CGI's AI Learning Strategy Earns 'Program of the Year' — Here's Why

CGI

Technology is at the heart of how CGI helps clients accelerate their digital transformation. As one of the world's largest IT services firms, the company employs over 90,000 professionals who help clients achieve the highest returns on their digital investments through systems integration, managed IT and business process services, and IP-based business solutions.

AI has long been a part of CGI's approach to client innovation. CGI has over 30 years of experience in advising and implementing AI solutions for clients, constantly learning from and adapting to technological advances. As generative AI came on the scene, CGI's leaders recognized the need to move from automation to creation.

In July 2023, CGI announced a $1 billion investment over three years to expand its AI capabilities to help clients design and deliver responsible, ROI-led strategies, according to *a company announcement*.

"As we were talking to clients, we'd say this is AI's iPhone moment. We now have an interface where we can tangibly access AI versus having it behind layers of programming, neural networks, and more," said Dave Henderson, President of Intelligent Solutions and Innovation at CGI. "In the early days of GenAI, we were actively discussing its transformational power and impact to both our business and that of our clients."

This moment also brought about an industry-wide discussion on embracing responsible AI, with CGI understanding the imperative to ensure all employees became deeply familiar with its Responsible AI (RAI) Framework.

"As the increased accessibility to AI's transformative power advances our clients' organizations, we recognize that the opportunities enabled by AI, and GenAI in particular, must be met with great responsibility to deliver value and outcomes we can trust," Henderson added. "It was clear that if we were going to talk to our clients about AI and our approach to AI, we needed to get our global team on the same page."

It wouldn't be easy. As mentioned, it's a 90,000 strong workforce spanning the globe. How does an enterprise as vast as CGI train everyone on a framework for a technology that changes by the hour?

THE NUMBERS

70,000
Employees participated in the first release of the Global AI Training Program in 90 days

140,000
Badges were issued to employees who completed training

90%
Employees feel confident applying what they learned to their work

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THE CHALLENGE

Henderson partnered with his colleague Steven Starace, Senior Vice President of Human Resources at CGI, and his learning and development team to make a plan.

Their goal was to put together a curriculum that was relevant and timely — starting with building fluency in generative AI and the responsible use of AI, to expanding to technical learning paths, expert-led leadership sessions, and more.

Collectively, the company rallied behind this initiative.

Part of what makes CGI a reliable provider of AI services is its approach: a thorough, 360-degree, human-in-the-middle strategy. The team looks at problems from all angles to solve the business challenge and create the most impact. This includes applying models and providing trustworthy datasets but also enabling their clients and proving the value of the solutions.

"Our teams across the board take ownership and are eager to help clients solve problems and take advantage of new opportunities," said Starace. "Everyone had the desire to learn more – first as part of our general fluency and responsible use of AI, and then more deeply as part of specific journeys for different roles and industries. We created learning that was very digestible to feed the desire that was already there."

In the spirit of this culture, CGI wanted to ensure that its employees could speak confidently about generative AI and the responsible use of the technology.

Doing so would require training.

THE SOLUTION

Knowing the fast-moving nature of generative AI, the CGI team acted quickly to launch a training program that would scale and resonate with its workforce.

In addition to its RAI Framework, the CGI team used many of Skillsoft's curated AI modules and courses on topics like governance and everyday impact to business. The team also used Skillsoft's dashboards to track consumption and Skill Benchmarks to measure their workforce's skill gains over time. They mixed Skillsoft resources like these with their own to curate 60+ learning journeys, which saved them time and money.

The program was broken into three phases: **Build**, **Develop** and **Advance.**

At the beginning, the goal was to establish the baseline. Everyone had to understand what it means to use generative AI responsibly.

The program started at the ground floor:

- What is it?
- What are the potential risks?
- What are the benefits?
- And what are its applications?

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At later stages, the program would build upon this foundation, becoming more specific, dialing in skills and advancing innovation. For example, during the "Advance" phase of the program, the team launched the CGI AI Leader Series, which were live sessions on critical AI topics that aligned with strategic imperatives. These sessions were recorded and made available in Skillsoft's Percipio platform.

Henderson and Starace announced the curriculum internally with a personalized video message, explaining the goal and what employees would gain access to: a library of courses, modules and activities tailored to the company, individuals' roles, and their clients' industry needs.

The Program Features That Resonated with Learners

The team took a blended approach to building this competency in house, including courses, modules, hands-on activities and challenges.

- **Role-based Journeys** — The CGI team designed and launched a series of role-based training journeys related to different functional areas across the business, including for leaders.
- **Digestible Modules** — While expansive, CGI structured the program in bite-sized pieces. It made the content easy to consume quickly.
- **Personalized Training** — CGI's team tailored many courses and modules to their own policies around AI and the industries the company serves.
- **Innovation Series** — The team challenged employees to apply what they've learned and brainstorm innovative ideas that can be brought to market.

THE OUTCOMES

Within 90 days, 70,000 employees participated in the first phase of the program, amassing 140,000 completion badges. A post-curriculum survey showed that 90% of participants also felt confident they would apply what they'd learned on the job.

"The results were remarkable, almost unbelievable," says Mark Onisk, Skillsoft's Chief Content Officer.

"With a comprehensive global AI learning strategy, this organization's phased approach to AI learning and significant engagement demonstrates a forward-thinking and impactful program that aligns with strategic business goals," Onisk said in a statement to CGI. "The return on their AI program is among the best I have ever seen."

Skillsoft formally recognized CGI at its annual Impact Awards as having accomplished the "Program of the Year." The program was not mandatory and still received tremendous engagement. In fact, the award nomination says: "This has been the most successful non-mandatory learning program we have ever launched in our 48-year history."

"From the start, the goal was to establish the foundation with this program — to get started. As employees consumed the content, they hungered for more," Henderson said. The learning team quickly moved from theory to application, and that's where the future lies for this program. The team plans to offer more advanced training and double down on how to create growth opportunities internally and for clients. For example, at the time of this writing, Agentic AI learning is rolling out that includes comprehensive materials to help employees engage their clients in this topic.

In the meantime, the initial program has had a material impact. "My desire is to have an impact," Starace said. "This AI learning had a global impact that benefits all of our consultants as well as the clients they serve."

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WHAT WAS BEHIND THEIR SUCCESS?

- **A Culture of Learning** — CGI has cultivated a culture of learning, supported by employees having a sense of ownership. Starace says almost 90% of employees own company stock and feel accountable to the company's success. Because employees are also shareholders and are designated as CGI Partners, they feel responsible for their own development and the outcomes that cascade from it.

- **Empathy and Excellence** — CGI employees are giving, empathic professionals who would go out of their way to help their peers and clients. And because the organization is flat, as opposed to hierarchical, this is true for leaders and individual contributors. In fact, many leaders have climbed the ranks, making them more empathetic and in tune with different functional areas.

- **Stakeholder Alignment** — From the very beginning, employees throughout the company saw generative AI for what it is: a pivotal development in technology's history. Everyone rallied to create a plan and follow through — executives, senior leaders, directors and managers, individuals.

- **Immediate Action** — The team didn't waste any time. Expanding its AI capabilities — their clients' top innovation investment priority — required CGI to act. And it did in a big way. With a culture of learning in place and a host of ambitious professionals who strive for excellence, the workforce was eager for training.

- **Personalization** — While making training available quickly was important, it wasn't enough to throw off-the-shelf content at a highly technical, global workforce. The team believes personalizing the course work and modules to CGI's policies, clients' needs, and individuals' roles made a substantial difference.

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