



 **Case study**

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology



Precision learning in action.

How KAUST reimaged leadership development in Thinqi

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) is one of the world's leading research universities, home to a workforce drawn from over 100 nationalities who live and work together on a shared campus. That cultural richness is one of KAUST's greatest strengths, but it also sets an extraordinarily high bar for leadership. In an environment where colleagues from vastly different backgrounds interact daily, leaders must be highly effective, culturally attuned and capable of responding swiftly to organisational challenges.

For years, KAUST's approach to developing those leaders fell short of what the environment demanded. Leadership programmes were broad and generic, feedback arrived too infrequently to be acted upon, and performance data existed in silos.

The annual review process produced delayed snapshots of capability rather than a living picture of where leaders stood and what they needed next. The L&D team recognised that the organisation's complexity required something fundamentally different — not a digitised version of what already existed, but a genuinely new model of leadership development built around real-time insight, personalised pathways and measurable impact.



The challenge of leading in a world-class, multicultural environment

The limitations of KAUST's existing approach were compounded by the unique sensitivities of its setting. With more than 100 nationalities represented across the workforce, the risk of bias and the importance of psychological safety were ever-present considerations.

Feedback processes that might work in a more homogeneous environment could easily undermine trust or feel threatening in KAUST's close-knit campus context.

At the same time, L&D budgets were under increasing scrutiny, making it essential to demonstrate a clear and direct link between every investment in learning and measurable organisational outcomes.

Generic training programmes, however well intentioned, could not meet these demands. The leadership team needed evidence, not assumptions. They needed to know precisely where capability gaps existed, which leaders required what kind of support, and whether the interventions they designed were actually working.



Reimagining Thinqi as a closed-loop precision learning system

Rather than implementing Thinqi as a conventional learning management system, KAUST's L&D team worked in close partnership with Thinqi to do something considerably more ambitious: to redesign their entire leadership development model around the platform's capabilities. The result was a closed-loop precision learning system in which evaluation, prescription, learning and measurement are seamlessly connected within a single environment.

At the heart of the new model is continuous 360-degree evaluation. Instead of waiting for an annual review cycle, managers now receive ongoing feedback directly within the platform. Results are anonymised and instantly visualised in dashboards, giving both individuals and the wider organisation immediate insight into leadership performance. Crucially, this data does not sit in isolation.

Thinqi's AI-powered Evaluations Summary interprets the results, highlights priority areas for development and prescribes personalised learning pathways. Managers are directed to curated courses, playlists and events housed within the same system, with all engagement tracked. Re-evaluations then benchmark progress over time, creating a continuous evidence trail of development.

This is what distinguishes KAUST's approach. The platform was not simply switched on — it was used to reinvent the way the university develops its leaders. For the first time, feedback, learning and measurement form one unbroken cycle. Every data point leads to action, every learning pathway is personalised, and every intervention is grounded in evidence rather than assumption.

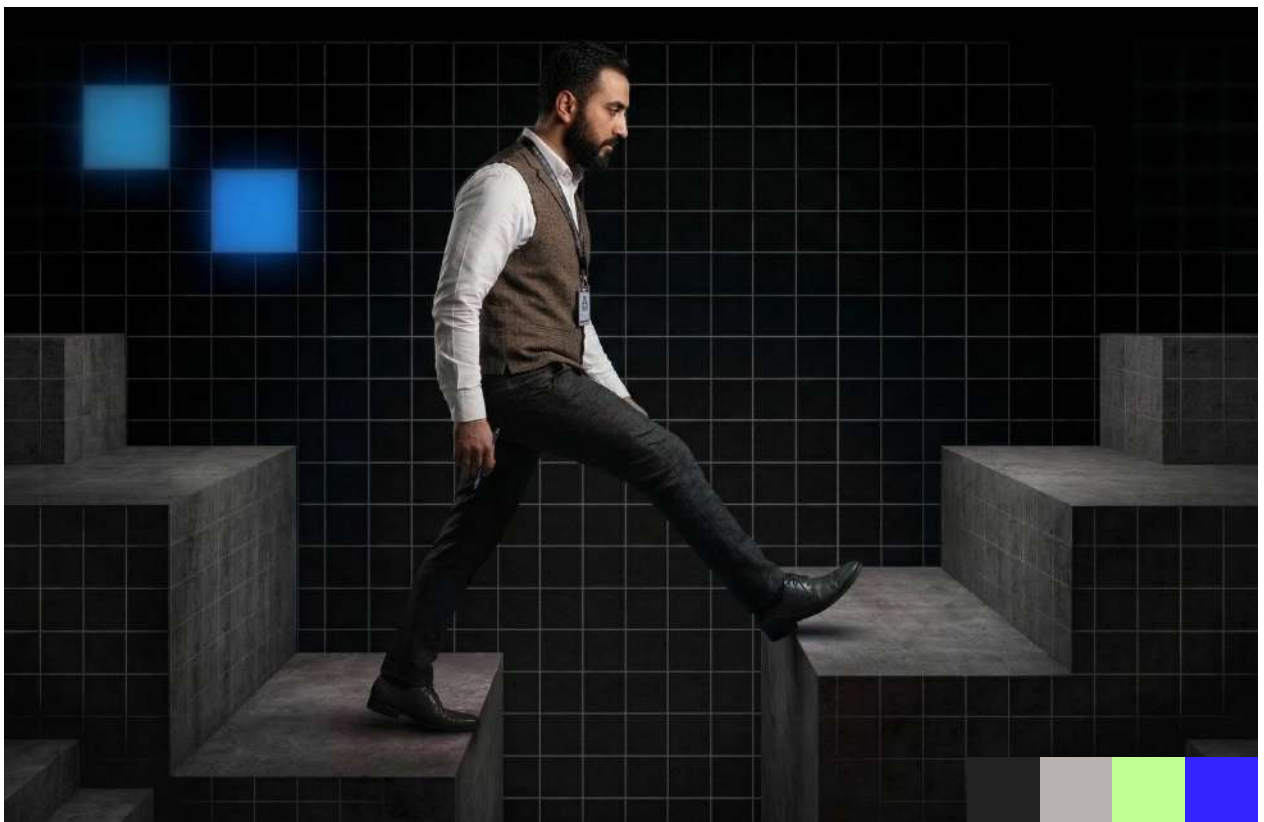


Overcoming barriers to change

Introducing such a fundamental shift was not without its challenges. Managers accustomed to static annual reviews had to adjust to a culture of continuous evaluation — a significant change in mindset. The innovation addressed this directly by ensuring that every evaluation was purposeful. Rather than producing reports that gathered dust, feedback immediately unlocked tailored development opportunities within the platform. That clear connection between input and outcome generated early buy-in, because managers could see the value of the process for themselves.

Cultural sensitivity required equal care. With over 100 nationalities represented, the risk of bias or a lack of psychological safety was real. The solution was to embed anonymised, competency-aligned evaluations that gave managers confidence in the fairness and integrity of the process. Feedback became something that could be trusted rather than feared.

Securing senior sponsorship was the third critical challenge. The L&D team needed the C-suite to see leadership development not as a cost centre but as a strategic priority. Real-time dashboards proved transformative in this regard. For the first time, executive leaders had genuine visibility of leadership capability across the organisation, enabling talent planning based on evidence rather than anecdote. That transparency repositioned L&D as a genuine strategic partner in organisational decision-making.





From broad programmes to targeted, evidence-based interventions

The impact of the new model played out at every level of the organisation. For individual managers, precision learning ensured that every recommendation was directly informed by their own 360-degree feedback, creating pathways that were timely, relevant and genuinely motivating. The continuous feedback loop also began to shift the wider learning culture. Where feedback had once felt exposing, leaders increasingly came to see it as evidence-based insight — something that guided their development, fostered psychological safety and built collective accountability for growth.

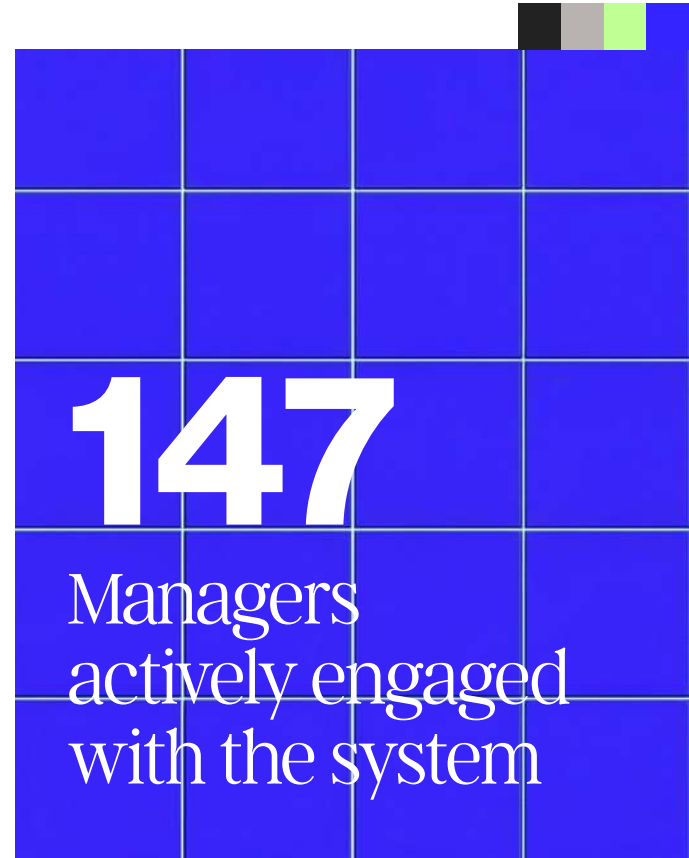
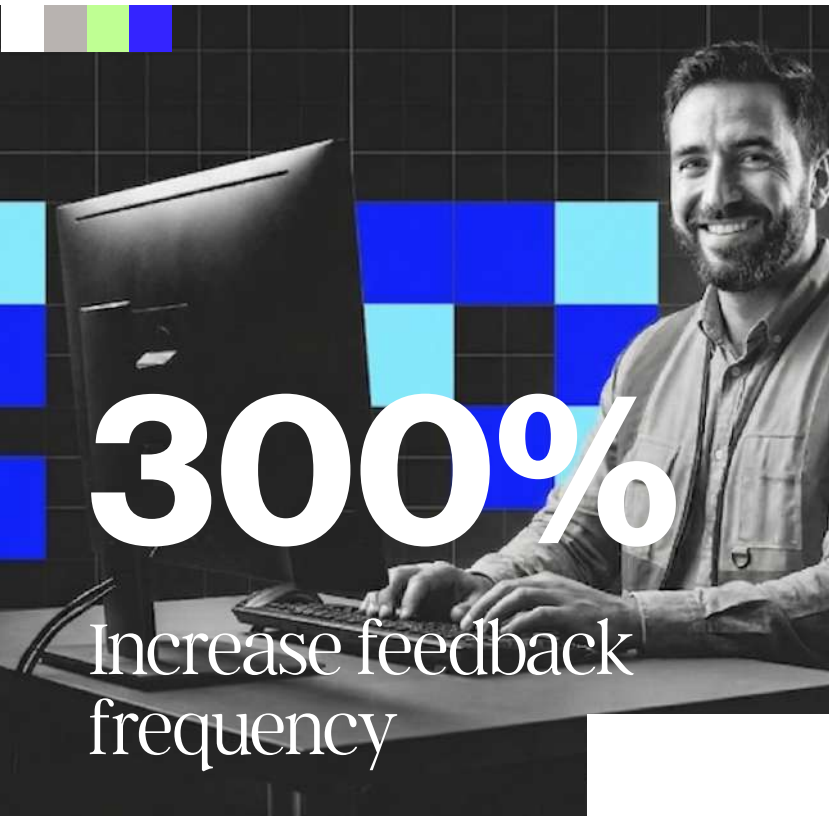
At a group level, aggregated data revealed common challenges that would otherwise have gone undetected.

A striking example arose when the platform's data confirmed that managers across KAUST's close-knit campus were struggling with sensitive conversations. Rather than responding with broad training, the L&D team designed precise, targeted interventions focused specifically on conflict management and psychological safety. These were delivered through the platform and followed by re-evaluations, which confirmed measurable improvement.

For the organisation as a whole, the shift from reactive to evidence-driven development has strengthened performance management, improved productivity and ensured that every learning investment is directly aligned with real business need.

The Results:

Measurable gains at every level



The outcomes of KAUST's precision learning approach have been significant and sustained. Feedback frequency increased by 300%, reflecting a wholesale change in how leadership development is approached across the university. 147 managers are now actively engaged with the system. Leadership capability, rated through the platform's continuous 360-degree evaluation process, has reached 4.37 out of 5 — a score maintained consistently over two years, evidencing not a short-term uplift but a genuine and lasting improvement in leadership culture.

Managers report greater confidence in handling sensitive conversations, a particularly meaningful outcome in KAUST's multicultural environment. These improvements have not been achieved through broad, generic programmes, but through targeted, evidence-based interventions that the platform makes possible at scale.

Precision learning as strategic infrastructure

KAUST's journey with Thinqi demonstrates that a learning platform, deployed with genuine strategic intent, can do far more than manage training. By working in partnership with Thinqi to reimagine what leadership development could look like, KAUST has created a system that is dynamic, equitable and directly connected to organisational performance. L&D has been elevated from an operational function into a strategic driver of institutional capability.

For universities and complex organisations facing similar pressures — to demonstrate return on investment, to develop leaders across diverse and culturally sensitive environments, and to move from annual snapshots to continuous insight — KAUST's experience offers a compelling proof of concept. Precision learning, delivered through the right platform and implemented with the right intent, does not simply improve how training is delivered. It transforms how organisations develop the people who lead them.

