

Top Trends Shaping L&D Strategy for 2026

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Rebecca Burton
Aziz Popal

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AI



Communications



Customer Service &
Support



Finance



Human Resources



Legal, Risk &
Compliance



Marketing



Procurement



Product
Management



Research &
Development



Sales



Supply Chain



Technology

Today's Virtual Briefing

Timing

- Introduction 5 minutes
- Forces Affecting L&D's Strategic Shift 5 minutes
- 4 Key Trends for consideration 40 minutes
- Conclusion and Questions 10 minutes



Participate in group chat opportunities during the virtual briefing for real-time benchmarking and discussion

Kieron Shitama

Sales Manager

Public Sector Leader – HR

Practice, Gartner

Kieron.Shitama@gartner.com

Speakers

Please contact us with any questions you have following the session.



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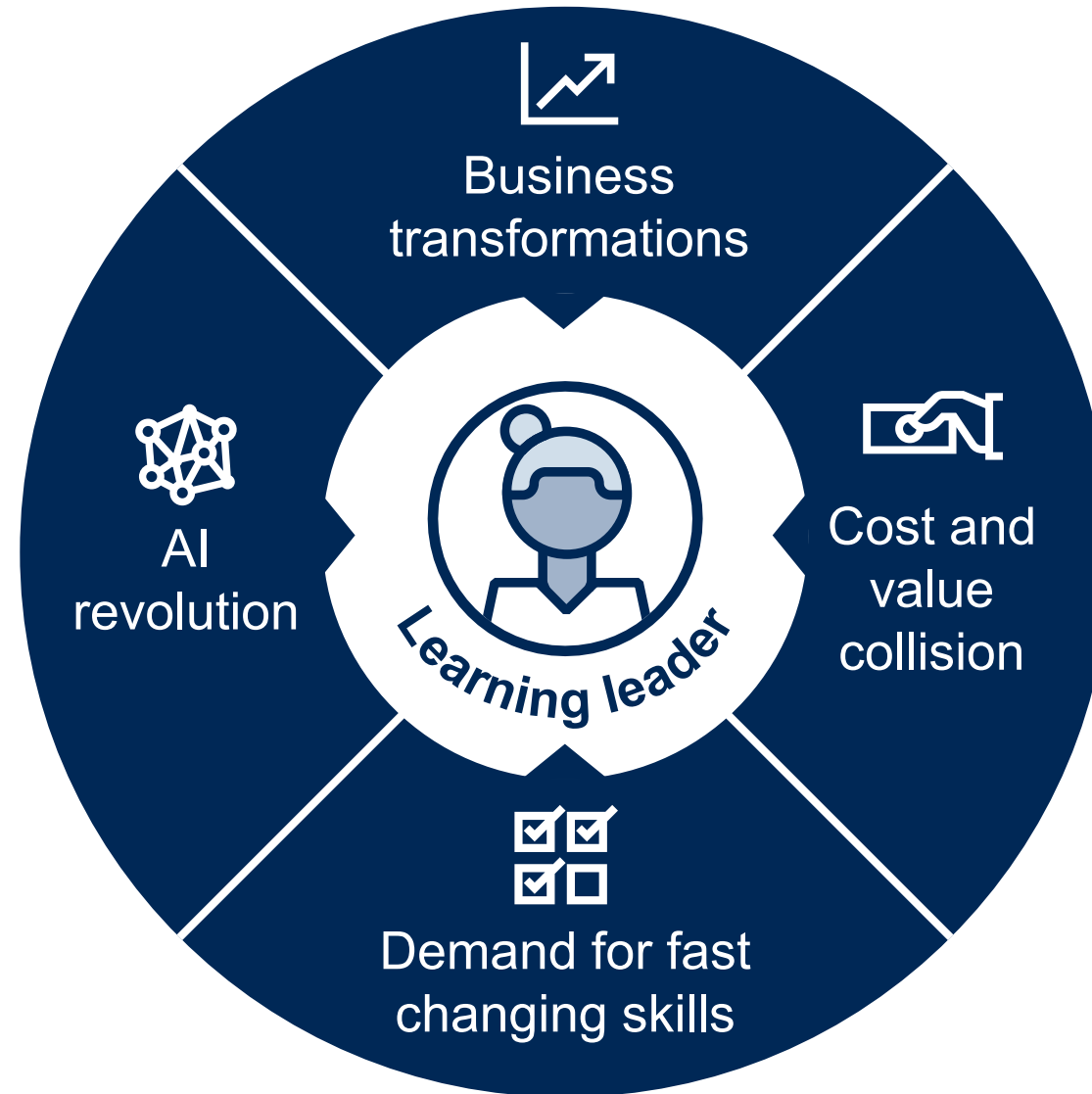
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(OOA)

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Forces Affecting Learning and Development





**What trends should
learning leaders
be ready for in 2026?**

Top Trends Shaping L&D Strategy in 2026

1

AI forces L&D
to **reinvent** itself

Top Trends Shaping L&D Strategy in 2026

1

AI forces L&D
to **reinvent** itself

2

Precise **skills**
data becomes
a business
mandate

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L&D
accelerates
efforts to
build **change**
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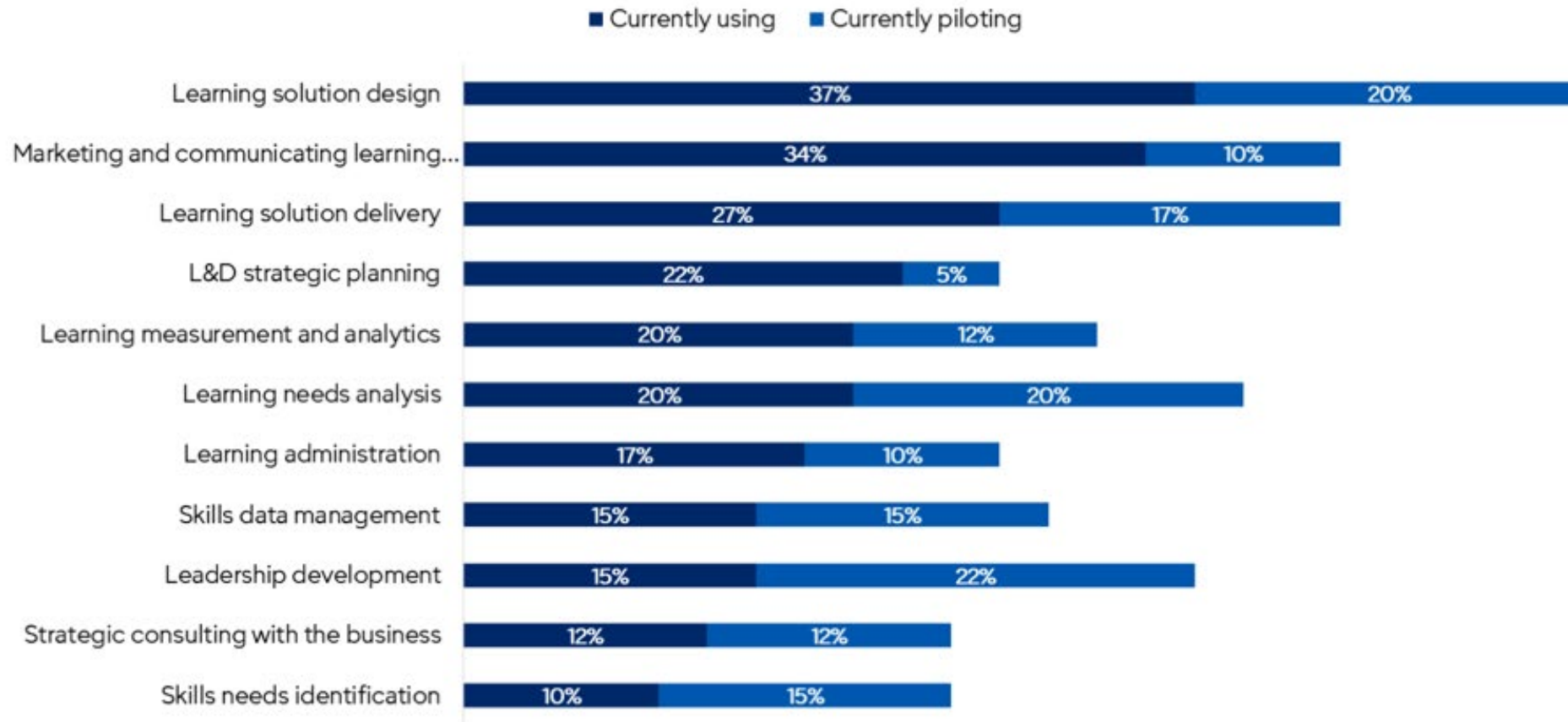
4

Automation
and AI erode
entry-level
learning

AI Forces L&D to **Reinvent** Itself

AI Is Already Transforming L&D Work

Percentage of L&D Leaders Reporting the Current use of Generative AI



n = 41 L&D Leaders*

Source: 2025 Gartner State of the L&D Function Survey

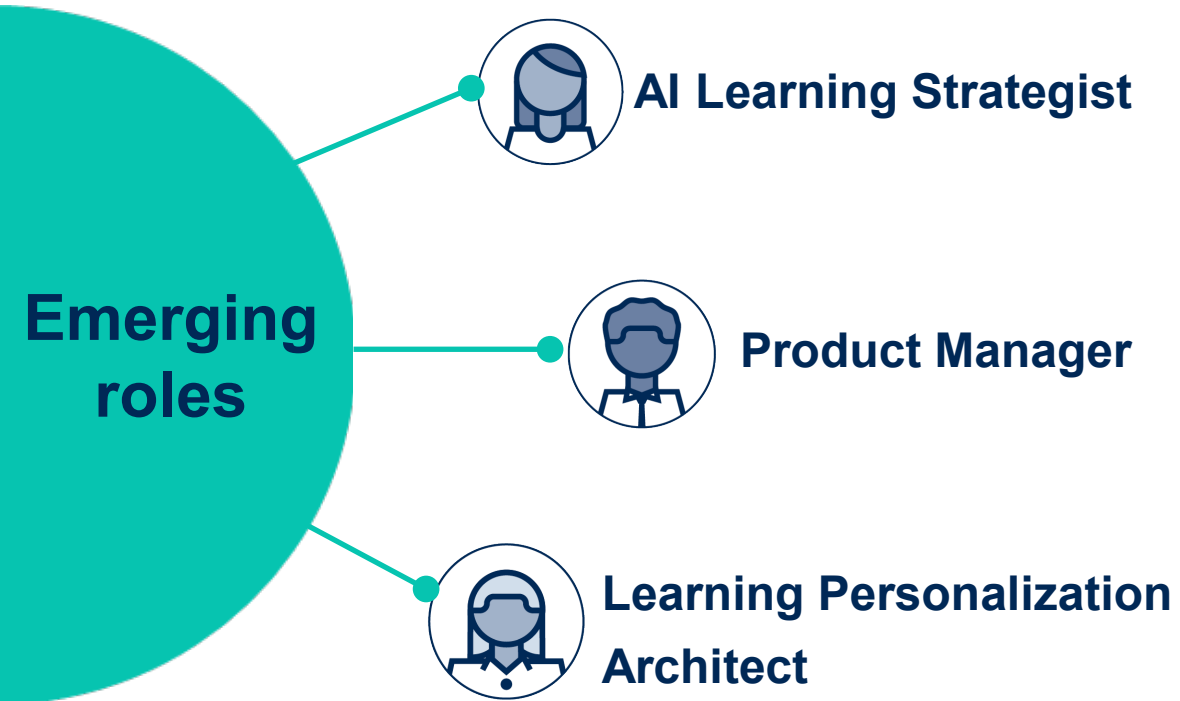
Question: Please indicate the extent to which your organization is currently using or planning to use Generative AI for the following L&D activities in the next two years. Percentages may differ due to rounding off.

* Small sample size, use as directional in nature

Source: Gartner

844395

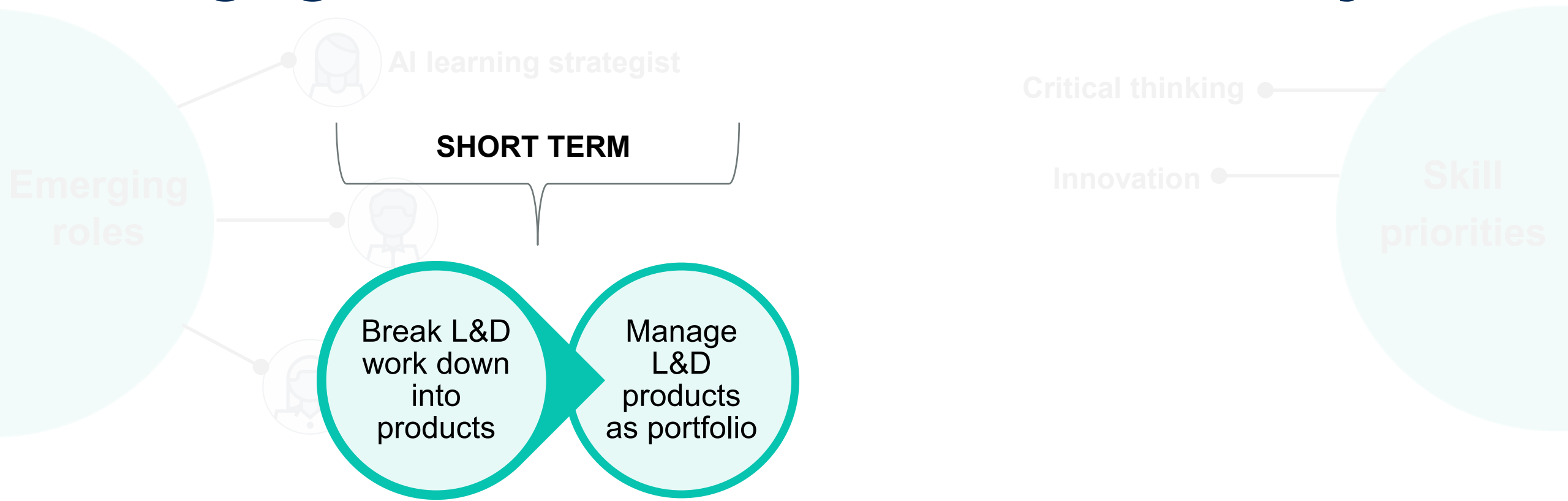
AI Disrupts L&D Roles



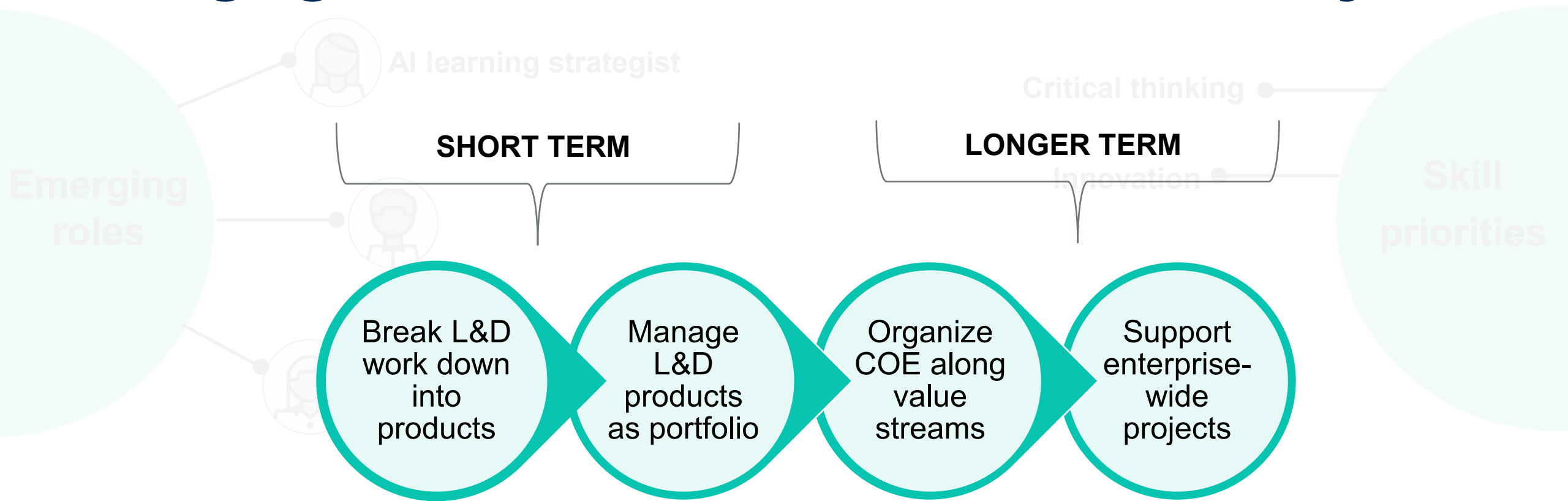
Refocus on L&D Skills Priorities



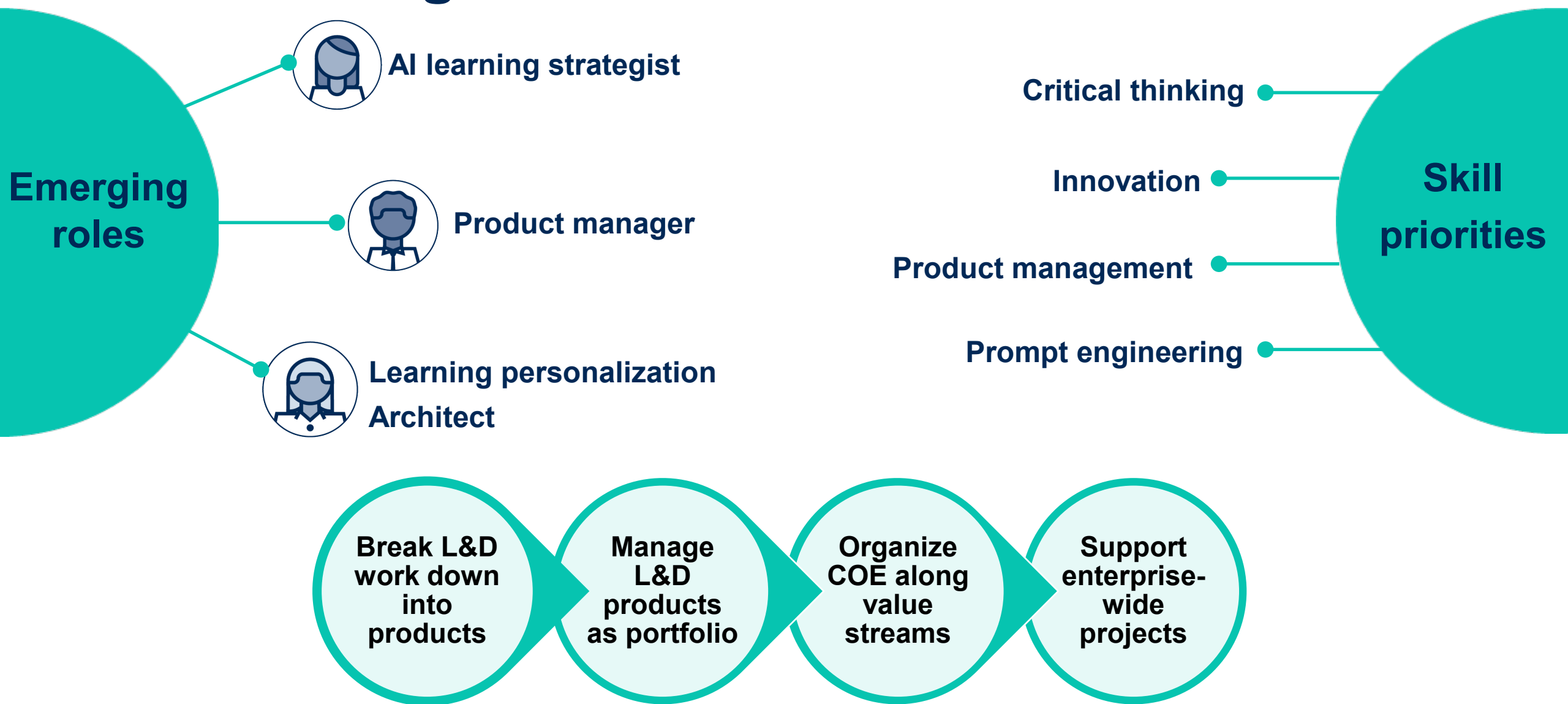
Emerging L&D Structure and Service Delivery



Emerging L&D Structure and Service Delivery



Reset and Right-Size L&D



Reset and Right-Size L&D for the AI-era

Questions for Strategic Planning



What L&D processes should be replaced, augmented, or automated?



How must we change our products and service delivery given new capabilities and demands?

Precise **Skills** **Data** Becomes a Business Mandate

Business Expects Insightful Skills Data to Inform Talent Strategy

39% of core skills are expected to change in the next 5 years

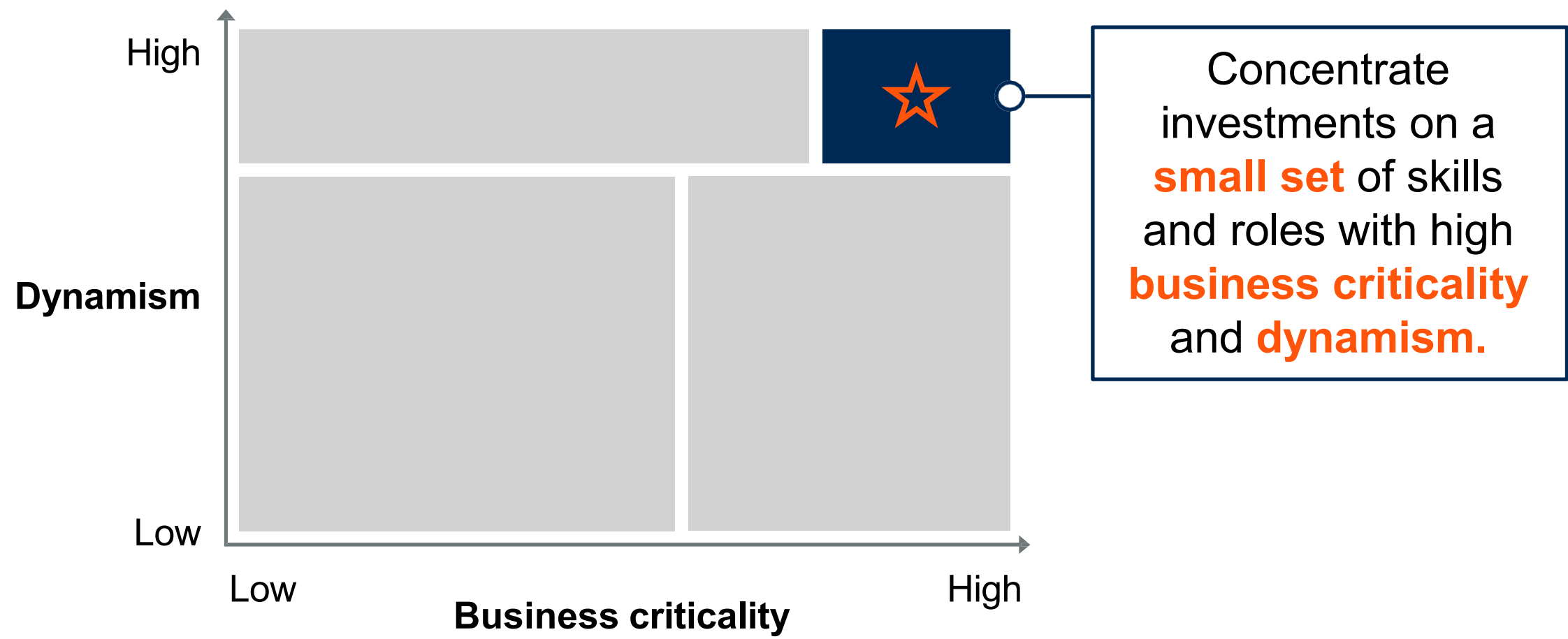


Business Leader

- 1** What skills do we need?
- 2** What skills do we have?
- 3** How do we know if we're closing the gap?

Default:
**Assess everything,
everywhere, all at once.**

Prioritize Skills Intelligence



Source: Gartner

**Assess business critical
skills where it matters
most for maximum impact.**

Questions to Determine Your Skills Assessment Approach

Utility

How will you use this data?

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Speed

Does this approach keep up with the pace of skills change?

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What level of confidence do you need in your skills assessments?

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What level of confidence do you need in your skills assessments?

Technology

What financial resources and technology do you have to support a skills assessment?

Verify Select Skills with Multi-Layered Assessment

4Silver*

1

Employee self-assessment

2

HRM evidence validation

3

Manager or SME quality check

Employee A's skill profile

Foundational skills
Select all that apply

☐ Branding
☐ Writing
☐ AI literacy
☐ ...

Current Proficiency
Select for each skill

☐ Beginner
☐ Intermediate
☐ Advanced
☐ Expert

Development Interests
Select for each skill

☐ Branding
☐ Writing
☐ AI Literacy
☐ ...

Evidence categories

Work history

Upload supporting data

⚠

Feedback

Upload supporting data

✓

Certifications

Upload supporting data

✓

HRM recency status

Quality check: rate proficiency (out of 1-100 scale)

Beginner

Intermediate

Advanced

Expert

*Pseudonym

Source: Adapted from FourSilver*

Employees' Verified Skills Support Strategic Decision Making

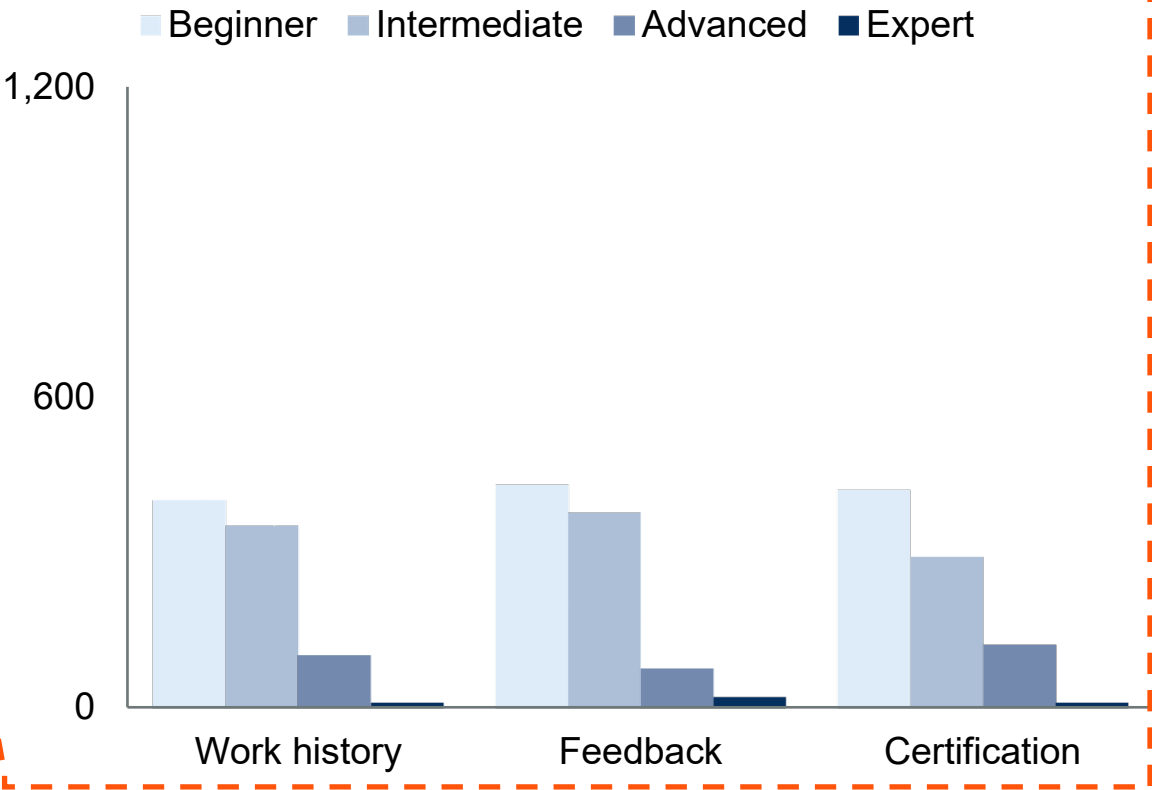


Presence of foundational skills
in the marketing function

Less presence More presence

	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced	Expert
Branding				
Writing				
AI Literacy				
...				

Number of employees with **AI literacy experience**, by evidence category



n = 1,000 (illustrative sample)

*Psuedonym
Source: Adapted from FourSilver*



**Assess business
critical skills where
it matters most**

Questions for Strategic Planning



For which critical roles or dynamic jobs does the business expect quality skills intelligence?



Where can we deliver the most strategic value to the business with skills assessment data?

L&D Accelerates Efforts to Build Change Ready Leaders

Leaders and Managers Are Not Change Ready



69% of HR leaders agree
leaders and managers are not
equipped to lead change.

n = 570 HR Leaders

Source: 2026 Gartner HR Priorities Survey

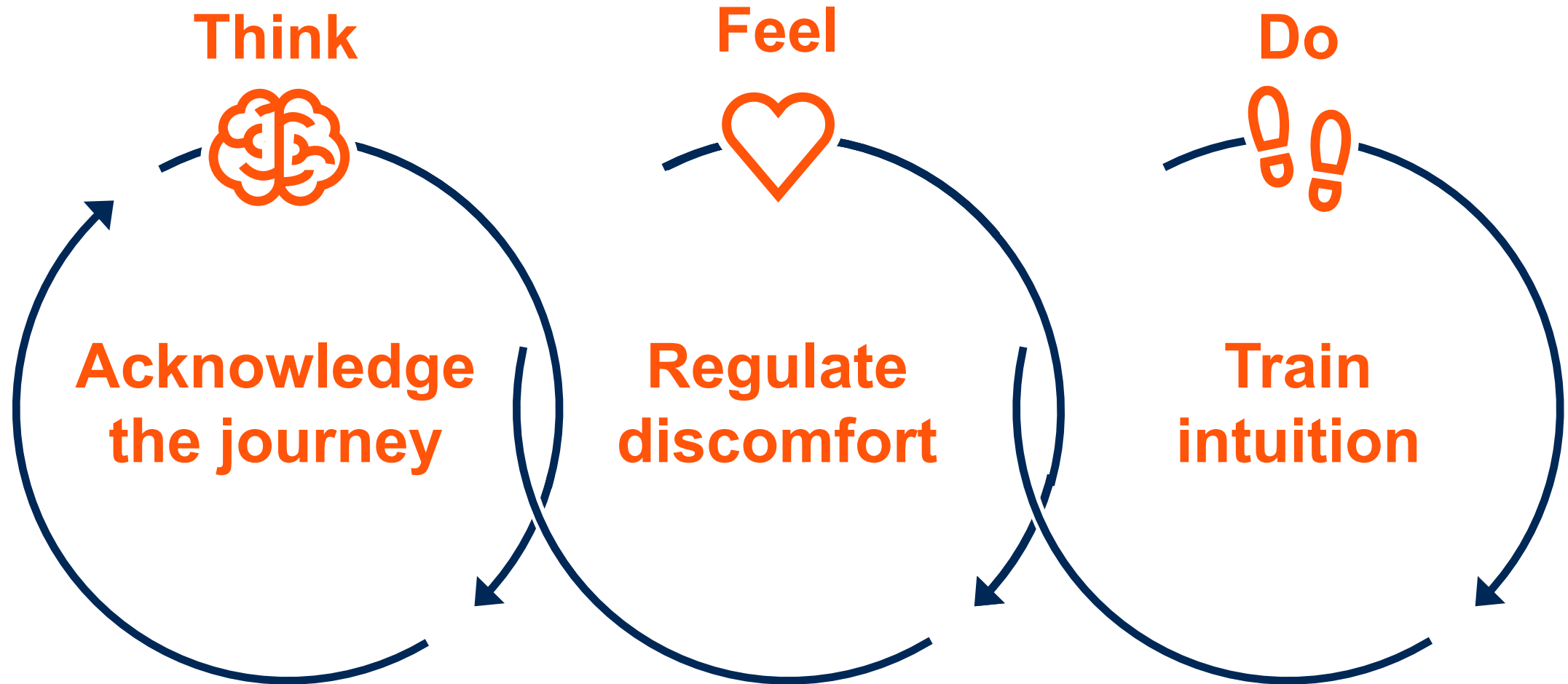
Q: "Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree that the listed items will be barriers to successfully executing on your goals for Leader & Manager Development: Our leaders and managers aren't equipped to lead change."

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Reinvent Change Leadership: Routinize Change



Source: Gartner

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Change Reflex:
A **core skill** that is applicable to
multiple change scenarios,
practiced with enough
repetition to **become intuitive.**

Core Change Skills for All Change Types

Likelihood of Achieving Healthy Change Adoption When Specific Reflexes are Present



n = 2,817 Employees

Source: 2025 Gartner Change Leadership Employee Survey

Note: Presence of reflex is a calculation that combines the employees' effectiveness at the skill, their opportunity to practice the skill in the past year and their reported feeling that applying the skill feels second nature. When all three elements are present, an employee is said to have that reflex.

Coach Change Skills During Micro-Moments



HR defines
general purpose
change skills

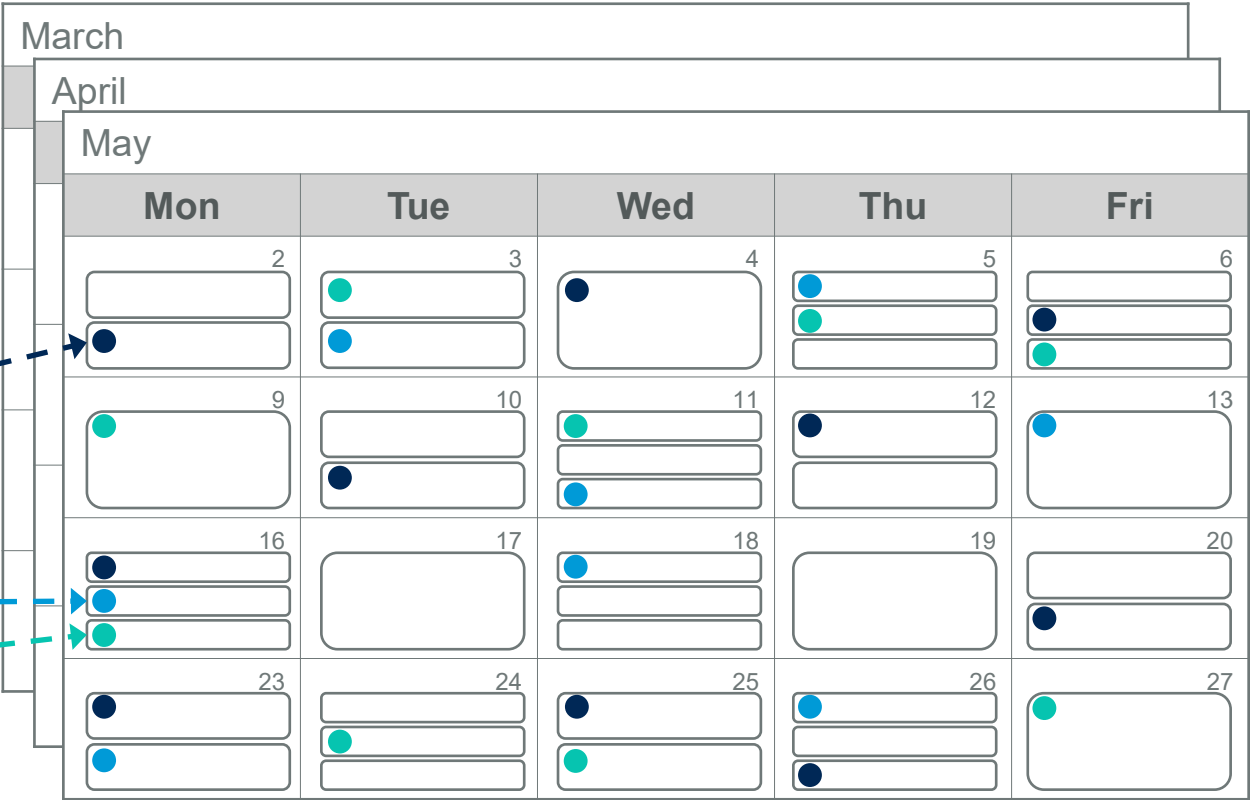
- Understanding context my business operates in

- Skill 2
- Skill 3

Leaders identify
micro-moments for
employees to practice
change skills

- Lead lunch & learn for **AI's impact on our business**

- Moment 2
- Moment 3



Source: Adapted from Jack Henry



Upskill leaders to **routinize change**

Questions for Strategic Planning



How can we adapt our leadership development programs to equip leaders to routinize change?



How can we support leaders to coach and develop employees to build change reflexes?

Automation and AI Erode Entry Level Learning



Early career stepping stones ...



....are disappearing



Erosion of repetitive, low risk tasks that helped employees learn by doing.



Business demand for complex skills, sooner.



**Matt Beane, Author
of 'The Skill Code'**

Source: Gartner Talent Angle Podcast: Modernizing L&D in the Age of Intelligent Machines with Matt Beane

Challenge + Complexity + Connection



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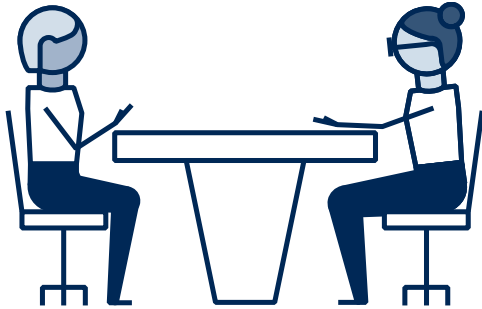
Redesign Skill Development for Early Career Employees

- ✓ **Discover** where traditional skill building is breaking down
- ✓ **Develop** learning opportunities that reintroduce the 3Cs
- ✓ **Deploy** scalable solutions using both human expertise and AI

Scale Coaching to Develop Complex Skills



Specialized leadership coaches for a select few



One-on-one coaching with leadership coaches

Source: Adapted From Network Rail

Scale Coaching to Develop Complex Skills



- 1 Expand and develop pool of coaches by establishing **minimum viable qualifications** and ongoing commitment.
- 2 Enable **learner-led matching** to foster trust in coaching relationships.

Qualified Internal Coaches at Scale



Peer Coaches

Use Digital Twins to Scale Access to Expertise



genpact

**Scale access to
expertise to
accelerate learning.**

Questions for Strategic Planning



How can we redesign early career development to replace lost foundational learning opportunities and build readiness for complex work?



What scalable solutions can we implement to ensure early career talent has access to expert guidance and feedback?

Key Takeaways for 2026 L&D Trends

**AI forces L&D to
reinvent itself**

Reset and Right-Size
L&D for the AI-era.

**Precise skills data
becomes a
business mandate**

Assess business
critical skills where it
matters most.

**L&D accelerates
efforts to build
change
ready leaders**

Upskill leaders to
routinize change.

**Automation and AI
erode entry-level
learning**

Scale access to
expertise to
accelerate learning.

Summary of Strategic Planning Questions

AI forces L&D to reinvent itself

- What L&D processes should be replaced, augmented, or automated?
- How must L&D products and service delivery change given new capabilities and demands?

Precise skills data becomes a business mandate

- For which critical roles or dynamic jobs does the business expect quality skills intelligence?
- Where can we deliver the most strategic value to the business with skills assessment data?

L&D accelerates efforts to build change ready leaders

- How can we adapt our leadership development programs to equip leaders to routinize change?
- How can we support leaders to coach and develop employees to build change reflexes?

Automation and AI erode entry-level learning

- How can we redesign early career development to replace lost foundational learning opportunities and build readiness for complex work?
- What scalable solutions can we implement to ensure early career talent has access to expert guidance and feedback?

Recommended Gartner Research

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- 🔍 [**Trends Shaping Learning and Development in 2026**](#)
Lee-Anne Vallée , Rebecca Burton
- 🔍 [**Case Study: Foundational Skills Strategy to Close Skills Gaps**](#)
Debangana Ray and Meaghan Kelly
- 🔍 [**Podcast: Modernizing L&D in the Age of Intelligent Machines With Matt Beane**](#)
Caroline Ogawa, Alex Chertoff, Kelly Armstrong
- 🔍 [**Executive Insight Series: Reinventing Change Leadership**](#)
Kayla Velnoskey, Ingrid Laman, KaJaiyaiu Hopkins, Kate McLaren-Poole



Thank you!