

NATIONAL LEARNING WEEK SPECIAL

STATE OF LEARNING FOR UK OFFICE EMPLOYEES

May 2024





The single biggest driver of business impact is the strength of an organization's learning culture

Josh Bersin

Learning is for life – not just for one week.

Nonetheless, this report is issued as part of the UK's focus on National Learning week. And so, it is useful to assess workforce experiences and outlooks on learning – especially those related to AI.

This Ipsos study reveals some unsurprising findings – and some very powerful, if concerning ones.

There is no dispute that AI is going to have a seismic impact on the future of work. Just as de-industrialisation and automation in manufacturing laid waste to a generation of blue-collar workers, AI has the potential to both kill and create millions of future jobs.

As such, there is a moral imperative to prepare for and define the jobs of the future – and to build the skills that prepare current and next generation employees for them. These results show we are far away from that landscape.

An unequal challenge

This study highlights inequalities in learning about AI – with women far less equipped to tackle an AI-enabled world of work, and far less likely to have related learning opportunities.

It is not just a gender challenge, but a class one too. Education and age also play a role. Older, poorer employees and those in more junior administrative roles may be the first to be discarded on the AI-fuelled scrapheap. This is not just a DEI or HR leader challenge to address. It is a vital imperative for leaders of every organisation.

On the job

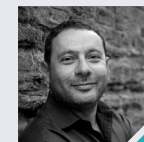
This research shows that on-the-job learning and coaching is the main preference of workers – not expensive or abstract training courses disconnected to the daily realities of people's jobs.

As such, employers need to define innovative solutions that enable this type of learning – integrating learning in the flow of work. A range of global studies have shown that high performing teams do this as the norm.

We hope you find this report a useful contribution to the discussion on learning solutions for today and tomorrow.



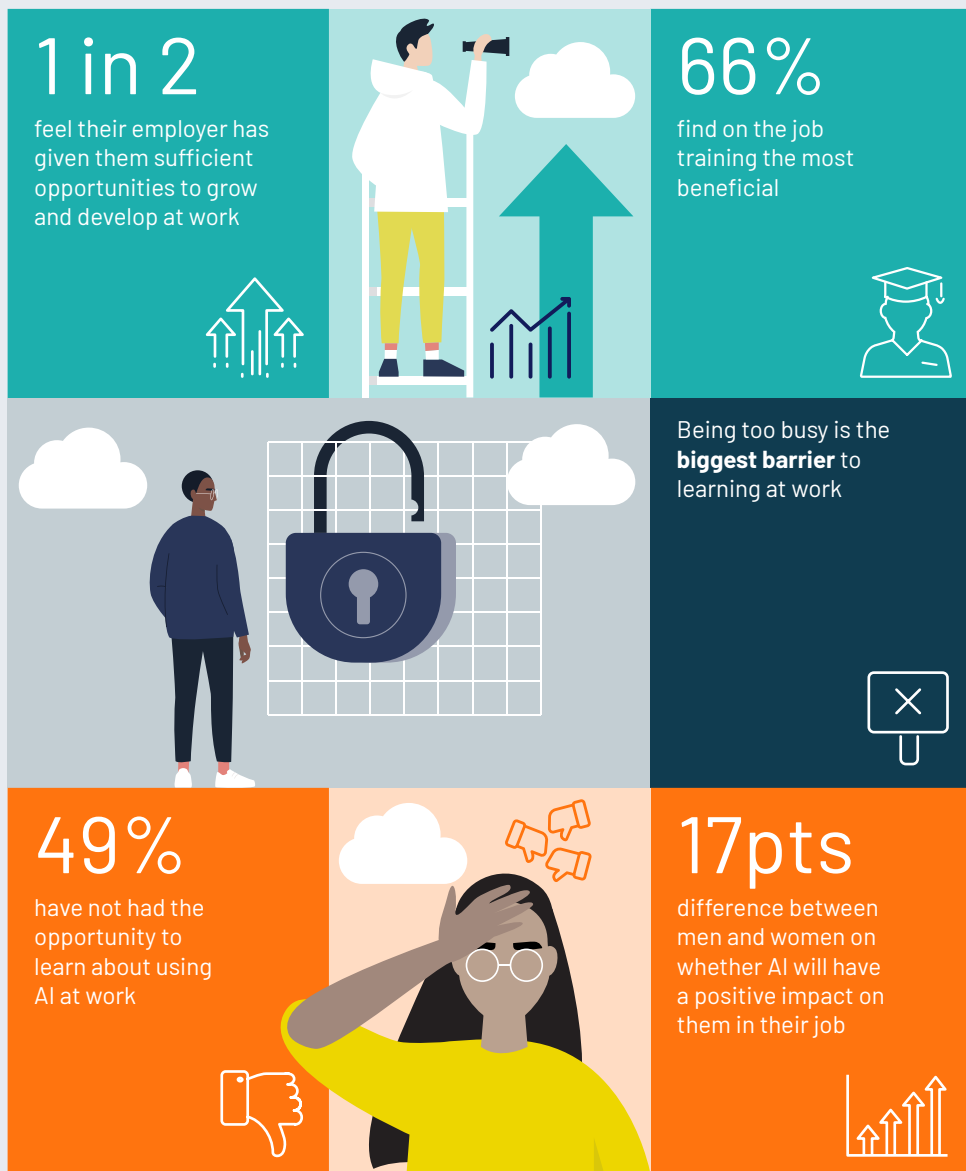
Kerri O'Neill
**Chief People Officer,
Ipsos UK & Ireland**



Ghassan Karian
**Chief Executive,
Ipsos Karian and Box**

Facts on a page

This report is based on the experiences and views of a representative sample of **UK office workers**



Source: 996 UK office workers, aged 16-74, surveyed online between 26-29 April 2024

Key insights

01

Supply isn't keeping up with demand

- Employees are keen to learn and keep abreast of advances in their industry, but just over half feel they have had sufficient opportunities to learn. Employers are not harnessing employees' appetite to learn.
- On the job training is the most beneficial, but to ensure employees recognise the opportunities for learning and development, they need ring fenced time for self driven development and investment in supported activities.

02

AI is here but the learning landscape is bleak

- Over half want to learn new skills to prevent AI from replacing their role at work, but just a third have had the opportunity to learn about it.
- Women have had less opportunities to learn about AI at work than men, and they are less confident it will have a positive impact on them in their job. Industries dominated by women are expected to be the biggest impacted by AI, and the learning landscape suggests they are ill prepared.
- Older employees and those without higher education qualifications are reticent about learning or seeing the benefit. These groups need to be encouraged to learn, or risk being left behind.

03

Employers need to do more to remove barriers and address inequalities

- Barriers exist – the largest barrier employees have cited is being too busy, with the most damaging barriers being limited opportunities or managers not supporting their development.
- The results also point towards inequalities in the workplace with women, older employees, those with fewer qualifications and those from lower incomes having fewer opportunities to learn. There is a need to signpost opportunities to employees and encourage life long learning.

Despite appetite, only 1 in 2 get sufficient opportunities to learn

What the data says

- 74% are keen to learn new skills to keep up with advances in their industry, though just 54% feel they have sufficient opportunities to grow.
- Graduates and men have more opportunities to learn than non-graduates and women respectively.
- Other groups missing out are those from lower income households and older workers.

What we should take from this?

- Employees recognise the need to grow with their industry, but employers are not always providing the appropriate investment to enable this.
- Groups of employees (and society) are at risk of being left behind. Meanwhile, the most privileged groups are being invested in, exacerbating inequality.
- The UK has an increasingly ageing workforce with a growing proportion of people being economically active over 65*. The drop in learning with age should not be overlooked.



Learning and development

Key: ■ Positive ■ Neutral ■ Negative

I want to learn new skills to keep up with advances in my industry

74%

15%

11%

In the past 12 months, my employer has given me sufficient opportunities to grow and develop at work

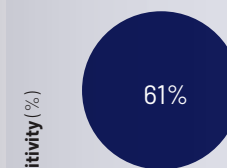
54%

23%

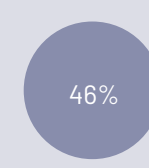
23%

In the past 12 months, my employer has given me sufficient opportunities to grow and develop at work

Education

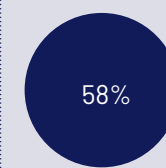


Graduates

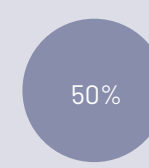


Non-graduates

Gender

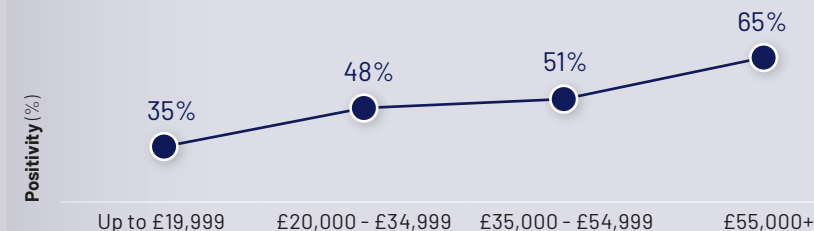


Man

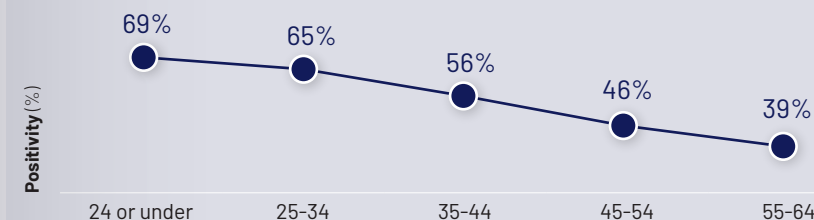


Woman

Income



Age Band



Source:

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*Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 3 March 2023, ONS website, article, Population changes and economic inactivity trends, UK: 2019 to 2026

On the job learning is king, but people are too busy

What the data says

- 66% prefer on the job training, 20pts more popular than the practical courses, and 29pts more than self study.
- Barriers remain, the largest barrier cited is being too busy. For those with graduate degrees, this is higher with 42% citing this as a barrier. Those with only GCSEs (or equivalents) said the biggest barrier was the limited number of courses relevant to their role.
- Younger employees are more likely to say their manager does not support their development, whilst older employees are more likely to say they do not experience any barriers.

What we should take from this?

- On the job training enables employees to learn through experience and there is a recognition of the value of this. Although it still requires investment, it should be easier for employers to offset and ringfence time.
- We have seen older employees and those without graduate degrees do not have the same opportunities to learn as others; the results here suggest they need more support in identifying relevant learning opportunities. Whilst older employees are less likely to feel there are barriers, there remains an opportunity to ensure they are learning.



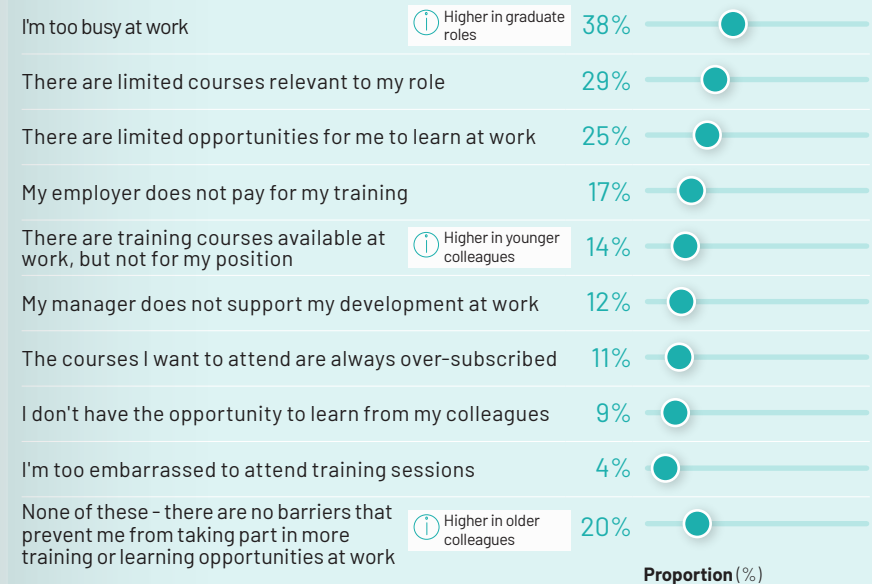
On the job training most popular

In general, which, if any, of the following types of training or learning at work do you personally find most beneficial?



Time is main blocker

Which, if any, of the following barriers prevent you from taking part in more training or learning opportunities at work?



Source:

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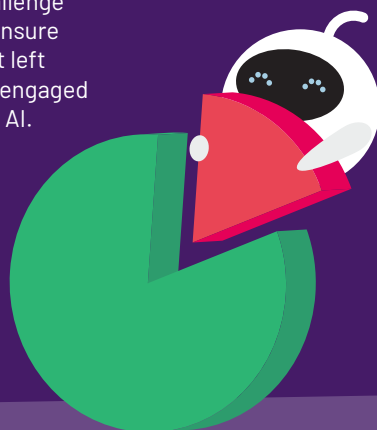
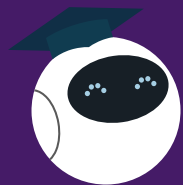
AI is on the way but 1 in 2 have not had the opportunity to learn about it at work

What the data says

- Over half of employees have not had the opportunity to learn about AI at work in the last twelve months.
- Despite a similar proportion wanting to learn about AI to prevent it replacing their role at work, demographic differences highlight appetite is stronger in younger and more qualified employees.
- 1 in 3 do not believe AI will have a positive impact on them at work. Again, it is the younger employees and those who have more qualifications who are more positive about its potential.

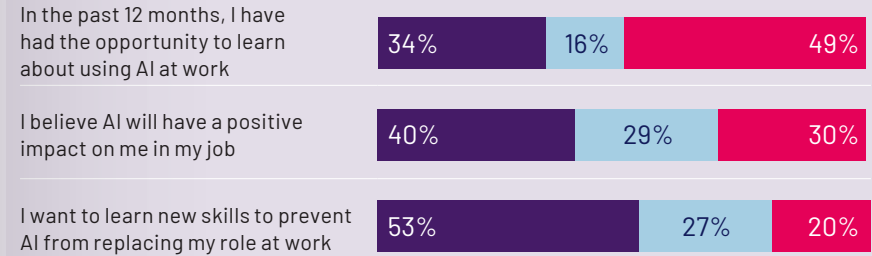
What we should take from this?

- AI is already having a wide ranging impact on the world. Back in 2023 it was predicted that AI could replace the equivalent of 300 million jobs*. Whilst this prediction should be taken with a pinch of salt, the rate of technological change identifies a clear learning need, and one which employees are not being supported with.
- The differences by qualification and age present a challenge: older and less qualified employees have less of a wish to learn about AI, and yet they are also the ones who do not believe it will have a positive impact on their job. The challenge for employers is to ensure these groups are not left behind and they are engaged with the potential of AI.



AI

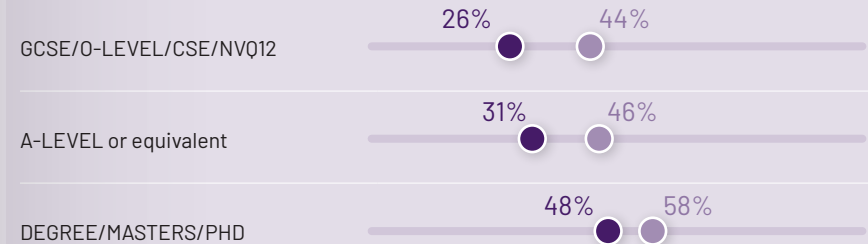
Key: ■ Positive ■ Neutral ■ Negative



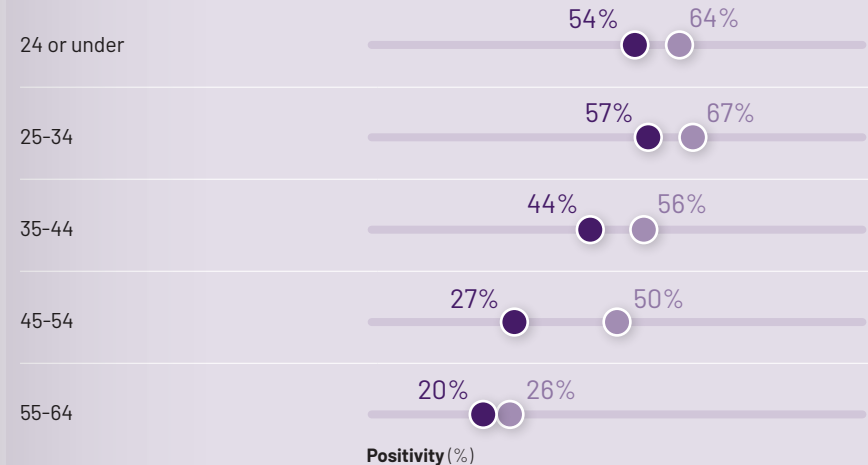
Sentiment towards AI by demographics

Key: ● I believe AI will have a positive impact on me in my job
● I want to learn new skills to prevent AI from replacing my role at work

By education



By age



Source:

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*Liang, A. (2024, January 15). AI to hit 40% of jobs and worsen inequality, IMF says. Retrieved from BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-67977967>

Technology gender gap sees no sign of abating

What the data says

- Women are 17pts less confident than men that AI will have a positive impact on them in their job.
- Women are less likely to feel they have had sufficient opportunities to grow and develop at work than men, nor to have had the opportunity to learn about AI at work in the past 12 months.
- Compared to men, women find on the job learning more beneficial.



What we should take from this?

- There is a gender gap in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) and this data suggests the gap between men and women will only grow wider as AI becomes a bigger part of the working world.
- Reports suggest that women will be more exposed to AI, presenting either an outcome of greater risk to roles being replaced, or a greater chance of reaping rewards. Given the findings here, without the support of employers, it paints a bleak picture.
- AI aside, the gap in learning between men and women presents a clear opportunity for employers to address the imbalance. The gender pay gap is well documented, and for women to succeed they need to be given at least the same opportunities as men.



Gap where women trail men

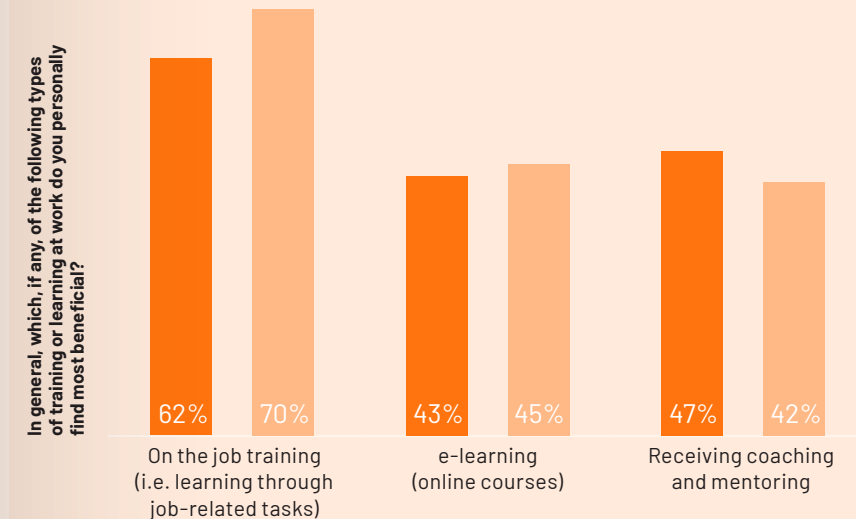
Women far less confident about opportunities and impact of AI



Positivity of women vs. men

Largest gaps between men and women in the experience of training or learning at work they find most beneficial

Key: Men Women



Source:
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How to show you are investing in your employees

What the data says

- 54% of employees feel their employer has given them sufficient opportunities to grow and develop at work in the last 12 months (p7).
- Being busy at work is the biggest barrier cited by employees, but it is limited opportunities, lack of managerial support or lack of financial investment which have the biggest impact on people feeling their employer gives them sufficient opportunities.
- Employees associate self-study, e-learning and training where you get a certificate with stronger belief their employer has given sufficient opportunities to grow and develop.

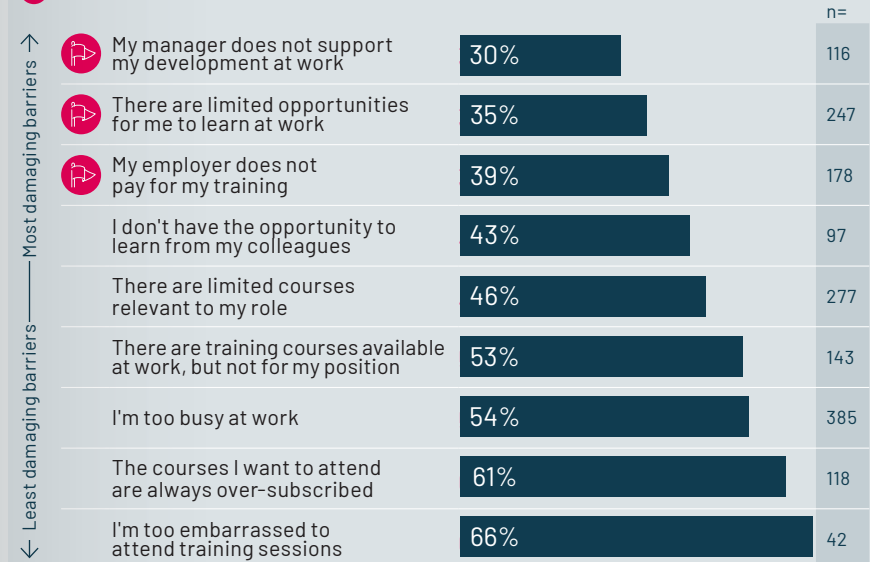
What we should take from this?

- Whilst capacity remains a barrier, the most damaging barriers to employees confidence in an employers approach to learning show a need for better signposting, investment and, crucially, managerial support.
- Rather than purely being the role of people and development teams, managers play a key role in supporting development
- Earlier in the report we saw on the job training is deemed the most beneficial, however to make an impact on whether people believe an employer invests in their growth and development, time needs to be set aside for people to pursue self-driven learning or investment provided for supported learning, outside of the day to day.



Colleagues who say the following are barriers to learning

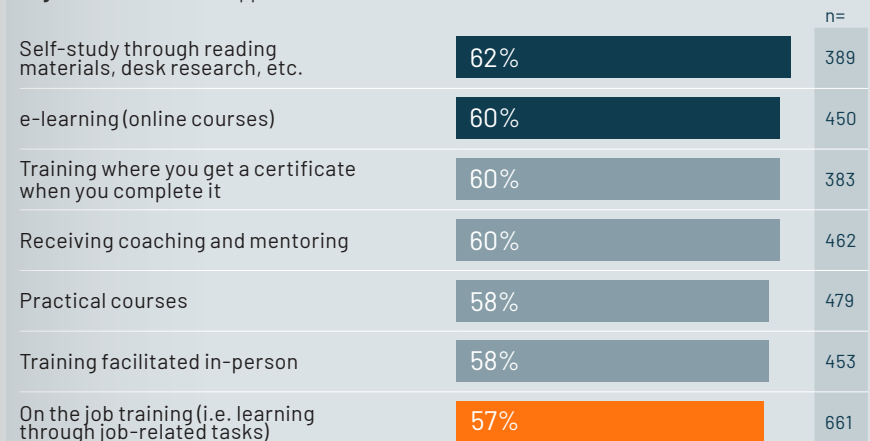
🔧 Action areas



In the past 12 months, my employer has given me sufficient opportunities to grow and develop at work – Positivity (%)

Colleagues who say the following are beneficial learning methods

Key: ■ Self driven ■ Supported ■ On the Job



In the past 12 months, my employer has given me sufficient opportunities to grow and develop at work – Positivity (%)

Source:

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For more information:

✉ ghassan.karian@ipsos.com

Ghassan Karian

Chief Executive,
Ipsos Karian and Box

Analysis and reporting team

Matty Mason – Senior Analyst

Alice Streatfeild – Senior Consultant

Massimiliano Belli – Designer

For more insights



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