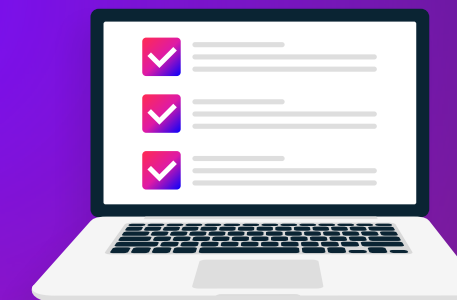




Why your biggest L&D problems will only be fixed with integration



L&D in 2026: a research report

Executive summary

Organizations across the US are aligned that learning matters: **94%** of leaders agree that learning and development (L&D) has a direct impact on organizational performance.

However, that belief has not translated into measurable workforce results. This research, conducted in partnership with People Management Insight, surveyed 250+ HR and L&D professionals to understand the challenges limiting effectiveness, and where the opportunities are to boost organizational learning in 2026.

There's a common assumption that L&D's biggest barriers are weak content and lack of employee engagement, but the survey data tells a different story, revealing a clear misalignment at the heart of most L&D strategies.

Nearly half of organizations don't allocate any formal time for employees to engage in learning, while almost a quarter (**21%**) do not report on learning's impact at all. As a result, learning teams are under pressure to prove impact, but lack the data connections required to do so.

This report shows that the next evolution of L&D is not simply 'better learning'. The real opportunity lies in a joined up HR and learning model that embeds development into the flow of work and connects learning activity directly to workforce performance.



250+

professionals surveyed by MHR
and People Management Insight



Read more



A deeper dive into the findings

Learning is a clear priority, but proving impact is easier said than done

94%

agree L&D impacts organizational performance

21%

do not report on the impact of L&D at all

➤ To demonstrate real value, L&D teams need stronger evidence chains connecting learning activity to workforce outcomes through robust reporting and HR-system integration.

L&D's biggest priorities in 2026

Compliance & mandatory training	66%
Leadership development	65%
Role/industry-specific skills	50%
Personal & career development	25%
Digital & technology skills	25%
Wellbeing & resilience	13%
Equality, diversity & inclusion	11%

➤ Despite significant market noise around AI and digital skills, compliance and leadership development remain the top priorities for L&D teams.

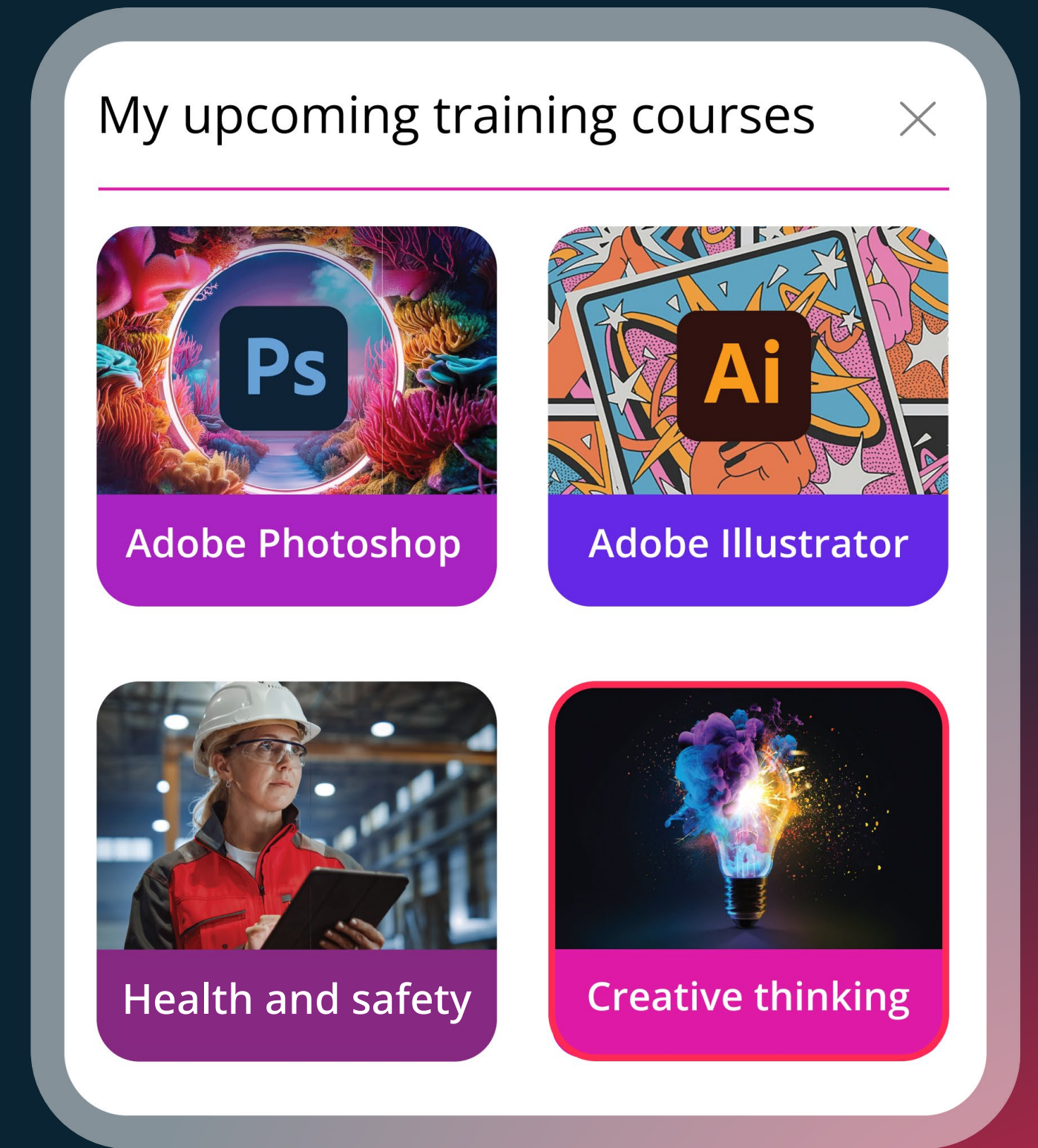
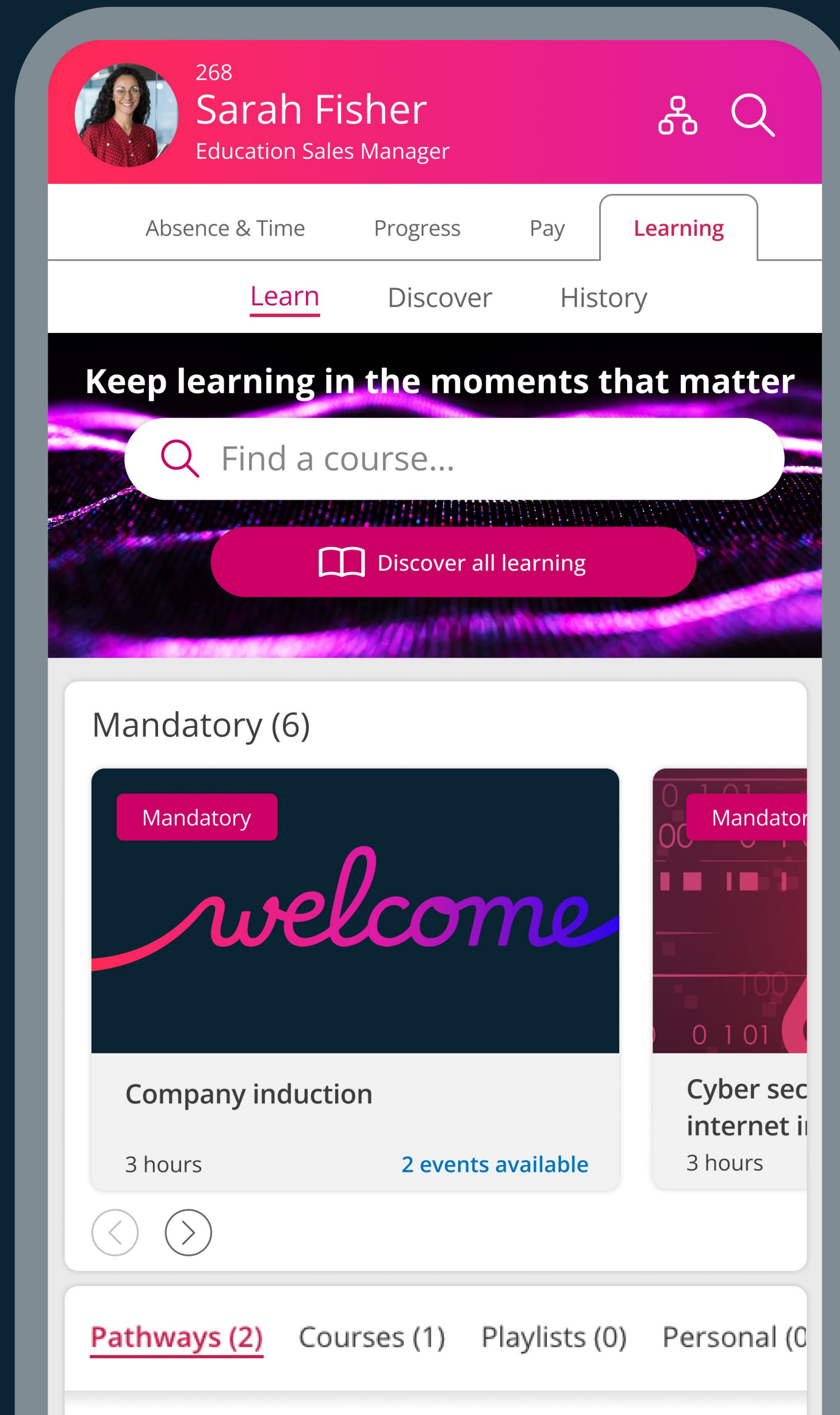
The biggest barriers to effective learning

Limited employee time or capacity	70%
Budget constraints	57%
Lack of senior leadership buy-in	28%
Poor engagement with learning	26%
Difficulty demonstrating ROI	24%
Fragmented systems/technology	23%
Skills shortages within L&D	13%

➤ Even the best learning initiatives will fall short if they are not supported with adequate time and resources. Introducing bite-sized learning that employees can fit alongside their day-to-day work could be a powerful alternative.

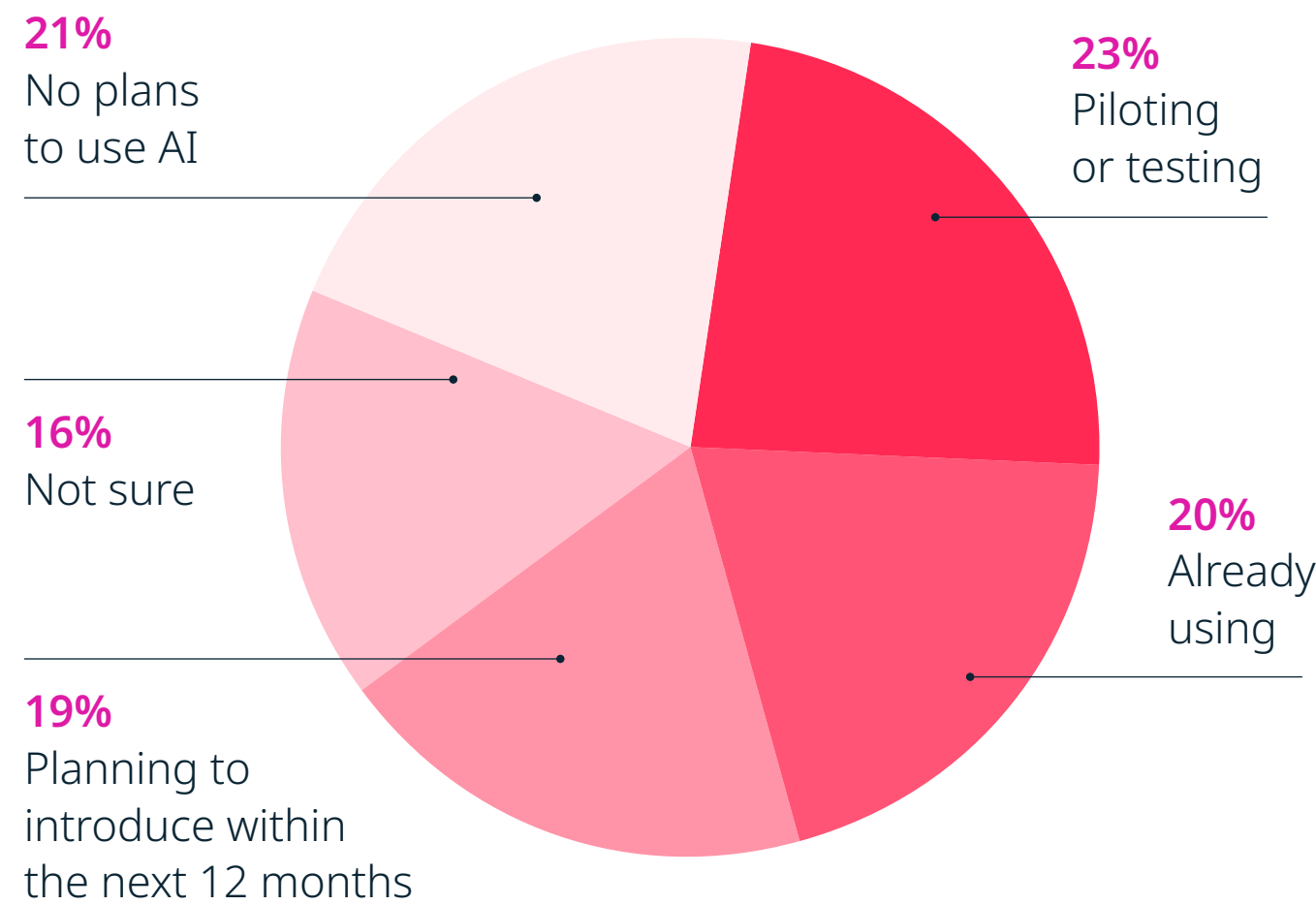
Streamline training with People First

People First supports bite-sized, on-demand learning that enables employees to take charge of their own development and build skills at a pace that suits them.



AI adoption in L&D

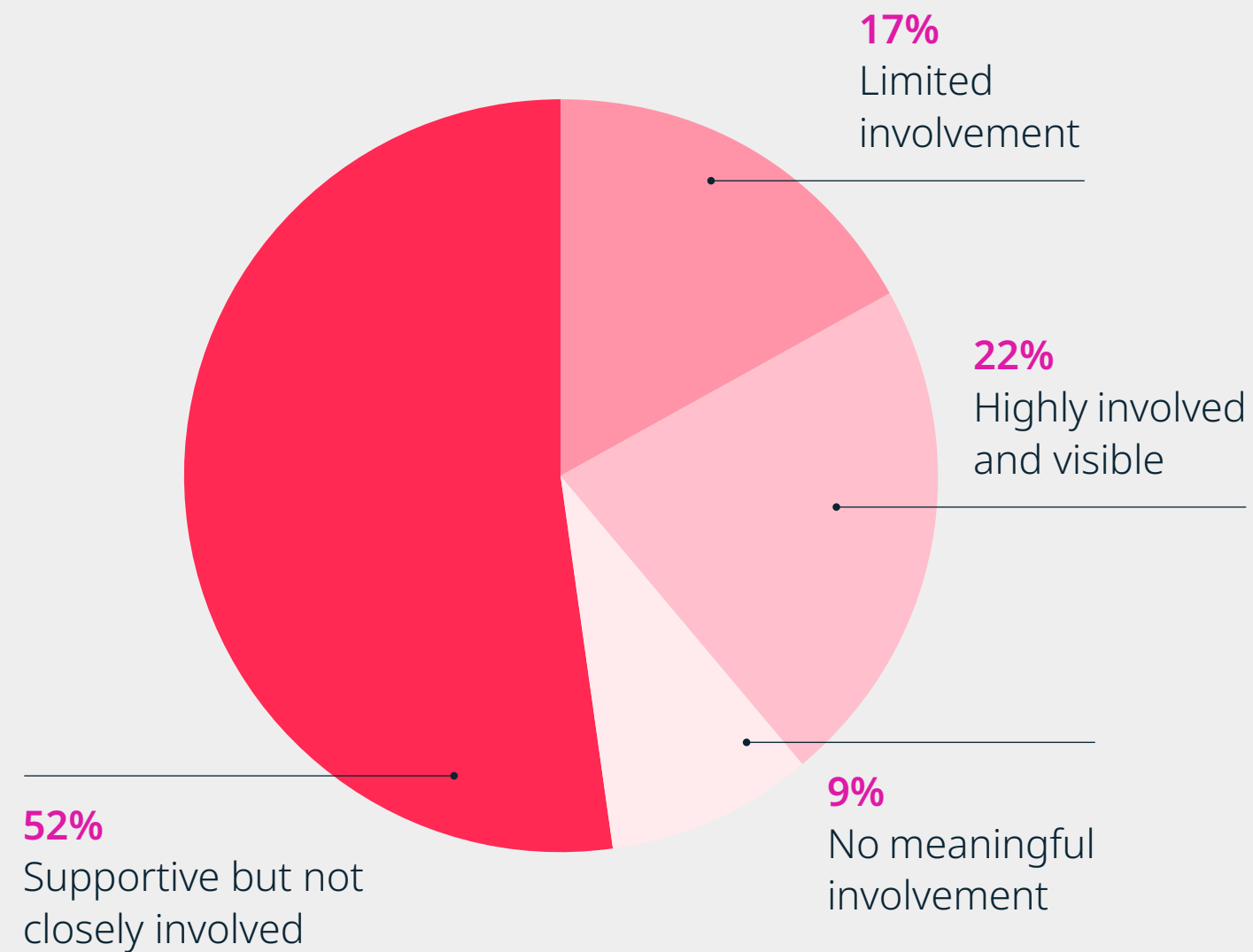
How much is your organization planning to implement AI?



➤ AI adoption is accelerating, but uncertainty remains high. Many organizations may lack a clear roadmap for how AI should support learning strategy and skills development.

Leadership is supportive of L&D, but from a distance

How involved is senior leadership in L&D?

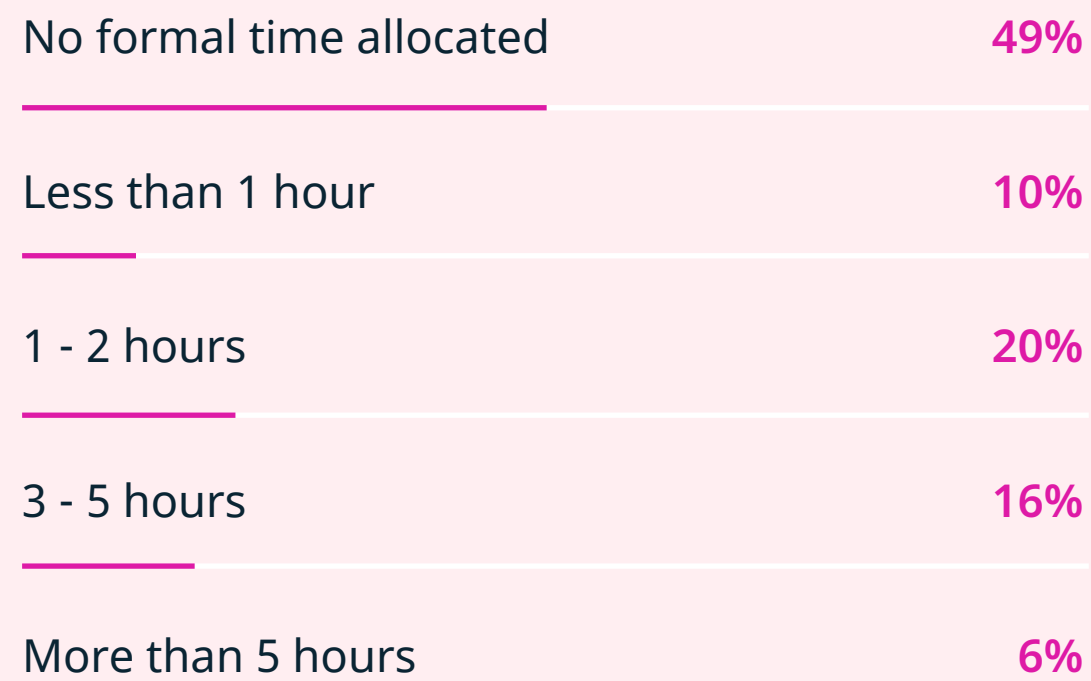


➤ Only **1 in 5** leaders are actively involved in shaping or promoting learning in their organization. There's a clear need for a top-down approach with clear visibility where senior management lead by example.

1 in 5
leaders are highly involved in promoting or shaping L&D limits

Time for learning isn't formally protected

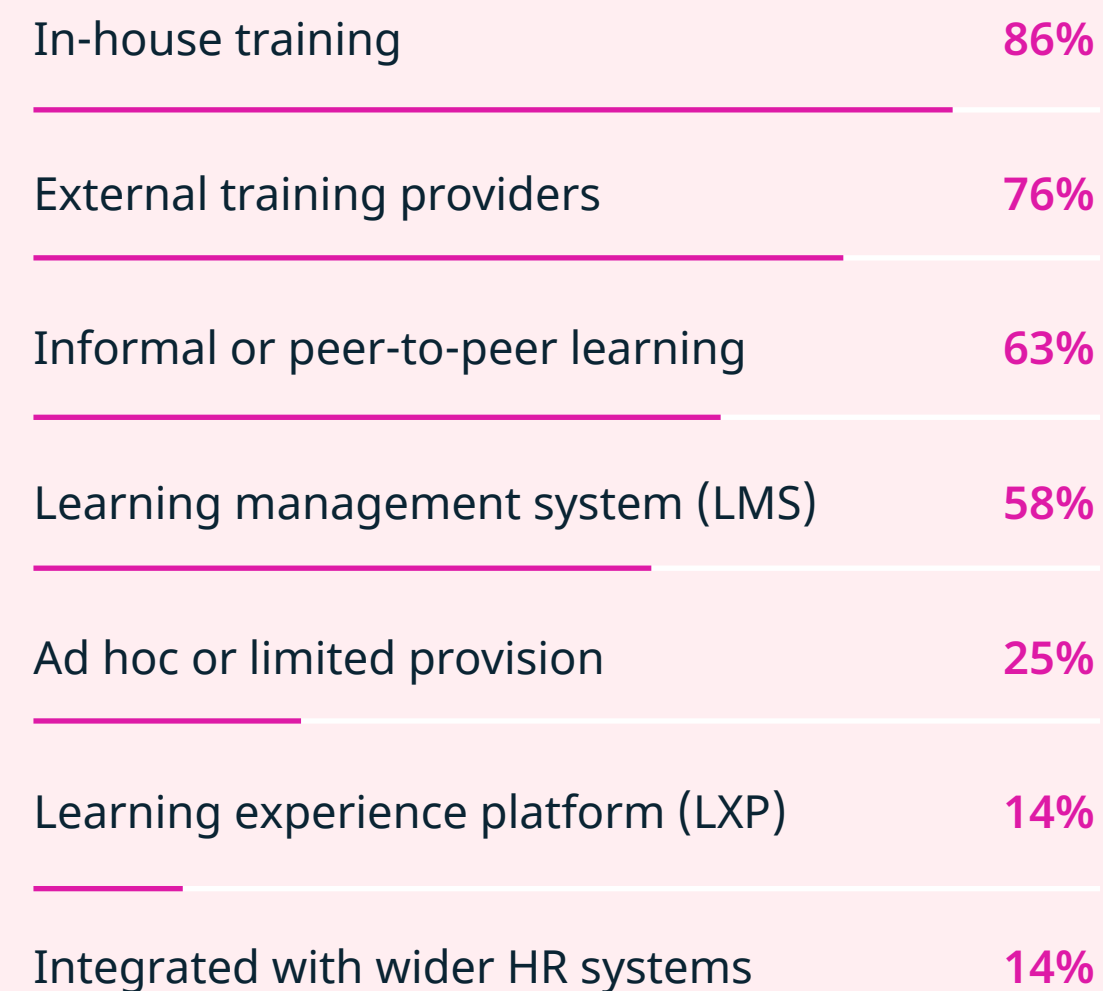
How much time are employees encouraged to spend on L&D each month?



It's no wonder that the majority cite lack of capacity as the biggest barrier to L&D. Learning must be treated as part of everyday work, supported by systems that aligned development with performance cycles.

L&D delivery remains varied

How is L&D delivered in your organization?



While organizations use a wide range of learning channels, very few have true system integration, making it harder to track completion and measure outcomes.

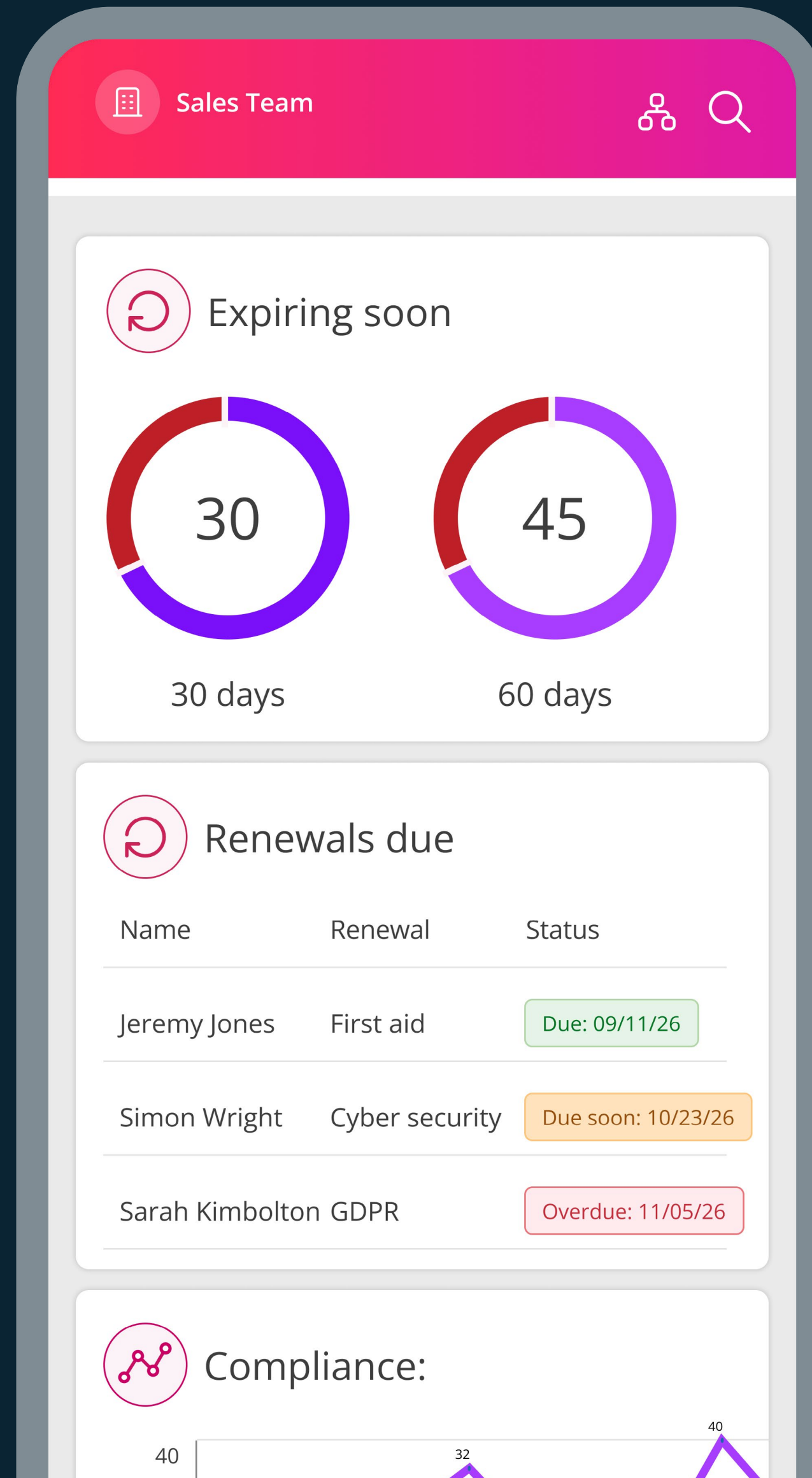
49%

don't formally allocate time for L&D

86%

deliver L&D through in-house training

People First provides one hub for all L&D needs, whether that's reporting on completion of bite-sized learning modules or tracking attendance for in-person training events. With all your learning data in one platform, you'll never struggle to piece together data again.



HR and L&D working hand in hand

Are HR and L&D separate teams, or integrated?

68%

integrated teams

32%

separate teams



➤ Closer integration between HR and L&D enables more strategic workforce planning and clearer visibility into the impact of development.

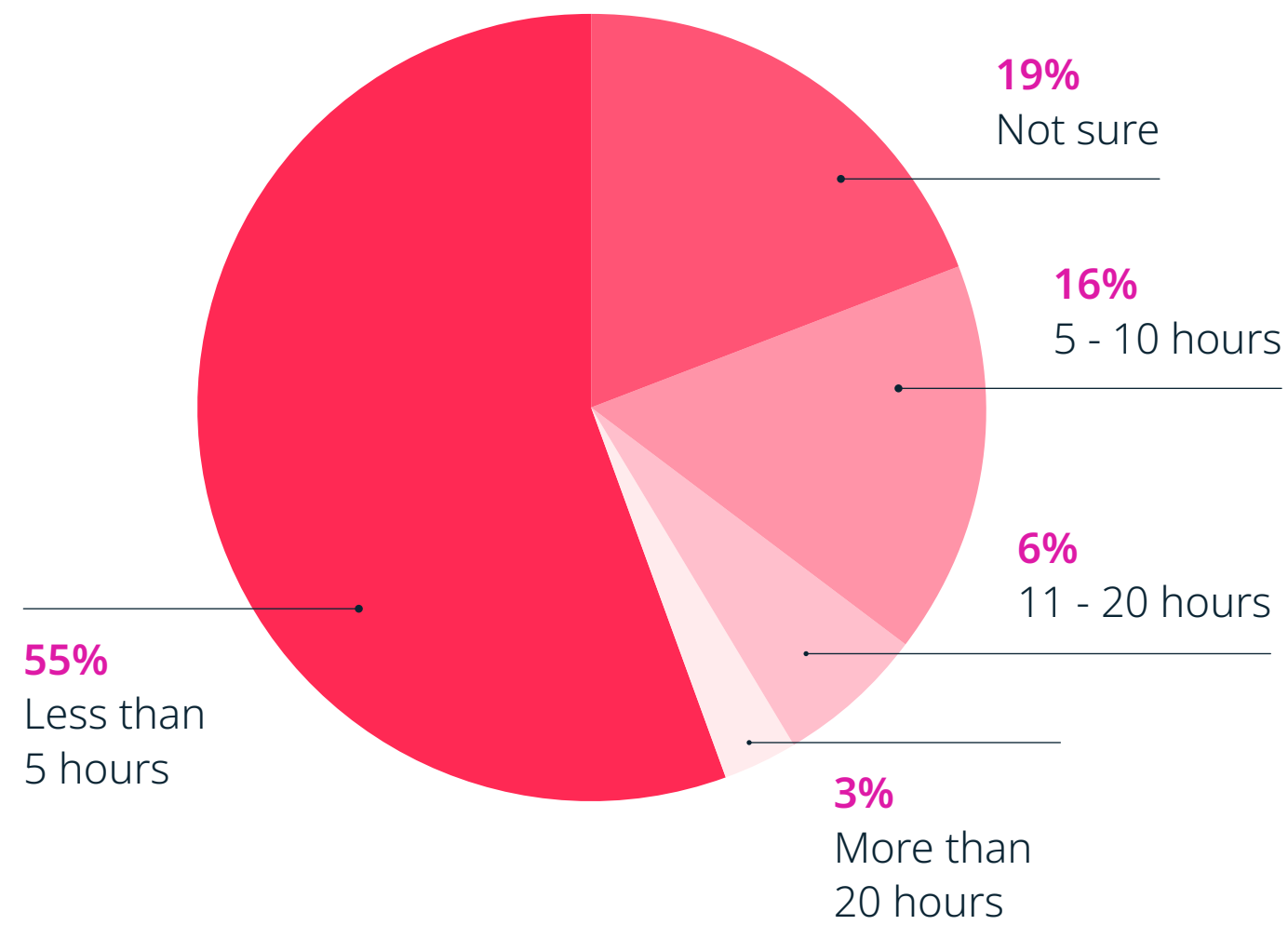
The core benefits of L&D

Improved performance/productivity	60%
Improved employee engagement	56%
More effective managers	41%
Future skills readiness	35%
Better retention	35%
Improved organizational culture	30%
Stronger internal progression	27%

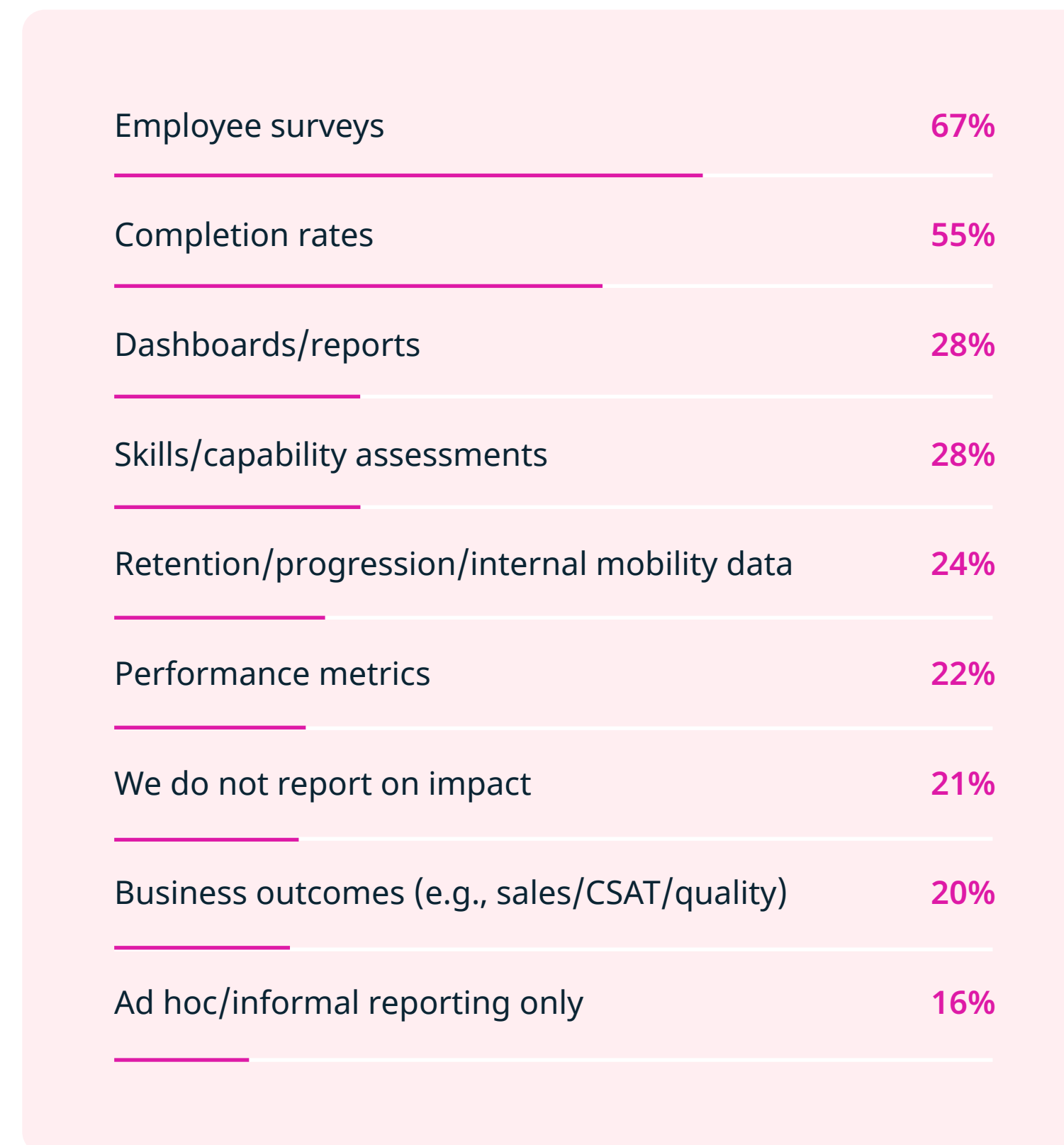
➤ Learning is a key driver for both organizational performance and employee engagement.

Reporting is inconsistent and limited

How much time do you spend on L&D reporting each month?



How do you report on the impact of L&D?

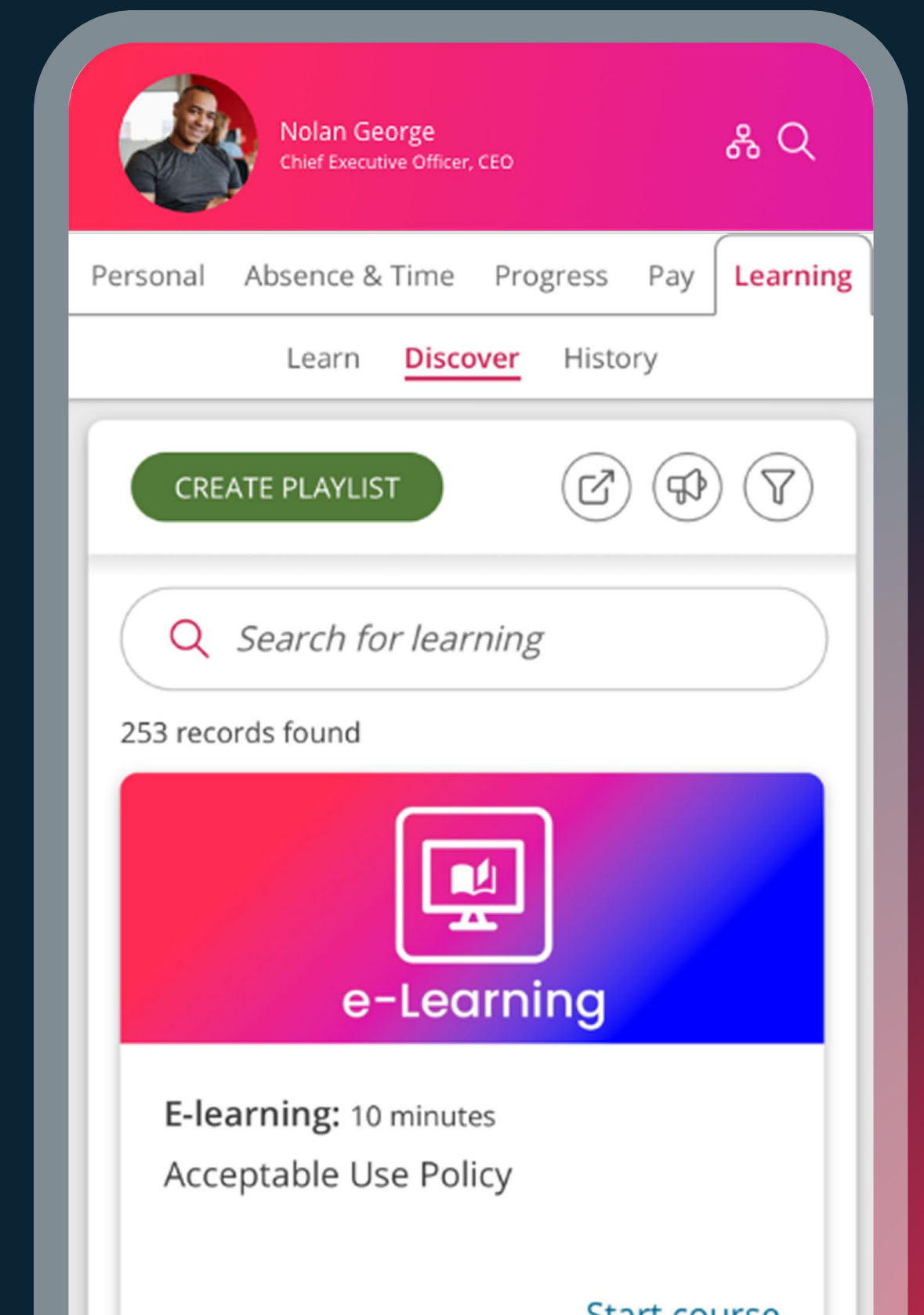
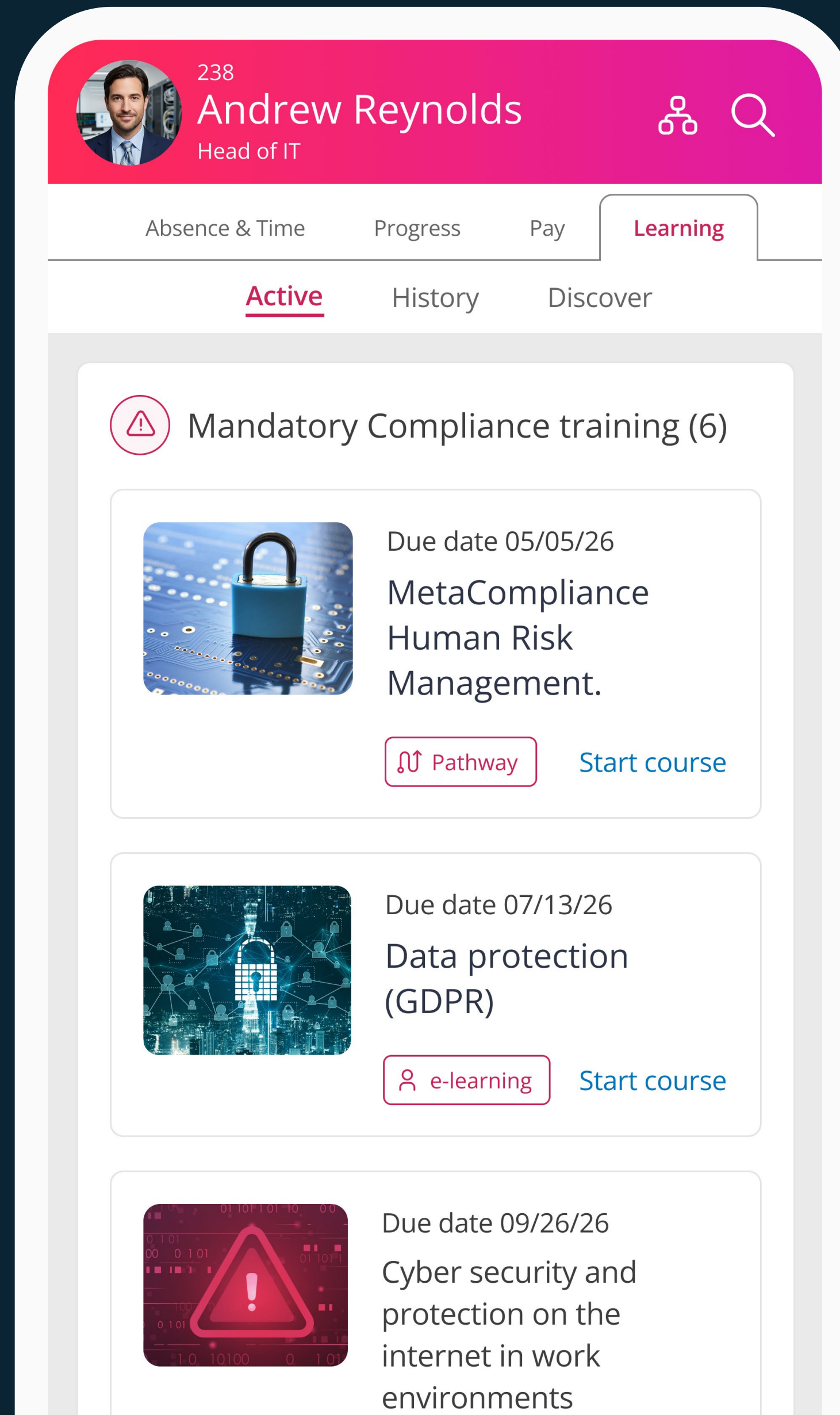


➤ L&D reporting is often informal, ad hoc, or unstructured. Worryingly, nearly a quarter don't report on impact at all, either due to limited time or because their systems don't have analytics capabilities.

The platform behind high-performing teams

People First integrates learning and HR in one secure platform.

Conduct employee surveys, report on course completion rate, build custom dashboards, and view retention and progression metrics in one place. With People First, employee learning metrics are directly tied to organizational performance without the need to manually collate data from separate HR and learning systems.



Where fragmented systems create friction

More than a quarter (**23%**) of L&D professionals cite fragmented systems as their biggest barrier, while nearly a third (**32%**) operate with HR and L&D as separate teams. Together, these findings point to a fundamental issue: a lack of alignment between learning and people data.

23%

cite fragmented systems as their biggest barrier



It's clear that disconnected systems and siloed working is stopping L&D teams from achieving their full potential, with time constraints, lack of employee engagement and limited reporting capabilities adding another layer of difficulty.

Integration as the next step

When learning is integrated with core HR systems, it becomes much easier to:

- ▶ Report by job title, department, level, tenure, or location
- ▶ Link learning to performance reviews, promotions or retention trends
- ▶ Identify skills gaps and readiness for future roles
- ▶ Demonstrate strategic business impact

People First

People First makes compliance, upskilling and development a breeze.

By combining learning and HR in one secure platform, you'll have a complete view of your workforce, with learning data sitting alongside performance, engagement and progression insights:

- ▶ Empower employees with personalized learning and curatable content, as well as a wide range of ready-to-use courses
- ▶ Say goodbye to repetitive admin tasks and free up your time to focus on what matters most
- ▶ Get live insights into your training programs for faster feedback and reporting



Don't just take our word for it...



"The learning platform on People First has been a massive benefit for our L&D team and for our employees themselves."

Neil Jackson, Learning and Development Manager



"I like L&D in People First. It allows team members to see what training courses are available, and as a self-service portal, it allows them to book onto courses themselves."

Connor Clement, Senior HR Manager

people first
powered by MHR

Explore People First