

2025 Workplace Training Report



404: AI leadership readiness not found —training systems buffering, workforce overloaded, productivity crash imminent

Findings supported by our world-leading apprenticeship partner:



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Foreword:

As automation and generative AI accelerate change, the demand for human and technical skills is outpacing many organisations' ability to adapt.

Flexible working, the drive for sustainability and rapid advances in AI and technology are transforming the workplace at a dizzying speed, leaving workers struggling to keep up.

Although some people have a natural aptitude for change, today's workforce is increasingly dissatisfied, anxious, and less productive.

While **67%** of executives cite geopolitical instability as the greatest threat to growth, our evidence reveals real dangers lie closer to home: falling morale and low productivity, with falling morale and low productivity damaging many organisation's ability to succeed.

82% of HR leaders report their organisations are experiencing change fatigue, and 1 in 2 employees feel workplace anxiety at least once a week.

This is a significant obstacle to growth. Without the skills and resilience needed to manage, organisations risk falling behind.



AI readiness presents another challenge:

97%

of HR leaders claim their organisations offer AI training, only

39%

of employees report having received it

Additionally, **52%** of executives have never used AI tools, while **71%** of middle managers actively leverage AI in their daily tasks. This gap in AI adoption threatens to stall growth and competitiveness.

The stakes are high: **77%** of HR leaders plan to increase training budgets in 2025, highlighting the strategic importance of skills development.

Employees agree: **64%** say access to upskilling opportunities is critical in deciding whether to stay with their employer.

Forward-thinking organisations recognise the opportunity. By investing in human and technical skills, prioritising employee retention strategies, and embedding well-being into their workforce, they can retain talent, drive innovation, and achieve sustainable growth.

Our Workplace Training Report 2025 offers a roadmap for navigating these challenges. It moves beyond diagnosis to provide actionable strategies for creating a resilient, future-ready workforce.

By aligning training with strategic goals and embedding critical change skills into their organisational DNA, leaders can create workplaces that succeed.

In the context of rapid change, there is also great opportunity for growth.

In 2025, the companies that invest in their people, foster resilience, and use training as a lever for transformation will thrive and succeed.



Research partner:

This report sets out the findings of research conducted by Opinium in partnership with Corndel. This research was conducted online among:

- » 250 HR decision-makers at enterprise UK businesses (1000+ employees)
- » 1000 UK employees at UK businesses at enterprise UK businesses (1000+ employees)

This research took place between 12 November - 22 November 2024

Opinium is an award-winning strategic insight agency chiefly known for its full-service market research and consultancy work.



Executive summary:

AI represents a generation-defining opportunity to transform businesses and the economy, but can a workforce at tipping point unlock its potential?

Productivity crash imminent

The world in which AI is being introduced is already suffering significant change fatigue. Employees are burned out and anxious, with productivity issues limiting their ability to embrace new ways of working. Many organisations are pushing forward with AI strategies, but confidence in their readiness is low—only 44% of employees believe their organisation is prepared.

While **97%** of HR leaders claim to provide AI training, only **39%** of employees report receiving it. Leadership readiness remains inconsistent—**70%** of middle managers are using AI tools daily, but **52%** of executives have never used them. The disconnect between leadership strategies and workforce experience continues to widen.

At the same time, more than **80%** of HR leaders report their organisations are experiencing change fatigue, and workplace anxiety is widespread, affecting one in two HR leaders and employees weekly. AI adoption risks widening existing skill and productivity gaps rather than solving them.



97%

of HR leaders report providing AI training, only **39%** of employees say they've received AI-specific training



80%

of HR leaders report their organisations are experiencing change fatigue



52%

of executives have never used AI tools, compared to **71%** of middle managers who actively leverage them in daily tasks



1 in 2

HR leaders and employees feel workplace anxiety weekly



Training systems buffering

The task of readying the workforce to transform is further affected by a lack of leadership readiness and significant gaps in perception around skills training, particularly in data literacy, with **65%** of employees receiving no data training in the past year, a gap that extends across all levels, including executives (**72%**) and unskilled workers (**74%**).

Despite these gaps, there are positive signs of organisational commitment to workforce development.

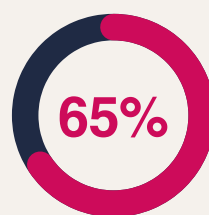
Training budgets are increasing, with **77%** of HR leaders planning to expand investment in skills training and nearly a third committing to increases of over **26%**.

AI and digital skills remain a priority, with **80%** of HR leaders focusing on technical training and **74%** prioritising human skills like leadership and adaptability.

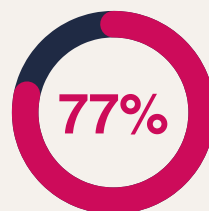
The Apprenticeship Levy is also being used more effectively, particularly for upskilling in technology (**80%**), data (**79%**), and leadership (**70%**).

However, without a cohesive, strategic approach, these investments risk remaining fragmented, failing to build the sustained capability and agility that businesses need to navigate AI-driven change.

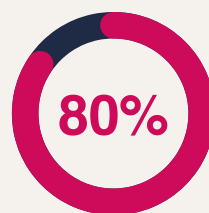
Embedding training within a broader workforce strategy that ensures accessibility, relevance, and long-term impact is essential to addressing the real barriers to readiness and transformation.



of employees receiving no data training in the past year



of HR leaders plan to increase training budgets



The Apprenticeship Levy being used for upskilling in tech (**80%**), data (**79%**), and leadership (**70%**)

The way forward

To ensure AI adoption and workforce development are successful, organisations must act decisively in six key areas:

01

Enhance AI leadership readiness

Upskill leaders in AI fundamentals and change skills to drive transformation and inspire trust.

02

Close critical skills gaps

Prioritise training in technical, human, and data skills to build a future-ready workforce.

03

Combat change fatigue

Equip employees and leaders with change management training to improve adaptability and reduce disruption.

04

Embed well-being strategies

Scale mental health initiatives and management training to reduce workplace anxiety and improve morale.

05

Leverage apprenticeships

Maximise the Apprenticeship Levy to develop critical skills in technology, data, and leadership.

06

Boost productivity

Address workload imbalances, streamline processes, and empower managers to optimise team performance.

The Workplace Training Report 2025 highlights the urgent need for organisations to adapt their training and development strategies in response to pressing challenges and emerging opportunities.

By aligning training investments with broader business goals, companies can cultivate a resilient, skilled, and future-ready workforce.

For detailed strategic recommendations, refer to the full report.

 [Read the report](#)



Mind The 'Skills' Gap

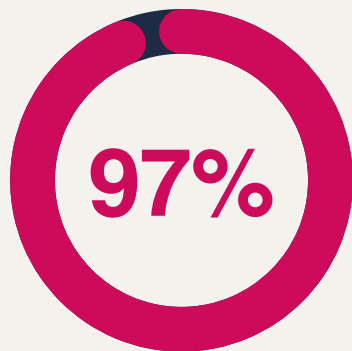
For UK organisations, there is a disconnect between bold skills development strategies and the realities of delivering high-impact training to the workforce. While leaders prioritise technical, human, and AI skills, employees report inconsistent access to effective training.

Achieving a future-ready workforce depends on training strategies aligned with workforce needs and accessible to all. Organisations that act decisively to 'mind this skills gap' will position themselves to lead in a rapidly evolving world.



AI training is non-negotiable for competitiveness

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the workplace, offering organisations unprecedented opportunities to innovate and scale. Yet, a significant readiness gap threatens this potential. Across UK organisations, there is a disconnect between ambition and execution, with misalignments in leadership, workforce preparedness, and training access hindering progress.



of HR leaders claim to have provided AI training in the past year

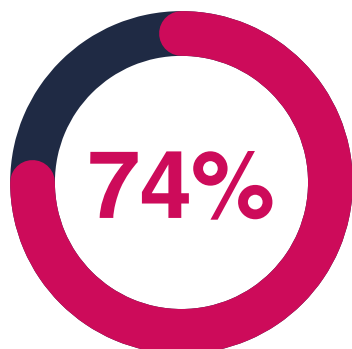


of employees report receiving AI training



rate their instruction as highly effective

Among younger employees, **74%** use AI tools regularly, but just **52%** have received formal training — and only **14%** rate this training as highly effective. As a result, one-third of UK employees feel unprepared to adopt AI in the next 1–3 years.



report using AI tools regularly



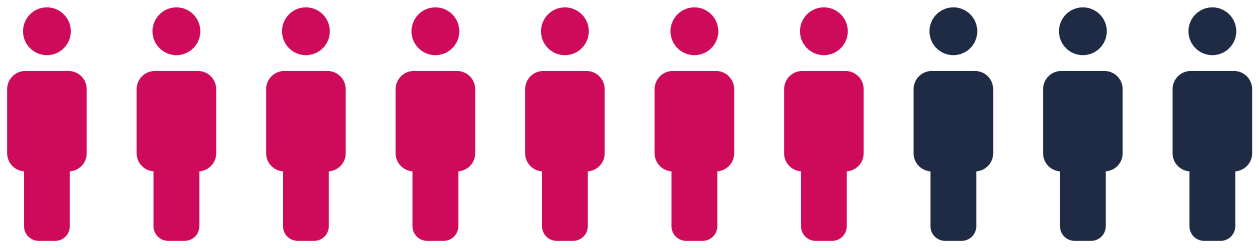
have received formal training



rate their instruction as highly effective

This discrepancy reveals a fundamental training challenge: organisations may be investing in training, but many employees are yet to feel the impact. Among younger employees, **74%** report using AI tools regularly, yet only half (**52%**) have received formal training. Of those trained, just **14%** rate their instruction as highly effective. This leaves **1 in 3** UK employees feeling unprepared to adopt AI in the next 1–3 years.

Section 1.1

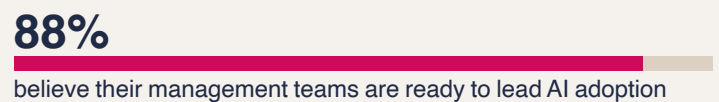


The gap is even more pronounced in leadership readiness. Middle managers are emerging as key adopters of AI, with **7 in 10** integrating it into their daily workflows.

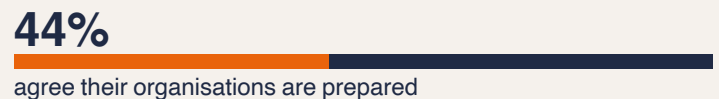


In contrast, **52%** of executives have never knowingly used AI tools, eroding confidence across teams. Only **55%** of employees trust their managers to lead digital transformation effectively, and just **4 in 10** believe they can adopt AI tools themselves.

While HR leaders remain confident—**88%** believe their management teams are ready to lead AI adoption—only **44%** of employees agree their organisations are prepared.



Among Gen Z and Millennial employees, optimism reaches **57%**, but large portions of the workforce are left behind, exposing a need for tailored, targeted AI training, or risk stalling AI integration altogether.



McKinsey's 2024 insights on generative AI adoption shed light on the broader opportunity—and challenge. Remarkably, **88%** of employees using generative AI are in non-technical roles, highlighting its untapped potential beyond specialised teams. However, this also highlights a critical need for cross-departmental AI literacy, as only **12%** of generative AI users occupy technical positions.

Organisations that embrace AI across all functions are 2.5 times more likely to prioritise reskilling and upskilling, capturing substantial cost efficiencies and revenue gains. Many organisations fail to utilise their in-house early-adopters who are forming AI-pockets within parts of the business.

Globally, organisations are accelerating AI adoption, with implementation in at least one business function rising from **50% to 72%** in 2024 (McKinsey). For UK organisations, closing the readiness gap is an urgent priority.

Over the next 12 months, investing in fundamental AI training, equipping leaders with AI capabilities, and ensuring equitable access to resources will be key. The stakes are high, but so is the potential.

Organisations that act decisively will future-proof their workforce, turn disruption into opportunity, and establish a competitive edge in an AI-driven workplace.



Contribution by Jake O'Gorman



Jake O’Gorman

Director of Data, Tech and AI Strategy at Corndel

Jake O’Gorman is an influential Director of Data, Tech and AI Strategy at Corndel, specialising in guiding organisations through the transformative impacts of emerging technologies with a focus on data-driven leadership. His background includes six years as a Commercial Director, enhancing enterprise solutions in coaching and leadership, and seven years as a corporate speaker and facilitator. A two-time national representative at the World Memory Championships and the 2015 Memory World Cup winner. Jake is an alumnus of the Oxford Executive Finance Programme and is currently pursuing a Master of Laws in Corporate and Commercial Law.

AI training is non-negotiable for competitiveness

If 2024 was a big year for AI development, 2025 is shaping up to be the year of AI deployment. After a period of experimentation and cautious planning, organisations are applying AI to broader, more impactful challenges. The momentum is undeniable—initiatives are moving beyond pilots, and the excitement around AI’s potential is palpable. Yet, as organisations push forward, they’re finding it harder than expected to translate ambition into results.

Why? The answer lies in readiness—or rather, the lack of it.

The readiness gap

AI initiatives are often sold on their transformative impact, yet the reality is that many organisations are still underprepared for their deployment. You’ll read, for example, in this report that while 97% of HR leaders say they’ve offered AI training, only 39% of employees have actually received any. This isn’t as contradictory as it might seem—it does, however, illustrate how many organisations are focusing their training efforts on narrow groups, such as technical teams or senior leadership, rather than an offering across the broader workforce.

And this creates a real problem. The people most likely to use AI day-to-day—managers, customer service reps, analysts—are often receiving the least by way of training. Without it, adoption remains low, and the promised impact of AI can quickly stall.

Then there’s the leadership gap. 48% of senior leaders admit they haven’t yet used an AI tool, compared to 29% of middle managers. While it’s not

uncommon for leaders to be less involved with day-to-day tooling, this becomes problematic when they’re expected to set direction, identify opportunities, and support their teams, yet without sight of how these tools actually work.

And readiness goes beyond AI-specific training. The foundations of successful AI adoption rest on leadership and data. Strong leadership is needed to drive the cultural shifts required to embed AI into daily operations, while high-quality data and data literacy aid AI systems in producing reliable, meaningful results. And yet, 75% of respondents in this report said they hadn’t received any data training in the past 12 months. Without these critical foundations, even the most advanced AI systems will fall short.

This is why AI training must go beyond basic introductions or isolated upskilling efforts. True competitiveness demands fluency, not familiarity, and a cultural shift that embeds AI as a capability across every part of the organisation.

Hidden AI: embedded but overlooked

While many organisations see themselves as just starting their AI journey, the reality is often more complex. Large enterprises typically rely on dozens, if not hundreds, of third-party applications for tasks like recruitment, payroll, and expense management. Increasingly, these tools have AI capabilities embedded—often as a response to market pressures for vendors to stay competitive.

This means AI is already entrenched in many organisations’ operations, often without full awareness or oversight from leadership. While these tools can enhance efficiency, they also introduce risks—such as security, non-compliance, and reputational damage—if left unchecked.

What complicates matters further is that many organisations focus their governance and training efforts on AI tools they’ve actively chosen, rather than accounting for the breadth of third-party systems already in use. This creates blind spots of risks they aren’t fully prepared to manage.

Governance frameworks and training aren’t optional—they’re essential to ensuring organisations stay in control. Without these measures, the silent adoption of AI through third-party tools can quickly become a liability.

The regulatory landscape: a catalyst for change

For many, the growing patchwork of AI-related regulations adds another layer of urgency. The upcoming EU AI Act, while not applicable to every organisation, is a clear sign of where things are heading. Alongside existing data privacy laws like GDPR, new regulations will require transparency, explainability, and accountability in AI systems.

Non-compliance could result in significant fines, but for forward-thinking organisations, these regulations represent more than a compliance exercise; they’re an opportunity.

AI literacy is essential for navigating this landscape. Providing widespread training across teams not only ensures compliance but also empowers employees to use AI responsibly and strategically. This isn’t just about avoiding penalties; it’s about staying competitive in a rapidly evolving market.

The road ahead

AI isn’t just another tool—it’s a transformative capability that will be a key driver of competitiveness in the years to come. Yet, getting it right requires more than excitement or ambition. It demands a commitment to widespread training, robust governance, and the necessary foundational work in leadership and data literacy.

Those most likely to succeed won’t be the ones adopting AI, but those embedding it into the fabric of how they operate. The path forward isn’t without challenges, yet if done well, the rewards—for teams, customers, and bottom line—will speak for themselves.

Unlocking potential through technical and human skills

To build a workforce that is both resilient and future-ready, organisations must prioritise two critical skill sets: human and technical skills.

Human skills—such as leadership, communication, adaptability, and problem-solving—drive collaboration, strategic decision-making, and change management.

Technical skills, including AI proficiency, data literacy, and digital tools, enable employees to leverage new technologies and optimise productivity.

While AI can generate insights, automate processes, and analyse data, human skills unlock its full potential.

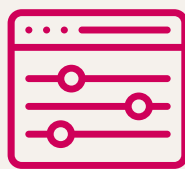
According to Microsoft's IDC Brief, **49%** of experienced professionals rank problem-solving as their most important skill, followed by communication (**45%**) and data analysis (**44%**).

These capabilities ensure AI is interpreted effectively, applied ethically, and used to drive business impact. Without investment in human skills, AI alone cannot deliver strategic success.

94% of HR leaders in large businesses say they have addressed human skills gaps, while **92%** report focusing on technical and data skills.



94%
Human



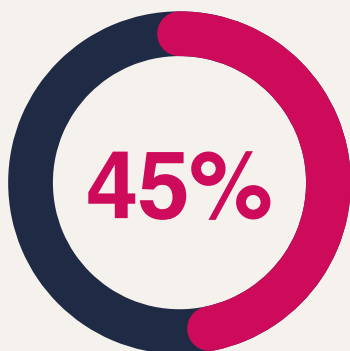
92%
Technical



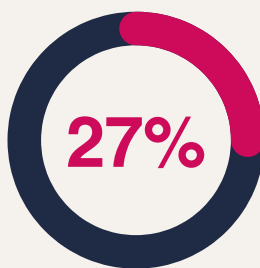
92%
Data

Yet employee experiences paint a different picture.

Only **45%** of employees have received training in human skills, with participation dropping to **27%** for technical skills and **29%** for data skills.



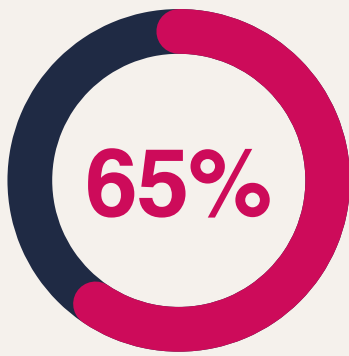
report reskilling or upskilling
in human skills



technical skills



data skills



When it comes to data literacy, the disconnect is stark.

Two-thirds (65%) of employees have not received data skills training in the past year.

This gap is most pronounced at the extremes of the organisational hierarchy: **74%** of unskilled workers and **72%** of executives report no data skills training.

The shortfall also affects middle management (**57%**), junior managers (**63%**), and skilled workers (**64%**).

Without broad access to data skills training, organisations cannot fully realise the benefits of data-driven decision-making.

74%

Unskilled workers

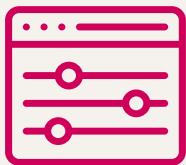
72%

Executives

39%

Middle managers

For HR leaders, closing skills gaps is the biggest priority to stay competitive in 2025. HR leaders advise the focus is technical skills (**80%**), human skills (**74%**), and data skills (**66%**)



80%

Technical



74%

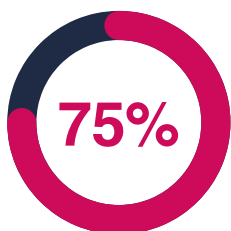
Human



66%

Data

This highlights the growing need for multi-skilled employees—individuals who can navigate complexity, adapt to change, and integrate human and technical skills to drive impact and meet the demands of an evolving workplace. The next 12 months will be pivotal in developing teams who can perform at critical intersections of business, where change and performance can be a catalyst for success.



The impact of effective training is undeniable: **75%** of employees who receive training report positive career development outcomes. The challenge lies in ensuring that every level of the organisation is equipped with the right skills to remain competitive.

Closing the alarming divide between strategy and execution calls for a targeted and strategic approach to drive performance and long-term success.



Contribution by David Reed



David Reed

Chief Knowledge Officer and Evangelist at DataIQ

David Reed, Chief Knowledge Officer at DataIQ, examines the gap between AI strategies and workforce skills. Despite living in a digital world, many employees—across all levels—struggle with data literacy. He highlights the misalignment between rapid AI adoption and slow workforce upskilling, arguing that one-size-fits-all training won't work. Instead, businesses need a flexible, role-specific approach to data and AI skills or risk leaving both senior leaders and new hires behind in an increasingly data-driven world.

Knowing the latest micro-trend on TikTok is not a digital skill. (Unless you work as a social media marketer, in which case it is part and parcel of your job.) Yet something about the digitally-saturated world of Gen Z terrifies employers – especially senior executives – and induces a feeling of being left behind.

In reality, nearly everybody in employment is at some risk of finding their skills set is redundant given the accelerated cycle of digital innovation and the rise of data-driven processes. New tools are arriving on our desktops daily with little or no clear strategy for how they should be used or training in getting the best out of them.

Just consider the eruption of Large Language Models (LLMs) wrapped in consumer-friendly apps like Microsoft Copilot which dropped during 2024.

No sooner was prompt engineer the most sought-after talent than it became diluted through the rapid familiarity we all gained in how to use ChatGPT, Gemini, Stable Diffusion, Midjourney and the rest.

Getting a job done using new digital tools is not quite the same as getting the right job done or ensuring the outcome of the job is right.

Compliance and risk departments quickly hit the Stop button when they realised staff might be pumping confidential, sensitive or commercially-valuable data into LLMs just to get back a report summary or presentation outline.

What this has highlighted is the enormous gap between AI strategies (assuming organisations have one) and people strategies. Aligning these is not easy because they operate at very different cycle rates – AI is an immediate, top-down ask, even if properly architecting for it can take years, whereas people are an always-on, continuous, bottom-up and side-to-side ask that is never fully realised.

Layer onto this the way in which data competencies are being progressively required in roles at every level and it becomes obvious that skills mapping, talent acquisition and staff upskilling is trying to move in three directions at once. Just as TikTok doesn't train the digitally-native in how to segment a customer base, neither does the annual Spotify Wrapped data download make users skilled in trend analytics.

Add into this one further issue – that the U-shaped skills gap revealed in Cornel's research shows white-collar senior executives lack digital and data skills just as much

as new blue-collar recruits. What made the C-suite great at management early in their careers is no longer what they need to lead a data-driven organisation now.

So where do you start trying to bring some alignment between AI and data skills at every level of the business and in line with what HR and the L&D functions can actually deliver? Clearly, the one-size-fits-all offering won't work, neither will hoping for a big bang reset. Some of the wilder ideas from the early days of facing into data have been shown to fail, like training the executive in coding.

Instead, what is needed is an incremental plan, tailored to each role and reflecting personal learning abilities (which may mean being time-poor just as much as being innumerate). And above all, it needs to be flexible. After all, by the end of 2025, current skills for using AI may look as irrelevant as TikTok trends like ice-bath challenges or speeded-up dance tunes...



The Pace of Change

Resilience is built when organisations set out to deliberately cultivate this within their workforce. In an era of relentless workplace change, the strain is showing.

Change fatigue is eroding morale, productivity barriers are stalling progress, and slow action to reform apprenticeship policies are hindering the training potential.

By addressing these critical areas, organisations can develop a workforce equipped to navigate disruption with purpose and precision.



An anxious workforce needs more support

The modern workforce is under considerable strain. As organisations grapple with change, the toll on mental health is impossible to ignore. For HR leaders, the pressures are evident: 1 in 5 experience workplace anxiety daily, and 1 in 2 feel it weekly.

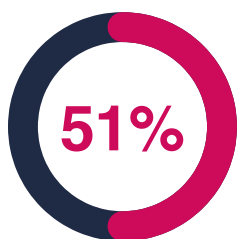


Daily anxiety
1 IN 5

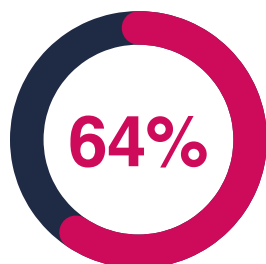


Weekly anxiety
1 IN 2

Employees are similarly affected, with **51%** reporting workplace anxiety at least once a week—a figure that climbs to **64%** for younger workers aged 18–34.



reporting workplace anxiety
at least once a week



for younger workers
aged 18–34

The causes of workplace anxiety are clear.

Heavy workloads and time pressures top the list, affecting **54%** of employees, while poor work-life balance and a lack of managerial support affect **26%**

54%

heavy workloads and time pressures

26%

poor work-life balance

26%

lack of managerial support

84-90%



identify mental health support as critical

4%



considering mental health support unimportant

Employees are equally clear about the solutions:

84% identify mental health support as critical to their satisfaction and performance, a figure that rises to 90% among younger employees.

Only 4% of employees dismiss mental health support as unimportant — a compelling case for embedding well-being into core business strategies.

Across the UK, 64% of HR leaders report implementing work-life balance policies and leadership training to reduce workplace anxiety.

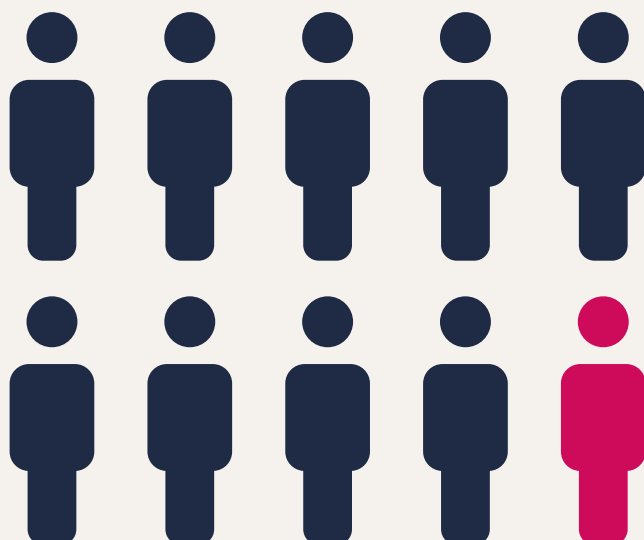
Other measures include empowering peer support networks (52%), manager check-ins (52%), resilience programmes (49%), and goal-setting workshops (48%).

These efforts are working: 9 in 10 HR leaders report these initiatives as effective, with leadership training (97%), goal setting (96%), and work-life balance policies (95%) delivering the greatest impact.



These efforts are working

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64%



of HR leaders report implementing work-life balance policies and leadership training

52%



empowering peer support networks

52%



manager check-ins

49%



resilience programmes

48%



goal-setting workshops

97%



leadership training

96%



goal setting

95%



work-life balance policies

Addressing anxiety is not just about reducing absenteeism or boosting morale; it is about safeguarding an organisation's most valuable resource—its people.

Leaders must act strategically and with empathy, embedding well-being into the heart of their business strategies. Those prioritising mental health today will empower an engaged and productive workforce.

Change fatigue is a significant problem

Change is a constant in the modern workplace, and for many, it has become exhausting.

Four in five HR leaders say their organisations are experiencing change fatigue, with 14% calling it a major concern.

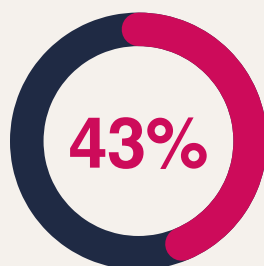
Employees feel the strain too: 62% report feeling fatigued by constant disruption, and 15% describe their fatigue as severe.

Younger workers are particularly affected, with 67% of those aged 18–34 experiencing change fatigue, compared to 66% of those aged 35–54 and 52% of those over 55.

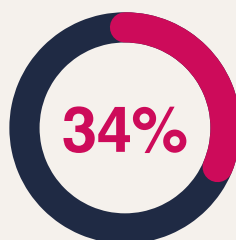
4 IN 5



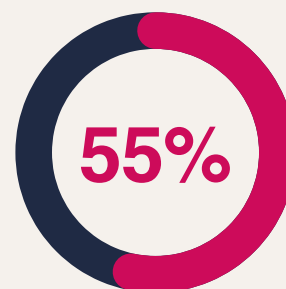
Despite the mounting toll, leadership responses are fragmented. In the past year, only 43% of employees received resilience training, of those, 34% described it as minimal. Worse still, 55% of employees report receiving no training at all. These gaps leave workers unprepared for disruption, heightened fatigue, and weakened morale.



of employees received
resilience training



of those describing
it as minimal



of employees report receiving
no training at all

This inconsistency is reflected in trust levels.

While 92% of HR leaders express confidence in their workforce's ability to handle disruption, only 66% of employees trust their managers to do the same, and just 58% have faith in senior leadership.

This trust deficit highlights the need for better training and support for leaders.

92%

of HR leaders express confidence in their workforce's ability to handle disruption

66%

of employees trust their managers to do the same

58%

have faith in senior leadership

Organisations cannot afford to let change fatigue persist unchecked.

By equipping employees and leaders with resilience skills, targeting younger workers disproportionately affected by disruption, and improving leadership confidence through tailored change management training, businesses can begin to turn the tide. Without decisive action, the burden of constant change will continue to grow, undermining morale and productivity.



Contribution by Caroline Currathers



Caroline Carruthers

Chief Executive Officer at Carruthers and Jackson

Caroline Carruthers, CEO of Carruthers and Jackson, champions data strategy as key to business resilience. She emphasises that successful change relies on people, not just technology, and leaders must engage teams to prevent change fatigue. Advocating for data literacy at all levels, she highlights leadership's role in fostering a culture of informed decision-making. By building trust and aligning data strategies with business goals, she envisions organisations unlocking real value through their people, processes, and technology.

Evolution is vital in any business; however, organisational change needs to be handled correctly by leadership teams to ensure employees don't become exhausted or unmotivated.

Having an effective data strategy in place ensures organisations can be resilient and adaptable in the face of continuous changes. Having a concrete data strategy provides in-house teams with a high-level roadmap and a framework to assess capabilities on an ongoing basis. This empowers organisations with a deeper understanding of how and where improvements can be made to provide tangible business value.

A common challenge for data leaders is overcoming change fatigue amongst employees as they look to incorporate new data strategies, technologies and tools, specifically following the rise in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the release of ChatGPT.

To encourage employee engagement, it's critical that the wider team understands what new tools and technology can do for them.

When implementing change, businesses need to think about the risk side of it, they need to think about the policies, they need to think about the governance and they also need to think about the architecture, the flow and the people in the organisations, as what really makes or breaks a company's technology data and AI strategy is the people using it every day.

Data literacy is the ability to create, read, write and argue with data. In an ideal world, all employees would at least have a foundational level of data literacy so they can engage with new data strategies and better understand new technology. Having the correct facilities for training is crucial to achieve this.

Leadership teams also need to lead by example, the skills of employees in an organisation are directly influenced by the behavior of a business's leadership. If senior executives aren't embracing new technology and making decisions based on data, then how can the rest of the organisation be expected to do so?

To secure organisation-wide support for new data and technology initiatives, leaders will have to create the vision, the view of the end state — where are we going?

And a lot of it is around storytelling; you must have a wholly credible business case or a strategy document that aligns

to the business objectives and business goals that is understandable for people, both at board and senior exec level, and those people out in the field and operations.

I've seen time and time again; organisations will do data or IT projects and the whole engagement side comes down to a one-page set of instructions on how to do something. That's not engagement, that's not hearts and minds, that's not winning that battle.

Engagement is about ensuring the team understands what's in it for them and conveying the art of the possible and how much better it's going to be when they come on this wonderful transformation with you.

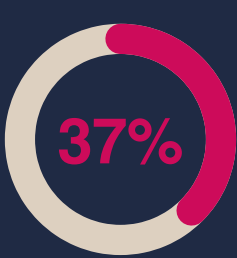
A lot of it boils down to trust. You must build that credibility and trust with the whole organisation to get them to embrace change.



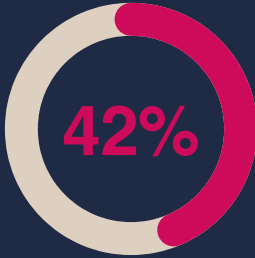
Productivity pitfalls must be addressed

A 2024 global survey by Gallup found that companies are 17% more productive and 21% more profitable when they offer training to employees. Despite efforts to boost efficiency, persistent barriers continue to undermine workplace productivity.

Chief among these is workload imbalance, cited by 37% of employees as their biggest challenge. This issue disproportionately affects women with 42% identifying it as a problem, compared to 33% of men, revealing perceived inequities in task distribution.



of employees cited workload imbalance as the primary obstacle



women



men

Other significant productivity blockers include lack of resources (31%), poor management (30%), and meeting overload (29%). The latter reflects a workplace culture increasingly criticised for prioritising face time over focused work.

Meanwhile, individual challenges such as distractions (24%), personal well-being (23%), and procrastination (22%) further illustrate the organisational and individual nature of the productivity problem. Together, these factors create an environment where organisational inefficiencies compound to limit potential.



Managers have a crucial role to play, but their impact varies widely. While 50% of employees report that their manager positively affects their productivity, the remaining data is sobering: 18% say their manager negatively impacts their performance, and 26% report no impact at all.



of employees report that their manager positively affects their productivity



report no impact at all



say their manager negatively impacts their performance

These figures highlight the challenges faced by managers, often dubbed ‘accidental managers’ — 82% who step into management roles without any formal leadership training according to CMI. This lack of preparation, combined with the growing squeeze of competing demands, leaves managers ill-equipped to build and sustain high-performing teams. Without targeted organisational support, these missed opportunities weaken engagement, diminish team performance, and erode organisational resilience.

To overcome these barriers, organisations must rethink task distribution, reduce unnecessary meetings, and provide managers with the tools and training they need to inspire their teams. Empowering managers to tackle these challenges can unlock hidden potential and boost productivity.

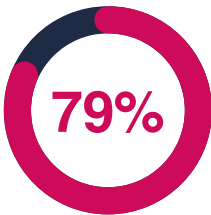
Apprenticeships and policy reforms offer new opportunities

The Apprenticeship Levy has been instrumental in shaping skills development across the UK, equipping businesses with critical capabilities in high-demand sectors. As organisations grapple with widening skills gaps and rapid workforce transformations, the need for resilience has never been greater. The promised reforms of the Growth and Skills Levy are becoming increasingly urgent to ensure the UK workforce can keep pace with the demands of the market.

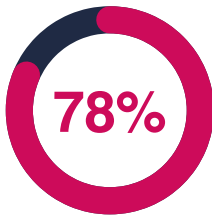
The Levy’s impact is undeniable in areas like technology (80%), data (79%), and leadership (78%), where HR leaders report using it to address critical workforce needs.



Technology

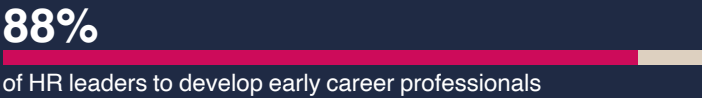


Data



Leadership

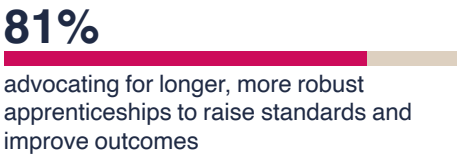
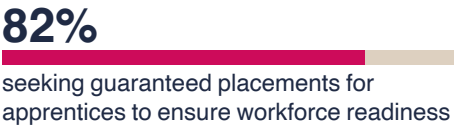
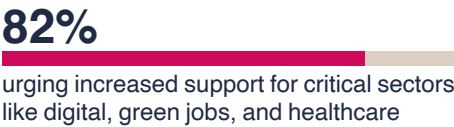
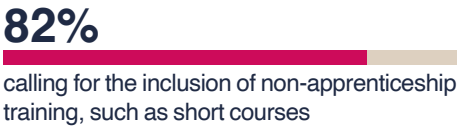
Degree-level apprenticeships are emerging as a vital tool in the talent strategy of UK businesses. They are leveraged by 81% of HR leaders to develop early career professionals and 77% use it as a key attraction strategy for new talent.



However, challenges remain. Funding constraints and complex administration — reported by 64% of HR leaders — are limiting the expansion of these programmes.

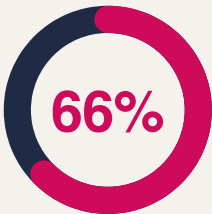


Our research shows HR leaders are vocal in their calls for reform, advocating for:

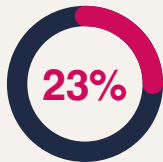


While 66% of HR leaders express optimism about upcoming reforms, concerns remain. A third is “very optimistic,” but 23% doubt whether reforms will deliver on their promise, and 9% question their scalability.

As businesses await clarity on the Levy’s future, scepticism is growing about the speed and effectiveness of reforms. A lack of timely decisions risks undermining UK corporates’ ability to plan, invest, and address urgent workforce challenges.



of HR leaders' express optimism about upcoming reforms



doubt whether reforms will deliver on their promise



question their scalability

At Corndel, we recognise the transformative potential of bold reforms.

By aligning workforce development with strategic business needs, the Levy can become a cornerstone of organisational resilience, adaptability and growth. As reform discussions progress, Corndel will continue to provide guidance and strategic support to organisations eager to deliver high-impact training solutions.

Realising Workforce Potential

What makes organisations successful? It's the people—empowered, supported, and equipped with the skills to realise their professional best.

In today's workplace, workforce potential remains an untapped asset. The challenges are plenty, from rising workplace anxiety to widening skills gaps and inconsistent progress on inclusion. This calls for strategic leadership to embed well-being into core business practices, scale training as a retention lever and address generational and diversity gaps. Leaders who can do this will improve performance and unlock value at every level. The question must be: how do we act decisively, and at scale?



Training and development are key to retention

Forward-thinking organisations increasingly recognise the value of training for both retention and performance.

77%

plan to expand their training budgets in 2025

28%

or organisations committing to

26%

increase of their training budgets

This confidence is reflected in their investment plans:

77% plan to expand their training budgets in 2025, with **28%** committing to increases of over **26%**. This builds on the 2024 momentum, where **62%** of organisations planned to increase training budgets, a sharp reversal from 2023, when **48%** of HR leaders anticipated budget cuts.

By contrast, only **5%** of HR leaders expect to cut their training budgets, underlining workforce development as a key business priority.

The return on investment (ROI) is equally compelling.

More than three-fifths (**61%**) of HR leaders report strong ROI from corporate training in areas like productivity, retention, and performance, with **21%** describing this ROI as very strong. These outcomes highlight training's crucial role in tackling talent retention and organisational effectiveness.

61%

of HR leaders report strong ROI from corporate training

21%

describing this ROI as very strong

Reskilling and upskilling are central to these efforts.

For **64%** of employees, access to reskilling opportunities is a key factor in deciding whether to stay with their employer. This aligns closely with the views of **76%** of HR leaders, who identify reskilling as vital to their long-term retention strategies. Employees' expectations further reinforce this point: **6 in 10** employees expect development opportunities in the workplace, and three-quarters (**75%**) value flexibility in their roles as part of their overall satisfaction.



6 IN 10

Training also delivers significant performance benefits. More than half (**56%**) of employees report that workplace training has directly improved their productivity, with female employees seeing the greatest impact (**61%** compared to **52%** of male employees). These outcomes highlight training's dual role as a retention tool and a performance enhancer.

Communication gaps in Equality, diversity, and inclusion require action

Despite widespread recognition of its importance and impact, equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) remain areas where organisations are falling short.

Gartner's 2024 research found companies with diverse workforces experience a 12% improvement in performance and a 20% higher intent to stay among employees, directly linking diversity to both business success and retention. PwC's 2024 Global DEI Survey further reinforces this, showing that investing in diversity and inclusion leads to a 6.8% increase in stock price, while employees who feel undervalued are three times more likely to leave.

Over a fifth (22%) of employees are unaware of any EDI training initiatives within their organisation, while 2 in 5 employees report never having participated in related sessions.

Without broad engagement, EDI efforts risk becoming ineffectual, particularly as inclusion becomes a fundamental expectation in modern workplaces.



Progress is mixed.

While **69%** of HR leaders report implementing EDI training beyond mandatory compliance, only **48%** include it as a core component of their strategy.

Another **21%** limit their efforts to specific areas, and **24%** have yet to act, leaving EDI initiatives fragmented and unable to drive meaningful cultural change.

69%

of HR leaders report implementing EDI training beyond mandatory compliance

48%

include it as a core component of their strategy

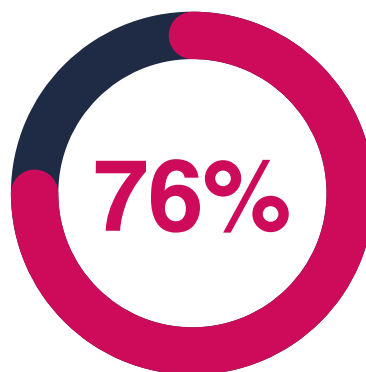


Leadership representation also falls short.

On average, **37%** of senior leadership teams include individuals from underrepresented groups such as women, neurodiverse individuals, and ethnic minorities. Though **20%** of HR leaders report achieving higher representation (**51% to 75%**), this remains the exception, reflecting how far many organisations still must go in achieving genuinely inclusive leadership.

The challenge is compounded by a lack of unified advocacy at the top. **76%** of employees believe senior leaders should champion EDI efforts, and worryingly, nearly a quarter (**21%**) do not see this as important.

Without visible and consistent leadership support, EDI initiatives risk being deprioritised, further eroding trust and credibility within the organisation.



Contribution by Kemi Akinboro



Kemi Akinboro

Founder of The Black Career Guide & Professional Development Expert at Corndel



Kemi Akinboro brings over 15 years of expertise in Leadership and Development, with a career spanning consulting and educational leadership. She currently works at Corndel while serving as Programme Director of Open Programmes at London Business School. Throughout her career, Kemi has excelled in delivering multifaceted projects from conception to completion. As the founder of The Black Career Guide, Kemi demonstrates her unwavering commitment to fostering career growth and championing inclusive development.

Creating Inclusive Workplaces: Diverse Leadership as a Catalyst for Change

Creating inclusive workplaces is not just a professional goal; for many of us, it's deeply personal. As a Black woman navigating systems that weren't always built with me—or others like me—in mind, I've seen how underrepresentation stifles progress. I've also witnessed the transformative power of diversity and the undeniable strength it brings to organisations. Diverse leadership is not a box to tick; it's the cornerstone of innovation, resilience, and equity.

The Power of Diverse Leadership

Leadership that reflects the true makeup of society isn't something I think any of us would debate. Diverse leadership brings lived experiences, unique perspectives, and fresh ideas into the decision-making process. These perspectives are essential for organisations to solve problems creatively and remain competitive in an ever-changing world.

However, the statistics in the UK tell a sobering story. Ethnic minorities hold just 1 in 16 top management roles, and only 37% of senior leadership positions across the FTSE 100 are held by women. For disabled individuals, the numbers are even more disheartening. These figures highlight a stark disconnect between the promises of diversity and the reality.

When diversity is truly embraced, the results speak for themselves. Research from McKinsey shows that companies with ethnically diverse leadership are 36% more likely to outperform their peers. Organisations with gender-diverse teams are 25% more likely to achieve above-average profitability. In short, diversity is not a token gesture—it's a proven driver of success.

Barriers to Representation

The barriers to diverse leadership are entrenched, systemic, and multifaceted.

1. **Unconscious Bias:** Prejudices that people don't even realise they hold continue to shape who gets opportunities and who doesn't. Evidence shows that people recruit people who are like them.
2. **The 'Only One' Syndrome:** Too often, minority leaders find themselves the sole representative of their identity in the room, creating immense pressure and little room for error.
3. **Corporate Cultures Resistant to Change:** Many organisations pride themselves on tradition, which can become a barrier to progress.
4. **Access to Opportunity:** Structural inequalities, including disparities in education and professional networks, continue to limit who can rise to leadership.
5. **These obstacles are not insurmountable.** But they will not disappear without deliberate, collective action.

A Vision for Change

So how do we break through these barriers? It starts with courageous leadership—leaders who aren't afraid to challenge the status quo.

1. **Unapologetic Accountability:** Organisations must set ambitious diversity goals and hold themselves publicly accountable. Initiatives like the Parker Review, which calls for every FTSE 100 board to have at least one ethnic minority director, should become the standard, not the exception.
2. **Championing Talent:** Programmes that provide mentorship and sponsorship for underrepresented groups are essential. When leaders actively open doors for others, they pave the way for systemic change.
3. **Cultural Transformation:** Diversity is meaningless without inclusion. Leaders must create environments where everyone feels valued, safe, and empowered to contribute fully. This means listening, adapting, and dismantling discriminatory practices and unhealthy norms.
4. **Revisiting Recruitment:** to recruit more diverse talent into leadership, organisations must expand recruitment pipelines by partnering with networks like BYP (Black Young Professionals) or Women's Leadership Network. Crafting inclusive job descriptions, ensure diverse hiring panels, and invest in leadership development for underrepresented groups. Transparent diversity goals and inclusive branding further demonstrate commitment, attracting and retaining diverse talent.

A Call to Action

The journey towards inclusive workplaces isn't an easy one, but it's the most important one we'll take. For too long, the narrative around diversity has been passive, peppered with empty promises. That time has passed. As a Black woman, I know firsthand that representation matters. It's not just about having a seat at the table—it's about transforming that table entirely so that it serves everyone.

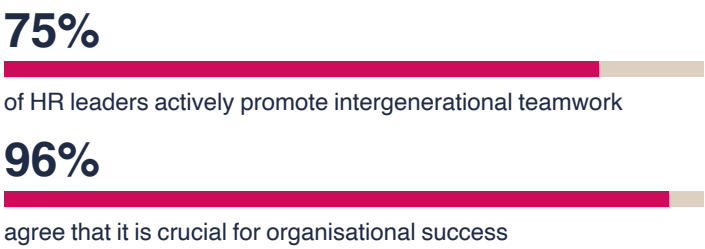
Diverse leadership is more than a business advantage—it is a matter of justice. It reflects the world we live in and ensures everyone is seen, heard, and valued. Real change begins when leaders embrace diversity as essential, not optional. By fostering equity and inclusion, we can create workplaces that empower everyone to thrive and drive meaningful progress together.

Organisations need to manage multigenerational expectations

For the first time, workplaces span five generations, from Gen Z to the Silent Generation.

The number of payrolled employees aged 65+ rose by 6.3% between May 2023 and May 2024, reaching 1.2 million — the highest recorded level (Gov.UK). This reflects a broader pattern of experienced workers staying in or re-entering the workforce, challenging organisations to address long-standing biases.

While **75%** of HR leaders actively promote intergenerational teamwork, **96%** agree that it is crucial for organisational success. By combining older employees’ institutional knowledge with younger colleagues’ fresh perspectives, multigenerational teams can become a powerful competitive advantage.



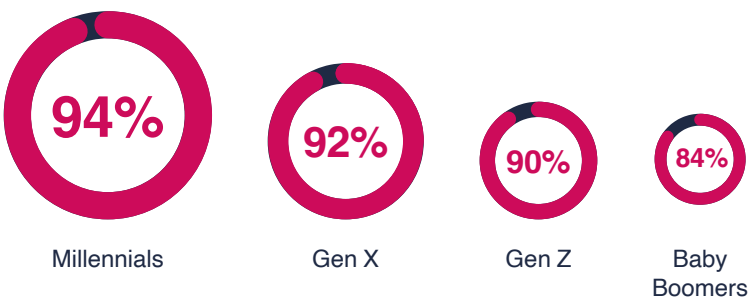
Age-related discrimination remains a significant barrier. AARP’s 2024 research found that 6 in 10 workers aged 50+ face age-related prejudice, with women facing the most significant challenges.

Three-quarters of women have encountered age-based discrimination during their careers, with incidents peaking in early and later career stages (Women of Influence, 2024). In UK fund management, for example, women aged 50–64 account for just **8%** of employees, despite making up **41%** of the broader workforce. These inequities demand urgent, targeted interventions to create equitable opportunities for experienced workers.



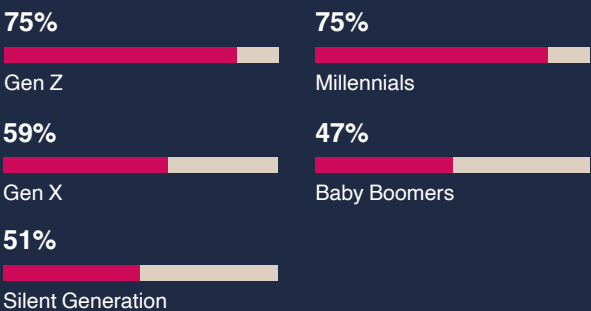
At the same time, younger generations bring their own complexities.

Millennials, Gen Z, and Gen X increasingly expect workplace support. Mental health support is a top priority for Millennials (**94%**), Gen X (**92%**), and Gen Z (**90%**), compared to **84%** for Baby Boomers and **80%** for the Silent Generation.



Similarly, professional development expectations reveal sharp generational divides.

HR leaders report rising demands from Gen Z (**75%**) and Millennials (**75%**) for growth opportunities, far surpassing those of Gen X (**59%**), Baby Boomers (**47%**), and the Silent Generation (**51%**). Addressing these priorities is vital to retaining younger talent while maintaining engagement among older employees.



2025 Strategic Recommendations

The Workplace Training Report 2025 highlights the challenges and opportunities defining the future of work. The data reveals a workforce in flux, grappling with technological transformation, multigenerational complexity, and rising employee expectations.

At the same time, the report reveals the immense potential for organisations to lead bold, strategic action. As global competition intensifies and technology continues to evolve at pace, organisations that hesitate to act risk being left behind entirely.



To navigate this complexity and secure long-term success, organisations must focus on six critical areas:



Close critical skills gaps

Prioritise training in technical, human, and data skills to build a future-ready workforce.



Enhance AI leadership readiness

Upskill leaders in AI fundamentals and change skills to drive transformation and inspire trust.



Embed well-being strategies

Scale mental health initiatives and management training to reduce workplace anxiety and improve morale.



Champion diversity and inclusion

Elevate EDI efforts by increasing leadership buy-in and representation to drive internal engagement.



Combat change fatigue

Equip employees and leaders with change management training to improve adaptability and reduce disruption.



Leverage apprenticeships

Maximise the Apprenticeship Levy to develop critical skills in technology, data, and leadership.



Boost productivity

Address workload imbalances, streamline processes, and empower managers to optimise team performance.



Foster generational collaboration

Bridge generational divides through targeted development programs and inclusive teamwork initiatives.

This report is both a call to action and a guide, offering practical insights for HR, L&D, and business leaders to help their organisations navigate the complexities of 2025 and beyond. The future of work demands resilience, adaptability, and a people-first approach. Bold reforms and innovative approaches are essential. Policymakers must enable flexibility to scale training programmes and apprenticeships, while businesses embrace continuous learning to navigate disruption and emerge stronger.

By aligning workforce strategies with long-term goals, organisations can transform challenges into opportunities for progress. Investing in training, championing diversity, and prioritising well-being is critical to fostering resilience, driving innovation, and achieving sustainable growth.

The path forward is clear: invest in your people, adapt to change, and cultivate a workforce prepared to meet the demands of 2025 and beyond.

[→ PDF Download: Workplace Training Report 2025](#)