

The State of Microlearning in 2026

What's changed since 2023, what the research says, and how to prove your training is working.



20%

of employees worldwide were engaged at work in 2025

2 min

between interruptions in the average workday

~40%

of job skills are set to change by 2030

6 min

is roughly where attention to online video tops out

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23 pages · About 25 minutes to read · Every statistic is sourced on page 22

A NOTE FROM 5MINS

Three years on, the questions have changed

We published our first State of Microlearning report in 2023. ChatGPT was a few months old. Most of the L&D teams we spoke to were curious about AI and a little nervous about it.

Nobody asks us whether short lessons work anymore. The questions we hear now are sharper. How do we get 400 people through their annual compliance refresh without a month of chasing? How do we turn a 60-page policy into training by Friday? How do we show an auditor, or the board, that people learned something and didn't just click "next"?

This edition tries to answer those questions with evidence. We've refreshed the research, rebuilt the platform categories for a market where AI now writes much of the first draft, and replaced our old ROI chapter with a measurement framework you can start using this quarter.

Some things haven't changed. Spaced review still beats cramming. Short videos still hold attention better than long ones. Completion rates still flatter programs that nobody remembers a week later. We've kept those findings and updated the sources behind them.

Where the evidence is thin, we say so. Gamification helps, but the effect is modest. AI saves time on content, but someone still has to check it's right. And a few headline numbers that get passed around L&D circles don't trace back to any study at all, so you won't find them here.

How to use this report. Read section 1 for context, skip to section 4 if you need to build a business case, and use the checklist on page 20 in your next platform review. Every statistic has a numbered source on page 22.

The 5Mins team

London, October 2026

2026 AT A GLANCE

Eight numbers that frame the year

20%**Engagement keeps falling**

of employees worldwide were engaged at work in 2025, down from 23% in 2022. Manager engagement fell from 27% to 22% in a single year.¹

2 min**The workday is fragmented**

The average worker is interrupted by a meeting, email or message every 2 minutes, and gets 117 emails and 153 Teams messages a weekday.²

80%**People are stretched**

of the global workforce say they lack the time or energy to do their job.³

59 in 100**Most people need new skills**

workers will need reskilling or upskilling by 2030. Nearly 40% of the skills used on the job are set to change.⁴

49%**Executives are worried**

of L&D professionals say their executives are concerned employees don't have the skills to deliver the business strategy.⁵

39%**AI training lags AI use**

Three in four knowledge workers use AI at work, but only 39% of those users have had AI training from their employer.⁶

40 hrs**Less time for training**

US employees got 40 hours of training each in 2025, down from 47 in 2024. The share delivered on mobile doubled, from 3% to 6% of hours.⁷

~6 min**Short video holds attention**

In 6.9 million video sessions, median viewing time topped out at about 6 minutes, however long the video was.⁸

SECTION 1

Where microlearning stands in 2026

In 2023 the case for microlearning rested on habit: people were already learning in short bursts on their phones, so why not at work? That argument still holds. In 2026 three harder pressures sit on top of it.

Less time

Work is more fragmented than ever, and training hours are falling.

More to learn

AI and regulation are changing what people need to know, fast.

More to prove

Regulators and boards want evidence, not attendance lists.

What happened between the two editions



2023

Generative AI arrives at work. L&D teams start testing it for first drafts, quiz questions and summaries, mostly as individual experiments.



2024

75% of knowledge workers now use AI at work and 78% of them bring their own tools.⁶ In the UK, a new legal duty requires employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment, from 26 October.⁹



2025

The EU AI Act's AI literacy duty applies from 2 February.¹⁰ The UK's "failure to prevent fraud" offense comes into force on 1 September.¹¹ More than 1 billion people now use standalone generative AI tools every month.¹²



2026

Global engagement falls for a second year in a row, to 20%.¹ In our conversations with customers, the question shifts from "should we use AI for training?" to "how do we check it's right and prove it worked?"

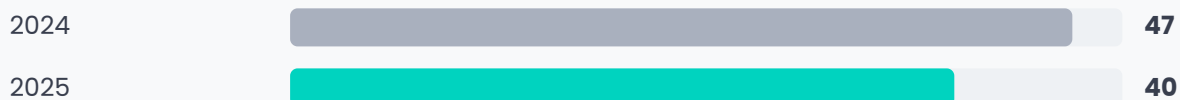
SECTION 1 • THE TIME PROBLEM

Training is competing with 270 messages a day

Microsoft's 2025 research on what it calls the "infinite workday" puts numbers on something most of us feel. The average worker receives 117 emails and 153 Teams messages a weekday. A meeting, email or ping lands about every 2 minutes. Meetings that start after 8pm are up 16% year over year.² And 80% of the global workforce say they lack the time or energy to do their job.³

Meanwhile, formal training time is shrinking. US employers gave each employee 40 hours of training in 2025, down from 47 the year before, while spend per learner rose to \$874.⁷ Organizations are paying more for fewer hours.

Training hours per US employee, per year⁷



Short learning fits the gaps

A 45-minute module needs a blocked-out slot that rarely survives the calendar. A 5-minute lesson fits between a shift handover and a stand-up. That's the practical reason microlearning keeps growing: it's the format that still gets done when the day falls apart.

People already learn this way outside work

The typical internet user spends more than 2.5 hours a day on social and video platforms. The average TikTok session lasts 9 minutes 42 seconds, and people open the app about 10 times a day.¹² Duolingo, the best-known consumer microlearning app, reached 58.7 million daily active users in Q2 2026, up 23% on a year earlier.¹³

None of this means workplace training should copy social media. It means your people have a well-practiced habit of learning in short sessions, many times a day. Good workplace learning design works with that habit instead of against it.

SECTION 1 • THE SKILLS PROBLEM

More to learn, and fewer people engaged

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 expects nearly 40% of the skills required on the job to change by 2030. Out of every 100 workers, 59 will need reskilling or upskilling, and 11 of those are unlikely to get it. 63% of employers cite the skills gap as a main barrier to future-proofing their business, and 77% plan to upskill their workforce in response.⁴

26%

of companies believe they're effectively developing the skills they need to execute their strategy.¹⁴

15%

of employees say their manager helped them build a career development plan in the last six months.⁵

Engagement is moving the wrong way at the same time. Gallup found that 20% of employees worldwide were engaged in 2025, the second annual fall in a row, and estimates that low engagement costs the global economy around \$10 trillion in lost productivity, about 9% of global GDP.¹

Engaged at work, global (Gallup)¹



Learning won't fix engagement on its own. But there's a link worth noticing. In LinkedIn's research, 84% of employees agree that "learning adds purpose to my work", and the share who say learning helps them adapt to change has climbed every year, from 49% in 2022 to 68% in 2025.⁵ People want to learn. They're short on time and short on support from their managers.

SECTION 1 • DEFINITIONS

What counts as microlearning in 2026

There's still no single definition, and the 2023 edition quoted seven of them. The most useful recent synthesis comes from a 2024 systematic review of 40 studies by Monib, Qazi and Apong. They describe microlearning as an approach that delivers "targeted, action-oriented, bite-sized content" for a specific objective, usually within seconds or minutes.¹⁵ Across those studies, microlearning had a positive effect on cognitive outcomes (knowledge, retention, application), behavioral outcomes (task performance, completion, engagement) and affective outcomes (motivation, satisfaction, confidence).

Our working definition is simpler: **one objective, one lesson of about 5 minutes, followed by a check.** A course is a series of these lessons, so a full course is never "5 minutes long", but each sitting is.

Five characteristics

The first four come from our 2023 edition. We've added a fifth.

Characteristic	What it means in practice
Time	A short effort that fits into the working day, without blocking out an afternoon.
Focus	One small, specific objective per lesson, as part of a larger curriculum.
Form	Delivered in snippets: short video, flashcards, a quiz, an audio brief, a job aid.
Medium	Mobile-first and multimodal, so it works on a shop floor as well as at a desk.
Evidence (new)	Every lesson produces data: who started, who finished, what they got right first time, and when they need a refresher.

Why we added "evidence". In 2023, tracking was a nice extra. In 2026 it's often the reason a team buys a platform at all. The UK government's guidance on the failure to prevent fraud offense, for example, says "training and maintaining training are key".¹¹ If you can't show it, it's hard to argue it happened.

SECTION 1 • THE MARKET

Nine types of microlearning platform

In 2023 we sorted the market into nine categories. Three years later, two of them (chatbots and learning-generated content) have been reshaped by generative AI, and AI practice tools have arrived as a category of their own. Here's how we'd divide it now.

Type	What it is	Strengths	Watch out for
1. Ready-made libraries	Off-the-shelf lessons by topic, skill or regulation	Fast to launch, no production cost	Generic content, slow updates
2. AI content creation	Turns your documents, policies and slides into lessons, quizzes and video	Your own content, in hours, in many languages	Accuracy review, whether your data trains the vendor's models
3. Blended platforms (LMS + LXP)	Library, creation, admin and reporting in one system	One record of learning, less admin	Scope creep in implementation
4. Chat and messaging delivery	Lessons sent through Teams, Slack, WhatsApp or SMS	Meets people inside tools they already use	Thin reporting, limited formats, more noise
5. AI assistants	On-demand answers and coaching in the flow of work	Instant help at the moment of need	Answers must be grounded in approved content
6. AI practice and roleplays	Simulated conversations, scored with feedback	Rehearsal before the real thing	Scenario realism, how scores are used
7. Social short-form video	Public creators on short-video platforms	Free, engaging, huge range	No tracking, no quality control
8. Consumer learning apps	Language, coding and general skills apps	Excellent habit design	Not built for workplace compliance or records
9. Audio and documents	Audio briefs, podcasts, infographics, job aids	Hands-free, frontline friendly	Hard to check understanding

We've deliberately not named vendors in each category. Most platforms now span two or three types, and the lines move every quarter. The rest of this report focuses on types 1 to 6: the platforms organizations use to deliver and track workplace learning.

SECTION 2

Six trends shaping 2026–2028

TREND 1

AI moves from pilot to production

71% of L&D professionals are now exploring, experimenting with or integrating AI into their work.⁵ The early promise was speed, and that part is real: a policy document can become a set of lessons, a quiz and a short video in an afternoon instead of a month.

The mood has cooled, though. Donald H Taylor's 2026 L&D Global Sentiment Survey, with more than 3,500 votes from over 100 countries, found interest in AI has peaked as organizations use it more selectively, and many practitioners say AI is adding to their stress rather than easing it.¹⁶ And the people being trained are ahead of the trainers: three in four knowledge workers use AI, but only 39% of those users have had AI training from their employer.⁶

What to do: when AI writes the first draft, review becomes the bottleneck. Set an accuracy check and a data policy (does the vendor train models on your documents?) before you scale up.

TREND 2

Compliance gets more specific, and more provable

Three recent rules show the direction of travel. Each one points to training as part of the "reasonable steps" an organization must be able to show:

- **EU AI Act, Article 4** (from 2 February 2025): providers and deployers of AI systems must take measures to ensure a sufficient level of AI literacy among their staff.¹⁰
- **UK duty to prevent sexual harassment** (from 26 October 2024): employers must take reasonable steps, and tribunals can raise compensation by up to 25% where they haven't.⁹
- **UK failure to prevent fraud offense** (from 1 September 2025): government guidance on reasonable procedures says "training and maintaining training are key".¹¹

What to do: map each regulation to a lesson, a refresh cycle and the record you'd show an auditor. This report isn't legal advice, so check your obligations with your legal team.

SECTION 2 · TRENDS

TREND 3

Skills replace courses as the unit of planning

When nearly 40% of job skills are expected to change by 2030,⁴ a catalog of courses stops being a useful plan. Leaders want to know which skills each role needs, who has them, and where the gaps are. Only 26% of companies think they're developing those skills effectively.¹⁴

Microlearning suits skills work because each lesson maps to one small objective. Stack enough of them against a role, add a check, and you get a picture of capability that a completion certificate can't give you.

What to do: pick one role. Define 5 to 10 skills, set levels for each, and attach lessons and checks to every level. Expand once it works.

TREND 4

The frontline becomes the main audience

Deskless workers (people in retail, hospitality, care, logistics, manufacturing and the like) make up an estimated 80% of the global workforce.¹⁷ Most corporate training was designed for the other 20%: people with a laptop, a company email address and a quiet hour.

Delivery is slowly catching up. The share of US training hours delivered on mobile doubled from 3% to 6% between 2024 and 2025.⁷ Gallup also found that frontline and on-site employees were more likely than others to be unsure whether their organization uses AI at all,¹⁸ which is a reminder that new tools reach these teams last.

What to do: test every program on a phone, on a slow connection, with someone who has no company email address. If it fails any of those, it fails the frontline.

SECTION 2 • TRENDS

TREND 5

Practice beats content

Watching a video about a difficult conversation doesn't prepare anyone for one. Practicing does. The research on retrieval practice (see section 3) is clear that actively recalling and applying information beats re-reading it.¹⁹ AI roleplays bring that principle to soft skills: a manager can rehearse a performance conversation or a salesperson can handle an objection, then get a score and coaching feedback.

The need is obvious. Only 15% of employees say their manager helped them build a career plan in the last six months, and half of the people LinkedIn surveyed name a lack of manager support as a top barrier to career development.⁵

What to do: add one scored practice activity to every leadership and customer-facing program. Use the scores for coaching, not as a pass mark.

TREND 6

Learning moves into the tools people already use

Josh Bersin's idea of "learning in the flow of work" was in our 2023 edition. In 2026 it's practical: reminders arrive in Slack or Teams, lessons open on a phone, and AI assistants answer questions inside the platform. With 153 Teams messages a weekday already landing on the average worker,² there's a catch. Every new nudge adds to the noise.

What to do: send fewer, better nudges. One daily prompt with a single lesson works better than a weekly digest of ten.



SECTION 3

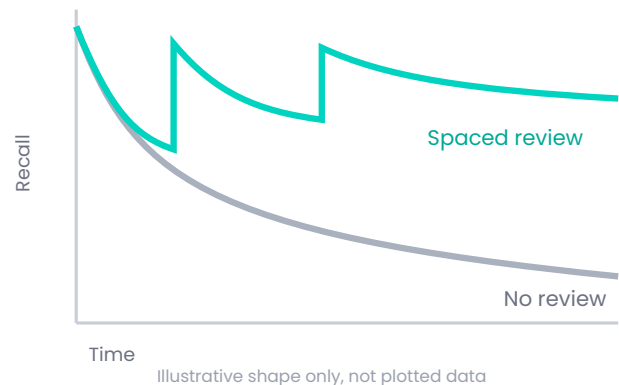
What makes learning stick

Our 2023 edition leaned on spaced repetition and gamification. Both still hold up. Here's what the research says, and where it's weaker than vendors (us included) sometimes make it sound.

1. We forget quickly without review

In 2015, Murre and Dros replicated Ebbinghaus's 1880 forgetting curve. One participant spent 70 hours learning lists and relearning them after delays from 20 minutes to 31 days. The results closely matched the original.²⁰

So what: delivery isn't the end of the job. Plan the review.



2. Spacing beats cramming

Cepeda and colleagues pooled 839 assessments from 317 experiments. Spreading study out beats massing it together, and the best gap between sessions gets longer the longer you need to remember.²¹

So what: for topics people need all year, schedule refreshers weeks apart, not one big annual session.

3. Testing is learning

A 2017 meta-analysis by Adesope, Trevisan and Sundararajan in the Review of Educational Research found practice tests produce better learning than restudying the same material.¹⁹

So what: end every lesson with a question. It's practice, not just assessment.

SECTION 3 · THE RESEARCH

4. Shorter videos hold attention

Guo, Kim and Rubin analyzed 6.9 million video sessions from four edX courses. Median engagement time topped out at about 6 minutes regardless of video length, and viewers often left videos longer than 9 minutes before the halfway point. Viewers of the shortest videos were also more likely to attempt the follow-up problems (56% against 31% for the longest).⁸ The authors' advice: segment video into chunks under 6 minutes.

5. Gamification helps, modestly

Sailer and Homner's meta-analysis in Educational Psychology Review found gamification had small positive effects on learning.²² The effect on knowledge was the largest; the effect on behavior was the smallest.

Effect of gamification on learning outcomes (Hedges' g)²²



That's the honest picture. Streaks, points and leaderboards help people build a habit and come back tomorrow. They don't make weak content good. Use them to get people through the door, then let the lesson do the work.

What it looks like in practice

85%

IKEN reached 85% monthly engagement with 5Mins, and learners kept streaks going for 30+ days.

30-40% → 80%

AZA Finance lifted training participation from 30-40% to 80%.

SECTION 3 • PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Eight design rules for microlearning that sticks

1 One objective per lesson

If you can't say what someone will do differently afterwards, it's two lessons, or none.

2 Keep each lesson to about 5 minutes

Under the 6-minute mark where attention to video drops off.⁸

3 Finish with a question

Retrieval is where the learning happens.¹⁹

4 Space the review

Bring key points back days and weeks later, not just once a year.²¹

5 Design for a phone first

Then check it works on a laptop, not the other way around.

6 Use your own scenarios

A near miss from your warehouse beats a stock example every time.

7 Give people some choice

Mandatory topics plus a feed of optional ones keeps the habit going.

8 Measure more than completion

See section 4 for what to track instead.



SECTION 4

Measuring what matters

Completion tells you who finished. It doesn't tell you who learned, or whether anything changed.

In 2023 we warned against treating an 80% completion rate as proof of engagement. That's still the most common reporting mistake we see. Completion is a useful compliance record, and auditors will ask for it. But it sits at the bottom of a stack of five measures, and a business case needs at least three of them.

Level	The question	Measures to track	Where it comes from
1. Reach	Did people start?	Activation in the first week, % of invited people who log in	Learning platform
2. Habit	Do they come back?	Active days a month, streaks, return rate, time spent	Learning platform
3. Learning	Did they understand?	First-attempt quiz accuracy, improvement on retests, roleplay scores	Learning platform
4. Behavior	Are they doing it?	Manager observations, quality checks, audit findings, near-miss reports	Managers, QA, H&S
5. Business	Did it matter?	Incidents, time to competence for new hires, customer scores, admin hours saved	HRIS, operations, finance

A note on time spent. Time watched is a useful habit measure, but it cuts both ways. Long sessions might mean interest, or a confusing lesson, or a compulsory topic that people are clicking through. Pair it with first-attempt accuracy before you draw conclusions.

Survey your learners at least once a year as well. Metrics tell you what people did; a short survey tells you why.

SECTION 4 • ROI

The three E's, three years on

Our 2023 framework split the benefits of microlearning into Engagement, Effectiveness and Efficiency, and the costs into Time, Resources and Materials. It still works. We've added the cost most teams forget: the admin time spent chasing completions and building reports by hand.

Engagement

Activation, active days, return rate. Are people using it without being chased?

Effectiveness

First-attempt accuracy, retest improvement, practice scores, observed behavior.

Efficiency

Learner hours per topic, time to launch new training, admin hours per month.

Time

Learner time away from work, plus admin and reporting time.

Resources

Subject-matter experts, content production, review of AI drafts.

Materials

Platform licenses, content libraries, translation.

A simple ROI worksheet

Annual value = (admin hours saved × hourly cost) + (learner hours saved × hourly cost) + measurable risk or performance gains

Annual cost = platform + content creation and review + learner time

ROI = (annual value - annual cost) ÷ annual cost

Worked example

Illustrative numbers only. Swap in your own.

A 300-person company runs six compliance topics a year. Moving from 45-minute modules to 5-minute lessons with a short refresher cuts learner time from 4.5 hours to about 2 hours per person, saving 750 hours a year. At a loaded cost of £25 an hour, that's £18,750.

Automating enrollment and reminders saves the HR coordinator 15 hours a month, another £5,400 a year at £30 an hour. Before you count any reduction in incidents or audit findings, that's £24,150 of time back to set against the cost of the platform.

SECTION 4 · GETTING STARTED

A 90-day measurement plan

Most measurement plans fail because nobody captured a baseline. This one starts there.

DAYS 1-30

Baseline

- Record current completion rates and time to complete
- Log admin hours spent chasing and reporting
- Run a 5-question knowledge check on one priority topic
- Pick one business measure to watch (incidents, ramp time, audit findings)

DAYS 31-60

Launch

- Roll out to one team or site first
- Track activation in week 1 and active days each week
- Automate enrollment and reminders
- Ask managers to note one behavior they see change

DAYS 61-90

Compare

- Repeat the knowledge check and compare first-attempt accuracy
- Compare admin hours with the baseline
- Review the business measure
- Present a one-page result: reach, learning, behavior, time saved

Keep the report to one page. Leaders don't need every chart. They need the starting point, what changed, and what it saved. If the numbers are mixed, say so. A credible small result beats an inflated big one.

HOW 5MINS PUTS THIS INTO PRACTICE

The AI microlearning platform, an LMS and LXP in one

We built 5Mins around the research in this report: lessons of about 5 minutes, a question at the end of each one, review that comes back at the right time, and reporting that goes beyond completion.

Learn in 5 minutes a day

A TikTok-style feed with 20,000+ lessons, 500+ courses and 265 compliance courses from 200+ expert instructors. Daily Picks and Hugo AI Assistant keep it personal.

Create with AI Studio

Course Creator, Video Creator, Roleplays and Audio Briefs. Most documents become a video in about 10 minutes, published in 70+ languages at the same time. Your documents are never used to train AI models.

Zero admin

Automations enroll and remind people by email, Slack and push, with 50+ HRIS integrations. Learners use the browser or the iOS and Android apps.

Audit-ready proof

Compliance Dashboard, learning records, certificates and e-signatures, and an audit log. Skills-based training adds competency levels and skills gap analysis.

95%+

completion

80%+

first-week activation

Up to 20 hrsa month saved on
training admin**2-4 wks**to go live, for most
customers

Candyspace cut compliance time by 58% and turned 3-4 days of content creation a month into a couple of hours. **AZA Finance** lifted participation from 30-40% to 80%. **IKEN** reached 85% monthly engagement.

CHECKLIST

10 questions to ask before you buy

Take these into your next platform demo, including ours.

- 1 How long is a typical lesson, and does each one end with a check?
- 2 Can we turn our own policies into training, and how long does that take?
- 3 Who reviews AI-generated content for accuracy, and how?
- 4 Are our documents ever used to train AI models?
- 5 Does it work on a phone for people without a company email address?
- 6 Can it enroll and remind people automatically from our HRIS?
- 7 Can we see first-attempt quiz accuracy, not just completions?
- 8 What does the record we'd hand an auditor actually look like?
- 9 Can people practice conversations, not just watch content?
- 10 How fast can we go live, and how much of our team's time will it take?

CONCLUSION

Short lessons, real evidence

The case for microlearning in 2026 doesn't rest on novelty. It rests on arithmetic: less time, more to learn, and more to prove.

The research behind short, spaced, tested learning is older than any app, and it's held up. What's new is the toolkit. AI can now turn a policy into training in an afternoon, practice tools let people rehearse the hard conversations, and reminders reach people inside the apps they already use.

That raises the bar for L&D rather than lowering it. Content is cheap now. Accuracy, relevance and proof aren't. The teams that do well over the next three years will be the ones that check what AI produces, design for the frontline first, and report on learning and behavior, not just completion.

If you take one thing from this report, make it the 90-day plan on page 18. Capture a baseline, run one pilot properly, and let the numbers make the case.

Three things to do this quarter

1

Pick one compliance topic and add a question to the end of every lesson.

2

Write a one-page AI content policy: who reviews drafts, and where your data goes.

3

Record a baseline for admin hours and first-attempt accuracy before your next rollout.

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Where every number came from

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5Mins figures (completion, activation, admin time, go-live time, library size) come from 5Mins platform data and published customer case studies. Customer results are from IKEN, AZA Finance and Candyspace case studies. Regulatory summaries are for information only and are not legal advice.



AI MICROLEARNING

Training your people actually finish

See how 5Mins turns compliance, leadership and role skills into lessons of about 5 minutes a day, with zero admin and audit-ready proof.

Start free trial

Book your demo

Free access needs no credit card.

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