

WE LEARN

# # HUMAN SKILLS MATTER

Why are the skills that matter most the ones we measure least?



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everyone agrees human skills matter.

Employers rank creativity, resilience, and curiosity among the most important capabilities for the next five years. Workers say they want help building them. Nearly 80% of employers globally say reskilling is critical to their business strategy. (World Economic Forum, *Future of Jobs Report 2025*)

So there's no awareness problem here. The conversation has been had. The reports have been read. The head-nodding is universal.

And yet....

Most organizations don't name these skills in job postings, measure them in performance reviews, or reward them in promotions.

The gap isn't about what people believe. It's about what organizations actually do. And when you look closely at how most learning functions operate, you start to see why that gap is so persistent.

**This ebook is about where that gap lives and what to do about it.**

If you've read our **Learning is Human ebook**, you know our perspective: connection is what drives better learning outcomes. Workers want human support, mentors, practice in safe spaces. They're not getting enough of it. This piece picks up where that one leaves off. It asks a harder question: if we all agree this matters, what's standing in the way?

## SECTION 1

# Valued but *INVISIBLE*

Creative thinking is the skill workers value most across sectors, company sizes, and regions. That finding comes from the [World Economic Forum's \(WEF\) New Economy Skills report](#), which analyzed data from education, industry, and workforce technology providers worldwide.

Here's what makes that finding sting: creative thinking barely registers in hiring decisions or promotion criteria.

**Only 72% of US job postings mention even one human skill.**

In supply chain and transport, fewer than half do. Curiosity and lifelong learning — which employers consistently say is critical for the future — is the weakest skill across every global region the WEF measured. It barely shows up in job descriptions. It's rarely recognized in the workplace. (WEF, *New Economy Skills*, 2025)



But when peers do recognize creative thinking in a colleague, they assign it the highest value of any skill. (WEF, *New Economy Skills*, 2025) People see the worth. The systems around them don't.

This is the contradiction at the center of the conversation. We say these skills drive performance. We hire without naming them. We develop without measuring them. We promote without rewarding them.

SECTION 2

# What we mean by

# HUMAN SKILLS

When we say "human skills," we mean the capabilities that depend on human judgment, context, and lived experience — the ones that resist automation.

The *WEF's New Economy Skills* report organizes them into four areas:



**Creativity and problem solving:** creative, analytical, and systems thinking



**Emotional intelligence:** resilience, motivation, self-awareness, flexibility



**Learning and growth:** curiosity, lifelong learning, mentoring, coaching



**Collaboration and communication:** empathy, active listening, leadership

These go well beyond what most people picture when they hear "soft skills." Analytical thinking and systems thinking live here too. What connects them: they all take real practice and human interaction to develop.

## Human skills don't *MAINTAIN THEMSELVES*

When organizations don't see these skills, they don't invest in them. And without investment, the skills don't hold.

There's a comforting idea in L&D that human skills, once built, stick around. People call them "durable." The word implies permanence, something you develop once and carry forward.

The data tells a different story.

When the pandemic stripped away the conditions human skills need to grow (regular practice, collaboration, feedback, connection to other people) those skills declined across the board. By 2025, not a single one had fully recovered to pre-2019 levels. (WEF, New Economy Skills, 2025) That's five years of erosion without full recovery.

Building these capabilities also takes longer than most organizations budget for. The majority of people need months of sustained, deliberate practice to reach proficiency. Only about a



quarter make meaningful progress within weeks. (WEF, New Economy Skills, 2025)

And the declines weren't evenly distributed. Individual contributors, the people doing most of the actual work, lost the most ground. Senior leaders held steadier because they had access to coaching, structured programs, and feedback loops. Development resources disproportionately flow upward. The people most exposed to skill erosion get the least support.

Think about what that means for your organization. If your development budget concentrates on leadership tiers, the people carrying out the day-to-day work — the ones whose creativity, resilience, and collaboration you depend on — are the ones declining fastest.

**"Durable" is a dangerous word when it becomes a reason to stop investing.**

## SECTION 4

# What's getting *IN THE WAY*

Most L&D teams care deeply about this. They work hard. They build good programs. The problem isn't effort. It's what's underneath the effort.

When we surveyed 118 L&D leaders and asked them to assess their own maturity across six dimensions, over 80% landed at Reactive or Operational levels. ([WeLearn Learning Strategy Benchmarking Report, 2026](#)). These are teams that have moved past pure compliance. They're thinking about strategy, engagement, impact. But they haven't connected the work to business outcomes in ways they can prove.

Here's what shows up again and again. These are L&D-wide challenges, but human skills feel them first.



1

**Content gets built. Strategy doesn't.**

Content and experience design is where most energy goes and where scores are highest. Teams create engaging, multi-format learning. But a defined content strategy? A taxonomy that connects learning to business-critical skills? That lags far behind. Organizations build strong individual pieces without a system connecting them to anything.

Having a documented learning strategy makes a measurable difference. In our data, organizations with one score significantly higher across every dimension. Organizations with strategies "in development" score closer to those with nothing at all. The document isn't the point. The discipline it creates is. You have to name priorities. Define who decides what. Agree on how you'll know if it worked. Half-finished doesn't get you there.

2

**Metrics get reported. Decisions don't**

**change.** Teams communicate data to leadership. But does that data actually change what gets built next? Rarely. Tying learning outcomes to business impact is the single strongest predictor of overall maturity in our data. Stronger than content quality. Stronger than technology adoption. When you can show what moved, you earn trust. When you earn trust, you get investment. When you get investment, you build capability. Teams stuck counting completions can't enter that cycle.

3

**Nobody owns the decisions.**

Governance has the widest variation of any dimension we measured. Some organizations have real structures — cross-functional bodies, clear decision rights, regular reviews. Many have nothing. Without governance, priorities reset every time leadership attention drifts. Investments scatter. Progress doesn't compound.

None of this is about budget. It's about infrastructure. And without it, human skills are the easiest to deprioritize — they're harder to define, harder to measure, and the first to slip when systems aren't holding them in place.

## SECTION 5

# AI makes this *MORE URGENT*

AI will change parts of learning. It already has: faster content creation, personalized pathways, always-on availability. For routine cognitive tasks, statistical reasoning, and technical writing, the transformation potential is significant and real.

But for the skills that matter most to how organizations actually perform — creativity, empathy, resilience, leadership, curiosity — AI plays a supporting role. These are the skills least likely to be replaced or fundamentally changed by automation. (WEF, *New Economy Skills, 2025*) They depend on judgment. Trust. Lived experience. Things that don't come from a model.

So there's a choice to make. You can push toward AI-generated content and faster production. Or you can get the human infrastructure right first (the strategy, measurement, and people development) and bring AI in where it genuinely helps.

In our benchmarking data, AI readiness scored lowest of all 30 questions we asked. ([WeLearn Learning Strategy Benchmarking Report, 2026](#)). This isn't a few organizations falling behind. Almost everyone is in the same place. Most L&D teams haven't built the data foundation that smart AI adoption requires — clean learner data, integration across systems, a roadmap for what comes next.

AI is useful. But adopting it before you have done the foundational work doesn't save time. Rather, it adds risk.



## What the organizations getting this right do

There's no single playbook, but patterns do show up. What sets them apart isn't that they've solved L&D. It's that human skills get the same attention as everything else.

Successful organizations start with people before content and platforms. They figure out which human capabilities their workforce actually needs to grow, and what the business needs to change. Then they design learning that serves both.

They measure outcomes. They know which business metric a creativity or resilience program was supposed to move. They track whether it moved. They use that data to decide what to build next.

They build governance that holds. Someone owns the decisions about where learning investment goes. Those decisions follow criteria. Priorities survive leadership changes because they're embedded in structures, not dependent on personalities.

They get leaders involved as people who visibly work on their own leadership, communication, curiosity. Who show up to programs. Who talk about what they're working on. Because culture follows behavior. Always.



The WEF report highlights examples across contexts that reinforce these patterns. Universities have redesigned education around real-world competency assessments, where students prove what they can do, not just what they know. Organizations have built safe, repeatable practice environments for leadership and communication skills. Multi-year coaching programs for school principals in South Africa produced measurable performance gains that exceeded regional averages. The settings differ. The principle is the same: treat human skills with the same rigor you'd give any other business priority.

None of this requires a massive transformation. It requires discipline. Clarity about what you're building toward. And the willingness to find out whether you got there.

SECTION 7

# Where this leaves you

The gap isn't awareness. Everyone agrees human skills matter.

The gap is between agreeing and building for it. With strategy.  
With measurement. With governance. With leaders who participate.

You probably don't need to do more. It might be as simple as connecting what you're already doing to the outcomes that count, and then proving it.

That's the work.



## *BRING THIS TO YOUR TEAM.*

Share this with your leadership and ask: how does our organization actually name, develop, and measure human skills? Where are the gaps between what we say matters and what our systems support?

The conversation is where it starts.

# Resources

[Learning is Human](#) – WeLearn ebook on why human connection drives better learning outcomes [↓](#)

[New Economy Skills: Unlocking the Human Advantage](#) – World Economic Forum (December 2025) [↓](#)

[Learning Strategy Benchmarking Data Report](#) – WeLearn (January 2026) [↓](#)

[WeLearn Learning Strategy Scorecard](#) – self-assessment across six dimensions of L&D maturity [↓](#)



## AUTHORS



**Roberta Gogos**

Roberta is a HR Industry Go-to-market Leader and Lighthouse Research and Advisory Analyst.

She has been behind the scenes at market-leading companies to help them shift market narrative, influence buyer behavior and expand into new markets. She is known for her ability to turn strategic vision into measurable execution through positioning, storytelling, and operational rigor.

Since 2024, Roberta has been focused on industry research used by investors, corporates and vendors to assess technologies and inform M&A decisions, improve GTM, enable sales, inform product development, and develop thought leadership.

Nearly 20 years of experience in marketing, positioning, and strategy, with 10+ years of that being directly related to talent and the workforce.

[Connect with Roberta on LinkedIn](#)



**Sean Stowers**

Sean is the Founder, CLO, and CEO of WeLearn, a learning solutions company dedicated to elevating individuals and organizations through human-centered workforce education.

Sean's career spans corporate learning, workforce development, and strategic consulting. He started at IBM Learning Services, then moved into leadership at a global education consulting firm, where he led award-winning training programs. He has worked with global organizations to design impactful learning strategies that drive business results.

Driven by a passion for connection and engagement, he launched WeLearn to redefine corporate learning with modern solutions. A trusted thought partner, Sean helps organizations implement learning strategies that support business transformation. He collaborates with clients on content development standards, AI adoption, and L&D governance.

[Connect with Sean on LinkedIn](#)

# WELEARN

**We believe learning is  
human — and we build it that way.**

WeLearn is a learning services, consulting, and custom content partner.  
We work alongside you to create solutions grounded in strategy, shaped by  
culture, and designed for real behavior change.

Based in Chicago, WeLearn serves global corporations including  
Fortune 500 companies.

Learn more at: [www.welearnls.com](http://www.welearnls.com)