AVION CONSULTING

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

The Skills Clock Is Running Faster Than the Training Budget

Professional skills now expire twice as fast as they did a decade ago. Most organizations still budget and plan as if they don't.

5 years

Time before a professional skill becomes outdated today, down from roughly 15 years a decade ago

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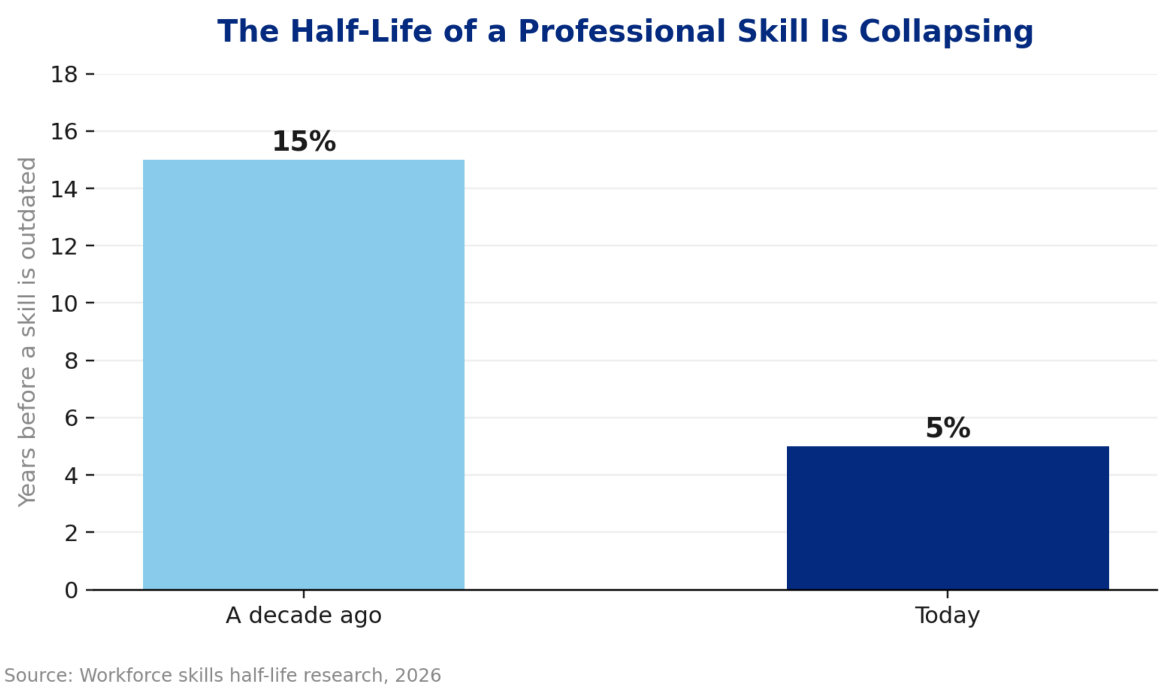
The Assumption Baked Into Most Training Budgets

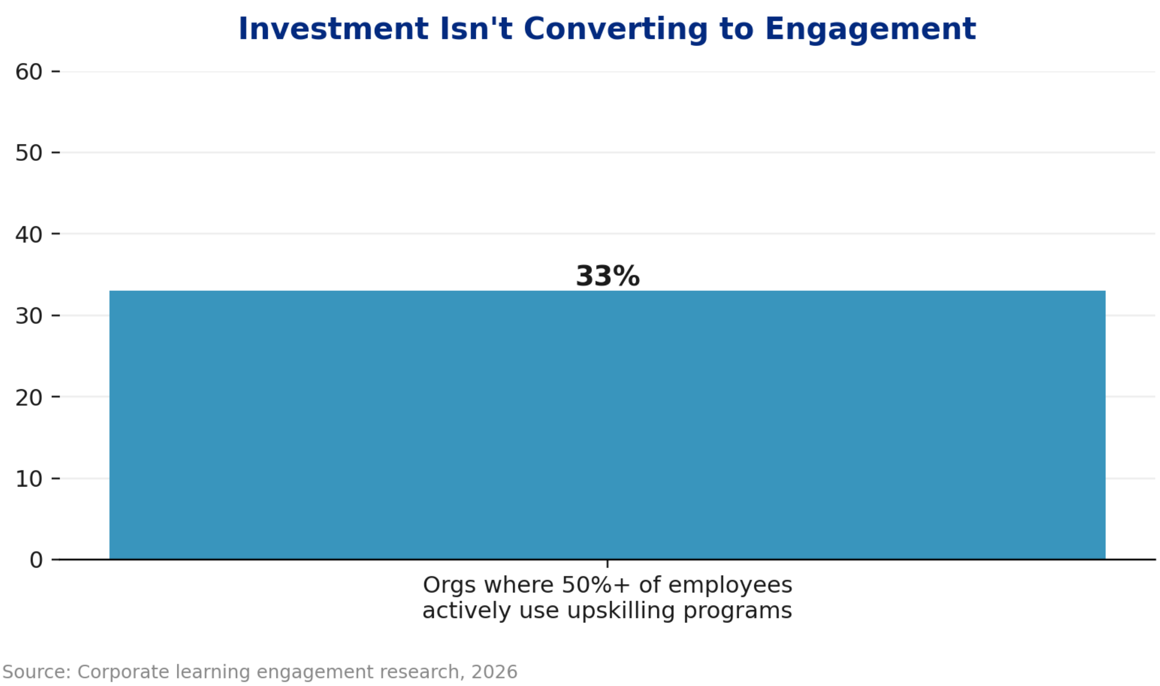
Most annual learning and development plans are still built on an implicit assumption: that a skill acquired this year has a reasonable shelf life, several years at minimum, before it needs meaningful refreshing. That assumption no longer holds. Professional skills now expire roughly twice as fast as they did a decade ago. What once took fifteen years to become outdated now takes around five.



The half-life of a professional skill has collapsed.

The Gap Between Spend and Actual Use

The response from most organizations has been to spend more on upskilling programs, which sounds like the correct fix until you look at whether anyone is using what gets purchased. Only about a third of organizations report that more than half their employees are actively engaging with the upskilling programs the company pays for. The spend is real. The behavior change it is meant to produce, largely, is not.



Most organizations cannot get half their workforce to actively use the upskilling investment already made.

The Numbers at a Glance

Metric	Figure	Source
Time for a skill to become outdated, a decade ago	~15 years	Workforce skills half-life research, 2026
Time for a skill to become outdated, today	~5 years	Workforce skills half-life research, 2026
Orgs with 50%+ active engagement in upskilling programs	~33%	Corporate learning engagement research, 2026

Why More Catalog Content Isn't the Fix

The typical response to low engagement is to add more courses to the learning platform, which addresses a supply problem the data does not actually describe. The gap is not a shortage of available content. It is a shortage of time, relevance, and a clear line between completing a module and anything that changes in someone's actual role. Employees are rational. They deprioritize learning that does not visibly connect to what they are accountable for this quarter.

What Changes Behavior Instead of Just Completion Rates

The organizations seeing real behavior change tend to deliver learning inside the workflow itself, at the moment a skill gap actually shows up, rather than as a separate catalog visited on its own schedule. That shift, from learning as a destination to learning as embedded support, is a bigger driver of engagement than adding volume to the existing catalog ever was.

Two Different Jobs to Do

For the CEO

Ask what percentage of your workforce's core skills you expect to be materially different in five years, then ask whether your current learning investment is sized for that rate of change or for the fifteen year half-life that no longer applies. Most organizations are budgeting for a world that closed several years ago.

For the CHRO

Engagement, not enrollment, is the metric that should be on your dashboard. A catalog with strong completion rates and weak behavior change is optimizing for the wrong outcome. Tie learning investment to specific role-relevant skill gaps that managers can name, not to a general catalog employees are expected to browse on their own initiative.

The Real Constraint

The organizations closing this gap are not spending more than everyone else. They are spending more precisely, tied to skills that are actually expiring in their specific workforce, delivered at the moment of need rather than stockpiled in a catalog nobody has time to browse.

References

1. Workforce skills half-life research compilation, citing multiple 2025-2026 studies on professional skill decay rates.
2. Corporate learning and upskilling engagement research, 2026.