

Why the frontline workforce needs better training – and why they're not getting it - Training Journal

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the persistent gap between frontline workers' appetite for learning and the inadequate training provision offered by employers, with particular focus on the UK and shift-based sectors. The author, a senior executive at Human Capital Management vendor UKG, argues that companies are failing frontline workers through rigid, inaccessible training structures, contributing to skills gaps, disengagement, and costly turnover. Key evidence is drawn from UKG's proprietary 'Perspectives from the Frontline Workers' report, citing figures such as 68% of frontline workers expressing interest in learning new skills, 33% of distribution and logistics workers ranking training as a key job selection factor, yet only half receiving more than one hour of training per month. The article concludes that technology-enabled, flexible, on-demand, and AI-driven learning — enabled by Human Capital Management platforms — represents the primary solution. The implied conclusion is that organisations investing in smarter, digitally integrated training will benefit from improved retention, engagement, and productivity.

Key Insights

1. 68% of frontline workers express interest in learning new skills, and 73% indicate willingness to learn outside of working hours, according to UKG's proprietary report — suggesting demand for development is high but supply is misaligned.
2. In distribution and logistics, 50% of workers receive more than one hour of training per month while another 50% report receiving none at all, indicating significant variation in training provision within the same sector.
3. 30% of frontline employees spend less than one hour per month on learning activities at work, and 17% spend no time at all, pointing to a structural disconnect between stated organisational commitment to training and actual employee experience.

Practical Takeaways

- Organisations with shift-based or transient workforces face particular structural barriers to training delivery — time constraints and scheduling inflexibility are identified as core inhibitors, with 27% of frontline employees citing lack of flexibility as a reason for leaving.
- On-demand and AI-personalised learning formats are presented as mechanisms to embed development into daily workflows rather than treating training as a discrete, time-intensive event.

Critical Analysis

The article's primary limitation is its reliance on a single proprietary data source — UKG's own 'Perspectives from the Frontline Workers' report — with no independent or peer-reviewed corroboration. The author is a senior UKG executive, creating a clear conflict of interest, as the recommended solution (HCM platforms, AI-driven tools) aligns directly with UKG's commercial product offering. No alternative solutions, competing technologies, or critical perspectives on HCM platforms are presented. The UK statistic (72% of organisations struggling to fill skills gaps) is cited without attribution to a specific source. Strengths include the article's use of concrete quantitative data points, its identification of a genuine and documented workforce challenge, and its accessible framing of structural barriers. However, the piece functions more as branded thought leadership than as independent analysis, and its conclusions favour UKG's product category without acknowledging implementation costs, change management challenges, or evidence of platform efficacy.

Organizational Practice

The article describes organisations in frontline sectors (distribution, logistics, and shift-based industries) using traditional one-size-fits-all training models delivered infrequently. Some organisations are described as beginning to adopt Human Capital Management platforms offering personalised learning pathways, adaptable scheduling, on-demand content, and AI-driven tools to support continuous learning integrated into daily work routines.

Strategic Implications

The article reflects a broader tension in performance and development systems between the demand for continuous, personalised employee development and the structural constraints of frontline, shift-based work environments. The data points to a pattern where training investment does not translate into employee learning time, raising questions about programme design and delivery accessibility rather than solely budget allocation. The emphasis on AI-personalisation and on-demand formats as solutions aligns with a wider industry movement toward disaggregated, technology-mediated learning — though the evidence base for their effectiveness in frontline contexts remains largely vendor-generated in this piece.

Validation Status: passed
