



Did your learning and development predictions come true in 2023?

By Becky Norman, 27th November 2023

At the start of 2023 we asked a selection of TrainingZone's top guest writers to make a prediction about the world of learning and development for the year ahead. With the close of 2023 creeping in, these nine writers look back at their forecasting and assess its accuracy.

When heading into 2023, most of us were vaguely prepared for another year of uncertainty and complexity for organisations. But these days we know better than to make bold assumptions about what, specifically, is in store.

Still, New Year predictions are a good opportunity to flex our forecasting skills and so at the beginning of 2023, we asked our top TrainingZone writers to dust off their crystal ball and make a prediction for the world of learning.

As 2023 draws to a close, we've asked these nine L&D experts to assess the extent to which their prediction 'came true'.

Here's how our L&D future gazers rated their crystal-ball gazing skills...

1. Prediction: Skills must become central to business strategy

Robin Hoyle, Head of Learning Innovation at Huthwaite International

Last year I predicted a focus on L&D informing business strategy through concentrating on the skills gaps organisations need to address to meet their strategic opportunities and challenges. To some extent that has come true, but there is much still to do.

Now the challenge is for L&D teams to focus not just on what people need to do, but how. It is L&D's job to help people develop – and master – new skills. It's the whole organisation's job to ensure this has a positive impact on performance.

I also predicted that we would need to choose technology wisely and, certainly, 2023 has been the year of Generative AI. The degree to which it is actually starting to inform practice and being 'chosen wisely' to support skills development is debatable.

As with most technological breakthroughs the immediate hype by the technophiles (and in the case of AI, the doom-mongers) blots out pragmatic discussion. The focus, inevitably, is on what we could do, rather than what we should do.

2. Prediction: AI will lift L&D out of its rut

Donald Clark, CEO of Wildfire Learning

Well I got that one right! ChatGPT launched on 30 November and has dominated the tech world – the fastest adopted technology our species has ever seen.

Let's be honest, most are using it to learn or for performance support, largely bypassing L&D.

This year I have given keynotes on AI for Learning in the Far East, South Africa, Senegal, Norway, Sweden, Netherlands, Spain, Greece, Belgium, US and UK. It has dominated conference agendas and spawned hundreds of start-ups as well as forcing legacy learning technology companies to up their game.

AI changes everything, the very nature of work, and therefore why we learn, what we learn and how we learn. As an HR or L&D professional, you must upskill to get to know this technology.

3. Prediction: Reflection practice will become BAU

Jackie Clifford, Director of Clarity Learning and Development

I predicted that “this year we will become more reflective than ever before” and I proposed three methods of reflection.

What I notice is that there is definitely in-the-moment reflection. What may be lacking is taking dedicated time for the prospective and retrospective reflection.

To progress our reflective practice I believe that we should make it a priority. We build in time to clean our teeth twice a day so let's make reflection a habit – we could even do it whilst brushing our teeth!

In the morning we can do some prospective reflection about the day ahead and in the evening we can reflect on what went well, what didn't go so well, why and what we'll do tomorrow to make things even better.

4. Prediction: Organisations will stop throwing L&D budget down the drain by truly starting to maximise apprenticeships

Erica Farmer, co-founder of Quantum Rise

Perhaps my prediction was a little over optimistic, however we've seen real momentum with the larger levy paying organisations getting clearer on the benefits of apprenticeships.

The trailblazers of the world in this space – Centrica, Barclays, Amazon, JLR – continue to make impact in not just delivering high impact programmes, but also educating other organisations too.

There is still lots to do, and with a general election a year away, the landscape will become more uncertain as forecasters consider the changes a Labour government would make to the adult education system.

There are calls for the levy to be more flexible, and with the dawn of AI looking to flip education on its head, who knows what it will look like this time next year! All in all, I grade my prediction B minus.

5. Prediction: L&D maturity will be defined by how we take personal responsibility and step out with courage

Laura Overton, Founder of Learning Changers

The avalanche of change this year has been accompanied by a tsunami of fear, uncertainty, doubt and even denial as L&D struggles to keep up and understand the implications for our work and jobs.

This year's CIPD Learning at Work study showed that organisations harnessing a broad range of technology options (including generative AI) were more likely to report strategic alignment with organisational outcomes, a more holistic learning process and opportunities to continuously improve.

They were AI curious, twenty times more likely to be using generative AI, chatbots and adaptive learning and curation tools than minimalist technology users (with a focus on simple libraries and LMS). They were also more likely to be driven by performance requirements and informed by evidence-based learning principles.

What's more, the study showed us that L&D practitioners who's business leaders recognise their contribution to business impact were more likely to be broadrange users of technology. They are also more likely to be working in a culture of permission where experiments are given time and team harness the outcomes in a spirit of continual improvement.

So yes, I think that 2023 has shown us that fortune is favouring the bold and will continue to do so!

6. Prediction: The AI bot will reap hype status – but we must be wary

Dr Nigel Paine, Co-Presenter of Learning Now TV

At the start of 2023 I predicted the huge rise in interest in ChatGPT and the need to not get carried away. We will, in my wise words: "help AI find its place". It is neither heaven nor hell but another technology to help us make life better for L&D and the communities it serves.

I got the focus on AI right but I was a little cautious about its power to disrupt. If you forget the hysteria, then AI is still a game changer. However, it will do that as a helper, a supporter, an aide and co-pilot, not as a monster that will take over.

On balance, I give myself 8/10 for putting my finger on something important, but not quite realising how far-reaching its implications have already become. And we are just at the beginning. It will find its place as I predicted, but its impact will be bigger than I acknowledged.

7. Prediction: Coaching conversations will gain prominence

Jo Wright, Co-founder of Coaching Culture

My prediction that more and more leaders and managers will use a coaching style with their teams continues to gather momentum. Organisations increasingly recognise that the role of the manager is becoming that of a coach. In fact, research is now showing that more organisations are either

removing the role of the 'people manager' altogether and replacing them with coaches or creating self-managing teams.

This trend will continue as it is increasingly recognised that not only do incapable managers create high levels of employee anxiety and stress, but leading and managing people requires a high level of skill and emotional intelligence, not role-specific technical capability. Times are changing for sure.

8. Prediction: JOMO is the new FOMO

Nicky Marshall, Director of Discover Your Bounce

My original prediction was around the joy of missing out and a higher value being placed on happiness, and I am seeing some of this play out. People are carving out 'call free' times in their work schedules and I think there is a bigger emphasis on doing what is meaningful/makes you happy – both at work and in their own time.

However, I do think that people are busier than ever, at work and at home – whether employed, running a business or running a household, people seem time-poor and stressed. Something that we may see being addressed in 2024?

9. Prediction: As more employees speak up, organisations will need to listen up

Anna Shields, Co-founder of Consensio

2023 has been a year with a lot of conflict. The Israel-Hamas war, the war in Ukraine, and other conflicts around the world have affected millions of people, including many families, friends and colleagues.

Looking back at our prediction for this year, it's even more critical for organisations to support employees with the skills to listen deeply and to make space for different perspectives.

This year has also highlighted that, in 2024 and beyond, we need more than deep listening skills. We also need the skills to appreciate what comes before listening. To be aware that we, as well as our colleagues, may be impacted directly or indirectly by world events, and that there is a need to be open to how this may show up in the workplace.

L&D professionals can ensure that training in listening, communication and conflict management skills addresses this need for broader awareness, and leaders will need to authentically listen to their employees' needs during times when conflict is all around us.

Onto next year...

What's on the cards for 2024? We'll be seeking out fresh predictions from our L&D experts in the new year.