



The L&D guide to AI: conversations from the field



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Opening

Let's be honest about where things stand with AI in L&D. You're feeling the pressure because every conversation loops back to AI. Every conference you attend has an AI keynote. Every vendor pitch includes AI features. Every white paper warns that if you're not moving fast, you're falling behind.

We've created this eBook to step back and have some honest conversations about AI in learning and development. Not as AI vendors trying to sell you the future, but as an LMS provider with a large partner network watching this unfold alongside you.

We spoke with industry analysts, learning strategists, people working directly with customers, and experts from within Totara to talk about what's happening with AI in L&D.

The conversations were candid. People spoke openly about the pressure they're feeling and the mistakes they've made. They also talked about what is working, where the limitations still sit, and what organisations in highly regulated industries need to think carefully about before implementing AI tools.

This eBook is best read in sequence, but you can jump to sections that catch your interest. Throughout, you'll see sections called "Totara's approach to AI" where we explain how we're thinking about specific challenges. If anything here sparks questions, reach out. These conversations matter, and they're better when they're two-way.

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The **AI moment** in learning

01



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The pressure on LMS

Once organisations move beyond the initial excitement around AI, the operational reality starts to set in. L&D teams are being asked to introduce new tools, support workforce upskilling, and respond to leadership expectations, often while still working within systems and delivery models designed long before AI entered the conversation.

Across our conversations, each speaker described a different part of that challenge, from procurement cycles and platform decisions to workforce readiness and the changing role of L&D.

John Leh shared with us a surprising observation. Despite all the commotion, he hasn't seen a single organisation change their learning system specifically because of AI. What he's seeing instead is organisations going through their normal software procurement cycles. When it's time to renew or replace a learning system, AI becomes one consideration among many, but these organisations still have years of processes and business operations all linked together that need to move with them.

His point highlights how AI adoption is often constrained by the realities of enterprise systems. Even when leadership teams want rapid change, learning platforms still sit inside wider operational environments that cannot easily be replaced overnight.

The opportunity comes during these natural procurement windows. That's when organisations can bring AI capabilities into their learning systems in a managed way, following proper procurement rules and keeping IT on board with security requirements.

On the other hand, Amanda Nolen observes a disconnect between what's happening at the executive level and what L&D is prepared to deliver. When you look at the business side, the capital expenditure on AI tools has been substantial. Companies are investing heavily without clear plans to upskill people or reimagine how work gets done.

The C-suite is thinking about workforce development and skills. The challenge is that most L&D leaders are still working with traditional models, creating courses and training content against annual plans. By the time that content is ready, it's often already outdated. These are the same leaders now being asked to develop fluency in a technology that's still evolving, while simultaneously helping the rest of the workforce do the same. And at the end of it all, leadership expects polished results.

The expectations from leadership often centre on two areas: cost efficiency and rapid workforce upskilling. What's sometimes missing from these conversations is a clear understanding of how learning development works or what's realistically achievable in the timeframes being discussed.





TOTARA TIP:

Flexibility matters more than features

AI is moving faster than most organisations can realistically evaluate or implement. New tools appear constantly, which makes long-term technology decisions difficult for L&D teams.

Because of that, many organisations are becoming more cautious about locking themselves into one approach too early. The challenge is less about choosing a single AI tool and more about building an environment that can adapt as the technology changes.

Key takeaways:

01

Demand for AI capabilities without understanding implementation

Leadership expectations often centre on cost efficiency and rapid workforce upskilling, but conversations sometimes lack understanding of what's realistically achievable in the proposed timeframes.

02

Substantial investment without clear implementation plans

Companies are spending heavily on AI tools, but the focus isn't on reimagining how work gets done or what AI should handle versus humans.

03

L&D is expected to master and teach simultaneously

Learning teams are being asked to become proficient with AI while upskilling the entire workforce, often within ambitious timeframes set by leaders who may not fully understand how learning development works.

04

Flexibility is becoming more important than fixed AI strategies

With AI tools changing rapidly, many organisations are prioritising learning ecosystems that can adapt over time rather than committing too early to one platform or way of working.



The skills L&D teams need now

So, as AI reshapes how learning is delivered, where should you focus your time and energy? Here are the capabilities that matter most in 2026:

Working with AI agents

L&D teams need to understand how agents work and how to sustain them effectively over time. This ongoing maintenance work will be a significant part of the L&D role going forward.

Map your workflows before you automate them

Model Context Protocol (MCP) enables AI agents to carry out transactions in your LMS based on natural language requests, but this depends on clear workflow mapping. Understanding which tasks are most common, time-consuming, or complex helps you give the AI agent the right structure to follow when matching instructions to actions.

Look beyond your industry

Look to sectors that are further ahead. Marketing offers lessons in speed and ROI, healthcare shows how AI can support decision-making, and supply chain demonstrates how to move capability at scale.

Develop scenario design capabilities

As conversational learning and AI roleplay grow, there is increasing demand for realistic workplace simulations and practice environments. Designing believable scenarios and practice environments is becoming more valuable across learning teams.

Learn how to work effectively with AI

Many AI tools now provide prompt suggestions and guided workflows, but users still need to provide context and review the outputs they receive. Understanding how to guide AI towards useful responses remains an important skill, particularly in learning and compliance environments.

Develop data literacy

L&D teams need to interpret interaction data, user attributes, content metadata, and behavioural patterns to make informed decisions. Understanding what the data shows and how to act on it is becoming foundational to effective learning design.

Build AI governance literacy

It's necessary to understand where AI is appropriate and where it isn't. Teams should know when human review is required and how AI fits within existing organisational policies. As AI becomes common in workplace learning, understanding the risks is increasingly important.



From capability to application

As L&D teams build these skills, the focus shifts to applying AI in practical ways. Often, the most effective use is the least visible, quietly improving how learning is created and delivered.

Tools like Totara's AI features support this by helping teams work more efficiently. Content can be drafted or summarised more quickly, images generated without extra tools, and knowledge checks created from existing materials. Learners can set clearer goals, while recommendations help surface relevant content when it is needed.

Used well, these capabilities make it easier to deliver learning that is timely and aligned with organisational needs.



Watch:

Explore how AI-powered tools in Totara can help organisations make content creation more accessible across the workforce. From AI-assisted writing and imagery through to rapid knowledge checks, this session looks at how learners and subject matter experts can turn ideas into structured learning content more quickly.



AVAILABLE ON THE TOTARA COMMUNITY, FREE TO ACCESS:

From Consumers to Creators: Empowering Learners with AI in Totara



Where AI is genuinely delivering value

02



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Now that we've covered the role of AI in L&D, the general view around it, the expectations and pressure on teams, what the C-suite are after, and what your employees expect, we need to look at the latest developments in AI tools for learning.

We sat down with four of our partners who've made headway in AI and created tools that progress learning at impressive scale. We'll cover what they've built, why they did so, what needs these tools fulfil, and what they've learnt from the experience.

We'll also talk about the elephant in the room: AI in compliance and regulatory industries. How do you use generative technology in environments where accuracy isn't just important but legally required?





BuildAI: Content creation tool

BuildAI is a powerful tool that allows non-specialist users to create engaging, trackable learning content in Totara's LMS. It uses the power of AI to transform static content – documents such as presentations, policies, and procedures – into course content and assessments. Users can also create from scratch using prompts.

The AI provides structured prompts that focus the user to think of their audience needs, and content and structure are tailored to the audience knowledge levels, roles, learning outcomes and other variables.

Its intuitive interface helps reduce complexity. This makes it easier for non-learning designers to create content – enabling SMEs to share business knowledge and contribute to learning programs.

BuildAI was developed with Totara's partner Cortexa to work seamlessly in Totara's LMS and is [available as an addition to all Totara users on version 16 onwards](#).

cortexa

About Cortexa

Cortexa is a UK-based business that has been developing and delivering e-learning and LMS solutions since 2002. A Totara Partner since 2017, the company works with organisations across multiple sectors to support digital learning delivery and platform development.

For this interview, we spoke with Jonathan Griffiths, Sales Director at Cortexa, about BuildAI.

1. How does BuildAI turn that static content into something learners can engage with?

Jonathan Griffiths:

"BuildAI is fully integrated within Totara. You can upload presentations or PDFs, edit and refine the content, and then publish it as a SCORM object directly into Totara itself.

You can either start from scratch or transform an existing document. Once the file is uploaded, the system contextualises the content and prompts you with questions such as who the audience is, the duration of the module, the tone, and the type of imagery you want to use.

It then generates the course with an assessment at the end. From there, you can finesse it, fully brand it, and publish it into folders across teams or the wider organisation.

It also includes version control, so if regulations change or new information needs adding, you can create a new version from the existing course and publish the updated version."

2. What surprised you most once you saw BuildAI in action?

Jonathan Griffiths:

"What surprised us was the speed and accuracy of BuildAI. We were also impressed by how well it contextualises information and understands the nuances behind uploaded content.

That really helps subject matter experts because they do not have to extract everything from their heads. What they put down on paper is often enough for the system to understand the context and build on it sensibly, helping flesh out ideas and develop them into more complete learning content."

3. What problem were you originally trying to solve with BuildAI?

Jonathan Griffiths:

"One of the primary things we come across with customers is that they have rich amounts of knowledge tied up in documents, whether that is a static PDF or several presentations. Historically, that has been the way they impart knowledge through face-to-face presentations. >



The problem we were trying to solve was how to extract that knowledge and information out of those documents in an interactive way where learners can quickly engage with, and complete assessments on, the content. Anything from general onboarding through to learning about specific products.

We also wanted it to be trackable. Existing methods can be labour intensive and not very intuitive, so we were looking for a way to extract information easily without needing lots of learning design experience or technical know-how."

4. Even with those capabilities, you were clear that AI is not a "magic wand". Where do human judgement and learning design still matter most?

Jonathan Griffiths:

"The best results come when the knowledge has already been formatted and presented well. That still relies on subject matter experts being able to get their knowledge into a credible format from the beginning.

It is not a silver bullet where you can upload a large document and hope for the best. Segmenting content correctly still requires human interpretation and design skills.

There is also the final validation stage. Even though the tool asks for tone and style preferences, we still encourage customers to review the content, check the assessment questions, and make sure the objectives are being assessed correctly."

5. Finally, with so many AI tools entering the L&D space, what reality check would you give teams deciding what to adopt?

Jonathan Griffiths:

"The starting point should always be evaluating what you actually need from the tool. And of course, this includes asking the question "is another piece of online learning the right answer to the performance question!". But assuming it is, then it's still easy to get swayed by things that look impressive without properly analysing where the impact will be most meaningful for your organisation.

You should focus on admin-heavy tasks and the areas that consume the most time and resource without adding huge amounts of value.

There is still definitely a place for traditionally developed e-learning, particularly when you need high levels of quality and interactivity. But often organisations do not need every piece of content developed that way.

It can be an amalgamation of both. Some content can be highly produced, while other content can be developed more rapidly and cost effectively.

If your organisation sits on lots of documents but needs to get that information out to a broad spectrum of learners, then BuildAI is the perfect tool for that."





Actua's Ayleen: AI-powered learning assistant

Mario Planas, Director & Founder, and Adriana Bertolani, Head of Marketing & People, Actua.

Every organisation we work with has the same problem, even if they don't always see it straight away. They've invested in platforms, built libraries of content, and trained their people. But when an employee needs an answer in the middle of their working day, they can't find it. Knowledge gets trapped inside LMS platforms, SCORM files, and documents scattered across the business. We call this the crisis of accessibility to knowledge.



The pressure falls on two groups. Subject matter experts end up answering the same questions over and over. L&D teams receive more content requests than they can realistically handle.

This is what led us to build Ayleen. The idea was to give learners direct answers when they need them, connected to content already available inside the organisation. This is already how people search for information outside work. They use ChatGPT or Gemini to get quick answers. We wanted to bring that same experience into the LMS while keeping everything tied to the organisation's own content.

1. What Ayleen does

Ayleen sits on top of the LMS experience as a knowledge assistant. A learner asks a question, and it searches across connected systems including LMS content, SCORM files, documents, videos, and external repositories. It analyses the question, identifies the most relevant information, and generates a direct response while linking back to the original sources.

One capability that surprised even us during testing was how it handles SCORM content. Ayleen can extract information from SCORM packages that would normally remain completely inaccessible inside a traditional LMS. Older learning content that previously couldn't be searched properly suddenly becomes useful again.

Actua's tip: If your organisation has years of SCORM content sitting unused, don't assume it's lost. Ayleen can index and retrieve knowledge from those packages, making older content part of your active knowledge base again.

2. What we didn't expect

The quality of responses genuinely surprised us. Ayleen doesn't behave like a traditional search engine retrieving stored answers. It generates responses that feel contextualised and personalised for the learner. When we started experimenting with roleplay scenarios and different types of agents, the level of customisation surprised us too.

A practical example: if the platform contains resources about gamification techniques, Ayleen can explain those concepts directly. Ask it to help build a gamification strategy and it generates recommendations based on available information, rather than simply repeating the original content back to you.

Actua's tip: Experiment with different agent types during your testing phase. The roleplay and scenario capabilities open up learning experiences that go well beyond standard Q&A interactions.

3. Where humans still matter

Everything human still matters. Collaboration, creativity, discussion, and real interaction remain central to how people learn. The role of AI is to make access to knowledge more efficient and reduce repetitive work for administrators, tutors, and experts.

We see this as collaboration between humans and AI. Content creation still requires human review before anything reaches learners. The instructional designer or subject matter expert reviews the final result.

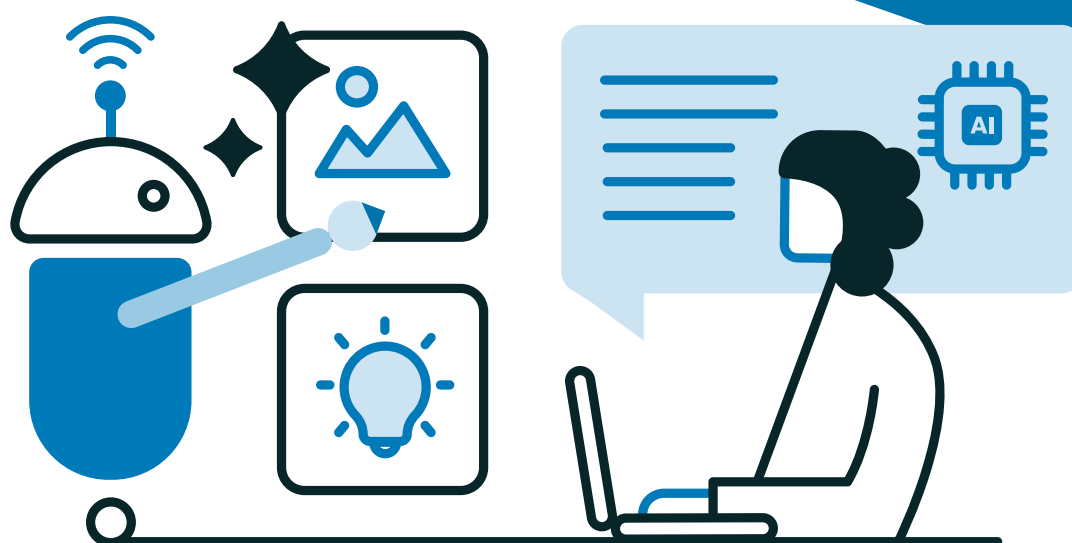
4. Starting out with AI tools

The most important thing is to focus on the objective rather than the technology. Many organisations become interested in AI tools because they look impressive. The real question is always where the value will come from and what specific problem needs solving. >



Start small, experiment, and invest time in understanding how these tools actually work before scaling anything up. Every L&D professional should now be spending time understanding what AI can do and how it could support their organisation.

Mario Planas is Director and Founder, and Adriana Bertolani is Head of Marketing and People, at Actua, a Totara Partner specialising in digital learning experiences and learning platforms designed to support performance and organisational growth.





Mindtools Kineo: AI tutoring and personalised learning



Mindtools Kineo has worked with Totara since the platform's early years, supporting more than 200 clients across industries including healthcare, retail, finance, and manufacturing.

For this chapter, we spoke with **Rodrigo Bolaños, Executive Director at Mindtools Kineo**, about how AI is changing personalisation, learning workflows, roleplay, and compliance-focused learning environments.

1. What led you to start building more conversational and personalised AI learning experiences?

Rodrigo:

"In the L&D industry, we have been talking about personalisation for the last 10 or 15 years. Now, that is possible.

We first started a couple of years ago, by creating chatbots that were experts on SOPs, policies, protocols and documentation. However, they were not really personalised to the user. So, we started working on how we could integrate those chats into an LMS tutor. That became **AI Tutor**.

It is a fully integrated chatbot that works with Totara and gets all the context. One of the most important is user context, things like role, organisation, location, language, custom fields, and learning history.

Instead of navigating through menus or searching catalogues, learners can simply ask questions. They can ask what courses are pending, what they completed yesterday, or what content is recommended for them. The tutor already understands what is visible to that user and what they are authorised to access.

We also use retrieval-augmented generation, or RAG, where we structure and train the AI on approved organisational documents. That allows the tutor to guide users through processes, policies, or procedures using controlled information rather than open-ended internet responses.

Personalisation will continue increasing from here. Eventually, the system could recognise that a learner struggled with a particular quiz question

and proactively offer support or recommend additional practice. If platforms do not start offering that level of responsiveness, users will begin seeing them as outdated."

2. One of the tools you've developed focuses on AI-supported roleplay and skills practice. How does that work, and where are organisations using it most?

Rodrigo:

"We have several solutions built around creating safe environments where people can practise before dealing with real-world situations.

One is AI Skills Practice, which is delivered through SCORM. The AI takes the role of a customer, employee, patient, or manager, and the learner practises conversations based on a specific scenario. That could be leadership, customer service, healthcare communication, compliance situations, or performance management.

The learner is assessed against a predefined rubric. We provide structured feedback based on the criteria for that skill, and those rubrics can be tailored for each customer.

We also have solutions using audio, text, and real-time voice conversations. One of them, Loop, allows users to speak naturally with the AI during difficult conversations or simulated workplace situations.

A lot of these use cases came directly from customers. Organisations wanted safer ways for people to practise difficult or high-pressure conversations before facing those situations in real life." >



Rodrigo's tip: "There are three things that are very important in these types of apps.

One is user engagement. You have to create something like Duolingo, something that shows progress, gives assessment history and reminds people when they need to practise again. You do not develop a skill in a day.

Then you have the manager level. Managers need visibility of how their users are doing across those skills and insights into what is happening with their team.

Last is the organisation level. That is where you can see what is happening across everyone. If you have 2,000 people, you can see how they are doing, how many have already practised, and where the gaps are.

3. A lot of your customers are in heavily regulated industries. How do you manage the risk side of AI?

Rodrigo:

"We pay a huge amount of attention to guardrails and testing.

One of the biggest misconceptions is that these systems are simply ChatGPT connected to an LMS. That is not what we are doing. We use enterprise-level AI infrastructure, but the content, instructions, permissions, and orchestration layers are all carefully controlled.

Each project is heavily customised around the customer's environment. We structure and transform the content before it reaches the AI because uncontrolled information leads to uncontrolled outputs.

We also create testing frameworks alongside customers. We define expected outputs, identify what is considered acceptable or unacceptable, and test those responses repeatedly until we achieve the level of consistency required.

That matters enormously in industries like healthcare or finance where inaccurate information creates genuine risk.

When cars were first introduced, they were dangerous too. Society created rules for how to build them and how to use them safely. AI is similar. The important part is building these systems in a way that delivers safe outcomes."

AI in regulated industries: two perspectives from the field

Regulated industries have a complicated relationship with AI. The technology offers real potential, but the stakes are higher and the governance requirements are stricter. We spoke with two of our partners who work with regulated organisations every day about what responsible AI adoption looks like in practice.

The first thing that becomes clear is that adoption looks very different depending on where an organisation sits.

Some regulated organisations are avoiding AI altogether because the perceived risk still feels too high. Others are experimenting carefully with local models or open-source solutions, while the rest are **experimenting cautiously with controlled environments, local models, or carefully governed use cases. In almost every case, AI decisions involve multiple stakeholders, including IT security, compliance, legal, and procurement teams.**

“

You are unlikely to see organisations in healthcare or other heavily regulated environments implementing AI widely just because it sounds exciting.”

Michael Repnik, Managing Director, LearnChamp

On the content creation side, generative AI tools have genuinely changed how course content gets produced. But the technology is probabilistic by design. It can be biased depending on the model, and it has no awareness of business context, why a course was created, or whether the content is aligned to learning objectives. That human layer doesn't disappear just because AI is accelerating the process.

“

AI is like a very smart intern. It is very fast and very clever, but it does not have all the context. So, you have to take care of the outputs.”

Rodrigo Bolaños, Executive Director, Mindtools Kineo

If authoring tools create learning materials automatically, organisations still need to ensure the information is accurate and properly reviewed by humans before it reaches learners. Clearly labelling and identifying AI-generated material is a good hygiene practice that supports auditing and future version control. The level of risk also depends on the industry. Compliance in healthcare is very different from compliance in other sectors.

The potential for AI to improve compliance processes goes well beyond content creation though. At the moment, people complete courses or attend training sessions, managers review reports, and organisations manually track whether employees remain compliant. AI could dramatically improve that process through prediction, reporting, monitoring, and ongoing checks. There is also strong potential around administrative support, versioning, translations, and helping subject matter experts bring content into systems more efficiently.

Michael makes an important distinction that's easy to miss. Many organisations are already using AI-powered authoring tools for content creation, but this should not be confused with a broader enterprise AI strategy. Real transformation requires integrating AI into workflows and long-term workforce capability building, not simply adopting isolated tools.



Rodrigo sees the configurability of a platform like Totara as an advantage here, allowing personalised experiences while maintaining the level of oversight these environments require. Flexibility has value, but it has to be balanced with governance.

Organisations need control over approved sources, permissions, user roles, and how information is surfaced through AI systems.

When it comes to the skills organisations need to build, the answer depends heavily on the industry and the role. There is a big difference between desk workers and other industries, but generative AI capabilities are becoming relevant across almost every role. At LearnChamp, AI is already part of almost every internal process, used across content creation, platform work, translations, video generation, and automation. The skills that matter go beyond knowing how to use one tool. Prompt engineering, data privacy, understanding hallucinations, and automation all become relevant depending on the role and the industry.

Both partners also emphasise that the wider workforce is being left out of the conversation for too long. A small innovation team exploring AI use cases while the rest of the organisation remains disconnected isn't a sustainable approach. Employees need exposure to AI and a basic understanding of how these systems work, not deep technical expertise, but enough to engage with the technology responsibly.

“I would be much more concerned about organisations avoiding AI entirely because of risk than organisations approaching it carefully with proper governance in place. The important thing is having clear foundations and realistic control rather than treating AI as either completely safe or completely untouchable.”

Michael Repnik, Managing Director, LearnChamp

Key takeaways:

- Regulated organisations are adopting AI at very different speeds. Some are avoiding it entirely, others are testing carefully, and some are moving faster behind the scenes than their public stance suggests.
- AI has significant potential to improve compliance processes beyond content creation, particularly around tracking, prediction, reporting, and ongoing monitoring.
- Using AI-powered authoring tools is not the same as having an enterprise AI strategy. Real transformation requires integrating AI into workflows and workforce capability building.
- The configurability of a platform like Totara allows organisations to personalise experiences while maintaining the level of oversight required in regulated environments.
- Organisations that leave the wider workforce disconnected from AI while a small innovation team works in isolation will struggle to scale adoption successfully.

Rodrigo Bolaños, Executive Director at Mindtools Kineo.

Michael Repnik is Managing Director at LearnChamp, an e-learning solutions provider with more than 20 years of experience helping organisations support change at scale.



LEARNCHAMP



Totara's approach to AI

As AI adoption increases, our focus has been on applying AI in ways that reduce administrative pressure and improve workflows without weakening the controls organisations rely on.

For this chapter, we spoke with **Liam O'Neill, Head of Product – Ecosystem**, and **Bryn Whyman, Head of Product – Totara Suite**, about workflow automation, connected ecosystems, AI governance, and why



Totara has taken a more deliberate approach to introducing AI capabilities into enterprise learning environments.

1. How is Totara approaching AI within highly regulated industries?

Bryn Whyman:

"Totara is in a strong position because regulated industries need exactly the things Totara has always been good at: trust, flexibility, auditability, and control.

Our direction with AI is really about making learning operations faster and smarter without weakening the governance customers depend on.

A lot of organisations in regulated industries are interested in AI, but they also need to understand what the AI can access, what actions it can take, and how outputs are labelled.

AI can absolutely improve productivity and make learning feel more relevant, responsive, and connected to people's work. That's where we're focused: turning those gains into practical tools for learning teams and meaningful experiences for learners, while sitting inside a structure that customers can manage and trust."

2. You've spoken about being deliberate with where AI is introduced into Totara. What is shaping those decisions internally?

Liam O'Neill:

"One of the big opportunities with AI is reducing workload for people who are already under pressure, especially site administrators and managers.

If AI can help remove some of the repetitive operational work, then those people can spend more time on work that needs human attention.

But, you have to approach this carefully because there are security and accuracy implications. Those two things have been front of mind for us from the beginning.

At its core, AI is still a guessing machine. Even at best-case accuracy levels, you are still usually talking about something around 95% accuracy. That sounds high until you start chaining multiple AI workflow steps together.

If the first workflow step is 95% accurate, and then the second step is also 95% accurate, your combined accuracy starts dropping very quickly. After enough workflow steps, the accuracy becomes too unreliable to be useful in a compliance environment.

That is why we are very careful about where AI is being used and where it is not being used. In some situations, a human validation step makes sense. Totara's BuildAI is a good example of that because users can physically review and correct outputs before anything is finalised.

We are also offering AI as an optional add-on because it is not always appropriate for every customer or every workflow. Where AI can genuinely make life easier for administrators or users, we are very interested in introducing it. But we are not forcing AI into every part of the platform and increasing pricing around that." >



3. How is Totara applying AI inside operational workflows?

Liam O'Neill:

"One of the areas we are really focused on is giving organisations practical ways to use AI inside operational workflows rather than just adding isolated AI features into the platform.

A good example is compliance management. Someone can ask the system for the latest non-compliance across the organisation, and the AI can surface overdue certifications or compliance gaps directly from Totara.

From there, the workflow can continue naturally. The AI can draft reminder emails, prepare responses, identify the affected users, and guide the administrator through the next actions that need to happen.

What is important is that the workflow still keeps organisations in control. In compliance environments especially, customers need visibility into what actions are being taken and confidence in the outputs being generated.

That is also why we are quite deliberate about where AI is used inside workflows. AI is very powerful, but if every workflow step relies entirely on AI, the accuracy drops quickly.

The bigger opportunity here is connecting AI into systems organisations already use across their operations. Learning platforms do not operate in isolation anymore. AI becomes much more useful when it can work across compliance, reporting, HR systems, communication tools, and operational workflows as part of one connected environment."

4. What are organisations still misunderstanding about AI adoption in L&D?

Liam O'Neill:

"A lot of organisations are still looking at AI in learning through a fairly narrow lens, usually course creation. That is definitely a useful use case, and one Totara already supports, but it is only one part of the picture

The organisations that will probably get the most value from AI are the ones treating it as part of a broader ecosystem rather than as a standalone feature sitting inside one platform.

There is also sometimes an assumption that more AI automatically means better outcomes. We do not necessarily think that is true. In enterprise environments, especially regulated ones, the more important questions are usually around visibility and accountability."

5. What concerns are customers raising most often around AI right now?

Bryn Whyman:

"Customers are asking the right questions: what data AI can access, what actions it can take, how outputs are labelled, how usage is audited, and where human review sits. In regulated industries, they also need to know that AI doesn't undermine compliance evidence or introduce risk into critical processes.

This makes Totara a well-placed solution because our AI story can combine practical productivity gains with transparency and flexibility enterprise customers need."



We've shared perspectives from industry analysts and learning strategists about where AI is heading in L&D. But some of the most valuable conversations happen between people doing this work day-to-day.

The Totara Community is where those conversations are happening. You'll find people discussing L&D challenges, sharing tips, and often getting direct input from Totara experts. There are regular webinars showcasing key features and success stories and communities of practice where you can connect with peers working on similar problems.

Join the community



The uncomfortable questions

03



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The limitations and realities of AI in learning

Let's talk about what AI can't do. Or, what it can't do yet.

When generative AI first appeared, a lot of the focus went straight to content creation. The promise: create entire courses, from learning objectives through to final assessments, all generated by AI. Technically, yes, AI can build courses and source content. Practically, though, it's more complicated. Where is the content coming from? Is it your own private LLM or something from the public domain? If it's pulling from your learning management system, how reliable is that SharePoint data sitting in there?

One of the biggest lessons L&D departments have learned is that AI can provide instructional design help and accelerate course development, but you can't do it hands-off without a professional instructional technologist or designer. At least not now, and possibly not for a while yet.

There are places where AI works brilliantly. Quality assurance tasks that used to require specialists reviewing every page and every link can now be handled reliably by AI. Administrative tasks where AI helps organise data or identify issues work well too. AI can analyse your content and flag 38 pieces that haven't been used in five years, then ask if you want to delete them. That's useful. What you don't want is AI deleting those 38 pieces and then informing you afterwards.

AI can help you schedule better, create content better, tag your content better, and manage skills more effectively. What it can't do is operate without professional oversight. John Leh, who's been working in learning system selection for decades, recalls an advice he received from his professor over 30 years ago: "Everything that I'm teaching you today, except the process, every tool you learn, everything, technology that you touch will be defunct by the time you're my age. So, what we're going to do is we're going to teach you how to think to use those tools as opposed to rely 100% on those tools."

In a nutshell, your profession *still* requires people who can think and use tools effectively to do better work. AI is just the newest tool in that progression.

Where organisations are most likely to oversell or over-rely on AI is in areas that require human presence and credibility.

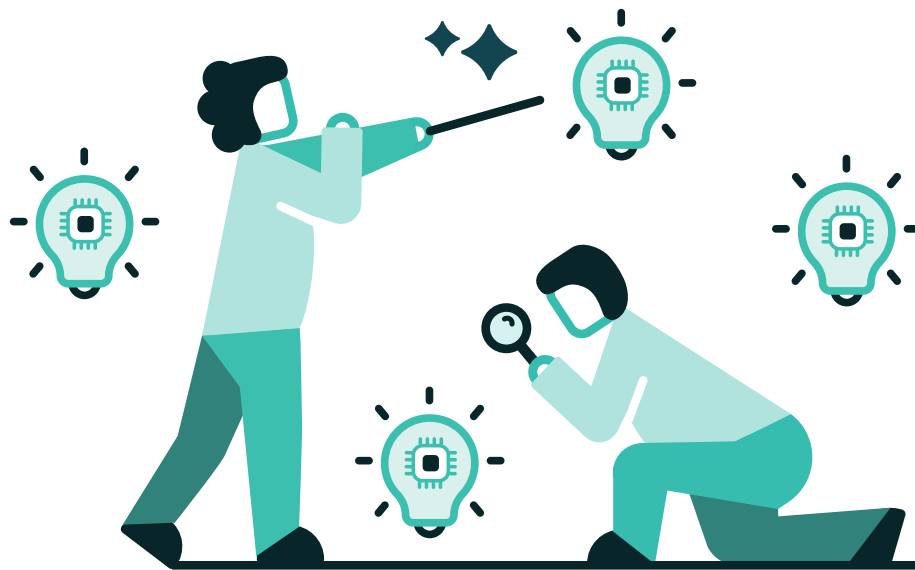
AI can support organisational change, but it still cannot replace trust. You can use it to build the presentation, but you still have to be the person standing in front of the room making the case.



Our perspective

During our conversations, John raised an uncomfortable point that many in the industry are thinking about: what happens as AI gets better at the things it currently can't do well? If it could analyse all your content, prioritise it, remove outdated material, clean the data, and tie everything together into courses, what does that mean for L&D teams?

When you look at other industries, AI has taken a bit from every profession over time. What matters now is making yourself indispensable by being someone who can think and use all these tools effectively, rather than someone who simply operates them.



Why many organisations are hesitating



Our question:

With AI demonstrating impressive capabilities across learning and development, what's holding organisations back from wider adoption?



John Leh

Legal and fiscal liability

Large organisations have zero tolerance for AI risk, particularly in regulated industries. The question of what happens if AI-generated content causes harm, whether physical injury or business damage, creates substantial legal exposure that these organisations won't accept.

Data security concerns

Global organisations worry about accidental data sharing or errors caused by AI.

Need for granular control

One of the most requested features from large organisations is an AI control panel in their learning system. They want to see everything AI is touching and decide yes or no for each feature.





Our question:

With AI demonstrating impressive capabilities across learning and development, what's holding organisations back from wider adoption?



**Amanda
Nolen**

Leadership bandwidth

Business leaders are under significant operational pressure, which often leaves little time for experimentation or learning, pushing AI adoption lower down the priority list.

Making space for learning

Organisations need to consciously make space for AI adoption and learning, but that's easier said than done when employees are already stretched.



**Totara
specialists**

Regulatory constraints

Working in a regulated industry means AI decisions aren't purely about appetite or ambition. Legal frameworks, industry standards, and the genuine consequences of getting things wrong all shape what's possible. Human involvement in high-stakes processes is often a requirement that exists for good reason.

Data privacy legislation

The kind of personalisation AI can deliver often depends on access to detailed employee data. In many countries, collecting and using that data at the scale required simply isn't permitted under existing law. For organisations operating across multiple regions, this creates real boundaries around what AI-driven learning can realistically achieve.



Create or integrate?

Before ChatGPT launched publicly in 2022, OpenAI had already spent years developing its underlying models with major backing from Microsoft.

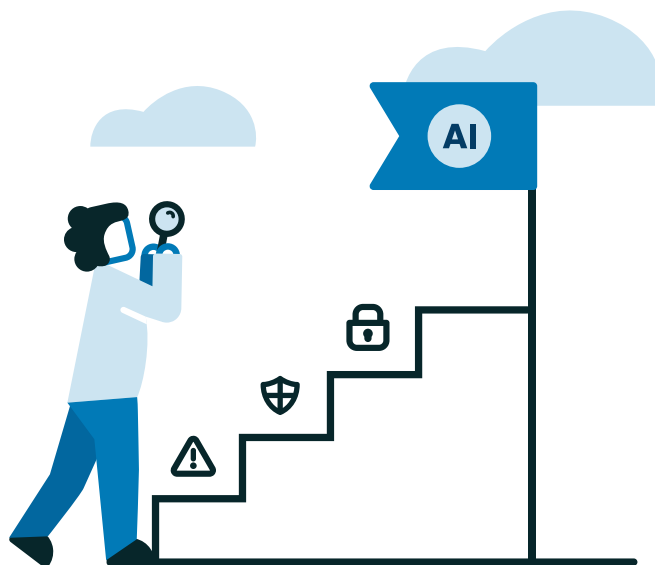
A similar pattern can be seen with Claude. Anthropic has raised billions in funding, alongside support from companies including Google and Amazon, to develop and scale its models over time.

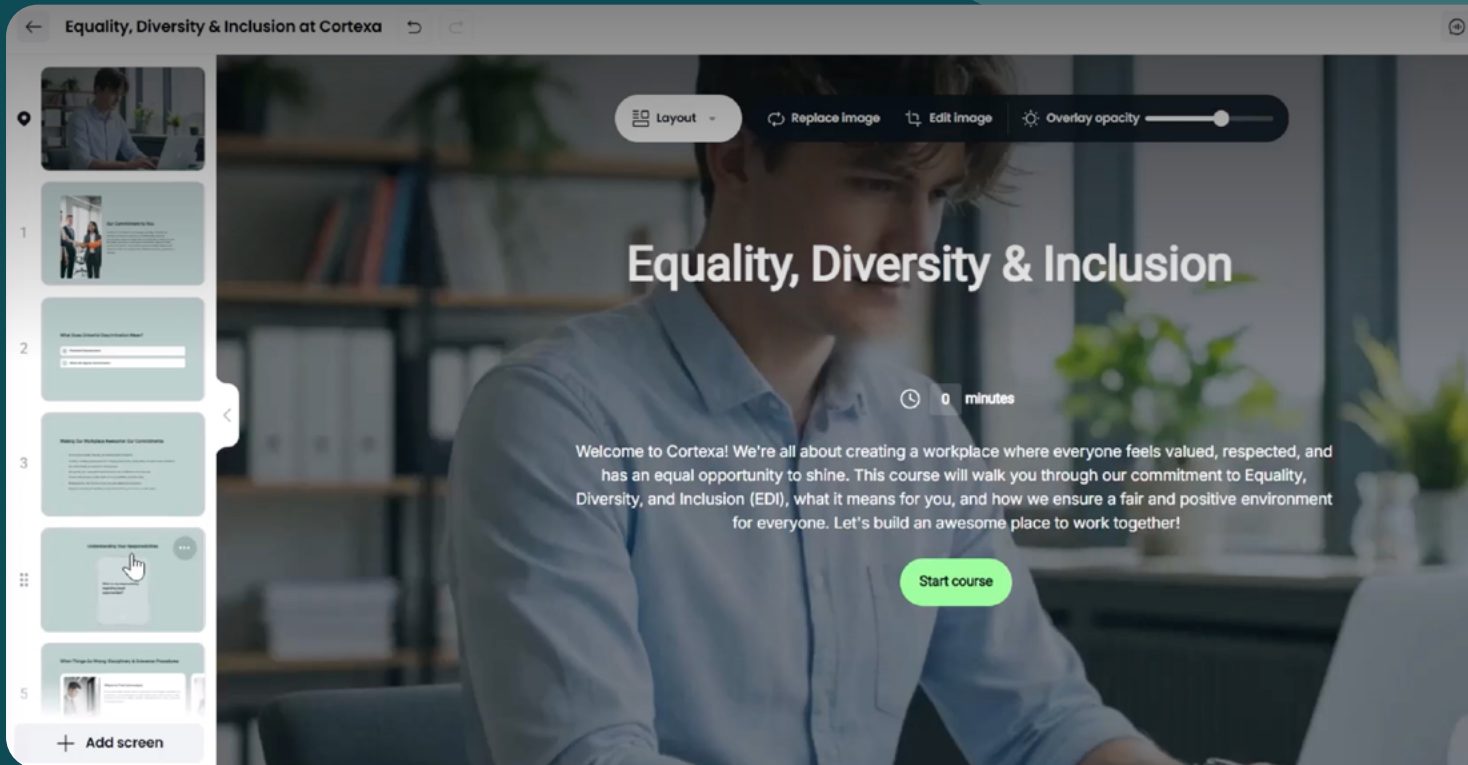
Now, not every company needs an army of researchers to build something useful with AI. Many organisations are already creating valuable tools on top of existing models. But building and maintaining large-scale AI systems from the ground up is a very different challenge. For many L&D teams, it makes more sense to focus on practical application while working with providers already investing heavily in the underlying technology.

Here, all of the industry experts we spoke with were in agreement too: **L&D teams shouldn't try to become AI development shops.** Bringing technology staff into learning teams to build custom AI solutions creates problems down the line. You end up maintaining custom solutions that become increasingly difficult to sustain.

The recommendation is to work with people and companies who have expertise in AI development. Let them handle the complexity while you focus on what your learning function does best. At the same time, organisations cannot afford to hand over all understanding of AI to external vendors either.

There's another consideration that often gets missed: learning triage. When the business requests a learning intervention, one of the first questions L&D should ask is whether the performance outcome should be automated at all.





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Creating learning content from scratch takes time that most L&D teams don't have. BuildAI changes that by turning your existing policies, procedures, and documents into smart learning experiences directly within Totara, in minutes rather than weeks.

Smart prompts guide you through the creation process, keeping your content focused on audience needs and learning objectives. The result is ready for you to review, edit, and publish.

The next three years

04



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What will change for L&D teams

AI is already changing how learning is delivered and what learners expect from it. Across our conversations with analysts and learning strategists, similar themes kept coming up around accessibility and changing expectations.

For learners: Personalisation at scale

Think back to 2020. If you had 25,000 people across a global organisation who needed a piece of content, you created a SCORM course and all 25,000 people got more or less the same version. Over time, you might have added some basic personalisation, maybe an alternate path for managers versus employees, but nothing particularly sophisticated.

In a couple of years, there'll be 30,000 different versions of that course for all the different people. Everyone gets their own version based on the skills they have, the training they've taken before, their life experiences, and data from other systems. If they don't need a particular piece, it gets written out.

For compliance training, that might be less dramatic. For customer education, though, it gets interesting. What your organisation purchased, what your job role is, how long you've had it, which features you're using in the application, an analysis of what other people doing the same thing are learning, and the impact of specific learning on outcomes like customer satisfaction, all tied together to give each person exactly the learning they need.

Do they go to the LMS to get it? Maybe if they're not busy and have time on their hands, but generally you're going to bring that learning wherever they are in the software application or on their mobile device. The industry has talked about this for a long time, but now it's becoming real.

Learning habits are already reflecting this shift. People who used to read books extensively are doing less of that now. They're exploring different ways to get the knowledge they need at the moment they need it and expanding from there as they see fit.



For L&D roles: A different kind of work

The one-size-fits-all course as the default style of learning will not be how most organisations operate in two to three years. That's surprising the prediction from the experts we spoke with, and it's one they're willing to stand behind.

Access to learning will increasingly come through a prompt bar, whether that lives in a dedicated platform, integrated into Slack or Teams, or rolled into Copilot or Gemini. In many cases, learners won't even know they're in a learning experience. They'll ask a question, and the system will route it to an intelligent tutor when that's what's needed.

L&D professionals will shift into the role of learning orchestrators and architects rather than course designers. When people push back on this, arguing that we understand personalisation and context better than any system could, the response is direct: exactly right, and now we can deliver that at scale.

A skilled classroom facilitator adapts in real time. They notice when people are disengaged, when someone needs more support, or when the room is ready to move on. What AI changes is the ability to bring some of that responsiveness into digital learning more consistently and at a much larger scale.

For some people in the profession, that shift will feel uncomfortable. But the capability does not replace what L&D does well. If anything, it places more importance on the people who can understand context and design learning experiences that are effective.



One decision L&D teams should not delay

The best place to close this eBook is with some practical advice. We asked the industry analysts we spoke with, along with experts at Totara, to share one piece of advice for L&D teams navigating AI adoption. Here's what they told us.

Take a breath, then commit to learning

First, stop panicking. You're not going to get fired because you haven't implemented AI everywhere yet. A lot of people have been genuinely worried about not having a job in the next 6 to 18 months, but that's not the reality playing out. You can take a breath.

Second, commit to lifelong learning. This advice applies whether AI exists or not, but it's particularly relevant now. Just 10 minutes a day makes a substantial difference. Your first 10 minutes or your last 10 minutes of the day spent learning something new about AI adds up to an hour a week. That's 52 hours a year, which is a lot of education from something that takes less time than your coffee break or morning exercise.

You can use AI itself to help you map out what you should learn across that time. You don't need to become an expert. If you think of a bell curve from "I don't know AI at all" to "I'm a complete nerd about it," you just want to be in the middle to slightly right of centre.

Build communities and use the tools yourself

For L&D teams, communities of practice matter more than ever right now. The human element is becoming more important than it's been in a long time. Building trust, creating a sense of shared experience, and helping people apply AI to the same use cases works best when facilitated through communities rather than top-down training programmes.

For leaders specifically, you need to use AI yourself. You can't guide your workforce through this change if you're not engaging with the technology in your own work. It's the familiar advice about putting on your own oxygen mask first, but it's particularly relevant here.



Fix your foundations now

One theme came up repeatedly in our conversations: AI works best when the information behind it is organised properly.

That starts with the basics. Is your content up to date? Can people find what they need? Is information stored in a way that makes sense? These are not new challenges, but they become much more visible when organisations start introducing AI.

Another practical takeaway from the interviews was that AI tends to highlight existing problems. If content is well organised, AI has a much stronger foundation to work from. If it isn't, those issues become harder to ignore.

Nobody knows exactly where AI will be in two, five, or ten years. What you can control is the quality of the foundations you're building on today.





Let's keep the conversation going

If anything in this eBook sparked questions, or if you'd like to talk through what AI might look like in your learning environment, we're here.

Book a no-obligation demo today



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