Brandon Hall Group

NovoEd

Upskilling and Reskilling:

Delivering Personalized Learning at Scale

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Executive Summary

As organizations face unprecedented change and volatility, the need to quickly and effectively reskill and upskill their workforce to meet new demands has dramatically increased. However, most companies remain challenged by just how to accomplish this. Brandon Hall Group Research found that only half of companies believe their learning

approach is positioning them to meet future work requirements. Business is moving too fast and the workforce is too busy, distracted and dispersed for traditional training models to be completely effective.

Organizations should completely rethink their approach to learning if they want to

prepare for future work requirements. This environment requires a much more agile learning environment aligned with the goals of the business and the learners. Learning must become much more personalized and contextual if companies want to engage their learners and drive real impact on behaviors and performance.

Is your organization culturally ready to take on personalized learning at scale?

YES 47%

NO 53%
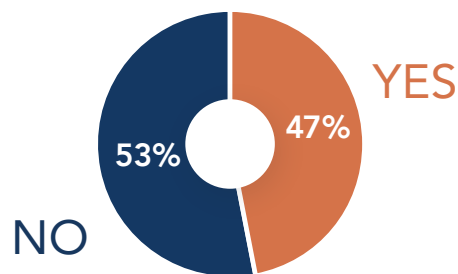
Source: Brandon Hall Group
Upskilling/Reskilling Study, 2021

Organizations that want to put their workforce in a position to win must answer several critical questions, including:

- Is our learning strategy well-aligned with learner and organizational outcomes?

- Are we applying learning and brain-science principles to our learning experience?

- Which tools and technologies will help facilitate personalized learning at scale?

- Are we properly leveraging the role of managers in the learning experience?

- Are our learning development and delivery processes agile enough to keep up with the needs of the business?

This report provides an overview of Brandon Hall Group's Upskilling and Reskilling research, which focuses on delivering personalized learning at scale. Based on quantitative research and scores of interviews, we offer six strategies to deliver personalization and context to create a culture of continuous learning. They are:

- Ensure tight alignment between business goals and learning outcomes.

- Employ neuro- and cognitive-science principles.

- Reward and recognize learning.

- Managers and supervisors play a critical role.

- Adopt more agile learning development processes.

- Leverage the right technologies.

Current State

Organizations find themselves in a challenging spot when it comes to learning's strategic role in the business. On one hand, more than three-quarters of companies say that business leaders rate learning as highly important to the organization. This makes it clear that learning is a priority and a critical success lever. However, only 45% of companies rate themselves highly on how integral learning is to the organization's culture.

This is driven by learning's seeming disconnect with the business. Learning strategies are not properly aligned with business outcomes and the actual process of learning with many employees seems completely divorced from their jobs. Ensuring learning is personal, relatable and easy to access within the flow of work will make it more impactful and sustainable.

The momentum is there, as 82% of companies say they are working on improving their approach to personalized learning. And the push to do so is coming from all sides, as 70% of companies say learners are asking for it and 64% say the business is.

Actions Being Taken to Improve Personalization
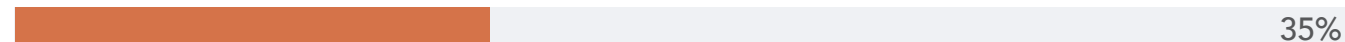
Adopting new learning processes
85%

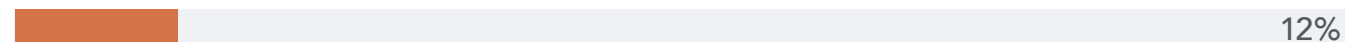Elevating the awareness of need/importance of personalized learning in the organization
72%

Technology evaluations/selections
67%

Retraining learning organization
35%

Hiring new learning professionals
12%

Source: Brandon Hall Group Upskilling/Reskilling Study, 2021

Complexities

Today's learners do not have access to the knowledge and information they need when and where they need it and **feel little to no connection with the learning they are given.**
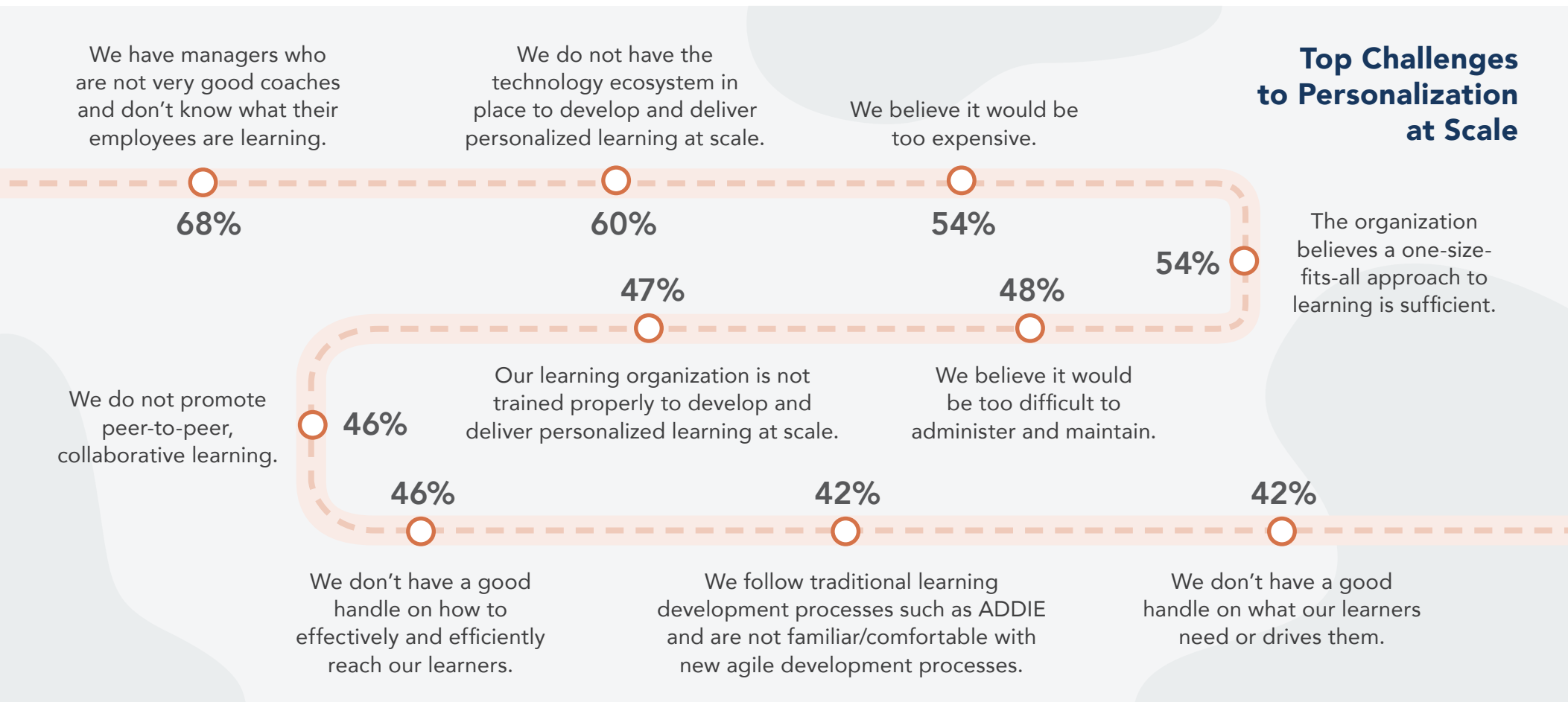

At the core of this issue is a heavy reliance on traditional, formal learning experiences that have never been very contextual. In fact, 54% of companies say the organization believes a one-size-fits-all approach to learning is sufficient. But once companies recognize the need to move away from this model, they face other challenges.

As with any initiative, the biggest things stopping companies from improving the personalization of learning are time and money, each cited by more than 80% of companies. Looking past that, nearly two-thirds of companies say it just isn't a priority. But if learning is as important to business leaders as they say it is, it must become a priority. Other companies say they simply don't have the capabilities to deliver personalized learning at scale, whether their challenge is from technology, skills or both. More than one-quarter say they just don't know how to approach it.

Even companies where personalized learning is a priority, and time money and resources are available, they face many challenges with personalized learning at scale. The thing that companies said was challenging most often was that their managers don't have insights into what their employees are learning. This element is often overlooked and managers can play a huge role in contextual, flow-of-work learning.

As with many initiatives, a lack of technology plays a big role in personalized learning. Delivering learning at scale requires a technology ecosystem to develop and deliver personalized learning. For many companies, this is an entirely new endeavor and it can seem overwhelming. Nearly half say that it is too difficult to administer and maintain, and 47% say the organization's staff are not properly trained to design and deliver personalized learning.

Top Challenges to Personalization at Scale

We have managers who are not very good coaches and don't know what their employees are learning.
68%

We do not have the technology ecosystem in place to develop and deliver personalized learning at scale.
60%

We believe it would be too expensive.
54%

The organization believes a one-size-fits-all approach to learning is sufficient.
54%

Our learning organization is not trained properly to develop and deliver personalized learning at scale.
47%

We believe it would be too difficult to administer and maintain.
48%

We do not promote peer-to-peer, collaborative learning.
46%

We don't have a good handle on how to effectively and efficiently reach our learners.
46%

We follow traditional learning development processes such as ADDIE and are not familiar/comfortable with new agile development processes.
42%

We don't have a good handle on what our learners need or drives them.
42%

Source: Brandon Hall Group Upskilling/Reskilling Study, 2021

Consequences

Because each individual has their own learning needs, goals, preferences, drivers, etc., companies need to create and deliver personalized learning at the scale that the organization requires and expects. Learning leaders who take their cues from consumer-technology experiences and the latest neuroscience research can create more contextualized learning experiences for any size workforce. These experiences drive learner engagement, knowledge retention, behavior change and performance improvements that have a measurable impact on the business.

What kind of impact can personalized learning have? It was cited as important or critical to improving both organizational performance and individual performance by 93% of companies. Another 89% said it was important or critical to improving employee engagement. Engagement and performance are always at the top of any organization's priority list, so it is clear that companies should be leveraging strategies that are aimed at improving them.

Other outcomes heavily influenced by personalized learning include improving the adoption of and engagement in learning, improving the depth and length of learning retention and promoting a learning-focused culture in the organization.

Our research uncovered organizations that believe their learning approach is preparing them for future of work requirements are more likely to find the elements of personalized learning to be of greater importance than those who are less prepared.

Importance of Personalized Learning Elements
(4 or 5 on a 5-point scale)

● Unprepared
● Prepared

A well-developed learning strategy
- 82%
- 98%

Learning needs to highly align with the objectives of the business at every employee level.
- 78%
- 89%

Learning can be rated by learners.
- 68%
- 82%

Learners require frequent feedback by coaches/mentors and managers on their learning progression.
- 67%
- 82%

Learners need to be recognized and rewarded for learning.
- 62%
- 82%

Learning needs to blend multiple modalities in all learning use cases.
- 62%
- 75%

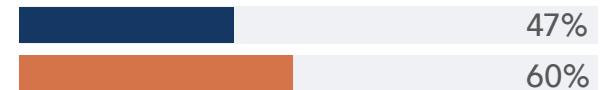**Learning should consider the digital prowess of the learner.**
- 60%
- 77%

Learning should reflect a mastery approach.
- 58%
- 73%

Cadence and frequency of learning opportunities must be customized by learner.
- 53%
- 71%

Learners must be consulted on content delivery requirements.
- 47%
- 60%

Source: Brandon Hall Group Upskilling/Reskilling Study, 2021

Critical Questions

Organizations that want to put their workforce in a position to win should answer several critical questions, including:

- Is our learning strategy well-aligned with learner and organizational outcomes?

- Are we applying learning- and brain-science principles to our learning experience?

- Which tools and technologies will help facilitate personalized learning at scale?

- Are we properly leveraging the role of managers in the learning experience?

- Are our learning development and delivery processes agile enough to keep up with the needs of the business?

- Do we fully understand how artificial intelligence, machine learning and other advanced data processing and analytics can help drive personalized learning?

Brandon Hall Group POV

Six Strategies to Drive Personalized Learning at Scale

1. Ensure close alignment between business goals and learning outcomes.

Personalization cannot exist without alignment — and alignment starts at the top. A well-developed learning strategy is the number-one element in personalized learning, rated as important or critical by 90% of companies. Not far behind that is the need for learning to closely align with the objectives of the business (88%) and the personal and professional goals of learners (84%).

To establish this alignment, companies must include business leaders and other stakeholders in the development of the learning strategy. This helps L&D understand the needs of the business and helps stakeholders understand how learning can respond to those needs.

Additionally, learner feedback must be incorporated into the learning strategy. A company can't hope to meet the needs of learners if they don't know what they are. Having a deep understanding of the various audiences throughout the organization helps create alignment between the business goals and how the workforce will achieve them. Articulating this alignment to learners gives them the critical "what's in it for me" factor that is often missing from learning, which drives engagement.

This exercise of alignment also helps crystallize the metrics of success before the learning programs are developed. Knowing what outcomes are expected and how they are measured not only makes it easier to gauge learning's impact, but can also be used to shape personalized learning experiences.

Organizations where the learning strategy aligns with business and learner objectives are

four times more likely

to say their strategy is effective in achieving business outcomes.

Source: Brandon Hall Group `Upskilling/Reskilling Study, 2021

2. Leverage the right technology.

Any solid learning strategy requires a technology road map laying out how the strategy will be executed. Creating the best learner experience not only requires the right strategy, but also the technology to make it a reality. Sixty percent of companies cite a lack of the right technology ecosystem as highly challenging in their efforts to support personalized learning.
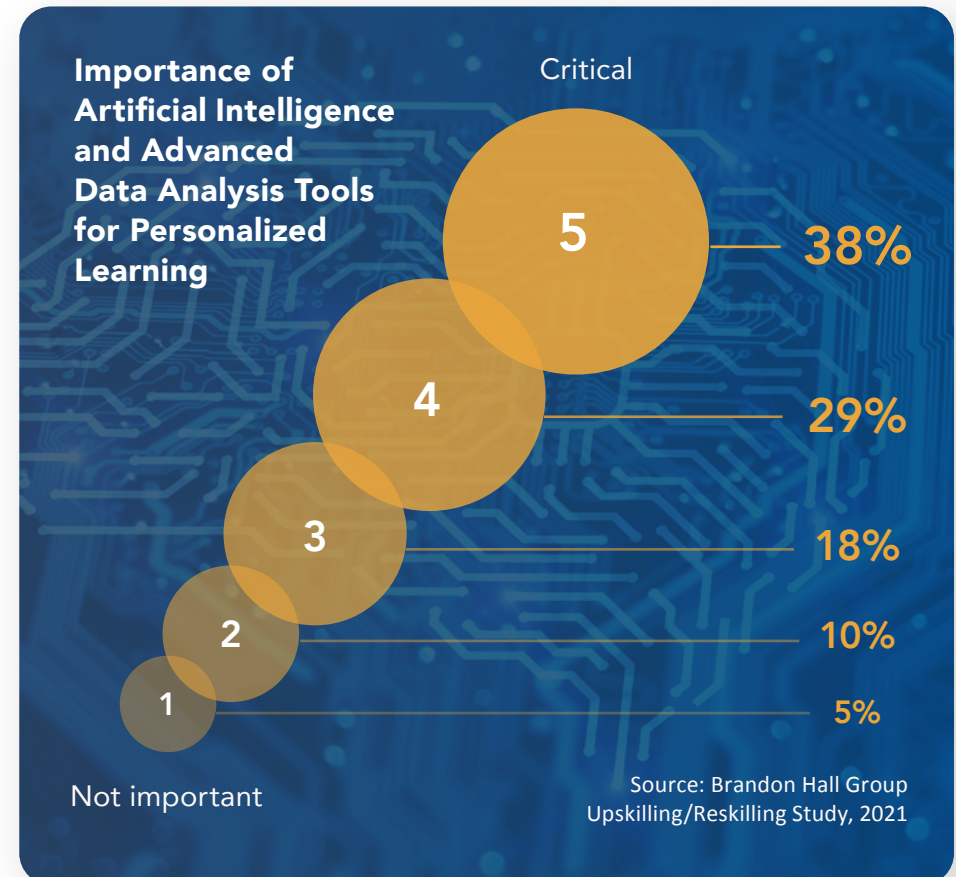
The kind of highly blended, contextual and accessible experiences that are effective requires a great deal of thought regarding technology. A single LMS may not suffice. With an ecosystem that increasingly includes more video, microlearning, simulations and other interactions outside of the class and course, companies must be prepared to do robust due diligence on their technology selections.

Another technology aspect critical to personalization is data; what is captured and how it is used. Consumer-facing technologies use a wide array of detailed information that feed algorithms to deliver completely personalized experiences. The learning function must recognize the need and value of this kind of data as well. Without things such as machine learning powering the technology, personalization is a cumbersome, manual process. This expanded use of data means companies must get a better handle on what data they have and how valid it is. Artificial intelligence is only as intelligent as the data fed into it.

Importance of Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Data Analysis Tools for Personalized Learning

Critical

5 — 38%

4 — 29%

3 — 18%

2 — 10%

1 — 5%

Not important

Source: Brandon Hall Group
Upskilling/Reskilling Study, 2021

3. Employ neuro- and cognitive-science principles.

To be successful, learners need to learn how to learn and solve problems flexibly. These processes are critically important for working memory to succeed. Working memory is necessary for people to recall the information at the moment they need it. Personalized learning helps ingrain the knowledge more deeply so it can be retained, avoiding falling off the Forgetting Curve.

Additionally, learners' brains must focus on learning experiences with dynamic spatial and temporal structures. This is why a series of event-based, formal experiences will never deliver the same results as an approach that includes more frequent, in-the-flow-of-work learning opportunities.
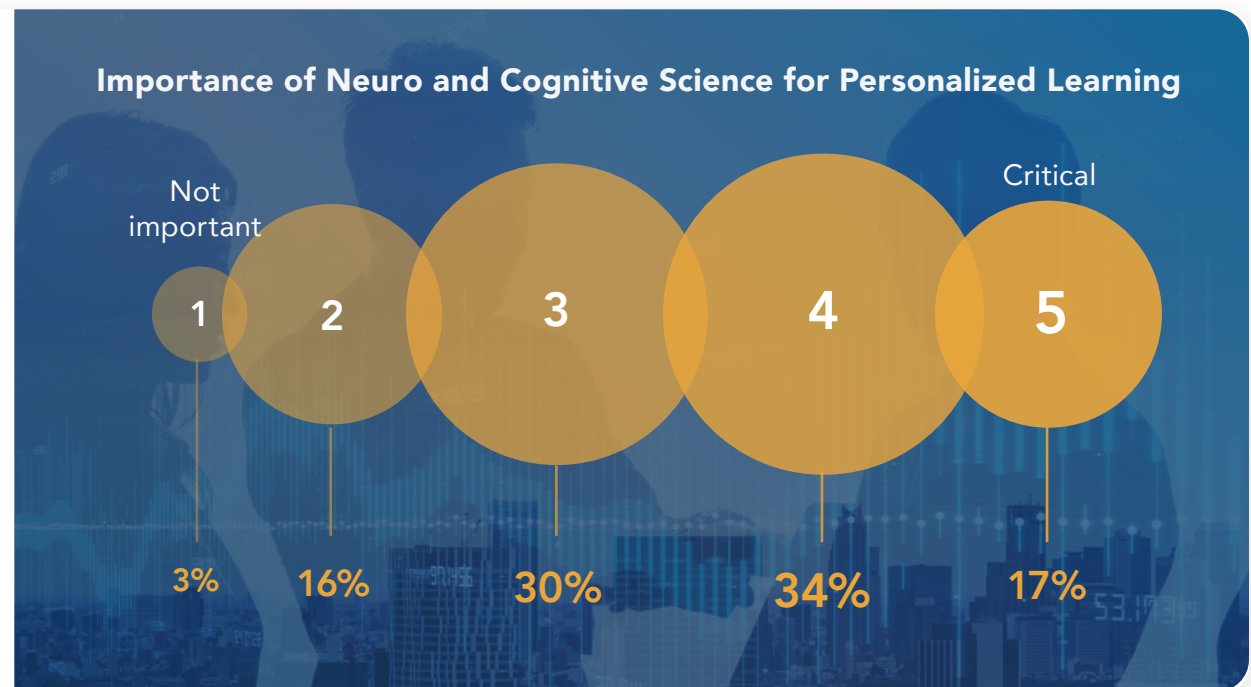
Studies confirm that learners presented with neurocognitive-based learning show far better results with attention, working memory and mood. Spaced learning gives learners an opportunity to internalize and contextualize learning with their jobs and workflows. Additionally, opportunities to practice and reinforce make the learning real and applicable.

80% of companies

who are ready for the future of work consider these principles to be important/critical.

65% of organizations

that are not prepared say the same.

Importance of Neuro and Cognitive Science for Personalized Learning

Not important

Critical

1 — 3%
2 — 16%
3 — 30%
4 — 34%
5 — 17%

Source: Brandon Hall Group Upskilling/Reskilling Study, 2021

4. Adopt more agile learning development processes.

Not only do traditional learning delivery modalities hamper the personalization of learning, so do traditional content development processes. And while its design principles are sound, complete reliance on the ADDIE model of content development makes it difficult to respond to rapidly changing business and learner needs. More agile approaches such as the Successive Approximation Model (SAM) allow for faster, more iterative development cycles.

Companies that are not ready for the future of work are more likely to be following traditional development processes like ADDIE and are **less familiar with newer, more agile processes.**

If your development is collaborative, you benefit from continuous feedback from customers, end-users and stakeholders. If your development is incremental, you don't have to prioritize everything upfront. You just have to decide what the next few priorities are. If you're designing, developing, testing and releasing changes in small increments, you don't have the same level of risk as when you're doing one big project. It's much easier to detect errors and make course corrections as you go.

If you want to bring the power of agile into your learning design and delivery:

- Commit to an agile mindset.

- Adopt an agile process for design and development.

- Focus on developing microlearning instead of courses.

- Find ways to enable the direct contribution of knowledge by those who have it to those who need it.

5. Reward and recognize learning.

In some cases, achieving the outcomes intended by the learning isn't enough of an incentive to get learners engaged and involved. It may make sense to apply some sort of reward or recognition to the learning to tap into learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. These rewards can be compensation-related if the program is critical enough to the organization. But often it is enough to simply recognize learning achievements through things such as points, badges and leader boards. This is often referred to as gamification.

There are several key elements when it comes to gamification. It isn't enough to apply a bunch of points and call it a game. To truly realize its potential, it has to include the things that make it appealing to learners as well as deliver on engagement, retention and results. These elements are at the core of any good game and can be directly applied to learning. What makes games a serious undertaking is the behavioral science and psychology behind them that lead to the achievement of learning outcomes.

This approach to learning has outcomes beyond engagement and retention. Games give learners ownership of their learning as well as the freedom to fail and try again without consequences and expand the palette of learning modalities by adding new dimensions. Gamification can also take engagement with learning a step deeper by inspiring learners to discover their own intrinsic motivators for learning.

82% of companies who are ready for the future of work consider learning recognition important/critical.

62% of organizations that are not prepared say the same.

Source: Brandon Hall Group Upskilling/Reskilling Study, 2021

6. Managers and supervisors need to play a critical role.

One blind spot for most organizations when it comes to learning is the role of the manager. While much time and energy are spent on leadership development and programs to develop good managers, very little thought is given to the role managers play in their employees' learning.

Part of a good coaching strategy should include discussion and feedback around learning programs, not just on performance and workflows. Knowing that their manager is aware and involved in the learning programs makes them more personal and contextual for the learner.

Additionally, as companies strive to ensure learning occurs more often within the flow of work, managers' involvement is critical. No one is better positioned to understand what the flow of work is and how and when learning fits into and supports it than managers. Managers are much closer to the world employees live in day-to-day than the learning function could ever be, so managers become indispensable resources for designing contextual, in-the-flow-of-work learning.

82% of companies
who are ready for the future of work say it is critical managers give frequent feedback.

60% of companies
believe their managers are aware and involved in what their employee are learning

Source: Brandon Hall Group Upskilling/Reskilling Study, 2021

NovoEd POV

1. Skills-based hiring is on the rise.

There will always be tensions between job requirements and workforce skills. But organizational expectations that workforce preparation and ongoing education are the responsibility of schools has perpetuated and exacerbated the so-called skills gaps and shortages. Addressing the situation with more specific skill requirements will not work. There's an opportunity to change this by reimaging roles based on foundational soft skills — such as emotional intelligence and digital literacy — and moving toward more creative and personal approaches to training and upskilling.

2. Organizations should embrace full-fledged capabilities on top of skills.

Skills are tactical things that are taught — such as coding, welding or how to use an accounting program. They can be taught in schools or certificate programs. But capabilities are abilities that can be applied in various contexts, enabling adaptation. In today's fast-moving world, when skills can become obsolete in just a handful of years, developing capabilities is a strategic response in generating outcomes.

3. Corporations should be the new universities.

Cue employer-supported training at scale — but instead of offering up libraries of content that map to specific skills, they are constructed as corporate capability academies, focusing on what organizations need from their employees to thrive. That may be technical skills, but more often it's about context, problem solving, adaptability and skill taxonomies that show how skills relate to each other within the flow of work.

4. In acknowledging organizational responsibility in developing employee capabilities, organizations are preparing for the future.

When cognitive abilities, emotional intelligence capabilities and practical professional skills are bundled together, they create readiness to perform. Thinking about it in this way helps organizations get creative and even personal around skill clustering and opens workplaces up to cross-domain and non-linear career trajectories. Orienting corporate learning around capabilities helps prepare organizations for the future, not just the here-and-now.

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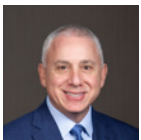
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About Brandon Hall Group

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About NovoEd

Founded at Stanford's Social Algorithms Lab in 2012, NovoEd is a capability-building platform that combines social and collaborative learning to unlock performance readiness at scale.

Through cohort-based experiences, NovoEd taps into collective wisdom, placing each learner at the intersection of perspective, application, and expertise. Large enterprises such as 3M, GE and Nestlé partner with NovoEd to accelerate their critical initiatives, reconnect teams, and achieve rapid alignment through learning that is deeply felt and experienced and swiftly transformed into impact.

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