

L&D AI Tech Trends Report 2026

Training to Drive Performance
for a Skills Based Economy



Executive Summary

In 2026, Learning & Development is no longer a cost center - it's a strategic growth engine, **providing solutions to business-critical challenges**.

Organizations face mounting pressure to:

- + Close skills gaps in a rapidly evolving, AI-driven economy
- + Reduce time to competence - training staff faster and more efficiently to improve performance, reduce staff churn and cut costs
- + Deliver measurable impact with actionable insights and data

These dynamics create acute challenges and pivotal opportunities for L&D leaders.

Introduction

The L&D Tech Trends Solving Business Critical Challenges

The skills-based economy in the age of AI is reshaping the way organizations think about talent development. In an era of rapid technological change and AI adoption, traditional training models are falling short.

Employees expect **flexibility, personalization**, and tools that help them build **confidence and competence quickly**.

At the same time, **business leaders demand clear evidence of ROI from L&D investments**.

This report explores **six key trends - both established and emerging** - that are set to define Learning & Development in 2026 and beyond.

Drawing on data, case studies, and expert insights, we show how forward-thinking organizations are leveraging AI-powered solutions and gamification to **transform onboarding, accelerate skills mastery, and create measurable business impact**.

For L&D leaders, acting on these trends now can secure their place at the top table as drivers of growth and innovation.

Six Key Trends

- + Immersive onboarding: building skills and confidence fast – **reducing churn, cutting time to competence and improving performance**
- + AI content creation on demand: fueling the learning journey efficiently and **bridging skills gaps at pace** in an era of unprecedented change
- + AI-powered performance enhancing tools: AI conversational coaches and **the rise of AI Context Engineering**
- + AI powered analytics tools: the transformational power of **proving impact and ROI**
- + AI personalized learning journeys: accelerating skills, future-proofing the workforce and **the rise of Skills Mapping**
- + Gamification and the Attensi Method: **games as the ultimate engagement engine**

Why it matters

- + **82% of employees** say onboarding needs improvement.
- + **58% of employees** admit to skills masking - hiding gaps to avoid judgment.
- + **67%** would use AI tools for private skills practice.
- + **68% of Gen Z job seekers** are more likely to prioritize skills growth job opportunities.¹
- + **49% of L&D leaders** see a skills crisis, stating their executives are concerned that employees do not have the right skills.²

Organizations that act on the six key trends outlined in this report can reduce churn, accelerate performance, and attract, retain and develop top talent. The future of workforce development is measurable, personalized, and **empowered by AI**.

Top Six Trends Explored

Onboarding for Success

From skills masking to skills mastery

Why it matters:

Onboarding is no longer about the first 90 days - it's about building confidence, competence, and engagement from day one.

Key insights from Attensi's influential 2025 Onboarding White Paper
(As featured in *The Hill*, *Forbes* and *CNBC*):

- + **82% of employees** say their onboarding needs improvement.
- + **54%** struggle with job-specific tasks; **51%** with navigating systems.
- + **58% admit to skills masking** - hiding competency gaps to avoid judgment.
- + **67%** would use AI-powered tools for private skills practice.

Onboarding for Success

From skills masking to skills mastery

Case Studies:

Circle K:

Engaged 14,000 employees with game-based onboarding training, improving merchandise sales and basket size while reducing churn.

YMCA Dallas:

Reduction in employee turnover by 58% through gamified onboarding simulations.

EQ:

Gamified onboarding training resulted in 3 x ROI

accelerating onboarding for call center staff "Attensi provides that safe practice area where they can try out different processes over and over again until they get it right. They don't have to worry about making mistakes in a live system."

- *Emmalene French, L&D Facilitator, Equiniti (EQ)*



Star Pubs (Heineken Group):

83% improvement in time to competence for compliance training, whilst increasing pass rates in unannounced testing visits by 36%

"Attensi gamification modules take a fraction of the time of traditional training and maximise ongoing staff performance and productivity. That's a real help when employment costs are resulting in many licensees having to operate with smaller teams."

- *Tracy Bickerdike, Head of Training and Development Star Pubs (Heineken Group)*



AI powered Content Creation

Bridging AI Skills Gaps & Future-Proofing the Workforce

The current skills gaps phenomenon means that L&D professionals have a huge training content gap to fill to upskill the workforce effectively and efficiently.

“Nearly half of learning and talent development professionals see a skills crisis, with 49% agreeing,

“My executives are concerned that employees do not have the right skills to execute our business strategy.”
- *LinkedIn Workplace Report 2025*

This in part explains the emerging trend towards in-house training content creation tools, which have **become increasingly efficient and user-friendly since the introduction of AI Co-pilots, AI Agents and AI Assistants.**

“Organizations are increasingly adopting AI-powered tools for on-demand, self-service content creation.”
- *LinkedIn Workplace Report 2025*

This area of the market is developing rapidly.

The Attensi example:

Our **AI CREATOR tool** is equipped with AI Co-pilots and AI assistants. This means content creators can make impactful training immediately with no coding or design expertise required.

The user can also upload documents including PDFs for the AI Co-Pilot to use to generate engaging training games.

CREATOR is constantly upgraded with new and improved features. New for 2026, Attensi has expanded in-house content creation tools to include RealTalk conversation simulation content. Book a demo.

AI powered Content Creation

Bridging AI Skills Gaps & Future-Proofing the Workforce

Case Studies:

itsu:

Leveraged Attensi AI Creator to produce impactful training content at scale.

“Working with Attensi Creator AI copilot is great – especially when you can’t get your creative juices flowing – it really helps you. With Attensi AI – things that we didn’t think were possible before – they are possible now. It has opened new borders.”

- *Alba Trujillo Mora, itsu international training manager*

Star Pubs:

Attensi Ai Creator reduced content creation time from days to hours

“Attensi Creator is fabulous because it enables us to create our own content super easily. I love Attensi AI – you can drop a PDF in there and it will create you a course that would normally take three to four days - we can do it in less than a day.”

“We have created some great game-based training and it’s had a real impact. We have improved our mystery guest score by 7% and it also translates into top line sales and bottom-line profit.”

- *Tracy Bickerdike, head of training and development at Star Pubs.*



AI Insights & Data Analysis

Proving Impact and ROI

AI adoption is a core thread in 2026 trends, but so too is AI tool overwhelm – leading to choice inertia.

Not all AI tools are created equal and the fast proliferation of AI tools available in the market means **L&D teams are tasked with testing claims against performance** more than ever before.

Quality is the litmus test over quantity in 2026 and L&D teams need to be confident that they can prove ROI.

"49% of organizations say the biggest barrier to AI adoption is estimating and demonstrating business value"
- **Gartner**

According to McKinsey's The state of AI in 2025 report,
"two-thirds of organizations have not yet begun scaling AI across the enterprise, and only 1% consider themselves fully mature in AI deployment"
- **McKinsey**

In Attensi's 2025 survey of 2000 employees in the US and UK,
"71% agreed that better analysis of the impact of training would enable them to secure more funding for L&D resources."
- **Attensi**

Utilizing an effective and efficient AI data analysis tool that supports L&D teams to evidence the impact of their training initiatives with tangible data and insights is paramount to success in 2026.

The Attensi example:

Attensi INSIGHTS, with its AI co-pilot functionality for quantitative and qualitative data analysis and user-friendly dashboard, provides valuable and actionable insights fast. Book a demo.

"Tracking competency rather than just attendance was a game-changer. For the first time, we could see not just who had completed training, but who actually understood it and could apply it. That insight allowed us to close gaps and ensure no one was left behind."
- **Jacqui Cooper NHS Chief Nursing Information Officer**



Personalized Learning Journeys

The **personalized learning journey** involves building skills that drive real behavior change, and doing so in ways that:

- + Meet individual learning needs and styles
- + Provide career development pathways
- + Are measurable with tangible feedback
- + Are deeply engaging to drive the motivation to practice and master skills

The personalized learning conundrum and training as a talent acquisition magnet.

Transformative training doesn't just reduce churn and improve performance - it attracts, retains and develops top talent.

According to a 2025 WorldatWork report, **52% of Gen Z job seekers prioritize roles offering personal development**, and they are **68% more likely** than other generations to seek growth opportunities.

Employers that invest in training and have clear development pathways signal innovation and employee-centric values, making them more competitive in a skills-based economy.

As AI reshapes entry-level work, skill-building becomes a valuable commodity for employees and a strategic advantage for organizations.

However, in 2026 we anticipate some debate on what personalized learning journeys really mean!

Personalized Learning Journeys

Our hypothesis for 2026:

Employers who offer personal development and training as a “service” and “benefit” to their employees are likely to be far more successful in attracting, retaining and developing talent than those who simply offer discretionary access to learning tools on a completely self-serve, self-motivated basis.

Should it be up to employees to choose what skills will benefit them and self-motivate to take the time to access appropriate learning materials?

Will this best serve the goals of the individual and the business? In 2026, we predict that the emerging trend of skills mapping will stand out as a stronger advantage to both employers and employees over purely self-serve learning at the discretion and motivation of the individual.

The Attensi example

Attensi ENGAGE supports personalized learning journeys from onboarding to career development pathways.

ENGAGE is a gamified learning experience platform that hosts all learning and development content in one central hub – giving learners a journey to skills mastery in the areas where they need to grow to thrive.

The platform supports all learning content including games, videos, apps and documents. It is customizable and easy to update, with data analytics to measure and analyze learning impact with actionable insights.

ENGAGE is recognized in Forrester’s 2025 LMS/LXP Landscape report as one of 23 notable suppliers in the global marketplace.

“[Attensi] Personalized training saved us so much time. We didn’t have to deliver the same content three different ways to suit different learning styles – the training itself adapted to individual needs. It was more engaging and much more effective.”

- Naomi Fraser, Information Governance Manager at Clatterbridge Cancer Centre



AI Coaches & Trainers

The Rise of AI Context Engineering

Conversational AI is redefining coaching – providing an immersive environment in hyper-realistic contexts so that employees have a safe space to build skills and, through practice, **master the skills they need to thrive.**

The critical thing for L&D professionals to assess in 2026 is a supplier’s ability to provide first class **AI context engineering**, ensuring that the experience is hyper-relevant and gives learners genuine **“on the job” experience in the simulation.**

The Attensi Example

Attensi RealTalk is a market-leading example of AI conversational simulation training, recognized in Fast Company’s Most Innovative Companies 2025 list and Training Industry’s Top AI Training & Coaching Companies list 2025.

RealTalk addresses one of the biggest pain points in workplace learning:

difficult conversations.

Why it matters:

- + **72% of employees** want training for handling difficult conversations, and this jumps to 87% for Gen Z.
- + **75% have experienced anxiety** around these conversations, with a third facing it in the last six months.
- + **53% of employees agree** AI-powered role-play offers a psychological safe space, and it helps them practice interpersonal skills without fear of judgment.
- + **42% Gen Z and 44% Millennials** have a strong preference for **AI trainers**
- + Skills like empathy, social skills, and emotional intelligence are ranked as critical for the next three years.³

AI Coaches & Trainers

The Rise of AI Context Engineering

RealTalk uses **agentic AI and freeform dialogue** to create hyper realistic, engaging simulations that prepare employees for real on-the-job interactions - whether in sales, leadership, or customer service.

RealTalk stands out from other AI conversational tools due to its carefully engineered infrastructure, with an emphasis on AI context engineering and content guardrails.



**RealTalk is now available
on mobile AND as self-serve
content for creators**

Why Games Work

The Attensi Method based on the Psychology of Behavior Change

Games compel us to keep playing – or to put it another way – to keep practicing.

It is extremely difficult to replicate that level of self-motivation using any other media.

When gaming principles are applied well to L&D strategies, the results are superior.

According to a co-authored study by Harvard Business School and Columbia Business School, "Gamified employee training offers demonstrable improvements over traditional methods concerning course completion, employee knowledge retention, and office-level performance outcomes."

"The app-based video game-style model really is transformational for the NHS. The simulation training is engaging, and we knew we were on the right track when one nurse completed her training module on a night shift, causing others to try to beat her score. There's no way a nurse can or should be in a classroom for eight hours, so with three-minute training modules that can be completed on a shift, that's the pure joy of Attensi."

- *Jacqui Cooper NHS Chief Nursing Information Officer*

Furthermore, the report highlights that, "**Gamified training** has been linked to **35.8% increase in fees collected, 16.3% more clients, and 22.3% more new client opportunities** in offices that implemented it successfully."⁴

Attensi's game-based learning methodology leverages the COM-B Model (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation, Behavior).

Clear goals, consistently high engagement, instant feedback, in-game rewards, and safe failure loops make Attensi games superior learning tools.



Why Games Work

The Attensi Method based on the Psychology of Behavior Change



"I was dead against it [game-based training], but when I understood it and played it, it was fun, engaging, easy to use, and I saw the benefits quite quickly. It was a game changer."
- *Kevin Robinson, Operational Compliance Manager, Star Pubs (Heineken Group)*



"The feedback from the staff has been really positive. They love the skills games, they love the points. You see them getting competitive and wanting to get the good scores. It's a more memorable, fun way of doing it."
- *Tracy Bickerdike Star Pubs (Heineken Group)*



"Attensi training was exciting and reminded me of SIMS, which I love to play. It's highly personalized. Since Attensi training I use Meditech more efficiently, allowing me to see and help more cancer patients per day."
- *Aimee Clark, Senior Therapeutic Radiographer (Clatterbridge Cancer Centre)*



Conclusion

In 2026, L&D leaders face both unprecedented challenges and transformative opportunities.

The tech trends outlined in this report - immersive onboarding, AI-driven personalization, gamification, AI coaches, AI content creation and advanced analytics - are not optional; they are essential for thriving in a skills-based economy.

Organizations that embrace these innovations can solve business critical challenges:
reduce churn, accelerate time-to-competence, and attract, nurture and retain top talent.

And those that want to be a step ahead should investigate the emerging trends of AI context engineering and skills mapping.

However, the real test for L&D teams is to discern quality over quantity in AI L&D tools and to evidence ROI. That is how L&D professionals can drive revenue growth and secure more investment in training that delivers for 2026 and beyond.



Scan the QR code
book a demo now

© Attensi 2025. This document and its contents are the intellectual property of Attensi. Reproduction, distribution, or use of the data, insights, or material contained herein is permitted provided proper attribution is given to Attensi with a link to www.attensi.com. Individual data points, charts, and graphics may be extracted and used separately with proper attribution.

Commercial use or modification without prior written consent is prohibited.

Source references

1.

<https://worldatwork.org/publications/workspan-daily/how-l-d-benefits-can-attract-and-retain-gen-z-workers>

2.

<https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report>

3.

<https://attensi.com/learn/insights/new-data-ai-virtual-trainer-for-difficult-workplace-conversations/>

4.

<https://business.columbia.edu/research-brief/playing-excellence-how-gamified-training-impacts-employee-performance>

