

AI-POWERED TRAINING

From Onboarding to Retention

BY CHRIS KUNTZ

AI can be used to improve onboarding and ongoing training, helping employee retention.

A Deloitte survey released in October 2022, "State of AI in the Enterprise," Fifth Edition, found that more than 90% of companies believe AI-powered learning will be important for their organization's success in the next three years. By leveraging AI-powered personalized learning, real-time feedback, and data-driven performance evaluations, and identifying training needs, organizations across industries can create a more efficient, effective workforce.

AI-powered training can help drive success throughout an employee's tenure, from onboarding to continual learning to enhancement of the everyday work experience. At the same time, AI-powered training drives operational efficiencies by measuring training effectiveness and, as a result, providing hard data on the ROI of a training program.

The ability to track a training program's ROI is no small thing when one considers the investment made in training by U.S. companies. According to Statista's November 2023 report, "Expenditure Breakdown in the Training Industry in the United States from 2016 to 2023," "companies active in the U.S. training industry had a combined annual expenditure in terms of training staff payroll of 63 billion U.S. dollars and spending on outside products and services amounted to roughly 10 billion U.S. dollars."

Effective training is especially important in industries experiencing significant labor shortages, such as manufacturing.

The traditional method of measuring training effectiveness has largely been to survey trainees following their completion of a training course. This subjective approach doesn't provide the hard data needed for true measurement. By contrast, AI-powered training approaches can measure actual on-the-job performance and correlate that back to the training completed for that job, creating an accurate picture of the effectiveness of that training.

ONBOARDING—HIT THE GROUND RUNNING WITH AI

Employee onboarding is crucial to any organization. An employee's first impression of a workplace can set the tone for their entire experience with the company. An engaging and informative onboarding process can improve job performance by setting up workers for success.

Effective onboarding programs also can boost employee engagement and have been shown to:

- Reduce employee turnover
- Cultivate existing and new skills

- Integrate workers more quickly
- Foster long-term employee satisfaction
- Create the foundation for workforce development

OPTIMIZING ONBOARDING WITH CONNECTED WORKER TECHNOLOGY

In manufacturing, many companies are using modern connected worker technology to transform and optimize how they hire, onboard, train, and deliver on-the-job guidance and support. AI-based connected worker software provides a data-driven approach that helps train, guide, and support today's dynamic industrial workforces by combining digital work instructions, remote collaboration, and advanced on-the-job training capabilities.

As workers become more connected, manufacturers have access to a new rich source of activity, execution, and tribal data. With proper digital tools, they can gain insights into areas where the largest improvement opportunities exist. Today's industrial workers embrace change and expect technology, support, and modern tools to help them do their jobs.

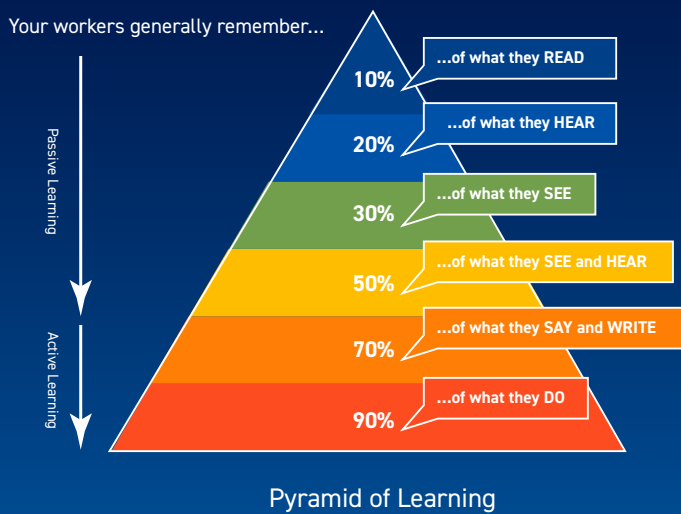
The AI-based connected worker solution we have at Augmentir (where I am vice president of strategic operations), delivers continuous learning and development tools to optimize onboarding training for a rapidly changing and diverse workforce. Built-in reporting for skills management and job proficiency allows managers to accurately track and manage skills, certifications, and qualifications for their teams. AI-based analytics help companies better understand their workforce and make informed workforce development decisions.

USING AI TO OPTIMIZE ONGOING TRAINING

To remain competitive, companies must continuously reskill and upskill their workforce. One way to achieve this is by operationalizing learning—taking a more systematic approach to training and workforce development rather than treating it as a one-time event.

According to McKinsey's December 2022 report, "The State of AI in 2022—and a Half Decade in Review," companies that embrace AI-powered learning reduced training time by up to 50% and improved learning outcomes by up to 60%. AI-powered solutions make learning more accessible, engaging, and effective; and by integrating training and learning solutions into the everyday operations of the company, they can create a culture of continuous learning and improvement. In fact, here at Augmentir we've seen manufacturing companies use this approach to reduce new-hire onboarding and training time by up to 72%.

Learning in the Flow of Work



With AI, organizations can incorporate more learning processes into the everyday workday of their employees—essentially bridging the gap between knowing and doing. This “active learning” aligns with the Pyramid of Learning model (see above) that illustrates the different stages of learning and the relative effectiveness of each.

With active learning, the learner actively engages with the material, often through problem solving, discussion, or application of the knowledge while they are on the job.

In general, active learning is considered more effective than passive learning in promoting a deep understanding and retention of information. Therefore, leaders often strive to design learning experiences that involve higher levels of active learning, moving beyond the lower levels of the pyramid and promoting critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

This approach can be implemented with mobile learning solutions that leverage connected frontline worker technology and AI to provide industrial workers with bite-size, on-demand training modules that they can access on smartphones or tablets. These modules can be customized to each worker's skill level, making it easier for employees to learn at their own pace.

Additionally, AI-driven learning solutions offer:

Personalized learning. AI-powered learning, when customized to an employee's skill level, not only allows people to learn at their own pace but also get training matched to their experience level.

For example, novice workers may be required to watch a microlearning video as a safety prerequisite to performing a task, whereas a more senior worker with the appropriate level

of job experience and proficiency may not be required to watch the learning video.

Performance-based learning. AI-powered solutions provide workers with hands-on learning experiences that are customized based on their actual job performance. These experiences can be delivered through a variety of content mediums—rich media, self-help guides, microlearning videos, and even augmented reality (AR) experiences.

Real-time feedback. AI-powered solutions can monitor workers' performance in real-time, providing instant feedback to help them improve and giving them access to content that can help resolve workflow issues.

AI can also help with the assessment of employee performance. Traditional performance evaluations often rely on subjective assessments from managers. Conversely, AI-powered performance evaluations can provide a more objective and data-driven assessment of performance, while also providing a more accurate picture of an employee's strengths and weaknesses.

BLENDING SKILLS MANAGEMENT INTO THE FLOW OF WORK

On their own, digital work instructions deliver standard work guidelines but fail to consider the unique skills of each worker. Standalone skills management programs may offer a highlight reel of the skills and certifications of employees but neglect to capture performance in real-time to provide accurate skills evaluations. Nor do they offer the personalized training content needed to ensure workers perform their absolute best. To optimize training, a blended approach is recommended.

A vivid example of the value of this approach may be found in manufacturing, where the challenges—for example, the talent shortage and the Great Resignation—resonate with other types of companies. In the past, standalone skills management systems were sufficient for two reasons:

- Turnover was infrequent, so line supervisors knew everyone on their team and their current skills and endorsements. This made it easy for the supervisor to assign work safely and optimally.
- Investments in training, reskilling, and upskilling were performed either in a one-size-fits-all approach or through a purely subjective or anecdotal approach.

Currently, however, a different situation exists. Line supervisors are dealing with team members they don't know well, new employees are starting every day, and experienced ones are leaving. This creates safety issues and makes it difficult to optimally assign work. Not only are the workers variable, but their skill levels and certifications are a constantly moving target.

An integrated, closed-loop skills management system is the solution for this era of high workforce turnover and

absenteeism. Skills management solutions that combine skills tracking capabilities with connected worker technology and on-the-job digital guidance can deliver significant additional value. Data from actual work performance can inform workforce development initiatives, allowing the company to target training, reskilling, and upskilling efforts where they have the largest impact.

Connected worker solutions that combine skills management with digital work instructions, collaboration, and knowledge management are uniquely suited to optimize today's variable workforce. AI-generated insights are pulled from patterns identified across all work activity in real time. These insights identify where new and experienced workers may benefit from either reskilling or upskilling.

This combination of smart digital technology can also leverage training resources, such as instructional videos, written instructions, or access to remote experts to deliver personalized guidance for workers to perform their best. These tools intelligently work together to help assign workers to procedures based on required skill levels.

IMPROVE THE TRAINING, IMPROVE THE WORKER EXPERIENCE, IMPROVE RETENTION

Augmentir knows from our clients that industrial work comes with an immense amount of stress. If employees do not receive the right level of support, this stress can lead to increased errors, poor work performance and, eventually, burnout. And this is not an issue faced only by manufacturers; at the end of 2022, as reported by E. Beth Hemphill for Gallup in "Uncomfortable (but Necessary) Conversations About Burnout," 76% of employees overall experienced some form of workplace burnout. This not only affects performance and productivity but much more, including engagement and employee retention.

To offset employee burnout, managers should aim to:

- Reduce employee stress
- Remove roadblocks, ensuring their workers have the proper tools to complete their tasks
- Ensure workers are a good match skill-wise for the work they do
- Give workers a say in how the work is completed
- Empower workers to believe that the work they are doing is valued and important

In Gallup's "State of the Global Workplace: 2023 Report," 79% of employees did not feel engaged at work. This same poll found that most employees don't find their work meaningful and do not feel hopeful about their careers.

When it comes to supporting workers and battling workplace burnout, there is no one-size-fits-all answer, and many organizations are realizing that taking the same approach

for "desk workers" does not account for the many and uniquely different needs demanded by frontline or "deskless" workers. Managers must keep in mind these needs when combating and detecting burnout and boosting employee engagement.

AI and machine learning-based technology, combined with a worker-centric approach, can help tremendously in this respect, accounting for the human element in operations while still taking advantage of innovations.

Manufacturers can use the capabilities of connected worker platforms—digital software tools that help improve the way humans work in industrial settings—and AI to take a proactive approach to reducing stress and preventing employee burnout. By taking highly granular connected worker data and using AI to filter out the unnecessary portions, industrial operations not only can improve tasks and productivity but also better support and empower frontline workers.

The principles on which these initiatives are built apply to nonindustrial settings as well. Organizations across industries can use AI to engage employees by taking these steps:

- Creating communication touchpoints and streamlining communication
- Pairing workers and tasks based on skill level
- Suggesting training and certification opportunities for upskilling workers
- Creating feedback paths so employees have a say in how tasks are completed

To complement AI and software platforms, companies can implement tools such as wearable devices, mental health applications, and more to aid in engagement efforts. Finding the right balance and combination is key for knowledge exchange and conversation, making employees more engaged within the team.

USE AI TO EMPOWER, NOT REPLACE

In conclusion, it's important to take advantage of new technologies and implement them where needed, but technology by itself is not the answer. Finding a balance between technology integration and a worker-driven approach is key, and it is paramount that the true needs of the workforce are not forgotten. Although AI and machine learning-based technology can help tremendously with detecting and reducing employee burnout, it has its limits and can only do so much. Technology cannot replace how workers feel and how they interact with management on a day-to-day basis. And at the end of the day, AI can only augment employees. It should be used to empower them, not to replace them. [AQ](#)

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