How HR leaders can align talent development with business goals - hcamag.com

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the gap between organizational investment in talent development and the strategic value that structured learning programs can deliver, with a particular focus on Canadian employers. Drawing on commentary from talent strategist Tamara ElSahyouni and Alan Kearns, managing partner and founder of CareerJoy, the article argues that training is systematically undervalued as a business lever in Canada relative to US and European benchmarks. Key evidence includes Kearns' citation of his organization's Work Made Better Report 2025, which claims companies using data-driven learning development are 46 per cent more likely to be rated high-performing, and a reported average training spend of $889 per employee in Canada. A 2025 KPMG study and a 2024 Future Skills Centre study are cited to illustrate a significant AI training gap among Canadian workers. The article concludes that HR leaders must reposition talent development as a strategic function — grounded in skills mapping, leadership development, and quantifiable productivity metrics — rather than a discretionary benefit, with AI governance treated as a prerequisite to AI upskilling.

Key Insights

1. Canadian employers invest approximately $889 per employee annually in training, with roughly two-thirds spending less than $500 per employee — significantly below US and European benchmarks according to CareerJoy's Work Made Better Report 2025.

2. A 2024 Future Skills Centre study found that 44 per cent of employed Canadians using AI tools at work had received no formal training, indicating a structural mismatch between AI adoption and workforce readiness.

3. ElSahyouni argues that organizational AI governance frameworks must precede employee AI upskilling, warning that absent governance, staff will independently use AI tools in ways that may create data risk.

Practical Takeaways

- Skills mapping at the organizational level can serve as a diagnostic tool for identifying where training investment will have the highest impact on performance and risk mitigation, before committing significant budget.

- Translating behavioral and engagement metrics into productivity and financial numbers is described by ElSahyouni as a mechanism for HR leaders to build the business case for training investment with senior leadership.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article draws on two practitioner voices with distinct but complementary perspectives — one more quantitative (Kearns) and one more process-oriented (ElSahyouni) — and references two external studies (KPMG 2025, Future Skills Centre 2024) to anchor the AI training gap claims. Limitations: The central ROI statistic ($1.45 return per dollar invested) and the 46 per cent high-performance likelihood figure both originate from CareerJoy's own proprietary report, creating a conflict of interest that is not disclosed in the article. No independent replication or third-party validation of these figures is offered. The article is geographically scoped to Canada but does not clearly delineate which claims are Canada-specific versus universal. The commentary is largely normative and anecdotal, relying on expert assertion rather than controlled evidence. The AI governance recommendations, while directionally sensible, are presented without supporting data on outcomes.

Organizational Practice

The article describes organizations conducting skills mapping to identify training gaps, investing in leadership development as a cost-effective cascade mechanism for broader staff capability building, and being advised to establish AI governance policies prior to deploying AI upskilling programs. HR leaders are described as translating behavioral metrics into productivity and financial outcomes to justify training expenditure to senior leadership.

Strategic Implications

The article reflects a broader trend of repositioning HR from an administrative to a strategic function, with talent development framed as a measurable input to organizational performance rather than a discretionary cost. The emphasis on AI governance as a precondition for AI upskilling points to an emerging sequencing challenge in workforce transformation initiatives. The Canada-specific training investment data, if validated independently, would suggest a structural underinvestment pattern with implications for national competitiveness benchmarking in PMS design.

Validation Status: passed
