

W E L E A R N

# L&D's guide to AI adoption

Assessing your organization and workforce



BASED ON QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WITH  
L&D LEADERS THROUGHOUT 2025

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

# We spent 2025 listening

Through roundtables, interviews, and monthly working sessions with learning and development leaders across industries, we heard the same patterns again and again. How people talk about AI. What holds them back. What moves them forward.

This guide captures what we learned. The personas mentioned here come directly from how fellow L&D professionals describe their own experience. We heard the same concerns, the same language, the same sticking points across every session.

Everyone brings something valuable to responsible AI adoption. The question is how to support each person so they can contribute fully.



## SECTION 1

# Why AI adoption stalls

Before we share what works, it helps to understand what does not. Three problems showed up in nearly every conversation:

## No foundation

Organizations rush to tools before building shared language, clear expectations, or trust. People do not know what they are allowed to do or what success looks like.

## Silos

Teams try things in isolation, nobody shares discoveries, tools multiply, quality varies and effort gets duplicated.

## Training without trust

Technical instruction happens, but nobody addresses the fear underneath. People worry about making mistakes, looking foolish, or losing their jobs. Until those concerns are acknowledged, training alone will not move anyone.

L&D can solve these problems. You already know how to translate strategy into behavior, how to build capability and confidence together. AI adoption needs that same approach.

## SECTION 2

# What the research showed

Understanding the problems was the first step. Next was identifying patterns that point toward solutions. When we analyzed the conversations, several patterns stood out.



Reactions to AI vary. Some people worry it will replace them. Others cannot wait to start.



Clarity correlates with action. People who knew which tools were approved, what data was off limits, and what good use looked like moved forward.



The same personas appear across industries. Role and seniority matter less than how someone approaches AI.



Support drives maturity. In organizations where people felt protected, even cautious employees moved quickly. In environments without pressure, people moved on their own.

## SECTION 3

# Five principles that emerged

These findings pointed to a set of principles that came up repeatedly in our conversations. They form the foundation for everything that follows in this guide.

## 1 Start with meaning.

People engage when AI connects to their work and their identity. Tool training without purpose falls flat.

## 2 Prompting is a literacy.

Few teams have taught anyone what a good prompt looks like. This gap creates uneven results and unnecessary frustration.

## 3 Governance should enable.

Risk management matters, but progress dies when safety becomes a wall. The goal is clear boundaries that let people move confidently.

## 4 Community scales faster than announcements.

Peer learning and visible wins change culture. People trust someone who has figured something out.

## 5 AI should make people feel stronger.

The progress that lasts makes people feel more capable, not more replaceable. When AI feels like a threat, people avoid it.

## SECTION 4

# Layers of AI readiness

With these principles in mind, how do you actually assess where your organization stands? AI readiness is not one thing. It operates on three layers, and you need clarity on all of them:

## Systems layer

Does your organization have the structures, policies, and decision-making principles for responsible AI use? This includes governance, values alignment, and clarity about expectations.

Organizational maturity (5 levels)

## Team layers

What behavioral patterns exist in your groups? Different approaches to AI typically work alongside each other. Understanding the mix matters.

Persona distribution

## Individual layer

How do people feel? Emotional signals shape behavior more than technical training. Fear, curiosity, skepticism, confidence, these all determine how people engage.

Emotional readiness

## The diagnostic question is:

### Where are we right now?

- Structurally.
- Behaviorally.
- Emotionally.

A complete picture across all three gives you something you can actually work with.

No organization is one thing. Most are a mix. Knowing that mix helps you design support that fits.



### Assessing your organization

Where are your systems?  
(5 maturity levels)



### Understanding your workforce

Where are your people?  
(6 personas)

## SECTION 5

# Assessing your organization

The systems layer deserves closer attention. Where does your organization fall on the AI maturity spectrum? Most fall into one of five levels:



- **Reactive**

AI use is isolated and tech-driven.  
The mindset: "We just need a tool."

- **Opportunistic**

AI is used for efficiency.  
The mindset: "Solve this quickly."

- **Aligned**

AI exploration ties to business goals.  
The mindset: "Let's be intentional."

- **Embedded**

Ethics are integrated at every stage.  
The mindset: "We scale safely."

- **Human-Centric**

AI is co-designed with stakeholders.  
The mindset: "People and performance together."

Knowing where your organization sits helps you set realistic expectations for what comes next.

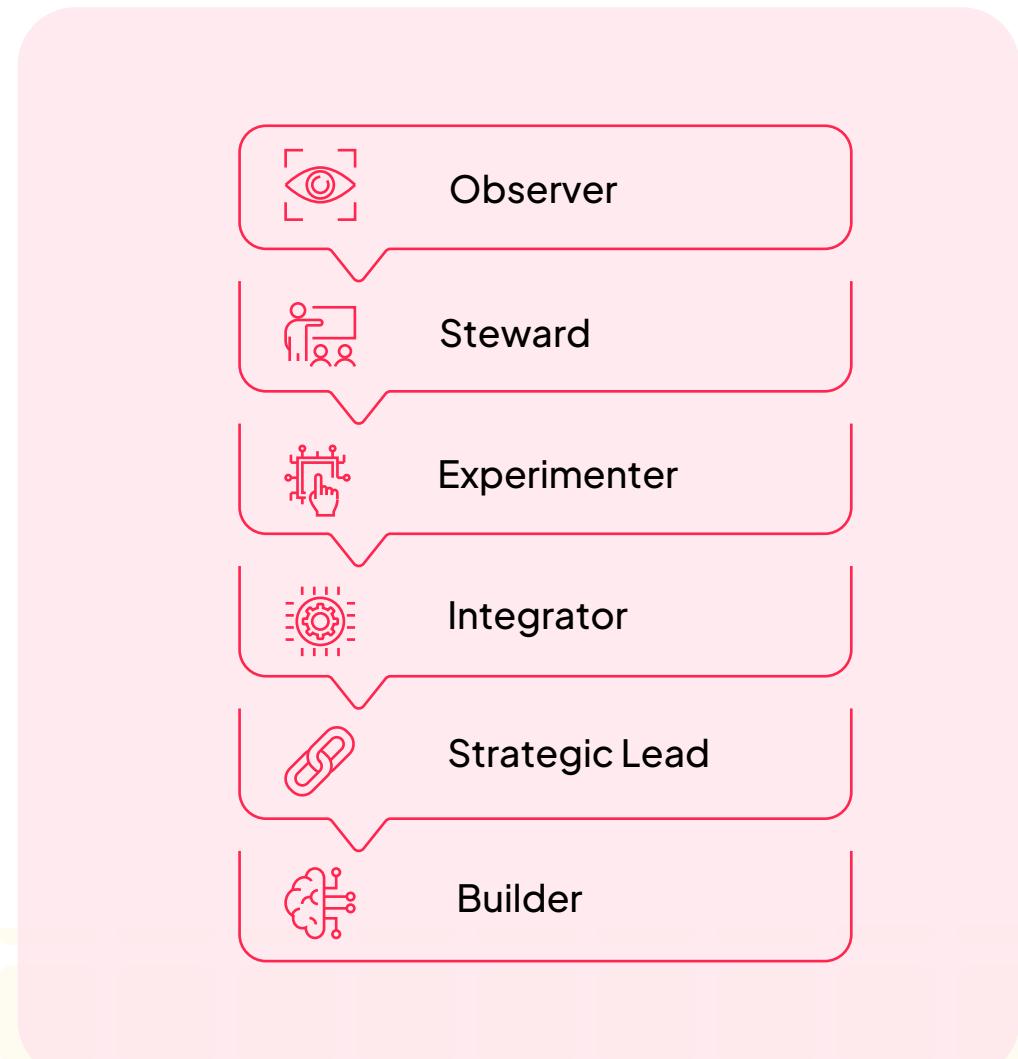
## SECTION 6

# Understanding your workforce

With organizational context established, the next step is understanding how people across your workforce approach AI.

The research revealed six distinct behavioral patterns. We call them personas — not to put people in boxes, but to give us a shared language for understanding where someone is and what they need.

People do not move in a straight line. They enter at different points depending on role, experience, and context. The ladder shows progression in confidence and influence, not a strict hierarchy.



## PERSONAS



## Persona 1: Observer

(aka the AI Clarity Seeker)

Often the largest group, also the most overlooked. They are not resistant, but they are waiting for someone to show them it is safe to begin. They feel hesitant, self-protective, and relieved when guidance is concrete.

*"I do not know what I do not know yet. I need to understand before I take a risk."*



### How to spot them:

Asking lots of clarifying questions before trying anything. Waiting for someone else to go first. Saying things like "I don't want to break anything" or "what if I do it wrong?" Sticking to templates. Only using tools after explicit approval.

### What they need:

- A low-stakes environment.
- Simple prompts and guided workflows.
- Clear examples of acceptable use.
- Hands-on demos with peer support.
- Early wins where stakes are low.
- Small doses and repetition over time.

### Where they can start:

- Summarize meeting notes.
- Rewrite an email for clarity.
- Generate a first draft outline.
- Create quiz questions from existing content.

### Conversations to have:

With their manager about expectations. With IT about approved tools. With peers who have started using AI.



## Persona 2: Steward

(aka the AI Alignment Seeker)

Your organization's conscience. They are not trying to block progress, they are trying to protect against moving too fast without guardrails. They feel protective, responsible, and comfortable when boundaries are defined.

*"I believe in AI as long as we are not exposed to risk."*



### How to spot them:

Asking "is this allowed?" and "what happens to the data?" Flagging risks others overlook. Referencing compliance and policy in discussions. Pushing back on "just try it" with questions about accuracy and guardrails. Respected by peers for their caution.

### What they need:

- Policies in plain language with real examples.
- Approved tools and checklists.
- Transparency about model limitations.
- Opportunities to co-create policies.
- A seat at the table when guidelines are designed.

### Where they can start:

- Review AI-generated content for accuracy.
- Create checklists for evaluating outputs.
- Document approved use cases.
- Build decision trees.

### Conversations to have:

With legal and compliance about policies. With IT about data handling. With leadership about their role in shaping guidelines.



## Persona 3: Experimenter

(aka the AI Capability Explorer)

Your organization's spark. They generate energy and momentum. The challenge is channeling it so it does not create chaos. They feel curious, energized, and validated when experimentation is celebrated.

*"Let me try it.  
I will learn what  
I can do by  
doing it."*



### How to spot them:

Already trying the new tool before it is announced. Sharing shortcuts and workarounds in meetings. Saying "I found a way to do this faster." Testing multiple approaches to see what works. Sometimes working outside official channels.

### What they need:

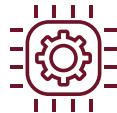
- Sanctioned spaces to explore.
- Prompt libraries.
- Clear boundaries.
- Formal opportunities to share findings.
- Coaching on responsible experimentation.

### Where they can start:

- Build prompt variations.
- Test multiple tools for the same task.
- Create templates others can adopt.
- Document what works.

### Conversations to have:

With Stewards about boundaries. With leadership about scaling discoveries. With peers about sharing findings.



## Persona 4: Integrator

(aka the AI Impact Connector)

They see what others miss. They notice how AI affects people, roles, and culture. Without them, organizations risk implementing AI in ways that undermine trust. They feel empathic, values-driven, and motivated by impact on people.

*“AI must help people, not harm them.”*



### How to spot them:

Asking "how will this affect people?" and "what about the team that has to use this?" Noticing resistance before others do. Raising concerns about fairness or inclusion. Adjusting AI outputs carefully for context. Trusted by peers as someone who speaks for the culture.

### What they need:

- Ethical frameworks with real scenarios.
- Clear messaging about what AI means for specific roles.
- Standards for human judgment.
- Opportunities to shape messaging.
- Inclusion in change management.

### Where they can start:

- Review outputs for bias.
- Create role-specific messages.
- Design feedback loops.
- Build trust into rollout communications.

### Conversations to have:

With leadership about values. With HR about workforce implications. With affected teams about concerns.



## Persona 5: Strategic Lead

(aka the AI Adoption Architect)

They bring order to complexity. They see the whole system and build structures that let everyone else succeed. They feel confident, logical, and energized when things come together.

*"We need structure, pathways, and measurement or nothing will stick."*



### How to spot them:

Asking "how does this scale?" and "how do we measure this?" Building frameworks before anyone asks. Connecting AI discussions back to business goals. Wanting alignment across teams before moving forward. Frustrated by fragmented efforts.

### What they need:

- Enterprise-wide frameworks.
- Clear policy principles.
- Champion networks.
- Metrics tied to outcomes.
- Authority to coordinate across functions.

### Where they can start:

- Design capability frameworks.
- Create role-based pathways.
- Build dashboards. Establish champion networks.

### Conversations to have:

With executives about strategy. With IT about standardization. With all persona groups about needs.



## Persona 6: Builder

(aka the AI Workflow Builder)

They have moved past exploration into construction. The question is whether the organization can keep up and learn from what they create. They feel confident, curious, and proud of what they build.

*“We have already built the future. Now let us bring others along.”*



### How to spot them:

Already built something others did not know was possible. Mentoring colleagues informally. Iterating rapidly on workflows. Asking for clearer pathways to share what they have created. Sometimes pushing boundaries faster than governance can keep up.

### What they need:

- Partnership with governance, not restriction.
- Visibility and recognition.
- Standards for sharing.
- Mentoring roles.
- Structured innovation channels.
- A seat at the strategy table.

### Where they can start:

- Create reusable workflows.
- Develop pattern libraries.
- Mentor others.
- Evaluate new tools.

### Conversations to have:

With Strategic Leads about scaling. With governance about enabling innovation. With earlier-stage personas about knowledge transfer.

## SECTION 7

# How to use this guide

## 1 For yourself:

Notice which persona sounds most like you. Think about what conditions help you engage confidently with AI. Share your persona with your team.

## 2 For your team:

Map personas across your group. Notice concentration and gaps. Design support that fits the actual distribution.

## 3 For your organization:

Coach each persona differently. Stop treating AI enablement as one-size-fits-all. Build pathways that respect where people start.

## 4 If you want help:

WeLearn offers diagnostic workshops, persona mapping, pathway design, and ongoing support.



# Recommended reading on AI

[The Human Edge: Leading With Values In the Age of AI](#) 

[The Human Side of AI Adoption: A Guide for L&D Leaders](#) 

[Human First: L&D's Role in AI Governance](#) 

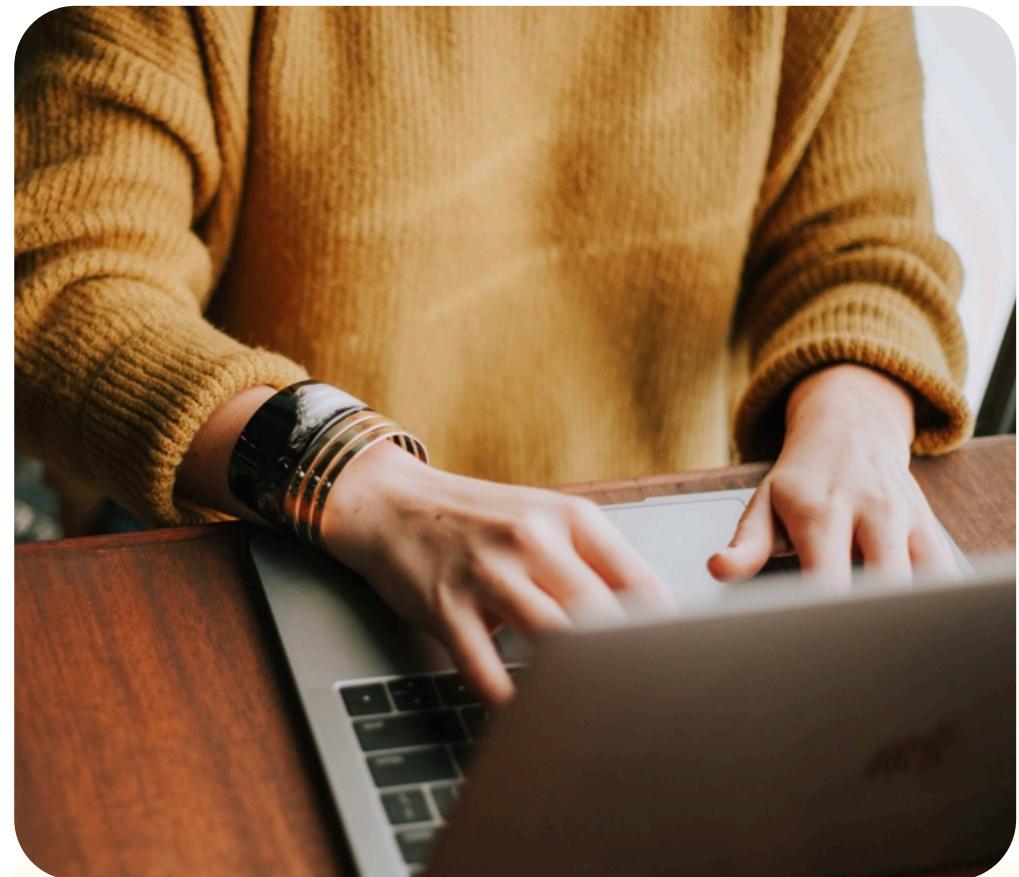
[Shaping the Human Promise of AI: L&D's Role in a New EVP](#) 



# About the research

This guide comes from qualitative research collected across 2025 through roundtables, interviews, and working sessions with L&D leaders, managers, and practitioners across industries. The personas and recommendations reflect behavioral patterns and readiness signals that emerged consistently across all groups.

This is a synthesis of what we heard — representing how peers across our industry actually engage with AI in their roles and organizations.



## 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](#)



## Loren Sanders

Loren brings two decades of expertise in Healthcare, HR, and L&D as a strategy consulting partner at WeLearn Learning Services. Known as a "Professional Synergist," she specializes in organizational effectiveness, talent acquisition, and leadership development.

Her book, *Empathy is Not a Weakness and other stories from the edge*, has earned wide recognition. Loren focuses on eliminating toxic workplace leadership and building cultures rooted in inclusivity and psychological safety. She speaks at conferences nationwide, combining empathy with performance-driven strategies.

Loren earned a BA in Community Health Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and an MBA in Organizational Behavior from Lake Forest Graduate School of Management. She owns Roxlo Coaching and Consulting and teaches as an adjunct instructor at her alma mater.

[Connect with Loren on LinkedIn](#)

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