



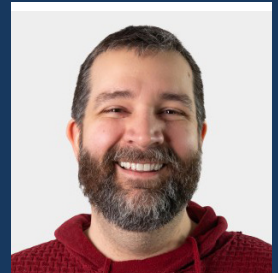
Executive Interview



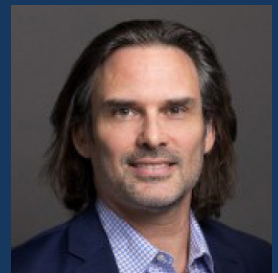
Enabling the Frontline: Rethinking Workforce Technology for 2.7 Billion Workers

2026

confirm.



Adam Thompson
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About Confirm



Confirm, formerly known as Learning Pool, is a workforce technology company formed through the consolidation of five specialist businesses: Learning Pool, WorkRamp, WorkStep, Elucidat and Confirm. Founded in 2006 and built on nearly two decades of experience supporting learning and performance in large, complex organizations, Confirm launched its Workforce Enablement System (WES) in 2026, a platform designed to connect learning, engagement, performance and compliance into a single system rather than four disconnected ones. Confirm's frontline and enterprise products are used by organizations including IHG, Bosch, Coca-Cola, Siemens, Nissan, Canva, Reddit, Tesco, Boots, Lidl, B&Q and M&S.

About Adam Thompson



Adam Thompson is Chief Product Officer at Confirm, where he leads product strategy across the company's Workforce Enablement System. Based in London, Thompson previously served as Chief Product Officer at Cognism and held product leadership roles at Phenom, Catalant Technologies and OutMatch HCM, where he also served as CEO and Chief Product Officer. He founded ThompsonBridge, a company focused on HR analytics, and began his career in the United States Navy.

About David Wentworth



This Excellence at Work Executive Interview is moderated by **David Wentworth**, Brandon Hall Group's Managing Director of Learning and Talent. He works with technology providers and enterprise organizations to better understand learning and talent challenges and what it takes to overcome them. His insights come from nearly two decades of experience conducting research, interviews and data analysis in the learning and talent space. Prior to rejoining Brandon Hall Group™, he served as VP, Talent Platform Evangelist at Schoox, and before that spent 11 years at Brandon Hall Group™ as Principal Analyst. He is a podcast host and a regular speaker at talent management, learning and HR industry events.

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Who Counts as Frontline

Q David

When we say frontline workers, who do you think of?

A Adam

Frontline workers range all the way from people in hospitality, restaurants and hotels, to retail workers and logistics workers, folks that work in warehouses. It certainly applies to people in healthcare, nurses and primary care technicians, people that work for airlines, flight attendants and people that work in cargo. I would stretch it as far as bank tellers and people who work inside contact centers. There are 2.7 billion frontline workers in the world. That is about 60 percent of the US working population. I live in the UK, and here it is about the same, roughly 60 percent of the population would be classified as frontline.

Squeezed From Every Side

Q David

What specific challenges and issues are these workers facing right now?

A Adam

There is a ton. If I start one level up, with what is happening to the businesses themselves, 45 percent of restaurants are not profitable right now, and about 50 percent of retail locations are earning less than two percent profit margins. They are under a lot of cost pressure from rising transportation costs, labor costs that are up about 30 percent globally since the pandemic, and higher food costs, while shoppers are dealing with their own cost-of-living crisis, which makes it hard for retailers and restaurants to pass those increased costs along. There are also a lot of evolving business models, ghost kitchens, contactless models where you need people to stock shelves and merchandise but maybe not staff a register. The way that flows through to the workforce is that profitability increasingly has to come from efficiency, which is a difficult message for workers who are already under pressure. Specifically, it is too many tools and too many logins, which introduces friction into a day where insights and tasks need to be understood within minutes, not figured out at a desk.

Careers Feel Invisible

Frontline turnover climbs when workers do not see a path to roles like store or warehouse manager.

Q David

How do organizations approach solving that kind of talent shortage?

Build, Buy or Partner

A Adam

A customer of ours described it as a build, buy or partner model. In nursing, the US is predicted to have a shortage of about 500,000 nurses by 2030, and the National Health Service in the UK is under similar pressure.

Organizations can try to buy the talent, which means talent acquisition tries to poach from a finite pool. They can partner for the talent, reaching into the value chain to work with nursing schools and get people early. Or they can build the talent themselves. In a lot of these situations, I think you end up having to build the talent, which means more investment is going into talent enablement in a world where labor markets are tight.

Q David

The tools available to us have not changed dramatically, so why is this conversation so important right now?

A Adam

When you are under tremendous cost pressure, have to show profitability and cannot pass costs onto customers, you are forced to find operational efficiencies, which means tool consolidation, enabling workers faster, holding onto them longer and making them more effective.

Performance management, employee engagement software and learning management systems are concepts that have existed since the 1980s, but they are typically three distinct systems, which means three friction points instead of one. Your data is fragmented, your employees' experience is fragmented, and your overhead is likely higher than it needs to be because you are working with three separate vendors.

One System, Not Three

Fragmented performance, engagement and learning tools multiply friction, fragment data, and drive up cost.

Borrow From Sales Enablement

Q David

What are some of the ways you help companies put that concept into practice?

A Adam

One of the big ways is helping them reframe L&D, HRBP and transformation roles. I think a sales enablement role is a good paradigm: someone embedded in a sales organization responsible for the learning, engagement and performance of that team, closely aligned with revenue operations and sales leaders.

In HR, that is fragmented. L&D is responsible for overall learning, but its KPI is typically completions, and you can have a ton of course completions while your business is declining. HRBPs are often an advisory role rather than one that equips a team with the tools to be more performant. Transformation roles tend to be point-in-time and project based. What I think we need is a talent enablement department that merges those three concepts, with KPIs tied directly to the business units they serve, in the same way we saw the rise of a go-to-market engineer in the revenue space.

One Ecosystem, Not Silos

Bringing learning, communication, scheduling and performance into one system strengthens automation, AI recommendations, and the bottom line.

Q David

What does workforce enablement look like in a company that is doing it right?

A Adam

We have actually rebranded ourselves as a category around workforce enablement, and we are not the only ones moving in that direction. From a technology view, the two anchor points of the HR tech ecosystem have always been the applicant tracking system

TA Set the Blueprint

and the HCM, and each of those has consolidated different tools under its umbrella.

Talent acquisition now has behavioral assessments, interview scheduling and recorded video interviews all integrated, which makes the process feel more seamless for candidates. The parallel for the rest of the workforce is learning management, internal communications, knowledge bases, and in the frontline world, shift scheduling, payroll, employee engagement and performance management.

All of those fragmented pieces need to be in one ecosystem. That makes employees' lives easier, gives you the connective tissue for stronger automation and AI-based recommendations, and ultimately saves money.

Q David

How does the dispersed, franchised nature of frontline work complicate this?

A Adam

Frontline workers are typically dispersed and not co-located, so they do not communicate regularly across locations. When you add franchises, a restaurant or retail location technically does not even work for the same company, even though it operates under the same brand, and you have to be very careful with co-employment laws in the US. Capturing what is going right and wrong in a way that works across such dispersed organizations is critical.

Q David

Everyone is talking about skills right now. How should frontline organizations approach that?

Dispersed by Design

Frontline workers rarely cross paths across locations, and franchise structures add legal limits on what employers can coordinate.

Skip the Mega-Taxonomy

A Adam

I am a bit of a contrarian here. I agree that hiring and developing employees should be based on the skills they need, but if you introduce large, unwieldy skills taxonomies, especially in the frontline world, I have seen it take years for people to implement them. ONET has skills and task taxonomies across every job, which is what the Bureau of Labor Statistics uses, and I think that is too heavy for the frontline.

It typically boils down to somewhere around three to seven capabilities per role. If I were giving a skills-based recommendation to frontline organizations, I would focus on the first-time manager, the next group of shift managers or assistant store managers. Identifying that person from the rank and file usually comes down to about six things: can they do certain tasks well, do they have good performance reviews, are they engaged. If yes, that is somebody to talk to about the job opening.

Q David

Is there a unique wrinkle to the AI conversation for this workforce?

Frontline Fears AI Displacement

Frontline workers get little AI enablement today, and unaddressed fear of displacement can outpace the actual pace of change.

A Adam

I think there are two unique challenges. First, the frontline workforce typically has very little enablement or interaction with AI tools, so there needs to be enablement for how AI applies to frontline use cases.

Second, the frontline is more nervous than people realize about their jobs being displaced by AI or automation, and there has been a fair amount of fear-mongering around that, even though we have not actually seen it materialize in the job market yet. I would get in

Iron Man, Not Terminator

front of that by saying our goal is still to need the human, atoms still have to move across the shop floor, and AI is not going to do that. The goal is to make people better, faster and more empowered, more like Iron Man than the Terminator.

The other nuance is that AI can hallucinate, so for something like a food allergy question, any AI model has to be effectively hallucination-proof. The way to do that is to have it point to the actual codified answer from your SOPs rather than take an AI-generated answer at face value, which is critical in restaurants, healthcare and hospitality, where the wrong answer to a high-value customer could have a real financial impact.

Q David

What happens if an organization is dragging its feet on an AI strategy while its workforce moves ahead anyway?

A Adam

There is so much shadow usage. A lot of organizations are still afraid to implement AI, but if you do not provide the tool, employees will still find one and use it without you knowing, and the cost of those mistakes is probably greater than the cost of implementing something you are comfortable with as a business.

You cannot expect frontline workers to know an answer is coming from an unreliable source and take it with a grain of salt; that is not how they use these tools. You do not necessarily have to build your own chatbot, but you have to understand your company's strategy for how AI tools are allowed to access your information.

Shadow AI Fills the Gap

When organizations withhold approved AI tools, employees find their own — often at greater risk than the one leadership feared.

Automation Shifts, Not Cuts

Q David

What has actually happened in workplaces that introduced things like kiosks instead of cashiers?

A Adam

What I have heard is that they did not get rid of people; they gave people different jobs and had them focus on things that required more thinking and strategy rather than simply listening to a customer and inputting information. It was not about not needing those people, it was about needing them to do more valuable work.

That said, I have a lot of empathy for the frontline employee who has an immediate reaction of feeling at risk, especially during a cost-of-living crisis. I have been a dishwasher, a bank teller and a cashier at Target, and I could have had the same reaction. Over-communicating and putting out good news stories about new jobs, new roles and how people are leveling up helps assuage some of that fear.

Q David

How has the role of L&D changed, and where does it need to go?

A Adam

It has changed tremendously. In the frontline world, we went from everybody gathering in an auditorium once a month for a trainer before or after a shift, when people are groggy or exhausted, to something more continuous in most organizations.

Where it needs to go is that L&D has to pinpoint strong KPIs and ROI, tied to things like the frontline manager pipeline. Have we internally developed the next cadre of shift managers and store managers,

From Auditorium to Always-On

Frontline learning has moved from a monthly gathering after a shift to continuous, in-the-flow development.

Tie L&D to a KPI

and what were the outcomes?

A lot of companies run employee engagement surveys, and one of the top items that comes up is that people do not feel they understand their development opportunities or have the right tools. If I were in L&D, I would set a KPI to improve that specific metric by the next survey cycle, and then look for a correlation to improved turnover.

Q David

How do L&D leaders stay connected to what that experience actually feels like?

A Adam

I would ask my frontline colleagues if I could come work with them once every six months and do a day in their shoes, to keep developing that empathy and stay close to what it is really like to walk into one of those roles, where it can feel like your first day again. That connection seems to be missing in a lot of frontline organizations.

I am not saying it is easy. Transforming an organization is incredibly difficult, but the way to help HR carry a bigger voice at the table is by showing a direct linkage to business outcomes.

HRBPs as Allies, Not Enforcers

Reframing HR business partners as true allies of the workforce, not just leadership, starts with auditing how the team actually shows up for frontline employees.

Q David

What advice would you give to leaders trying to reframe the HRBP and L&D roles?

A Adam

Go talk to people in sales enablement, or research what that function

Minutes Are Millions

looks like, and bring those takeaways into the HR world. I would also look closely at the framing and shape of L&D and HRBP roles.

Someone once described HRBPs to me as the hatchet men, and as brutal as that sounds, I think we need to find a way to reframe that role so it feels like a true ally of the workforce, not just of leadership. Take a step back and do an audit of the interactions your team is actually having with the workforce. Ask your frontline team and their managers how many different tools and logins they have to work with, and find a way to consolidate. Minutes are millions on the frontline.

If you are an organization with 10,000 employees and you save 10 minutes per employee, that adds up to millions in savings and there is a ripple effect into retention as employees feel less burdened.

Q David

What final thoughts would you leave with someone interested in the frontline and learning technology space?

Every Path Is Valid

Celebrating employees who climb the ladder should not make those who choose seasonal or steady frontline work feel like they chose wrong.

A Adam

We need more stories about the paths this work can lead to. Restaurant chains that celebrate the success of past employees turn those people into brand ambassadors who still shop there or order from there. The CEO of Walmart started as a cashier, and we need more stories like that.

It is also important to show that path without making employees who do not choose it feel bad. If someone is happy doing seasonal work for three months, that is a completely valid choice and the goal should be to make that a great three months for them.



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