Addressing the Barriers Blocking Employee Development - Gallup

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the growing urgency of employee skill development in the context of rapid technological change and AI adoption. Drawing on Gallup survey data and external sources including Lightcast and the World Economic Forum, the article argues that organizations are failing to close critical skill gaps despite widespread awareness of the problem. Key findings indicate that 59% of CHROs in Q1 2025 identified development as a top employee experience challenge — a 16-percentage-point increase from 2024 — while fewer than half of U.S. employees participated in any skill-building training in 2024. The article identifies time constraints as the most commonly cited barrier across CHROs, managers, and employees, but argues that lack of supervisor support is the strongest predictor of employee turnover intent. A structural mismatch is also noted: the most commonly completed trainings (compliance, role-specific, harassment prevention) diverge significantly from the skills CHROs and employees identify as most beneficial (leadership and technical skills). The article concludes that organizations expanding development beyond traditional in-house training — through mentorship, tuition reimbursement, AI-driven talent marketplaces, and external learning — are better positioned to link learning to business outcomes and career mobility.

Key Insights

1. Lack of supervisor support — not time — is the strongest predictor of turnover intent among employees facing development barriers, making manager enablement a higher-stakes priority than scheduling reform.
2. A structural misalignment exists between the trainings organizations most commonly deliver (compliance and role-specific) and the skills both CHROs and employees identify as most beneficial (leadership and technical), suggesting resource allocation is not tracking stated strategic priorities.
3. A significant proportion of employees (58%) sought learning and development experiences outside of employer-provided offerings in the past year, indicating that unmet internal demand is already being self-directed externally.

Practical Takeaways

- Organizations where managers have not received management training face a compounding risk: undertrained managers are more likely to be actively disengaged and more likely to impede rather than enable their teams' development, linking manager development directly to retention outcomes.
- Gallup's meta-analytic projection links doubling the proportion of employees who feel they have opportunities to learn and grow to an estimated 18% increase in profit and 14% increase in productivity

— a quantified business case that L&D functions can reference in resource allocation discussions.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article integrates multiple data sources (Gallup surveys, Lightcast skills data, WEF projections) and distinguishes between employee, manager, and CHRO perspectives, lending layered credibility to the barrier analysis. The distinction between 'most cited' and 'most dangerous' barriers is analytically useful and counterintuitive. Limitations: The piece is authored and published by Gallup, creating an inherent conflict of interest — the conclusion section explicitly promotes Gallup reports, consulting services, and award programs. The meta-analytic productivity and profit projections (18% and 14%) are presented without direct citation to the underlying studies, making independent verification difficult. Survey sample sizes and methodologies are not disclosed in the article. The 'Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award-winning organizations' cited as examples are unnamed, limiting reproducibility or external scrutiny. The article frames all findings toward a prescriptive conclusion that favours Gallup's commercial offerings.

Organizational Practice

Some organizations provide full graduate-degree tuition reimbursement programs for future management talent. Others operate internal AI-driven talent marketplaces that match employees to open roles, career paths, project opportunities, mentors, and personalized learning based on skills data. These practices were reported among Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award-winning organizations, though the organizations were not named.

Strategic Implications

The data points to a widening gap between stated organizational priorities around leadership and technical skill-building and the actual distribution of training investment toward compliance and role-specific content. The high rate of self-directed external learning (58% of employees) suggests internal L&D ecosystems are not meeting demand, which has implications for how organizations design and resource development infrastructure. The finding that manager support is the strongest predictor of turnover intent — stronger than time constraints — implies that performance management systems that do not account for manager development behaviour may underestimate a key attrition driver. The trend of CHROs increasingly identifying development as a top pain point (up 16 percentage points year-over-year) signals growing executive-level pressure to demonstrate measurable L&D impact.

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