

‘Training isn’t the problem – intent is’: Why HR must rethink learning in 2026 - hcamag.com

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Executive Summary

This article addresses a persistent structural problem in organisational learning and development: the prioritisation of training completion metrics over demonstrated workforce capability. The central argument, advanced by Sharon Macquarie, head of global training at Avetta, is that compliance-driven training design undermines genuine learning outcomes and creates operational and safety risks. Macquarie contends that training only delivers value when paired with clear competency expectations and verified through real-world performance assessment, particularly in high-risk roles. Key evidence is anecdotal and practitioner-based, drawing on Macquarie's professional experience rather than cited research. Her findings highlight the erosion of training impact when completion rates substitute for capability verification, the importance of instructor-led foundational learning supplemented by digital delivery, and the growing risk posed by inconsistent training standards across blended workforces of employees and contractors. The article concludes that HR leaders must reframe training policy as a strategic instrument of risk management and workforce readiness, incorporating real-time competency data systems and behavioural skill development alongside technical proficiency.

Key Insights

1. Completion rates and LMS dashboards are poor proxies for workforce capability; the critical measure is whether workers can perform safely and effectively under real operational conditions.
2. The boundary between technical and behavioural skills is described as effectively collapsed, with communication, accountability, and leadership now treated as direct enablers of safety and performance outcomes.
3. Inconsistent training standards across blended workforces — encompassing employees, contractors, and subcontractors — are identified as a significant and underappreciated source of organisational risk.

Practical Takeaways

- Organisations operating in high-risk environments may reduce capability gaps by grounding training content in actual workplace incidents and real operational constraints rather than idealised process descriptions.
- Training policy frameworks that define competency verification methods, reassessment frequency, and field-level effectiveness measures offer a more operationally robust approach than policies focused solely on module completion requirements.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article raises a well-recognised and legitimate critique of compliance-driven training cultures, and the capability-versus-completion distinction is a credible and substantiated concern in L&D scholarship. The practical specificity — particularly around contractor workforces, real-time competency data, and blended delivery models — adds operational relevance. **Limitations:** The article is entirely reliant on a single practitioner's perspective with no cited studies, surveys, or external data to substantiate claims. Assertions such as 'the line between technical and behavioural skills has effectively disappeared' are presented as established fact without supporting evidence. The source, Sharon Macquarie, represents Avetta, a supply chain risk management vendor, which introduces potential promotional bias — the emphasis on contractor workforce management and standardisation aligns closely with Avetta's commercial positioning, though this is not disclosed or acknowledged in the article. No counterarguments or alternative perspectives are presented, and the article reads more as advocacy than analysis.

Organizational Practice

Avetta, through the perspective of its head of global training, describes practices including pairing training with structured on-the-job competency assessments, using instructor-led delivery for foundational safety content supplemented by digital learning for scale, incorporating real workplace incident examples into training content, standardising training and assessment expectations across employee and contractor workforces, and deploying data systems to provide real-time visibility into workforce competency status.

Strategic Implications

The article reflects a broader observable shift in L&D discourse away from activity-based metrics toward outcome-based capability measurement, a trend with direct implications for how organisations design performance management systems that incorporate learning as an input. The emphasis on real-time competency data as an operational risk tool suggests convergence between L&D functions and workforce planning or safety management. The blended workforce dynamic — employees alongside contractors — points to increasing pressure on organisations to extend performance and capability frameworks beyond direct employment relationships.

Validation Status: passed
