

Unlocking the capability to innovate

**What more than 3,000 workers
across Canada, the United States
and the United Kingdom reveal
about learning and adaptation**

New data shows a gap between the training people receive and the capability they actually need. This report uncovers why current approaches fall short, and what it takes to help people adapt, collaborate and **create real value.**

Executive summary

The world of work is changing faster than most people and organizations are ready for. The question now is: How do we help individuals and teams keep pace, learn through change, and build the capability to thrive?

Professional development is often the first response. The challenge is that not all workplace training is created equal, or truly effective.

Traditional training focuses on technical knowledge and compliance, yet success today depends on something deeper. InceptionU calls this innovation readiness, which is the ability to adapt and create as technology and society continue to evolve.

Our research found that many people are not being taught the skills they need to succeed in today's complex work environments. To build innovation readiness, people need **workplace training that develops their capability to adapt and innovate** through hands-on practice and applied problem-solving.

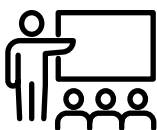
Our study was conducted across Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, and examined how people learn at work, what actually drives growth and engagement, and why some individuals are more prepared to innovate and succeed than others.

The data revealed a clear divide between those who complete professional development courses that simply “check a box,” and those who are given the opportunity to build capability through practical, job-related learning.

From the survey findings, we identified five key insights that help organizations, educators, and policymakers understand how to support people in building innovation readiness.

1. Compliance training doesn't help talent succeed, applied learning does
2. Collaboration isn't just about teamwork, it's an innovation engine
3. Applied learning is a key retention strategy
4. Confident risk-taking signals the ability to adapt and innovate
5. Close Gen Z's innovation readiness gap through connection

Together, these insights show that preparing people for the future of work requires a shift from providing information-based courses to creating learning experiences that build innovation readiness. These experiences help people strengthen their skills, collaborate more effectively and adapt to change with confidence.



81% of workers have completed workplace training in the past 12 months, yet only **32%** say it was directly applicable to their role.

Why does this research matter?

Professional development has become the default response to change. When people face new technologies, regulations, or market disruptions, the reflex is often to take another course or pursue another certification.

Yet despite billions invested globally in professional development each year, many workplaces face the same challenge: people are not equipped with the skills they need to succeed.

Our research began with a hypothesis that this disconnect exists because most training is designed to achieve compliance, not enhance capability. Standard approaches teach people what they might need to know or avoid, but rarely help them build MetaSkills, which are the foundational abilities that let people learn, adapt, and perform more effectively. These include critical thinking, systems thinking, creative thinking, computational thinking, scientific thinking, design and collaborative skills, which are all key factors of innovation readiness.



Companies worldwide are expected to spend **\$515 billion** (USD) on corporate training and development by 2029



66% of managers and executives say most recent hires were not fully prepared for their role

—Deloitte's 2025 Global Human Capital Trends survey



About the study

Our talent innovation study explores how people learn at work, the kinds of training they receive, and how those experiences shape their ability to adapt and innovate. We designed it to learn whether standard workplace training actually builds the MetaSkills people need for innovation readiness and long-term success.

For this study, we asked questions about decision-making, risk tolerance, communication, and innovation style to understand how people approach change and collaboration at work.

To test our hypothesis at scale, we surveyed more than 3,000 working adults across Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom between August and September 2025. Respondents represented a broad cross-section of the workforce, with a balanced mix of genders, generations, industries, and roles.

GEOGRAPHY

~1,000 participants in each country

GENERATIONS

Gen Z (22-29), Millennials (30-44), Gen X (45-64), and Boomers (65+)

GENDER

Roughly even male and female representation, with a small proportion identifying as non-binary or another gender

EMPLOYMENT TYPE

Mix of salaried/self-employed (67%) and hourly (33%) employees

POSITION

46% of respondents were junior, mid-level, senior and technical role employees, and 54% were managers ranging from emerging leaders, mid-level and senior managers to executive management and c-suite

ORGANIZATION SIZE

Company size included small- to mid-sized teams of <10 employees (13%), 11 to 50 employees (14%), 51 to 150 employees (15%), 151 to 500 employees (17%), as well as large enterprises of 500+ employees (42%)



We surveyed more than **3,000 working adults** across Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom.



5 innovation readiness archetypes

To uncover patterns in how participants approach innovation, our study defined five archetypes, each representing a distinct mindset toward workplace change. These are not job titles or demographic groups, but behavioural profiles that show how individuals respond when something new is introduced at work.

All participants were asked “*which of the following best describes your actions during times of change or new direction at work?*” and chose one of the following responses in the chart below, (each of which reflects a different stage of innovation readiness).

Based on these responses, the research team categorized participants into five archetypes that represent different mindsets toward workplace change and they were used to interpret broader patterns in innovation readiness across the sample.

1. **Builders** are consistently innovation-ready. They actively shape change, turning ideas into action and contributing to what comes next.
2. **Embracers** are open and optimistic, helping others adapt once they understand the purpose behind a change.

3. **Drifters** are willing but passive, staying focused on their immediate work while waiting to see how change unfolds.
4. **Resistors** are cautious and suspicious, preferring predictability or avoiding change until they feel secure.
5. **Destroyers** are defensive about the current system and act to preserve it, often because they feel they have the most to lose from change.

These archetypes provide a lens for understanding where people are on the path toward innovation readiness, without judging those who are earlier in their journey. The following sections use this framework to interpret what the data reveals about key factors such as decision-making, risk tolerance, and collaboration.

These findings show how learning approaches can help people move toward becoming Builders — individuals who consistently turn ideas into action.

This research was conducted by InceptionU and [RKI](#) as a follow-up to [Digital Journal’s Innovation Talent Study](#) published in the spring of 2025. The earlier study introduced organizational innovation archetypes, and this work extends that research by examining how learning environments, capability development, and MetaSkills influence where people fall on that spectrum across Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Survey participants breakdown by archetype

Archetype (not visible to participants)	Definition/response provided to participants	Survey results by % of total
Builder	I see where it is going and want to contribute to the momentum, turning ideas into action and actually building what’s next	10%
Embracer	I like new ideas and enjoy helping others get on board. I stay positive, look for the upside and want to be part of making it work	29%
Drifter	I am comfortable following the lead. Mostly, I focus on doing what is needed in the moment, mostly focusing on key aspects of my job	40%
Resistor	My first thought before I understand the change, is that I don’t want to do it. I work to slow down or avoid heading in those directions	12%
Destroyer	I have too much at stake in the current system. I will plot to ensure that the new idea does not go forward	8%

Key findings

1. Compliance training doesn't help talent succeed, applied learning does

Access to workplace training is widespread across all survey respondents, but that doesn't mean it's effective. More than three quarters (81%) of respondents completed training in the past 12 months, and one in three (33%) said they participated simply because it was required.

When learning is treated as a checklist exercise, it rarely helps people build the MetaSkills they need to succeed. The data showed that while participation in training is high, application of learning is low. Only 32% of study participants said the training they received was directly applicable to their role. But among the most innovation-ready talent, the pattern shifted; 43% of Builders and 39% of Embracers reported that training was applicable to their role, whereas 21% of Destroyers and 23% of Resistors said the same.

This gap tells an important story.

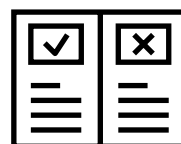
When workers are able to convert learning into application, they're more likely to be Builders. They connect training to their day-to-day challenges and experiment with new approaches.

Those from lower innovation-ready groups are less likely to be accessing learning that helps them grow. This distinction between knowledge-gathering and application is what separates those who are simply informed from people equipped to navigate and lead change.

Our takeaway: Innovation readiness depends on capability development, not compliance.



81% of workers completed training in the past 12 months, but **1 in 3** said they did it because it was required.



While **43%** of Builders and **39%** of Embracers reported that training was applicable to their role, just **21%** of Destroyers and **23%** of Resistors said the same.

Our takeaway: Innovation readiness depends on **capability development**, not compliance.

Collaboration is not only a MetaSkill — it's a growth strategy. When people are **empowered to build together**, they are better at innovating.

2. Collaboration isn't just about teamwork — it's an innovation engine

When we asked people what kind of training would help them most at work, one MetaSkill stood out: Collaboration. Almost half (44%) of respondents said they would benefit from more training in this area.

Collaboration positively transforms how people feel about their jobs. More than half of survey participants (53%) said working with great people and supportive leaders or mentors is what makes their work interesting enough to stay in their role.

The effect is even stronger among the most innovation-ready workers: 59% of Builders and 58% of Embracers identified collaboration as the top reason to remain at their jobs. But for less innovation-ready archetypes, the pattern held as well. Nearly half (44%) of Destroyers and 42% of Resistors still ranked it first.

The data also revealed that collaboration is the foundation for becoming more innovation-ready. When asked what they would need to successfully improve a process, service or product, Builders and Embracers were significantly more likely than other archetypes to choose “the right team members,” “flexibility to shape roles,” and “opportunities for team skill development.” This co-creation mindset illustrates how Builders and Embracers are able to turn ideas into results.

By contrast, 70% of Destroyers report that they are more used to making big decisions in isolation (versus 44% of Builders), backing up our hypothesis that less collaboration indicates a lower level of innovation readiness.

The data shows us that collaboration is not only a MetaSkill — it's a growth strategy. When people are empowered to build together, they are better at innovating.

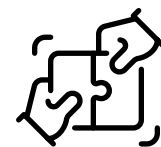


44% of workers said collaboration skills are what they most need to develop



53% of participants reported that working with great people/leadership makes work interesting enough to stay.

→ Collaboration matters most to innovation-ready talent: 59% of Builders and 58% of Embracers rank it #1



Builders are most likely to identify teamwork, role flexibility and team skill development as key to improving processes. Destroyers (70%) prefer to work alone.

When learning is **meaningful and applicable**, it becomes a retention strategy.

3. Applied learning is a key retention strategy

On-the-job training doesn't just shape people's success at work, it impacts whether or not they choose to leave an organization.

Nearly every person we surveyed (96%) said they benefited from working at an organization that values learning and development. But the type of benefit they experienced depended heavily on the learning opportunity that was delivered.

Two thirds (67%) of Builders said their workplace learning improved their skills and confidence, compared with just 38% of Destroyers. Similarly, 62% of Builders gained more opportunities for growth and advancement through training, while just 32% of Destroyers did. Finally, 48% of Builders reported their training led to a greater sense of purpose in daily work, but only 33% of Destroyers felt the same.

These differences matter, because our data also showed that training has a significant impact on retention. Across all respondents, 59% have left or considered leaving an employer in the past year, and 40% said training-related reasons drove their interest in quitting.

When we did a deeper dive to see where our innovation-ready archetypes landed on this question, we found Destroyers are more likely to cite training issues as a reason to leave (54%) than Builders (36%).

What this tells us is that when learning is meaningful and applicable, it becomes a retention strategy.



96% of workers say they benefit from workplaces that value learning and development.

But builders experience those benefits far more often: 67% report improved skills and confidence vs. 38% of Destroyers.



59% of respondents have left or considered leaving their employer in the past year.

40% say training-related reasons would influence their decision to leave a job.

Destroyers are more likely to cite training issues as a reason to leave (54%) than Builders (36%).

4. Confident risk-taking signals the ability to adapt and innovate

Adaptability, or the capacity to respond to change, is crucial to innovation. Because even the best ideas stall when people aren't equipped to shift their perspectives and behaviours.

Our research showed that innovation-ready employees are the most comfortable navigating a key feature of adaptability, by a *very* large margin. Nearly two thirds (63%) of Builders reported a high tolerance for uncertainty and risk associated with new work opportunities, compared with only 26% of Destroyers.

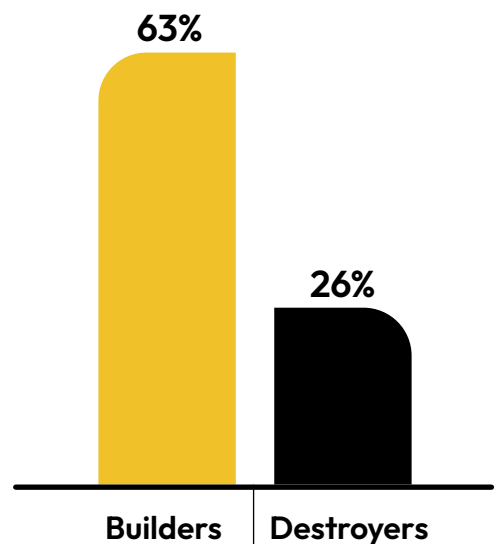
Having high tolerance for uncertainty and risk translates to a willingness to explore new solutions or new markets, the resiliency to withstand volatility, and the flexibility to be agile as needed.

Another indicator of how adaptable people are came out in how well they manage workplace stress. Once again, our data found that far more Destroyers (78%) and Resistors (87%) than Builders (52%) reported job-related stress and anxiety.

These contrasts suggest that Builders tend to experience risk and stress as manageable challenges which don't limit their innovation readiness. Destroyers and Resistors, on the other hand, are more likely to retreat from risk and uncertainty, viewing them as disruption rather than opportunities to innovate.

To be clear, we're not knocking Destroyers and Resistors. Becoming more adaptable requires intentionally practicing skills and adopting a mindset that develops the trait. But without applied MetaSkills professional development, it's hard for talent to better manage their workplace stress and risk tolerance, and move towards Builder-style innovation readiness.

High-risk tolerance



Builders report significantly lower workplace stress and anxiety (52%) than Resistors (87%) or Destroyers (78%).

Becoming more adaptable requires **intentionally practicing skills** and adopting a mindset that develops the trait.

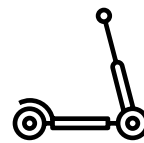
5. Close Gen Z's innovation readiness gap through connection

One of the most surprising findings from our study was the starkness of the generational gap in innovation readiness. Gen Z respondents were 40% more likely than the total average of respondents to be categorized as Destroyers — far more than any other generation. Meanwhile, older workers landed at the opposite end of the spectrum. Gen X participants were 23% less likely, and Boomers 53% less likely, to be Destroyers.

The data doesn't specify why the youngest working generation is so much more likely to be opposed to change, but if we look at some of our other findings, there are clues.

For instance, we know that Destroyers struggle with low tolerance for risk, higher stress levels, and a tendency to work in isolation rather than collaboration — all factors that limit adaptability and innovation readiness. Gen Z workers are digital natives who may have only ever experienced hybrid or remote work. So their ability to build work relationships, handle team-related stress, and collaborate might not be as well developed as others.

If this is the case, Gen Z talent especially benefit from applied collaboration and shared problem-solving exercises, as well mentorship and training that encourages experimentation and feedback, helping them become more comfortable with uncertainty and risk.



Gen Z respondents were **40%** more likely to be classified as Destroyers



Gen X were **23%** less likely and Boomers were **53%** less likely to be classified as Destroyers

Gen Z workers are digital natives who may have only ever experienced hybrid or remote work. So their ability to build work relationships, handle team-related stress, and collaborate might not be as well developed as others.

Turn insight into action

If you are an employer, educator, funder, or policymaker who wants to help talent build their capability for innovation, enabling learning experiences that are actually applicable to their roles and rooted in hands-on practice is key. Innovation readiness blossoms when people learn by doing, building the confidence and skills they need to adapt or create something new.

How organizations and companies can apply our findings

Organizations and companies that want to prepare their people and teams for the future can begin by reframing professional development as capability development. This means replacing static, one-off courses with applied, ongoing learning experiences that mirror real work and invite collaboration and the development of MetaSkills across teams.

To put these approaches into action:

- 1. Make learning experiential:** Anchor programs in real-world projects, challenges or innovation sprints where skills can be applied immediately
- 2. Build collaboration and other MetaSkills intentionally:** Use cross-functional teams and peer learning to help employees practice co-creation and shared accountability
- 3. Measure growth, not attendance:** Track capability and confidence gains, not course completions. Success should be defined by what learners can now do differently and better



Innovation readiness blossoms when **people learn by doing**, building the confidence and skills they need to adapt or create something new.

How educators and learning systems can apply our findings

Across most sectors, workplace learning systems are built for predictability. They focus on consistency and compliance, not creativity and confidence.

Employees and leaders alike need learning experiences that build the MetaSkills required for complex problem solving, such as critical thinking, systems thinking, collaboration, and adaptability. These skills cannot be learned in theory. They must be practiced, refined, and applied in context.

This can be achieved by investing in learning systems that feature:

1. **Learning by doing:** Embed real projects and real problems into learning design so participants can immediately apply new ways of thinking to realistic challenges
2. **Collaboration as a capability:** Create environments where teamwork, reflection and shared decision making are part of the learning process itself
3. **Designing for adaptability:** Use cycles of experimentation and feedback to help people grow comfortable with uncertainty and risk



How funders and policymakers can apply our findings

Enabling innovation-ready talent is not only an organizational challenge but a system-wide opportunity. Funders and policymakers have a critical role to play in shaping conditions that help applied learning and MetaSkills development thrive at scale.

To accelerate workforce innovation readiness, funders and policymakers can:

- 1. Invest in capability ecosystems:** Support partnerships between employers, educators and innovation organizations that deliver project-based, experiential learning programs
- 2. Fund applied learning pilots:** Prioritize initiatives that demonstrate measurable improvements in adaptability, collaboration and problem-solving, rather than only technical proficiency
- 3. Reframe success metrics:** Incorporate capability outcomes, such as confidence, adaptability and collaboration, into workforce and education funding frameworks.



Prioritize initiatives that demonstrate measurable improvements in **adaptability, collaboration and problem-solving**, rather than only technical proficiency

How we bridge the capability divide

InceptionU's programs were designed to bridge the capability gaps identified throughout this report. People don't build capability by being told what to do, but by testing out and improving relevant skills on the job.

This "learning by doing" approach provides technical knowledge as well as the confidence to navigate ambiguity, collaborate effectively, and design solutions that respond to complex, real-life challenges.

- For instance, in the *Transformation Design* program, cross-disciplinary teams design and test solutions for business, community, or social challenges. Through this process, learners practice collaboration, creative inquiry, and iterative design.
- And in the *AI in the Wild* program, tech professionals and business leaders engage in scenario-based exploration of emerging technologies. They apply systems thinking and experimentation to understand how innovation intersects with ethics, regulation, and societal impact.

Across all programs, participants move beyond knowledge acquisition to strengthen adaptability and confidence through applied experience. This is exactly the kind of learning environment our data showed to be most effective for driving retention, collaboration, and innovation.

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Conclusion

Our research revealed a simple but critical truth: access to knowledge alone doesn't create innovation readiness.

Capability grows when an innovation mindset and the right learning opportunities and environments align, creating the conditions people need to practice adaptability, collaboration and creative problem-solving.

Builders had the highest levels of innovation readiness and were most likely to translate learning into action, turning new ideas into measurable outcomes.

The archetype most likely to describe itself as regularly motivated and engaged at work was Destroyers (60%), which showcases that even though some people struggle with change, it doesn't mean they're not committed to their workplace or to growing their professional success.

Without the right learning environments, even motivated workers struggle to apply what they know or enhance their capability, let alone fuel innovation.

The future of work will belong to those who can continuously adapt in order to create alignment between motivation, action, and opportunity by prioritizing capability over compliance and designing training systems that turn learning into doing.

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BE READY FOR YOUR FUTURE, TODAY.

InceptionU is a Calgary-based learning and innovation organization that helps people build the MetaSkills and mindsets needed to navigate complexity.

We design learning experiences for individuals who want to strengthen their critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and confidence in uncertainty. For organizations, we create programs that shift workplace cultures from compliance-oriented training toward environments where people learn together, work through problems, and build long-term capability.

Our work is grounded in the belief that innovation is human, and that people thrive when they have the trust, support, and conditions to grow in community.

Learn more at InceptionU.com