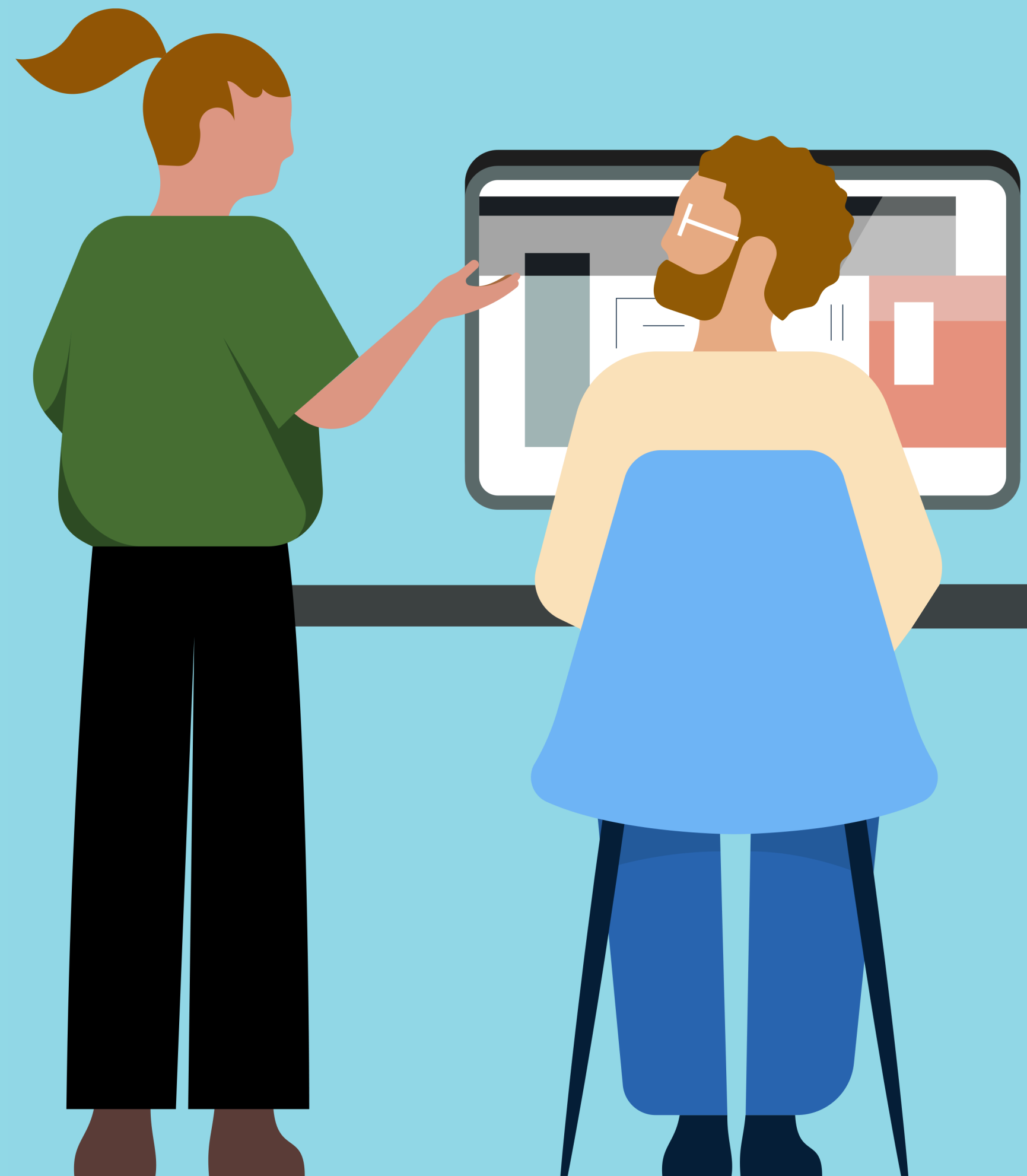


# Talent Development's ROI Playbook



# Foreword: Advancing career-driven learning, one play at a time

As companies adapt to a new landscape driven by technological transformation, talent leaders face daunting tasks. They must keep and energize top talent, do more with less across their programs, and inspire employees to build the skills that will keep their company future-ready. While the challenge is significant, so is the opportunity. However, there isn't yet a playbook for unlocking that opportunity.

We believe **the key is career-driven learning**—where upskilling, coaching and internal mobility are all combined to help **align employees' personal career goals with organizational needs**.

In fact, LinkedIn data has shown that **progress toward career goals** is employees' number one **motivation to learn**. For companies to be their best, their employees need to be able to do their best.

LinkedIn has made a commitment to amplify the insights we've gathered from thousands of interactions with talent leaders. Our goal is to equip these leaders with effective strategies and frameworks to guide them through this unprecedented moment of change.

**Showcasing the ROI of learning**, the focus of this playbook, is a key component of that change. Let's begin.

# #1

Progress toward career goals is employees' #1 motivation to learn



# Elevate career-driven learning by measuring what matters

As AI changes the world of work at an unprecedented pace, it has become clear **how critical learning and upskilling are to business survival**. Yet measuring ROI is notoriously difficult for Learning and Talent Development professionals, and there's a disconnect between the metrics most commonly used in the world of learning and talent development and the metrics C-suite executives use to evaluate business performance.

This challenging moment presents an opportunity for Learning and Talent Development professionals to elevate career-driven learning inside their organizations by effectively **communicating their impact**.

Shifting the thinking about career-driven learning from a perk to a priority was already important. Now it's urgent. This playbook provides guidance and resources for **measuring and demonstrating the value of career-driven learning** to your business.

“Asking, What data do I need to be a better partner to the business? is so much different than, What data do I need to prove that I'm worth the expense?”



**Jess Almie**

Learning & Performance Strategist at Almie Consulting



# Key Opportunities

While measuring the impact of your L&D initiatives is important, it's equally important to communicate the impact of those initiatives to stakeholders across the business.

This playbook will explore proven strategies for capitalizing on three key ROI opportunities from global Learning and Talent Development leaders and experts.

## 1. Clarify key business priorities related to learning

Learning and Talent Development professionals generally aren't measured against P&L impacts; L&D isn't often seen as a strategic business driver

## 2. Prioritize metrics that tie to business goals

Don't stop at measuring learning hours and seat time — measure metrics that matter to the business

## 3. Capture and communicate success to your stakeholders

There's no blueprint – and few resources – for showcasing upskilling metrics in a consistent, repeatable and transparent way



“

Effective stakeholder management requires a strong partnership between talent development teams, HR business partners and business leadership. As part of your needs assessment, connect with both budget and key decision makers in each department.

If you socialize your plans with wider leadership teams for input before putting them into action, you'll get greater buy-in and alignment from your stakeholders.”



**Stephanie Conway**

Senior Director, Talent Development at LinkedIn



# Clarify key business priorities

Measuring the impact of learning and talent programs is as much about stakeholder management as metrics.

**Naphtali Bryant**, executive coach and leadership development consultant at RAC Leadership, describes this as thinking in terms of **ROE (Return on Expectations for your stakeholders) rather than ROI.**

This playbook lays out three steps for demonstrating the ROI of your L&D programs that focus heavily on understanding the needs of other leaders in the business and bringing them along. The first, covered in this section, is to clarify key business priorities.

## Key tactics in this step:

-  Understand the stakeholder landscape
-  Connect with key people

“Shadow different teams to understand how the business makes money, how each team operates, and where pain points are, and then build learning programs tied to business goals, team needs, and overall strategy.”



**Benton McTaggart**  
Founder at Benton McTaggart Coaching





## Understand the stakeholder landscape

Understanding your key stakeholders is vital to demonstrating impact. In complex organizations it can be hard to know who or how to engage, so the experts we spoke to recommended using two criteria to define key stakeholders:

### Their level of approval over your initiative:

#### Decision-makers

These are the people with the most direct authority over your program, such as division leaders, C-Suite executives, or GMs who own budget decisions.

#### Influencers

These are the people with indirect authority who can be vocal supporters for your program. **Stephanie Conway**, LinkedIn's Senior Director of Talent Development, starts by talking to chiefs of staff who deeply understand the needs of the business leaders they support. Others may include long-tenured employees, or respected front-line managers.

### Their starting perception of your initiative:

#### Advocates

Your goal is to pull your stakeholders toward this end of the spectrum, where they are not only aware of, but are champions of your upskilling initiatives.

#### Skeptics

**Chris Louie**, Head of Talent Development at Thomson Reuters, says it's most important to start with your skeptics to ensure your learning program addresses their priorities.



## Connect with key people

Connecting directly with stakeholders is key to getting proper context. **Mark Pearson**, VP of Talent, Culture and Community at AMD, recommends an annual listening tour to understand the C-suite's talent needs. If your stakeholder engagement isn't at that stage of maturity, even a few 1:1s with key leaders is a good place to start.

### A roadmap for stakeholder alignment:

#### Recommended stakeholder questions:

- What are your top 3-4 strategic objectives?
- What are the biggest talent and skill pain points and bottlenecks in the business ?
- What impact has learning and career development had on your business?
- What additional impact would you like to see learning and career development have on your business?
- What meetings should I attend and what sources of information should I read to stay on top of your priorities?

#### As you listen, pay attention to:

- Business goals, objectives and investment priorities that learning and career development initiatives could support
- How your talent development programs could bolster business performance metrics, such as revenue growth, profit margins, and employee retention
- New products, initiatives or services that might require new or different skills inside the organization
- Barriers and pain points that learning and career development programs could help mitigate



“ Any time you have an initiative, **you’re going to have skeptics**. You need to understand their personal hang-ups and perspectives. Ask them about their experience and what’s already working for them. You’re able to overcome their skepticism when you can connect to things they are already doing and have confidence in.”



**Chris Louie**

Head of Talent Development at Thomson Reuters

# Stakeholder Map

Use this stakeholder map to identify the key people you need to connect with. In the boxes below, list the people who are your decision makers or influencers, and determine whether they are more likely to be advocates or skeptics at first. This will help you define an approach for engaging each one.

Decision-makers

Influencers

Advocates

Skeptics


# Define the right metrics

You already know how important it is to go beyond the engagement metrics that are typically used to show learning outcomes.

But it's far easier said than done, and you are expected to demonstrate impact across the business for outcomes you don't fully control.

As one leader told us, "L&D is often seen as both the **silver bullet** for any problems the business is facing and the **scapegoat** when things go wrong."

It's a challenging dynamic, and this section is all about easing the burden by more clearly connecting learning goals to desired business outcomes.

## Key tactics in this step:

- Shift from engagement to outcomes
- 📷 Widen the aperture of what you measure

“ The world of work is changing faster than ever, so if you’re sticking with the old feel-good ‘butts-in-seats’ metrics, you’re going to get left behind. It's not about spraying your learning programs and praying someone gets it. Learning programs will be measured by what sticks — metrics like time to execution and increased qualitative feedback in performance reviews will help us show our impact.”



**Mark Pearson**

VP, Talent, Culture and Community at AMD



## Shift from engagement to outcomes

Moving from measuring engagement alone to measuring outcomes is a vital step in demonstrating ROI. You're likely familiar with the tried and true Kirkpatrick Model for making this shift.

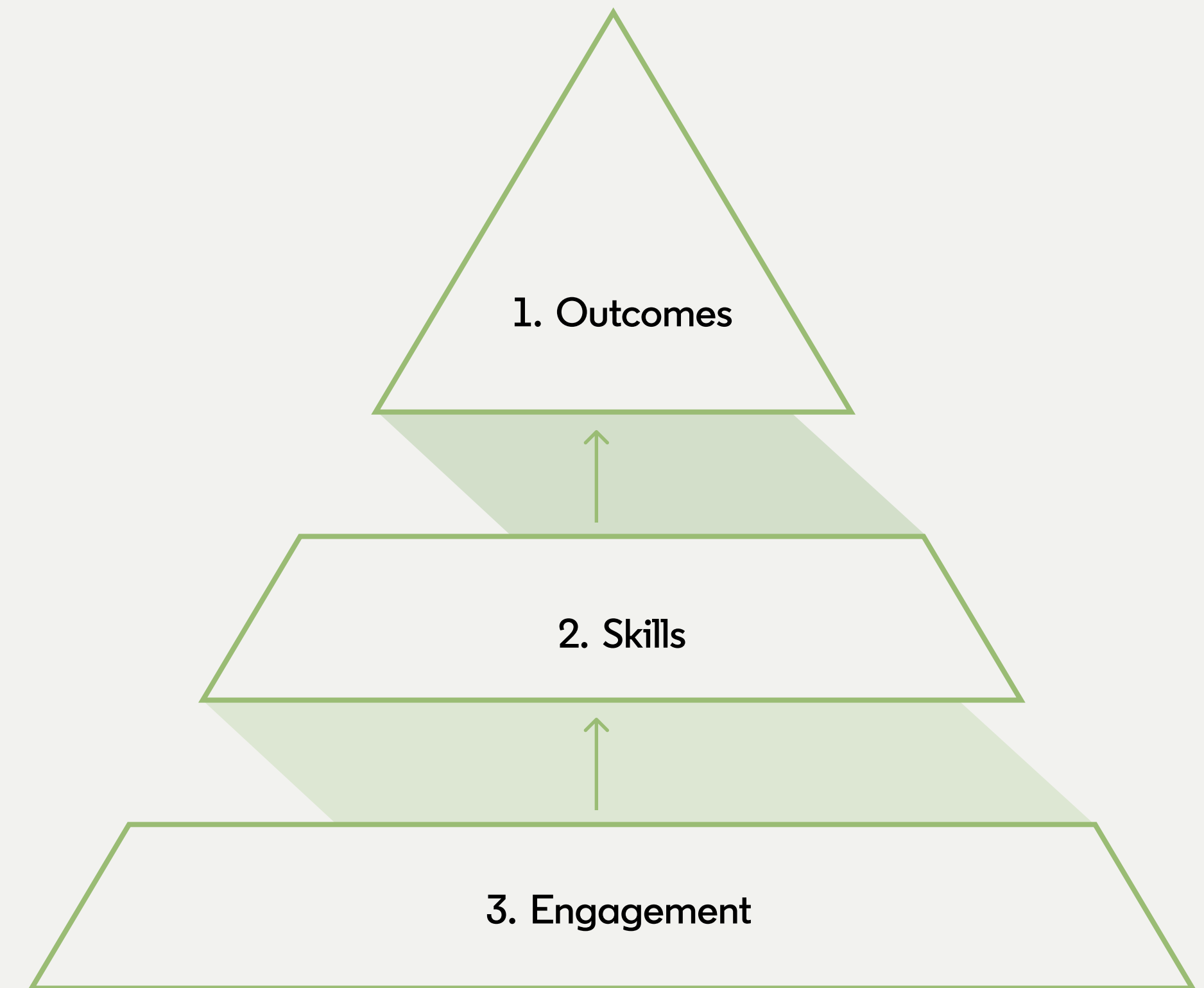
We've developed a simplified version that will help you connect learning engagement to business impact.

- 1. Outcomes:** Start by identifying metrics most directly relevant to the business outcomes you and your stakeholders are trying to drive
- 2. Skills:** Then pinpoint the skills needed to achieve those outcomes
- 3. Engagement:** Finally, identify the most important metrics that let you know employees are actually attending and engaging with your programs

Stakeholder expectations should give you a start in key areas of focus at all three levels.

**88%** of organizations are concerned with retention

**#1** Providing learning opportunities is the #1 retention strategy







## Widen the aperture of what you measure

In LinkedIn's research, we've identified the most common metrics used by Learning and Talent Development pros.

### Most Common Ways to Measure The Business Impact of Career Development

Employee engagement	72%
Retention	64%
Employees developing new skills	55%
Promotions	48%
Internal mobility rate	32%

## Examine Your Impact

The previous metrics are a good starting point, but to bring your stakeholders along, it helps to **think more broadly about the kinds of impact you can influence or assist**. Consider measuring the three types of quantitative metrics below, using the examples provided as inspiration.

### Bottom line results/financial impact:

- Increased revenue
- Bigger average deal size  
(after upskilling sales people)

### Productivity, efficiency and output:

- New hire time to competence
- Faster ticket resolution
- Fewer injuries

### Employee career outcomes that go beyond NPS and other engagement scores:

- Improved employee performance
- Employees who up/re-skilled and moved to a new career path



## Qualitative metrics that help you connect emotionally with your stakeholders

As Weill Cornell Medicine's Chief Learning Officer, **Ruth Gotian** works with physician leaders who want to see hard numbers for programs where it can be difficult to quantify results, especially at early stages.

She uses qualitative results to help win hearts and minds:

**Impact stories:** These can include **customer outcomes** as well as **employee impact**. One of Ruth's favorite outcomes is when an employee who was stuck in their career gets unstuck because of a learning program.

**Employee testimonials:** Giving employees a platform to publicly speak to the **benefits of career development initiatives** is a powerful way to win over skeptics.

**Manager observations & feedback:** Capture **testimonials** from managers about the impact upskilling has had on their team's work.

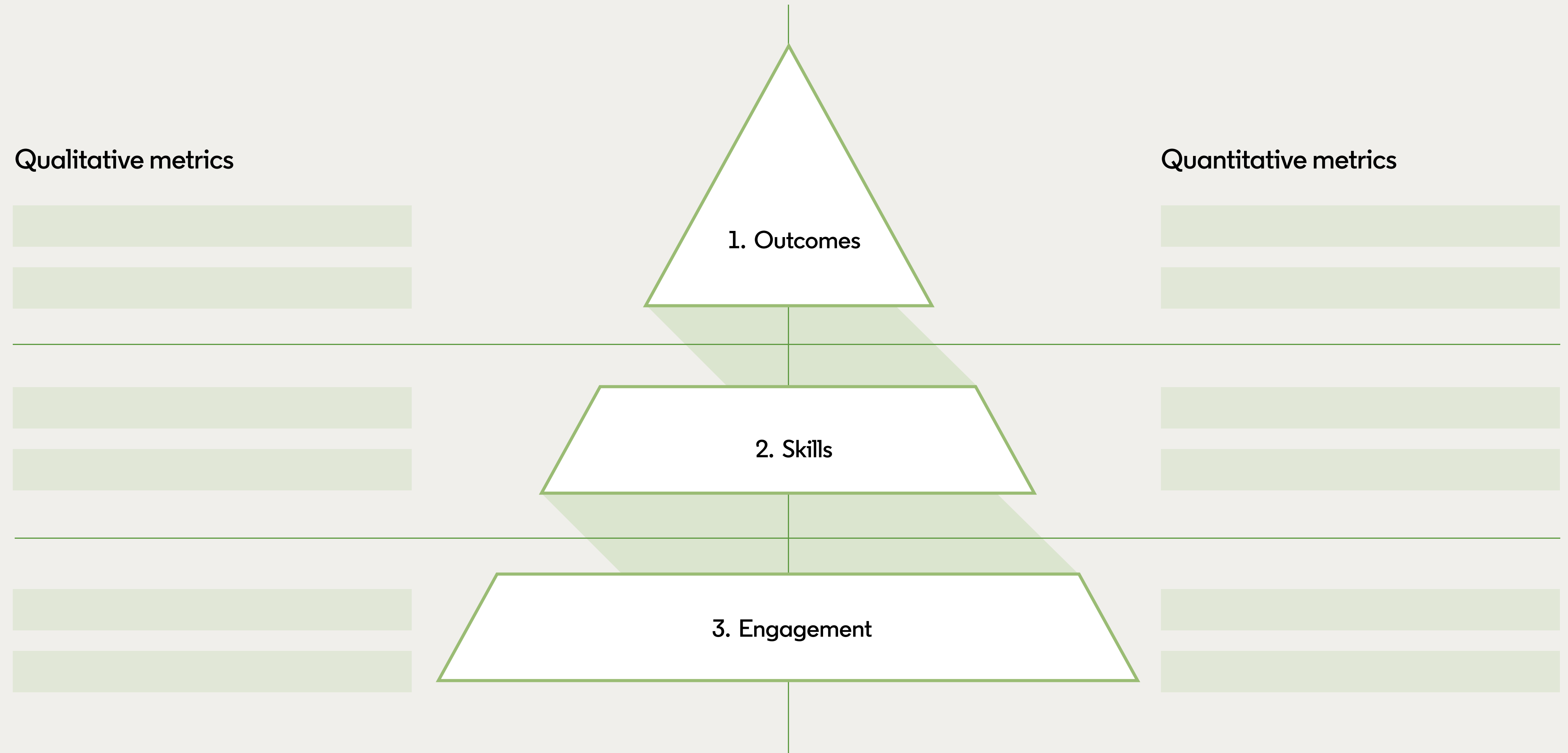


# Define the right metrics

## Now it's your turn.

What are some metrics that are relevant for your organization and programs?

Brainstorm qualitative and quantitative metrics for each level of the impact model:



“ We all know mentoring works, but it's difficult to quantify the impact. We took a qualitative approach: through stories, keynotes, photos, and social media features about mentoring at our organization. We knew it was working because when people got promoted, they thanked their mentor by name.”



**Ruth Gotian**  
Chief Learning Officer at Weill Cornell








# Capture success

It's challenging enough to define the right metrics that will resonate with your stakeholders. But measuring those metrics is often the hardest part.

We consulted leading practitioners and gathered the following three tactics for demonstrating measurement. By the end of this section, you'll have practical guidance on demonstrating program success to internal peers and decision-makers.

## Key tactics in this step:

-  Breaking it down
-  Pacing it out
-  Aligning with the bottom line

# Companies that prioritize career development have higher rates of engaged learners and job promotions

↑ **2.4x** more employees who engage with learning

↑ **2.6x** higher rate of promotions overall

↑ **3.4x** higher rate of promotions into management and leadership roles



## Measuring impact

Learning and Talent Development professionals grappling with the “how” of implementation shared three strategies for making impact and ROI metrics manageable:

**Break them down:** Break bigger impact metrics into smaller intermediate goals

**Pace them out:** Establish distinct metrics for each program phase to help tell an impact story that builds over time

**Align with the bottom line:** Connect metrics to money made or saved for your business



“Amazon offers a variety of programs at varying lengths through the Career Choice program. For example, we offer CDL programs which can be completed in a matter of weeks to a Cloud Support specialist that can take up to several months all the way through college degrees which can take years. Regardless of the program duration, we **measure success through outcomes** to ensure the investment made by Amazon and the employee pays off in terms of **improved skills, job placement and wage growth.**”



Tammy Thieman  
Director, Career Choice at Amazon



## Breaking it down

If some of the key metrics you've chosen are too complex to make the cause and effect of your learning program clear, try breaking them down into smaller pieces.

For example, LinkedIn's **Stephanie Conway** took on the challenging goal of building AI expertise in the LinkedIn workforce, and broke it down into building blocks like number of employees consistently using Microsoft Copilot in their work.

In the spirit of this approach, let's break it down further. Imagine an organization that has a goal of increased AI skills proficiency. How could a learning or talent leader connect their program to this outcome?



## Measuring metrics across diverse learning formats

**Stacia Garr**, Cofounder and Principal Analyst at RedThread, highlights six types of AI learning and the associated metrics to measure progress:

### Plan:

How we encourage and enable our employees to embrace AI as part of their career development journey

**Metric:** % of senior leaders who have had planning sessions to incorporate AI in career development

### Discover:

How we enable our employees to find the types of content and opportunities that will prepare them to leverage AI

**Metric:** # of campaigns highlighting internal resources on AI-driven workflows

### Consume:

How we enable our people to access and consume AI-related learning content

**Metric:** # of individuals who have completed a course on using AI in their role

### Experiment:

How we provide opportunities for practice of new AI skills and knowledge

**Metric:** # of employees using AI tools in product development processes

### Connect:

How we enable people to connect with each other and learn from each other

**Metric:** # of questions from employees received by internal AI experts

### Perform:

How we enable our employees to deliver on the potential for AI-driven productivity

**Metric:** % performance improvement on AI task-based assessments in learning programs





## Pacing it out

The longer-term impact of many learning and career development initiatives can conflict with the needs of leaders driven by quarterly results.

LinkedIn's **Stephanie Conway** recommends plotting your impact metrics on multiple time horizons in order to show your stakeholders more immediate progress toward goals that sit further out.

Let's go back to our hypothetical L&D leader who needs to show her learning initiative is increasing AI literacy in the organization. She might sketch out some of her goals as below. By pacing out her impact metrics, our L&D leader is able to keep momentum with her stakeholders.

### By end of Q1:

100% of senior leaders have had career conversations with their team members on how to incorporate AI in their day-to-day work

### By end of Q2:

50% of employees have completed courses on AI-infused workflows

### By end of Q4:

100% increase in employees who self-report frequently using AI tools in their work

“ Demonstrate impact in stages:  
in the near term, measure something like  
training attendance and learning reach;  
in the medium term, measure skill proficiency;  
and in the longer term, work toward business  
impact with a goal like organizational fluency in AI.”



**Stephanie Conway**

Senior Director, Talent Development at LinkedIn



## Align with the bottom line

The best way to get business leaders' attention is to show how your initiative impacts their bottom line. For those metrics that are not already tied to financial impact, try to make the connection. HR consultant and L&D expert **Amanda Nolen** suggests three ways to do this. Ask how your initiative can:

- Make money
- Save money
- Mitigate risk

The [Business Value of LinkedIn Learning report](#) gives metrics to help you showcase your programs' ROI. If you're just getting started, the report contains publicly-available estimates to project financial impact of your programs.

### Common metrics

### How to measure financial value

Increased retention rates



Quantify the cost of making external hires to show savings

Increased productivity

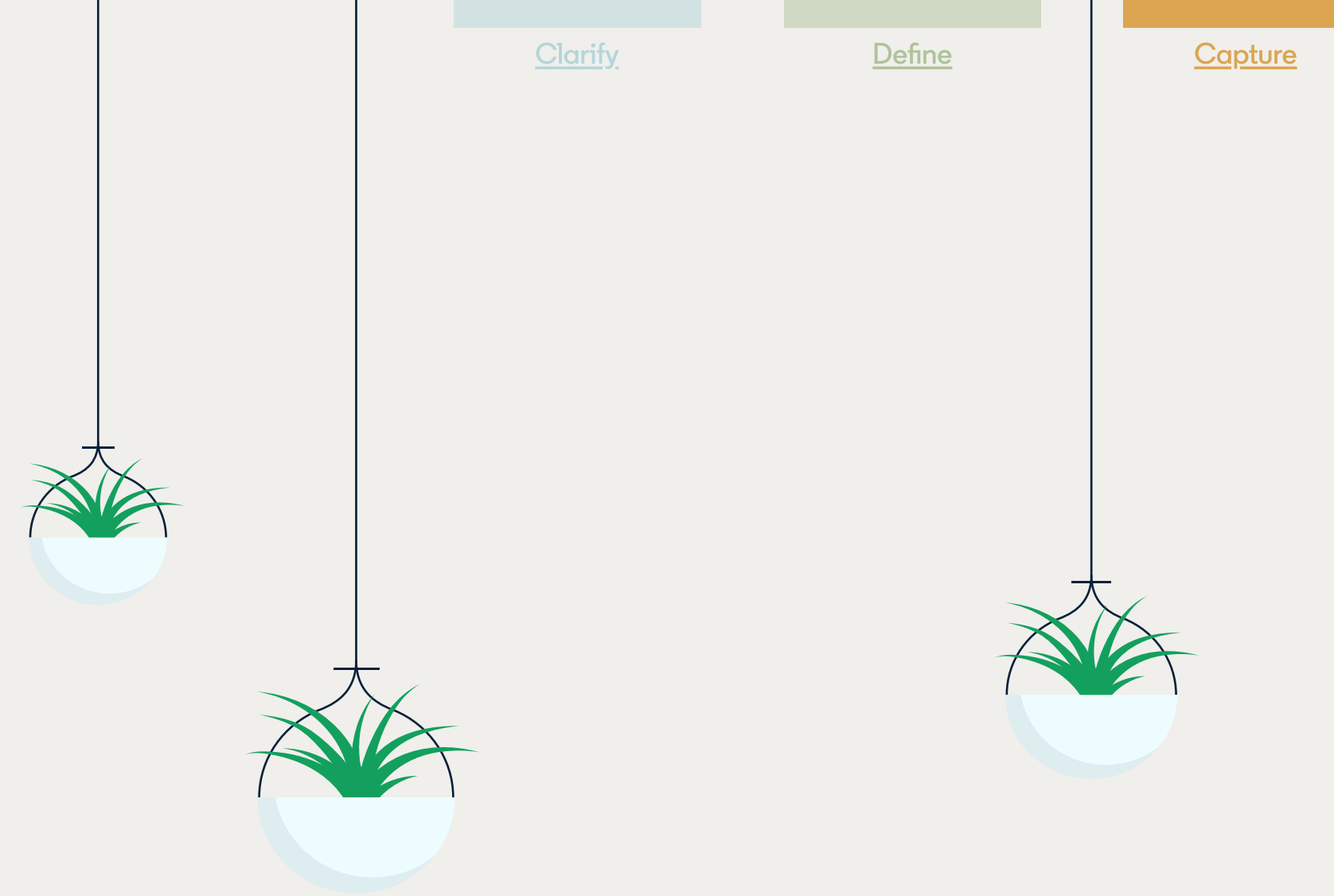


Calculate the value of hours saved by participants

# of participants enrolled in virtual learning workshops



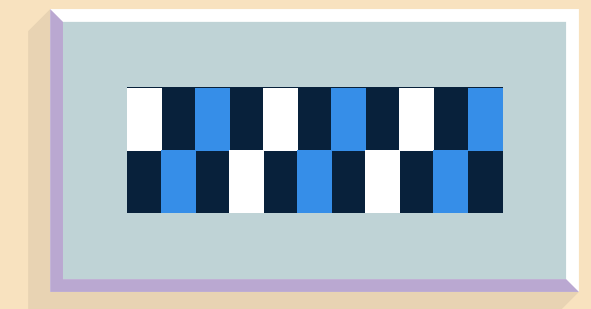
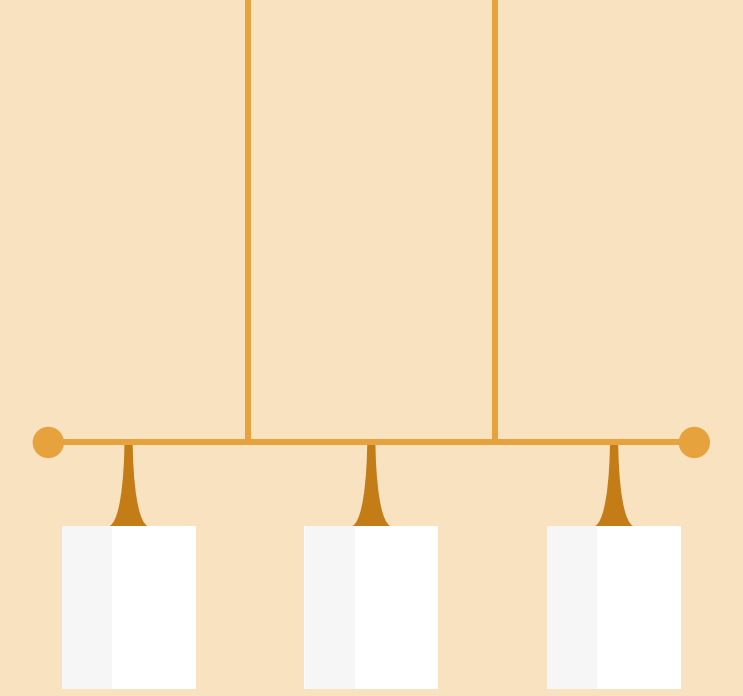
Quantify travel costs avoided (if shifting from in-person to virtual learning)



“ You must be able to answer at least one of these three questions: How will this initiative help you to make money, save money, or mitigate risk for the company?”

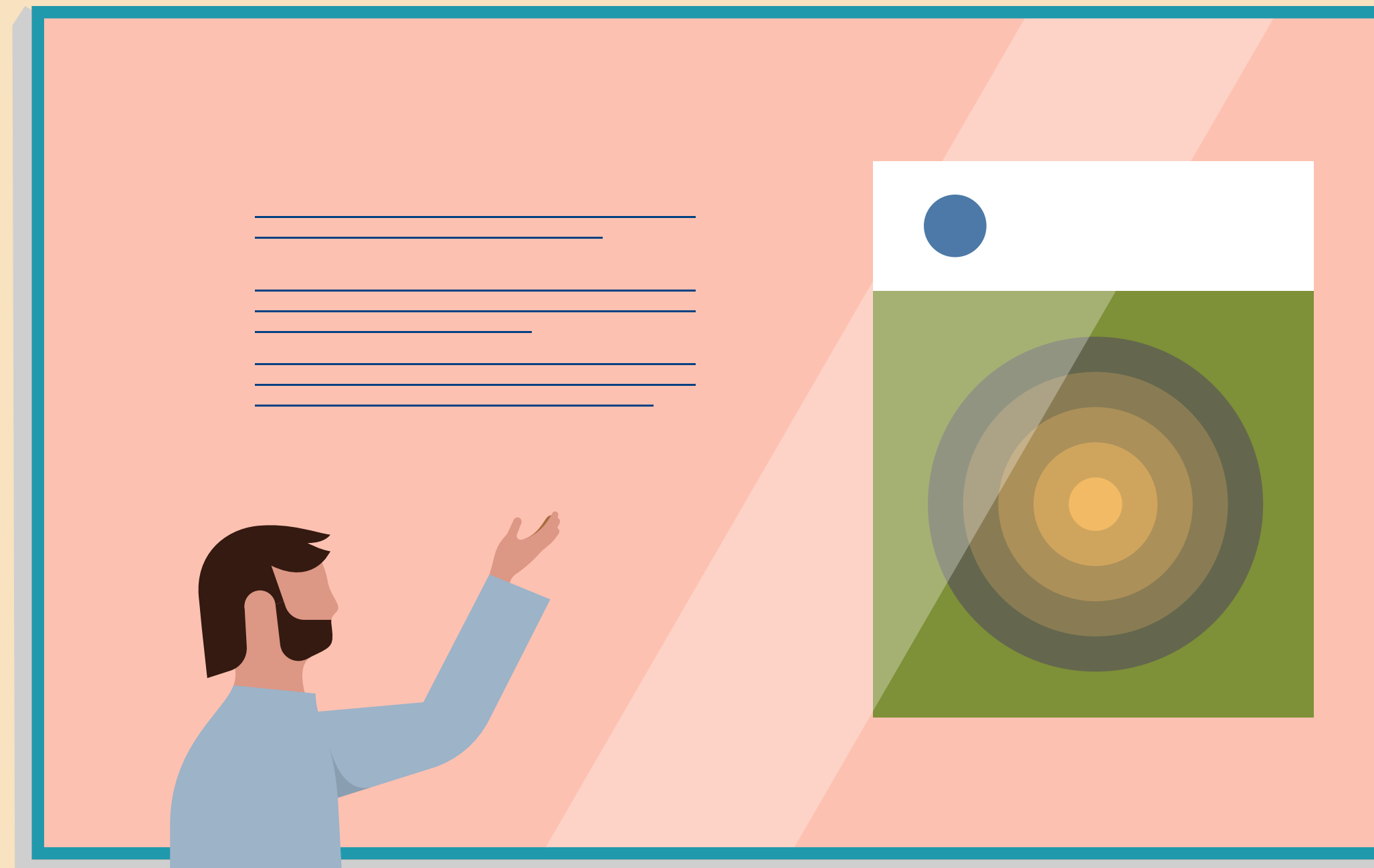


**Amanda Nolen**  
Co-founder at NilesNolen



# 695%

Organizations using LinkedIn Learning courses see higher net revenue and productivity, plus lower learning and hiring costs, leading to an estimated **695% three-year ROI**.





# Creating a virtuous cycle of impact

Measuring ROI should ideally create a positive feedback loop where better input from stakeholders helps you make more informed decisions about where to strategically invest your own resources, leading to better results and positive business outcomes.

It's a process that's never finished: a virtuous cycle of impact. Refer back to this playbook when you are making the case to invest in your upskilling programs, and check out the resources from LinkedIn on the following page for further inspiration.





## Additional Resources

LinkedIn Learning is the only skills development platform built on insights from 1 billion professionals on LinkedIn.



### [1. IDC Report on the business value of learning](#)

Dive deep into the business value of learning to help organizations stay agile and competitive in a rapidly shifting landscape

### [2. Strategies for showing the business impact of learning](#)

Use best-in-class guidance to show business impact of learning programs

### [3. Hard to measure impact can still be the most meaningful](#)

From the power of narrative to how L&D can help employees navigate an AI-driven future, learn how five experts showcase the business impact of their programs

### [4. Learning and development metrics your CEO will care about](#)

Explore eight metrics to show learning program value and engagement

Ready to see how upskilling can make outsized impact on your business?

[Explore LinkedIn's Products](#)