



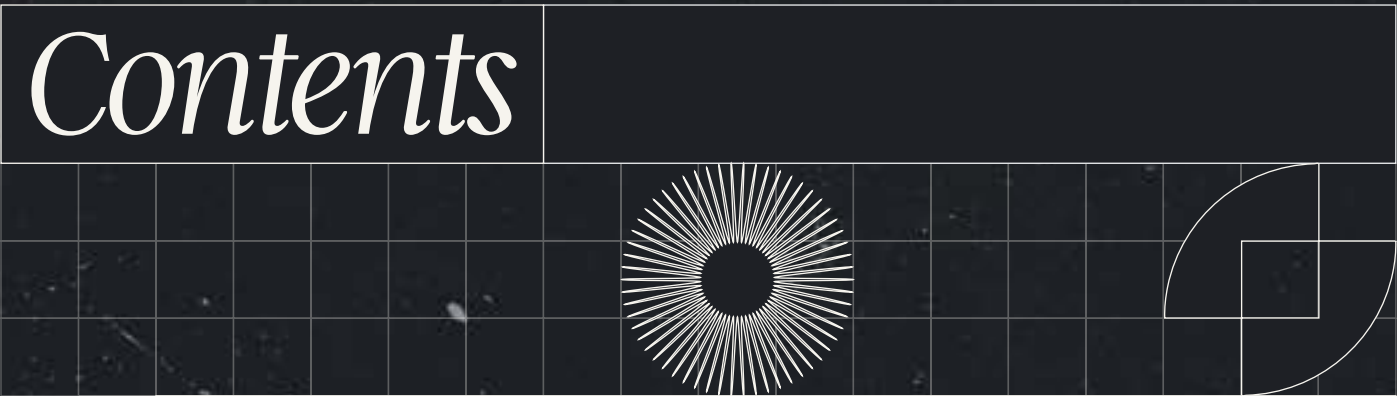
2026 edition

A Guide to

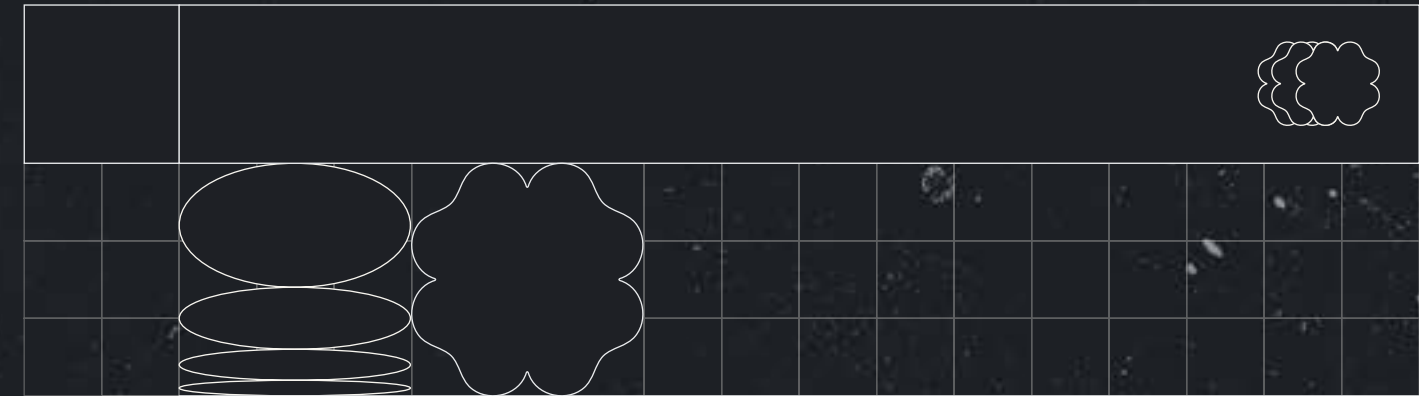
Sourcing a Learning System



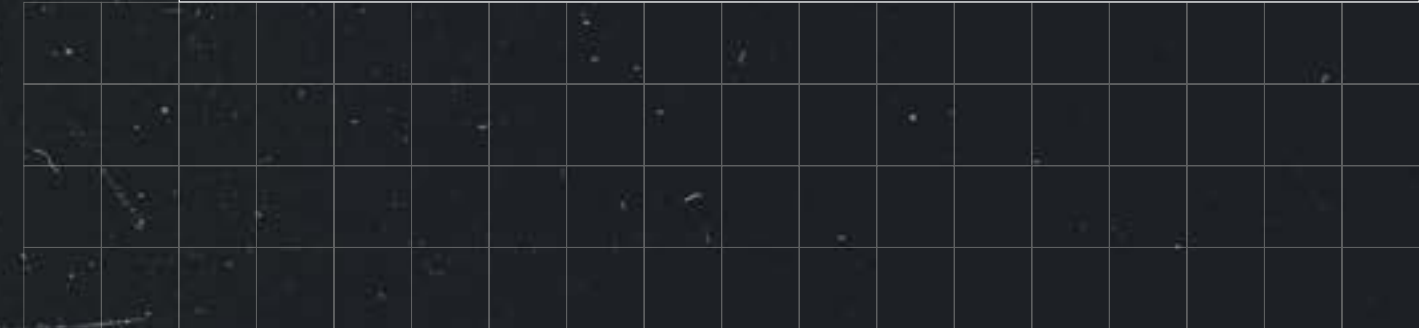
How to choose a platform that connects learning, talent and performance, and *prove* you chose well.

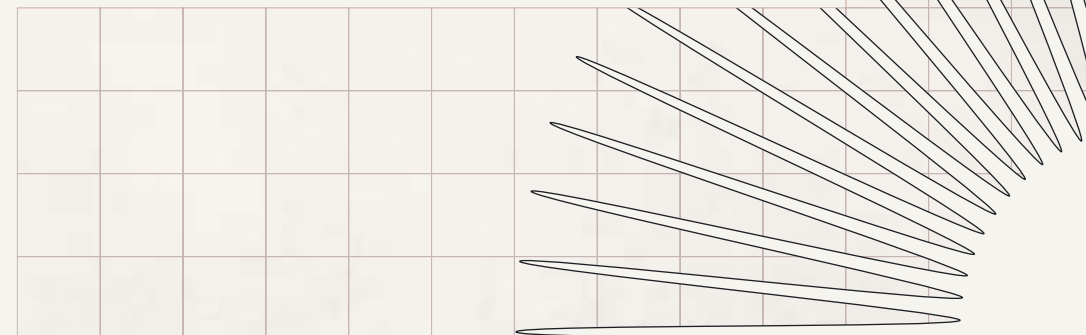
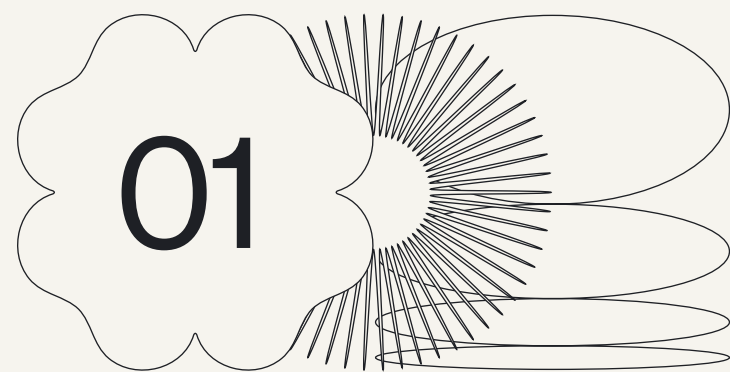


01	Welcome	04
02	Do you still <i>need</i> a learning system at all?	06
03	Before you buy: understand <i>the people</i> , not the features	16
04	The <i>business</i> leader	26
05	The <i>HR</i> and <i>talent</i> leader	34
06	The <i>learning</i> leader	48
07	The <i>line</i> manager	64



08	The <i>IT</i> leader	78
09	Where <i>AI</i> fits, and where it <i>does not</i>	90
10	The <i>capabilities</i> checklist	102
11	<i>Selecting a vendor</i> , and running a demo that tells you the <i>truth</i>	106
12	<i>Choosing well</i> , and knowing where you stand	114





Welcome



Sourcing the right learning system has never been simple, and if it feels harder than it used to, that is because it genuinely is.

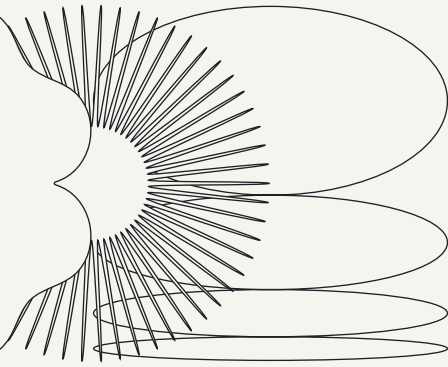
A few years ago the challenge was mostly about telling similar vendors apart. Today it runs deeper. Artificial intelligence has changed what these tools can do, the market has shifted beneath the familiar categories, and the questions that felt important even three years ago are not quite the right ones any more.

It is a big decision, often an expensive one, and usually one you will live with for years. The pressure for results is real, the options are many and they all sound convincing, and it is easy to feel you are being asked to commit before you have worked out what you actually need. That is an uncomfortable position, and an understandable one.

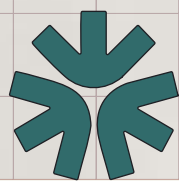
This guide is here to help you get back on the front foot.

It is built around the questions worth asking, the things worth checking, and an honest account of how the ground has moved, so that whatever you choose, you choose it with confidence and for the right reasons.

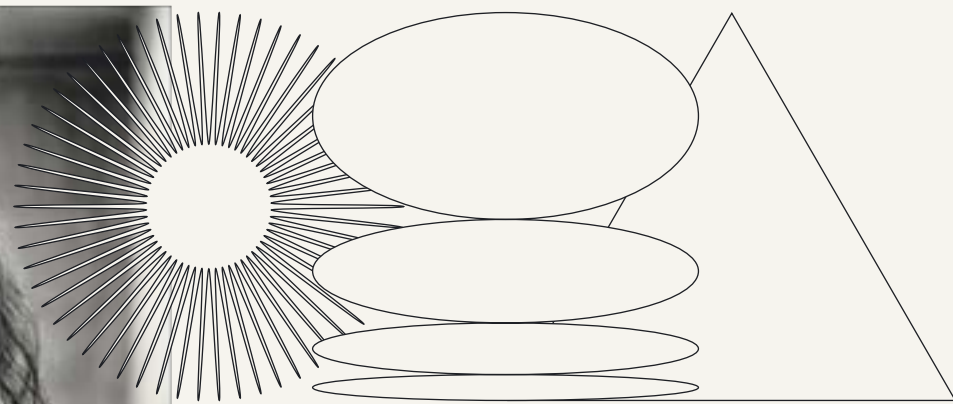
02



Do you *still need* a learning system at all?



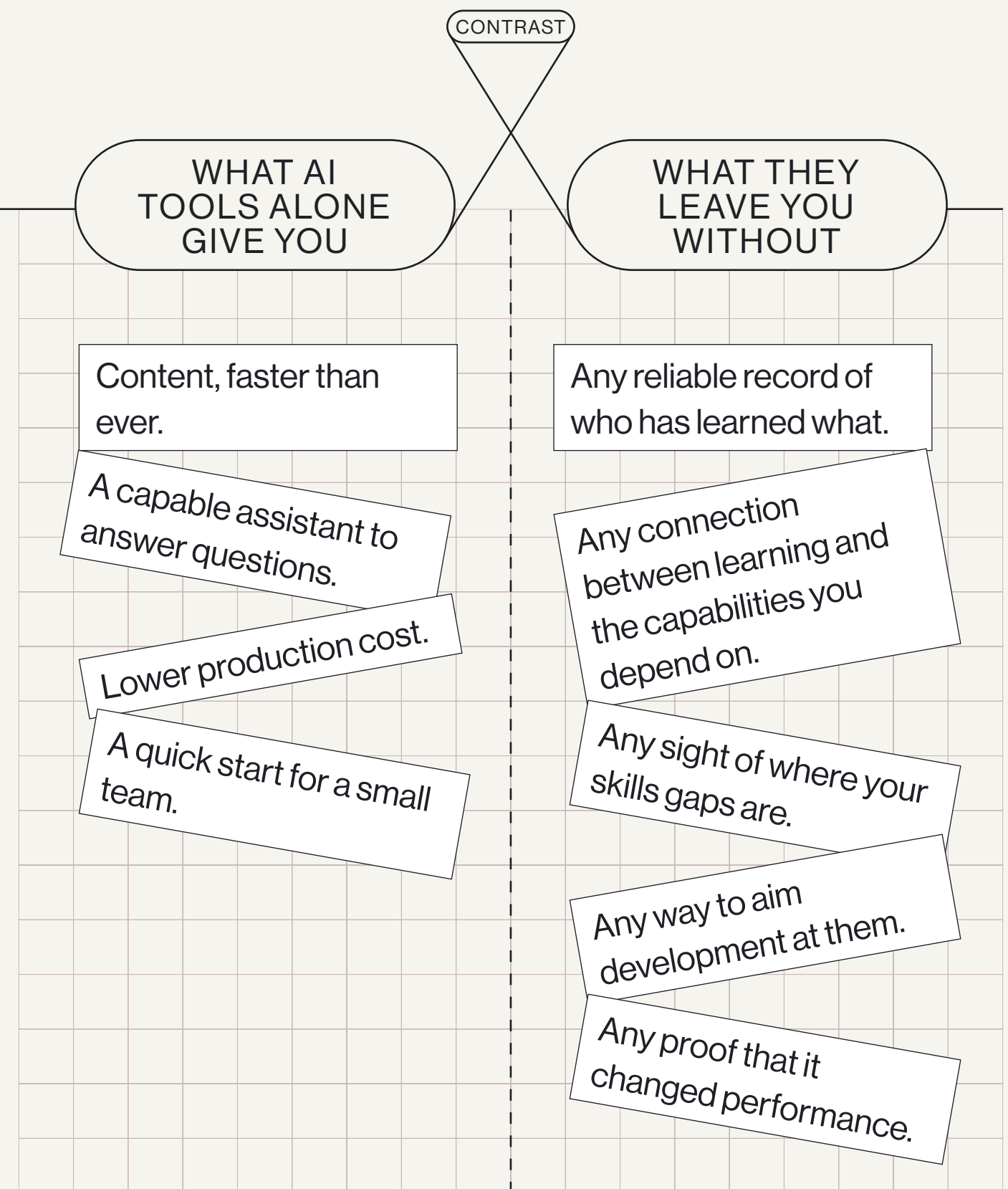
Start with the question sitting
behind every learning technology
decision right now, even when
nobody says it aloud.



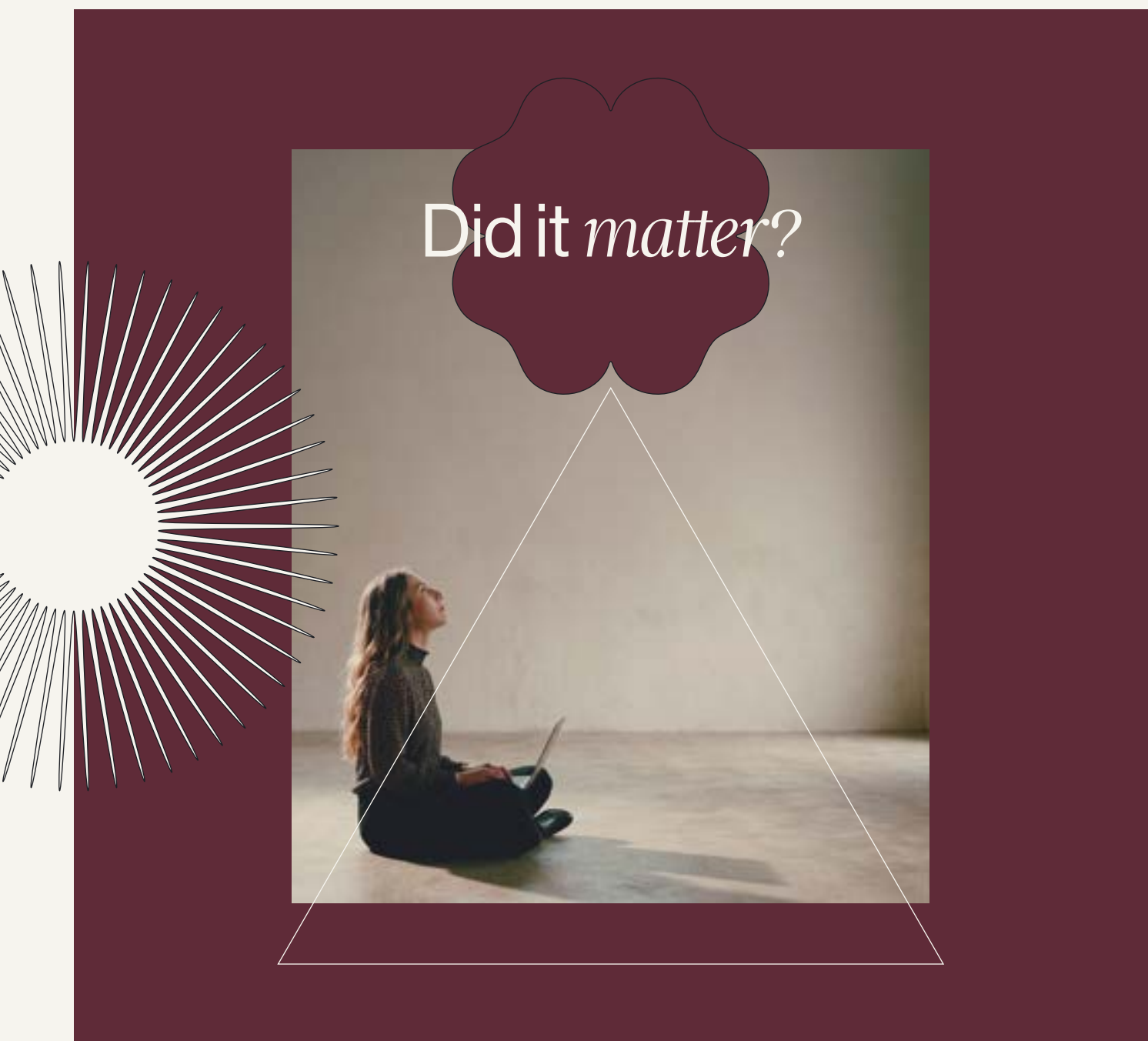
If AI can write a course outline in seconds, answer a learner's question, draft an assessment and turn a dense policy into a lesson, what is left for a learning platform to do?

It is a fair question, and working through it honestly is the fastest way to understand what you should be looking for.

So picture the version of your organisation that leans on AI tools alone.



You would be very good at producing material, and no better at knowing whether any of it mattered. That distinction is the one that matters in 2026.



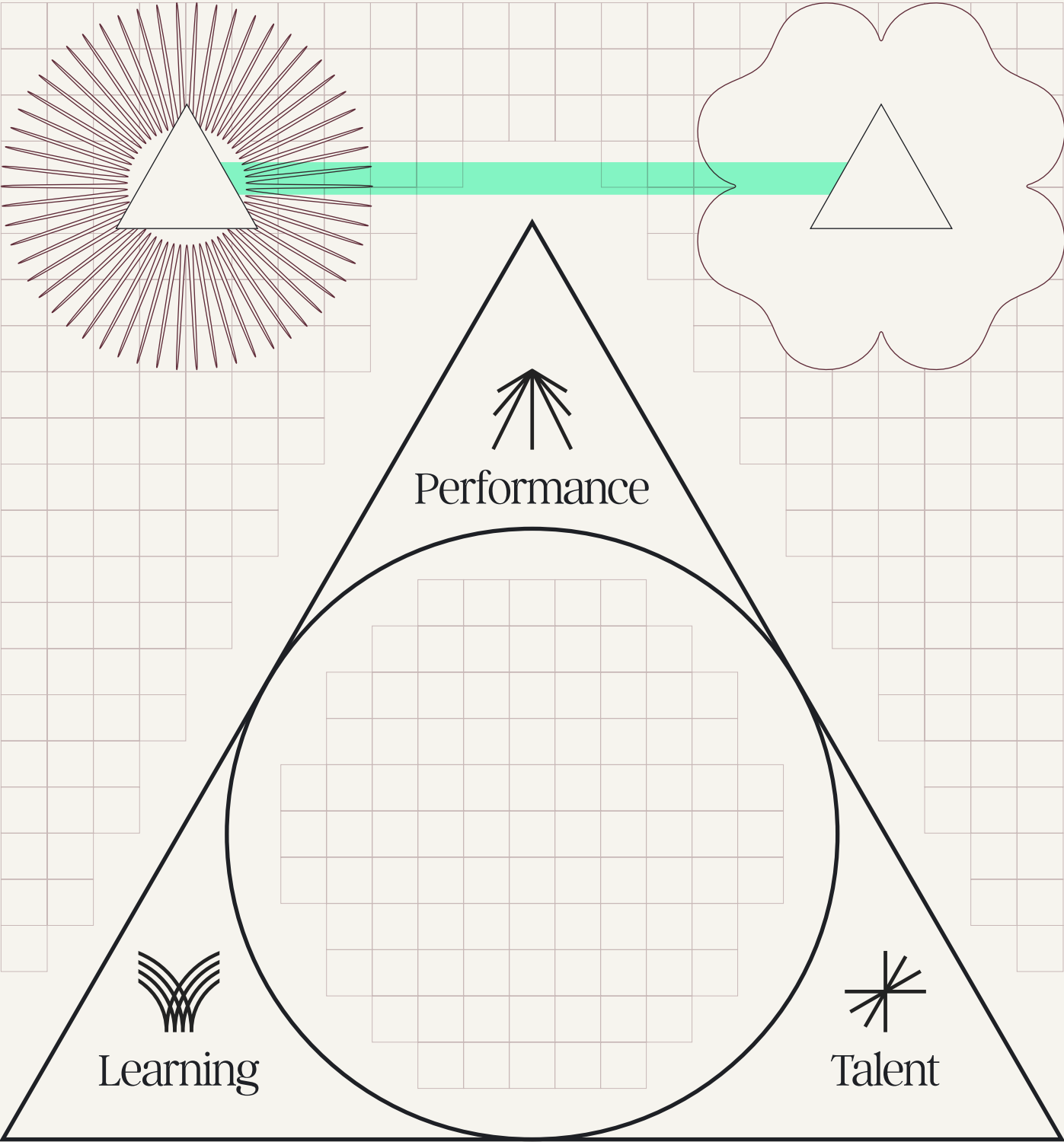
The value in learning was never really the content, and never the act of delivering a course. Those were the visible parts. AI has made content cheap and delivery effortless, and in doing so revealed what was always valuable:

Knowing what your people need to be capable of, seeing where they fall short, aiming the right learning at the right gap, and proving, in terms a finance director accepts, that it worked.



AI has not replaced any of that. It has made it the only part worth paying for.

So a learning system is no longer a place to store courses. Its job is connection, holding together the things most organisations keep separate:



DEFINITION

Learning

the development people actually do

Talent

the capabilities the organisation is trying to build

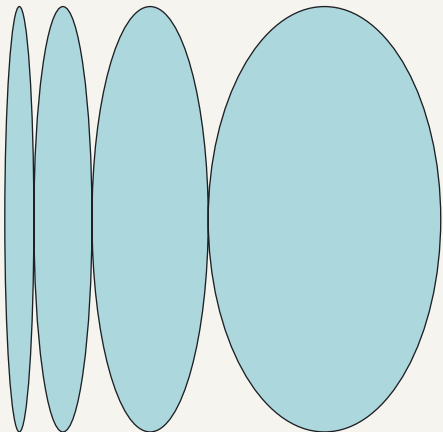
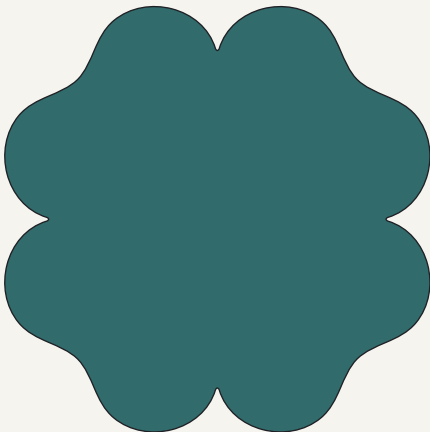
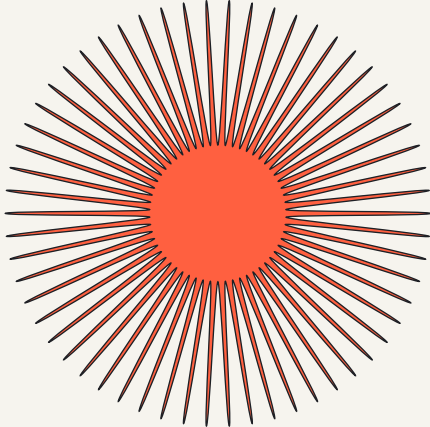
Performance

the business outcomes it all serves

A system worth buying connects these three. Most still treat them as separate. The connection is the hard part, and the part worth paying for.

None of which means the practical things stop mattering. They matter more, because now they have to earn their place. Most organisations still have to prove mandatory and regulatory training has been done, and in healthcare, policing, local government and other regulated settings that is not going anywhere. So look at how a capability like compliance holds up when you look past the word, because the same scrutiny applies to everything a vendor shows you.

Compliance management

WHAT YOU NEED IT TO DO	WHAT MOST VENDORS MEAN	WHAT STRONG LOOKS LIKE
Prove mandatory and regulatory training is done, accurately enough to put in front of an inspector or a board without caveats. 	Recording completions and letting you export a spreadsheet. It looks like compliance and behaves like a filing cabinet. 	 Setting the specific requirements for particular roles and teams, tracking them precisely rather than in bulk, and warning you before something lapses.

THE TEST

“Show me how you’d track three specific compliance requirements for one team, and warn me before one expires.”

Almost everyone claims compliance. Far fewer can show it against a scenario you recognise.

Keep that last move in mind throughout.

Almost every capability here comes down to the same thing: not whether a vendor claims it, but whether they can show it against a situation you recognise. The difference between the claim and the demonstration is where the right decision is found.

03

Before
you buy:
understand
the people,
not the
features



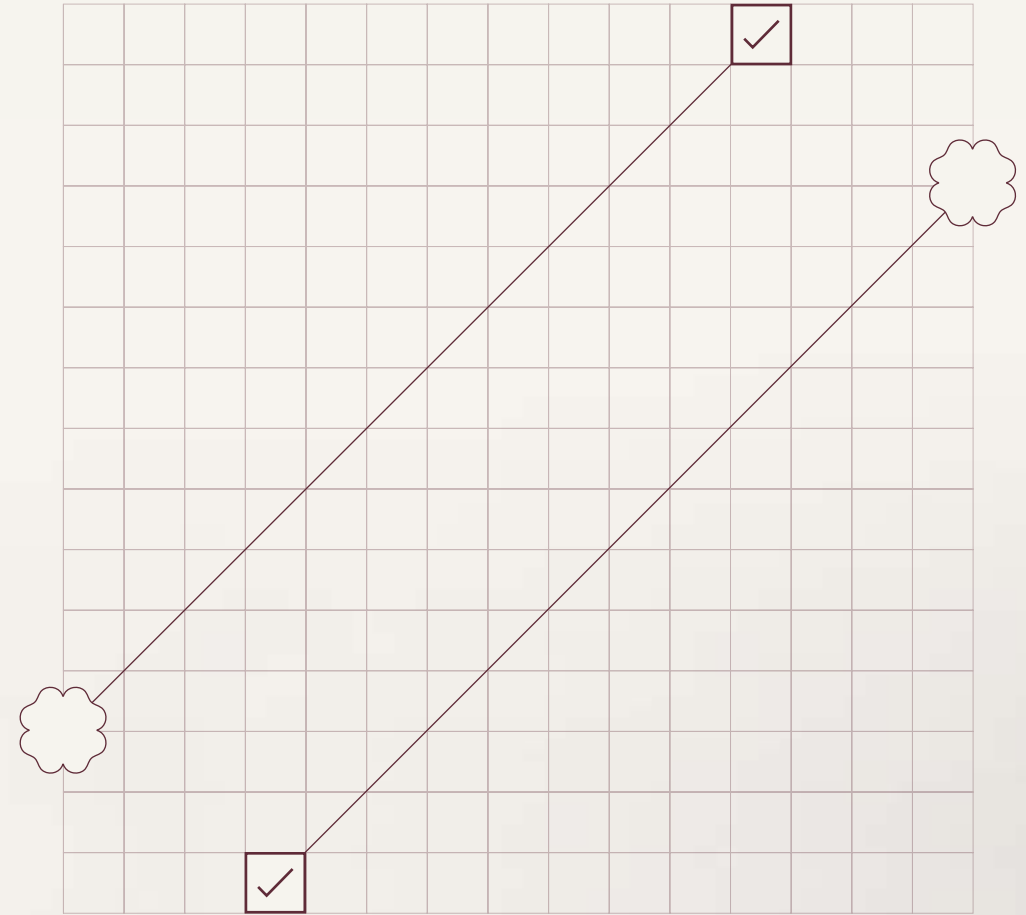
Most learning system decisions begin the same way. Someone is asked to find a platform, and sensibly gathers requirements. Compliance wants better reporting. A line manager wants something their team will open. HR wants visibility of skills. IT wants it secure and integrated. Every request is reasonable. The trouble is what happens when you pile them into one list and hand it to a vendor.

What comes back is one of two things, and
neither is what anyone wanted.

Sometimes it is a wish list so long and contradictory that no real system could satisfy it. A rainbow-coloured unicorn that looks wonderful on paper and does not exist.

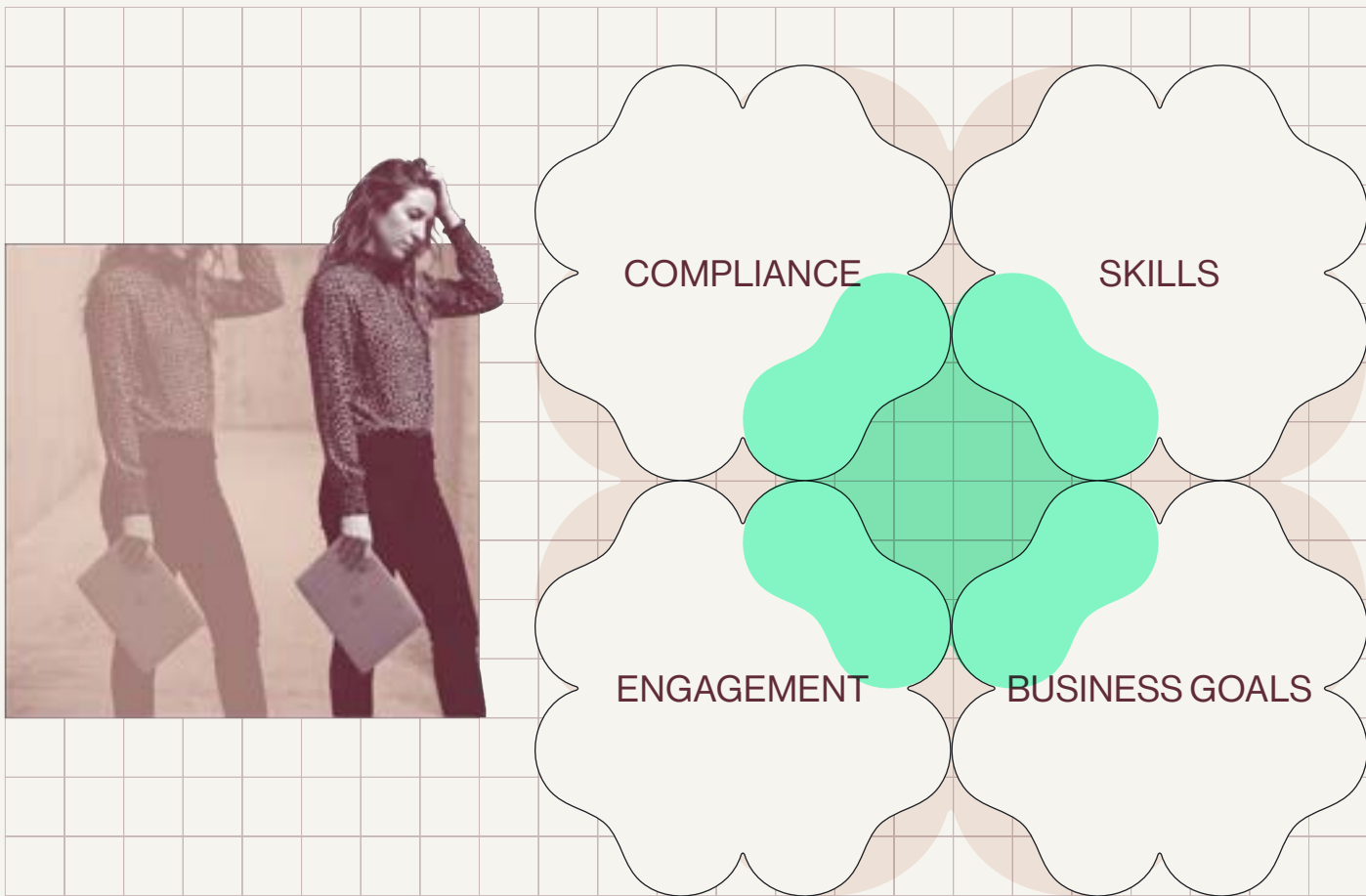
More often it is worse. You buy the platform that ticked the most boxes, and find the boxes do not connect. Compliance reporting that has no idea what the business is trying to achieve. A skills framework that does not talk to the learning. A nice interface on top of nothing joined up. A creature assembled from parts that were never designed to work together, satisfying everyone slightly and no one properly.

This happens for a structural reason, not because the requests were poor. The departments making them work in separate systems and separate conversations. Each describes its own corner accurately, and none can see they are all describing the same problem from different seats.



“The compliance question, the skills question, the engagement question and the business goal are not four problems. They are one problem, seen from four directions: whether the organisation can build the capability its strategy depends on.”

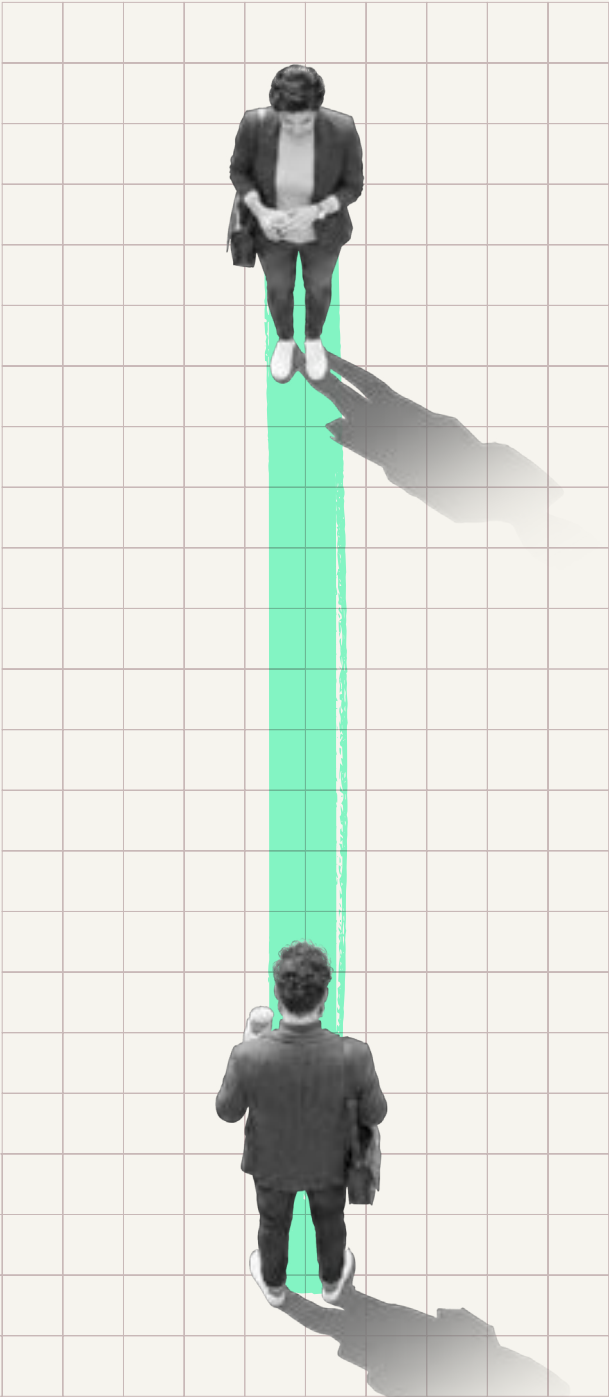
And the cost of missing that is real.



87%
of organisations know
they already have a
skills gap or will soon,

yet most still buy the tools meant to address it as a pile of separate features rather than a way to connect the people who own the problem. The gap does not close, because what was bought was designed to satisfy a list, not to close it.

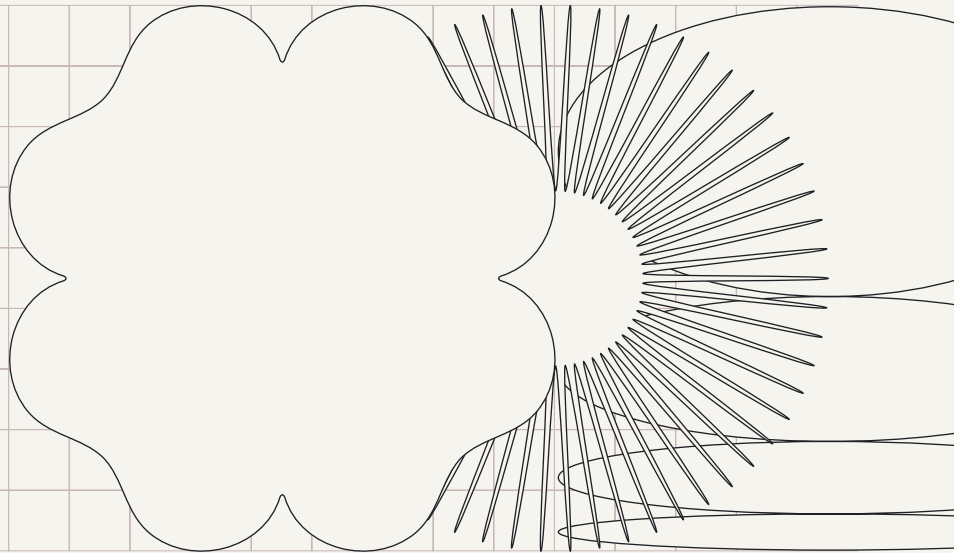
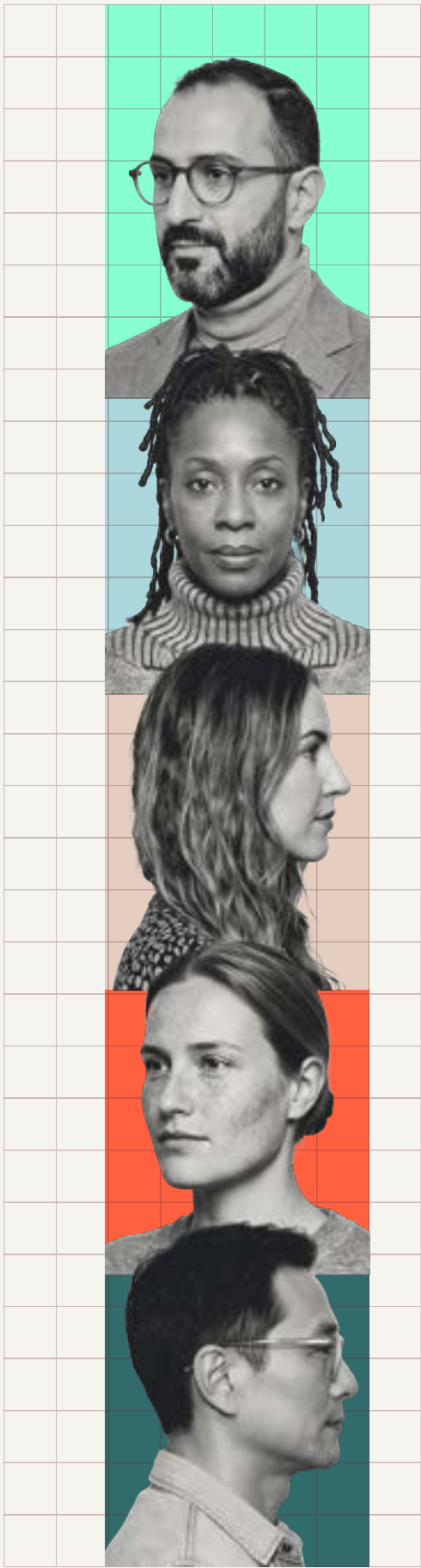
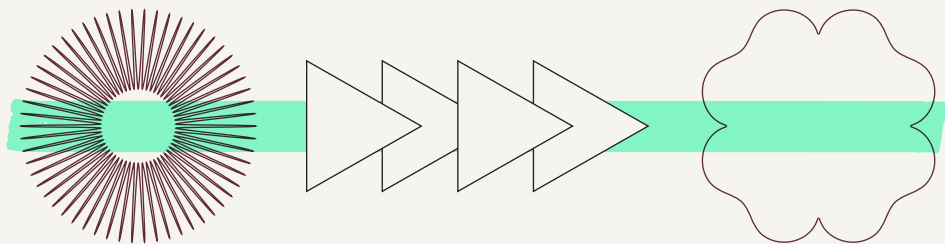
So this section is not a feature checklist, and it is deliberately not arranged the way a vendor arranges a demo. It is arranged around the people with a stake in the decision, because understanding what each genuinely needs, and how those needs connect, is the only way to avoid the unicorn and the monster.



What you are really doing is not buying features. You are fixing a structural alignment problem, the disconnect between the parts of your organisation that define performance, build capability, and deliver learning.

Get the understanding right and the features follow, because you will know which ones matter and why. Get it wrong and the longest feature list in the world will not save you.

A word on that checklist, because it is coming. Later in this guide you will find a clear set of capabilities worth testing and worth future-proofing against. But it comes second on purpose, and works only as a qualifying gate. Once you understand your stakeholders, the checklist tells you whether a system delivers what you need. Reach for it first, before that understanding, and you are straight back to building the unicorn.

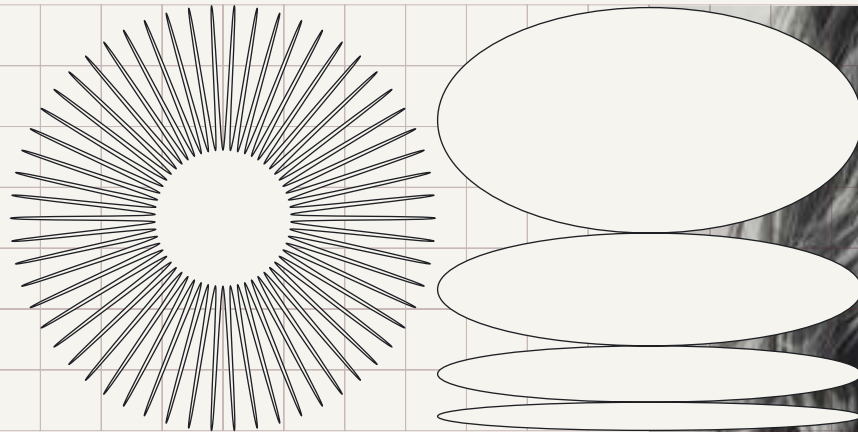


How to *read* the people that follow

The order is deliberate. We begin with the business goal and the leaders who own it, because that is where the requirement really starts. Then the people who understand and develop the workforce, because a goal means little until you know whether your people can deliver it. Only then the learning itself and the person it is for, because learning is the intervention that closes the gap, not where the thinking starts.

Read in that order, the stakeholders trace the same line a good system has to trace:

From what the business needs, through the capability it depends on, to the learning that builds it.



DEFINITION

The challenge, in their own words

because it is easier to recognise a person than a job title.

What they actually need

from a system, as opposed to what they might put on a form.

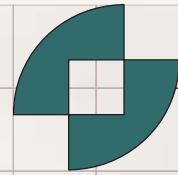
Questions to ask them

inside your own organisation, before you speak to any vendor.

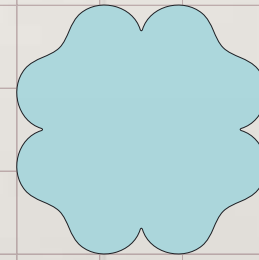
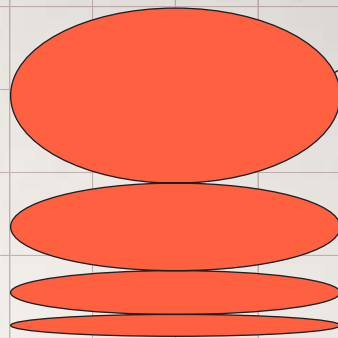


Treat what follows less as a description of stakeholders and more as a way of interviewing your own organisation. That is what it is for.

04



The *business* leader



“I have signed off a plan and told the board we can deliver it. What I honestly cannot tell you is whether we have the people to actually do it. And that is the thing that keeps me awake.”

Start here, because this is where the requirement really begins.

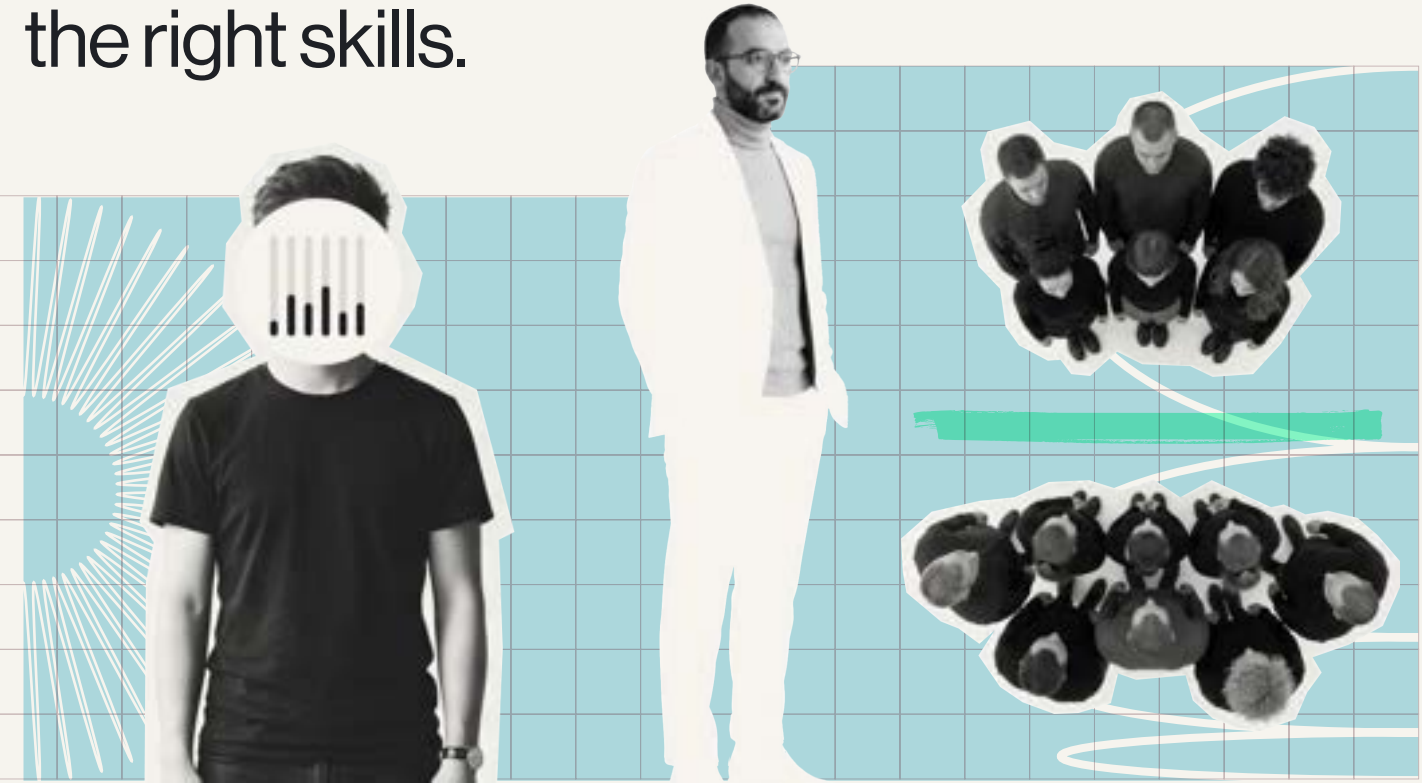
Not with learning, but with a leader who has put their name to something and cannot be sure the workforce can deliver it. They are not looking for a learning platform. They are looking for a good night's sleep.

That worry is well founded, and already expensive.



70%
of executives say
their business is
already suffering
financially because
their people lack
the right skills.

87%
of organisations
know they have a
skills gap now, or
will soon.



So the instinct that something is missing is usually right. What is missing is a way to look at it directly.

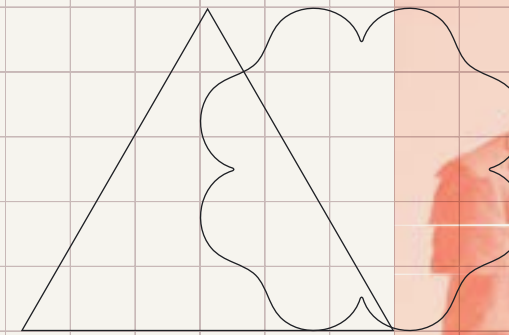
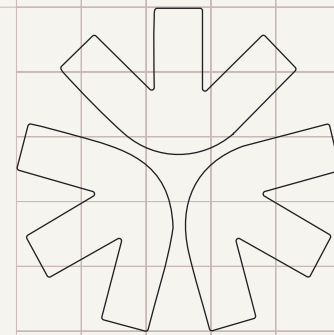
What a leader needs is not a catalogue. It is an answer to four questions:

01 Do we have the *capabilities* this plan depends on?

02 Where are we *short*?

03 What is the plan to *close the gap*?

04 Is it *working*?

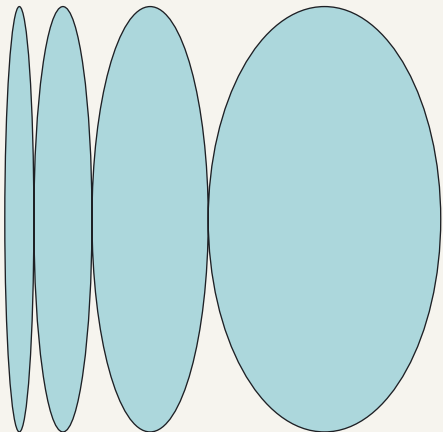
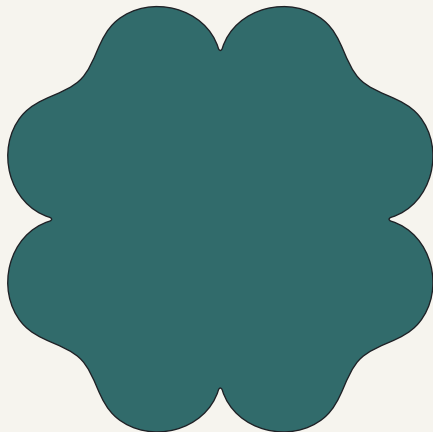
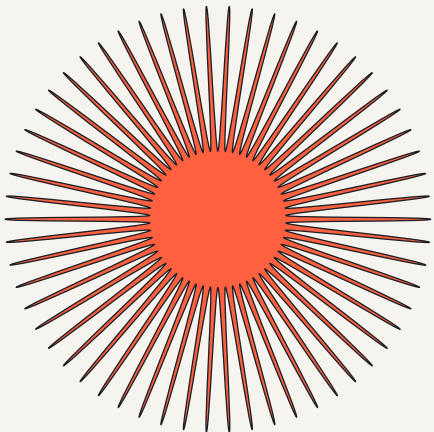


Those four questions do double duty.

They are not just what the leader needs to feel. They are the test you take to a vendor. A system that can answer them is built to connect learning to the business. One that cannot will leave your leader reassured by activity and no clearer on capability. The confidence they want is a product decision, not a presentation.

One thing to hold in mind: a leader is the recipient of this, not the operator. They will not build frameworks or run reports. What matters to them is reporting that lands the whole story on their desk, in a form they can repeat to the board.

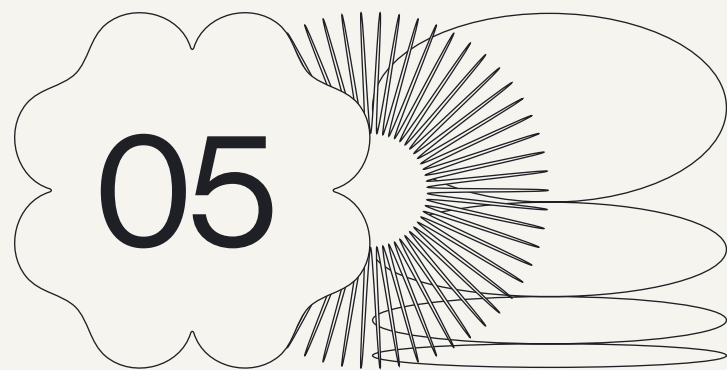
Reporting and return on *people development*

WHAT YOU NEED IT TO DO	WHAT MOST VENDORS MEAN	WHAT STRONG LOOKS LIKE
Show leaders, without digging, whether capability is growing and whether the investment is paying back.	Dashboards of activity. Completions, logins, hours. Easy to produce, nearly silent on whether the business is more capable.	Reporting that ties learning back to the capabilities and goals it served, so a leader sees whether it moved what matters, and can tell that story to the board.
		

THE TEST

“Show me the single view you’d put in front of my chief executive to tell them whether our investment in people is working.”

A wall of activity metrics answers the leader’s workload, not their worry.



The *HR* and *talent* leader



“I can see the skills gaps and the succession risks in my workforce data. What I cannot tell you is whether anything we are spending on learning is actually closing them, because that all lives in a system I never see.”

This is the person the old way of buying a learning system left out, and the omission is the whole problem.

The business goal has been set. The next question is whether the workforce can actually deliver it, and that is a question about capability. The person who can see capability most clearly is not in L&D. It is here, in HR and talent.

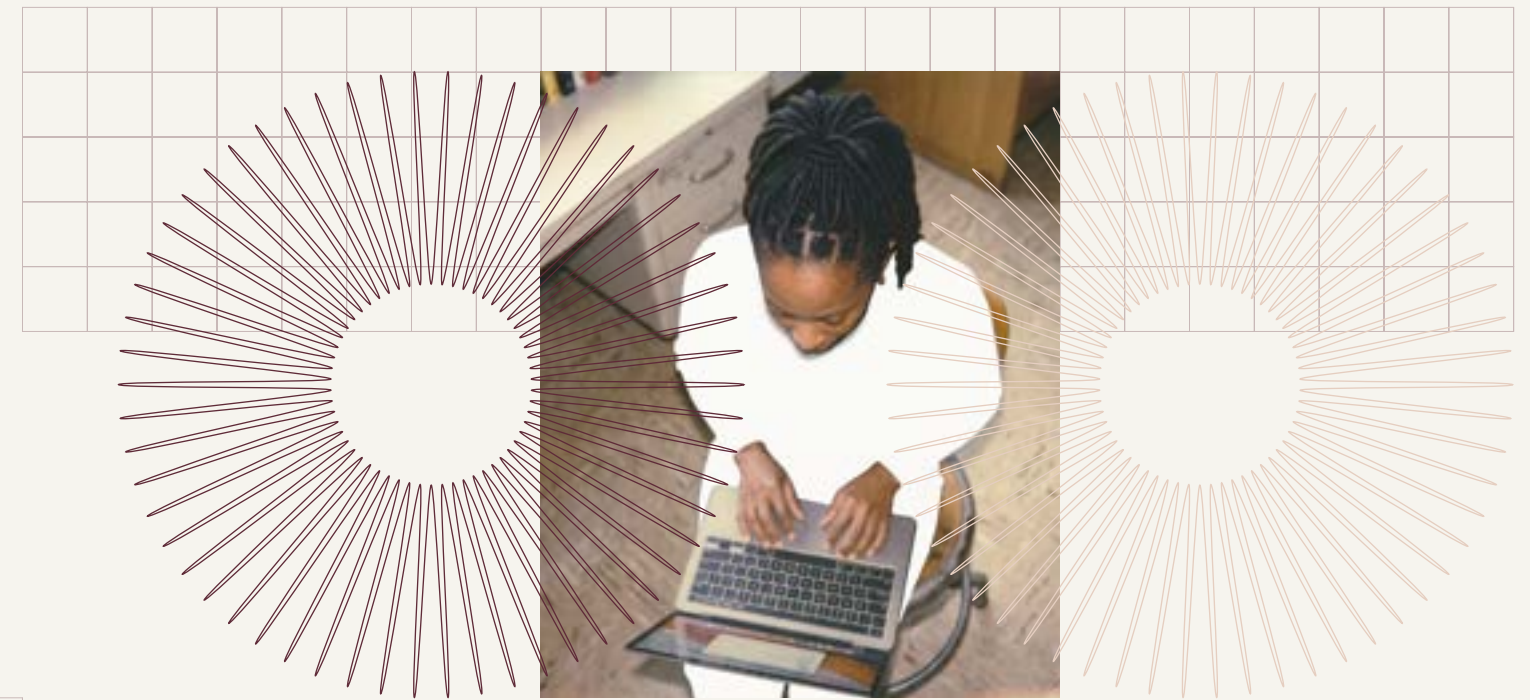
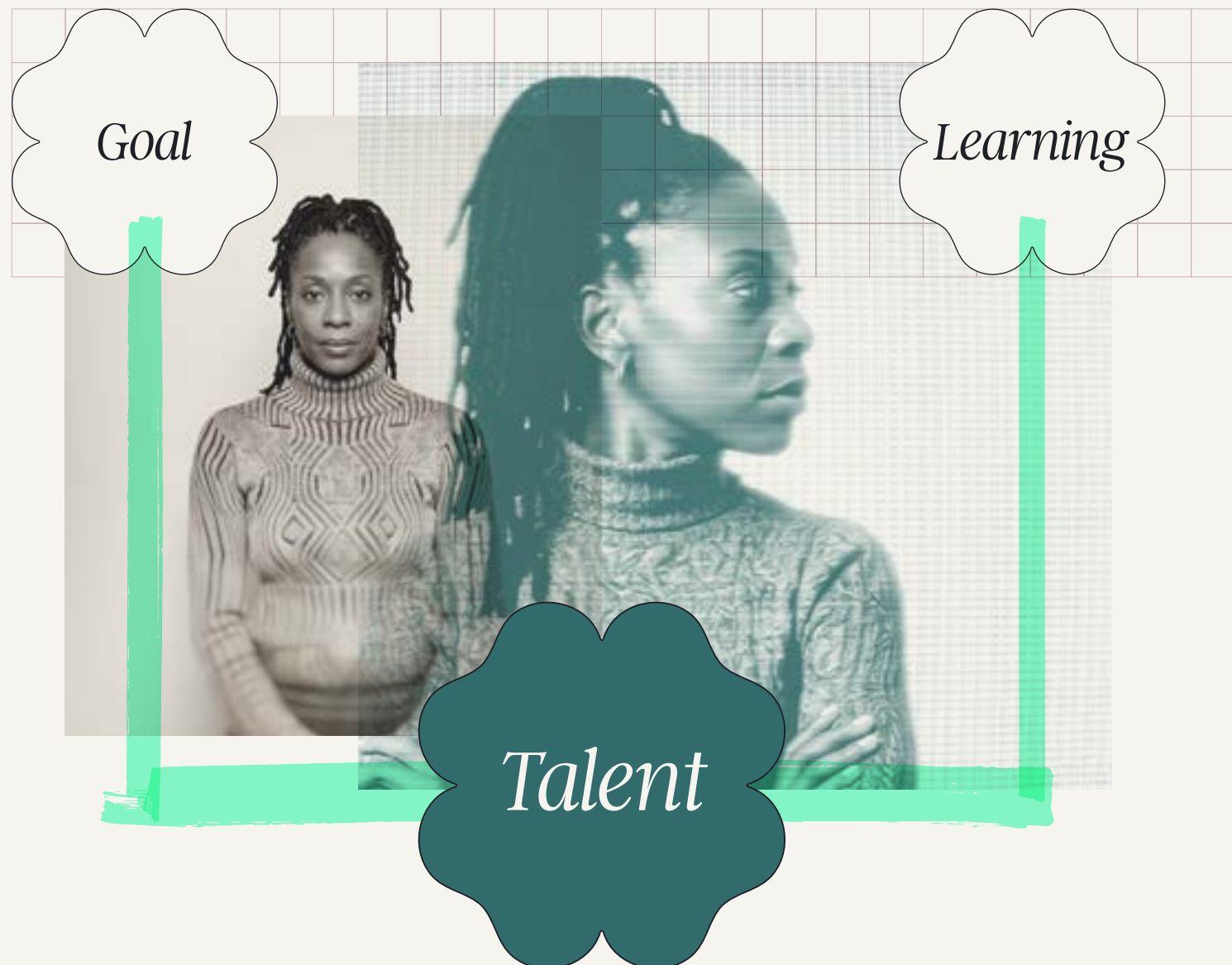
They can often see the shape of the problem plainly. Which capabilities are thin. Where the organisation is one resignation away from trouble. Which roles have no obvious successor. What they cannot do is connect any of it to the learning that is meant to be addressing it, because learning has always been run as a separate activity in a separate system.



Both functions working hard. Neither able to see the whole.

The gap between the goal and the learning is a talent-shaped gap, and it is invisible until someone can see capability directly.

You cannot aim learning at a gap you cannot describe. Describing it, seeing where people stand against what their roles require, is talent work, and it is the step most organisations skip.



And here the talent question becomes a product test.

A system bought for 2026 has to make the capability picture and the learning the same picture. If the talent data and the learning sit in different systems that do not speak, you have bought the disconnect that brought you here. So the thing to test is the join:

Can this system describe the capability your roles require, show where people stand against it, and connect that directly to the learning that closes the gap?

Ask your HR and talent leaders, before any vendor:



01 Where can you already see capability gaps or succession risks that you have no way of acting on through learning today?

02 What do you do by hand, or go without, because your talent data and your learning sit in different systems?

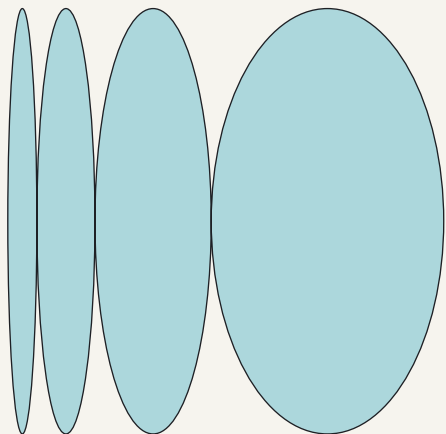
03 If you could connect one thing about our people to the learning we deliver, what would tell you the most?

04 What would you need to see to tell the board, with evidence, that we are closing our skills gaps?

Competency management

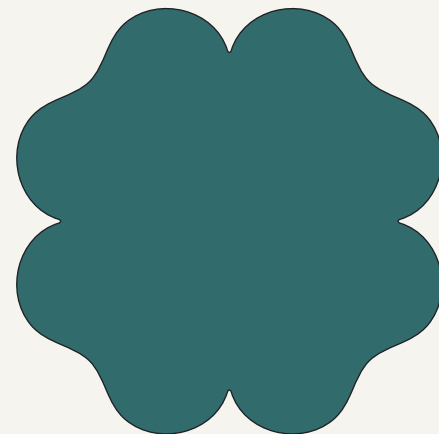
WHAT YOU NEED IT TO DO

Define the competencies your roles require, in your organisation's language, so capability is described in terms of your business rather than a generic library.



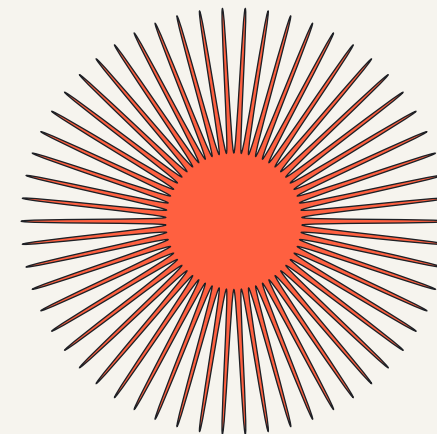
WHAT MOST VENDORS MEAN

A fixed skills taxonomy
you cannot easily change,
or a list of skills with no
connection to roles or
learning.



WHAT STRONG	
LOOKS LIKE	

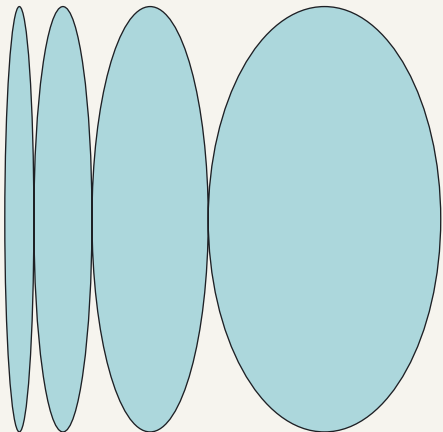
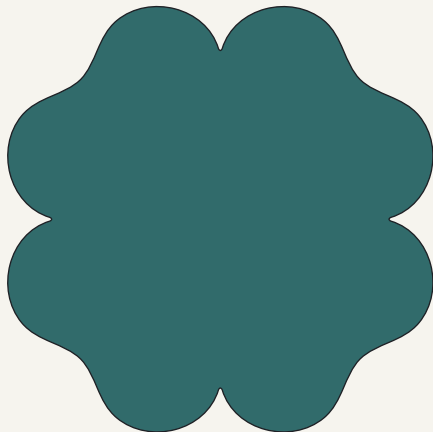
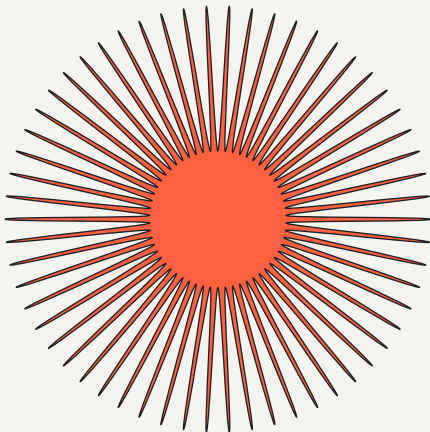
Frameworks built around
your actual roles, people
mapped against them,
and those competencies
connected directly to the
learning that develops
them.



THE TEST

“Show me how
a competency
framework here
connects to the
learning that closes
a gap in it.”

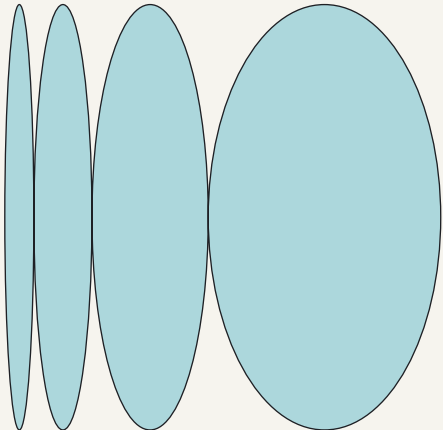
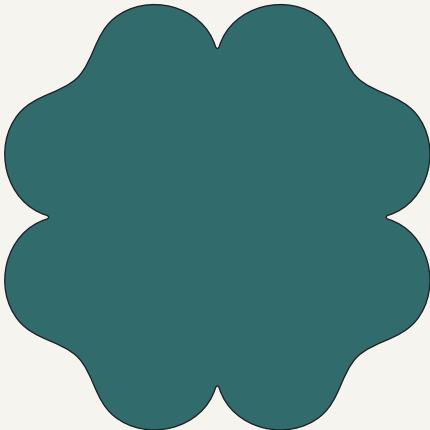
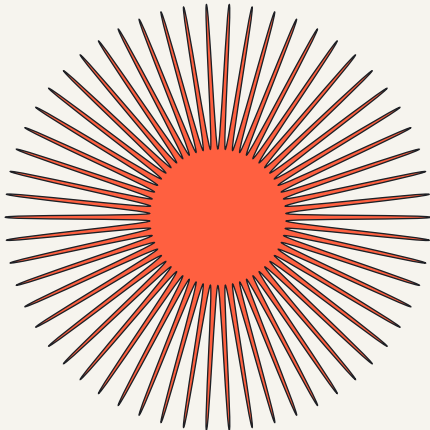
Success profiles and baselining

WHAT YOU NEED IT TO DO	WHAT MOST VENDORS MEAN	WHAT STRONG LOOKS LIKE
Establish what good looks like for a role and measure where people stand against it, at the level of the individual, the team and the whole organisation, so you know your starting point. 	A job description field, or a self-assessment that produces a number with nothing behind it. 	A clear profile of what a role requires, an honest baseline of where people are, and a view of gaps and succession risk before they become a crisis. 

THE TEST

“Show me how I’d baseline a team against what their roles require, and see the gaps at a glance.”

Career pathways

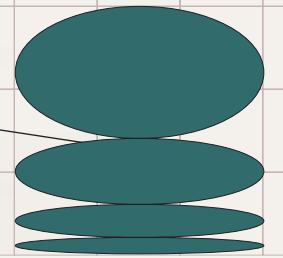
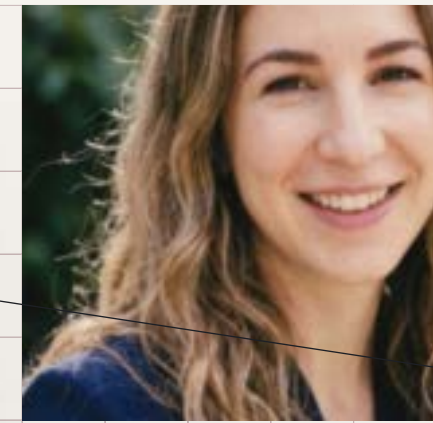
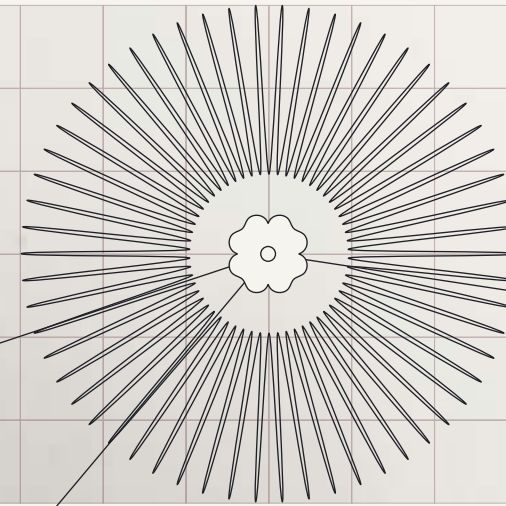
WHAT YOU NEED IT TO DO	WHAT MOST VENDORS MEAN	WHAT STRONG LOOKS LIKE
Show people a credible route to progress, built on the capabilities they would need, so development feels like a path rather than a series of disconnected courses.	A static org chart, or a list of courses badged as a development plan.	Pathways connecting a person's current capabilities to those a future role requires, with the learning to get there attached.
		

THE TEST

“Show me what this looks like for someone moving into a different role, from where they are now to what they would need.”

05

The *learning* leader



“I know the work we do matters. What I cannot always do is prove it. I can show activity, completions, hours delivered, but that is not the same thing, and I suspect the board knows it too. I want to be in the room where the strategy is set, not handed it afterwards and asked to make some training.”

This is the most important person in the decision, and often the most frustrated.

They did not get into this to administer courses. They got into it because developing people is how organisations become capable of more. But they have only ever had tools that measure activity, so activity is all they can show. They feel the gap between how much learning happened and what it changed more sharply than anyone, because that gap is why they are treated as a cost rather than a driver.

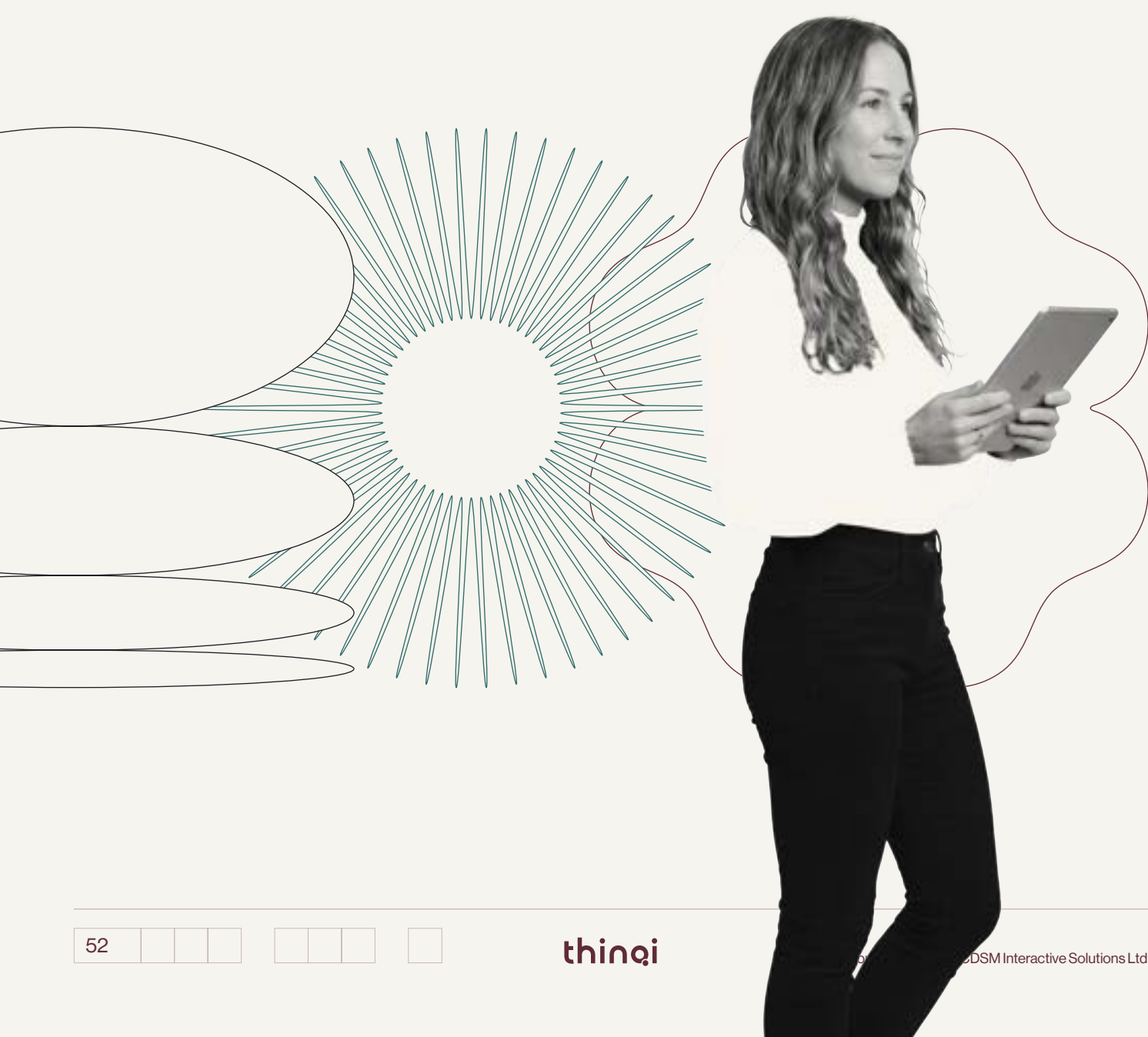
That frustration is real. It is also not the end of the story, because what they lack is not ability. It is connection.



Everything changes the moment learning becomes the informed answer to a question the business has already asked.

Once the goal is set, and the talent picture shows where the organisation is short, the learning leader is no longer guessing. They can point learning at the exact gap, and trace a line from it back to the business goal.

That line is the whole difference:



“We delivered four thousand hours of training.”

“Here is the capability gap that stood between us and the plan, here is what we did, and here is the evidence it is closing.”

The first is activity.
The second is a seat at the table.

To do that, a learning leader needs to connect in two directions at once:



DEFINITION

Upward, to leadership

trace learning back to the business goal, and defend it to people who think in outcomes and budgets.

Sideways, with HR and talent

understand what capability exists, whether it meets the goals, and whether succession is in place.

Operationally

link the pathways, courses and events they run to the specific competencies they are meant to build.

This is the reframe at the heart of buying a system in 2026.

You are not buying a better way to deliver training. You are buying the learning leader the ability to prove training was the right thing to do, and that is a decision made when you choose the platform, not something a talented team can add later by working harder.

Ask your learning leader,
before any vendor:



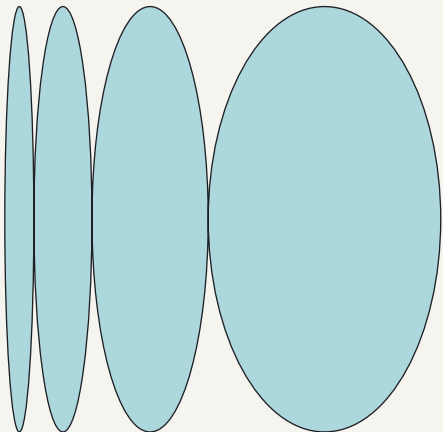
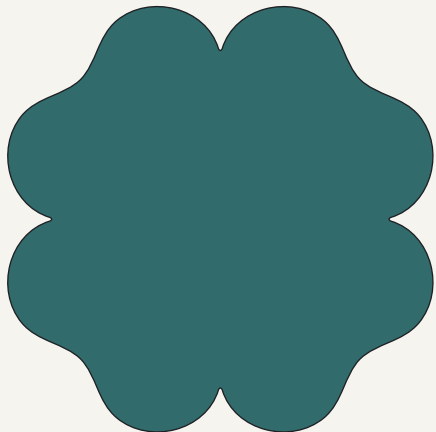
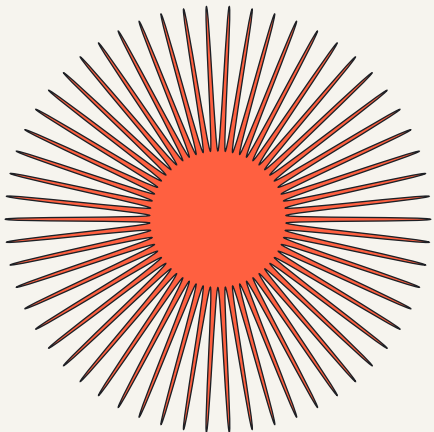
01 When you are asked to show the value of learning, what can you produce, and what do you wish you could?

02 Where do you deliver learning without being sure it is aimed at a capability the business needs?

03 What would you need to show leadership to be treated as a partner, not a supplier of training?

04 How much of what you know about our people lives in your head or in spreadsheets, rather than a system?

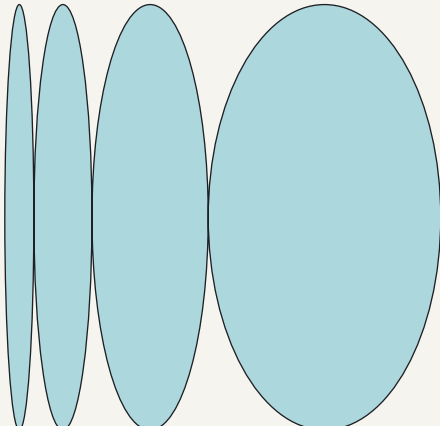
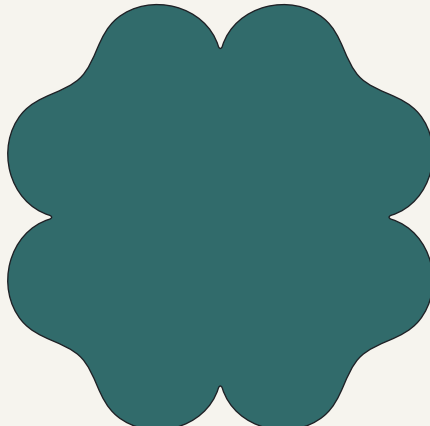
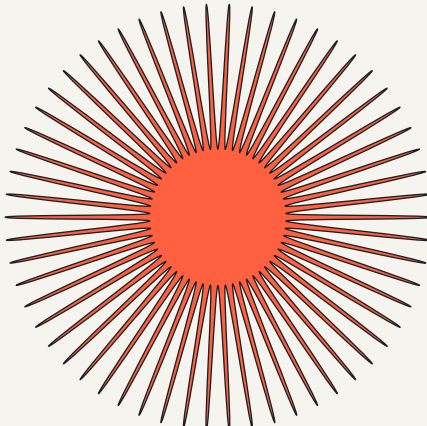
Connecting learning to *capability*

WHAT YOU NEED IT TO DO	WHAT MOST VENDORS MEAN	WHAT STRONG LOOKS LIKE
Link pathways, courses and events to the competencies they build, so every intervention is aimed at something. 	Course tags that lead nowhere. 	Learning attached to your frameworks, so you can see which gap it addresses and show a capability moved because of it. 

THE TEST

“Show me how I’d take a missing competency and prove the learning we assigned actually closed it.”

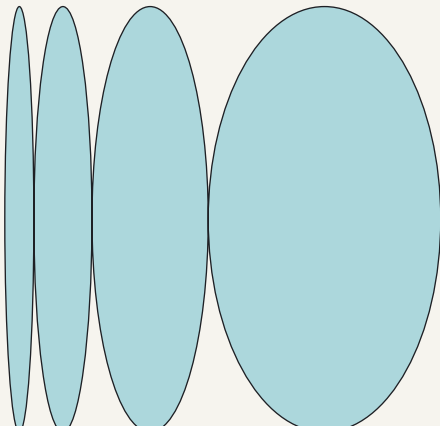
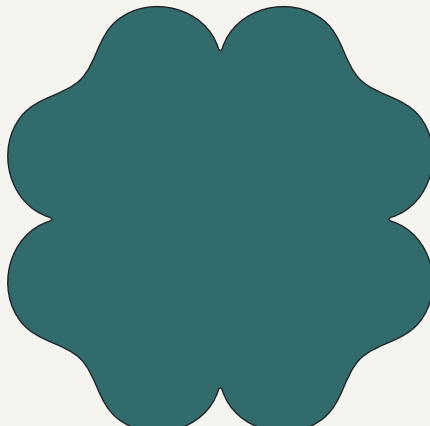
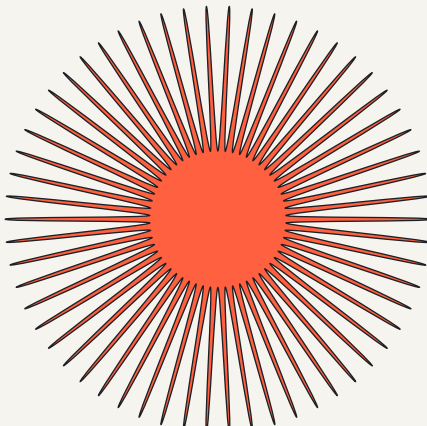
The business-wide view of *capability*

WHAT YOU NEED IT TO DO	WHAT MOST VENDORS MEAN	WHAT STRONG LOOKS LIKE
See, across the organisation, what capability you have, whether it meets the goals, and where the gaps and succession risks are. 	A report of what people completed, not what they can do. 	A live picture of capability at organisation level, tied to goals, surfacing risk before it becomes a problem. 

THE TEST

“Show me whether our workforce has the capabilities our strategy depends on, and where it doesn’t.”

Compliance across the business

WHAT YOU NEED IT TO DO	WHAT MOST VENDORS MEAN	WHAT STRONG LOOKS LIKE
See organisation-wide that mandatory requirements are met, and act before anything lapses. 	An exportable completion report. 	A clear view of what is required, who is compliant, and what is about to expire, precise enough to stand behind in front of a regulator. 

THE TEST

“Show me how I’d know, across the organisation, that we’re compliant today and what’s about to lapse.”

06

The *line* manager

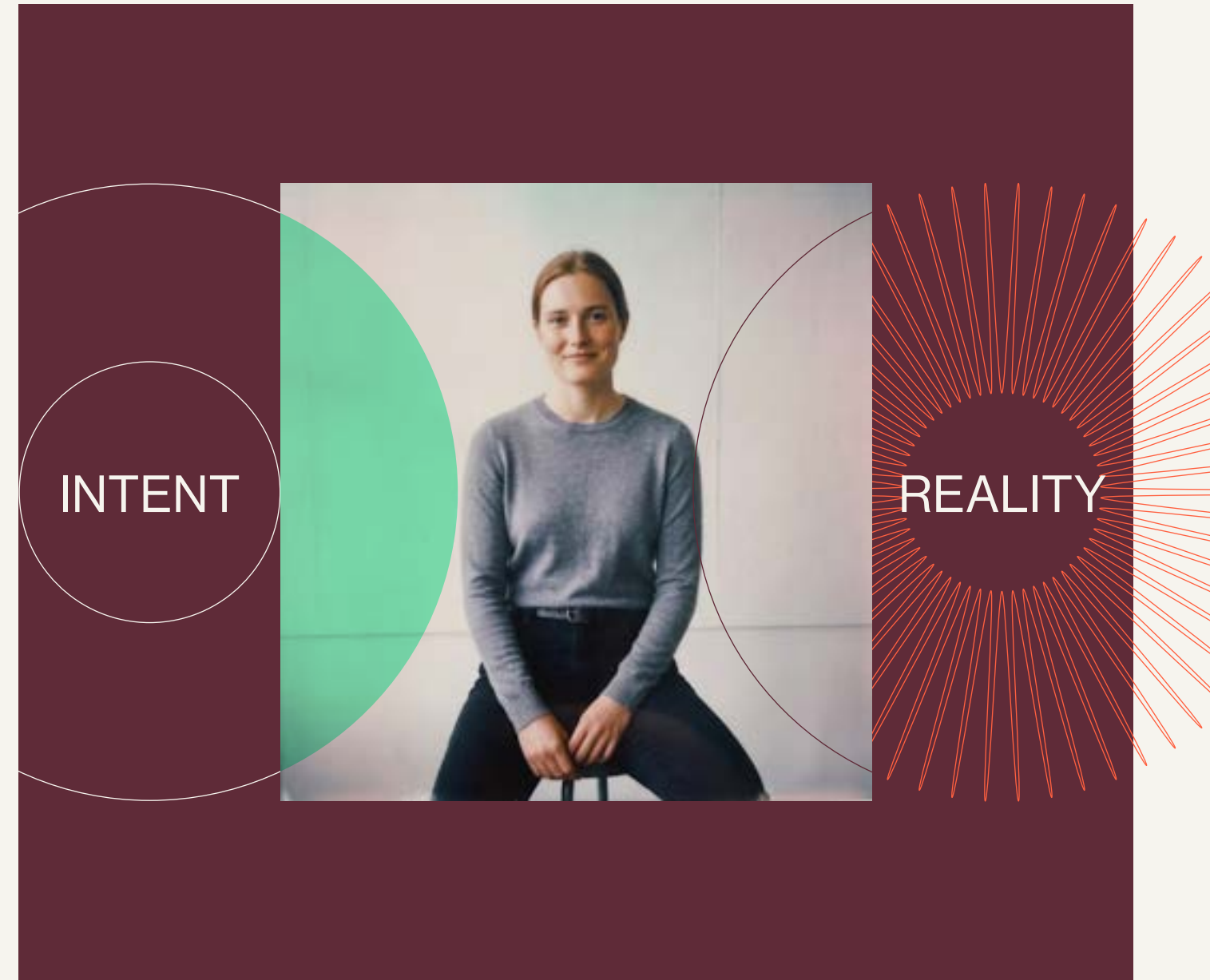
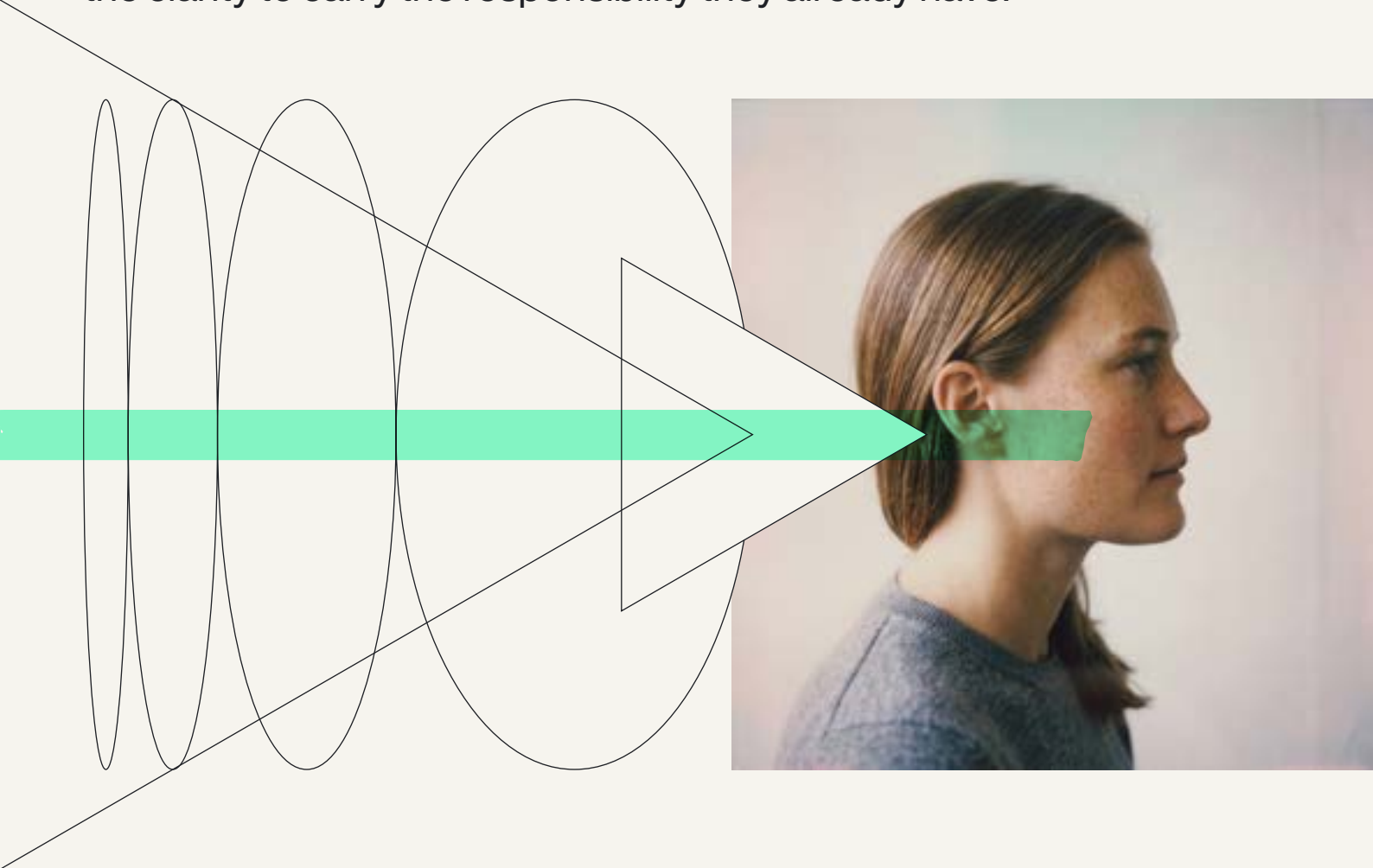


“I get told to develop my team, keep them compliant, have good appraisal conversations and spot who is ready for more. Nobody gives me the time or the information to actually do it. So I do my best from memory and gut feel, and hope I am not missing something important about someone.”

The line manager is where all of this becomes real, or quietly falls apart.

Everything the layers above decide only turns into anything if the manager makes it happen with the people in front of them. And yet they are usually the worst served person in the chain, handed responsibility for developing, assessing and progressing a team, with almost none of the information or time to do it well.

They carry a low-grade worry: that they are letting someone down, missing a development need, overlooking someone ready to progress, finding a compliance gap too late. Not through negligence, but because they are working blind. What they want is not more responsibility. It is the clarity to carry the responsibility they already have.



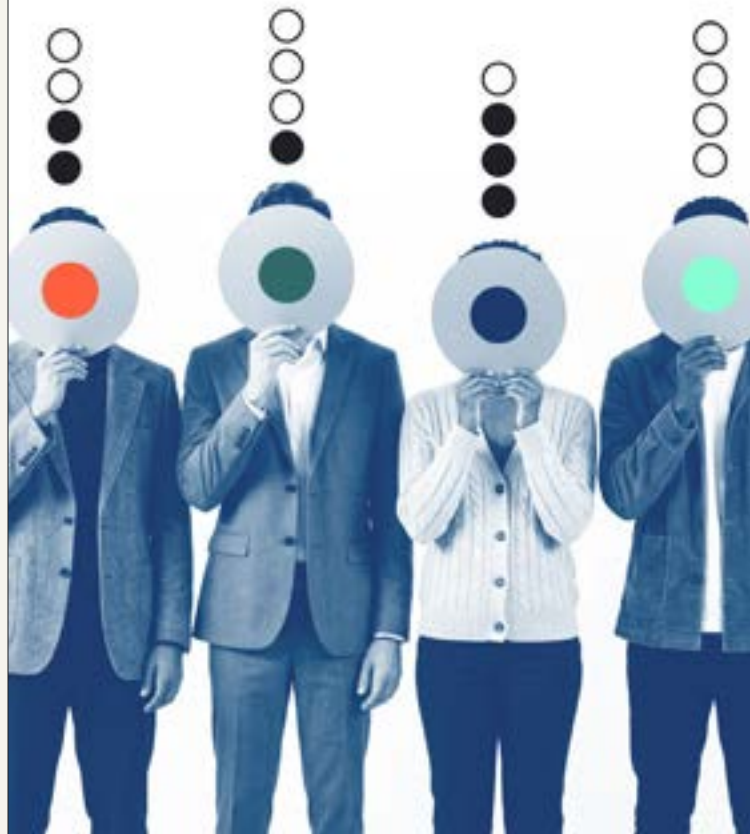
This is the activation layer, the point where organisational intent becomes individual reality.

All the capability data in the world achieves nothing if the person having the actual conversation cannot see it.

So a manager needs the system to hand them, for their team specifically, the things they currently piece together or guess at:

01

What skills their team has, and where the gaps are.



02

What learning their people need, and whether it is happening.



03

Whether the team is compliant, and what is about to lapse.

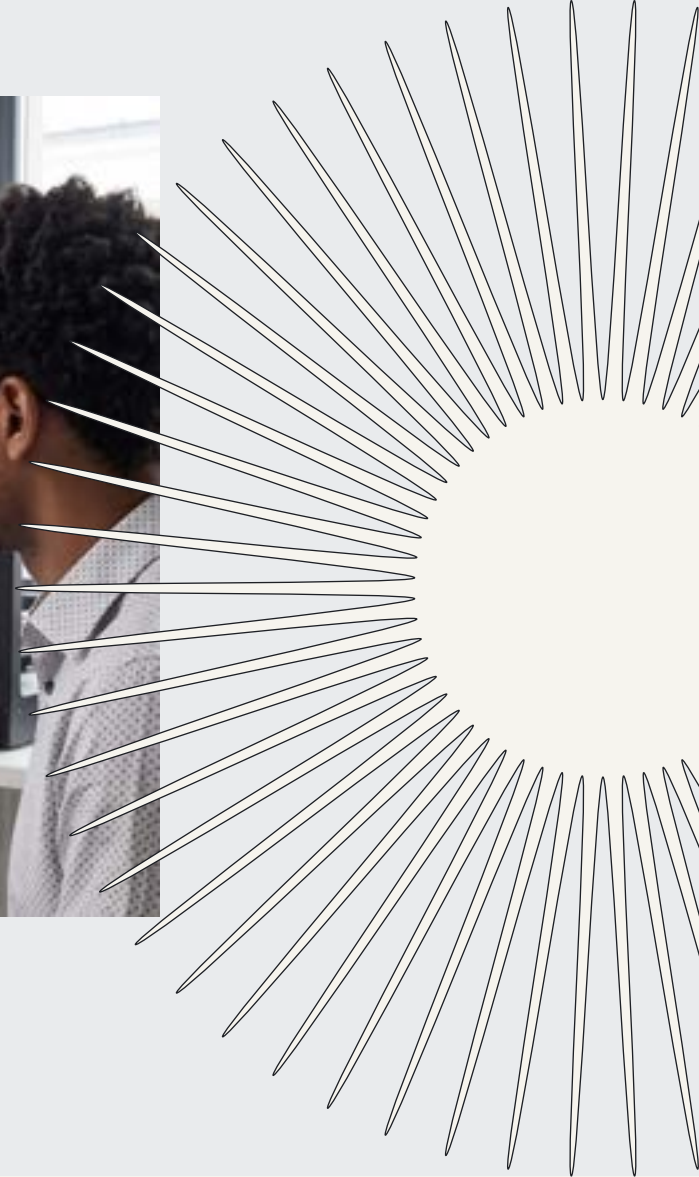
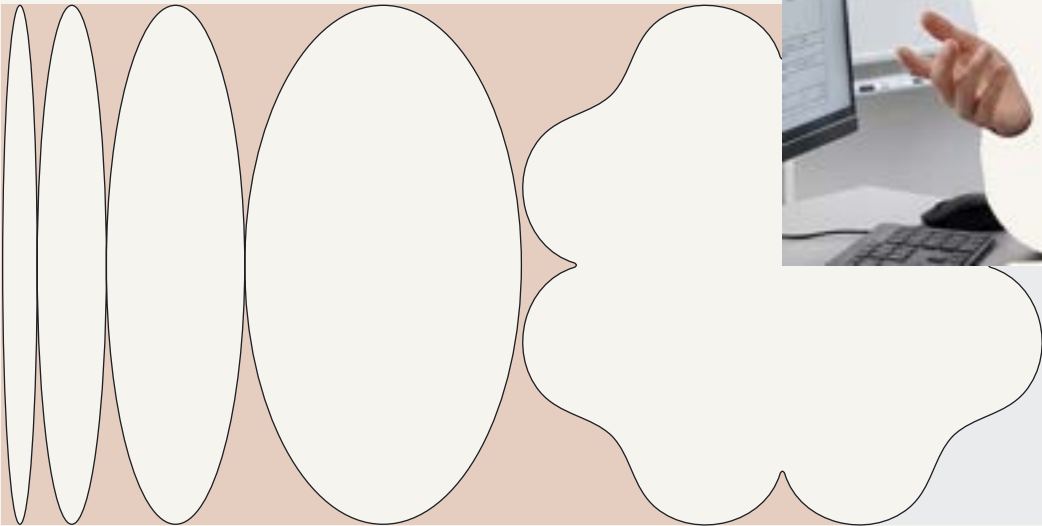


04

Enough about each person to hold a grounded development and appraisal conversation, and set objectives that connect to where the business and the person are both going.



Give a manager that, and you do not just make their life easier. You activate the whole chain, turning a strategy that lived in the upper layers into thousands of informed daily conversations.



And this is a product test.

A manager can only work from what the system surfaces to them. If the data exists in the platform but never reaches the manager in a usable form, the activation layer never switches on, and everything above it stalls at the point of contact. A platform that informs managers activates an organisation. One that locks the data away from them leaves the strategy stranded one step short of the people it was meant to reach.

Ask your line managers,
before any vendor:



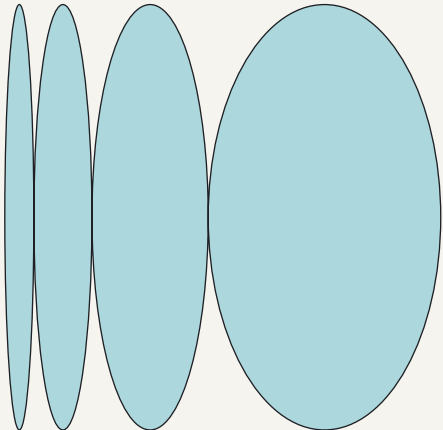
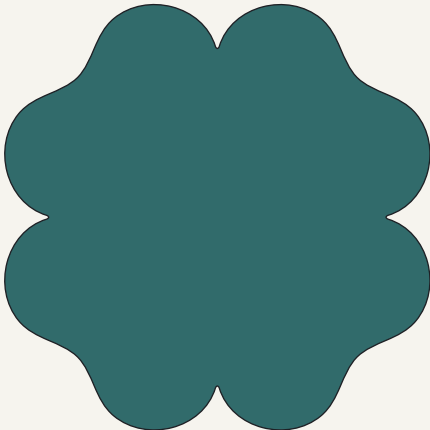
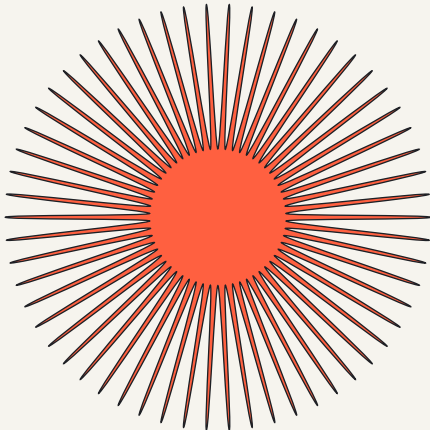
01 When you sit down for an appraisal, what do you wish you knew about the person that you don't have in front of you?

02 How do you know today what skills your team has and where the gaps are, and how confident are you in that?

03 What do you track by hand, or chase, to stay on top of your team's compliance and development?

04 When someone is ready for more, how would you actually spot it, and what would help you see it sooner?

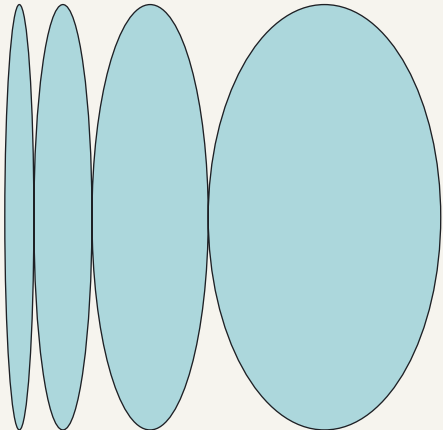
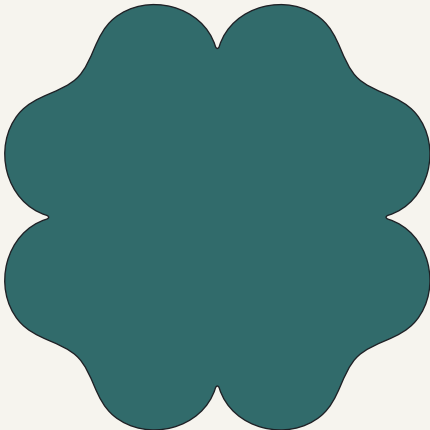
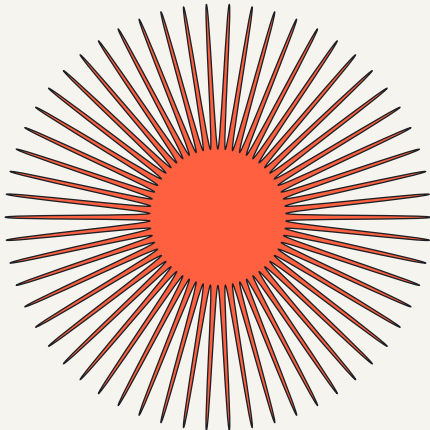
Team capability and development

WHAT YOU NEED IT TO DO	WHAT MOST VENDORS MEAN	WHAT STRONG LOOKS LIKE
Give a manager a clear view of their team's skills, gaps, and the development needed and happening, so they manage from information not instinct.	A list of what the team has completed, which says nothing about what they can do or need next.	A live picture of the team's capabilities against what their roles require, gaps visible, learning attached, in a form a busy manager can use.
		

THE TEST

“Show me what a manager sees about their own team, and whether it tells them what to do next.”

Appraisals, objectives and *team compliance*

WHAT YOU NEED IT TO DO	WHAT MOST VENDORS MEAN	WHAT STRONG LOOKS LIKE
Let a manager run grounded appraisals, set objectives that connect to business and personal goals, and stay on top of team compliance without a manual chase.	A separate appraisal form disconnected from everything else, and a compliance list with no early warning.	Appraisals and objectives drawing on the same capability and goal data as the rest of the system, and team compliance that warns before it expires.
		

THE TEST

“Show me how a manager would prepare for an appraisal and check their team’s compliance in the same place, using real information about each person.”

07

The *IT* leader



“Everyone gets excited about what a new system can do. My job is to ask the questions nobody else wants to think about. Where does our data live. Who can get at it. What happens when it breaks. If I get those wrong, it is my name on the incident, not theirs.”

The IT leader enters last, but nothing happens without them.

They are the person who ties all of this into the organisation's actual technical and governance reality. While everyone else focuses on what the system will do for them, the IT leader carries a heavier responsibility:

making sure that saying yes does not expose the organisation to a risk that lands on their desk later.



They are not being obstructive when they slow things down. They are being the adult in the room, because the cost of getting the technical, security and governance questions wrong is not inconvenience. It is a breach, a failed audit, or a system that quietly does not work with everything else.

They need a set of questions answered properly, not waved away, and they will judge a vendor as much on the seriousness of the answers as on the platform:

01
Where is the data hosted, and does it stay in the country it needs to?



02
How is it secured, and can the vendor prove it rather than assert it?



03
What certifications and independent assurance stand behind the claims?



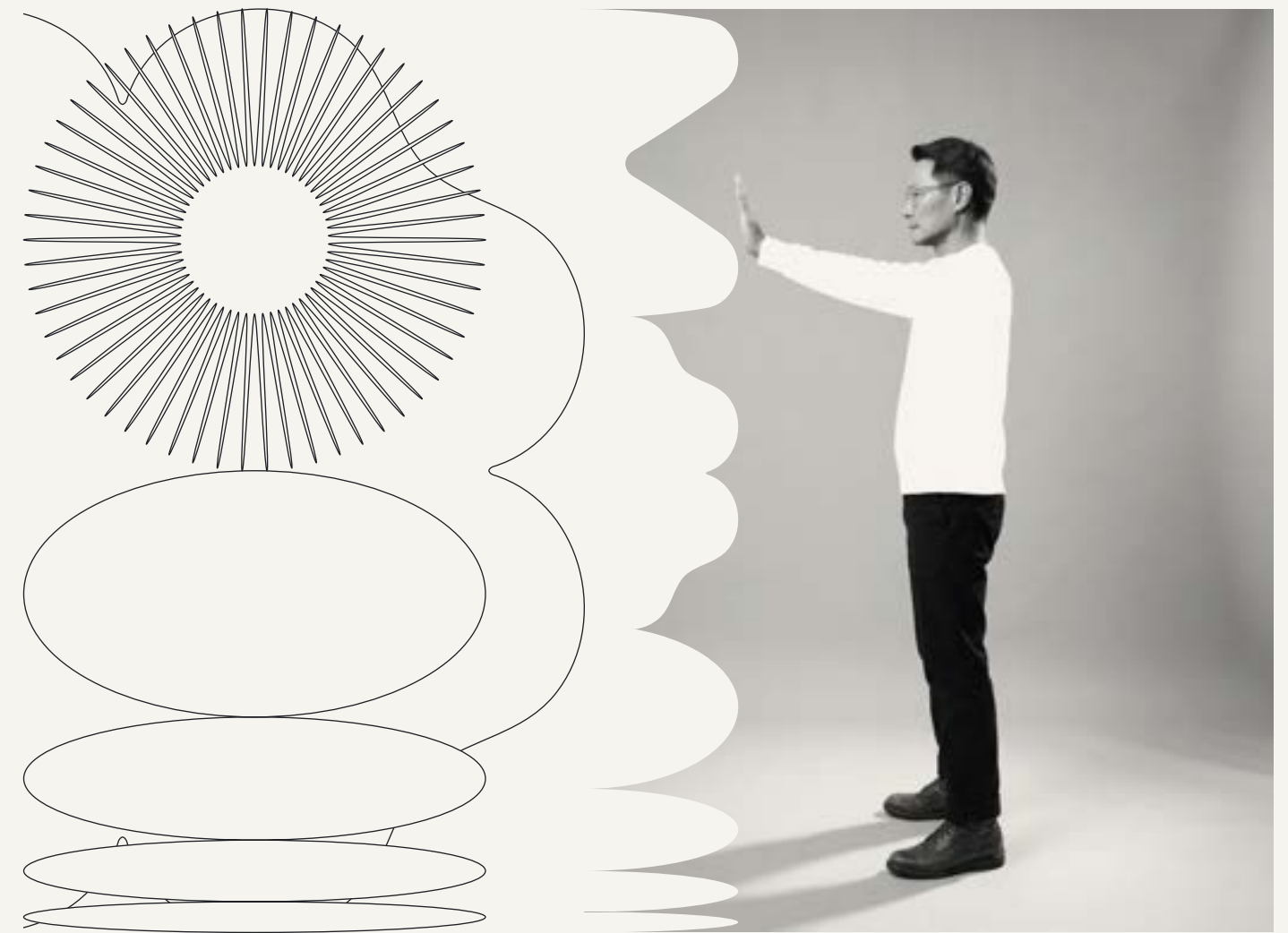
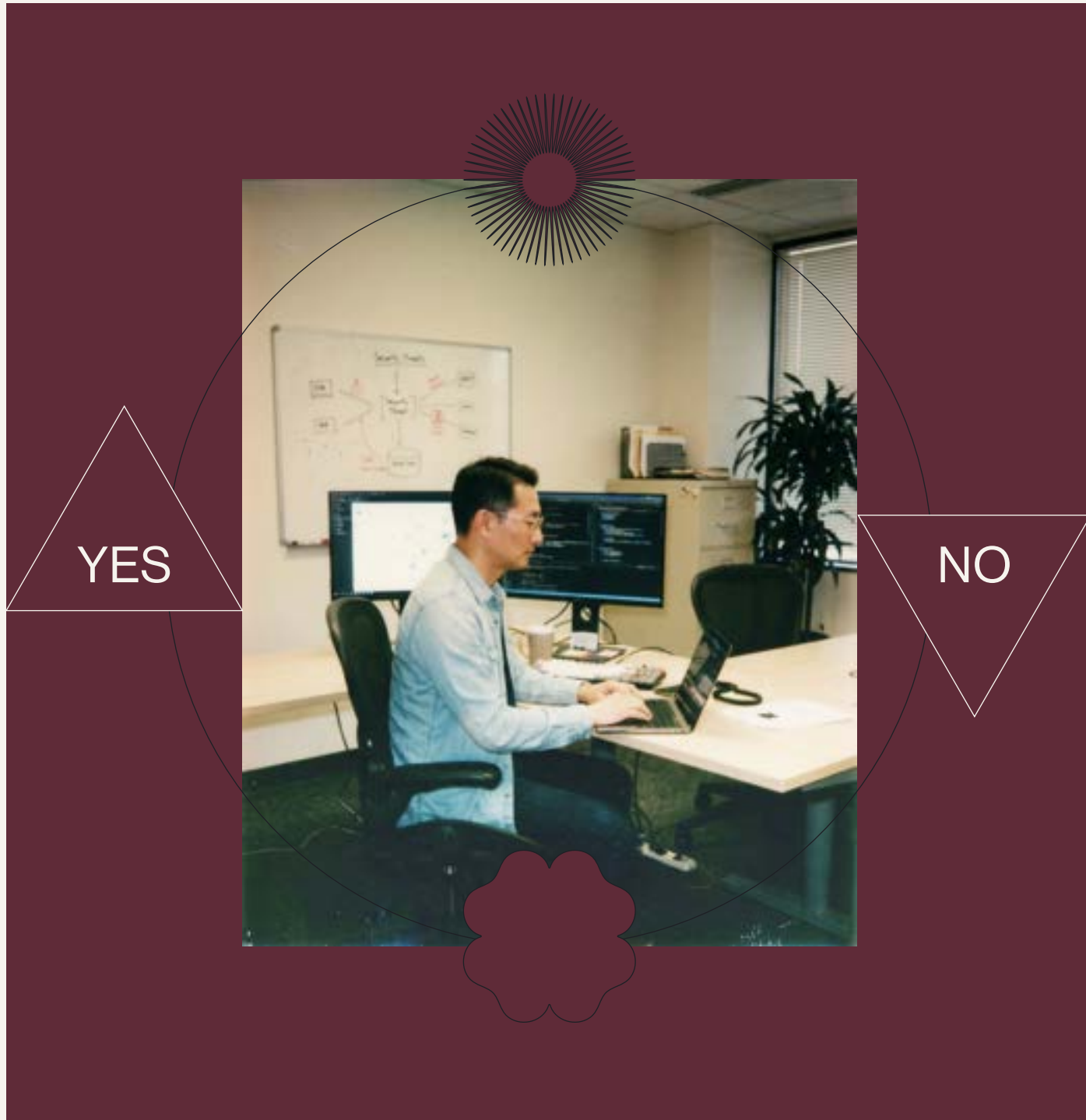
04
How does it integrate with what is already in place, the HR system, single sign-on, the rest of the estate?



05
What happens when something goes wrong, and what do support, uptime and recovery actually look like?



In a regulated sector these are frequently the questions that decide whether a procurement can proceed at all.



And in 2026 this connects to AI directly.

The moment a system uses AI on your workforce data, the governance questions stop being routine and become central. Where that data is processed, whether anything is trained on it, and how it is governed are no longer boxes to tick but the difference between a responsible deployment and an exposure. A supplier who answers plainly and backs it with independent proof is telling you something reassuring about how they build. A vague one is telling you something too.

Ask your IT and information governance leads, before any vendor:



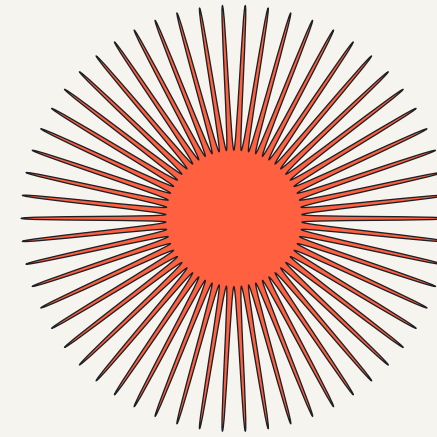
01 What would a new platform have to satisfy, on security and data, before you'd approve it?

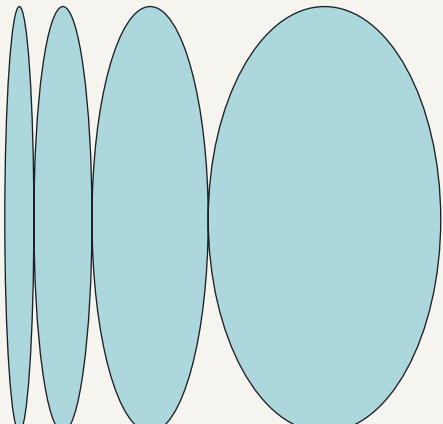
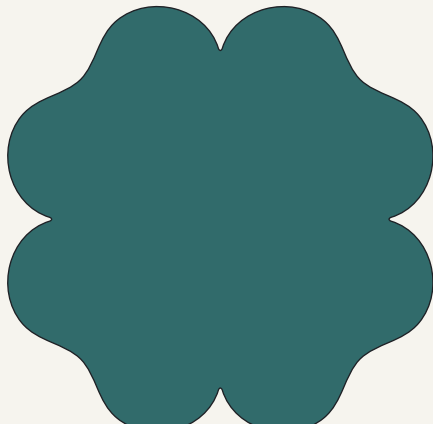
02 Which systems would this need to integrate with to work properly rather than become another silo?

03 What is our position on where data is hosted and processed, particularly once AI is involved?

04 What independent certification or assurance would you want to see, rather than take a vendor's word?

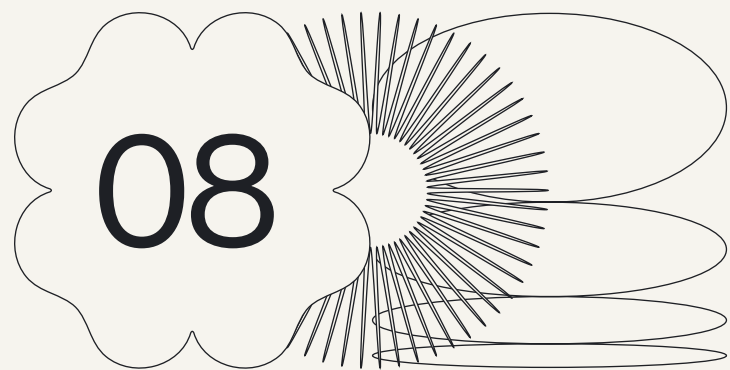
Security, integration and assurance



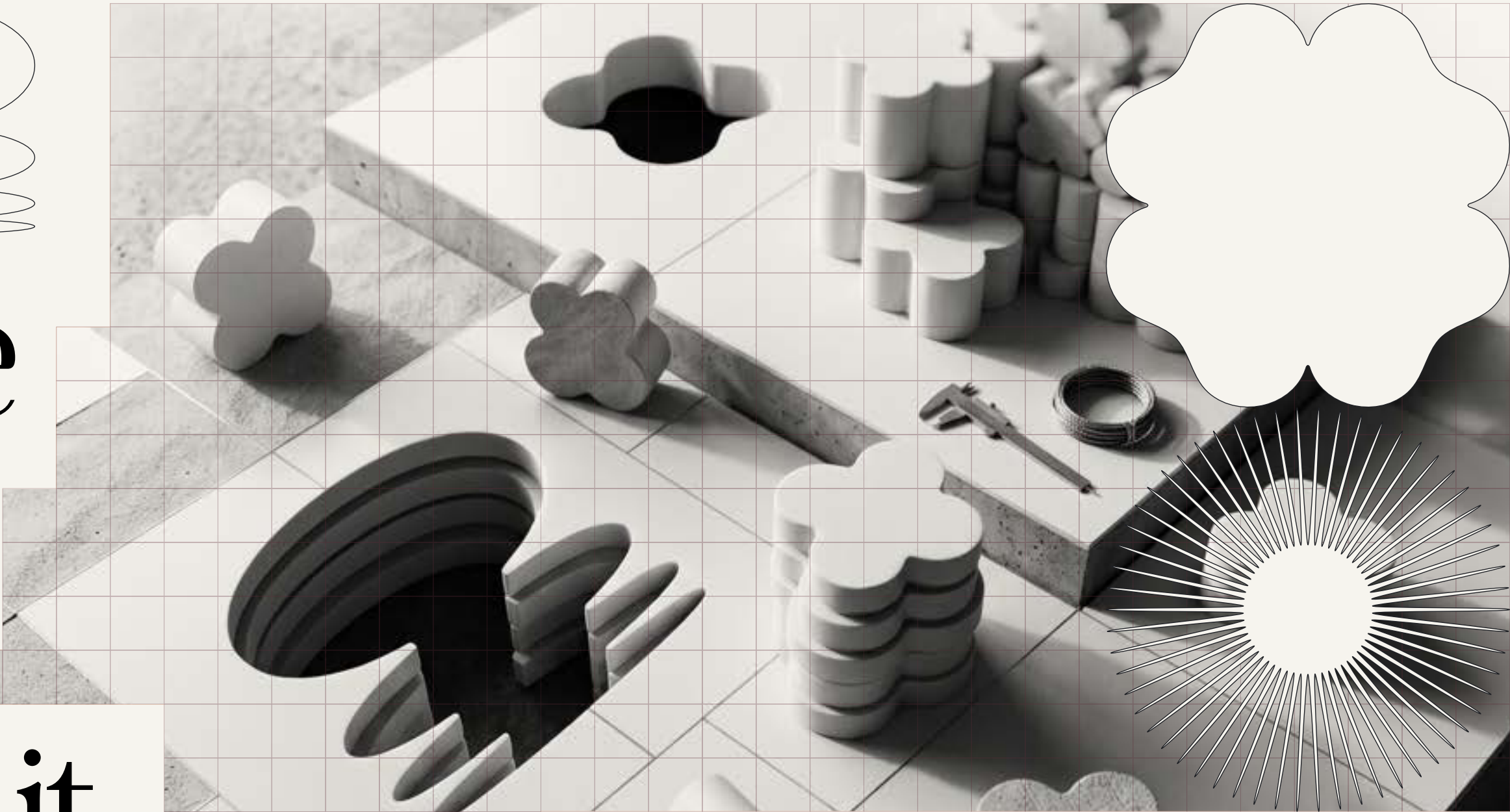
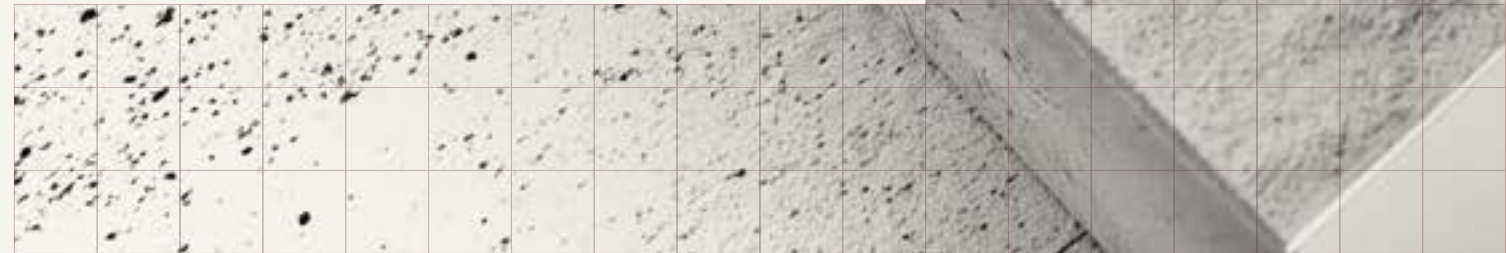
WHAT YOU NEED IT TO DO	WHAT MOST VENDORS MEAN	WHAT STRONG LOOKS LIKE
Give the organisation confidence the platform is secure, fits the existing estate, and handles sensitive people data responsibly, with proof rather than assurances. 	A short security statement, a logo or two, and a promise that everything is fine. 	Current certification (ISO 27001, Cyber Essentials and Cyber Essentials Plus), an annual independent penetration test, clear UK data residency, GDPR compliance, and genuine integration with the systems you run, all evidenced. And where AI is involved, a clear account of where data is processed and how it is governed.

THE TEST

“Show me your certifications, tell me where our data would be hosted, and show me how you integrate with our HR system and single sign-on.” Vague answers to precise questions are themselves an answer.



Where *AI fits,* and where it *does not*



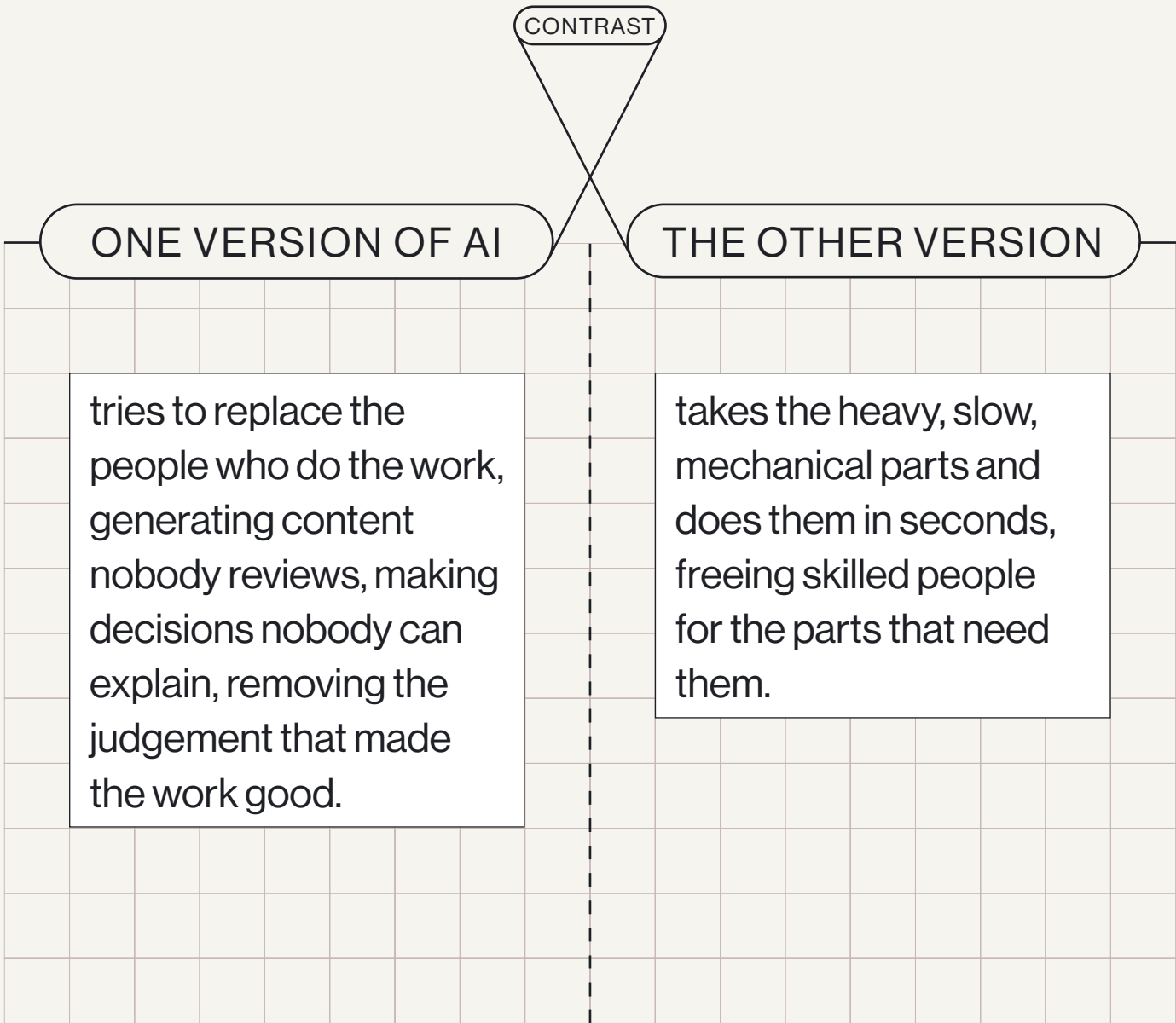
By now the shape of a good system is clear: it connects the goal to the capability to the learning to the evidence.

The obvious 2026 question is what AI does to that picture, and the answer is simpler than the noise suggests.

AI does not change what a system is for. It changes how much of the work it can help you do, and how quickly.



The distinction to hold onto through every vendor conversation:



The first is outsourcing dressed up as innovation. The second is genuine leverage.

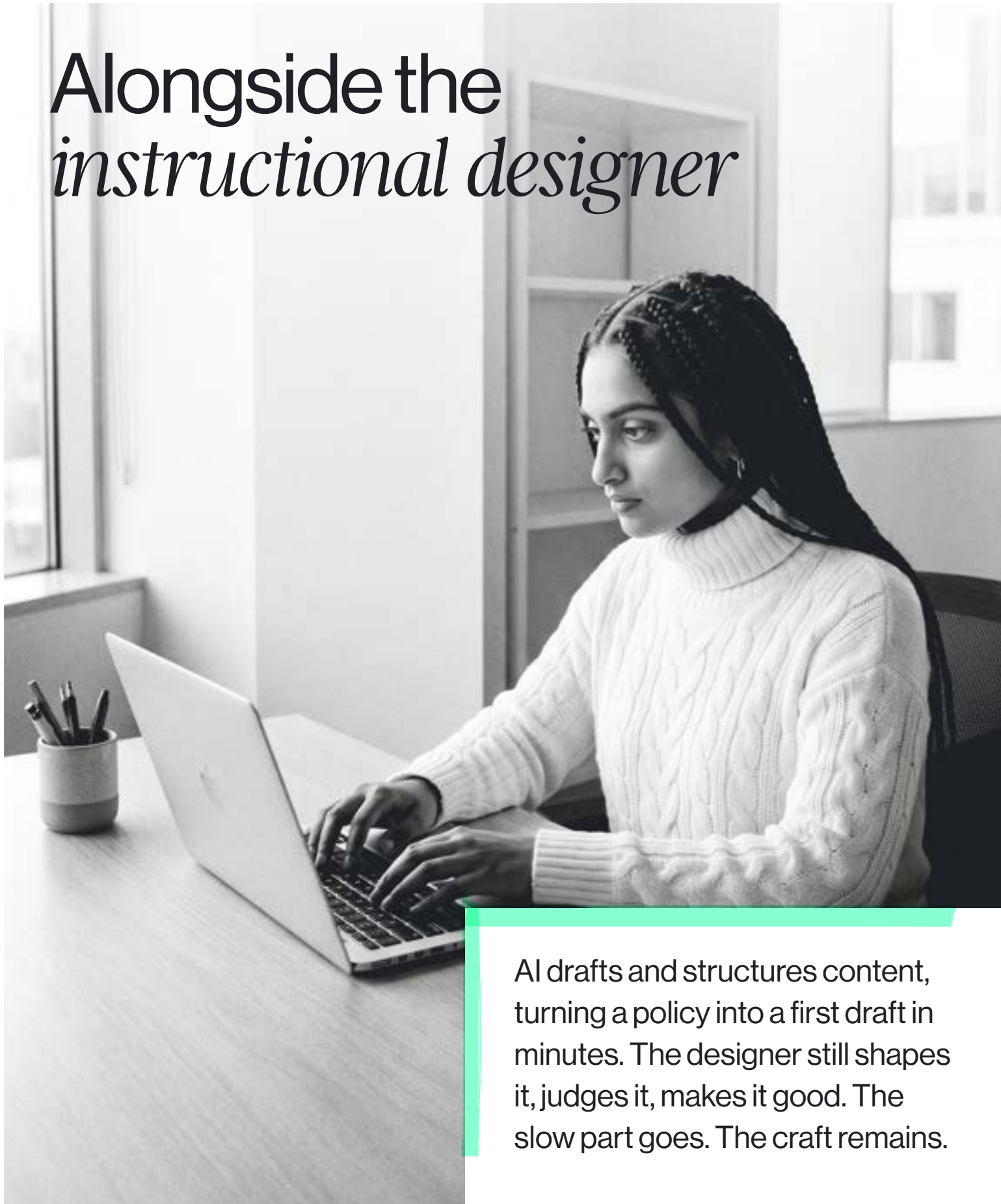
Put plainly: AI should enhance the people who do the work, not replace them.

A vendor whose AI story is about removing humans should worry you. One whose story is about making humans faster, sharper and better informed is describing something worth having.

Held to that standard, AI earns its place by helping the people you already met. It is easiest to see working alongside each of them:



Alongside the *instructional designer*



AI drafts and structures content, turning a policy into a first draft in minutes. The designer still shapes it, judges it, makes it good. The slow part goes. The craft remains.

Alongside the *learning leader*



AI helps build competency frameworks and analyse capability data at a speed no team could manage by hand, surfacing patterns and gaps for a human to interpret and act on.

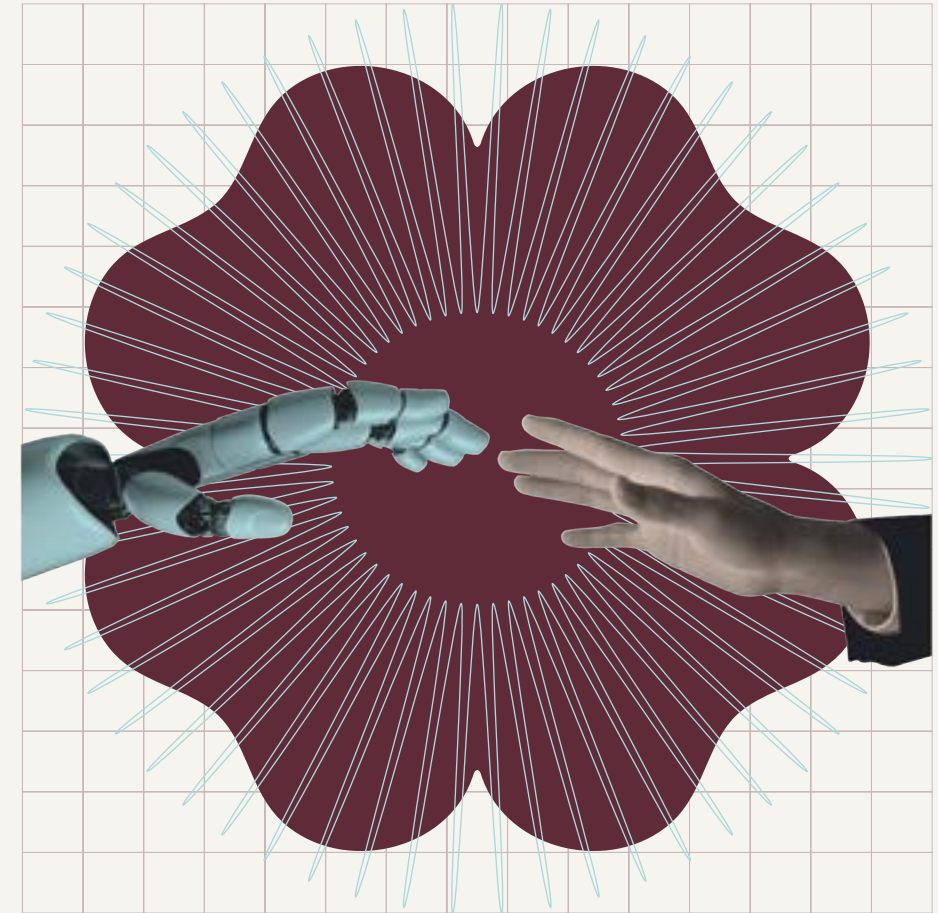
Alongside the *line manager and employee*



AI provides talent and career guidance grounded in a person's actual baseline of skills and the pathways open to them, so the guidance is specific, and the people make the decisions with better information.

In every case the pattern is the same:

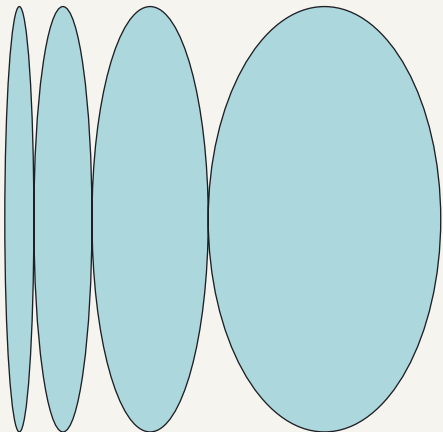
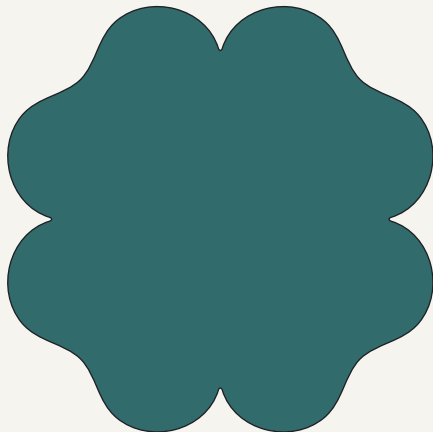
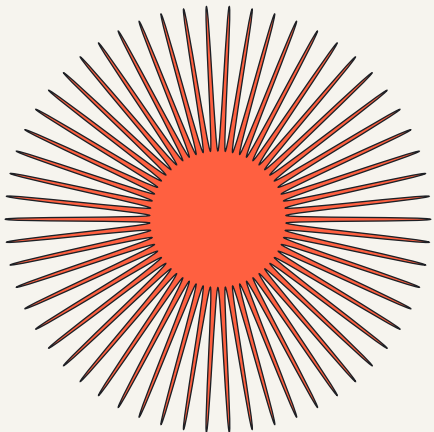
The human stays in charge, and AI removes the friction that made good practice too slow to sustain. Which is also why a connected system is where AI does the most, because AI is only as useful as the data and connections it has to work with. Bolted onto a disconnected platform, it is a novelty. Working across a connected one, it is genuinely powerful.



A short word on what is coming, because you are buying for the years ahead too. AI is moving from a feature you switch on to a layer that helps orchestrate the whole system, coordinating content, capability, learning and guidance in the background.

You do not need to predict exactly where that lands. You do need a vendor building toward it thoughtfully and safely, rather than bolting AI on to look current.

AI that *enhances* rather than *replaces*

WHAT YOU NEED IT TO DO	WHAT MOST VENDORS MEAN	WHAT STRONG LOOKS LIKE
Speed up and sharpen the work your people already do, while keeping human judgement in control of anything that matters.	AI features bolted on for the demo, content generated with no human in the loop, automation that quietly removes oversight.	AI woven through a connected platform, doing the heavy lifting across content, capability and guidance, always with a person shaping and approving, and always able to explain what it did.
		

THE TEST

“Show me where AI does the work here, and show me where a human stays in control of it.”

09

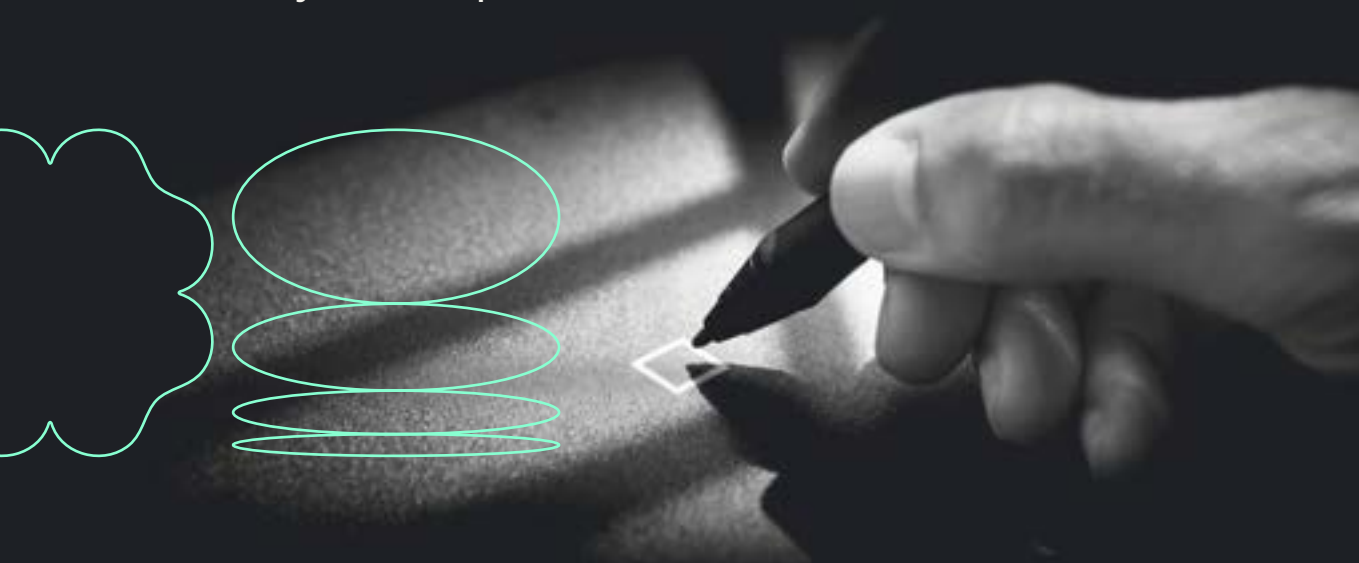
The *capabilities* checklist

You have reached the point where a checklist is useful, which is to say you have done the harder work first. You have spoken to your stakeholders, you understand what your organisation needs to connect, and you know which of the people in this guide matter most in your context. Now, and only now, a list of things to confirm becomes a qualifying gate rather than a wish list.

Use it that way. Each capability below is an outcome worth having. Under each are the specific things to confirm a system can do or provide. Take it into a demo and make a vendor show you, not tell you.

Items marked ⊕ are worth looking for beyond today:

the things that may not be your first priority now but will protect you over the life of the system as AI and expectations move on. Not every item will matter equally to you, and that is the point. A checklist you read critically is worth ten you accept wholesale.



Once you have the capabilities that matter most to you, you have something more valuable than a shortlist of vendors. You have the beginnings of a demo agenda, because every item here is something you can ask a supplier to prove in front of you. Which is exactly what the next section is for.

01 CONNECTING LEARNING TO BUSINESS GOALS, AND PROVING RETURN

- ☐ You can set business or organisational goals in the system
- ☐ Learning can be linked directly to those goals
- ☐ Reporting shows whether capability is improving against a goal, not just activity completed
- ☐ You can produce a single, clear view of return on people development for senior leaders
- ☐ ⊕ Reporting can trace a measurable line from a learning intervention through to a business outcome

02 UNDERSTANDING AND BASELINING CAPABILITY

- ☐ You can build competency frameworks that reflect your actual roles, not a fixed generic library
- ☐ People can be mapped and baselined against what their roles require
- ☐ Capability is visible at the level of the individual, the team and the whole organisation
- ☐ Skills and succession gaps are surfaced before they become a problem
- ☐ ⊕ Competency frameworks can be created or maintained with AI assistance, with human oversight

03 TARGETING AND DELIVERING LEARNING

- ☐ Learning can be attached to the specific competencies it is meant to build
- ☐ You can see which capability gap a given piece of learning addresses
- ☐ Learners are guided to relevant learning based on their role and goals, not a generic catalogue
- ☐ Learning pathways connect a person's current capabilities to those a future role requires
- ☐ ⊕ Content can be built or drafted with AI assistance alongside your own designers

04 ACTIVATING MANAGERS AND TEAMS

- ☐ A manager can see the skills and gaps within their own team
- ☐ Appraisals and objective setting draw on the same capability and goal data as the rest of the system
- ☐ Managers can set objectives that connect to both business and personal goals
- ☐ A manager can see and act on their team's development and compliance in one place

05 COMPLIANCE AND ASSURANCE

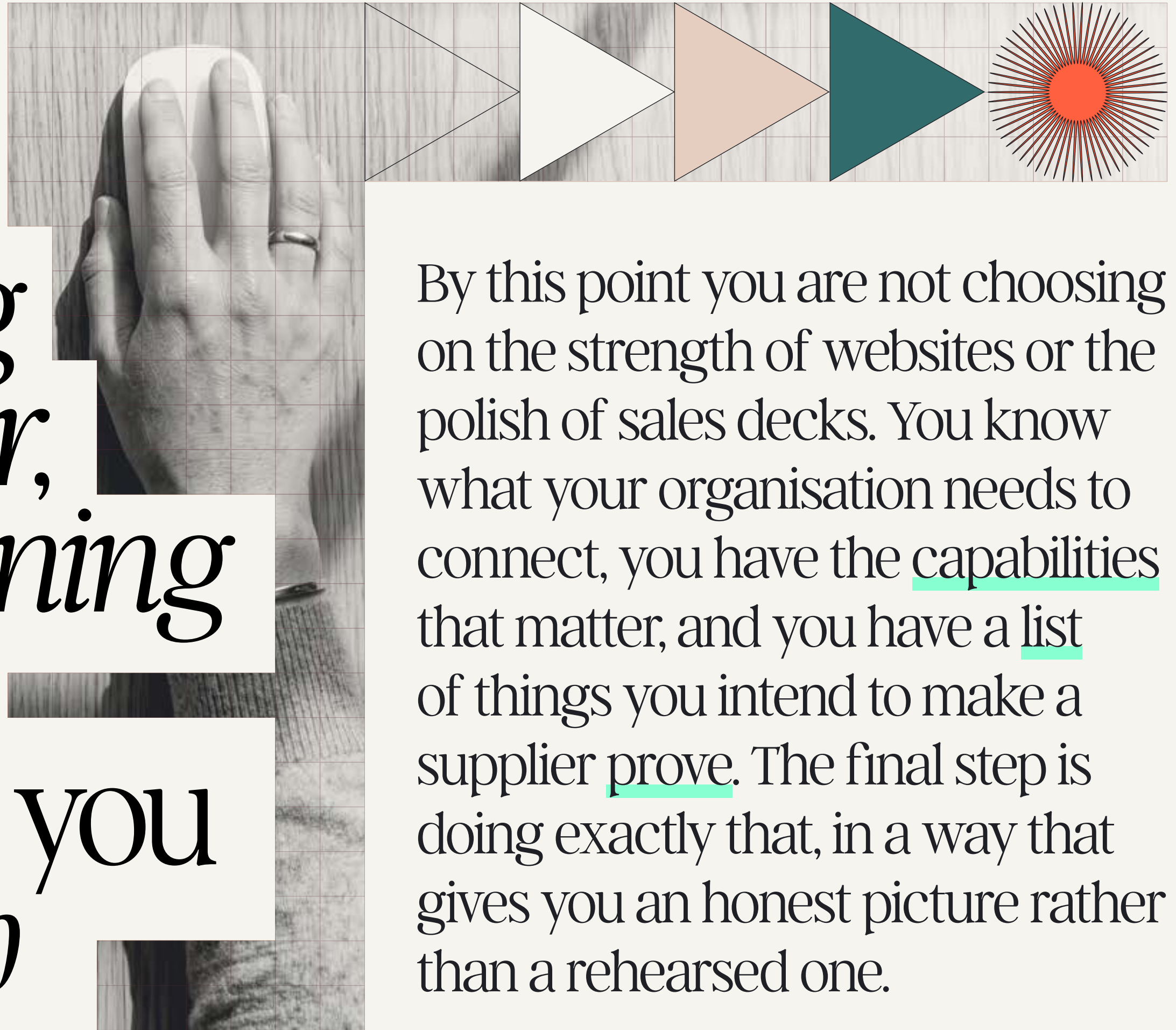
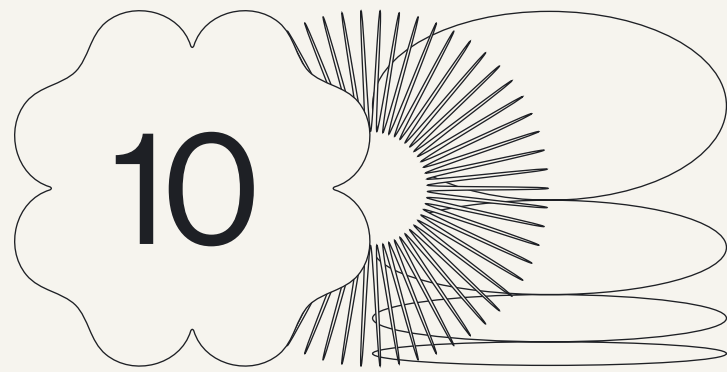
- ☐ Compliance requirements can be set specifically by role and team, not tracked in bulk
- ☐ The system warns you before something lapses, rather than after
- ☐ You can see organisation-wide compliance status precisely enough to stand behind in front of a regulator
- ☐ Managers can see their own team's compliance without manual chasing

06 SECURITY, DATA AND TECHNICAL FIT

- ☐ ISO 27001 certified
- ☐ Cyber Essentials and Cyber Essentials Plus certified
- ☐ Independent penetration testing carried out annually
- ☐ UK data residency, with data hosted and processed where you need it
- ☐ GDPR compliant, with clear data handling you can verify
- ☐ Integrates with your existing systems, including your HR system and single sign-on
- ☐ ⊕ Where AI is used, a clear account of where data is processed and how it is governed

07 AI THAT ENHANCES RATHER THAN REPLACES

- ☐ AI speeds up the work your people do rather than removing them from it
- ☐ A human stays in control of any decision that matters
- ☐ The system can explain what its AI did and why
- ☐ ⊕ AI helps orchestrate content, capability and guidance across a connected platform, not as bolted-on features

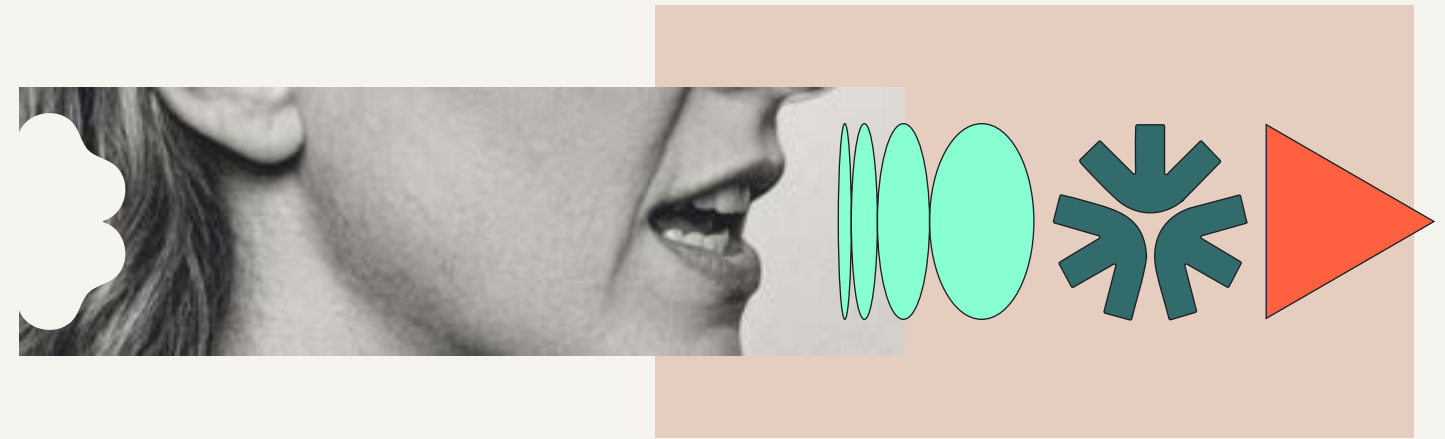


Selecting a vendor, and running a demo that tells you the truth

By this point you are not choosing on the strength of websites or the polish of sales decks. You know what your organisation needs to connect, you have the capabilities that matter, and you have a list of things you intend to make a supplier prove. The final step is doing exactly that, in a way that gives you an honest picture rather than a rehearsed one.

The single most useful principle for a demo is also the simplest. Do not let a vendor run their demo. Run yours.

A supplier left to their own agenda shows you what their platform does beautifully and moves quickly past what it does not. That is not dishonesty, it is human nature, and the way around it is to arrive with your own scenario and ask them to work through yours.



Bring your *own* scenario

Hand a vendor a situation you actually recognise, and ask them to show you how their system would handle it, there and then:

“We have a business goal, here it is. We think we have a capability gap in the way. Show us how your system would help us find it, target learning at it, activate our managers around it, and prove to our board that it closed.”

Watch what happens. A connected platform walks that path in one continuous motion. A disconnected one starts switching between tools, exporting spreadsheets, or explaining that a step is on the roadmap. The seams show up under a real scenario in a way they never do under the vendor's own script.



The questions *worth asking* in the room

Drawn from the capabilities you have already met, and phrased to be answered by showing, not telling. Ask a vendor to demonstrate each one live:

 01 Set a business goal in the system, and show how I'd know three months later whether it was working.	 02 Show the single view you'd put in front of my chief executive to tell them whether our investment in people is producing a return.	 07 Show how I'd know, across the whole organisation, that we're compliant today and what's about to lapse.	 08 Show where AI does the work, and where a human stays in control of it.
 03 Take a missing competency and prove the learning we assigned actually closed it.	 04 Show whether our workforce has the capabilities our strategy depends on, and where it doesn't.	 09 Show your certifications, tell me where our data would be hosted, and show how you integrate with our HR system and single sign-on.	If a vendor can show you those convincingly, against a scenario you recognise, you are looking at a system that connects what this guide argues must be connected. If the answers are slideware, roadmap promises or a change of subject, you have learned something just as valuable.

Beyond the demo: the
questions that protect
you later

 03

How are you developing your platform, particularly your use of AI, over the next few years?



04

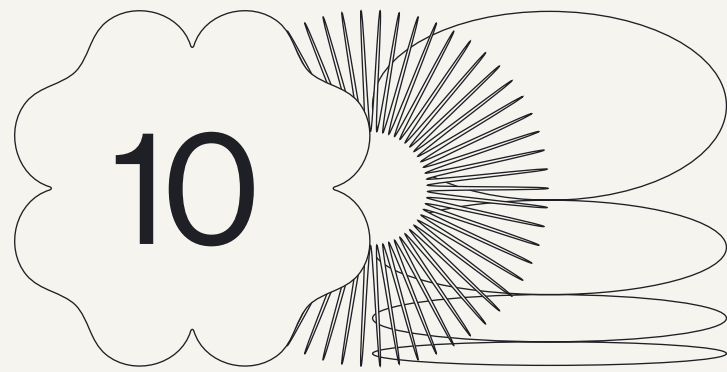
Show whether our workforce has the capabilities our strategy depends on, and where it doesn't.



▲ 05

What does it look like to grow with you, as our needs and our organisation change?

These tell you about the relationship you are entering, not just the product you are buying. Over the life of a system, that relationship matters as much as any feature.



Choosing well, and knowing where you stand

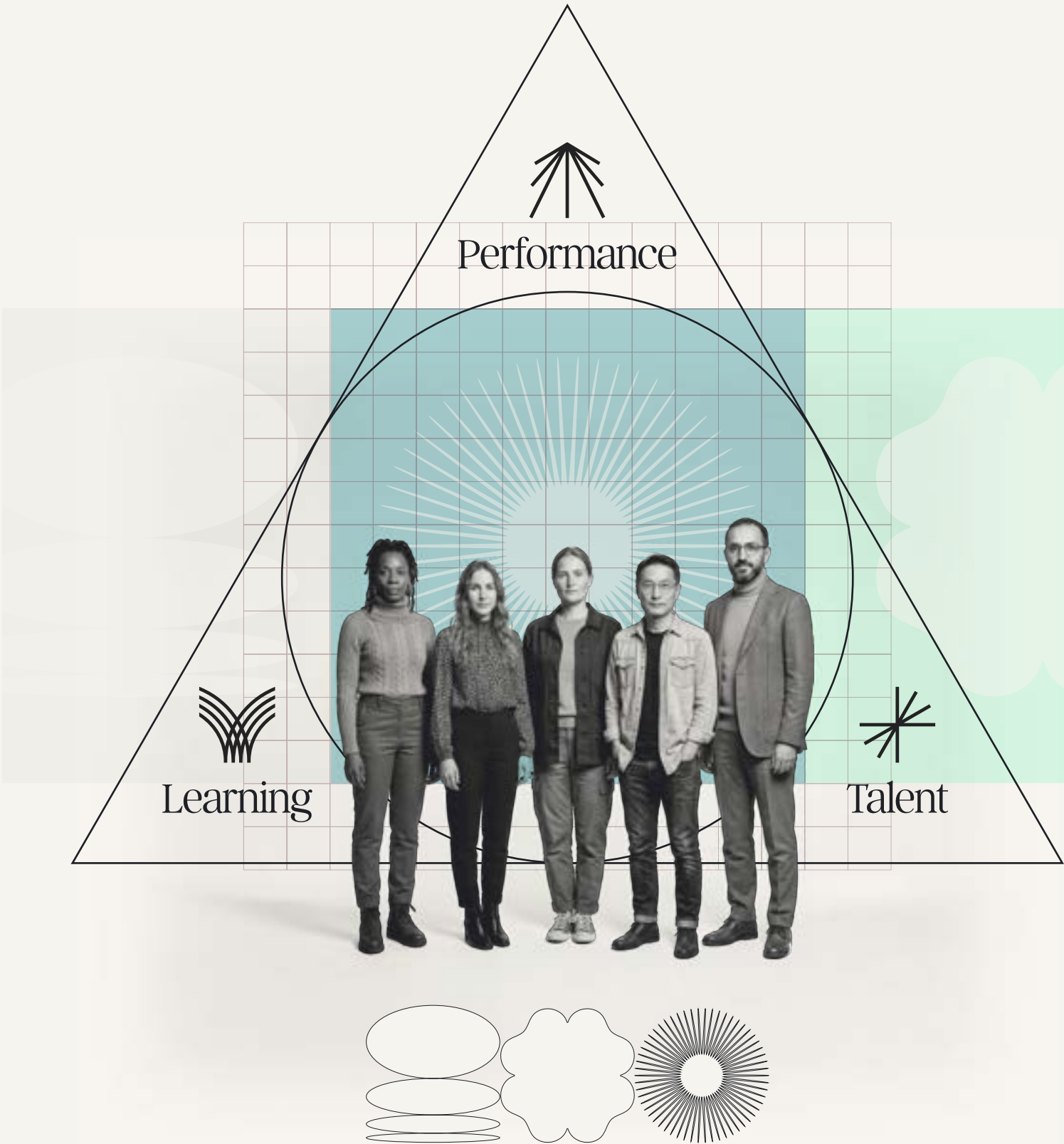
The right system will not necessarily have the longest feature list or the most impressive demo. It will be the one that connects what your organisation needs to connect, that your people will actually use, and that is built and supported by a partner you trust to be there as things change.

If you have understood your stakeholders, tested against the capabilities that matter, and made vendors prove their claims against your own reality, you will know it when you see it, and you will be able to defend the decision to your board and to yourself. Which, in the end, is what sourcing well really means.

There is one more thing worth doing before you begin, and it is the piece most organisations skip.

Everything in this guide rests on understanding where your organisation actually stands today. How connected your learning, talent and performance really are. How much of your capability you can genuinely see. How much of your learning you can trace to an outcome.

Sourcing a system to fix a problem you have not measured is how the wrong system gets bought. So it is worth taking an honest baseline first.



Baseline your *maturity* before you buy

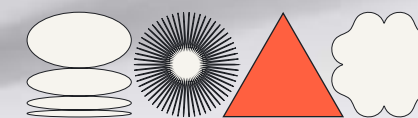
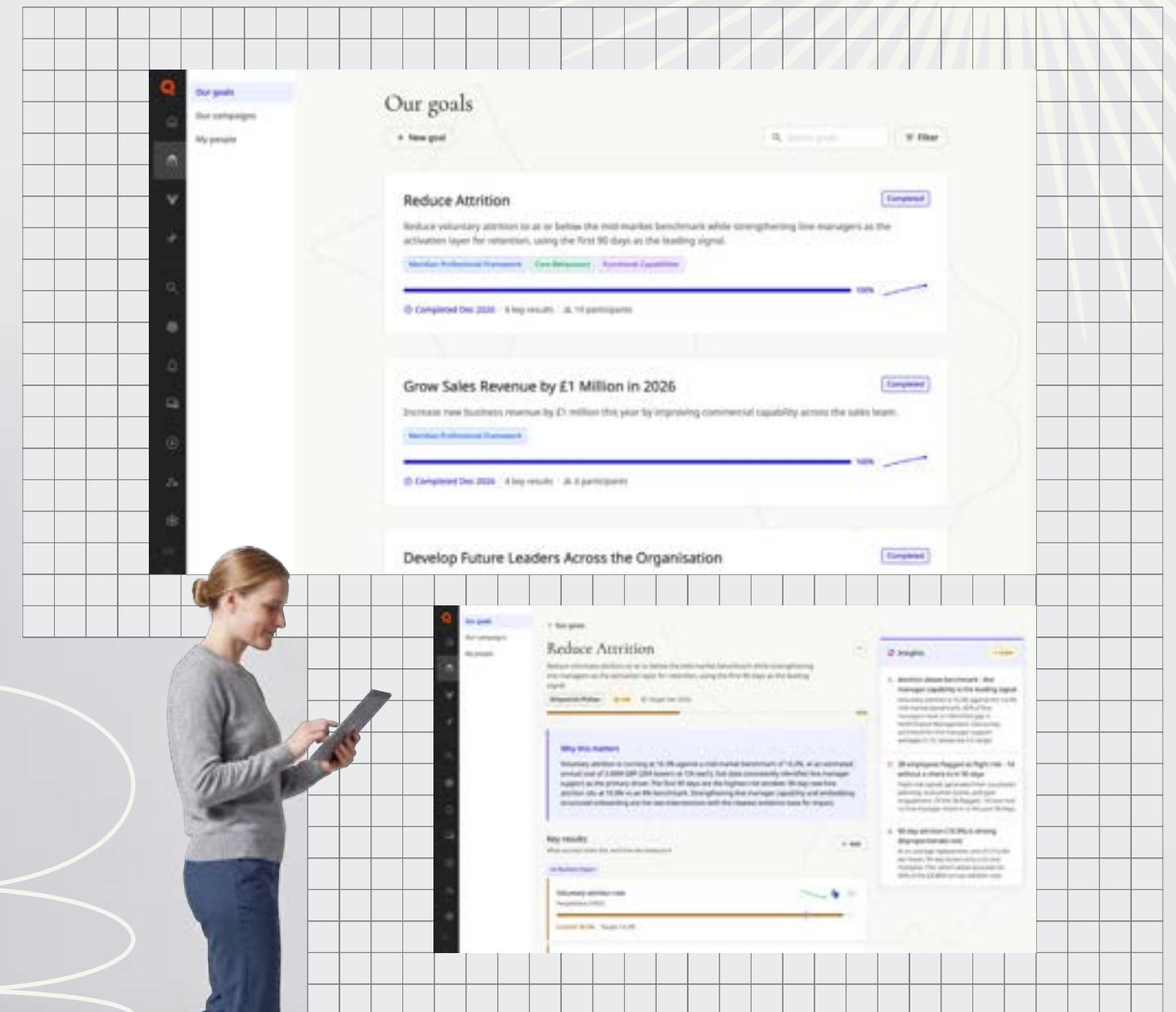
We have built a short diagnostic that does exactly that. It walks you through the domains that determine how mature and connected your people function is, and shows where you are strong, where the gaps are, and what to prioritise, the same understanding this guide asks you to bring to a vendor conversation.

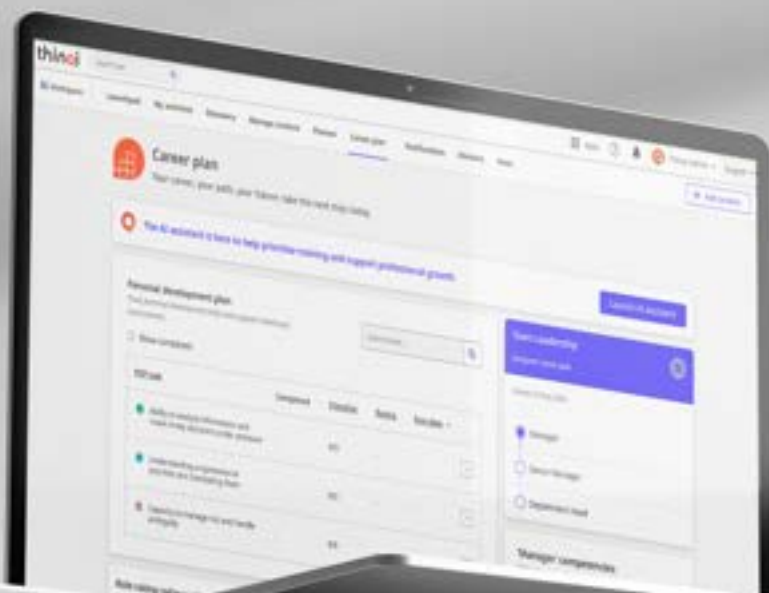


It takes about **ten minutes**, and it will make everything here more useful, because you will be reading it against a real picture of your own organisation.

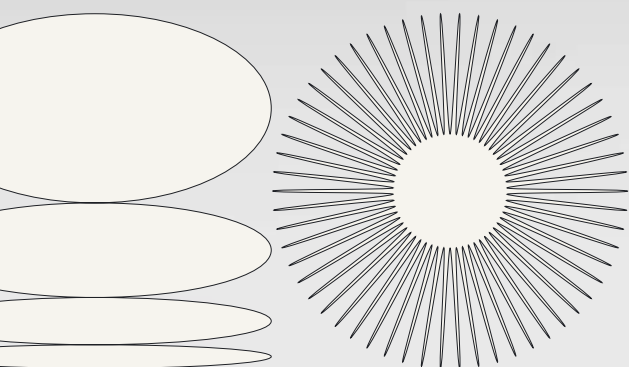
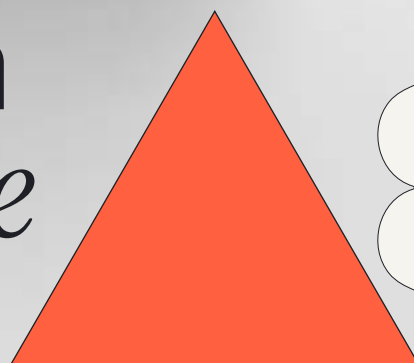
Scan the code to take the diagnostic and see where your organisation stands.

Know where you stand, then set *where you're going*





A learning system
is no longer *a place*
to store courses.



thinqi

Chosen well, it is the connective tissue
between the learning your people
do, the capability your organisation is
building, and the performance it is all
meant to serve.

Choose the one that connects those
three, and you are not buying a platform.
You are building the engine.

