

“Round Trip to Zero” In Learning Digital Skills

Redefining Digital Learning Through
Engagement, Application, and Practice

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LEAP

Abstract

This white paper explores the necessity for continual digital upskilling and reskilling in response to the rapidly changing technological landscape faced by professionals and organisations today. It identifies three prevalent methods of workplace learning: formal instructor-led training, informal peer-to-peer learning, and self-directed learning through platforms offering micro-courses and online courses like Udemy and LinkedIn Learning.

Each method has unique benefits but also exhibits significant limitations. Formal training often fails to adapt to specific organisational needs and can be costly and inflexible. Informal learning, while adaptable, lacks structure and does not typically contribute to formal certification or Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Self-directed learning offers flexibility but may lack engagement and the communal support of workplace learning.

To bridge these gaps, the paper proposes a blended learning strategy that combines the discipline of formal training with the flexibility of informal and self-directed

methods. This hybrid approach is designed to be more accessible, responsive, cost-effective, and closely aligned with the technological demands of the modern workplace.

The paper also addresses the cultural shifts necessary to implement this strategy effectively and underscores the unsustainable contrast between high investments in digital transformation and the insufficient focus on skills development.

It argues for a transformative approach to learning that balances the development of technology and human capabilities, ensuring sustained organisational growth.



JOURNEY

"In our extensive experience with digital transformation, we have coined the term Round-Trip to Zero to describe concerning but all too common scenario. Despite initial successes reported in up to 75% of transformation efforts, many organisations revert to their original performance levels over time.

This happens because a significant portion of these transformations fail to achieve their intended outcomes and sustaining the gains proves elusive. The absence of enduring skills and capabilities to maintain and capitalise on early achievements often leads to a complete negation of progress, bringing the organisation back to square one. This term serves as a critical reminder for senior digital leaders: transformation is not only about reaching new heights but ensuring the foundation is robust enough to support and extend these new capabilities indefinitely."

Michael Ekpe and Andrew Mugoya

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About the Authors

Michael Ekpe and Andrew Mugoya each have worked in technology for over 25 years across a range of sectors. Michael has held senior leadership roles in both the public and private sector including as Chief Technology Officer at the UK Houses of Parliament. Andrew has worked in technology in the finance sector and as an entrepreneur, founding several companies offering digital services to global clients.

Michael and Andrew are the co-founders of LEAP (www.leaphigher.io) - a revolutionary new solution in offering digital learning.

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Introduction

The digital skills gap poses a formidable challenge for both professionals and organisations, necessitating a critical re-evaluation of training methodologies to stay in step with rapid technological advancements. Currently, workplace learning predominantly utilises three methods: structured instructor-led training, informal peer-to-peer learning, and self-directed online courses. Each method offers distinct benefits but also brings inherent drawbacks that contribute to the widening skills gap, particularly in advanced areas such as artificial intelligence (AI). This deficiency not only impacts economic performance—with estimates indicating a loss of approximately £63 billion annually to the UK economy—but also leads to significant expenditures as organisations spend on average £6.6 billion annually to recruit and train additional staff.

Traditional training methods often fail to address specific organisational needs and can be both costly and inflexible. Informal learning, while pertinent and directly applicable, typically lacks the consistency and formal recognition necessary for comprehensive skill development. Another downside of informal learning is that it may perpetuate sub-optimal or outdated working practices, given there is no certainty that what a colleague imparts is good or best practice. Furthermore, although offering autonomy, self-directed learning may not provide sufficient engagement. These gaps result in lost potential revenue and increased operational costs.

The Digital Skills Shortfall

- **59%** of the UK workforce, or **23.4 million** working adults, cannot perform all 20 essential digital tasks.
- **8%** of the workforce, approximately **3.2 million people**, cannot perform any essential digital tasks.

Economic Impact

- **£12.8 billion** lost in GDP annually, potentially rising to **£63 billion per year by 2030**.
- **£145 billion** lost in cumulative GDP growth from 2018–2028.
- **£5.69 billion** in lost wages for UK workers.

Business and Security

- **39%** of businesses reported a cyber breach in 2022.
- **70%** of digital transformation projects fail due to workforce incapability.

Job Market and Accessibility

- **5.6 million** job vacancies still need to be filled due to skill shortages.
- Digital exclusion hinders access to cheaper goods, public services, and essential online tools.

Moreover, foundational training models like internships and apprenticeships, while valuable at the entry-level, often do not provide the continuous, advanced professional development needed at higher levels. This shortfall underscores the demand for a transformative approach to learning and development—one that effectively bridges the gap between traditional education structures and real-world professional demands.

This paper proposes a hybrid learning model that integrates the structured nature of formal training with the flexibility of informal learning and the autonomy offered by self-directed courses. This approach aims to make professional development more accessible, responsive, and cost-effective, thereby enhancing a learning culture that could lead to a 52% increase in productivity and a 92% higher likelihood of innovation.

Research supports that a robust learning culture, bolstered by this integrated model, not only enables significant organisational benefits but also necessitates navigating substantial cultural and operational shifts. This paper will outline strategies for effectively overcoming these challenges, promoting a transition to a more dynamic and effective training framework. By investing in this holistic approach, organisations not only improve retention rates—with 94% of employees more likely to stay if development opportunities are provided—but also better equip their workforce to meet the challenges of a digital future. This strategic focus on human capital is essential for maintaining competitiveness in the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

52%

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Current Models of Corporate Learning

In today's dynamic corporate environment, professional development primarily happens through three distinct models: formal classroom training, informal on-the-job learning, and self-directed online learning.

1

Formal Learning

Formal classroom training, the traditional cornerstone of corporate education, is well-structured but often disconnected from the immediate practical needs of the job. It can be costly and inflexible, making it difficult to scale across an entire organisation. The broad topics covered typically do not address specific skill needs, resulting in training that is out of touch and poorly aligned with actual job requirements. Furthermore, the infrequent nature of these sessions disrupts continuous learning and development, with training days often leading to productivity losses—a concern highlighted by the CIPD, which notes a decline in responsiveness to business changes among learning and development professionals.

2

Informal Learning

On the other hand, informal learning offers flexibility and direct applicability to job tasks but lacks a formal structure and defined objectives. This often leads to inconsistent learning experiences across the workforce and does not provide formal recognition of skills development. As per Corporate English Solutions, tracking and measuring the effectiveness of informal learning is challenging, and the lack of consistency and recognition can demotivate learners. Additionally, the casual nature of this learning model can result in the inappropriate dissemination of sensitive information, complicating the tracking and evaluation of progress.

3

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning through online platforms such as Udemy or Coursera grants learners autonomy and access to a broad range of topics. However, this model may lack the interactive elements, contextual relevance, and engagement necessary for deeper learning and retention found in more traditional settings.

With the digital skills gap affecting approximately 70% of organisations, there is a pressing need for a more integrated learning model that not only meets the

requirements of modern workplaces but also keeps pace with digital advancements. This model must combine the structured approach of formal training with the practical relevance of informal learning and the expansive accessibility of self-directed online courses. Such a comprehensive strategy aims to create a dynamic, responsive, and effective corporate learning environment that can effectively bridge the prevailing skills gap and cater to the diverse needs of today's workforce.



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Introducing Learning Through Engagement, Application, and Practice

The profound contrast between substantial investments in digital transformation and the comparatively minimal investment in essential training highlights a significant oversight in organisational strategy and delivery.

Often, this imbalance leads to a "round trip to zero," where the benefits of digital investments are undermined by inadequate skill development. True transformation encompasses both technology and people. Without proper and relevant training, organisations cannot sustain the benefits of their investments, underscoring the need for a new learning approach that values technological and educational advancements equally.

Responding to this need, our proposed Hybrid Learning Model, Learning Through Engagement, Application, and Practice (LEAP), blends the best aspects of formal discipline with the practicality of informal learning. This model is designed to enhance workplace learning by addressing the current system's shortcomings, thereby supporting a true transformation that integrates technology advancement with human capital development.



Learning

Acquiring digital skills through structured tools, templates, and curriculum.

Engagement

Leveraging collaborative learning with peer-to-peer interactions and social dynamics.

Application

Experiential learning with real-world, on-the-job application to deepen understanding.

Practice

Improving mastery and professional practices through community involvement and shared problem-solving.

Benefits summary of the LEAP approach



Learning Approach	Alumni or Peer Community	Flexibility	Relevance / Applicability	Certification / Recognition	Good Practice
Formal	Yes	No / limited	No / limited	yes	Yes
Informal	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Self-Directed	No	Yes	Yes	No	Limited
LEAP	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Key features of the LEAP model include:

On-the-Job Learning

Ensures skills are immediately applicable and reinforced in real-life scenarios, enhancing job performance directly.

Peer-to-Peer Learning

Leverages the collective knowledge of peers to enhance collaborative learning, with evidence suggesting that 43% of employees find peer learning most effective.

Continuous Development

Facilitates ongoing learning, crucial in today's fast-evolving business environments, as supported by trends in social learning platforms like LinkedIn Learning.

Structured Yet Flexible

Provides clear learning objectives while allowing adaptability to meet individual and team needs effectively.

Contextually Relevant

Tailors learning experiences to meet specific job challenges, significantly boosting learning effectiveness.

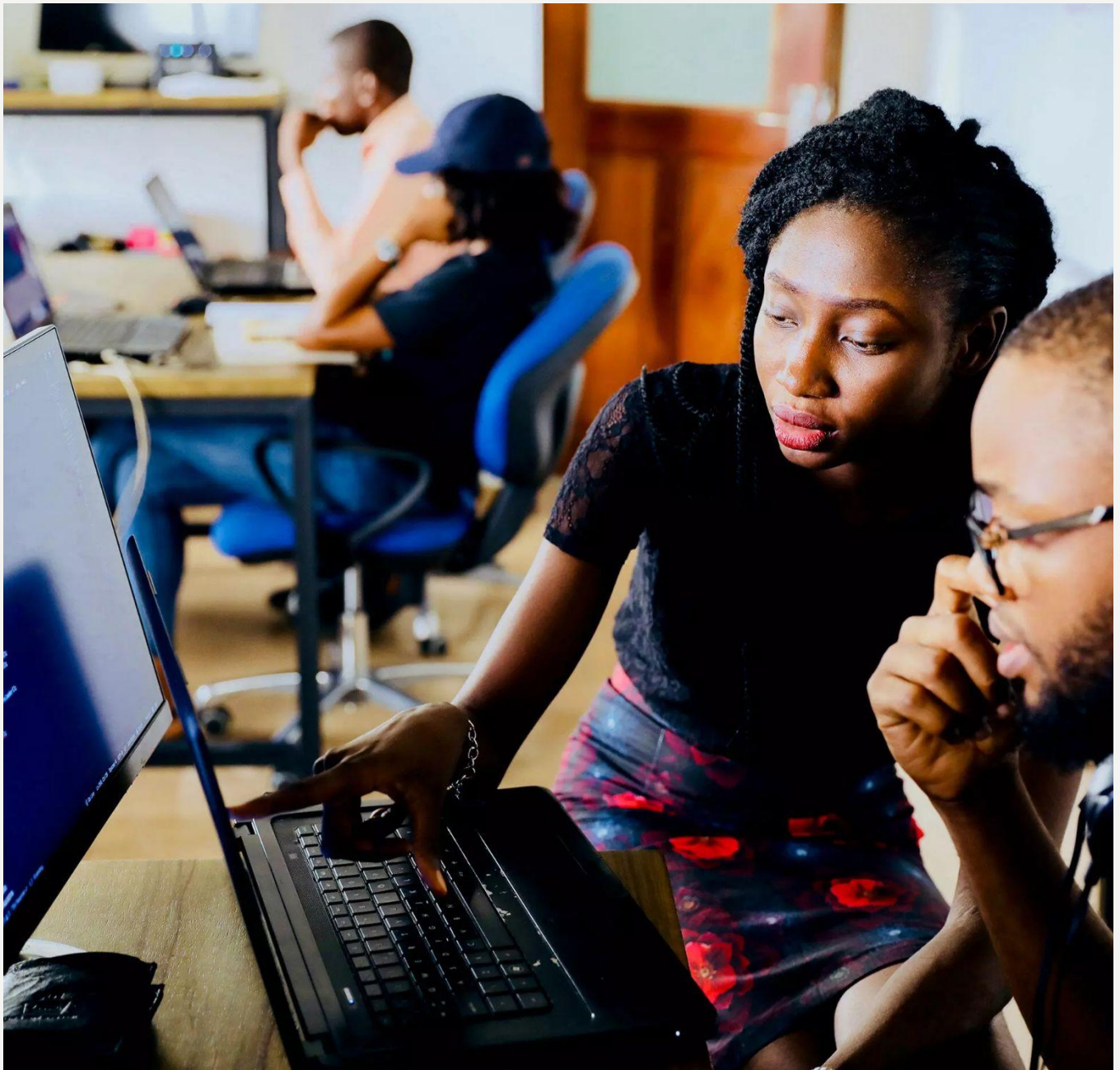
Secured Content

Ensures that learning materials are safeguarded within company boundaries, critical for maintaining confidentiality and integrity.

Self-Directed Content

Encourages learners to engage with curated resources at their own pace, fostering a culture of self-motivated learning.

By embedding a people-focused transformation within the introduction of the LEAP model, organisations can align their digital transformation strategies with a robust educational framework, ensuring that investments in technology are complemented by investments in their most valuable asset. This strategic alignment is essential for maintaining competitiveness and achieving sustained growth in the digital age.



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Practical Implementations and Good Practices

The following examples illustrate effective solutions addressing specific needs, although they may not encompass all required capabilities:

Method Cards

These card-based learning tools provide structured, adaptable frameworks for skill development. They facilitate targeted learning through a modular approach, allowing users to focus on specific competencies.

Online Tech Communities

These communities connect learners with experienced experts who provide tailored guidance. This interaction enhances the learning experience by offering personalised support and expert advice in technical fields.

Online Developer Communities

These platforms enable peer-to-peer advice and problem-solving, highlighting the advantages of collaborative and social learning. They provide a dynamic environment where developers can share knowledge and tackle challenges.

Self-Directed Learning Platforms

Platforms such as Udemy or Coursera offer self-directed learning opportunities that allow individuals to explore a wide range of topics at their own pace. While these platforms provide flexibility and a broad learning catalogue, integrating interactive elements and community support can enhance the depth of learning and retention, aligning with more traditional educational experiences.



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Challenges in Implementing a Hybrid Learning Model

Implementing a hybrid learning model, while beneficial, introduces a set of significant challenges that can impede its success and widespread adoption. These challenges vary from cultural and psychological barriers to logistical and strategic misalignments within an organisation. Understanding and addressing these hurdles is crucial for the effective rollout of a hybrid learning strategy that truly transforms professional development.



SITUATION

Here are some key challenges that organisations must navigate:

Cultural Resistance to Change

Organisations frequently encounter significant resistance when transitioning to a learning-focused and collaborative environment. Discrepancies in digital readiness perceptions between top management and lower levels create barriers that hinder effective upskilling across the organisation. Moreover, There is a prevalent misconception that upskilling benefits only tech-focused roles, which restricts broader digital readiness and adaptability.

Emotional and Psychological Barriers

Resistance to digital change, particularly among long-tenured employees, is often driven by fears of redundancy or the challenges of adapting to new technologies. This resistance can lead to information retention by individuals who perceive these changes as threats to their roles or status within the organisation.

Consultancy-Driven Challenges

Learning and Development consultancies sometimes prioritise sales over addressing clients' actual needs, leading to solutions that do not match the organisation's specific requirements.

Inadequate Resource Allocation

Organisations often fail to allocate sufficient time and resources for learning activities, crucial for supporting ongoing professional growth and bridging skill gaps. This deficiency is exacerbated by an over-reliance on external consultancies, which are often costly and ineffective.

Difficulty Integrating Tools

The integration of various tools into a cohesive system is a prevalent challenge. Reliance on legacy Learning Management Systems (LMS) and a lack of data-sharing capabilities complicate effective integration and knowledge sharing across different departments.

Lack of Incentives Linked to Career Progression

In many organisations, learning and development opportunities are not directly linked to career progression, which diminishes the incentive for staff to engage in learning initiatives.



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Strategies for Overcoming Hybrid Learning Challenges

In this section we outline various strategies that can help transform potential obstacles into opportunities for enhancing learning and development across the organisation. These strategies focus on changing perceptions, leveraging internal resources, and integrating learning with strategic business goals to foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

Cultural Resistance to Change

Adapting Learning Approaches for Leadership

Transform the narrative around training for senior members from a chore to an opportunity to 'be in the know.' Establishing an environment where admitting ignorance is seen as a prerequisite for learning can be challenging for established leaders. By reshaping how learning is perceived—from a remedial activity to an enriching one—leaders are more likely to promote learning cultures within their teams actively.



LEADERSHIP

Emotional and Psychological Barriers

Leveraging Social Dynamics

Select key employees as internal champions to develop specific organisational capabilities. These champions, by gaining exposure and status, not only motivate themselves but also encourage peer engagement, thereby embedding learning deeply into the organisation's cultural and operational fabric.



EXPERIENC

Inadequate Resource Allocation

Curated Group Learning Activities

Design learning modules around active, group-based activities rather than passive listening or solitary online courses. This approach enhances information retention and applicability, promoting unity of information and reinforcing team cohesion.



MANAGEMENT

Consultancy-Driven Challenges

Implementing Advanced Digital Platforms and Communities of Practice

Develop a robust digital platform that houses up-to-date knowledge and insights on the latest digital trends and essential skills. Additionally, establish digital communities within the organisation for sharing insights, challenges, and solutions.



nAPPING

Difficulty Integrating Tools

Aligning Learning with Business Objectives

Tailor learning initiatives to directly address current business problems and opportunities. This alignment reduces reliance on external consultancies by building internal expertise and corporate intellectual property.



MASTERCLASS

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Conclusion: Advancing Corporate Learning

Our comprehensive strategy integrates structured, peer-to-peer, experiential, and self-directed learning elements to effectively meet the evolving needs of the modern workforce. It addresses significant gaps in traditional learning models and sets a new standard for corporate learning, significantly enhancing skill development and cultivating a culture of continuous innovation.

The proposed strategy not only equips organisations to bridge the digital skills gap but also empowers them to nurture internal champions and leverage social dynamics. It ensures that learning is closely linked to career progression and organisational objectives, enhancing employee engagement and motivation.

Ultimately, this model supports the development of a resilient and innovative workforce, well-prepared to navigate and succeed in the future. This strategic alignment between learning initiatives and business needs ensures that organisations adapt to changes and drive forward with confidence and a competitive edge.

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Appendix

LEAP manifesto

Our Mission

Leap provides immersive learning experiences that empower organisations and individuals with the confidence and knowledge to advance in a digitally transformative environment.

As the need for digital proficiency becomes critical to success, the gap between current capabilities and strategic ambitions can impede progress, leading to suboptimal decision-making and excessive reliance on external expertise.

Leap addresses this challenge by demystifying, aligning, and humanising digital skills through experiential learning.

We enable organisations to overcome barriers to their digital objectives and foster a culture that minimises jargon, dismantles silos, and eliminates imposter syndrome.

In doing so, we equip organisations to achieve their digital ambitions efficiently and effectively, acquiring digital skills the human way.



CHAMPION

Our Strategy

Challenges

Cultural Resistance to Change

Emotional and Psychological Barriers

Consultancy-Driven Challenges

Inadequate Resource Allocation

Difficulty Integrating Tools

Lack of Incentives Linked to Career Progression

Strategic Actions

Leadership Transformation: We transform the narrative around training for senior members from a chore to an opportunity to 'be in the know.' By creating an environment where admitting ignorance is seen as a prerequisite for learning, we reshape perceptions from remedial to enriching.

Empower Champions: We help select key employees as internal champions to develop specific capabilities. These champions, by gaining exposure and status, not only motivate themselves but also encourage peer engagement, embedding learning deeply into the organisation's cultural and operational fabric.

Digital Communities & Platforms: We build robust digital platforms that continually update with digital trends and skills, paired with active internal communities for problem-solving and insight-sharing.

Active Learning Design: We develop dynamic, group-based learning modules to enhance engagement and retention, moving beyond passive formats to reinforce team dynamics and cohesion.

Organisation-Aligned Learning: We align learning initiatives directly with current and emerging organisational challenges, enhancing internal expertise and reducing dependency on external expertise.

Career-Linked Learning: We connect development opportunities directly with career advancement, establishing clear incentives for active participation in learning initiatives.

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References

Digital Skills Gap Impact

- The UK's Digital Skills Committee reports that the skills gap costs the UK economy an estimated £63 billion a year in lost GDP. – 2022
- Capgemini notes that 70% of companies are affected by a digital skills gap. – 2017
- Businesses spent an average of £6.6 billion in 2019 to address the skills gap through recruitment, temporary staffing, and additional training (Open University Report). – 2019

Data Security and Costs

- Data breaches cost UK businesses an average of £3.2 million, with over a third resulting from phishing attacks (IBM Report). – 2023

Learning and Development Challenges

- Only 59% of learning and development professionals could respond agilely to changing skills needs in 2021, down from 69% the previous year (CIPD Report). – 2023
- Corporate English Solutions highlights challenges in tracking and measuring the effectiveness of informal on-the-job learning. – 2023

Learning Methodologies and Outcomes

- Hands-on learning can increase retention rates to 75% or higher (National Training Laboratories).
- 43% of employees find peer-to-peer learning the most effective way to learn new skills (Degreed). Degreed_How the Workforce Learns 2023_Digital.pdf
- 90% of the digital skills taught are retained by employees who participate in peer-to-peer teaching activities (Educational Psychology Review).

Organisational Impact and Strategy

- Companies with strong learning cultures are 52% more productive and 92% more likely to develop innovative products and services (Bersin by Deloitte). 2015
- Organisations that promote collaborative learning are 5 times more likely to be high performing (Josh Bersin Academy). – 2020
- 94% of employees would stay at a company longer if it invested in their learning and development; 85% of companies prioritising experiential learning report higher adaptability to digital transformation challenges (LinkedIn's 2023 Workplace Learning Report, Deloitte Survey).
- A 43% reduction in critical digital skill gaps over a period of two years in organisations with robust peer-to-peer learning programs (Deloitte Survey). 2023
- 50% of employees are more likely to have up-to-date digital skills in organisations that encourage peer-to-peer learning (Association for Talent Development).

Learning Investment and Engagement

- 73% of organisations plan to increase their investment in digital learning platforms to support remote and hybrid work models (Fosway Group).
- 59% of learning and development professionals believe social learning practices and platforms will become crucial in the workplace (LinkedIn Learning).
- 80% of employees say they would be more engaged at work if their learning environment included opportunities for peer learning (LinkedIn's 2023 Workplace Learning Report).

Business Growth and Innovation

- 34% of organisations are more likely to innovate successfully when facilitating peer-to-peer learning among their employees PWC 2013.

**Get up to speed,
to digitally succeed.**

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LEAP