



The Future is Now

America's Human Resources and Talent Leads
on AI and Learning at Work

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About Learning Society

Anchored at Stanford, Learning Society is a distributed narrative and research initiative advocating a paradigm shift in how the United States invests in people: from school models that center early-life classroom experiences leading to academic credentials, to learning models recognizing that human talent grows everywhere—at work, at home and at play, as well as at school—across the entire arc of lengthening lives.

Learning Society supports applied science to better identify, measure, and enable human learning wherever it occurs; fosters experiments and innovations that blur the boundaries between educational and other life experiences; and encourages strategies for sharing investment in human learning among all who benefit.

LEARNING SOCIETY 



Executive Summary

The explosion of AI technologies is rapidly changing how work gets done in virtually all business sectors, compelling corporate leaders to recruit and invest in human talent differently. Our study taps 15 C-level Human Resources (HR), Learning, and Technical officers at leading global firms to find out how businesses are responding to these changes in real time. Corporate leaders offer four key insights.

First, AI technologies are transforming demand for human capabilities, and reshaping work and workers as much as they are replacing tasks. Second, because traditional talent pipelines are not adapting quickly enough, workplaces themselves are becoming increasingly important—and innovative—sites of talent development. Third, employers are growing more skeptical of college degrees as proxies for capability and are developing more differentiated ways to understand people's skills, adaptability, and potential. Finally, continual investment in workers across lengthening lifespans is becoming more common, reflecting a broader recognition that as lives lengthen, economic resilience matters more—for individuals and for the companies that depend on adaptive, capable workers.

While tech leaders, policymakers, and pundits speculate about the future of work, corporate leaders in HR and learning are already shaping it.

The pace of technological change is rendering legacy talent strategies obsolete. Employers can no longer rely on traditional college pathways to prepare workers nimbly enough for rapidly shifting business needs.

The strategy of buying talent from outside the firm instead of growing it internally, which has grown increasingly common over the last 50 years, is neither economical nor practical in business environments that must evolve continuously to remain competitive.

Instead, companies are building their own capability systems to cultivate talent internally: providing pathways for advancement, making learning part of performance expectations, partnering with colleges and universities to develop novel talent pipelines, and using technology to provide and accelerate learning.

While these actions are already transforming business, they also are poised to have profound effects on our entire society. As leading, competitive companies navigate rapid technological change, some are reframing people strategy as a driver of innovation and growth.

Rather than treating talent development as a standalone activity or a training cost, they are investing in adaptive human capability—enabled by technology—to scale performance and reinvent work across longer working lives. Together, adaptive people strategies and enabling technologies are becoming a source of competitive advantage.

To better understand this changing landscape, we conducted interviews with 15 C-level executive and talent leaders at some of America's best known companies across a range of industries: from manufacturing to tech to retail to energy (full list of contributors on page 22). Their insights show how major employers are ahead of the curve in building new lifelong learning systems that are reshaping how human talent is identified and developed.

We asked about four key topics:

- 1** the impact of AI and technology on work
- 2** building skills and talent for the future
- 3** supporting talent development over lengthening working lives
- 4** novel partnerships between businesses and higher education



From Buying to Building Talent: Why Businesses Are Re-educating America

Over the past fifty years, employers systematically retreated from developing their own workforces. Beginning in the 1970s and accelerating through the 1990s, firms dismantled internal labor markets, reduced apprenticeship and training programs, and outsourced skill formation to universities, job seekers, and providers of contingent labor such as consulting firms and temp agencies.

This shift was driven by what long counted as common sense in business schools and corporate board rooms: that talent could be purchased “just in time,” that employees are interchangeable, and that training—and labor itself—is a cost center rather than a strategic asset. Structural factors reinforced these choices: heightened competitive pressures, financialization, and shareholder primacy pushed firms to prioritize short-term efficiency over long-term investment in human capability. As a result, investment in human capability lagged behind the rising complexity and dynamism of work.

Over time, HR systems and management incentives favored staffing flexibility and external hiring. Lean staffing models and rapid hiring cycles improved short-term responsiveness but obscured the long-term costs of turnover and knowledge loss. With training budgets often treated as discretionary, firms grew more dependent on external labor markets and less focused on internal development.

That model is now under strain. Rapid technological change and volatile skill demands have made external hiring slower, costlier, and less predictable. Capabilities are evolving faster than they can be sourced from outside the firm. As **Chris Ernst**, SVP Talent, Chief Learning Officer at Workday, observed, “The technology is democratized. People are your differentiator.”

At Hubbell, a global manufacturer of electric and utility products and solutions, **Debbie Tucker**, Vice President for Talent, Inclusion and Communications, has shifted from relying heavily on temporary labor to more direct hiring: “We are not going to get more resources, so how do we use the technology we have to be able to go out there and pull that talent closer to Hubbell?” To do so, she has reorganized the company’s internship program to quickly onboard and train people internally, rather than waiting for traditional educational pipelines to supply ready workers.

“We focus on converting interns into a rotational program where we move them every year for three years into a different job each time, because we want them to understand how big our company is ... they place full-time in a role, they’re very comfortable with the company.” Hubbell also has developed a program with local high schools to develop a new stream of talent. “We can’t hire high school kids, but we can give them some exposure through

that program to our manufacturing location and then as they graduate, they are candidates we can hire.”

It’s an approach also adopted by Ball Corporation, a global provider of sustainable aluminum packaging for beverages and personal care. Ball routinely starts potential employees with internships that can develop into full-time positions that include management training. Ball and Hubbell are not outliers. Internship programs for high school students are offered by a third of the companies we spoke with as a tool for identifying and engaging talent early.

Manufacturing companies are also responding to a shrinking talent pool for frontline workers. **Mark Kaestner**, Vice President for Talent Management, Learning & Development, People Analytics & Transformation at Ball, attributes the contraction to two key factors: outdated shift scheduling practices that don’t adequately account for the family and caregiving responsibilities of workers, and a long-prevalent cultural narrative that a four-year degree is a necessary qualification for good jobs. Kaestner and many of his colleagues have come to realize that inflexible work schedules and degree requirements hide talent that would otherwise be able and eager to contribute. “Fundamentally, the problem is, if you’re doing [long] shifts and you’re starting that shift at seven in the morning and going until, let’s say twelve hours,

seven at night. Whether I'm a man or a woman, I have to drop my kids off, that doesn't work really well. So you're ruling me out of the talent pool just by how you're scheduling," Kaestner explained. By splitting shifts and offering flexible hours, companies can significantly expand their talent pools to enable participation from those with scheduling restraints, such as caregivers and college students. And while the idea of college for all may be newly up for debate, legacy ways of doing business are hard to change. As Kaestner put it, "Our system is not designed for multiple tracks [into employment]. We've been promoting one track for a really long time—graduate from high school, go into college—instead of setting up a system that competes in the right way with college."

Ball and Hubbell's specific initiatives are innovative, but the idea that a lot of learning happens at work is hardly new. Learning has always happened on the job, but the scale at which employers are recognizing and formalizing it is unprecedented. Retail powerhouse Walmart is at the leading edge of this transformation. With over 2.1 million associates and a widely-publicized billion-dollar investment in workforce skill development, it might arguably be called the nation's largest learning organization. In the past decade, Walmart has led a movement toward substantial employer investment in workforce capability and internal mobility. Walmart's Executive

Vice President and Chief People Officer, **Donna Morris**, shared insights on a detailed study of the firm's learning and mobility programs, explaining that corporate leadership "became really strategic and specific that what we were training for was going to deliver outcomes that would create real, viable opportunity" for associates. The result is the "Live Better U" program that provides flexible learning opportunities.

"It's no longer about a degree. It's about skills. We've become very focused on micro-learning. Short-form learning. It can be a certificate. It can be a pathway."

The changes have resulted in "higher engagement, higher retention, and greater promotability." Morris emphasized the need for early-career employees to be recognized for capacities beyond school credentials, mentioning communication and business discernment as examples. As major employers begin to create pathways to advancement internally, they open the possibility that workplaces themselves can be important engines of economic mobility and also, potential competitors to college programs that have long promised to do the same. As Dominion Energy's Chief Technology Officer, **John Russell**, put it, "[a college degree] is a measure of aptitude. It's not necessarily a measure of success in a team-focused environment."



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John Russell, Chief Technology Officer, Dominion Energy

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People Are the Competitive Advantage in the Age of AI

Our respondents were virtually unanimous in reporting that AI is not eliminating but changing human work and workers. They agreed that competitive advantage lies in human talent and continuous development, and that new approaches are needed in this time of rapid change. Although AI is relatively democratized, it is deployed in specific workplace contexts, so talent can't be plug and play. Workday has highlighted the risk of a workforce skilled only in prompting algorithms without deeper learning and adaptation, stressing that people who understand the context in which they work will remain the key differentiator for business. "AI is providing immediate benefits and unlocking productivity gains and efficiencies. The winning companies are now putting plans in place for how they reinvest those dollars in ways that create the next cycle of growth, innovation and change for their companies," said Workday's Ernst.

Ball Corporation's Kaestner put it bluntly, "AI is going to become a fundamental skill. It is going to replace some jobs. It's going to replace people who don't know how to use AI." Many firms are investing in AI literacy across all roles. In September 2025, Walmart collaborated with OpenAI to make such training available for free to all associates. S&P Global's EVP & Chief People Officer, **Girish Ganesan**, told us about his firm's recently launched AI academy, framed as "staged learning journeys" that range from broad

awareness for all employees to specialized training for those in particular roles. “AI fluency needs to be both universal and specific,” he explained, “starting with AI for everyone to build a level playing field. Then leadership bootcamps to enable our senior leaders to guide their teams ... [providing] the precise skills they would need to apply AI responsibly in their day-to-day work.” S&P Global has also worked to specify what it means to upskill and reskill in an AI-powered workplace.

Ganesan explained that his firm’s efforts are built around the three dimensions of access, application, and acceleration.

Access describes the clearly structured learning pathways provided to all employees; **application** involves hands-on experience (e.g., hackathons, showcases, sandbox environments); **acceleration** describes efforts to diffuse innovations quickly across the organization. It all is part of a broader rethinking of talent development and mobility within the firm. “We are conceptualizing an internal talent marketplace to support career lattices, flexibility, and reinvention,” he said.

S&P Global’s efforts to reimagine talent development value chains by connecting skills assessment and curated learning opportunities with available jobs demonstrate a strategic approach to measuring capability investment on workforce mobility and contribution.

It is also part of a redefinition of workplace learning we heard across interviews with multiple talent leads: not as episodic training, but as ongoing capability building that integrates technical and human skills. **Tim Massa**, EVP and Chief Associate Experience Officer at grocery giant Kroger, told us, “AI can free us up to serve our customers and work more collaboratively, and cross-functionally with each other ... it can help me be a better experience maker.” He added that Kroger’s efforts to marry emerging technologies and human skills is intended to give employees the power to improve customer experience more directly than before.

“We believe AI can cut through [bureaucracy] so that we can be the servant leaders and help employees brighten somebody’s day.”

Rhonda Morris, Board Director, Workday and former CHRO at Chevron, told us, “I don’t want AI to be a crutch. I want it to be additive.” Getting there takes employer investment. “There has to be more time spent making sure people are level set and understand” how to use AI and the purposes of it before taking the leap of full implementation.

Once that happens, “It has a huge impact on decision quality, because you really want to make decisions that are going to help you, not focus on the shiny new toy.”

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Chris Ernst, SVP Talent, Chief Learning Officer, Workday

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A New Social Contract for Talent Development

The presumption that workers alone should “invest in themselves” through college degrees is giving way to a shared model of responsibility. When work itself changes constantly, both employees and firms need resilience that requires joint investment. “Companies have a responsibility to help all their workforce, just as educators, to be smart consumers and users of these technologies,” as Workday’s Ernst put it. Walmart’s Morris said, “Lifelong learning is so important, so essential. There should be dignity in big career changes.”

Sharing that responsibility for growing talent requires thinking differently and being open to new ways of learning, recruiting, developing, and working. “At Koch, we don’t apply traditional constraints; meaning just because you were hired to be an accountant, that doesn’t mean you will always be an accountant. Instead, we look at the individual and their unique set of characteristics and skills, rather than simply focusing on years of experience, education, or a resume,” said **Cara Chennault-Reid**, Vice President of Human Resources at [Koch Inc.](#)

This approach empowers employees and develops new pathways to career opportunities that best align with their skills, interests, and their passions: something that Chennault-Reid cited as a differentiator at Koch.

“[Our founder] Charles Koch ... has been well ahead of this need for change and began pushing us ten years ago, saying, ‘We cannot work the same way we’ve worked, it won’t be sustainable and will limit our growth and success.’ He challenged us to change our screening and hiring practices and begin looking beyond the resume to really get to know the candidate and the ways they could create value for Koch. His expectation for us, as supervisors, is that we make it our number one responsibility to know the individuals on our team and ensure we have employees in roles where they can create the greatest value.”

Technological advances have also brought the capacity to link capability investments directly to worker performance, a practice that has become central to strategy for companies like S&P Global and IBM. Under the direction of Senior Vice President & CHRO **Nickle LaMoreaux**, IBM has implemented AI-driven, personalized learning tools that enable bespoke development for the firm’s large and diversely skilled workforce.

“For all of our employees, we publish the skills that are in demand in the organization that we see growing. Additionally, we also publish a list of skills that are declining, so everybody knows where they stand.”

IBM tracks employee engagement and skill development across its 300,000 employees to align human capacities with rapidly evolving business needs.

Nicole Coletta, Director of Talent Insights & Analytics at Accenture, told us that her firm also was making deep investment in skill definition. “We’re very much rooted in your skills profile as a representation of you. I always tell our people, ‘If you can give me the best skills profile, I can give you the best employee experience.’ And that goes to our talent development. Because if I can see the skills you have and the proficiencies you have, I can better recommend learning credentials for you.”

Former Levi Strauss CHRO **Tracy Layney** sees a future where AI and technology and corporate talent investment will need to be designed intentionally to work together: “I don’t think most organizations have pulled that whole thread around potential performance, career path, bench chart, development,” she said, “I think that coaching is a huge opportunity.”

Koch’s Chennault-Reid’s emphasizes the importance of supervisors knowing their people and working with them to find roles in the organization where they will create the greatest value. “At Koch, the supervisor’s number one job is to know their team members and help make them better. This requires a different level of investment in each person and learning

what they like and what they are good at; while the employee also learns more about themselves, known as self-actualizing.”

This knowledge matters at the point of recruitment as well. As Accenture’s Coletta put it, “If our people are our greatest asset, what types of people do we need? What types of skills, what types of behaviors? That’s the recruiting piece of it all ... [we are looking for] a certain caliber of people who have that continuous learning mindset, who have those key behaviors: inquisitive, want to learn.”

Melissa Anderson, EVP & Chief Business Transformation Officer at Albemarle, says of the current moment, “We see a positive opportunity to recognize the learning that happens at work and the learning that employers enable.” She highlights the importance of looking beyond credentials and to remember the educational importance of workplaces themselves. “We need to recognize that learning happens in every domain of life. It always has — perhaps most importantly at work.”

Legacy schools and degrees continue to be part of talent recruitment, even while the leaders we spoke with approach them carefully. “We want to be very intentional about our skill strategy,” S&P Global’s Garish Ganesan told us. “Which are the schools we should partner with that align with our skill strategy so that the business

case for finding the right job for early talent is very clear.” He noted, for example, that corporate internship programs are typically “largely driven by grade-level, not by skills,” a difference that matters for firms like S&P Global that place hundreds of interns annually.

Koch Inc.’s headquarters has had success in collaborating with the W. Frank Barton School of Business at nearby Wichita State University to develop a talent pathway specifically for adults without college degrees. The program, called Spero (Latin for hope), offers classroom-based micro-credentials that are targeted toward upskilling and reskilling for the purpose of developing individuals who are ready for meaningful work, whether that’s with Koch or other employers in the community.

“We want them to be successful,” Chennault-Reid said. “They want us to be successful. It’s the principle of mutual benefit in action. It’s a win-win for the community, the individual and for Koch.”



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Melissa Anderson, EVP & Chief
Business Transformation Officer,
Albemarle

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Longer Workspans and New Credentials

We asked leaders to talk about another major change for corporate talent development: lengthening lifespans and increasingly age-heterogeneous workplaces. Longer lives mean longer workspans: the number of years people can anticipate pursuing paid employment. Coupled with AI, this demographic change means that younger workers can anticipate moving across multiple jobs and whole careers, while young and experienced alike can anticipate continual re-skilling.

Corporate leaders already recognize this, and are experimenting with more flexible employment models, phased retirements, and cross-generational mentoring exchanges that can enable sustained productivity and resilience.

IBM's LaMoreaux was clear about the limits of stereotypical conceptions of the connection between age and tech change. "There is no correlation between the generations, continuous learning, up-skilling, and aptitude for AI," she said.

"What it comes down to is your aptitude for curiosity, and your aptitude for learning. No company should fall into generational stereotypes when it comes to who can learn—and benefit from—AI."

Albemarle's Anderson noted that organizations increasingly balance the recruitment of new talent with efforts to retrain and redeploy experienced workers who may cycle across multiple industries over the course of their careers. "I think the opportunity here is making people more impactful and effective ... The careers of the future allow people to think about where they can contribute, their own personal career strategy, where their interests lie. Where their natural talents are and then continue to learn and build on them and expand them," she said.

Workday's Ernst detailed an internal program where AI matches Workmates to short term projects outside their comfort zone, to get into a different group, and expand their network. "We've had over 5,000 Workmates participate in the gig, and we've tracked gig participants longitudinally over the last two years, and we see a 42% increase in internal mobility. That's 42% of our people who are finding their next role or opportunity at Workday rather than the competition. That's all being powered by AI, experience-based development, helping the company grow and helping people grow their careers at the same time."

Longstanding markers of career progression also are changing. Walmart's Morris captured this succinctly: "It's out of date to think about a retirement age. We know that's not a reality."

In virtually the same breath, she told us that Walmart's youngest associate is aged 16, its oldest is 95. S&P Global's Ganesan talked about extending contributors' participation well beyond traditional timelines: building flexibility into career models, enabling non-linear careers, and supporting later life re-skilling "allows employees to continually contribute in meaningful ways at S&P, but also society at large." Leaders were cognizant of larger cultural shifts in the meaning and experience of work in later life. As IBM's LaMoreaux put it, "The idea of longevity is now in our society in a very different way, and people want value out of work in different ways."

Former HR lead at Chemours, Albemarle, and Hewlett-Packard **Susan Kelliher** describes "gradual exits" as a flexible workforce strategy that pairs early-career learners with later-stage employees who have reduced their hours, creating programs similar to co-op or vocational programs. She believes that this approach would mitigate productivity loss, safety risks within dangerous chemical manufacturing environments, and long on-ramp periods that occur when organizations wait until retirement to backfill roles. Allowing late-career employees the opportunity for periodic returns. "Having those [later-stage career] individuals come back, I would like to do it more. I think it's really valuable. If you think about people that are on the back end of their careers, it might really support

their personal rhythm. They don't want to be showing up every day, even if it's just a half a day. They want to show up. Six weeks ... Be the sage in the plant."

Hubbell's Tucker concurred on the value of these inter-generational exchanges. "How do we create an environment in which it's, 'hey, you've got people coming up behind you. How do we share the knowledge that we have?' And then how do you reverse mentor? [Our team members] might have a different way to do that that's using technology that might be better."

Albemarle's Anderson described a novel way that her firm was leveraging the knowledge of senior workers who were concluding their careers by helping the company make detailed specifications for aging physical plants: putting their site-specific wisdom to work creating documents and data that would be very hard to outsource.

Demographic and technological change together are accelerating the move toward alternative credentials and new forms of skill signaling. Several executives described how internal badges, micro-credentials, and AI-verified portfolios are beginning to supplement, and in some cases replace, traditional degrees. Ganesan noted that S&P Global is making efforts to rethink the value chain around talent development and encouraging employees to assess their own skills,

connect them directly to curated learning opportunities, and then to open positions in the organization.

"Our role is to enable our employees to take charge of their own development and make resources available to them."

Dominion Energy's Russell, underscored the trend, observing that "In my experience leading IT teams, it's increasingly clear having a four-year degree matters less than before—what matters most now is your ability to get things done." Rhonda Morris agreed: "We need to move from a four-year degree mindset to a lifetime learning mindset, where education is deeply experiential, social, and integrated into work over the course of a career."

There also is work to do in better understanding the talent a company already has. Layney cited the imperative of reimagining jobs and roles through a skills-based lens to better align talent with business strategy. Alongside concerted efforts at firms like Accenture and IBM that are developing detailed skill taxonomies, there are many other companies that struggle to specify the skills and capabilities their jobs require: "It's amazing how opaque that still is in organizations," she said.

Layne told us that moving beyond traditional role definitions to more rigorous, skills-driven frameworks is essential for improving workflow design and elevating talent management.

These developments carry important policy implications. If employer-issued skill portfolios and credentials are becoming central components of corporate talent strategy, they likely will need to be recognized as part of regional, state, and national workforce-development efforts as well. Doing so might make for more porous movement between workplaces and legacy schools.

For instance, employer-issued credentials in project management or cybersecurity might count toward academic certificates or degrees; employers and colleges might collaborate to create such programs and continually revise them as workplace needs and technologies evolve. Small and mid-sized employers face the greatest barriers to implementing these innovations. Leaders we spoke with were clear that developing these approaches requires care and effort among all parties involved.





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Rhonda Morris, Board Director at
Workday and former CHRO, Chevron

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Challenges and Opportunities for the Future That's Now

Despite significant momentum in workplace learning, executives emphasized that several barriers continue to constrain scale and impact. The challenges are structural as well as cultural, and they reflect the realities organizations face as they navigate AI and other technological shifts.

A prominent barrier is the tension between short-term financial pressures and long-term talent needs. Several leaders noted that corporate financial officers often approach learning through a “quarterly” lens, prioritizing cost containment over investment; an approach encouraged by the accounting rules that classify human capital as an expense.

As a result, when training is framed as a cost rather than an investment, budgets tighten quickly and development initiatives struggle to compete with near-term operational demands. Layney observed, “I just think we've continued to not hold leaders accountable for the talent aspects of the business. Not really. When have you ever heard, on an earnings call, anyone ask about the talent?”

Koch's Chennault-Reid emphasized the need to disrupt outdated practices and apply creative destruction to hiring practices, continual learning, and internal development to ensure companies have the talent needed for today and the future.

AI can be an enabler of this shift in thinking about human capital. **Susan Youngblood**, a career CHRO who now advises portfolio company leaders for Bessemer Venture Partners sees the technology deployed as a force multiplier for individual capability.

“The biggest impact for generative AI is going to be in driving value, creating a new product, new service, or new customer experience for a company.”

Unfortunately, outdated conceptions of corporate value, along with organizational inertia, inhibit progress. “Right now, nearly everyone is heads down focused on automation and productivity increases,” she said, likening large enterprises to “battleships” that turn slowly even when leadership understands the need for change. Concerns about security, privacy, and compliance add additional friction, particularly with emerging technologies such as generative AI, and can intensify uneven adoption inside organizations and reinforce hesitation among employees who are already anxious about technological disruption.

Even so, leaders identified multiple mechanisms for leveraging change. Leaders at firms as different as Walmart and IBM are far along in AI-enabled personalization and transparent skill

taxonomies that democratize talent development by giving employees clearer, more relevant pathways to growth. Human-centered approaches to technology adoption, as Youngblood described, can reduce fear and help employees engage confidently with new tools. “It’s getting people over that initial barrier of, ‘I can’t use AI because I’m not technical.’ And then providing people with content at a reasonable pace that will help them get whatever proficiency they’re trying to get,” she said.

Unequal access to educational opportunities early in the life course reduces individual mobility and, in turn, restricts how firms can develop, reskill, and deploy adult workers. Kroger’s Massa put it bluntly: “We have to create space for people to learn.” In creating that space, Massa and his colleagues are moving learning and talent development from the college campus to the corporate campus, changing the rhythms and cultures of both settings simultaneously.

In an AI-enabled economy, companies are choosing to become education providers in their own right, as well as partnering with schools to create truly novel learning infrastructure.

This new learning infrastructure can reach those who have been poorly served by the decades-long “college for all” project, broadening opportunity and unlocking the potential for millions of Americans whose

lives do not match the expectations and timetables of traditional degree programs. The potential for impact at scale is significant: the number of U.S. workers employed in 2025 by our respondents' firms is greater than the total number of bachelors degrees awarded that year. And because workplace learning can scale rapidly within organizations, it allows multiple models to evolve simultaneously, rather than relying on the "one-size-fits-all" approach of traditional schooling.

The early successes our respondents describe in partnering with educational institutions and in creating new talent pipelines suggest that a more flexible ecology of learning opportunities is already well underway. Walmart's Morris is decidedly optimistic about where it all is heading.

"People want to be part of the future," she said. The potential is massive. Consider that the business firms in the Fortune 500 collectively employ more than 31 million people: nearly twice the number of Americans currently in high school.

What might happen if all those workers were offered meaningful learning opportunities that bridged the gap between school and work?

Building a national human capital system in which workplaces and schools became coequal and coextensive sites of learning is an exciting civic challenge. It is already among the most remarkable educational innovations of our time.



Authors and Contributors

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Anne Trumbore is Chief Digital Learning Officer at the Sands Institute for Lifelong Learning at The Darden School, University of Virginia, where she is responsible for creating a strategy to expand access to world-class education and advance Darden's mission of providing transformational learning experiences to learners globally. Her book, [The Teacher in the Machine: A Human History of Education Technology](#) was published by Princeton University Press in May 2025.

Eva Sage-Gavin is a board director and former global Chief Human Resources Officer with deep expertise in organizational transformation, talent strategy, and leadership. She has held senior C-suite and HR leadership roles at Accenture, Gap Inc., Disney Consumer Products, PepsiCo, Sun Microsystems, and Xerox, leading large-scale workforce and capability initiatives. Eva serves on corporate and nonprofit boards, including the Board on Human-Systems Integration at the National Academy of Sciences. She is engaged in applied thought leadership on longevity, building human capability for resilience, and workforce transformation through the [Stanford Center on Longevity](#) and [Learning Society](#).

Mitchell Stevens is Professor of Education and (by courtesy) Sociology at Stanford, where he convenes the [Pathways Network](#), serves as Co-Director of the [Stanford Center on Longevity](#), and leads the [Learning Society](#) project. His most recent books are [Seeing the World: How Universities Make Knowledge in a Global Era](#) and [Remaking College: The Changing Ecology of Higher Education](#).

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Interview Contributors

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- **Cara Chennault-Reid**, Vice President of Human Resources, Koch Inc.
- **Nicole Coletta**, Director of Talent Insights, Accenture
- **Chris Ernst**, SVP Talent, Chief Learning Officer, Workday
- **Girish Ganesan**, Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer, S&P Global
- **Mark Kaestner**, Vice President for Talent Management, Learning & Development, People Analytics & Transformation, Ball Corporation
- **Susan Kelliher**, Chief HR Officer Chemours
- **Nickle LaMoreaux**, Senior Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, IBM
- **Tracy Layney**, Former CHRO, Levi Strauss & Co. and Adjunct Professor, University of Chicago Booth School of Business
- **Tim Massa**, Executive Vice President and Chief Associate Experience Officer, Kroger
- **Donna Morris**, Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer, Walmart
- **Rhonda Morris**, Board Director at Workday and former CHRO, Chevron
- **John Russell**, Chief Technology Officer, Dominion Energy
- **Debbie Tucker**, Vice President for Talent, Inclusion and Communications, Hubbell
- **Susan Youngblood**, Operating Advisor on AI and Workforce Strategy, Bessemer Venture Partners

All interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 2025, via Zoom, by at least two of the study authors; transcribed verbatim; and analyzed jointly by the authors with assistive technologies. Interviewees were given the opportunity to review quotations for accuracy in advance of publication.

Sands Institute for Lifelong Learning

The [Sands Institute for Lifelong Learning](#) at the University of Virginia Darden School of Business supports learners globally by providing transformational learning experiences in business education at all stages of their careers. The Institute promotes world-class learning environments, innovative programming, research in lifelong learning, and the recruitment and retention of top-ranked faculty.

Stanford Center on Longevity

The [Stanford Center on Longevity](#) (SCL) is an interdisciplinary research center that engages more than 100 faculty across Stanford's seven schools. Directed by Stanford psychologist Laura Carstensen, it serves as an intellectual hub for researchers interested in longevity and long-living societies.



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