

FREE · PRINTABLE COMPANION · L&D ESSENTIALS

The Complete Guide on Paper

A printable companion to learning & development — what it is, what it isn't, the frameworks that matter, and a 90-day plan you can actually follow.

Definitions & vocabulary	Core frameworks summary
L&D vs Training explainer	Full 90-day reading plan

Inside the toolkit: a printable companion covering definitions, frameworks, the L&D vs training explainer, plus the full 90-day reading plan. Free.

Published by **Global Skill Development Council (GSDC)**

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What's inside

Twenty pages, four parts. Read it cover-to-cover in an hour, or jump to the section you need today.

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Tip: if you only have 15 minutes, read pages 5, 12, and the worksheet on page 19.

What is Learning & Development?

Learning & Development (L&D) is the organisational function responsible for helping people build the skills, knowledge, and behaviours their roles — and their organisations — require, today and tomorrow. It sits inside HR but increasingly partners directly with business leaders.

A working definition

L&D in one sentence

L&D is the systematic effort to close the gap between the capabilities an organisation has and the capabilities it needs — through learning experiences, on-the-job practice, coaching, and culture.

Three components every L&D; function owns

- **Capability strategy** — what skills the business needs, by when, in which roles.
- **Learning solutions** — programmes, courses, coaching, content, and platforms that build those skills.
- **Learning culture** — the norms, signals, and habits that make ongoing learning natural at work.

What L&D; is *not*

- It's not just training — that's one tool among many (see page 5).
- It's not the LMS — the platform is plumbing; L&D is the work that flows through it.
- It's not only “soft skills” — modern L&D spans technical, leadership, compliance, and craft.
- It's not a one-time event — capability building is continuous.

Who works in L&D;?

L&D Specialists, Instructional Designers, Trainers, Facilitators, LMS Administrators, Learning Experience Designers, Talent Development Partners, L&D Managers, and Heads of Learning. The function spans entry-level coordinators all the way up to Chief Learning Officers.

Why L&D matters now

L&D used to be a “nice to have.” It is now a board-level concern. Three forces have moved it from the periphery to the centre of how organisations win.

1. The skills half-life has collapsed

Technical and even role-defining skills now go stale in years, not decades. Companies that wait for the labour market to supply trained people are too slow. L&D bridges that gap internally.

2. AI is reshaping every role

From customer service to legal to engineering, AI is changing how work is done. L&D is the function that helps everyone — not just the technical teams — adapt to AI-augmented work.

3. Hybrid and distributed work broke classroom training

Pulling everyone into a room for a two-day workshop no longer works. Modern L&D is asynchronous, mobile, blended, and tied to the moment of need.

The business case in one paragraph

Why CEOs and CFOs now care

Strong L&D moves three things business leaders genuinely measure: time-to-competence for new hires, retention of high-performers, and the gap between strategy and execution. Each has a direct dollar value — which is why L&D budgets, when defended well, rarely get cut first.

Who benefits

For employees

- Higher pay through faster capability growth.
- More options inside the company — internal mobility.
- Confidence to take on stretch work.
- A sense of being invested in.

For the organisation

- Lower hiring cost — build vs buy.
- Better retention of top performers.
- Faster execution of strategy.
- Resilience when roles change.

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L&D vs Training — the explainer

The terms get used interchangeably, but they are not the same. Confusing them is the single most common mistake new L&D professionals make in interviews and in stakeholder meetings.

The difference in plain language

In one line

Training teaches a specific skill at a specific moment. **L&D** is the broader, ongoing discipline of building capability across an organisation — of which training is one tool.

Side-by-side

Dimension	Training	L&D
Scope	A defined skill or topic.	Whole-organisation capability over time.
Time horizon	A session, a day, a week.	Months, quarters, years.
Audience	Specific group with a specific need.	Multiple audiences and career stages.
Format	Mostly courses and workshops.	Programmes, coaching, projects, content, culture.
Success measure	Did the learner pass / score / complete?	Did capability and business outcomes improve?
Who owns it	Often a trainer or facilitator.	A function partnering with the whole business.
Typical question	“How do I run this training?”	“What's the capability strategy?”

So training is bad?

Not at all. Training is essential — it is one of the strongest tools in L&D's toolkit. The issue is when training is treated as *the only* tool. Real capability change usually needs training **plus** coaching, on-the-job practice, manager reinforcement, and reflection.

The L&D operating model

Strong L&D functions don't run on heroic effort. They run on a clear model: a set of repeatable processes for how learning is identified, designed, delivered, measured, and governed.

The 5 core processes

Process	What happens	Typical outputs
1. Diagnose	Identify capability gaps tied to business goals.	Capability map, learning needs analysis
2. Design	Translate gaps into the right learning solution.	Design blueprint, learning objectives
3. Deliver	Make learning happen — at scale, in flow.	Live sessions, modules, coaching, content
4. Measure	Show what changed — at learner and business level.	Kirkpatrick L1–L4, business KPIs
5. Govern	Manage budget, vendors, platforms, risk.	LMS admin, vendor SLAs, compliance

Where teams typically sit

- **Inside HR / People function** — most common; reports to CHRO or Head of People.
- **Inside Talent Management** — when L&D is bundled with performance, succession, and OD.
- **As a standalone function** — in larger enterprises, often with its own CLO.
- **Embedded in business units** — sales enablement, technical academies, and so on.

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Core vocabulary every L&D pro should know

The 25 terms below are the load-bearing words of the field. You don't need to memorise them — but you should recognise each one when it comes up.

Term	What it means
L&D / Learning & Development	The function responsible for building capability across an organisation.
Training	A focused intervention to build a specific skill in a specific audience.
Instructional Design (ID)	The craft of designing learning experiences against clear objectives.
Learning Objective	A specific, observable outcome a learner can achieve after a unit of learning.
Learning Pathway	A sequenced set of experiences tied to a role or skill.
Adult Learning Theory	Knowles' principles describing how adults learn differently from children.
ADDIE	Analysis · Design · Development · Implementation · Evaluation — the classic ID model.
SAM	Successive Approximation Model — agile, iterative alternative to ADDIE.
Bloom's Taxonomy	Six cognitive levels used to write learning objectives.
Kirkpatrick Model	Four-level model for evaluating training: Reaction, Learning, Behaviour, Results.
Phillips ROI	Extends Kirkpatrick with a fifth level — return on investment.
70-20-10	A heuristic for how adults develop: 70% experience, 20% exposure, 10% education.

Core vocabulary (continued)

Term	What it means
Microlearning	Short (2–7 min), focused learning units tied to one objective.
Blended Learning	A mix of two or more modalities (e.g. digital + live + on-the-job).
LMS	Learning Management System — the platform that stores, delivers, and tracks learning.
LXP	Learning Experience Platform — learner-centric discovery layer often on top of an LMS.
SCORM	Legacy standard for tracking course completion and basic scores.
xAPI (Tin Can)	Modern standard tracking any learning experience as “actor + verb + object.”
LRS	Learning Record Store — where xAPI statements live.
Competency Framework	Defines the skills, knowledge, and behaviours a role needs by level.
Capability	What an organisation can do well — the combined output of skills, processes, and tools.
Upskilling	Building new skills inside an existing role.
Reskilling	Building the skills needed to move to a different role.
Sales Enablement	L&D specifically aimed at making salespeople more effective.
Onboarding	The structured experience that turns a new hire into a productive contributor.

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Frameworks summary — design

Two design frameworks dominate practical L&D work. You don't have to choose between them — most modern teams use ideas from both.

ADDIE

Analysis · Design · Development · Implementation · Evaluation

ADDIE is the classic, linear instructional design model. Each phase has a clear input and output, which makes it easy to govern, audit, and scale. It's the lingua franca of L&D.

Use ADDIE when:

- Stakes are high and audit trail matters (compliance, safety, regulated industries).
- Multiple teams must coordinate against a stable plan.
- Content rarely changes after launch.

SAM (Successive Approximation Model)

Preparation · Iterative Design · Iterative Development

SAM, developed by Michael Allen, breaks learning design into short, rapid cycles of prototype → review → refine. Instead of a single big sign-off, stakeholders see many small drafts and steer the work as it goes.

Use SAM when:

- Requirements are fuzzy or changing fast.
- You can ship a v1 in 4–6 weeks instead of months.
- Stakeholders are available for frequent, short reviews.

Frameworks summary — measurement

If you can't measure learning, you can't defend its budget. Two models dominate this conversation.

Kirkpatrick's 4 Levels

Level	Question it answers	Sample measures
L1 · Reaction	Did learners find it relevant?	NPS, smile-sheet, surveys
L2 · Learning	Did they gain knowledge / skill?	Pre/post-tests, observation
L3 · Behaviour	Are they applying it on the job?	Manager check-ins, observation
L4 · Results	Did the business KPI improve?	Sales, errors, retention, NPS

Phillips ROI Methodology

Adds Level 5 — Return on Investment

Phillips extends Kirkpatrick with a fifth level: ROI. It also introduces *isolation techniques* to attribute results specifically to the learning, not other factors.

$$\text{ROI \%} = ((\text{Monetary benefits} - \text{Programme costs}) / \text{Programme costs}) \times 100$$

Practical rule of thumb

- **Every programme** should at minimum measure L1 and L2.
- **High-stakes programmes** (leadership, sales, compliance) need L3 and L4.
- **ROI (L5)** is worth the effort when the CFO is asking — not before.

Frameworks summary — learning theory & strategy

Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy)

Malcolm Knowles' six principles: adults need to know *why*, learn best when self-directed, bring rich experience, are ready when content is relevant, are problem-centred not subject-centred, and are mostly driven by internal motivation.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Cognitive level	Sample objective verbs
1 · Remember	list, recall, name, define
2 · Understand	describe, summarise, explain
3 · Apply	use, apply, demonstrate
4 · Analyse	compare, contrast, examine
5 · Evaluate	assess, critique, justify
6 · Create	design, build, propose

70-20-10

A useful heuristic — not a precise formula — for how adults actually develop: roughly 70% from challenging experience, 20% from exposure (coaching, mentoring, peers), 10% from formal education. Strong L&D plans design across all three, not just the 10%.

Competency Frameworks

A defined map of the skills, behaviours, and knowledge a role needs at each level of mastery. Used in hiring, development, performance, and learning design. The backbone of strategic L&D.

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The 12 capabilities of a modern L&D pro

Modern L&D is a blend of business partnering, design craft, technical fluency, and people skills. Strong professionals rate themselves honestly against the list below.

Capability	What strong looks like
1. Business partnering	Translating business problems into capability priorities.
2. Training needs analysis	Diagnosing the real gap — not the requested gap.
3. Instructional design	Designing learning that actually changes behaviour.
4. Facilitation	Running engaging live and virtual sessions.
5. Content creation	Writing, scripting, building modules and decks.
6. LMS / authoring tools	Hands-on fluency with at least one of each.
7. Learning measurement	Designing for L1–L4 from the start.
8. Programme management	Owning timelines, budgets, vendors, dependencies.
9. Stakeholder communication	Selling the why before the what.
10. Coaching	Helping individuals improve through dialogue, not lectures.
11. Data literacy	Reading dashboards; spotting signal vs noise.
12. Continuous self-learning	Staying current as the field evolves.

Self-rate honestly

Score yourself 1 (novice) to 5 (expert) on each. The fastest career growth comes from picking the two lowest-scored capabilities you actually care about — and investing 90 days into each.

Building a learning culture

A learning culture is one where ongoing growth is the norm, not the exception. You can't mandate it — you have to build it, one signal at a time.

The 6 signals that make or break learning culture

- 1. Senior leaders learn visibly.** When the CEO reads books, takes courses, and admits gaps, others follow.
- 2. Time is protected.** If “learning Friday” gets steamrolled by meetings, the culture is dead.
- 3. Mistakes are dissected, not punished.** Blameless reviews are the highest-leverage culture lever.
- 4. Managers coach.** Without managers reinforcing learning, even great programmes fade.
- 5. Growth is rewarded.** Promotions, raises, and stretch projects flow to people who develop.
- 6. Curiosity has airtime.** Show-and-tells, brown bags, and book clubs all signal it's safe to ask.

3 traps even good L&D; teams fall into

- **Confusing access with culture.** A 10,000-course library does not equal a learning culture.
- **Optimising for completion.** A 99% completion rate often means the bar is too low.
- **Ignoring the manager layer.** Manager behaviour is the single biggest determinant of whether learning sticks.

If you do just one thing

Make manager coaching the centrepiece of your culture work. Train every people-leader in five minutes a week. Compound interest will do the rest.

Upskilling & reskilling: the playbook

Upskilling and reskilling are the most talked-about words in modern L&D — and the most mishandled. The playbook below is what separates real programmes from PR exercises.

Upskilling vs reskilling

The difference

Upskilling = building new skills inside the same role (a finance analyst learning Python). **Reskilling** = building the skills to move into a different role (a customer agent becoming a data analyst).

The 6-step playbook

1. **Identify the skill of the future** — for the role, the function, the company. Be specific.
2. **Define the start and end state** — what a learner can do before vs after.
3. **Choose a target population** — who, how many, in which timeframe.
4. **Design the journey** — blended, multi-month; not a single course.
5. **Build the manager scaffolding** — without it, the journey collapses.
6. **Measure the right metric** — application on the job, not just completion.

Common pitfalls

- Treating upskilling as a content problem — it's a behaviour-change problem.
- Picking a tool first, problem later — a tool isn't a strategy.
- Skipping the manager — programmes without manager reinforcement fade fast.
- Optimising for sign-ups instead of outcomes — vanity beats impact every time.

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L&D trends shaping 2026

Six trends are reshaping how L&D teams operate. Most aren't new — but each is accelerating fast enough that ignoring them costs you credibility with the business.

1. AI inside the learning workflow

AI is no longer a topic to *teach about* — it's a tool inside the design and delivery workflow. Expect AI-assisted authoring, learner coaching, content translation, and feedback to be standard.

2. Skills-based talent strategies

Organisations are moving from job-based to skills-based models — hiring, deploying, and promoting based on demonstrated skills rather than degrees and titles. L&D owns the skills layer.

3. Learning in the flow of work

Just-in-time microlearning, embedded in the tools people use, is replacing stand-alone courses for most performance-support use cases.

4. Manager enablement at scale

The single highest-leverage L&D investment is making every manager 10% better. Many teams are putting more budget into manager development than into individual contributor programmes.

5. Outcome-based learning measurement

Completion rates are out. Behaviour change and business KPI movement are in. L&D leaders who speak the language of outcomes are the ones getting heard.

6. Independent, portable credentials

Learners want credentials that travel with them — not just internal certificates. Recognised, independent credentials are increasingly the way professionals signal craft.

The 90-day reading plan · weeks 1–4

Twelve weeks. About six focused hours per week. By the end, you'll have read the field — and applied each idea to one real situation.

Week	Theme	What to read / do	Output by Sunday
Week 1	Field overview	Re-read pages 3–6 of this guide.	Notes: where do you sit in this picture?
Week 2	Vocabulary	Master the 25 terms (pages 7–8).	Use 5 of them in your LinkedIn About.
Week 3	Adult learning	Read 1 chapter on andragogy.	List 3 implications for your work.
Week 4	ADDIE deep-dive	Walk a real example end-to-end.	Write a 1-page ADDIE plan.

How to make the plan stick

- **Block the hours weekly** — don't try to “find time.”
- **Write the output** — even one paragraph forces clarity.
- **Share publicly** — a weekly LinkedIn note keeps you honest.
- **Pair up** — find one peer doing the same plan.

If you skip a week

Skip the week — don't double up. Trying to recover lost weeks is the #1 reason people quit. Resume on Monday and keep moving.

The 90-day reading plan · weeks 5–8

Week	Theme	What to read / do	Output by Sunday
Week 5	SAM & agile design	Read 1 short SAM primer.	Pick: would you use ADDIE or SAM next?
Week 6	Kirkpatrick	Read the 4 levels in depth.	Apply L1–L4 to a programme you know.
Week 7	Phillips ROI	Read 1 case study with numbers.	Write a 1-page ROI mock for any course.
Week 8	Authoring tool fluency	Build 1 module in Articulate Rise (free trial).	Share with a peer for feedback.

What “learning by doing” looks like

Weeks 5–8 shift from *reading about* to *making*. Reading 200 pages will not move your career as much as designing one real learning intervention, even a small one. Pick a real problem in your team or community and design for it.

Three real problems most workplaces have

- Onboarding that drags new hires into useful work too slowly.
- Manager 1:1s that drift into status updates instead of coaching.
- A tool nobody uses well because there's no real training around it.

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The 90-day reading plan · weeks 9–12

Week	Theme	What to read / do	Output by Sunday
Week 9	Measurement & analytics	Read 1 article on learning analytics.	List the 5 metrics you'd track.
Week 10	Capability building & competency frameworks	Read 1 case study.	Sketch a competency for one role.
Week 11	Modern topics: AI, microlearning, learning in flow of work	1 article each.	1-page point of view document.
Week 12	Synthesis & certification prep	Re-read your weekly notes.	Take a practice test if certifying.

What “finished” looks like at week 12

- You can explain L&D, training, and capability in plain language to a non-specialist.
- You can name and use at least 5 frameworks confidently.
- You have **built** something — even small — that another person has reviewed.
- You have a clear next step: a certification, a role move, or a stretch assignment.

If you want to keep going

Pick one specialism for the next 90 days: instructional design, learning analytics, leadership development, sales enablement, or compliance learning. Repeat the 12-week cadence inside that specialism.

Self-assessment & worksheet

Print this page. Fill it in by hand. Re-do it in 90 days and compare. The change will surprise you.

Part 1 · Where are you today?

- Current role and function: _____
- Years of relevant experience: ____ years
- One sentence on why L&D matters to you: _____
- One sentence on what's stopping you today: _____

Part 2 · Capability self-rating (1 = novice, 5 = expert)

Business partnering Rating: ____	Stakeholder communication Rating: ____	Learning measurement Rating: ____
Training needs analysis Rating: ____	Coaching Rating: ____	Data literacy Rating: ____
Instructional design Rating: ____	Programme management Rating: ____	Continuous self-learning Rating: ____
Facilitation Rating: ____	LMS / authoring tools Rating: ____	Content creation Rating: ____

Part 3 · Your 90-day commitments

- The two capabilities I will work on: _____ & _____
- The one programme / problem I will use as my practice ground: _____
- One person who will keep me honest: _____

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Next steps & how to use this guide

You've reached the end of the guide. The hard part — and the fun part — starts now: putting it to work.

This week

- Print pages 19 (self-assessment) and 16 (week 1 of the 90-day plan).
- Block 6 weekly hours on your calendar for the next 12 weeks.
- Tell one person what you're committing to.
- Pick the two capabilities you'll improve in the next 90 days.

This month

- Read pages 3–8 carefully and use 5 vocabulary terms publicly (LinkedIn, a team document, an interview).
- Pick one framework (ADDIE or SAM) and use it on a real problem.
- Identify one programme in your organisation where you can practise the Kirkpatrick measurement levels.

This quarter

- Complete the 90-day plan (pages 16–18).
- Build one tangible artefact — a designed module, a measured programme, or a capability map.
- Earn a recognised L&D credential to anchor your progress externally.

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