

aitd. Conference 2026

Capability, Connection and the Craft of Learning.

For three days in Brisbane, the Australian learning and development community came together to do what it does best: learn, be curious, share, connect and look forward.

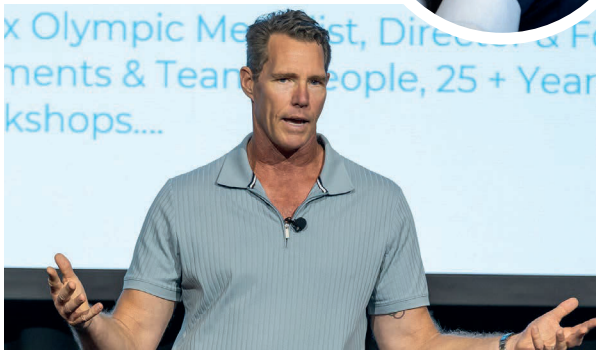
The 2026 AITD Conference brought together around 350 delegates, more than 50 speakers and a richly diverse cross-section of the profession. Corporate teams, state and federal government representatives, SMEs, consultants, leaders, generalists and specialists all found themselves united by a shared interest in one central question: how do we continue to build L&D capability that creates value, impact and agility?



Held at Sofitel Brisbane, the conference theme — *Building L&D Capabilities: Value, Impact and Agility* — felt timely and purposeful. In an environment where organisations are navigating shifting workforce expectations, technological change, capability gaps and increasing pressure to demonstrate impact, the program focused on strengthening the practical, strategic and human capabilities required to move the profession forward.

The Craft of Learning

The conference was not dominated by a single trend or technology. While AI certainly appeared across the program, it did not overwhelm the conversation. Instead, there was a refreshing return to the craft of learning: how people learn, how behaviour changes, how identity shapes capability, how practice embeds performance, and how L&D can work more closely with the realities of modern organisations.



This was captured beautifully in one of the most talked-about sessions of the conference: Dr Britt Andreatta's keynote on brain-based strategies for creating engaging learning. Her exploration of neuroscience, habit formation, neuroplasticity and attention reminded delegates that learning is not simply content delivery. It is a biological, behavioural and emotional process. Real learning depends on the right conditions, repeated practice, memory, motivation and the brain's capacity to change.

For many delegates, Britt's session was a powerful reminder of why learning design matters so much. If behaviour changes through repetition and practice, then our programs must be designed with that in mind. If attention is limited, we must design for it. If an "aha" moment has a physiological reality in the brain, then the work of L&D becomes even more meaningful. We are not simply producing workshops, modules or resources. We are helping people make sense of something new.

The Human Centre of Learning

That return to the human centre of learning was echoed throughout the conference. One of the recurring themes was that capability development cannot be separated from identity. Several sessions explored the idea that people do not simply adopt new behaviours because a program tells them to. They adopt them when those behaviours make sense within their understanding of who they are, what they value and how they see themselves in their role.



Glin Bayley's session on self-perception and identity was particularly thought-provoking in this regard. The idea that you cannot build capability in someone whose identity rejects it may sound simple, but it has profound implications for leadership development, behaviour change and organisational learning. It challenges us to go deeper than models and frameworks. It asks us to consider the stories people carry about themselves, and whether our learning experiences help expand those stories or unintentionally reinforce their limits.



Self-Leadership and Understanding Ourselves

The theme of self-leadership also appeared strongly across the program. Before people can lead others well, they need to understand themselves. Before they can adapt in uncertain environments, they need to develop a sense of groundedness. And before organisations can expect people to change, they need to create the conditions in which change feels possible.

That message found a moving expression in Hayley Lewis's keynote. Her story, from watching Tracey Wickham win gold as an eight-year-old, to writing '400m. Green and gold tracksuit. Queen.' on a piece of paper beside her bed, to later standing on the Commonwealth Games podium herself, carried all the hallmarks of high performance. But what resonated most was not only the success. It was the honesty.

Hayley spoke of pressure, reinvention, changing events as her body changed, business challenges, personal loss and the courage required to begin again. Her message was simple and deeply human: you are never too old to change something that isn't working.

For an audience of learning professionals, that message landed with particular force. After all, the work of L&D is often about helping people, teams and organisations adapt. But Hayley's story reminded us that adaptation is rarely neat. It involves courage, persistence, humility and the willingness to keep showing up when the plan changes.

Learning that Changes Behaviour

Across the conference, there was also a strong focus on learning that changes behaviour, not just learning that informs. Sessions explored coaching, embedded practice, strategic capability mapping, measurement, workforce development and integration across the employee lifecycle. Kathleen Gaynor's work on strategic capability mapping and Sue Borhan's insights into developing a dispersed workforce at Cater Care were strong examples of how L&D can connect learning initiatives to real organisational needs and workforce outcomes.

Another theme that surfaced strongly was the challenge of designing for modern attention. With Gen Z becoming a larger proportion of the workforce, and with digital platforms increasingly shaping how people consume information, L&D practitioners are having to think differently about engagement. Sessions exploring modern learner

expectations, attention and digital learning design sparked lively conversation.

Téa Angelos and the Vivlo Learning platform prompted discussion about how learning can meet people where they are, while still maintaining substance and quality. The challenge is not simply to make learning shorter or more visually appealing. It is to design experiences that respect attention, invite participation and create meaningful transfer into work.

The learning wall brought this to life in a particularly visible way. Across the event, delegates added reflections, ideas and provocations. Some were practical: “What’s the problem you are trying to solve?” Others captured moments of insight: “Prime the brain!” and “Visual storytelling”. Some reflected the value of connection: “An opportunity to pause, reflect + connect with colleagues” and “Meeting new people”. Others pointed toward the future: “Creating space for learning to be embedded” and “Learning in the flow of work does not need to be designed; it should be integrated into work as a natural part.”

Taken together, the wall became more than an activity. It was a live record of the conference experience: applied, social, curious and reflective.

Perhaps that is what made the 2026 conference so energising. It gave delegates space not only to absorb new ideas, but to test their own thinking against the thinking of others. It offered validation for work already underway, fresh language for familiar challenges and renewed motivation to keep developing as professionals.

It was also a reminder that L&D does not operate in isolation. The strongest sessions acknowledged systems, culture, leadership, data, technology and human behaviour as interconnected forces. Gabrielle Harris’s work on hidden dynamics and social defences, for example, pointed to a critical truth: sometimes the issue is not the individual, but the system they are working inside. That kind of thinking challenges L&D to move beyond fixing people and toward shaping environments where people can perform, learn and thrive.

A Sense of Momentum

By the end of the conference, delegates left with notebooks full of ideas, new professional connections and a strong sense of momentum. But perhaps the most important takeaway was simpler than any framework or model.

In a time of rapid change, uncertainty and technological acceleration, the conference brought the focus back to the learner, the workplace and the craft of creating conditions for meaningful growth. It reminded us that capability is not built through content alone. It is built through curiosity, practice, reflection, connection and courage.

AITD Conference 2026 was a celebration of all of that. A celebration of the profession’s expertise, generosity and adaptability. A celebration of the people who continue to design, facilitate, influence and evaluate learning in all its forms. And a celebration of a community committed to building better workplaces through better learning.

