2026 WHITE PAPER

TRAINING THAT WORKS UNDER PRESSURE

A guide to help L&D leaders design and deliver training that works when it matters most

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Executive summary

Transformation. AI. Doing more with less.

Teams, and the demands placed on them, are changing faster than ever. L&D leaders have never been under more pressure to keep up, and to prove what works. Static training and 'content dumping' have never been more costly.

This guide reframes the learning solution as a training ground: dynamic, fluid, future-proof, and responsive to what teams actually face. Inside are principles for designing and delivering it, and a 30-minute review to try this week.

Teams are moving. Is your training?

Complex and uncertain	Today's challenges are complex and uncertain. No single role, leader, team or domain can carry the work alone. The link between actions and outcomes is often ambiguous, and only clear in hindsight (Seyer 2026).
The talent velocity gap	86% of companies lack adequate talent velocity: "the ability to see skills, build or acquire what's needed, and mobilize talent in real time" [1].
Technical & human	Teams need to use AI well, and to communicate, decide and work together while everything around them changes. 78% of UK L&D pros are already exploring or using generative AI [2], and 91% say soft skills are increasingly important [3]. Recognising the need is easy. Building both, in real time, is much harder.
More with less	For L&D, that means a bigger agenda with the same time and budget. One UK financial services organisation, mid-transformation, was rolling out Copilot training while helping teams learn to collaborate in their new shape. Two very different skill sets, needed at once.
All under pressure	All of this is happening under pressure. 91% of UK adults experienced high or extreme pressure or stress in the past year [5]. Teams, leaders and L&D are all feeling it. **So how do you make sure training works when the pressure is this high?**

86%
of companies lack adequate talent velocity [1]

90%
see an increasing need for real-time skills visibility [1]

34%
of team members feel confident their team can handle what's coming (vs 52% of leaders) [6]

Sources on page 7.

Static training isn't fit for purpose

In these conditions, the risk and potential cost of getting training wrong has never been higher.

A season planned on day one

Imagine a sports team that planned every drill for the whole season on day one. No room to flex. No allowance for different opponents, injuries, or the dynamics playing out in the squad. No coach would work that way. Yet a 12-month training calendar often does exactly that. By the time a module is delivered, the tools and skills it teaches may already be out of date. Without flex built in, there's a real risk that much of it is no longer relevant.

No team works in a vacuum
Teams and leaders don't operate in a vacuum either. They work within a web of relationships, inside a wider system of stakeholders [7]. A framework taught in isolation rarely survives contact with that system.

Content dumping
Then there's content dumping: listing what people should know, putting it in a course and making them complete it. It ticks a box. It barely touches behaviour. In one small study of 60 people, those who practised a feedback conversation were rated 20% more effective by blind assessors than those who did e-learning on the same model [8].

Pressure changes the result
Research on stress-exposure training shows that, for some tasks, normal training doesn't improve performance once the task is done under pressure [9]. Training with pressure built in has an effect equivalent to nearly doubling the share of people who perform well [10, 11]. Skip it, and you design something that won't work for your audience when it matters most.

The costs add up
The costs add up: learners' time wasted, poor feedback on programmes, and training seen as irrelevant. **The bigger risks are commercial.** Organisations leading on talent velocity are far more confident than those lagging behind that they'll be profitable (88% vs 65%) and keep critical talent (76% vs 50%) [1].

+23 pts

talent velocity leaders vs laggards confident their organisation will be profitable (88% vs 65%) [1]

2x

stress training has an effect equivalent to nearly doubling the share of people who perform well under pressure [10, 11]

What learning leaders can do

Spare a thought for England's penalty takers. Between 1990 and 2012, England lost six of their first seven major-tournament shoot-outs. One former manager believed penalties were a lottery: impossible to recreate in training, so not worth practising. Gareth Southgate, who had missed his own penalty at Euro '96, disagreed. His players practised at the end of gruelling sessions, on tired legs, and rehearsed the long walk from the halfway line. In 2018, England won their first ever World Cup shoot-out.

Reframe learning as a training ground, not a classroom: a place where leaders and teams come to practise and get it wrong, so they're ready to perform when it matters most.

Below are some of the ways we've seen this work well: reducing the risk and cost of getting learning wrong, and designing and delivering training that works under pressure. They're ideas to adapt, not a fixed method.

01. DISCOVER

Relevance. Talk to the people you'll be training first. What's the leader's pain, what would a win look like, and what role will they play? Look beneath the brief: when teams get stuck, it's often relational.

Right fix. Check training is the answer. It works when people lack a skill or need safe practice to build a habit. It won't fix broken systems or unclear processes.

02. DESIGN

Outcomes. Be clear what learners should do, say, feel and see differently, including that not all pressure is the same, and some can be removed (see Clarity, page 5).

Pressure. Design for the sweet spot: enough pressure to feel real, enough safety to be honest. Add a little controlled chaos, like a live decision or a time limit [10, 11], so people get it wrong on the training ground, not in the board meeting or client call.

03. DELIVER

Practice. You can't learn to take a penalty by watching one. Give people time to rehearse the conversation, not just learn the framework, with feedback as they go [8]. In our experience, even 60 minutes on team dynamics can be transformative.

Flexibility. Borrow from Gestalt team coaching: notice what's happening in the room, hold your interpretation lightly, and offer it back as a question, not a diagnosis.

04. DEBRIEF

Review. The learning is in the review, not just the drill. Build in time to ask what happened, what worked and what to change. Then ask what teams rarely get asked: what happens to us under pressure, and what becomes undiscussable?

Real-life examples: train for pressure

When you reframe learning as a training ground, a place that equips people for pressure, it changes how you approach every skill you train. Here are three examples of what that can look like.

EXAMPLE SKILL

Clarity

Only **17%** of employees rate their team 6 or 7 out of 7 on planning how to respond to potential setbacks [6].

Reframe: Not all pressure is the same.

Clarity starts with seeing pressure clearly. Challenge pressures, like a stretching deadline, tend to lift performance. Hindrance pressures, like red tape or unclear roles, drag it down [12].

IN TRAINING

- Sort the pressures the team is under into ‘challenges’ and ‘hindrances’.
- Pick one hindrance. Solve it live in the room.

EXAMPLE SKILL

Communication

Only **20%** of employees agree their team has an effective way of checking how people are coping with pressure (6 or 7 out of 7) [6].

Reframe: A check-in doesn’t need 60+ minutes.

Good looks like people flagging overload early and quiet voices still being heard.

IN TRAINING

- Get the team talking about their pressure container, live in the room.
- Start a pressured exercise with a quick check-in: one word or a score out of 10.
- Agree how the team will check in when real pressure hits.
- “If someone’s overloaded, would they say so?”

EXAMPLE SKILL

Debrief discipline

Only **26%** of employees say their team captures lessons and builds them into future work [6].

Reframe: Don’t waste hard-earned lessons.

Teams that debrief well are 20-25% more effective than teams that don’t [13].

Good looks like short, honest reviews straight after the big moments, and actions that actually get followed through.

IN TRAINING

- End every pressured exercise with a five-minute debrief.
- Ask what happened, why, and what you’ll do differently next time.
- “After our last big moment, what did we actually learn?”

So, what can L&D leaders practically do next?

Idea: run a 30-minute review of your own training.

Take 30 minutes with your own L&D team. Treat it like half-time: look back, then adjust before the next half. Run three rounds of 10 minutes, one for each stage of pressure: before, during and after.

BEFORE — 10 MINS

REFRAME

Run a pre-mortem

- Imagine your training failed. Why? [14]
- Which three reasons matter most?
- For each one: what's the action, who owns it, and by when?

DURING — 10 MINS

RESPOND

Pressure Test your training

- Does your training work under pressure?
- Does your training leave space for learners to bring real challenges to the table?
- Does your training create enough safety for learners to open up?

AFTER — 10 MINS

RESET

Run a debrief

- What was supposed to happen?
- What did happen? Celebrate what worked and work out why.
- What would we do differently next time?
- What do we need to do right now?

30% → 76%

INNERFIT PROGRAMME [15]

Complex, uncertain and under pressure: that's the reality your training has to work in. Design for it, and the results show up. After one Innerfit programme during a Q4 peak, the share of people who felt equipped to reduce avoidable pressure within their control rose from 30% to 76% [15].

The evidence

Every number in this guide, in the order it appears.

1 LinkedIn. (2026). *The talent velocity advantage*. 2026 LinkedIn Talent Report.

2 LinkedIn. (2025). *Workplace Learning Report UK*.

3 LinkedIn. (2024). *Workplace Learning Report*.

4 Seyer, M. (2026). *6 Team Conditions* [Presentation].

5 Mental Health UK. (2026). *Burnout Report 2026*.

6 Innerfit. (2026). *Team Pressure Test* [Unpublished data]. 114 professionals scored statements on a 1-7 scale (7 = strongly agree).

7 de Haan, E., & Stoffels, D. (Eds.). (2024). *Relational Team Coaching*. Routledge.

8 The Experience Works. (2026). *Experience beats e-learning: Here's the proof*. theexperience.works

9 Driskell, J. E., & Johnston, J. H. (1998). Stress exposure training. In J. A. Cannon-Bowers & E. Salas (Eds.), *Making decisions under stress: Implications for individual and team training* (pp. 191-217). American Psychological Association.

10 Saunders, T., Driskell, J. E., Johnston, J. H., & Salas, E. (1996). The effect of stress inoculation training on anxiety and performance. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 1(2), 170-186. "Nearly doubling" uses the binomial effect size display: r = .30 is equivalent to 35% vs 65% performing well, assuming a 50/50 baseline.

11 Low, W. R., et al. (2021). Pressure training for performance domains: A meta-analysis. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 10(1), 149-163.

12 LePine, J. A., Podsakoff, N. P., & LePine, M. A. (2005). A meta-analytic test of the challenge stressor-hindrance stressor framework: An explanation for inconsistent relationships among stressors and performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(5), 764-775.

13 Tannenbaum, S. I., & Cerasoli, C. P. (2013). Do team and individual debriefs enhance performance? A meta-analysis. *Human Factors*, 55(1), 231-245.

14 Klein, G. (2007). Performing a project premortem. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(9), 18-19.

15 Innerfit. (2026). *Client programme evaluation*. Team and manager survey before and after training.

Does your training work under pressure?

Most training doesn't hold up under pressure. Take the Innerfit Team Pressure Test to see how your team really performs when it counts.

This Team Pressure Test shines a light on what's holding your team back.

You get an objective, evidence-based read on what's working, and the hidden gaps costing your team. Benchmark your team against others and get tailored quick-wins to help them perform under pressure.

- → **Only takes 6 minutes**
- → **Evidence-based questions across all three phases**
- → **Instant results report and recommendations**

Take the Pressure Test →

TEAMS WE'VE WORKED WITH

nationwide · WASSERMAN · CNN · sky · LILY'S KITCHEN · Mindful Chef · CRA · blue square. · SGS · IAA · Kingfisher · AWIN · Bristows

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