



# **360books**

## **What Is Collaborative Learning?**

## Executive summary

All over the world, L&D leaders are fighting for skills. Unfortunately, they're losing.

Right now, most organizations are averaging course completion rates of just 20-30%. There are simply too many competing demands on your teams, and people don't have the time or the space to learn the way they want to. This learning crisis is about much more than the global pivot to remote working. It's bigger than the ever-increasing expectations to get more done during the day. And it goes beyond our continued reliance on sluggish and outdated learning tools.

So, how can we help people lift their heads above water and develop skills? How can we start to view learning not just as a one-off yearly requirement, but as a key part of daily life? How can we celebrate learning together?



We need to get people excited about learning again. We want people using newly developed skills immediately in their role. We need to connect teams, get out of the way, and let them grow by sharing their expertise. After all, your organization's institutional knowledge is your greatest asset—you just need a way to put it to work.

Years ago, when we began applying the collaborative learning methodology to organizational learning, we were looking for a way to help businesses share their internal expertise quickly and easily. We had no idea just how urgent and vital collaborative learning would become. Now, we want to show you how it works, and how it's changing learning for organizations everywhere.

In this ebook, we'll explain what collaborative learning is, how it differs from traditional learning methods, and how it can help you upskill from within.

**Estimated reading time for this ebook:** 15 minutes

# About 360Learning

360Learning fosters internal mobility to solve the talent shortage by empowering companies to upskill from within. By turning their experts into champions for employee, customer, and partner growth, companies upskill their workforce fast to meet tomorrow's business demands. 360Learning's comprehensive learning platform combines LMS and LXP capabilities coupled with collaborative learning Academies to power your business's upskilling flywheel. Discover the easiest way to onboard and upskill employees, train customer-facing teams, and enable customers and partners—all from one place.

360Learning powers the future of work at 1,700 organizations. Founded in 2013, 360Learning has raised \$240 million with 400+ team members across the US and EMEA.

Want to see how we can help you make collaborative learning a reality?  
[Request a demo](#) with 360Learning today.



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# Chapter 1:

## What is collaborative learning?



So, what is collaborative learning, exactly?

Collaborative learning is a training method where employees share their knowledge and expertise to teach and learn from one another at the same time. This group learning enhances the training experience by capitalizing on each employee's skills, ideas, and institutional knowledge.

Collaborative learning is different than cooperative learning—where students work together in small groups to solve a problem or master a concept. Cooperative learning is a useful learning tool, but it's difficult to deploy on an organizational scale. It's most commonly used in high school and higher education settings. Like cooperative learning, collaborative learning encourages higher-level thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork—but it's much easier to scale across teams.

Collaborative learning is part of a larger trend toward interdependence in learning. Organizations are moving away from more hierarchical top-down management styles and toward low-authority, high-accountability models. Instead of individual project ownership, we're relying more and more on group work to achieve outsized results.

**In other words, we work in teams, so why not learn as a team?**

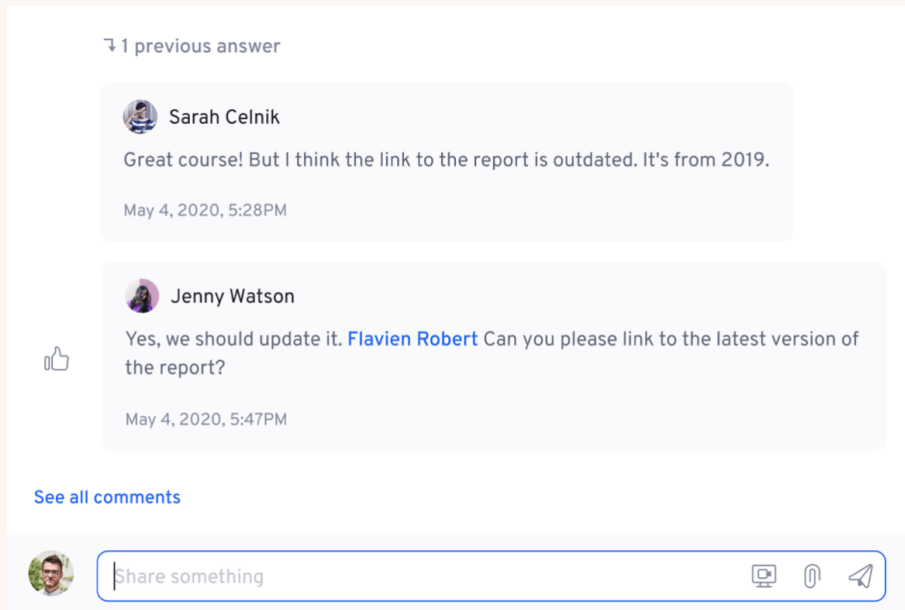
## **The key elements of collaborative learning**

Collaborative learning focuses on peer engagement and interactions throughout the learning process. Every learner shares their own learning needs, helping to reinforce individual responsibility for learning. Internal experts respond to these needs by working with others to convene project teams and create courses based on their own expertise. This way, expert knowledge is made accessible for everyone's benefit.

Because learning materials need to ship quickly to stay relevant, collaborative learning uses feedback to suggest improvements to courses. Rather than publishing course material once, authors and learners can make suggestions to update information, add new elements, and point out new developments in the field. They can also recognize others for their contributions to learning, celebrating organization-wide learning.

With collaborative learning, every section within a course includes Reactions and a forum, providing an essential feedback loop. Each course is a commitment to continuous learning. Feedback supports knowledge sharing in the most effective way possible: through peer interaction.

**Now, let's take a closer look at what set collaborative learning apart from traditional learning approaches, and how it's critical for internal mobility.**



## Chapter 2:

# What makes collaborative learning different?

Traditional, top-down approaches to corporate learning are a major reason for our current crisis in learning. These methods treat learning as something done to people, rather than something that supports growth.

The major problem with corporate learning as we know it? It's centralized, generic, slow, static, and driven only by deliverables. Management or HR set the learning priorities for everyone, and learners don't have an easy way to offer feedback on content to help it improve. This isn't just a drag for the learner. It's also a missed opportunity for course creators to receive feedback on whether their learning content is relevant or useful, or actually developing the skills your teams need.



In contrast with this top-down approach, bottom-up collaborative learning democratizes. Relevant, fast, iterative, and driven by impact, your learners can now access valuable courses.

Now, let's take a closer look at what these five benefits mean in practice.



## The five benefits of collaborative learning

### #01: Democratization

- Traditional corporate learning reflects a top-down management style, meaning executives or L&D determine training needs and then create or buy learning materials to meet those needs. In contrast, in a collaborative learning method, anyone can make a request or create a learning need.

This allows everyone in the organization to contribute to the learning process. Learners and authors feel more engaged, focused, and valued.

Learners share training needs, and internal experts use their unique skillsets to create content and fulfill those needs. L&D teams run quality control and make sure learners have what they need to succeed. This turns L&D into a strategic business function, rather than chasing course completions.

Because employees share learning needs, they can focus learning on what makes a difference in their day-to-day. The result is greater employee buy-in and smoother knowledge-sharing between employees and departments.

## #02: Relevance

- ▀ Collaborative learning courses are created by your fellow team members. This means courses are more specific to your company than third-party courses would be.

With traditional top-down learning, the L&D team either creates the learning content or purchases courses from a third party. The process of commissioning courses often requires instructional designers with technical backgrounds. Classes can take months to produce, and be very expensive.

Instead, collaborative learning enables L&D and employees to create and fulfill learning needs together. As a result, employees are more invested in the learning process. They help create quality content that L&D doesn't have to buy or source through external expert interviews.

## #03: Speed

- ▀ One of the biggest contributors to today's learning crisis is the sluggish response to training needs and skill gaps. By the time L&D teams have realized there's a gap in their resources and responded with the right course, the chance to make the biggest positive impact has long passed.

Collaborative learning connects people to share and quickly respond to

urgent training needs. Organizations can respond to opportunities for learning in a timely and effective manner. Learners see an immediate impact because of the relevance of course topics.

## #04: Iteration

- Because traditional course development is slow and expensive, updates and refreshes are infrequent. Collaborative learning methods make it far easier to update courses based on new information or employee feedback.

Now continuous improvements are more important than ever. Courses will become outdated due to technological or organizational changes. Static course design hinders flexibility and slows down employee learning. In fact, one of the biggest problems with so many organizations is relying on outdated learning technology like SCORM.

With collaborative learning, you can share information and change it over time based on feedback. Now, information gets into the hands of employees exactly when they need it, empowering them to make better decisions.

## #05: Impact

- Traditional L&D programs focus on deliverables and course completion. Collaborative learning is impact-driven and looks at the impact your training is having over time.

Most L&D departments measure success by the number of courses shipped and completed by employees. This approach offers very low visibility into how employees interact with the courses or see what they're learning. It also makes it difficult to demonstrate the ROI associated with training.

In contrast, collaborative learning is impact-driven because it doesn't define success as delivering a course. Because teams are active in the

learning process, their feedback indicates whether a course has been successful.

Now, let's take a step past the theory and see exactly how you can make collaborative learning work for your business or organization.

## Chapter 3:

# How does collaborative learning work?

All this theory might sound great, but for readers with an established culture of traditional corporate learning, it can seem a little daunting. How exactly is this supposed to work in practice? And where are you supposed to start with such a big shift?

Let's look at how collaborative learning keeps learning programs nimble, peer-driven, and distributed.

## Helping companies stay nimble

With a learning platform that features collaborative learning, you can create courses in minutes, not months. Now you can respond quickly to accelerating technology, industry disruption, and unpredictable world events.

Leverage 360Learning to  
Upskill from Within



LMS

Automate compliance and  
instructor-led sessions while  
optimizing costs

AI-ASSISTED AUTHORING TOOL

SCORM COMPLIANT

SCORM PLAYER

BLENDED LEARNING

USER PROVISIONING

## ■ **The problem:** L&D can't keep up with organizational change

In recent years, global events have shown us that an organization's priorities, goals, and infrastructure can change overnight. When valuable skills and experience are scarce, organizations need an entirely new way to think about resource allocation—and an entirely new way to empower skilled people.

Since most learning platforms don't allow for quick course production, L&D teams struggled to update courses to reflect changes such as missing skills. Producing even a single training course can take months of group work, and L&D teams can rely on instructional designers to build courses. The entire process is admin-heavy and resource-intensive. And it's expensive.

## ■ **The solution:** easy course creation that anyone can master

Collaborative learning makes it easier and more cost-effective to create and share courses. Anyone at the company can author a course, with no outside help required.

AI-assisted authoring tools help internal experts create courses faster, while maintaining the guardrails L&D admins need to ensure high-quality content. Sales Enablement teams can demo new product features. Customer Support teams can create a tutorial to help reps deal with specific recurring issues. An accounting manager can show the new procedure for submitting expense reports. Automate the distribution of courses to the right learners. Course authors receive feedback from their learners so can courses adapt when processes do.

That accessibility opens the door for a whole new range of training possibilities. You can still create comprehensive onboarding courses and set learning paths. But you can also develop micro-courses that are relevant to only a single department or even a solitary position. You could create a course to address temporary changes, even if they're only applicable for a month or even a week! You can roll out urgent content quickly and update it later to reflect new developments or real-world changes in the market.

**Example in practice:** When the company adopts a new billing software, the Customer Ops team is able to quickly create best practices and a course on how to use the software. Employees can start using the software right away. Customer Ops can then continue to update the course to reflect employees' questions or updates to the software.

# Putting your people's experience at the center of learning

Employees are a company's most valuable resource. A comprehensive learning platform lets teams learn from one another, sharpening your competitive advantage.



## ■ The problem: irrelevant and unengaging training programs

Right now, too many organizations think of learning as a one-way street: L&D creates learning materials, and employees consume them. Everything goes in one direction, with no opportunity for any back-and-forth or feedback. Industrialized learning is designed with the sole goal of delivering skills to employees. Only it doesn't work.

Centralized content creation is deliverable-driven, not results-driven. L&D spends too much time and money creating or purchasing courses that aren't applicable. They pump that content into LMSs built for administrators, not learners.

This approach has never been effective. Media consumption habits have changed to favor peer-driven content. Look at the growth of billion-

dollar social media companies to see how people respond to peer-driven content.

LXPs focused on content aggregation got us halfway to solving the problem. Learners can find and consume consolidated learning materials better than in a clunky LMS. But the real issue isn't the availability of content. Rather, it's the critical lack of purposeful practice of new skills, feedback opportunities from experts, and personalized learning based on skills insights that prevent real performance improvements.

## ■ **The solution:** learning as a conversation, not a directive

Collaborative learning is a peer-driven, bottom-up method for creating learning materials, making it more effective than traditional elearning methods. Employees identify specific learning needs based on what they view as gaps in their knowledge or skillsets. In-house experts then meet those needs by creating relevant courses. Everyone is an active participant in learning together.

Not only is this more democratic, but it's also more dynamic. There is room for conversation, feedback, and iteration. You can create more effective learning materials and boost employee engagement at the same time.

Fostering knowledge transfers and idea-sharing among employees doesn't just drive better performance—it also enables innovation. Empower your course creators to think like educators: employing decision-making and critical-thinking skills to create the best courses. Your teams might not have realized the skills available within their teams. But once experts start creating courses, they can upskill their whole team.



**Example in practice:** Instead of a sales enablement manager setting mandatory pitch-assessment modules required by all reps, she could give reps the opportunity to voice where they were running into problems and propose solutions. She could then create learning paths that offered the support and guidance needed to improve sales outcomes.

## Enabling a distributed company culture

In a world where employees are increasingly willing to job-hop, strong company culture matters more than ever. A platform that leverages collaborative learning can help you build that strong company culture, one that's more flexible, decentralized, and nurturing. One that helps employees upskill from within.

Leverage 360Learning to  
**Upskill from Within**



**ACADEMIES**

Tap into your experts to foster upskilling  
based on topical or functional areas

ACADEMY MANAGER

USER MANAGEMENT

CO-AUTHORING

CUSTOMIZATION

EXPERT ENABLEMENT

## ■ **The problem:** corporate learning makes employees feel like automatons

Building a company culture that empowers employees is a tall order. It's also an area where organizations have failed in the past, especially during moments of crisis. Rigid, top-down corporate cultures are inflexible and out of touch with employees' needs.

Centralized learning programs only contribute to the problem. They are more likely to focus on specific deliverables. For example: upskilling large swaths of employees without concern for individual growth opportunities. To do this, they turn to one-size-fits-all solutions, like mass reskilling programs or in-person training seminars.

Not only are these solutions usually expensive, they're not effective, and can be challenging to scale. Generic learning programs make employees feel like a number, not a person. The lack of personalization is a major contributing factor to the current crisis of engagement.

## ■ **The solution:** a culture of learning that empowers workers

Collaborative learning can play a decisive role in the ongoing struggle to keep employees happy, present, and focused. It encourages each employee to take ownership by contributing their skills and experience by creating content. In a collaborative learning environment, each person's skills and ideas are genuinely valued.

A collaborative learning culture lasers in on training impact. No more pointless videos or interminable webinars: If an activity isn't helping people learn, it's not worth their time. And you have the data to prove it.

A culture of decentralized learning shifts people forward in their learning journey. Most importantly, decentralized learning is useful in a company

of 10 or 10,000. It works whether you're all in the same building or spread out across the world. It scales as the company grows, and it's elastic enough to change with the organization's priorities.

**Example in practice:** Instead of launching a corporate reskilling initiative for 1,000 engineers, a company could encourage each employee to set their own learning goals based on their specific priorities for personal development.

## The new role for L&D in collaborative learning

Collaborative learning has big implications for the way L&D teams deliver learning outcomes. Instead of scheduling courses, chasing learners to complete training, and sending out (often ignored) requests for feedback, L&D teams can focus on strategic learning initiatives, such as decreasing onboarding times or launching a management academy. This creates new opportunities for everyone to focus on what matters.

In training departments with collaborative learning, coaches are responsible for scaling learning outcomes. As subject-matter experts create more courses, coaches guide people through their learning experiences, ensuring that learning needs are met with the right courses and that courses are as effective as possible. This new role helps L&D manage exactly how collaborative learning is driving growth and improving learning outcomes.

# Chapter 4:

## How are leading companies using collaborative learning in practice?

Adopting collaborative learning can have significant positive real-life effects that extend beyond the L&D department. Now, you can build a more flexible and adaptable workforce, encourage positive learning habits, and create a culture of learning.

### **Building a more flexible and adaptable workforce by upskilling from within**

Collaborative learning allows people to learn new products and processes quickly. It's easy to create training program or academies, which means it's easier for specific departments, or even entire companies, to adapt to products or processes.


This agility is a huge competitive advantage in a world in constant flux. A learning platform focused on quick responses to training opportunities can have a profound impact across your entire business. With a responsive learning platform, you'll be able to pivot to meet changing market dynamics. In practice, this means smoother transitions for workplace developments, such as adopting a new tool.

Next time you're faced with a workforce challenge, you may be able to reskill employees and avoid layoffs. For example, when Scandinavian Airlines found themselves with thousands of grounded flights due to COVID-19, they retrained their service workers as healthcare support workers. The company fulfilled a critical national need even as its primary income generator was off the table. Once the flight schedules returned to normal, they had retained their skilled staff, and could pivot back to normal operations much faster than if they had laid off employees.

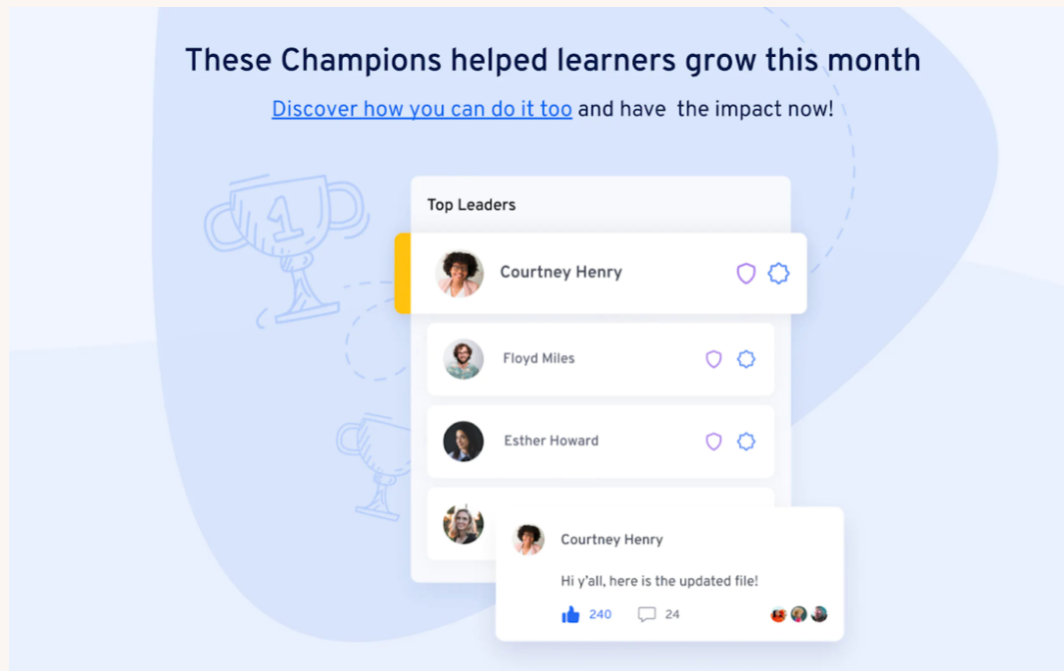
## Encouraging positive learning and engagement

Effective collaboration encourages active learning, making it more useful for knowledge retention and learning engagement than traditional passive learning methods.

Studies show that active learning increases knowledge retention. Employees involved in creating courses are more engaged, even if that means sharing feedback. Reactions and Relevance scores provide valuable feedback to L&D admins and authors, which further promote a learning culture.



Collaborative learning is also linked to greater employee engagement. Employees are more motivated to complete courses when they know their peers are counting on them. For example, 360Learning encourages group members with expertise to become learning champions who share their skills with others.



Industry research firm AlphaSights offers a great example of peer-based learning in action. Two-hundred and forty subject-matter experts contribute to digital training programs - a massive 27% of its workforce - are expert contributors to course content. The result? AlphaSights' learning content is current and relevant and course completion rates soared to 95%.

Researchers have also linked collaborative learning activities to enhanced communication and team-building capabilities. The act of teaching requires employees to flex their communication and critical-thinking skills. Helping peers learn builds a layer of responsibility and camaraderie as colleagues work together to conquer business challenges.

# Creating a shared learning culture

A comprehensive learning platform helps build a culture of learning by creating an atmosphere of learning with and from one another. Employees share expertise and build new skills, leading to higher levels of engagement in the learning process, and greater learning outcomes.

Companies often make the mistake of focusing on the skills they need to attract and develop internally. Leaders get stuck thinking in terms of fixed sets of duties and responsibilities and how to hire for them. In short, they're thinking about jobs, not skills. Unfortunately, by the time they invest in addressing a skills gap, the gap is usually so big, it impacts overarching business goals. Instead, foster a culture of continual upskilling and skill-based performance management, and avoid skills gaps altogether.

With modern learning platforms, organizations can develop and test learning content in a small group, before scaling it out to wider teams, divisions, and clients. AI consulting firm Appen offers a great case study highlighting this in action. The company saved a huge 102 days' worth of training over a three-month period by scaling up its employee onboarding.

This example demonstrates what can happen when you make human interactions the key focus at every step of the learning journey. Rather than setting a standard learning path, you can support open conversation, dialogue, and collaboration. With the right practical exercises, experts and learners seamlessly work together to upskill, rather than passively completing learning activities to check a box.





# Collaborative learning is the answer to our learning crisis

As we've seen, L&D teams everywhere are facing a crisis in learning. People don't have the time or the space to focus on online training the way they want to. We need a drastic solution to get them excited and empower them to share their skills and expertise.

Companies can respond to this crisis by creating a robust culture of collaborative learning. In return, they're rewarded with a highly-skilled, engaged, and loyal workforce that's ready to tackle the challenges ahead. They'll have the means to turn their collective talents into a competitive advantage and the flexibility to solve learning needs as soon as they arise.



To do this, you'll need the right tools. You need an integrated learning platform that's nimble, people-centric, and distributed. We talk to L&D experts on a regular basis. These discussions tell us that making human interaction the central focus of learning leads to better outcomes.

That's why we've built a learning platform that combines the power of a modern LMS and LXP, with collaborative learning academies. Use our comprehensive platform, or layer our collaborative LXP to your existing LMS. A user-friendly platform lets everyone play a part in your company's learning culture. Encourage every employee to actively build their skills and share them with others. With our platform, our users engage in 11 learning activities per day on average, with course completion rates boosted from the industry average of 20-30% to over 90%.

For years, we've been advocating collaborative learning as a way to transform organizational culture. Now, we're leading the charge in a collaborative learning revolution. The way we work, communicate, and learn is changing fast, and it's changing for the better. Avoid disruption from your competition by using collaborative learning as part of your strategic advantage. Upskill from within and build a culture of learning with collaborative learning.

**Interested in how we can help you make collaborative learning a reality? Get in touch with one of our learning experts today.**

# Over 1,700 companies love us already!

360Learning is already helping over 1,700 clients to transform their organizational culture through Collaborative Learning.



But don't just take our word for it: take a look at organizational learning expert Josh Bersin's exploration of [why collaborative learning makes such a big difference](#)—and how all kinds of companies can put it to work.

“360Learning is much more than a Learning Platform. Every single company needs a platform like this.” - [Josh Bersin](#)

- ➔ See how our collaborative learning platform can help your business keep up with the trends, opportunities, and challenges identified in Gartner's [2021 transformation report](#).
- ➔ See how we stack up against other organizational learning solutions at Gartner's [peer insights page](#).
- ➔ For a closer look at how we support collaboration between teams, check out features like our [Experts Engagement Tool](#), [Discussion Forum](#), [Authoring Tool](#), and [Learning Needs Tool](#).
- ➔ For a deeper look at how our clients embrace Collaborative Learning, read about how we helped [AI consulting firm Appen save \\$240k in annual training costs](#).

Want to see how we can help you upskill from within? [Request a demo](#) with 360Learning today.

**I want a demo**

# What's next?

The world is changing fast, and so is the way we learn. Traditional models of corporate learning are simply too slow, rigid, and unengaging for the current moment.

**Now, L&D teams everywhere need a better way to drive learning engagement.** You need a platform that lets you respond to learning opportunities quickly, develop bespoke content that matches learner needs, and let your subject-matter experts drive learning results.

Embracing fast, peer-based, and scalable collaborative learning doesn't just keep your teams happy and engaged: it also helps L&D teams save time on low-value administrative tasks like updating old content, scheduling courses, and tracking completions. More than that, it helps your organization respond to opportunities for innovation and invention.

## **Our comprehensive learning platform achieves this by:**

- ➔ Making it easy for people to share their learning needs
- ➔ Empowering any team to make and ship courses, paths, or academies quickly in response
- ➔ Shaping learner recommendations based on user data relating to skills, interests, role, feedback from other learners through collaborative features and AI.
- ➔ Encourage subject-matter experts to contribute their skills, share their knowledge, and iterate learning content over time in an award-winning authoring tool.
- ➔ Enabling L&D teams to build tailored programs by curating courses from 3rd party platforms - including existing SCORM libraries
- ➔ Using a continuous feedback loop to keep learning content current, accurate, and engaging
- ➔ Fostering a shared sense of connection and belonging through making every step of the learning process as interactive as possible