

The hidden risks of AI in training - HR Magazine

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the risks of deploying AI within Learning and Development (L&D) functions before establishing reliable behavioural baselines. The author, Ross Dickie, argues that AI accelerates existing L&D strategies without interrogating their validity, meaning organisations with flawed data foundations will produce personalised solutions to the wrong problems at greater speed. The article identifies core weaknesses in common diagnostic tools — manager feedback distorted by office politics, self-assessments driven by confidence rather than capability, and engagement surveys that oversimplify complex dynamics. Dickie contends that a robust behavioural baseline requires triangulation across quantitative and qualitative methods, including structured interviews, behavioural surveys, focus groups, observational analytics, and control groups. The article concludes that AI's primary value lies in filtering and accelerating analysis of qualitative data, freeing practitioners for human-centred work such as observation and evaluation. The broader implication is that AI in L&D is a multiplier of existing strategy quality, not a corrective mechanism, and that human judgment remains essential for diagnosing whether training is the appropriate intervention at all.

Key Insights

1. AI in L&D amplifies existing strategy quality — flawed behavioural assumptions fed into AI systems will generate faster, more elaborate iterations of the wrong interventions.
2. Common diagnostic inputs such as manager feedback, self-assessments, and engagement surveys carry inherent biases that are frequently treated as objective truth, distorting programme design.
3. The concept of 'desirable difficulty' in learning design suggests that removing friction from the design process via AI can undermine the critical thinking necessary to identify the right problems.

Practical Takeaways

- A multi-method behavioural baseline — combining structured interviews, observational analytics, focus groups, and where feasible control groups — produces more reliable diagnostic data than any single source.
- AI's immediate value in L&D is most defensible when applied to data filtering and thematic analysis of qualitative inputs, reinvesting saved time into direct employee observation and programme evaluation.

Critical Analysis

The article presents a coherent and internally consistent argument from a practitioner perspective. Its strength lies in identifying a genuine and underexplored risk: that AI adoption in L&D can institutionalise

existing measurement biases at scale. The concept of 'desirable difficulty' is referenced meaningfully in context. However, the article contains no empirical citations, no data, and no case studies to support its claims. All assertions are based on the author's professional experience and reasoning. The piece is authored by a consultant at Mindtools, a commercial L&D platform, which introduces potential framing bias — the argument positions AI as a tool dependent on expert human consultancy, which aligns with the author's commercial context. The article also does not engage with counterarguments, such as instances where AI has successfully identified behavioural patterns that human-led diagnostics missed. The practical methods recommended (control groups, structured interviews, observational analytics) are sound in principle but their feasibility constraints for resource-limited L&D teams are only briefly acknowledged.

Organizational Practice

The article describes organisations using manager feedback, self-assessments, and engagement surveys as primary behavioural diagnostics for L&D programme design. Some organisations are noted as using control groups to isolate the impact of training interventions. AI is described as being used for thematic analysis of qualitative data such as interview and focus group transcripts.

Strategic Implications

The article points toward a growing tension in L&D between the operational efficiency gains of AI adoption and the diagnostic rigour required for effective behaviour change programmes. It suggests that PMS trends favouring AI-driven personalisation at scale may outpace organisations' capacity to validate the behavioural assumptions underpinning those systems. The framing implies that investment in measurement infrastructure and practitioner capability to challenge briefs may become a differentiating factor in L&D effectiveness as AI tooling becomes commoditised.

Validation Status: passed
