers are now focusing more on:

- Developing effective leaders
- Strengthening workplace culture

- Introducing AI tools responsibly
- Building adaptable, change-ready teams
- Linking HR initiatives directly to business results

At the same time, Personnel Today reports that while HR budgets are increasing, senior leaders are demanding clearer evidence of impact. HR Managers are therefore expected to balance strategic goals with measurable outcomes.

Data from Lattice's 2026 State of People Strategy supports this shift – nearly three-quarters of HR professionals now play an active role in business planning. The modern human resource manager's role goes far beyond administration; it's about shaping culture, guiding managers, and using data to improve how people work.

Key Skills for HR Managers in 2026

The skills required for human resource management are expanding quickly. In 2026, employers are searching for HR Managers who can combine empathy and communication with data awareness and digital confidence.

Core HR skills remain essential, helping managers handle day-to-day responsibilities and support people effectively:

- Employment law and compliance – understanding legislation that protects both employer and employee.
- Performance management – setting objectives, giving feedback, and improving results.
- Employee relations – resolving conflict and maintaining a positive work environment.
- Learning and development – building skills across the workforce.
- Communication – adapting messages for staff at all levels.

Emerging skills are now shaping the future of HR management:

AI and analytics: According to Lattice's 2026 State of People Strategy, 42 % of HR teams already use AI tools daily, mainly for talent planning and feedback analysis.

Digital literacy: HR Managers increasingly use data dashboards to guide decisions and report progress.

Inclusive leadership: High-performing HR teams are five times more likely to prioritise diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (Lattice 2026).

Change management: Gartner 2026 notes that helping organisations adapt to new technology is one of HR's fastest-growing priorities.

Emotional intelligence: Research from HR.com's Leadership 2026 report highlights that effective leaders in modern workplaces need empathy and adaptability more than authority.

These skills show how HR Managers in 2026 act as both people specialists and strategic partners, guiding teams through change while keeping the human side of work at the heart of every decision.

Qualifications to Become an HR Manager

A strong educational background helps you progress into HR management and stand out to employers. In the UK, most professionals follow the CIPD qualification route, which is widely recognised as the benchmark for human resource management skills.

About the Author



Jill Kayton, Product Director, Avado.

An experienced product director and senior leader with a passion for creating impactful learning experiences that deliver measurable change for individuals, teams, and organisations.



Perspective 3: Top Five Challenges in Adult Learning

By Tom Stevens

Adult learning is a hugely beneficial and productive process, but it can be challenging. Part of the process is to be able to overcome these obstacles and realise that for every challenge we may face as adults.

Here we will look at the benefits and the obstacles of lifelong learning. Adult learning is a hugely beneficial and productive process, but it can be challenging. Part of the process is to be able to overcome these obstacles and realise that for every challenge we may face as adults, we have an advantage in some other respect.

Here are some of the challenges adult learners may face:

- *Time Management*
- *Motivation*
- *Anxiety*
- *Back to School*
- *An old dog learning new tricks*

1. Time management

Adult learners tend to have more responsibilities and existing commitments such as family, friends, work and travel times to contend with, so the restriction of a classroom-based , set lesson time structure is not ideal. It can be difficult to make room for learning and is absolutely crucial to prioritise. We need efficiency and flexibility. That's why a college that offers flexible schedules is a great option for adult learners. Distance learning can give us a quick and efficient way to help develop the skills we need with support from tutors who understand the fact that personal obligations might obstruct the learning process.

Insight: With more adults working hybrid or freelance jobs, flexible, asynchronous learning formats have become even more critical. Platforms that allow learners to pick up where they left off and mobile-friendly interfaces are now essential.

2. Motivation

Adult learners often struggle where the motivation for learning is necessity rather than interest. It can also be hard when attention is divided between different responsibilities. It is important to find a course with content that inspires and can be immediately applicable to our professional needs. The advantage is that as adult learners we feel the need to take responsibility for our lives and decisions and so have more intrinsic motivation to learn. We have a rationale for why we need to know how to do certain things.

Insight: Learners today seek more purpose-driven education. Courses that connect directly to career progression or personal development goals, such as Avado's CIPD-accredited programmes, tend to see better retention and completion rates.

3. Anxiety

Many adults return to learning in order to stay ahead in the job market or boost their careers, so adult learners are under a lot of pressure, from themselves and those dependent on their expertise. Returning to study can be a big investment in terms of time and money and because adults are more acutely tuned to learning outcomes and the results they want to achieve, there is more pressure on them to do so. On the other hand, adult learners come to the educational setting with more relevant experience and while the pressure can be greater as a result, having focused goals is often the key to success.

Insight: Performance anxiety in adult learners is now often linked to digital skills gaps. Offering onboarding support, peer learning groups, or microlearning resources helps build learner confidence early on.

4. Back to school

Going back to learning when we've had a break can be hard. Adult learners often feel outside their comfort zones when a number of years have passed, or if they didn't have the best experience before, but returning to study doesn't have to mean returning to school. For those of us who struggle with classroom learning, there are alternatives. Although balancing study with other commitments can mean slower learning, the balance can lead to more integrative knowledge. Distance learning is a popular method for adult learners, with a vast range of online courses available for gaining additional qualifications.

Insight: The stigma around returning to education later in life has decreased significantly. Many employers now actively encourage upskilling at all ages, especially in fields like L&D, HR, and digital marketing.

5. An old dog learning new tricks

Adult learners tend to be more established in their ways and more resistant to change. Maturity and profound life experiences influence learning and can lead to reluctance to accept new ideas, which is the enemy of learning. The reality is that ageing does affect learning – adults tend to learn less rapidly with age. However, depth of learning increases, and the ability to navigate knowledge and skills to extraordinary personal levels. Adult learners recognise the direct relevance of learning to their lives and are better at learning content that is oriented towards solving problems, and practical knowledge that will improve skills, facilitate work, and boost

confidence. Moreover, learning itself improves the mind, so the speed of learning does increase with practice.

Insight: With AI and immersive tech (like AR/VR) increasingly used in adult education, adaptability has become a key skill. Avado's digital-first approach ensures learners are supported through these changes.

We encourage you to take on the challenge of adult education, overcome the obstacles and learn something new.

What's Next in Adult Learning?

As lifelong learning becomes the norm, adult education must evolve beyond short-term skills. In 2025, personalised learning pathways, real-time feedback through AI, and a strong focus on learner wellbeing are shaping the future. Providers like Avado are staying ahead by designing flexible, career-aligned courses that support learners at every stage of their journey.

About the Author



Tom Stevens, Chief Commercial Officer, Avado.

Working with organisations to deliver impactful digital skills and leadership transformation programmes to increase digital capability at all levels of organisations. Tom has worked with the likes of Vodafone, Shell, and Disney to build and roll out scalable digital skills programmes globally.



A graphic with a blue background. On the left, a white rounded rectangle contains the text: "Success in HR is not just about managing resources; it's about inspiring and unleashing the full potential of individuals." Below this, it says "Dr. Dieter Veldsman" and "Chief HR Scientist, AIHR". On the right, there is a large blue speech bubble icon and a portrait of Dr. Dieter Veldsman, a man with glasses and a black jacket. In the bottom left corner, there is a logo for "AIHR ACADEMY TO INNOVATE HR".

Success in HR is not just about managing resources; it's about inspiring and unleashing the full potential of individuals.

Dr. Dieter Veldsman
Chief HR Scientist, AIHR

AIHR ACADEMY TO INNOVATE HR

ABOUT OIPD MEMBERSHIP

	<p>12 Facts About</p> <p>OXBRIDGE INSTITUTE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT-UK (OIPD)</p> <p>OIPD is a Global Professional Membership Body www.oipd.org.uk</p>																																						
<p>Fact 1: Awards and Grades were officially listed in the British Professional Qualifications Register in 2020</p>																																							
<p>Fact 2: OIPD's Principal Patron is Lord Couling of Cowlinge, Lord of the Realm – UK and Founder Chairman of Cambridge Global Learning- UK (CGL) - A global network of Practitioners or Facilitators of learning, which is a Division of OIPD.</p>																																							
<p>Fact 3: CGL, founded in 2010, merged with Oxbridge Institute of Professional Development in July 2020, now with over 1400 members from 40 countries. OIPD is a Global, Not-for-Profit, Self-regulated, Professional Membership Body. CGL & OIPD produce a bi-monthly E-magazine - REALIZE & a quarterly International Journal of Professional Development.</p>																																							
<p>Fact 4: The Board of Trustees, Governors of the Oxbridge College of Education, agreed to close the College due to COVID-19. The Trust then established the Oxbridge Institute of Professional Development (OIPD), as a global professional membership body.</p>																																							
<p>Fact 5: The Institute has several Oxbridge Development Centres (Represented by SNAP Members) in strategic geographic regions, in the UK, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, to help members prepare materials for assessment as well as their professional and life career development. OIPD also has a division that offers a range of assessment tools for members to use.</p>																																							
<p>Fact 6: A table of grade levels and fees (aligned to the UK Regulated Qualifications Framework - RQF)</p>																																							
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>RQF Level</th> <th>AWARD TYPE</th> <th>OXBRIDGE MEMBERSHIP GRADE</th> <th>FEES</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2-3</td> <td>TVET, Apprenticeship, BTEC, Basic Certificate, Diploma</td> <td>Associate</td> <td>£50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>Advanced Certificate (e.g., Certified Practitioner)</td> <td>Associate Life Fellow</td> <td>£100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>Professional Diploma Level</td> <td>Life Fellow</td> <td>£200</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6</td> <td>Equivalent to a Bachelor's Level Award/Advanced Diploma</td> <td>Principal Life Fellow</td> <td>£500</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7</td> <td>Professional Certificate/Master Practitioner</td> <td>Principal Senior Life Fellow</td> <td>£1000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8</td> <td>Professional Specialist Doctorate (Dr.S) or Professional DBA</td> <td>Principal Life Fellow</td> <td>£3500</td> </tr> <tr> <td>9</td> <td>Post-Doctoral Senior Research Professorship (Emeritus)</td> <td>Life Senior Research Fellow</td> <td>£1000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Organizational Institutional</td> <td>Corporate/Organizational membership. 'Accredited Institutional Membership' (AIM)</td> <td>An The CEO receives a Senior Fellow award Principal receives a Principal Fellowship</td> <td>£300 £950</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	RQF Level	AWARD TYPE	OXBRIDGE MEMBERSHIP GRADE	FEES	2-3	TVET, Apprenticeship, BTEC, Basic Certificate, Diploma	Associate	£50	4	Advanced Certificate (e.g., Certified Practitioner)	Associate Life Fellow	£100	5	Professional Diploma Level	Life Fellow	£200	6	Equivalent to a Bachelor's Level Award/Advanced Diploma	Principal Life Fellow	£500	7	Professional Certificate/Master Practitioner	Principal Senior Life Fellow	£1000	8	Professional Specialist Doctorate (Dr.S) or Professional DBA	Principal Life Fellow	£3500	9	Post-Doctoral Senior Research Professorship (Emeritus)	Life Senior Research Fellow	£1000	Organizational Institutional	Corporate/Organizational membership. 'Accredited Institutional Membership' (AIM)	An The CEO receives a Senior Fellow award Principal receives a Principal Fellowship	£300 £950			
RQF Level	AWARD TYPE	OXBRIDGE MEMBERSHIP GRADE	FEES																																				
2-3	TVET, Apprenticeship, BTEC, Basic Certificate, Diploma	Associate	£50																																				
4	Advanced Certificate (e.g., Certified Practitioner)	Associate Life Fellow	£100																																				
5	Professional Diploma Level	Life Fellow	£200																																				
6	Equivalent to a Bachelor's Level Award/Advanced Diploma	Principal Life Fellow	£500																																				
7	Professional Certificate/Master Practitioner	Principal Senior Life Fellow	£1000																																				
8	Professional Specialist Doctorate (Dr.S) or Professional DBA	Principal Life Fellow	£3500																																				
9	Post-Doctoral Senior Research Professorship (Emeritus)	Life Senior Research Fellow	£1000																																				
Organizational Institutional	Corporate/Organizational membership. 'Accredited Institutional Membership' (AIM)	An The CEO receives a Senior Fellow award Principal receives a Principal Fellowship	£300 £950																																				
<p>Fact 7: Candidates complete a membership application form and, after paying a 'one-time' Lifetime Fee, according to a grade and award level (See Table above) submit their APEL/CPD units. For a Professional Master's or Doctorate, a Portfolio Report & Viva</p>																																							
<p>Fact 8: Awards are based on APEL (Accredited Prior Experiential Learning) and CPD (Continuing Professional Development) units, or a Portfolio Report and a Viva, where candidates show work-based evidence of their specialist areas of expertise & experience from their work-life/career. Usually, this takes about 3-6 months to assess before a Viva (Only required for Doctorate)</p>																																							
<p>Fact 9: The Institute has a Board of 20 Advisors/Assessors from 18 countries, each being an eminently qualified professional learning practitioner, most with a Doctorate & many authors of books on Education, Learning, Growth, and Professional Development.</p>																																							
<p>Fact 10: Assessors play a role in Accrediting Institutional Members, their Professional Certification programs, and other Member Learning Providers' shorter competency-based training courses, as well as accrediting their Trainers. Also, in the Doctoral assessment.</p>																																							
<p>Fact 11: Individual members have their 'Accredited Prior Experiential Learning' (APEL/CPD) units also assessed, as well as their Doctoral portfolio reports and a Viva. <i>OIPD doesn't award academic degrees, but Professional Qualifications and Grades.</i></p>																																							
<p>Fact 12: Annual Award ceremonies are held in the UK. Additional award ceremonies may be conducted regionally when needed. <i>(NB: There are other Oxbridge Institutes, but only one OIPD, and while not a University, we do have strategic partnerships)</i></p>																																							

FEATURES AND BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

Twenty Benefits of Joining Oxbridge Institute of Professional Development – UK and Cambridge Global Learning Programs

1. Being a member of a UK Professional body (OIPD) that is a virtual, not-for-profit, non-sectarian, non-political, non-partisan, and non-hierarchical global network.
2. Being a member of a network of scientists & learning practitioners with many strategic alliance partners that promote shared learning and professional development.
3. Qualified members are awarded Professional Fellowships, thus enhancing their image, branding, and status.
4. Opportunities to undertake charitable and philanthropic work, related to continuous and lifelong learning and professional development, including some SDGs.
5. Learning Centres and programmes can be accredited by OIPD-UK. (For AIMs)
6. Members share research, knowledge, expertise, and best practices related to Learning and Professional Development.
7. CGL publishes an E-zine (REALISE) and OIPD - a Journal (IJPD) - which members receive on a complimentary basis.
8. Members have opportunities for paid consultancy work when made available to OIPD.
9. Members can promote their expertise, products, or services globally.
10. Members may be invited to write articles and present papers at seminars and conferences of OIPD or its partners and associates.
11. OIPD offers its own professional Certification at a Post-Graduate level. qualifications, via Hybrid or E-Learning, aligned to Level 7 of the UK Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF).
12. Members earn Continuing Professional Development (CPD) & Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) points from their qualifications & experience.
13. Such credits go toward exemptions to their awards, such as a Professional Certification or a Professional Master's.
14. Higher level awards, like a Professional Specialist Doctorate Fellowship (Dr. S) are gained from a written portfolio report and viva. A Mentor is assigned to help the candidate write their Portfolio Reports.
15. Members can benefit from counselling services, including the profiling of their learning style preferences, competence potential, or personality traits, and EI.
16. Members can both receive or provide professional coaching or mentoring services.
17. Members who nominate new members receive a 'finder's fee' upon their joining OIPD.
18. Members can become social entrepreneurs dedicated to philanthropic projects in emergent economies.
19. OIPD has an International Board of Advisors & Assessors of 'Distinguished Fellows', ready to help any member.
20. All CGL and OIPD certificates can be authenticated and verified by our strategic partner, GenuineIN which provides a digital portfolio for members who would like this.

MEMBERSHIP, GRADES & AWARDS

FEE GUIDE

A comprehensive summary of membership grades, professional awards, and applicable fees for individuals and institutions.



MEMBERSHIP GRADE / AWARD	FEE (GBP)	REMARKS
Ordinary Individual Member	£300	One-time membership fee
Specialist Research Fellow	£1,000	For Emeritus Professorship Existing members: £700
Principal Specialist Fellow (Level 8)	£3,500	For Professional Doctorates Existing members: £2,500
Principal Senior Fellow (Level 7)	£1,000	For Master's / Post-Graduate / Master / Specialist Certification
Principal Fellow (Level 6)	£500	For Bachelor's / Advanced Professional Certification
Senior / Associate Fellow (Levels 4–5)	£100/ £ 200	For Professional Diploma / Professional Certification
Associate (Level 1–3)	£50	TVET Certificates
Institutional Member (5-year term)	£300	Applicable to organizations / institutions
Accredited Institutional Member (AIM)	£950	Existing members: £700 Includes 1 Principal Fellowship
Accredited Master Trainer (AMT)	£300	Principal Senior Fellow Level 7
Senior Trainer	£200	Principle Fellow Level 6
TVET Trainer / Instructor	£100	Associate Fellow

MEMBERSHIP, GRADES & AWARDS

FEE GUIDE



PROGRAM ACCREDITATION / RENEWAL FEE

PROGRAM	ACCREDITATION FEE (GBP)	RENEWAL FEE (GBP)
First Program	£150	£75
Second Program	£100	£50
Subsequent Program	£50	£25

CERTIFICATION FEE

ITEM	FEE (GBP)
Certification Fee (per certificate) Level 4 to 7	£60 each
Certification Fee (per certificate) Level 1-3	£30 each

ASSESSMENT FEE

ITEM	FEE PER ASSESSMENT (GBP)
Assessment Fee (per candidate)	£60 each

NOTES

- As of January 2025, all OIPD Accredited Program certificates will be issued by Oxbridge Institute of Professional Development, UK.
- OIPD issued certificates are state-of-the-art Digital Smart Certificates, equipped with blockchain technology for enhanced security, verification, and fraud prevention.
- Certificates will be delivered digitally to ensure ease of access, instant verification and authentication.
- Some accredited programs may require more robust and stringent assessments.
- In such cases, additional assessment charges may apply based on the complexity, methodology, or external validation requirements.
- Those who require physically printed certificates may contact assessment@oipd.org.uk for separate pricing and arrangements.

OIPD in a Nutshell

- The Oxbridge Institute of Professional Development (OIPD) was established in the UK by a ‘not-for-profit’ Trust (XCTRUST80159755)
- OIPD is a Virtual Global Self-Regulated Professional Membership Body with over 2000 members from around 40 countries – and is still growing.
- OIPD has a Board of Advisors/Assessors of 20 professionals from 18 countries, most having a doctoral degree, with wide experience in Education, Lifelong Learning & Professional Development.
- OIPD offers Professional Awards listed in the “British Professional Qualifications Handbook” (UK), including a Professional Doctorate.
- OIPD enhances the status and recognition of its members through grades of Distinguished, Principal & Senior Fellow, Research Fellow, Associate Fellows & Associates. Membership is for life.
- Members can earn CPD credits from Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). Assessment is based on the submission of a Portfolio.
- OIPD has Country Partners in Africa, the Middle East, S.E. Asia, & UK.
- Has a Division, Cambridge Global Learning (CGL), which offers Professional Certification programs in Strategic Leadership & Learning Facilitation, and also publishes an e-Zine called REALIZE.
- Publishes a quarterly e-Journal on Professional Development (IJPD)



OIPD's TAGLINE
*“Recognizing and Rewarding
Competence and Experience”*

OIPD's Motto:
“Continuous and Life-Long Learning”

Check our Website – and Join our Network @ www.oipd.org.uk

Email: secretariat@oipd.org.uk Chairman, profpeter@oipd.org.uk