



THE MODERN LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

CHAPTER 15
AI MEETS THE MODERN
LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

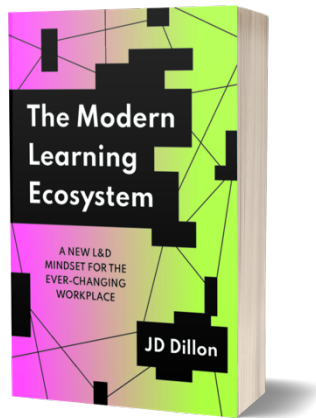
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For more information on *The Modern Learning Ecosystem: A New L&D Mindset for the Ever-Changing Workplace*, visit jdwroteabook.com.





“You KILLED it! I honestly think it should be required reading for all L&D teams.”

“Forget about dry, sleep-inducing textbooks. This book is like your favorite comedy show, but with more insights and fewer commercial breaks.”

“I loved it! I just purchased a copy for everyone on my team. A good reminder for folks that have been in the biz and an amazing reference for those just starting out in their career.”

How can we possibly keep up? This question is front and center in today’s workplace thanks to the downright ridiculous pace of change. There’s a never-ending stream of new processes, regulations, products, and technologies with which employees must contend. And in the middle of everything—between executives, stakeholders, managers, IT, subject matter experts, legal, and employees—sits L&D, charged with making sure people have the knowledge and skills needed to execute but rarely provided with the time and resources to get it done.

The *Modern Learning Ecosystem* outlines a practical approach for navigating nonstop workplace change. Inspired by decades of operations and talent development experience with the world’s most dynamic companies, learning and enablement expert JD Dillon challenges the traditional L&D mindset with a tried-and-true framework that makes right-fit support a meaningful part of the everyday workflow. This book provides step-by-step instructions for architecting a disruption-ready learning ecosystem that will help employees solve today’s biggest problems while building the knowledge and skills needed to seize tomorrow’s opportunities.

Visit jdwroteabook.com to learn more and grab your copy.

Chapter 15

AI Meets The Modern Learning Ecosystem

Harness AI to Evolve Your L&D Function

————— S P O I L E R A L E R T ! —————

This is going to change EVERYTHING!

The rapid evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) is more than just the latest technology fad. It's a digitally enabled paradigm shift that's rapidly changing how work gets done. Sure, there's lots of noise and hype surrounding AI, especially large language models (LLMs) and generative AI (GenAI) applications. Plus, there are plenty of questions to be answered, including concerns around regulation, sustainability, bias and fair use. But all signs point to AI having an unprecedented impact on every industry, function and job. This is bigger than social media. This is bigger than mobile devices. Heck, it might even be bigger than the internet. It's so profound that I just had to add a chapter on AI to my book!

So welcome to **Chapter 15 - AI Meets The Modern Learning Ecosystem**. Let's explore the potential for AI to improve the human experience of learning at work along with the steps L&D pros must take to prepare for this seismic shift.

Get ready to talk about ...

- How AI will (and won't) impact the modern learning ecosystem
- Why we need to take an OFI approach to workplace transformation
- How we can leverage AI to augment workplace learning and support
- How to take a principled approach to AI (and technology in general)
- Why every L&D pro must get onboard ASAP

November 29, 2022. That's the day my book - *The Modern Learning Ecosystem* - was published. Do you know what happened the next day?

- "Anti-Hero" by Taylor Swift hit the top of the music charts.
- The Edmonton Oilers defeated the Chicago Blackhawks 5-4.
- Bo Jackson - the unstoppable running back from Tecmo Bowl - turned 60.
- **OpenAI released ChatGPT.**

Talk about timing!

Since then, AI has become the hottest thing in tech since people thought the hoverboards from *Back to the Future 2* were real. Microsoft invested \$13 billion in OpenAI. DALL-E, Gemini, Claude, Bard, Firefly and Midjourney are household names. The aggregator website [TheresAnAIForThat.com](https://theresanaiforthat.com) currently lists 12,730 tools that can handle 16,570 tasks and cover 4,847 jobs. The AI market is expected to reach \$305.9 billion in 2024 and \$738.8 billion by 2030 according to Statista.

The AI hype quickly descended upon the workplace, where 60% of organizations now use GenAI according to research by McKinsey. The fervor starts at the top, where 28% of corporate boards have GenAI on their agendas. On the job, more than half of US employees are using AI according to The Conference Board. I'm one of those people, of course. Since 2022, I've completely overhauled my digital toolset and now apply AI-enabled tech almost every day. More on that later.

The AI hype has also spilled into L&D. It's less of a spill and more of a geyser erupting from a broken lawn sprinkler. The topic dominated Donald Taylor's "2024 L&D Global Sentiment Survey." 21.5% of L&D pros around the world indicated that AI is "what's hot" in workplace learning this year. 95.3% of instructional designers use AI in their day-to-day work according to research by Dr. Philippa Hardman. Those who don't cite access and permission issues - not lack of interest - as the primary reason they haven't integrated AI into their workflows. In 2019, I partnered with a friend from Amazon to facilitate a session on the potential for AI in L&D during ATD TechKnowledge in San Jose, California. It was the only AI session at the conference. 15 people showed up. In 2024, 10% of the agenda for the ATD International Conference & Expo focused exclusively on AI.

AI is clearly THE TOPIC of conversation. But so what? What does this all mean for L&D - as a function and a profession? How is this going to help us help the people we support do their jobs better?

The truth is ... I don't know. But I have a few educated guesses.

A Primer.

To understand how AI will impact L&D now and into the future, we must first get past the buzz to understand the fundamentals of this technology. Here's where we run into our first problem. I may be writing a chapter on AI in L&D, but **I'm not an AI expert**. I'm not now nor have I ever been a machine learning engineer or data scientist. I'm an L&D pro who's been applying AI in my practices for over a decade - first as a practitioner and now as a technologist. I deal more with the strategic application of the technology than the technology itself. That's what this chapter is about.

So I decided to bring in a co-author to help tell this story. Allow me to introduce LearnGeek AI.



Hello! I'm LearnGeek AI, and I'm here to explore the exciting fusion of AI and learning.

How could I not use AI to write an AI chapter? But LearnGeek AI isn't just any chatbot. It's a custom GPT that leverages 1 million words of my past work - including *The Modern Learning Ecosystem* - to provide advice on modern learning practices. You can chat with LearnGeek AI right now if you have a paid ChatGPT subscription. I'll let my co-author tell you a bit more about what it can do.



I'm here to demystify how AI can revolutionize learning and development, offering you a roadmap inspired by JD's innovative approaches. Think of me as your guide to integrating AI into your L&D strategy, making learning more personalized, efficient, and impactful. Together, we'll explore real-world applications and strategies that bring

the future of workplace learning to life. Let's harness the power of AI to create learning experiences as captivating and forward-thinking as a journey in the DeLorean.

Of course, LearnGeek AI is required to make *Back to the Future* references! We'll have lots of fun with my co-author throughout this chapter. First, let's break down a few key AI concepts so we're all on the same page.



Before diving into the application of AI in L&D, it's crucial for L&D pros to grasp a few foundational concepts:

- **Artificial intelligence (AI)** refers to computer systems designed to mimic human intelligence. This includes learning from data, making decisions, and solving problems. AI transforms our daily experiences by powering smart assistants that manage our routines, optimizing our road trips with real-time navigation, and personalizing entertainment through recommendation systems.
- **Algorithms** are sets of rules designed to perform a task or solve a problem, like a recipe in cooking. In AI, algorithms allow machines to learn from data, make decisions, and predict outcomes. They're essential for AI functionality, enabling systems to mimic human learning and improve over time.
- **Natural Language Processing (NLP)** is essentially how computers understand, interpret, and manipulate human language. Every time you use voice assistants like Siri or Google Assistant, that's NLP at work. Autocorrect and predictive text on your phone are also NLP applications. Even email filters that sort your inbox are using NLP to understand content and context.
- **Large Language Models (LLMs)** like GPT (Generative Pretrained Transformer) analyze vast datasets to understand and generate human-like text. LLMs enhance our daily lives

by powering chatbots that provide instant customer service, generating creative content for blogs and articles, and assisting in drafting and summarizing emails.

- **Generative AI (GenAI)** refers to AI systems that can create content, whether it's text, images, or even music. It's akin to having a personal assistant who not only understands our unique tastes and needs but also anticipates them, crafting solutions and content that feel tailor-made.
- **Multi-modal AI** refers to AI systems that can understand, interpret, and generate information across multiple types of data, such as text, images, and audio. This capability can enhance interactions with technology by allowing digital assistants to seamlessly understand and respond to voice commands, written text and images.

Understanding these concepts equips L&D professionals to envision AI not as a distant sci-fi dream but as a practical set of tools that can be leveraged to create more engaging, effective, and personalized learning experiences. Just as Marty McFly discovered the power of the flux capacitor, L&D pros can harness AI to power a new era of learning.

Thanks, LearnGeek AI!

AI is a complex discipline that's been around for decades. It's unrealistic to expect L&D pros to become AI experts. It's also unnecessary. Instead, we must have a grounded understanding of what AI can and cannot do before we apply this technology to evolve our practices.

AI is GOOD at:

- Recognizing patterns
- Automating repetitive tasks
- Summarizing information
- Making predictions

- Personalizing information at scale

AI is NOT GOOD at:

- Creating original ideas
- Determining truth
- Applying common sense
- Understanding context
- Applying empathy, judgment or ethics

The best way to think about the shift to AI-powered technology is how we interact with our tools. **We are moving from a world in which we tell the machine what to do to a digital paradigm in which we tell the machine what we want.** AI makes this possible.

As is the case with capabilities like video production and project management, some people will have deeper knowledge and skills than others due to the requirements of their roles. AI is quickly becoming part of every job just as it has already become part of everyday life. You leverage AI-powered technology every time you auto-complete a text, navigate to a restaurant or accept a recommendation on Netflix. Chances are you've also been applying AI-enabled technology on the job for years without considering it. Now, thanks to the acceleration of this technology, L&D pros must become AI fluent so we can make smart, responsible, forward-thinking decisions regarding the evolution of our roles and function.

Yet Another Industrial Revolution.

When I was in seventh grade, I did a history project on the Billy Joel song “We Didn’t Start the Fire.” I spent hours in the library researching the 116 historical references included in the lyrics. I photocopied images from encyclopedias, biographies and archived newspapers. I then glued those 116 black and white images onto a 32” x 40” poster board and laminated the entire thing. It was GLORIOUS! If I still had it, I would frame it and hang it in my living room.

Why am I telling you about my epic seventh grade project? First, I just want to let you know that I can answer any “We Didn’t Start the Fire” questions you may have. Second, it’s

a great example of work that would be now completed in a totally different way thanks to technology. Today, a seventh grader wouldn't need to step foot in a library. Instead, they could Google each historical reference to find an appropriate image. They probably wouldn't hand craft a paper collage, instead opting for a digital slideshow synced to a dubstep version of the song. If they did want to create a collage that evoked the meaning of the song, they could feed the lyrics to ChatGPT and get something like this in 10 seconds.



AI-generated image created by ChatGPT using the prompt: generate an illustrated collage that evokes the meaning of the song lyrics from We Didn't Start the Fire by Billy Joel.

“Thought leaders” love to evoke catchy phrases like “The 4th Industrial Revolution” when explaining the social, political and economic impact of digital transformation. I prefer to reflect on past experience to determine what did and didn't work the last time we found ourselves on the precipice of major technological change. This should help me make smarter decisions this time around.



Four major digital paradigm shifts have made a significant impact on how people live and work over the past 40 years.

Personal computers made technology accessible at home and in the workplace, increasing efficiency and enabling the digital transformation of countless industries.

The **internet** connected the world like never before, facilitating instant communication, access to information, and remote work possibilities, effectively shrinking the world and opening up global opportunities for both individuals and businesses.

Social applications have reshaped human interaction and professional networking, allowing people to connect, share, and collaborate across distances, transforming social dynamics and business marketing strategies.

Mobile devices have made technology portable, ensuring constant connectivity and access to information, revolutionizing the way we work, communicate, and manage our daily lives.



pc



internet



social



mobile



ai

AI represents the next great shift. Based on even the most subdued estimates, it may have the most significant impact of all given the confluence of factors driving this hype cycle. Companies are looking for new ways to grow their businesses while reducing costs and improving efficiencies. Microprocessors enable powerful AI models to run on personal smartphones. The creator economy has fostered an explosion of creativity while making it harder for consumers to find relevant, engaging content without the assistance of powerful-yet-clandestine algorithms. AI is the natural next step in how technology functions in this environment.

What can we learn from recent paradigm shifts to inform where we go next? There are two unfortunate truths when it comes to L&D's past experience with digital transformation. First, we always lag. How many organizations are still trying to figure out how to leverage mobile devices to support learning and performance? Second, we apply new technology to execute legacy practices. The internet fundamentally transformed how we do everything - from watching movies and communicating with coworkers to booking restaurant

reservations and shopping for furniture. I still can't believe I bought a bed in a box off the internet ... and it's super comfortable!

But what happened when we applied the transformative capabilities of the world wide web and cloud computing to corporate training? We moved the classroom online and called it "eLearning." We didn't take the time to step back and rethink our practices through the lens of digital transformation. Instead, we leaned into the immediate time and cost savings that come with scaled content distribution. Now, tens of thousands of people can complete the same course on their own schedules. But do they actually need the same course? Do they need a course at all?

AI represents the next opportunity to rethink L&D's purpose, value and practices through a digital lens. Given the significant impact AI is already having on the workplace, L&D can't afford to lag this time. We can't take 10 years to figure out where we fit in an AI-enabled workplace. More importantly, the people we support need help navigating an oncoming tidal wave of workplace change. If we don't step forward now and drive our own transformation, AI won't be something in which we participate. **AI will be something that happens to us.**

Three Levels of Digital Transformation.

There's one important question we must answer before we can navigate our way through the next digital transformation of the workplace: what the \$%#& is digital transformation?

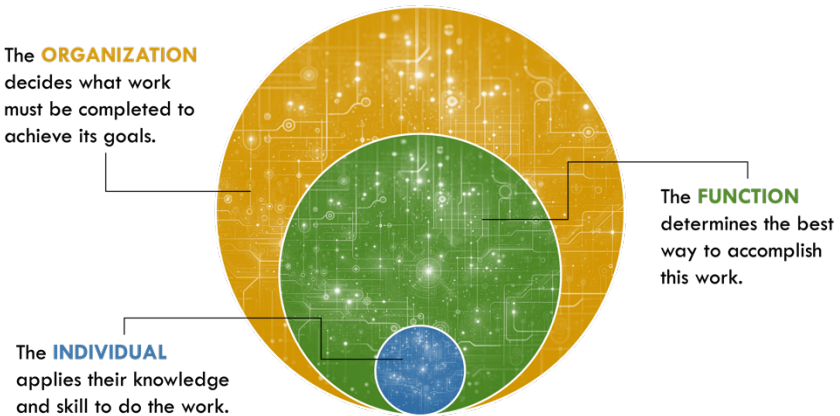


Digital transformation is like hopping into the DeLorean and hitting 88 mph, but instead of traveling through time, you're navigating the evolving landscape of technology to revolutionize how work gets done. It's about integrating digital technology into all areas of a business, fundamentally changing how you operate and deliver value to your team members. This journey will impact every aspect of L&D, from the tools and platforms used to deliver training to the methodologies that engage and empower employees to learn and grow.

That's about the level of clarity I'd expect from a machine - or a highly paid consultant. New technologies have broad, sweeping impacts on how we live our everyday lives.

When's the last time you used a paper map for directions or called a movie theater to find out the showtimes? But the ripple effects into the workplace are often more nuanced, affecting different industries, markets, organizations and professionals in distinct ways. We can't look at digital transformation as one big thing. Instead, we must consider the way technology influences change across levels of the workplace. This is where the **OFI Framework for Workplace Transformation** comes in handy!

OFI was first conceived by Aristotle in 318 BC as he tried to understand how the changing seasons impacted everyday life in Ancient Greece. And that's a total lie! OFI is something I recently came up with to codify my perspective on workplace transformation. Every popular framework started as a thing someone made up at some point, right? OFI provides a structured way to evaluate any sweeping, disruptive workplace change, including digital transformation.



The ORGANIZATION determines what work must be completed.

- Outcomes: the goals that determine the prioritization of work within the organization
- Governance: the rules that inform decisions regarding the work
- Decisions: how the work done within the organization must change

The FUNCTION determines the best way to accomplish the work.

- **Mandate:** the role the function is expected to play in support of organizational outcomes
- **Infrastructure:** the tools, tactics and technologies used to facilitate the work
- **Resources:** the processes and information provided to support the work

The **INDIVIDUAL** applies their knowledge and skill to do the work.

- **Mindset:** the willingness to adapt and embrace changes to the work
- **Understanding:** the ability to learn new things in support of the work
- **Workflow:** the readiness to change how work is done

Organization > Function > Individual

That's the OFI Framework for Workplace Transformation - trademark LearnGeek 2024!

We typically experience workplace transformation on an **individual level**. New technologies enable us to do our jobs in different ways - often improving efficiency, capacity and quality. Sometimes new tools are forced onto us, and we're required to make them fit. But we also have an opportunity to explore new methods and determine how they can help us level up our workflows - or if it makes sense to adjust how we work to gain extra benefits. This level of digital transformation is the easiest to grasp because it's the one we somewhat control.

That's not quite as true at the **functional level**. This is where management determines how to navigate their part of the change. They make decisions on functional priorities, resourcing and staffing based on the organization's mandate as well as the availability of new technology. These decisions directly impact the individual, as they affect considerations like work assignments, team structures and the functional tech stack. Ultimately, the function must make decisions that enable its ability to support company goals and deliver on its mandate.

That mandate is determined at the **organizational level**. This is where new technologies and a bevy of additional inputs, including shareholder demands, regulatory shifts, macroeconomics and a whole lotta FOMO, slam together, often resulting in large-scale workplace changes. Sometimes, this manifests in a vague company vision that never actually comes to life. I still remember when my CTO proclaimed "next year, we're going mobile" in 2012. To this day, I have no idea what that meant. Other times, digital transformation results in targeted shifts, such as the introduction of remote work. And then

there are instances when technology opens the door to entirely new business models, like Netflix's move from mail order DVDs to streaming media. Employees may have limited input into organizational transformation, but they ultimately don't have a choice in how they're impacted. These shifts have considerable downstream effects, from priority shifts and tech stack overhauls to corporate mergers and mass layoffs.

It takes time to make big organizational changes in response to disruption. The same is true for adapting functional processes to leverage new tools. That's why our experience with digital transformation tends to begin at an individual level. Thanks to IT red tape, limited budgets and pesky security concerns, we often get our first hands-on exposure to new tech outside of work. We learn handy Excel tricks on YouTube and wonder why the LMS doesn't work this way. Then, we start experimenting with our new tools on the job, trying to derive the same benefits we discovered at home. I once rigged my company wiki to look exactly like YouTube - because that's what people used in real life. Eventually, the rest of the workplace catches up with our individual progress and determines if/how these technologies will be applied at scale.

This is what happened with the internet, social media and mobile devices. And it's happening again with AI.

L&D + AI: Individual Transformation

What was the title of the last webinar you attended about AI in L&D?

I'll bet it was something like "How to Use AI-Generated Video for Training" or "15 ChatGPT Prompts for Instructional Designers." Most of the early conversation around AI in L&D is focused on the individual level of digital transformation - how we can use new tools to do our current jobs better. As we've established, big organizational changes take time. Experimenting with new tools to improve our practices is our way of getting past the hype and elevating our AI knowledge while we wait.

The emergence of GenAI has resulted in an explosion of interest and experimentation among L&D pros. I already mentioned Dr. Philippa Hardman's research into the growing ubiquity of AI tools among instructional designers. I'm doing the same thing - playing with new platforms to boost my knowledge and improve my output. Here's a quick overview of how I'm applying AI in my work.

Note: this is not an endorsement for any particular tools or providers. It's just the list of applications I use right now. By the time you read this, I'll probably have an entirely new list. That's why you should check out [LearnGeek.ai](https://www.learngeek.ai) for the latest!

Digital Assistants.

I have three. Max is my internal DA that leverages our corporate knowledge base to answer everyday work questions, like “am I permitted to upgrade my flight if it lasts more than 5 hours?” ChatGPT is my go-to brainstorming partner. Most of my speaking session titles and descriptions begin as drafts from ChatGPT. And then there’s LearnGeek AI - my custom GPT that sources 1,000,000 words of my written content (book, articles, blogs, podcasts, scripts) to provide guidance on modern learning practices. Altogether, these tools cut down on my need to search for basic information or interrupt other people with questions.

Content Generation.

I play with lots of different GenAI content tools. It just depends on what I’m making. Thanks to ChatGPT and Bing Image Creator, 75% of the images in my slide decks are now AI-generated. I haven’t written an assessment from scratch since 2019 thanks to Max, my team’s proprietary GenAI that uses source material to write multiple-choice questions. ElevenLabs fulfills all my voice-over audio needs, including my personal voice clone that takes my place for simple projects. HeyGen generates my video clone, which I use for experiments and short-form media. Opus Clip cuts my longer videos into bite-sized shorts for my [LearnGeek YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...). Finally, Vyond (mixed media video) and Mindsmith (eLearning) generate initial drafts of my instructional content.

Notes + Summaries.

I hate meeting recordings. I refuse to believe anyone watches them unless absolutely required. Instead, I use Zoom’s built-in AI companion to summarize meetings and distribute notes. I also use Max, which is integrated with my company’s Slack, to auto-summarize online content I share with teammates. This allows people to quickly scan the key points of an article and determine if it’s worth reading.

Translations.

I work with people all over the world. Many speak English more effectively than I do, but I never really know when someone may be struggling to understand my message. Therefore, I’m always exploring new translation tech. We’re getting close to the moment when I’ll be

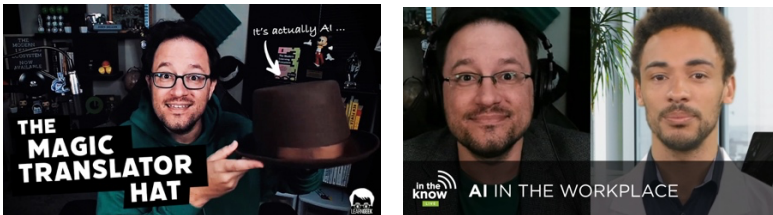
able to offer live translation for my presentations without help from event organizers. In the meantime, I use ChatGPT and Max to translate written content. This allows me to respond to email and social media comments in people’s preferred languages.

Captioning.

Did you know 63% of American adults under the age of 30 prefer to watch TV with subtitles - even if they understand the language and don’t experience hearing difficulties (YouGov). That’s why I use AI to caption my own presentations. This is easy to do online, as most delivery platforms offer built-in captioning. For in-person sessions, I use PowerPoint to display real-time captions on my slides. I carry an extra lapel mic that connects to my laptop via Bluetooth to make sure my voice is captured as I move around the room.

I’ve done the math. AI is saving me 10+ hours per week. It’s also helping me provide more equitable experiences while opening doors to new opportunities I would not have previously considered without this technology. For example, I didn’t have the time to explore short-form video content before I found Opus Clip. Now, I script my long-form content so it’s easy for AI to scrape and pull topical clips.

Here are two videos that demonstrate how I apply these tools in creative ways.

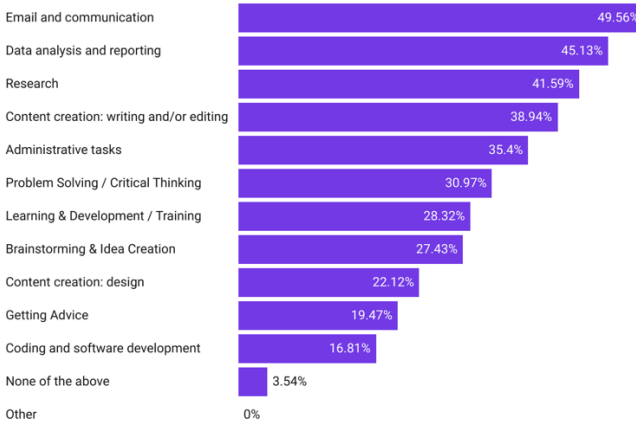


In [“The Magic Translator Hat”](#) I use my HeyGen video clone and ElevenLabs voice clone to speak multiple languages. In the [“How is AI transforming EX”](#) episode of “In The Know,” I used multiple tools to build an AI-generated guest. I also break down the process of producing the episode, which aired just a few months after the release of ChatGPT.

My personal experience is echoed in emerging research regarding the impact of AI on workplace productivity. A study by FlexOS found that 81% of GenAI users say the technology has improved their productivity. The most common use cases include

automating email and communication (49.56%), data analysis and reporting (45.13%) and research (41.59%).

What Tasks Do You Automate Using Generative AI at Your Workplace?



Source: FlexOS - Generative AI at Work Research Report • Created with Datawrapper

While more and more professionals are leveraging AI on the job, many continue to struggle with concerns around privacy, trust, discomfort, workplace restrictions and legal constraints. If you work in a healthcare or government job, you probably don't have the same freedom to explore AI-powered tools as those in less regulated industries. This disparity fosters lots of FOMO. It may also leave people unprepared to deal with future workplace changes. This is another reason I wrote this chapter. There's so much buzz and hype around AI - but not everyone has the same opportunity or support to navigate their way through the noise.

I have good news for anyone who feels like they're falling behind because they don't have the time, capacity or permission to play with AI. Our current slate of AI-powered apps is nifty, but it shouldn't be the focus of our transformation conversation. Tools will come and go, especially this early in the AI hype cycle. Pretty soon, most LLMs and algorithms will have the same capabilities. Just as it's hard to imagine a world without the internet, soon AI will be a table stakes part of how all technology works. Instead of getting stuck on specific applications, **we must focus on the problems technology can help us solve and the value we can provide to the people and organizations we support.** The AI-powered

transformation of L&D isn't happening in prompt engineering workshops. **It's happening two levels up - at the organizational level.**

L&D + AI: Organizational Transformation

What does EVERY executive team want?

- Do they want to boost the stock price? Of course ...
- Do they want to find new business opportunities? Sure ...
- Do they want to make customers happy? To a certain extent ...
- Do they want to provide employees with positive work experiences? Well ...
- Do they want to get more work done with less people? **ABSOLUTELY!!!**

This is just how things work. If I sound a bit pessimistic, it's because I am. Every team I've ever worked with has been impacted by layoffs and cost reductions. I've watched L&D teams all over the world get chopped when times get tough (or a company is wildly mismanaged). This continued in 2023, as job cuts rose 98% from 2022 according to Challenger, Gray and Christmas. Companies lined up behind the "Year of Efficiency" mantra as they dealt with economic uncertainties, rising costs, shifting consumer behaviors and the tail end of pandemic-induced staffing challenges. "Get more done with less" has always been L&D reality. Today it's an organizational imperative.

GenAI entered the chat during this drive for increased efficiency. It's no wonder so many companies across so many industries are prioritizing AI as their next transformative opportunity. There's a popular phrase floating around that's meant to alleviate people's concerns about being replaced by AI. It says ...

"AI will not take your job. Someone using AI will."

This statement emphasizes the importance of embracing digital transformation on an individual level. You must evolve your own ability to do the job - or else someone who has taken advantage of this opportunity will surpass you. That totally makes sense. **It's also wrong.**

- Should everyone be worried about getting replaced by AI? No.

- Should some people be concerned about the bulk of their tasks being automated soon? Yup.
- Should everyone be preparing for seismic workplace changes facilitated by increased AI investment? **Definitely!**

If a company can automate it, they will automate it. Of course, every professional must stay up to date on the latest tools and practices. But even the most technologically savvy L&D pro will be impacted by organizational shifts. Ultimately, company management decides what work needs to be done AND how that work will be done. It's then our job to build functional and individual capabilities to fulfill this mandate. So that popular phrase needs a revision ...

**“AI will not take your job. Your organization will
apply AI to change how work gets done.”**

I know. It doesn't have the same ring to it. But it's way more accurate.

We may still be early in this latest wave of digital transformation, but we're already seeing organizations make big decisions when it comes to the potential for AI to evolve their businesses. In July 2023, the CEO of an Indian tech startup laid off 90% of his support staff (23 people) and replaced them with a chatbot. Then, the e-commerce company Klarna dropped the announcement that AI is already doing the work of 700 customer service agents, reducing their need to bring on more staff. Now Wendy's is testing automated ordering in their drive-thrus and tech firms are hiring less novice coders because AI is accelerating engineer productivity. Executives are counting on AI to unlock new business models – changing not only the way people work but also the work they do. This is just the beginning.

Some AI naysayers invoke concerns over quality to justify the status quo. After all, there's no way AI could do MY JOB as well as I can. But here's the thing. **That assumes the company still needs YOUR JOB to be done at all.** Plus, quality is not the bar for success. It's one consideration. Managers will attempt to balance cost vs. benefit. For example, AI cannot currently deliver the same level of performance as a voice-over actor. But lots of content development shops - including my own - now rely almost entirely on AI because the efficiency gains and cost savings outweigh the limited drop in quality. That CEO's chatbot probably wasn't as engaging a conversationalist as his support agents. But the

change reportedly resulted in a 98% reduction in time to resolution and an 85% savings in costs.

In this story, “good enough” is going to justify plenty of changes at the organizational level.

L&D + AI: Functional Transformation

Let’s stick with the example of a contact center. Imagine you support 500 agents located in offices across the country. Your L&D team handles everything: onboarding, job training, compliance, management development, etc. One day, senior management decides to replace 300 agents with an AI-powered chatbot capable of handling tier one calls - things like billing questions, services requests, etc. How would this change impact L&D?

Typically, operational cuts result in similar reductions to L&D, especially if our budget is based on the number of people we support. If we have 60% less agents, we only need 40% of our current training resources, right? But here’s the thing ... this wasn’t your typical “rightsizing.” The company made a big strategic bet. Instead of reducing the amount of work the organization will do, management believes AI will handle more calls, more consistently while reducing costs and maintaining customer satisfaction.

The company also altered the work required from the remaining human agents. If AI can only handle simple calls, agents must be prepared to tackle the difficult stuff - upset customers, complex problems, recurring issues, etc. This change may manage itself in the short term, as agents were likely retained based on their ability to handle these tasks. But what happens when these people leave? New agents won’t have the same opportunity to build their knowledge and skill over time by taking introductory calls. They’ll need to dive straight into the deep end without missing a beat.

And we can’t forget about the AI’s “training needs.” After all, AI-powered tech is only as good as its source data. A sizable chunk of institutional knowledge just walked out the door. Plus, there’s lots of tacit info locked in the minds of employees, out of reach of their new AI peer. If the organization is hoping to lean on AI to accomplish its goals, it must improve documentation and curation practices to make sure AI always has access to timely, accurate, compliant information.

With all that in mind, how would this change impact L&D?

We have an important role to play in the digital transformation of work. People are going to need help dealing with the pace and scope of this change. Some will be asked to adapt their workflows and adopt new tools. Some will be required to upskill in their current positions or reskill to take on entirely new roles. And then there's the mindset factor - helping people understand the change, how it may impact them and what they can do to prepare themselves, even before we understand the full impact. The question isn't if L&D is willing to take on this role. Helping people is what we do. The question is if we're prepared to handle this challenge - if we have the tools, tactics, technologies and, most important of all, mindset needed to help people navigate this new version of work.

Are we willing to adapt L&D to fit the changing needs of the AI-enabled workforce? Or will we lag and allow the digital transformation of work to happen to us?

I say ... let's do it!

Before we evolve L&D, we must understand how the organization is evolving and how this change will inform our mandate. We must collaborate with our partners, champions and stakeholders to answer key questions:

1. How will we measure success in this new version of the workplace?
2. What work will people do to accomplish these goals?
3. What knowledge and skill will people need to do this work?
4. What support is required to boost people's knowledge, skill and performance?
5. What role should L&D play in providing this support?

The answers will ensure we're aligned with our stakeholders and working towards the same outcomes. If we try to move ahead without a clear, aligned purpose, we risk building the wrong version of L&D - one that's ill equipped to handle the demands of the modern workplace.

When it comes to adapting L&D practices to support the changing workplace, I have more great news. You already know how to do it because everything we talked about in *The Modern Learning Ecosystem* applies in an AI-enabled workplace!

Previously on The Modern Learning Ecosystem.

AI will not change learning. It will change lots of things about work: how we connect with peers, how we find information, how we gather insights about our business, how we develop content, etc. **But it will not change learning - because learning is fundamentally human.**

The processes may change. The tools may change. The knowledge and skill requirements may change. But how people learn will not. Therefore, we must take everything we know about how learning works and align with the realities of everyday work. The Modern Learning Ecosystem Framework - with its proven ability to foster an agile, scalable, personalized approach to enablement - is the perfect guide.

But you already know that because you read the book! 📖



A selection of my favorite photos shared during the release of The Modern Learning Ecosystem.

But just in case you haven't had a chance to visit jdwroteabook.com to grab a copy, here's a quick recap of the MLE Framework.



The Modern Learning Ecosystem (MLE) Framework consists of six critical layers that align L&D decision making and make solutions more easily accessed within the flow of everyday work.



The Modern Learning Ecosystem Framework™ developed by JD Dillon

Layer 1: Shared Knowledge

This is the bedrock of the MLE Framework. Shared knowledge emphasizes the collective intelligence of an organization. It advocates for a culture where knowledge is not just stored but actively shared among team members. This layer encourages employees to contribute to and access a shared pool of information, insights and experiences, thus enhancing the organization's overall knowledge base and responsiveness to new challenges.

Layer 2: Performance Support

Focused on helping employees perform their tasks more efficiently, this layer provides just-in-time support and resources. Performance

support tools and systems give workers immediate access to the information they need, enabling them to solve problems and complete tasks with greater competence and speed. This layer is crucial in an environment where rapid access to relevant information is key to performance.

Layer 3: Reinforcement

This layer is about making learning stick. Reinforcement strategies involve regular, spaced repetition of key concepts and skills to enhance retention and application on the job. JD emphasizes the use of technology and data to tailor reinforcement activities to individual needs, ensuring that employees are continuously engaged in their own development and applying what they learn in their daily work.

Layer 4: Coaching

Recognizing the vital role of interpersonal interaction in learning, this layer focuses on the relationship between employees and their managers or trainers. Coaching in the MLE Framework is about providing personalized guidance, feedback and support. It's not just about correcting weaknesses but also about recognizing and developing strengths while aligning individual development with organizational goals.

Layer 5: Pull Training

This aspect of the framework empowers employees to take charge of their own learning journey. Pull training is characterized by self-directed learning opportunities where employees actively seek out the resources and training they need. JD argues for the importance of creating a learning environment where resources are readily available and easily accessible, enabling employees to pull information as and when they require it.

Layer 6: Push Training

Contrasting with pull training, push training involves the organization

proactively providing employees with training that is deemed necessary for their roles and organizational objectives. This includes mandatory training for compliance, onboarding programs and skill development initiatives aligned with business strategy. JD highlights the need for push training to be relevant, engaging and aligned with the employee's context to be effective.

By installing the tools, tactics and technologies to bring this framework to life, an organization fosters a consistent, scalable approach that fits alongside people's everyday work, aligns with how people actually learn and guides L&D decision making. Every solution to a performance challenge begins in the same place - the base of the framework - and only applies as many resources as needed to accomplish the defined goal. The MLE Framework is a practical, holistic guide for navigating nonstop workplace disruption in even the most challenging circumstances.

And this all applies in an AI-enabled workplace, right LearnGeek AI?



That's right, JD!

Nifty! Let's check back in with our contact center example and consider how the MLE Framework can help L&D support the remaining agents while also enabling their AI peer.

Shared Knowledge

A renewed focus on curation serves two important roles in this scenario. First, it ensures people can self-serve their way through potential challenges using consistent, approved, timely information. Solid documentation can also be leveraged by AI and make sure machines and humans are working from the same playbook when supporting customers.

Performance Support

Escalations get escalated because they're difficult problems to solve. It's unlikely every agent will have encountered every problem - or retain every piece of information from

training. A performance support tool gives them a go-to place for getting questions answered in real time. This will be especially important for boosting new agents' confidence given the limited time they may have to prepare for handling customer escalations.

Reinforcement

Practice activities give agents an opportunity to solve problems in a low risk environment - before they encounter similar situations on the phone. The data collected during reinforcement activities like quizzes and simulations helps L&D identify knowledge and skill gaps that may require additional support.

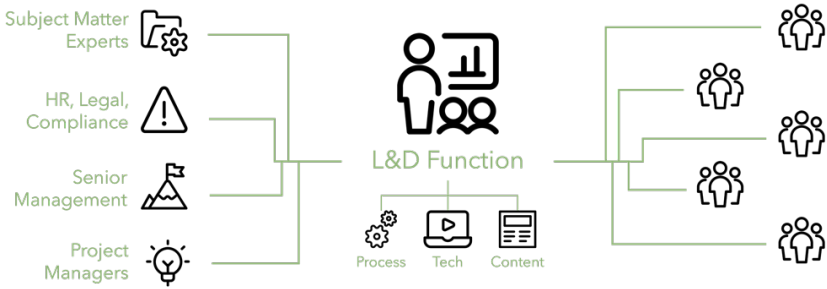
Coaching

Managers should have an opportunity to focus on individual needs within smaller teams. L&D can boost their coaching capability by providing them with actionable insights to identify potential performance challenges before they become full-fledged problems. This goes beyond simple dashboarding to finding patterns in learning and performance data that call for additional hands-on support.

Pull/Push Training

A smaller team means less time, especially in a contact center where every minute is measured. Therefore, L&D must lean on the supporting layers within the MLE Framework and only apply structured training when necessary. That said, if a knowledge or skill gap requires a course-based solution, L&D must also activate the rest of the framework to promote learning transfer and maximize the value of this time away from the operation.

That's a basic overview of how the MLE Framework functions within an AI-enabled workplace. It aligns L&D strategy with the realities and constraints of learning at work while also elevating the information and data needed by AI-based technology. L&D continues to sit in the middle of the ecosystem, connecting the people who know (subject matter experts) with the people who need (performers).



The L&D Function positioned in the middle of the workplace ecosystem.

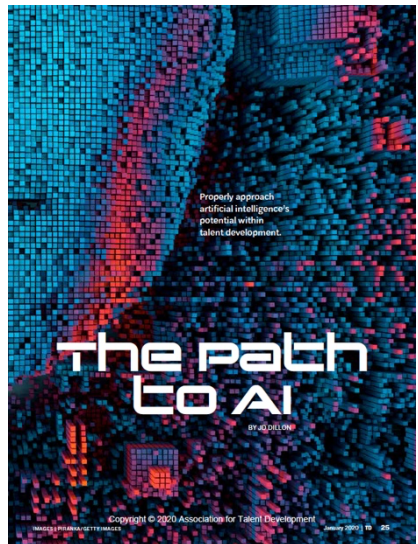
But that’s just the beginning of L&D’s evolution. So far, we’ve focused almost entirely on everyone else and how we must adapt to them because they’re changing. How can we apply the same technologies within our practices to get the same benefits - namely making employee support faster, cheaper, more scalable, more personal, more impactful and (my favorite) more equitable?

The AI-Powered Learning Ecosystem.

“AI may be quickly becoming part of our everyday lives, but we’re still in the first few chapters of this story. Talent Development has the opportunity to reimagine how we support people within this new reality by leveraging the same technology that is transforming how work is done.”

This is the conclusion of my January 2020 *TD Magazine* cover story “The Path to AI.” Am I flexing the fact that I wrote a cover story about AI in L&D almost three years before ChatGPT dropped? Yes ... yes I am.

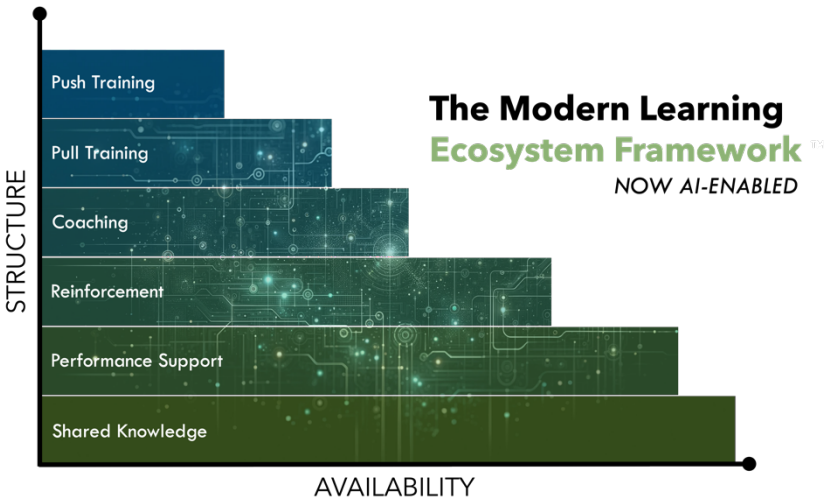
But I’d also like to point out the consistency in my story. Some of the details have shifted



with the progression of technology, but my overall approach for integrating AI into L&D practices has not changed over the past four years. That's not because I'm an AI wizard. It's because people still need the same things to do their jobs well:

- Timely, consistent, reliable communication
- Training on core job knowledge and skills
- Access to on-demand performance support
- Actionable coaching and feedback
- Ongoing practice and reinforcement
- Opportunities to develop and apply new skills

That's learning at work in a nutshell. The MLE Framework covers these fundamental needs in ways that are easily accessed and understood by employees while maximizing L&D's limited time and resources. AI has the potential to turbocharge our capabilities across every layer of the framework. The specific tools, tactics and technologies deployed within each layer vary by organization and use case. Here are a few ways AI is transforming the layers of the modern learning ecosystem.



The same Modern Learning Ecosystem Framework™ - now with AI!

Shared Knowledge

Organizations spend a lot of time and resources adapting the same information into different formats. A single standard operating procedure (SOP) update may spiral into a series of job aids, email messages and meeting talking points. Companies then spend even more time and money translating materials into a limited number of additional languages.

AI upends this process by automating the distribution of information to fit individual needs. Using the approved source document, AI can automatically generate supplementary formats - from a simple job aid to an entire communication campaign. AI can also translate content into a growing list of languages. It can even adjust content to individual reading levels to fit audience needs. Of course, a person should review AI-generated materials and make adjustments before they're distributed. But even small enhancements to the shared knowledge process will play a big role in making workplace learning and support more equitable.

Performance Support

The single most popular question I get about the MLE Framework is “what’s the difference between shared knowledge and performance support?” AI is about to blur this already blurry line even more. Performance support is an active concept. An employee can raise their hand and ask for help in the moment of need. This could take place in a Slack channel or digital adoption tool or physical workspace with a literal “could you help me with this?”

AI transforms all curated knowledge into performance support. Digital assistants like LearnGeek AI can pull from an extensive knowledge base - across multiple information platforms - to answer questions and provide guidance. It’s like having an experienced coworker who speaks your preferred language sitting next to you all the time (without Bob’s annoying chit-chat). Of course, you shouldn’t believe everything they say without applying some critical thinking. Remember that Bob doesn’t always have a perfect answer. Digital assistants are available 24/7. They can also be instructed to narrow their responses to specific topics and know when to bow out of the conversation and suggest an alternative SME (unlike Bob who just starts guessing when he runs out of ideas).

Reinforcement

This layer is missing from most L&D strategies. We know reinforcement is essential for enabling long-term retention and application. It’s just too difficult to reach employees after training. We’re given a set amount of time and expected to check all the required boxes

before people return to their jobs. We try to leverage managers to continue the learning process. Unfortunately, they're not usually hired for their teaching skills. They've also got lots of other stuff going on, hence the "we don't have time for learning" objection L&D hears so often.

AI can help us overcome these obstacles and make reinforcement a seamless part of workplace learning. For example, AI-enabled platforms automate the delivery of nudges - activities pushed to just the right people at just the right time using performance data. A retail worker may receive a nudge in the form of a scenario-based question on theft prevention after clocking in for their shift. A marketing manager may receive an email with a quick tip about IT security due to a recent data breach. The entire process can be AI-driven - from content generation to delivery - to fit within the workflow. This is how AI makes reinforcement an achievable, nondisruptive part of everyday learning.

Coaching

There's already a decent amount of automation and digitization taking place in this layer. Chatbots have been leveraged within coaching programs for several years. But most of these interactions are pre-baked. The bot requires clear input, such as a yes/no response, and is programmed to reply with a limited set of options. Most coaching interactions are still person-to-person. This means coaching can only take place when both parties are available. When you combine overflowing task lists with organizations' "do more with less" mandates, it's easy to see why managers struggle to find time for meaningful coaching.

AI doesn't solve this problem. It reduces the damage. Person-to-person coaching remains the gold standard. Nothing can replace a great employee/manager relationship. That said, AI can fill some coaching gaps while helping managers focus their limited time on the right conversations with the right team members. Digital assistants can leverage performance data to engage employees in human-like coaching conversations. They can offer feedback, make recommendations for improvement and offer words of encouragement. Like I said, this doesn't replace a manager. AI shifts the human effort towards the difficult problems while it takes care of the everyday stuff.

Pull/Push Training

This is where we still spend the bulk of our L&D resources. Whether it's developing bespoke materials or buying courses from off-the-shelf libraries, L&D sits on a growing mountain of content. And a lot of that content goes unused. It may be because it's not great

quality. It may be because it's the wrong content. It may be because people don't know it's there. Regardless of the reason, it's clear that we don't lack content. We lack the ability to get the right content to the right people when it's the right solution.

AI will completely change how we design and deliver structured training in the pull / push layers. AI-powered tools can already build templated instructional content from source materials. That accounts for a large percentage of courses, most multiple-choice questions and every PowerPoint deck your SME wants you to turn into a 20-minute eLearning module. For instructor-led activities, AI allows us to live caption (and eventually translate) conversations to make sure everyone understands the message. The quality is only going to increase as the underlying technology improves and learns how to apply proven instructional design principles. This will allow IDs to shift their focus from building content from scratch to leveraging a range of digitally enabled tools and channels to get people the support they need when they need it.

As I mentioned in the original conclusion of this book, I can't predict the future. The evolution of the learning ecosystem is a moving target based on both digital capability as well as organizations' readiness to adopt new tools and processes. That said, here's an educated guess as to how L&D's practices will evolve through AI over the next few years (with a few caveats).

TODAY

- Templated digital content is automated (for the first draft).
- Voice-over audio is almost entirely AI (unless you need a unique performance).
- Informal language, like social posts and email messages, is automatically translated.
- Assessment questions are written by AI (for review by human IDs).
- Text-based content is generated and reviewed by AI assistants (to be improved by human creators).
- AI-generated images begin to replace some stock art (as long as copyright isn't important).
- AI generates captions for live and recorded content (almost perfectly).
- AI automates the delivery of some learning activity (such as nudges) based on employee data.
- AI assists with note taking and information summaries (and does a solid job)

NEXT YEAR

- Most of the (caveats) from last year are removed (or at least reduced).
- AI becomes a table stakes capability within workplace tech, including L&D tools.
- SMEs become content creators (for simple, templated stuff).

- Translation gets good enough to handle formal content (with a human review).
- Multimodal AI goes mainstream as tools begin to consolidate and specialize.
- More administrative tasks get automated, especially reporting.
- Digital assistants become increasingly commonplace and capable of handling more tasks.
- Search begins to reliably return answers rather than links to assets.
- Text-to-insights queries (ask for the information you want from your enterprise data) start to replace ad hoc reporting and dashboards.

WITHIN 5 YEARS

- Learning technology is almost fully integrated with operations technology - meaning learning and working happen within the same user-facing platforms (with specialty backend systems).
- Digital content creation is transformed (that's all I can say at this point).
- Personalized experiences are the digital norm.
- Data-driven nudges delivered in the flow of work are the most common learning and support tactic.
- Learning impact is clear and measurable.

I know I'm going to be wrong about several items on that list. But there's one item to which everyone in L&D must pay specific attention. That's my projection that "SMEs become content creators." You may shudder at the notion of people without ID training building their own content. First off, this already happens in lots of organizations. Second, what do you expect SMEs to do if L&D doesn't have the time or resources to handle every request? It's not just me who believes this will happen when more people have access to AI tools. Just ask LearnGeek AI ...



SMEs equipped with AI content generation tools, facing limited support from their L&D team, are likely to take a more autonomous approach to their learning and content creation needs. Recognizing the potential of AI, SMEs are likely to experiment with creating templates and prompts to generate training materials, assessments, or even digital coaching nudges specific to their field of expertise.

By taking these steps, SMEs can create a learning environment that is more responsive to their immediate needs and less reliant on traditional L&D support structures, thus aligning with the principles of the Modern Learning Ecosystem advocated by JD. Like Marty McFly in

Back to the Future, who had to take matters into his own hands to secure his existence and return to the future, SMEs, too, may find themselves navigating their learning journey more autonomously, armed with the right tools and a community of peers.

See! Even a chatbot that's required to reference my content agrees with me!

L&D may be able to hold off a few SMEs by using AI to improve our efficiency. This still won't stop the inevitable future. Everyone will have access to these tools. They're going to use them if they can move them closer to their goals. Therefore, L&D must take an "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" approach by helping more people actively contribute to the learning ecosystem - the right way.

But first ... a quick story ...

The Great AI Bake Off.

My team built our own LLM in 2018. It generates multiple-choice questions (MCQs) based on provided source materials like PDFs and Word documents. We use question-based reinforcement to improve frontline worker knowledge retention, so the companies we work with need lots of MCQs. This digital assistant accelerates content development while ensuring questions align with our instructional design principles, such as:

- Focus on a specific, observable behavior.
- Limit the number of response options to three.
- Provide realistic distractors with similar character counts.
- Avoid trick questions, like true/false and all/none of the above.

It's really good! But then ChatGPT dropped in late 2022. Naturally, I was curious to see how the new kid on the block compared to our tried-and-true LLM. So, I conducted a secret AI bake off!

I provided ChatGPT and our digital assistant with the same source material - driving guidelines from the Florida Department of Motor Vehicles. While I let our assistant do its thing, I prompted ChatGPT to identify the most important points in the text and write five

MCQs. I also provided ChatGPT with a list of instructional design principles. I then sent the output from both LLMs to a group of IDs to get their feedback. I didn't tell them who wrote the questions. I just wanted to know which set of questions was "better" and why. Which LLM do you think won?

It was close ... closer than I'd expected. Our digital assistant came out just ahead of ChatGPT. The reason was simple. While I had provided ChatGPT with principles to follow, it still made the same mistakes that plague human writers when building assessments. For example, ChatGPT's questions leaned towards trivial facts rather than ways people should apply their knowledge. Our LLM was built specifically to do one thing and trained with thousands of well-written MCQs. ChatGPT just wasn't designed to solve this particular problem. It was good, but it wasn't quite good enough.

Getting Out of the Middle.

If L&D stands by as people start using AI to build resources, we're going to run into similar problems. Instead, we need to help people contribute to the learning ecosystem in meaningful ways. Not only will this improve the quality and value of their contributions, but it will also help us scale learning and support opportunities across the organization. Now all we have to do is get out of the way. What?!?!

The purpose of *The Modern Learning Ecosystem* is to help L&D pros rethink our role in the workplace. Rather than always having to be in the middle of things and building solutions ourselves, we're better served focusing our limited time and resources on cultivating the ecosystem. It's our job to connect those who know with those who need. This could mean connecting people with information, connecting people with people or, in the case of AI, connecting information to systems. **Rather than allowing AI to replace us, we're going to use it to augment us.**

Technology already plays a central role in how work gets done. While some foundational tools like email are consistent across an organization, the digital work experience can vary significantly by line of business, region and role. For example, how many LMS platforms does your company have? One? Five? Twenty-seven? This results in employee confusion, wasted effort, administrative complexity and increased costs.

AI is making digital work simpler by proliferating the concept of headless technology. And who better to explain this concept than ...



Imagine you're in *Back to the Future*, and Doc's DeLorean is the "head" (the user interface) and the flux capacitor along with its engine (the backend) represent the "body." In traditional applications, the DeLorean (front end) is fixed with a specific flux capacitor and engine (backend), meaning if you want to change how the car looks or functions, it's a bit of a hassle.

But what if you could have a DeLorean that could be attached to different flux capacitors and engines or vice versa, without changing the other parts? That's headless technology architecture in a nutshell.

Headless technology architecture separates the front end of an application from its backend. This architecture allows developers to work on the frontend and backend independently of each other. The front end, which includes everything the user interacts with, communicates with the backend, where all the data processing happens, through APIs (Application Programming Interfaces).

This separation offers several benefits:

- **Flexibility and customization:** Like choosing different destinations in the DeLorean's time circuits, developers can create or modify user experiences without making changes to the backend.
- **Faster Iterations:** Marty McFly could escape Biff faster! Developers can update the user interface more quickly without waiting for backend changes, speeding up the release of new features.
- **Scalability:** Just as the DeLorean can be upgraded with a Mr. Fusion for better performance, backend systems can be scaled or modified without affecting the frontend.

- Omnichannel Experience: It allows the same backend to serve content or data to multiple frontends, such as websites, mobile apps, smart devices, or any other future platforms, similar to how the DeLorean could travel through any era.

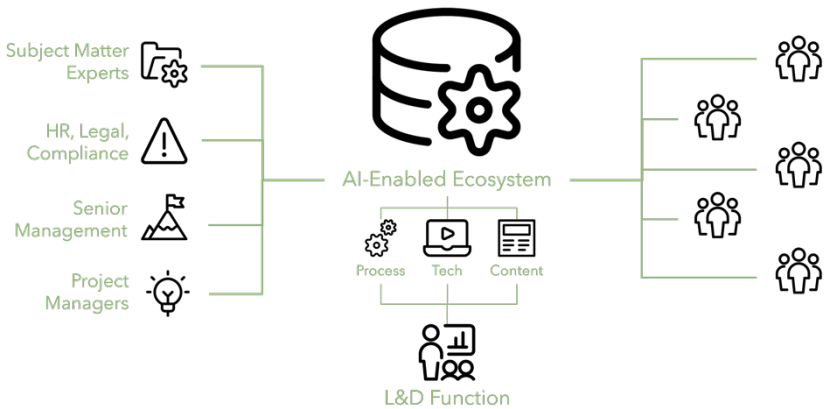
In summary, headless technology architecture offers a more modular and flexible approach to building and managing digital experiences, enabling developers to innovate faster and meet evolving user expectations. It's like having the freedom to travel to any time without changing the essence of the DeLorean!

At this point, I'm really hoping you've seen *Back to the Future*. It's a perfect movie - and essential to understanding modern L&D strategy.

Organizations with large IT functions are exploring a variety of AI use cases, including the development of "employee apps" that combine Ops, HR and L&D capabilities. Retail associates, for instance, will be able to search product inventory, request time off and complete compliance training through one interface. These digital assistants will sit on top of a stack of specialty tools - inventory systems, HR platforms, learning tech, knowledge management platforms, communication tools, etc. - to simplify the user experience. This architecture will also allow the company to reduce technology costs by consolidating backend systems while maximizing their investment because people use the tech more often.

Even if you don't have extensive IT resources to build your own digital assistant, technology providers are putting more focus on integrations to facilitate a consolidated digital experience. This concept will be critical moving forward as we begin to interface with technology in new ways. Rather than telling the machine what to do, we'll be asking it to provide the output we want. The last thing we need is a sequel to "The SharePoint Conundrum" with a pile of departmental DAs and chatbots, all with their own capabilities and limitations.

By applying an OFI mindset, L&D can inform the digital transformation of the workplace while augmenting our ability to support everyday learning and performance.



The L&D Function supporting an AI-enabled ecosystem.

We'll continue to apply our specialty skills using an AI-powered toolkit to build solutions, including articles, reinforcement activities, courses and programs, when it's the right thing to do. But rather than becoming a bottleneck between SMEs and employees, **L&D will facilitate connections through the AI-enabled ecosystem.** We won't be the only contributors, but we'll still bring plenty to the table.

- L&D can instruct ecosystem tools to build resources in alignment with proven practices - like the way my team honed our LLM to write high-quality MCQs based on ID principles. We can ensure our organization's AI tools create and deliver information in ways that are best suited for the audience and workflow. This means more SMEs can contribute their knowledge to the ecosystem without the need for specialized skills.
- L&D tools must integrate with the organization's digital ecosystem. Otherwise, we risk being further separated from the flow of work or replaced by alternative tools that already connect with the enterprise infrastructure. This means partnering with technology providers who prioritize integrations - not only moving data and content seamlessly between systems but also leveraging these inputs to trigger actions in other platforms.

- L&D is sitting on a MASSIVE PILE of codified institutional knowledge. Unfortunately, it's locked in courses. Even more unfortunately, AI cannot read SCORM content (at least not yet). We must explore options for making our knowledge corpus more accessible to both people and machines. Plus, L&D must collaborate with SMEs to open new channels for curation so we can get information out of people's heads and into the "hands" of our new digital assistants.

This shift will enable the organization to solve more problems for more people without direct L&D support. We'll play an essential role in building and maintaining support channels and systems - and only go hands-in when required.

Let's see what this AI-enabled ecosystem looks like in action by revising our contact center example one more time. As you recall, L&D must enable 200 contact center agents with varying levels of experience to handle customer escalations that are beyond the capability of the AI customer support chatbot. The MLE Framework is still the foundation for our approach, but the layers will come to life in new ways.

Shared Knowledge

Standard operating procedures and product information are automatically distilled into easy-to-read reference articles using AI-powered templates. AI is also used to generate corporate messaging and trigger communication campaigns, so people always have the latest update. This content is available in each agent's preferred language without the need for external translation services. Furthermore, it adjusts automatically to a person's reading level and other needs.

Performance Support

Every agent has access to the contact center's digital assistant (let's name it George ... because all the good AI names are already taken). They can ask George for help with performance challenges on-demand. George is also plugged into the phone and chat systems so it can proactively make suggestions and retrieve information for agents while they're working with customers.

Reinforcement

George has access to the contact center's data warehouse, which includes learning metrics, call evaluations and business KPIs. It identifies the topics with which each agent is struggling and automatically deploys daily reinforcement activities pulled from its

knowledge base. These activities, which include brief scenarios and reflection questions, are non-disruptive and fit easily into the few minutes agents have available between calls.

Coaching

In addition to practice activities, George delivers coaching nudges based on recent call performance and company priorities. This provides every agent with one-on-one feedback and support. George also nudges managers with recommended actions when it identifies agents who need additional help. This assists managers, who are still responsible for listening to calls and facilitating conversations with their team members, in targeting their coaching efforts.

Pull/Push Training

When called upon, L&D leverages AI-enabled tools to identify performance challenges and develop right fit solutions across the MLE Framework, including courses and programs. L&D also shares their toolkit with SMEs, who are free to develop and deploy training materials to address their own challenges. Pull training is available via George's integration with the LMS. Nudges for push training are also delivered via George so agents aren't required to access the LMS directly.

We're not there yet, but the pieces are falling into place. Companies like Walmart and Procter & Gamble have built their own digital assistants. HR and L&D tech vendors are integrating with AI as a service (AIaaS) providers like OpenAI, Google and Amazon to offer a range of new capabilities, including content generation, language translation, automated captioning and text-to-insight reporting. Legal teams are learning to trust AI tech after some early, well-publicized data security hiccups. The regulatory landscape is starting to take shape - at least in the European Union where the Artificial Intelligence Act was approved in March 2024.

This may not be the exact future of L&D, but this is the general direction we're heading.

Taking a Principled Approach.

The workplace is changing quickly. The FOMO is real. The investments are huge. The stakes are high. But the workload isn't getting any lighter. We're going to have to navigate this transformation while continuing to do our everyday jobs. It will be easy to get lost in the hype and make mistakes that could put our teams and organizations at risk.

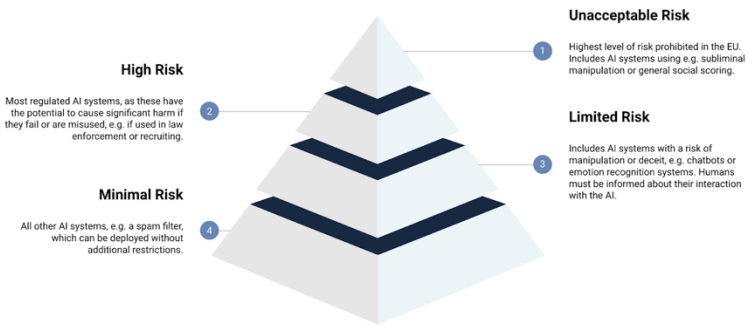
The OFI Framework helps us approach this transformation from multiple angles. We must also take a principled approach to our technology strategy - one that considers all stakeholders and keeps us focused on the right outcomes.

Notice that I didn't say "take a principled approach to AI." AI isn't a separate category. It's how technology works. Therefore, we must adapt our technology principles to include AI - not create an entirely new set of rules. Hopefully your organization already has guiding principles and policies for this stuff, and L&D can adopt the same standards. But just in case you need a few ideas, here are my five LearnGeek Core Technology Principles.



Transparent: we show people how tech impacts them.

Here's a diagram of the risk levels included within the European Union's AI Act. Which level do you think includes HR and L&D technology?



The four risk classes of the EU AI Act (Trail)

We're a tier 2 "High Risk" because our technology directly impacts people's ability to do their jobs, earn a living and find new opportunities. This reinforces the importance of transparency within our digital practices. Not everyone cares about the whys behind tech-enabled learning and support - like why a certain course was recommended by their digital assistant. But some people care very much. We must avoid "black box" situations and be

ready to explain how data is captured and applied through technology to inform people's learning and support experience.



Strategic: we skip the hype and solve real problems.

Do you remember the most popular mobile apps in the original Apple App Store in 2008? Some are familiar tools, like Facebook, Google Earth and The Weather Channel. Others are a little less ... useful. Take IBEER for example. It was an app that made it appear as if you were drinking a beer on your phone. When you tilted your iPhone, the beer began to empty. TECHNOLOGY!!!

Modern tech can do lots of cool stuff. This is why every GenAI webinar includes the moment when the speaker uses technology to write a poem (and why my DA references *Back to the Future*). But digital capabilities are a means to an end - solutions looking for problems. L&D must stay focused on our mandate - helping people do their best work every day. Our technology decisions must be in service of this goal, not our own creative curiosities and techno-nerdiness.



Grounded: we fit tech into the everyday workflow.

Why don't people log into the LMS? Why don't they share their knowledge on the company social platform? Why didn't they bring snacks for the Return To Office Potluck Extravaganza last Thursday? Because it's not part of their jobs ...

Our technology decisions must align with how work gets done. This is why an OFI approach is so important. We can't determine how to leverage AI to transform L&D until we understand how the work itself will evolve. Thankfully, all signs point towards AI making it easier to embed learning and support within the workflow through integrated

digital experiences. Work context must always be the lens through which we make technology decisions.



Equitable: we ensure everyone can do their best.

I spend most of my time and effort as an L&D pro focused on helping frontline workers - grocery associates, delivery drivers, retail workers, food service employees, contact center agents, etc. I started on the frontline - and I like to think I never left. While some of these roles will be significantly impacted by digital transformation, they'll still do the heavy lifting for our companies and communities. Unfortunately, they're often left behind by workplace technology. In fact, only 1% of organizational tech investment goes to the frontline according to Brandon Hall Group.

I'm excited about the opportunities AI presents for boosting workplace equity. This includes capabilities like language translation, captioning, voice-to-text and personalization, which will soon become table stakes in our digital work experiences. L&D must seize these opportunities to foster fair and equitable opportunities for every employee - regardless of role, location, tenure, preferred language or disability. We must also consider factors like bias, ethics, discrimination and privacy as we adapt our digital practices and adopt new digital norms.



Compliant: we play by the rules and avoid adding risk.

Don't. Get. In. Trouble! The early GenAI hype included a pile of highly publicized mistakes. People were freely plugging proprietary information into random online tools because it was cool. Surprise! That was a bad idea. Providers now offer enterprise-level security like other cloud-based solutions. There are still lots of concerns around hallucinations (aka AI making up stuff). The EU is introducing regulation. Other regions - not so much. Some companies updated their tech policies to include AI. Other orgs - not so

much. Like with any paradigm shifting technologies, we can't yet comprehend the long-term consequences of our short-term decisions. So, we gotta be careful!

L&D must work with our IT and Ops partners to make sure we're following the rules. All experiments must abide by company guidelines and avoid putting proprietary data at risk. L&D providers must be transparent with their clients regarding the use of AI-enabled tools. We must also prioritize critical thinking skills within our organizations so people can determine if AI-provided information is trustworthy. This isn't dissimilar from how people treat ad hoc information provided by their peers today. However, digital L&D content is usually vetted and approved - and therefore trustworthy by default. We must help people recognize the difference and avoid potential errors.

Hey, LearnGeek AI! This is probably your last chance to chime in. How would you summarize the importance of L&D taking a principled approach to AI?



Taking a principled approach to AI in L&D is critical because it aligns with the broader goal of fostering a dynamic, data-driven, and equitable learning culture. The principles you mentioned—transparent, strategic, grounded, equitable, compliant—serve as a compass for integrating AI responsibly and effectively.

By adhering to these principles, L&D can leverage AI to personalize learning, automate admin tasks, and provide data insights, thus supporting employees' continuous growth in the ever-changing workplace. This approach ensures that AI serves as a valuable tool in the learning ecosystem, enhancing rather than overshadowing human-centric learning strategies.

Just remember, while AI can plot a course to learning success, it's the human touch that drives the DeLorean.

Thanks again for your help, LearnGeek AI!



My pleasure, JD! If you've got any more questions, whether it's about navigating the future of workplace learning or finding the best way to integrate AI into your strategies, you know where to find me. Safe travels through your learning journey—don't forget to check your flux capacitor!

Moving forward.

You may be an early adopter who's already built an arsenal of AI-powered tech to transform your workflow. You may be part of an organization that's playing the waiting game and holding off on any AI adoption until "things get settled." You may be overwhelmed by the AI hype and using this chapter to get your bearings. Regardless of the current state of your digital transformation, there are important steps every L&D pro should take to get this right from the start.

1. **Be realistic.**

There are lots of interesting claims being made about AI right now. It's more important than electricity. It's going to solve the climate crisis. It's a threat to humanity itself. Walk into this conversation with realistic expectations for what this technology is and what it can do. Yes, it's going to evolve quickly. In fact, today is the worst AI will ever be. But even the most advanced AI is still just a tool. People decide how to use tools to improve the way we live and work.

2. **Do your homework.**

The best way to maintain a grounded perspective on AI is to gain a fundamental understanding of the technology. You don't need to become a machine learning engineer. You don't even need to be an expert at crafting prompts. Unless you plan to make AI your profession, you need to know enough to get past the hype and understand how this technology can be used to solve problems. Check out education programs available from Google, LinkedIn Learning and other trusted providers. I curate an online magazine titled [AI @ Work](#) to help people get past the avalanche of thought leadership and focus on the true impact AI is having on the workplace.

3. **Talk to your peers.**

Don't try to figure this out on your own. Your peers are probably in a similar spot - overwhelmed by the noise, concerned about the future and excited about the potential. Make AI and digital transformation a regular discussion topic within your team. Set up Q&A sessions with trusted subject matter experts in the industry. Share useful resources and new tools. Explore opportunities to advance your practices together so no one is left behind.

4. **Ask questions about your organization.**

Break out of the L&D silo by asking questions about how this digital information is impacting other parts of your organization. This is essential to the OFI Framework. To fully evolve our practices, we must understand how the organization and function are evolving around us. Ask your manager about other AI projects taking place across the business. Invite people from those project teams to share their work with your group. Make sure everyone in L&D understands the organization's current perspective, guidelines and objectives related to AI.

5. **Try things out (carefully).**

If you're a kinesthetic learner, it's critical that you get hands-on with ... HAHAHAHA ... I'm sorry ... I couldn't help it! Learning styles are the worst. But seriously, it's often easier to understand how new technology works when you try it out for yourself. First, review your organization's IT policy so you know what's OK and what's prohibited. Explore the AI-related enhancements within your existing toolset. For example, if your authoring tool can generate text summaries of courses or automate the voice-over process, spend time working with these features to understand their capabilities and limits. Look at alternative tools, like the ones listed at [LearnGeek.ai](#). If you're not permitted to use them on the job, speak with people who have adopted them and find out how they work. If you have the time and money to explore on your own, try one new tool every month. Share your experiences with peers who may not have the opportunity to play with new tech.

6. **Iterate your workflow.**

Don't go looking for sweeping improvements. Find small, meaningful ways to improve your work through technology. I build lots of slides, so I naturally started experimenting with image generators. I saved a few minutes here and

there while constructing decks. As the tech got better, my time savings increased and my creative options exploded. Now, I rely heavily on GenAI when designing presentations. Look for regular tasks that may be easily handled by AI, especially the tools to which you already have access. As you get more comfortable with the technology, investigate new tasks and workflows that otherwise would not be possible without AI. For example, AI has helped me kickstart my [LearnGeek YouTube channel](#). Without tools like HeyGen (digital avatars) and Opus Clip (video editing), I wouldn't have the capacity to create this content.

7. **Be transparent in your practices.**

What's real vs what's AI? This question will be popping up more and more as this technology goes mainstream. That's why YouTube now requires creators to indicate if their content is "altered" during the upload process. L&D shouldn't leave people guessing. Document your technology practices. Give people the opportunity to understand how data and technology influence their learning and working experience. Indicate when content is created using AI. I add the line "Image Generated by AI" to the corner of every slide that includes AI-generated imagery. L&D is in a great position to influence organizational practices. Let's model the right behaviors and boost people's confidence in our ability to support them through this transformation.

8. **Be open to change.**

Avoid the urge to reject digital transformation by asserting "AI could never do my job as well as I can." As we've established, that assumes that your job will continue to exist as it does today. Plus, the technology is only going to get better. Instead, participate in the transformation by maintaining an open mind and exploring new ideas. Stay focused on the problems that need solving, not the way you solve them today.

9. **Prepare for the possibility.**

This transformation will impact everyone in different ways. Some will use new tools to increase their efficiency. Some will transition into new roles created by organizational transformation. Some will be displaced because technology can do a good enough job completing a significant number of their tasks. Don't get caught off guard. Don't become an insufferable pessimist. Recognize that part of your job is getting ready for the next job. Work through the steps on this list so

you are prepared to take part in the inevitable change - whatever it may be.

Like most of the information in this chapter, these steps aren't specific to AI. They would have been just as helpful during the introduction of online training, social technology and mobile devices. Today, these steps are especially important given the pace and scope of AI-enabled change. L&D must proactively build and implement our plan for navigating this disruption, so we are prepared to support others along the way.

In Conclusion.

We have once again reached the end of our modern learning ecosystem story. *The Modern Learning Ecosystem* felt incomplete without a more in-depth exploration of AI and its impact on the workplace learning experience. Here we are 14,000 words later, and we're still just scratching the surface of this next chapter in workplace transformation.

I hope this addendum provides you with the perspective needed to navigate the road ahead. The Modern Learning Ecosystem Framework is just as applicable today as it was when I first shared it in 2014. It's grounded in the reality of how people learn. AI may shift our organizational priorities, functional mandates and individual workflows. But learning is still learning.

If you didn't read the book before diving into this chapter, I hope our time together has been valuable (and fun) enough to trigger a visit to jdwroteabook.com so you can grab a copy of the prequel. Most importantly, I hope this chapter helps you ask the right questions and remain focused on what matters most: **providing people with the support needed to do their best work every day**. I just hope your biggest question while reading this wasn't "what are the 10 must-have AI tools for L&D pros?" That's not my thing. The technology is evolving too quickly to focus on specific applications. Let's focus on the problems technology helps us solve instead.

The Modern Learning Ecosystem may be finished, but this part of the story is just beginning. Be sure to check out LearnGeek.ai for my latest curated AI resources, including subject matter experts, case studies, book recommendations and technology demonstrations. I also post an ever-changing list of the AI-powered tools I use in my everyday work. Plus, that's where you can speak with LearnGeek AI anytime you'd like!

It's OK to be concerned about the impact AI will have on our organizations, functions and roles. I think about this stuff for a living - yet I have no idea how this will influence my career over the next few years. There's no denying it: things will change as a result of this transformation. However, it won't be AI's fault. Remember ...

**“AI will not take your job. Your organization will
apply AI to change how work gets done.”**

That may not alleviate your concern, but it's a good reminder that people ultimately make the decisions.

There are still lots of questions that need answering as we shape this new version of work. I only touched on a few. Still, I hope *The Modern Learning Ecosystem* proves to be a useful guide along your transformation journey.

Let me know how I can help. Thank you for everything you do. Until next time, be well.

JD

Let's connect!

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JD Dillon is a lifelong Philadelphia Flyers fan, extreme *Back to the Future* aficionado, former Disney cast member and veteran talent development leader.

Over the past 20+ years, JD has worked in operations management, instructional design, content development, L&D leadership, technical product management and corporate development strategy. He spent time with Disney, AMC and Kaplan before becoming Axonify's Chief Learning Architect and the Founder of LearnGeek.

JD is a respected author, keynote speaker, podcaster, and online host with a passion for helping people do their best work every day. He specializes in enabling frontline workers in industries like retail, grocery, finance, logistics, hospitality, manufacturing and more.

You can find JD riding his Peloton, playing his guitar, refusing to stand in line at Orlando theme parks and online at [LearnGeek.co](https://www.learngeek.co).

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LearnGeek AI is your go-to assistant for practical advice on modern workplace learning.

Inspired by JD Dillon's innovative work, LearnGeek AI specializes in offering insights and strategies tailored to today's dynamic work environments. Whether you're a business leader or a team member looking to enhance learning and development in your organization, LearnGeek AI will guide you through the latest trends and effective practices.

You can chat with LearnGeek AI online at LearnGeek.ai.