# The Future of the Learning Experience

2022
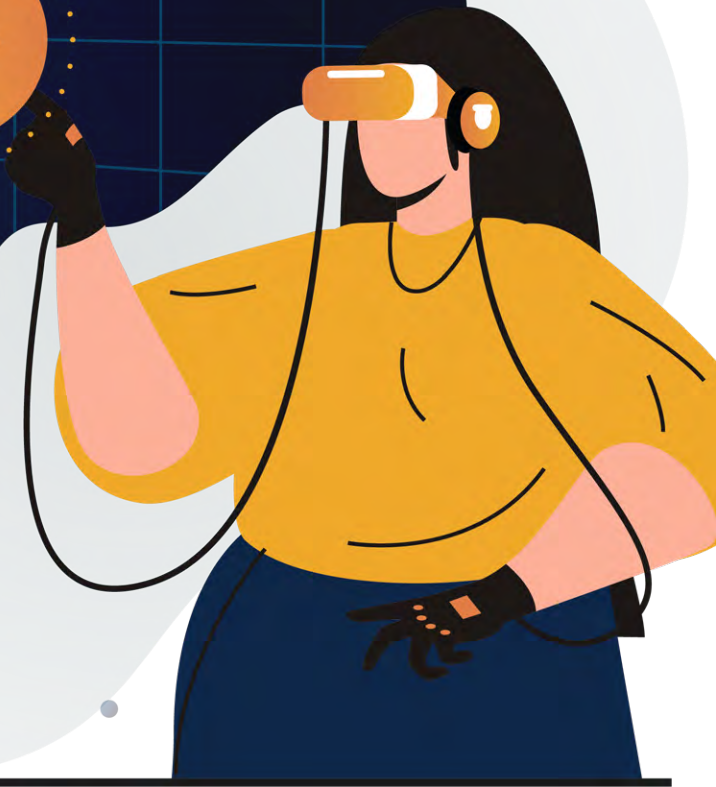
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# Executive Summary

The learner experience is somewhat of an enigma for most organizations — somewhat akin to engagement where they know they want it but they're not sure exactly what it is and how to get it. For most, a learner-centric learning environment consists of an easy-to-click user interface and good smile-sheet scores. But that is really just a tiny piece of the overall experience.

It's a lack of alignment and no connection or contextualization for the learner that causes the biggest problem and results in outcomes not being met (if they are able to be measured in the first place). Learning ends up feeling disjointed and separate from the job, keeping people from being actively engaged in their development. Additionally, learners haven't been given enough opportunities to practice and apply the skills they are supposed to be developing. Learners can't see how the learning relates to them, their job, or their goals. This becomes seen as a lack of development opportunities — a leading cause of voluntary turnover among younger workers.

This is all occurring at a time when learning is being recognized as a critical strategic function for the business, whether it is upskilling or reskilling employees, building high-performance sales teams, or engaging customers. In Brandon Hall Group's *Transforming Learning and Development for the Future of Work Study*,

The pandemic has also put the learner experience into sharp focus. Companies must be able to create and deliver compelling, engaging learning experiences that are meaningful to both the business and the learners and drive performance outcomes. This eBook looks at some of the trends that will shape the learning experience of the future.

## 62%

of companies said that business leaders believe L&D is either **highly important or critical** to the success of the business.

# Current State

The tools and technologies an organization chooses for learning in large part determine the kind of learning experience learners will have. Of course, without the right learning strategy, a commitment to learning as an organizational priority, or alignment between learning and the business, technology can't do much. But by choosing the right set of tools, companies can create experiences that are more aligned with the ways in which people work and learn and begin to drive real results.

The pandemic forced organizations to reassess their entire approach to learning technology – creating or recreating brand-new technology ecosystems to meet the needs of a dynamically shifting workforce. A wave of attrition, disengagement, and widening skills gaps has put an enormous amount of pressure on organizations to select the right technologies to execute a modern, agile learning strategy. This is critical if companies want

to create a learning culture that can scale across the entire organization, as well as beyond with partners, resellers, and customers. For nearly half of companies, however, the tools they have are simply not getting the job done.

**45%**
Inadequate

**40%**
Meets our needs

**15%**
Advanced

Source: Brandon Hall Group, Building the Next Generation Learning Technology Ecosystem

Learning and Development teams want tools that are easier to use for both learners and admins. They want tools that provide more learning opportunities outside the class and the course. They need technologies that give learners more autonomy in a personalized learning journey. They also want tools that give them more reporting and analytics horsepower. Getting it right requires diligence and a strong understanding of what learners need and what the business needs as well.

An effective modern learning ecosystem will employ multiple technologies that work well together – if not seamlessly – to provide a frictionless experience for learners. The various tools must also be able to share data for Learning and Development teams to derive their full value. There is no single technology framework that will work for all organizations. In any scenario, the technology selections an organization makes must be rooted in real-life use cases and leveraged to achieve specific outcomes.
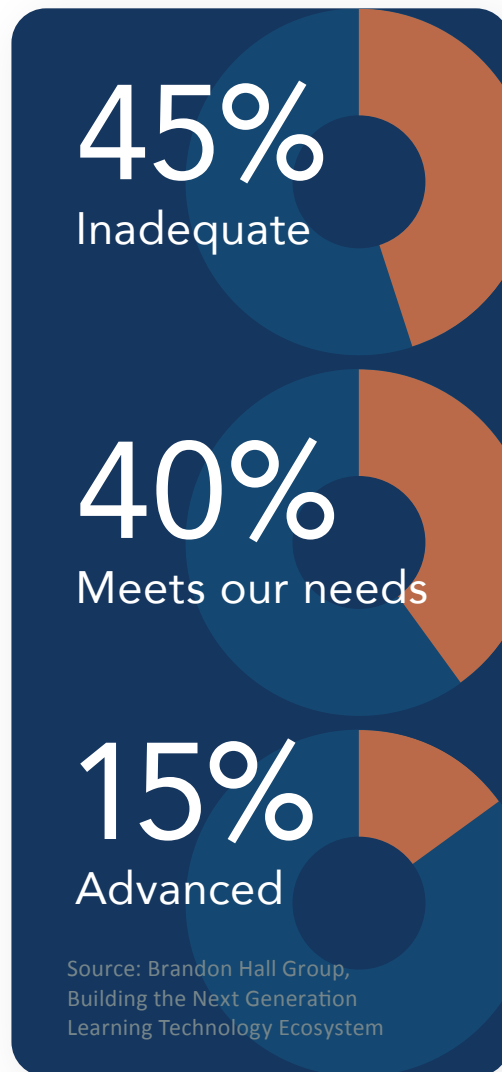
# Emerging Trends

**1** **Moving from Learning to Experience**

Knowing that Learning & Development must be looked at as a strategic endeavor, organizations can then use this lens when focusing their L&D efforts. Organizations have placed a premium on upskilling and reskilling their workforce in the face of attrition and skills gaps. But traditional approaches to learning are not effectively delivering those skills, and they are not doing it at a speed that can keep pace with the business. The kinds of skills companies need for the future, like emotional intelligence, critical thinking, innovation, and adaptability are not well served by classes and courses alone. While an instructor-led class can introduce and expand on these concepts, people need to put them to work to really build them.

Brandon Hall Group's research found that companies where learning is having a strong positive impact on outcomes like time to proficiency, employee engagement, and individual performance are much more likely to provide opportunities to practice and apply knowledge than those companies where learning is not so impactful.

## What Is Provided to Learners?

- ● Learning strong positive impact on outcomes
- ● Learning weak positive impact on outcomes

**71%**
**35%**
A method to reinforce learning concepts

**82%**
**54%**
Opportunities to practice/ apply knowledge
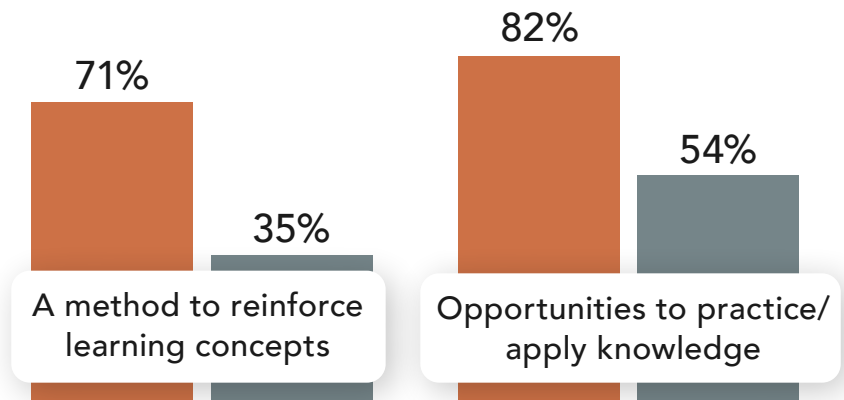
Source: Brandon Hall Group, Upskilling & Reskilling Study
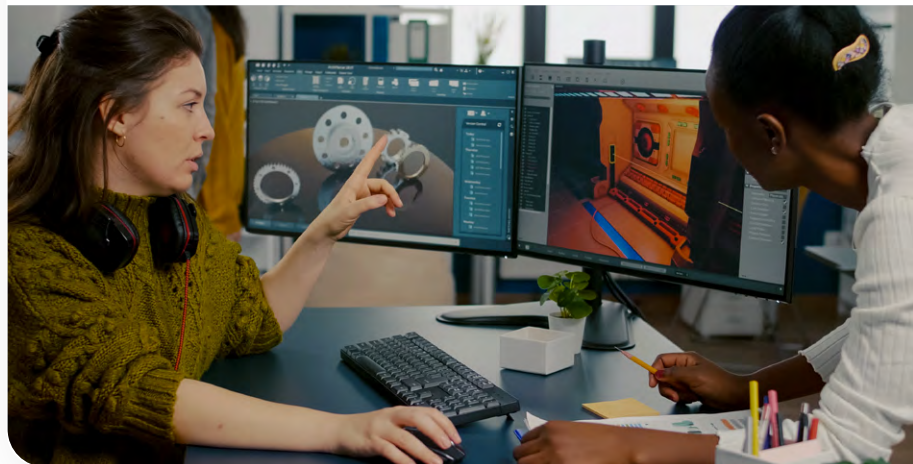
To transform learning into doing, organizations are leveraging more tools that provide experiential learning.

## Immersive simulations, virtual reality, and augmented reality
are seeing increasing adoption rates as companies begin to recognize their practical applications for learning.

Employees can practice new skills and behaviors in a no-consequence environment while receiving, feedback, coaching, and remediation.

Another approach companies are using to connect with learners is a

more targeted use of mobile tools. As people continue to experience more of their world via their mobile devices, it makes sense to bring learning to that environment. Organizations need to bring learning closer to the moment of need, and mobile access is an obvious choice. It is not the answer for everything, however. Understanding the needs of the learning audience and the intended learning outcomes will help determine if it's the right approach.

Mobile is just one element in the move toward more "in-the-flow-or-work learning." Traditional learning modalities are often seen as interruptions and distractions when people want to get their jobs done. Leveraging tools that can put learning resources into people's hands while they are actively working is critical.
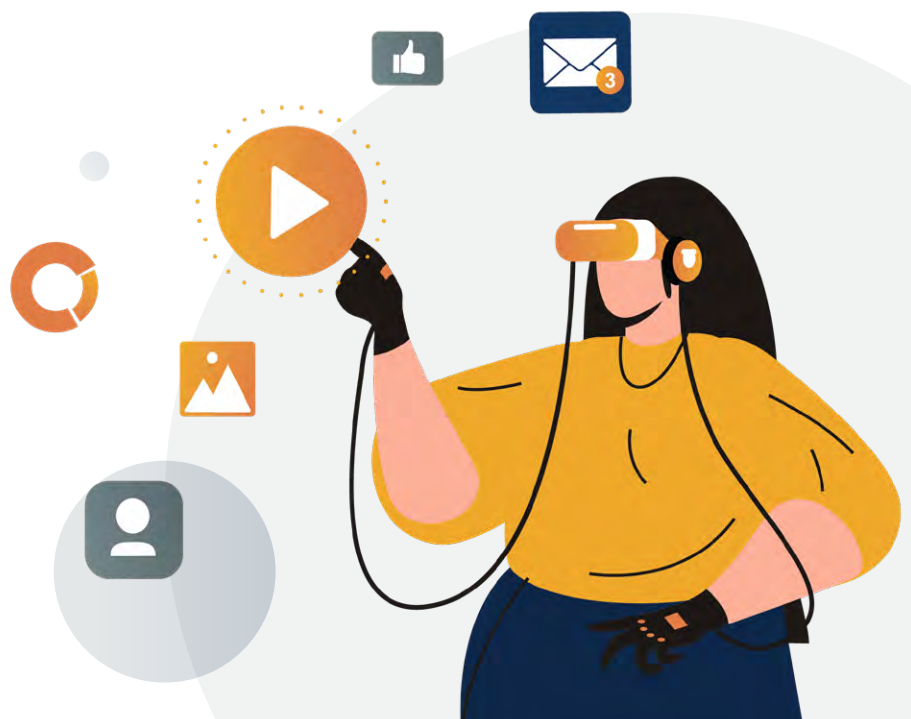
## 2  The Evolution of Content Design and Deployment

These new learning experiences need to originate from somewhere, so Learning and Development teams need to rethink their entire learning content strategy as well. Not only do traditional learning delivery modalities hamper the personalization of learning, but 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. This shift is not just for the benefit of developers and designers. Business leaders should also be championing this approach as it means their teams can be more agile, engaging with just-in-time learning that gives them what they need. This agile approach also provides more opportunities for performance measurement tied to specific learning elements as well.

Companies that say they 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.

Learning & Development teams have to break out of the mindset that every piece of learning content must be highly polished and perfected before it ever reaches a single learner. Today's business environment requires knowledge and information to be delivered more quickly, even if it means a perceived decline in quality. The reality is that people are quite accustomed to watching self-shot videos or reading informally shared information. If you want to bring the power of agile into your learning design and delivery:
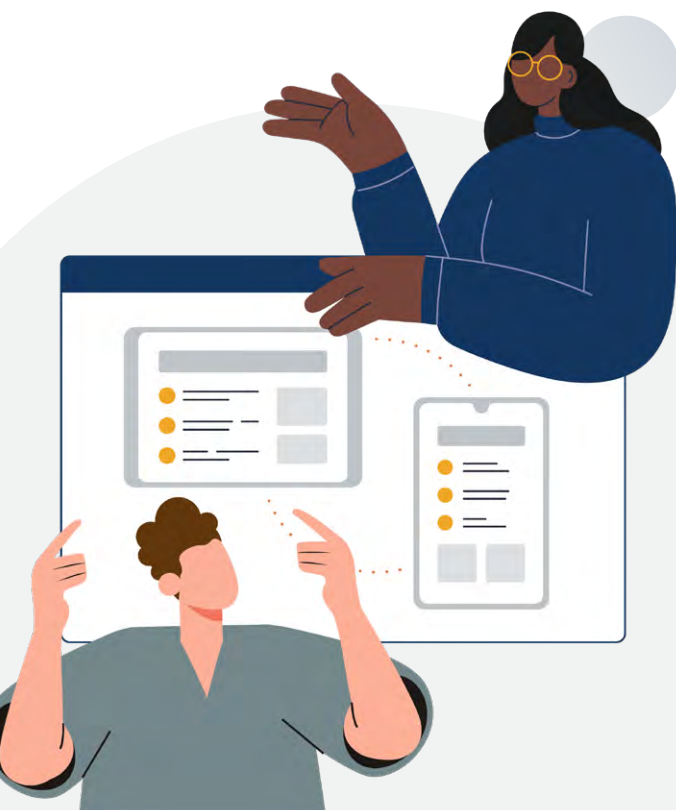
**Commit to an agile mindset**

**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**

This is critical as more content is being delivered outside of the traditional LMS. Learners are accessing content via learning experience platforms (LXPs), video platforms, microlearning tools, and much more. These tools don't need giant SCORM packages, they need rapid, relevant content. This does not mean a completely ad-hoc approach to learning, either. By building guided learning journeys and learning paths within an LXP, companies can leverage microlearning within structured learning programs. This allows microlearning to effectively reinforce learning within larger the context of larger concepts.

**3** **Personalization of Learning**

The common theme among the learning experience trends is that in today's environment, business is moving fast and the workforce is too busy, distracted, and geographically dispersed for a one-size-fits-all approach. Organizations expect their people to interact with learning resources weekly, daily or even multiple times a day to perform their jobs well. A library of courses and a schedule of classes cannot accomplish this. Ensuring learning is personal, relatable, and easy to access within the flow of work will make it more impactful and sustainable. At its core, personalized learning is the process of providing learning experiences based on an employee's professional and personal needs and interests; and making that learning accessible in a venue and time frame that is best for the employee.

In Brandon Hall Group's *Upskilling & Reskilling Study,*

# 82%

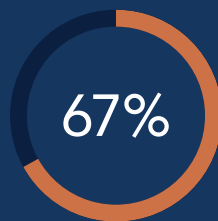of companies said they are working on improving their approach to personalized learning.

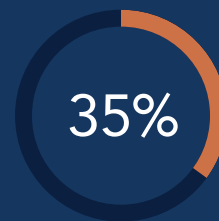## Actions Being Taken to Improve Personalization
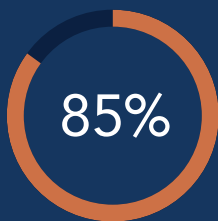
**85%**
Adopting new learning processes

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

**67%**
Technology evaluations/ selections

**35%**
Retraining learning organization

**12%**
Hiring new learning professionals

Source: Brandon Hall Group, Upskilling & Reskilling Study

People expect a certain degree of **personalization** within every technology-related interaction they have — and not just younger generations.

It only makes sense that the learning experience is personalized as well. The busier and more distracted people get, the more they need their interactions to be as targeted and relevant as possible. Personalization is not about the actual user interface of the technology. While there should be an esthetically pleasing and easy-to-navigate interface, what learners really want is to know "what's in it for me?" If a company can show learners how a learning activity is relevant to them, their role, their goals, and the overall needs of the business, they will have buy-in and engagement before the learning even begins.

**4**   ## Integrating Learning with the Business

With these new tools and modalities being adopted, the array of technology L&D teams are leveraging for their programs is growing increasingly complex. When you add to that the need for learning to tap into a host of other technologies throughout the business, it can be an integration nightmare.

Brandon Hall Group's study *Building the Next Generation Learning Technology Ecosystem* finds that

# 40%

of companies consider poor integration a leading reason to change learning technologies.
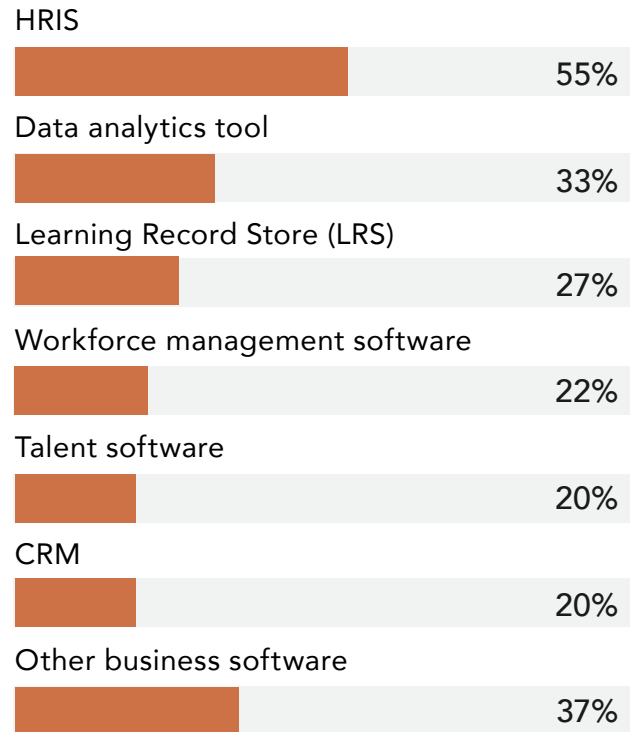
The real focus of technology integration has to go beyond just learning, though. If Learning & Development truly wants to be a strategic part of the business, its technologies will have to integrate with other systems throughout the organization. It is critical to understand all of the technological touch points that exist for learning platforms and build a strategy for insuring integrations are properly prioritized, executed, and managed. As companies continue to rely more heavily on data to make decisions, integrations become a key part of being able to leverage data across systems to achieve real, actionable insights.

These integrations drive multiple outcomes. They are critical for analyzing data from other parts of the business to measure learning's impact. Without access to data from these other systems, it is incredibly difficult for learning systems to make recommendations or become more personalized. Integrations are also a big part of flow-of-work learning. For instance, many sales teams do the vast majority of their work in a tool like Salesforce. Rather than pull them out of that environment to participate in learning programs, it makes more sense for both the sales teams and the business to give them what they need where they are.



**Which of the following systems integrate with your learning technology ecosystem?**

HRIS
55%

Data analytics tool
33%

Learning Record Store (LRS)
27%

Workforce management software
22%

Talent software
20%

CRM
20%

Other business software
37%

Source: Brandon Hall Group, Building the Next Generation Learning Technology Ecosystem

The pandemic also accelerated the need to integrate learning into meeting tools like Zoom and Teams. People spend a lot of time in these environments collaborating, so rather than have them log into a separate environment for learning, delivering classes in more familiar environments makes it easier for learners. Having learning technology integrate with meeting tools ensures seamless delivery and accurate tracking and reporting.

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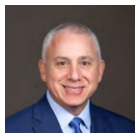
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