Brandon Hall Group™

The Tech-Enabled Artisan's Approach to Learning Design:

Crafting Excellence at Scale

RESEARCH BRIEF
2025

WE LEARN

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Introduction

Learning and development (L&D) teams find themselves in a uniquely challenging situation: rapidly scale learning programs to meet increasing demands while maintaining the quality that drives real performance improvement and, ultimately, business impact.

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation technologies creates opportunities and potential pitfalls for L&D professionals seeking to expand their impact.

Organizations Projecting High Impact for AI in HR in 2025

Source: Brandon Hall Group™ study, HR Outlook 2025

This research summary, a collaboration between Brandon Hall Group™ and WeLearn Learning Services, examines how organizations can harness the power of modern technology while preserving the craftsmanship that makes learning experiences truly transformative. We'll explore the delicate balance between scaling learning programs and maintaining the quality that ensures business results.

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The Real Problem with AI in Learning

The story of L&D mirrors the broader narrative of the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath. Just as mass production transformed manufacturing in the early 20th century, automated content creation and AI-driven development promise to revolutionize how we create and deliver learning experiences. However, this transformation brings with it a crucial question: Are we sacrificing quality for quantity?

> **"Just have ChatGPT do it!"**
> - Pretty Much Everyone These Days

AI tools have already proven they can radically shorten the time needed to perform important but repetitive tasks (e.g., transcription, creating quizzes, and basic learning personalization). AI can even perform more complex tasks like writing detailed course materials. But when everyone (L&D, the C-suite, your grandmother's dog, everyone!) knows AI can write something in 15 minutes, they start to expect everything in 15 minutes. Even when what's being written is derivative, shallow and boring for the learner.

This mindset leads to a prolific output of mediocre learning sludge that actively hurts employee engagement, performance and business outcomes.

However, this isn't a Luddite's manifesto against technology. Just as modern manufacturing has found ways to combine automation with craftsmanship – think of Tesla's highly automated yet precisely engineered vehicles – L&D has the opportunity to leverage technology while maintaining high standards of quality and effectiveness.

Benefits Identified from Incorporating AI Technology

Source: Brandon Hall Group™, The Learning Revolution

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The key lies in understanding that technology should enhance rather than replace human expertise. When properly implemented, AI and automation tools can:

- Streamline routine tasks, freeing up time for creative design
- Enhance personalization through data-driven insights
- Scale delivery while maintaining consistency
- Improve accessibility and reach
- Provide valuable analytics for continuous improvement

The Cost of Mediocrity

The true cost of sacrificing quality for quantity in learning programs extends far beyond the immediate savings in development time and resources. Like a building constructed on a weak foundation, learning programs that lack human insight, craftsmanship and strategic alignment eventually show their flaws – often at the worst possible moments.

Consider the ripple effects of a poorly designed compliance training program. While it might check the box for completion, its failure to engage learners and drive behavior change could result in:

- Increased risk of compliance violations
- Higher costs for remedial training
- Lost productivity due to repeated learning requirements
- Decreased trust in L&D initiatives
- Potential legal or regulatory consequences

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Don't discount the hidden costs of mediocre learning:

Diminished Learner Engagement

- Lower completion rates
- Reduced voluntary participation in future programs
- Decreased application of learning to job roles
- Negative word-of-mouth affecting a program's reputation

Reduced Business Impact

- Failure to meet performance improvement goals
- Missed opportunities for innovation and growth
- Lower return on learning investment
- Decreased stakeholder confidence in L&D initiatives

Reduced Business Impact

- Skills gaps remaining unfilled
- Reduced competitive advantage
- Higher turnover due to inadequate development
- Increased recruitment costs for external talent

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5 Elements of Learning Excellence

Just as a master artisan relies on fundamental principles and tools to create exceptional work, L&D professionals need a structured approach to design and develop high-quality learning experiences. From our research, we have drawn five essential pillars that support excellence in learning design, each building upon the others to create a framework for success.

1 Strategic Foundation: Building with Purpose

The first pillar emphasizes the crucial importance of proper groundwork before any development begins. Like an architect who wouldn't dream of designing a structure without understanding the site conditions and building requirements, learning professionals must begin with a thorough understanding of their context and objectives.

52%

of learning functions are well-positioned to support the business's performance goals.

Source: Brandon Hall Group™ study, Think Like a CEO: How Learning Drives Business Impact

This pillar typically includes the following elements:

- Comprehensive needs analysis that goes beyond surface-level requests
- Deep understanding of business objectives and success metrics
- Thorough learner persona development
- Stakeholder alignment and buy-in
- Clear definition of success metrics and ROI expectations

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2 Beauty as Craft: The Art of Learning Design

It doesn't matter how prolific you are if no one wants to consume what you produce. Your programs need to capture and maintain learner attention while driving meaningful interaction with the content. This goes beyond simple interactivity to create genuine engagement that promotes learning transfer.

Visual Design Excellence
- Purposeful aesthetic choices
- Brand alignment
- Visual hierarchy
- Cognitive load management

Meaningful Interaction
- Purpose-driven activities
- Real-world application
- Feedback mechanisms
- Social learning elements

User Experience
- Intuitive navigation
- Clear learning paths
- Accessibility considerations
- Mobile optimization

3 The Power of Narrative in Learning

Story-driven learning creates emotional connections that enhance retention and application. The third pillar recognizes the power of narrative in creating memorable and impactful learning experiences.

Narrative Structure
- Clear learning journey
- Character development
- Conflict and resolution
- Emotional engagement

Context Integration
- Industry-specific scenarios
- Role-relevant challenges
- Real-world applications
- Cultural considerations

Memory Hooks
- Memorable characters
- Emotional resonance
- Personal relevance
- Pattern recognition

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4 Universal Design: Learning for All

The more barriers you can remove for learners, the more of an impact your programs will have. Customizing and personalizing learning is easier than ever (thanks in large part to AI and other technological innovations). This ensures that learning experiences are accessible and effective for all learners, regardless of their background, abilities, or learning context.

Accessibility
- Technical standards compliance
- Multiple format options
- Adaptive technologies
- Universal design principles

Cultural Competence
- Global relevance
- Cultural sensitivity
- Language considerations
- Local context adaptation

Learning Flexibility
- Multiple learning paths
- Varied assessment options
- Diverse content formats
- Adaptive difficulty

5 The Artisanal Learning Mindset

One thing that AI cannot provide is human insight and judgment. L&D professionals must provide a critical eye throughout the development process. It's important to focus on continuous quality assurance and improvement throughout the learning design process. Critical components include:

Quality Standards
- Design guidelines
- Development benchmarks
- Review processes
- Performance metrics

Continuous Improvement
- Feedback loops
- Iterative development
- Performance monitoring
- Impact assessment

Quality Control
- Review protocols
- Testing procedures
- Validation processes
- Standards compliance

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AI as a Tool: Leveraging Technology Without Losing Touch

The relationship between master artisans and their tools has always been one of mutual enhancement rather than replacement. A master woodworker doesn't view power tools as a threat to their craft but as a means to achieve their vision more efficiently. Similarly, L&D professionals should view AI and automation technologies as tools that amplify rather than replace human expertise.

Technology Integration

- AI-assisted content development
- Automated personalization
- Data-driven insights
- Adaptive learning paths

Human Oversight

- Quality control
- Creative direction
- Strategic alignment
- Stakeholder management

Process Optimization

- Workflow automation
- Resource allocation
- Timeline management
- Quality assurance

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Conclusion: Designing the Future of Learning

The future of L&D lies not in choosing between automation and quality, but in thoughtfully combining both to create learning experiences that are both efficient to produce and effective in driving performance. By maintaining high standards while embracing innovative tools, organizations can create learning programs that truly transform performance and deliver lasting business impact.

The organizations that thrive will be those that successfully combine the precision and scale of modern technology with the timeless principles of learning craftsmanship.

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Our team of passionate experts is at the forefront of learning and development, continuously pushing boundaries and embracing the latest trends and technologies.

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Holistic Approach

We take a comprehensive view of learning, ensuring that every aspect of your strategy is cohesive, effective, and forward-thinking.

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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.

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