Brandon Hall Group™

Scaling Cohort-Based Learning: Benefits, Challenges, and the Critical Role of Technology

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NovoEd

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Introduction

Cohort-based learning offers a compelling solution for corporate learning organizations seeking to deliver impactful and business-aligned learning experiences that drive employee performance, engagement, and retention.

Cohort-Based Learning:

Learners progress through an experience together as a group, fostering collaboration, peer-to-peer learning, and a sense of community.

Cohort-based learning enables employees to build connections, share ideas, and learn from colleagues across departments and geographic regions that they may not normally interact with. Cohort-based learning can also align well to the culture of national and multi-national organizations because of the continued popularity of hybrid and remote work.

The collaborative nature of cohort-based learning is highly attractive to organizations that want to build a culture of continuous learning. Its use and effectiveness are on the rise, according to Brandon Hall Group™ Learning Benchmarking research.

→ 89% of organizations say the level of cohort-based and collaborative learning will increase or remain the same over the next year.

→ 69% of organizations surveyed said cohort-based, collaborative learning is highly or moderately effective — compared to 27% when the question was first asked in 2020.

However, leveraging cohort-based learning at scale is challenging, especially for enterprise organizations.

Scaling Cohort-Based Learning

Scale requires expanding both the reach and impact of learning experiences to accommodate participants at different levels of seniority, across different locations, departments, and business units without sacrificing program quality.

Cohort-based learning, while powerful, faces significant challenges in a dispersed work environment. Without technology designed to deploy, manage, and measure such programs, their potential remains untapped. The unique nature of cohort-based learning demands a purpose-driven, behaviorally designed platform to truly thrive.

This eBook delves into the benefits of cohort-based learning, the hurdles of scaling it in modern enterprises, and the indispensable role technology plays in ensuring its success across diverse and distributed workforces.

Limitations of Traditional Forms of Training

Traditional approaches to online learning do not provide everything employees need to thrive. For example:

Virtual instructor-led training allows for real-time interaction and discussion but rarely fosters interactive and interdependent project work.

Self-directed learning gives employees control over the focal areas, content, schedule, and pace of learning. However, it also requires a great deal of motivation and self-direction without support or interaction.

Personalized learning is highly flexible and contextualized, but lacks the social and collaborative element that harnesses the power of a group and fosters learning from peers.

Where Cohort-Based Learning Shines

Peer Learning and Collaboration

Through peer learning and collaboration, learners tap into a collective intelligence that helps them navigate the complexities of the business landscape more effectively. This approach enables learners to gain insights from each other's successes and failures.

By working together, employees can leverage their unique skills, expertise, and backgrounds to develop innovative solutions. Diversity of thought helps organizations approach challenges from multiple angles, increasing the likelihood of finding effective solutions.

Get Feedback On Practice

Practicing and applying new skills is a critical part of effective training. Isolated, individualized practice limits learners' confidence and depth of mastery.

Cohort-Based Learning enables peer feedback on practice, enabling learners to master challenging situations in a safe environment that allows them to experiment and learn from mistakes before applying their skills in higher-stakes situations.

Community and Networking

Cohort-based learning fosters a sense of camaraderie, connection, and belonging. It also encourages active participation as individuals feel more comfortable discussing their challenges and seeking advice from others. These interactions enhance the ability to understand and respect different viewpoints, which can lead to greater — and faster — innovation that organizations require to thrive.

This sense of community encourages employees to share best practices, seek feedback, and engage in reflective discussions, ultimately fostering a culture of learning and growth within the organization.

The Challenges of Scaling

Maintaining engagement:

As the number of learners and cohorts increases, it becomes more difficult to ensure consistent engagement and participation.

Managing logistics:

It is difficult to coordinate schedules, assign groups, and manage communication channels for a large number of learners and cohorts. Ensuring that everyone has access to the right resources, information, and support at the right time requires robust planning and coordination.

Ensuring consistency:

Maintaining consistency in the quality of instruction, content delivery, and learning outcomes across multiple cohorts and facilitators can be difficult.

Facilitating interaction:

Cohort-based learning relies heavily on peer-to-peer interaction and collaboration. With larger numbers of participants, facilitating meaningful interactions, discussions, and group work becomes more complex.

Providing personalized support:

As the scale of the program grows, providing individualized support, feedback, and guidance to each learner becomes more resource-intensive. Ensuring that every participant receives the necessary attention and assistance can strain facilitators and support staff.

Adapting to diverse needs

As the learner population grows, so does the diversity of their backgrounds, prior knowledge, learning styles, and goals. Accommodating these diverse needs and providing relevant, personalized learning experiences at scale can be difficult.

The Critical Role of Technology

Learning leaders must determine how to best scale learning so that it has a significant impact on achieving business goals. Partnering with the right technology provider is crucial to deliver high-impact learning at scale. Platforms designed for cohort-based learning have a significant impact on participation, knowledge transfer, and driving strategic workforce outcomes. Key advantages of such platforms include:

Sustained Engagement:

Automatic badge issuing immediately recognizes learner achievements, boosting motivation and engagement.

Facilitated Interactions:

Enhanced functionality for group interactions and social features increase the sense of community and encourage collaboration.

Scalable Logistics:

Streamlined enrollment and scheduling workflows combine with automatic progress tracking and reporting to streamline program coordination.

Personalized Support:

Powerful automation, including automating email communications, and a modern user interface combine to free up time for personalized support.

Ensure Quality and Consistency:

Comprehensive analytics reveal successes and areas for further iteration, enabling data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement.

Adaptability to Diverse Needs:

Centralized learning paths and flexible learning journeys ensure a consistent and structured learning experience for all cohort members.

An Example of Success: Marriott Transforms Global Leadership With Cohort-Based Learning on NovoEd

NovoEd, a Brandon Hall Group™ Platinum Preferred Provider, transforms learning through an integrated solution for creating, facilitating, and delivering high impact learning experiences. NovoEd works with all content sources, and supports all types of formal learning, including self-paced, hybrid, blended, cohort-based, one-to-one, and team-based learning.

Marriott International uses NovoEd to realize the benefits of cohort-based learning with programs that go beyond content and knowledge checks, integrating peer learning, feedback, practice, and application.

In 2023, Marriott International began a global leadership transformation that will impact all of it's almost 9,000 hotels. After more than tripling its headcount between 2021 and 2023, Marriott anchored its Human Capital Management strategy on three core elements — growing great leaders, investing in associates, and providing access to opportunity.

To achieve its vision of a united, global approach to leadership, Marriott International had to radically transform and scale it's approach to leadership development through a new program portfolio.

Marriott is building this new program portfolio on NovoEd. The first two programs in this new portfolio — Embark and Envision — are for first-time managers and managers with one to two years of experience. These programs are available worldwide in 17 languages.

Anchoring these five-week programs are cohorts of 30-40 learners in a shared course environment. Throughout the program, learners:

◆ Consume content customized for Marriott's leadership learning objectives.

◆ Attend a series of online facilitator-led sessions that are relevant and customized to the learning objectives.

◆ Participate in discussions that enable peer learning.

◆ Complete assignments in partnership with other cohort participants and on the job in their roles. This delivers collaboration, networking, and application.

◆ Receive feedback and support from peers and facilitators.

All of these elements are synthesized and coordinated on the NovoEd platform, including content consumption, assignment submission, live events, discussions, peer interaction, and feedback.

The program achieved:

5x improvement in scale	**8,000** completions within the first seven months of use	**improved outcomes** such as team retention, employee engagement and customer satisfaction

Key Takeaways

Cohort-based learning is a compelling solution for impactful development now and in the future. Given its effectiveness over and above online learning and its scalability, organizations should consider cohort-based learning approach for development moving forward.

The critical challenges and opportunities include:

Cohort-Based Learning Can Enhance Learning Effectiveness: Cohort-based learning fosters a sense of community, enabling employees to learn from each other's experiences, share best practices, and develop innovative solutions through peer-to-peer interactions.

Technology is Crucial for Success: Purpose-built platforms designed for cohort-based learning are essential for managing logistics, facilitating interaction, tracking progress, and providing personalized support at scale. These platforms enhance participation, knowledge transfer, and overall learning outcomes.

Scalability is Challenging but Essential: Scaling cohort-based learning to accommodate a growing number of participants across diverse locations and departments requires careful planning and the right technology to maintain quality and engagement.

Real-World Application Increases Learning Effectiveness: Cohort-based learning allows employees to practice and apply new skills in a safe environment, enhancing critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities that are directly applicable to their work.

Marriott's experience in their leadership transformation demonstrates how the NovoEd platform can enable large organizations to realize the benefits of cohort-based learning, offering a solution that makes cohort-based programs easier to build, scale, and administer.

To learn more about why companies including Marriott, 3M, and Nestlé use NovoEd to go beyond content and knowledge checks to drive performance readiness at scale, visit novoed.com.

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About NovoEd

Founded at Stanford's Social Algorithms Lab in 2012, NovoEd is a capability-building platform that uses social and collaborative learning to drive alignment, performance, and mobility at scale. Through cohort-based experiences, NovoEd taps into collective wisdom, placing each learner at the center of perspective, application, and expertise. Large enterprises such as 3M, GE, and Nestlé partner with NovoEd to accelerate their critical initiatives and reconnect teams through learning that is felt, experienced, and swiftly transformed into impact.

NovoEd

To learn more, please visit: www.novoed.com

About Brandon Hall Group™

With more than 10,000 clients globally and more than 30 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group™ is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

Professional Certifications
Self-paced certification programs. Virtual group sessions for companies. In-person conferences and summits.

Membership
Individual and Enterprise Membership options: Includes research assets, advisory support, a client success plan and more.

SOME WAYS WE CAN HELP

Advisory Offerings
Custom research projects, including surveys, focus group interviews and organizational needs assessments for transformation, technology selection and strategy.

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Three annual programs recognize the best organizations that have successfully deployed programs to achieve measurable results.

ENTERPRISE EXCELLENCE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Recognizes the best HCM programs that transform their organization and achieves breakthrough results. This designation is a step above the HCM Excellence Awards® which focuses on one program within a company. Enterprise Excellence is a hybrid of award winners who are also members.

SMARTCHOICE® PREFERRED PROVIDER PROGRAM

Uniquely places HCM service and technology companies at the top of organizations' consideration list of vendors. It adds an unmatched level of credibility based on BHG's thirty-plus years of experience in evaluating and selecting the best solution providers for leading organizations around the world.

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Provides comprehensive marketing solutions for human capital management solution providers. We offer strategic services to establish a strong foundation for your marketing efforts.