



# Learner Engagement and Performance:

From Correlation to Causation

## Research Brief

**fuse**



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## Current State

Learners are completing learning programs — but that’s not enough. The learning function is very good at moving people through learning and keeping up completion rates but are these learners engaged enough to change their behavior and apply new skills? Are they engaged enough to keep coming back to continuously grow and develop? Organizations may not be doing enough to engage their learners and meet their needs.

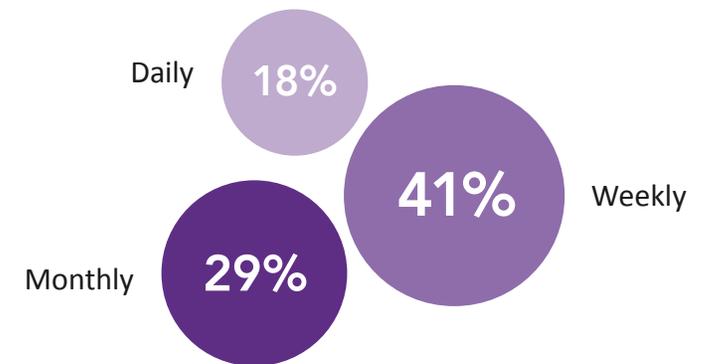
### The Modern Employee:

- ✓ Wants to find answers quickly
- ✓ Expects on-demand, personalized experiences
- ✓ Prefers self-paced learning; what they want when they need it
- ✓ Needs it all to be digestible: informal, social, mobile

Brandon Hall Group’s *Learning Strategy Survey* found that nearly two-thirds of organizations say that people need to interact at least weekly with learning resources to be effective at their jobs. In an environment where all learning

is course-based, that is impossible. Companies cannot expect their workforce to attend classes or finish courses every week, let alone every day. More needs to be done to bring learning to the learners.

**How often would you expect employees to interact with learning resources to be effective at their jobs?**

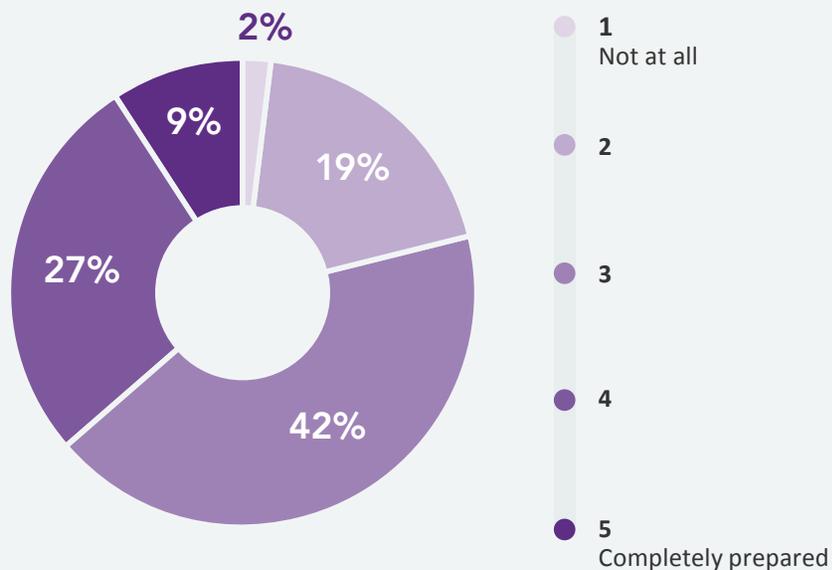


This focus on course-centric learning lacks a connection with business and performance outcomes. It’s an approach that can neither keep pace with the speed of change now occurring in the corporate world, nor provide adequate performance support.

## Situational Analysis

At the same time, organizations are behind the eight-ball when it comes to skilling their employees. Only about one-third believe they are well prepared to develop the future skills they will need.

**To what degree is your organization prepared to develop the skills that will be required by the business in the near future?**



Source: Brandon Hall Group, Learning Strategy Study

It's not about predicting with 100% accuracy what skills your employees will need in the future, though. It's about enabling organizational learning culture that values and rewards continuous learning. Individuals should be prepared to upskill and reskill quickly and the organization must be able to pivot and adapt to whatever the future may hold.

By moving from a course-centric design strategy, companies can be better prepared to meet the more dynamic and

ever-changing needs of the business, regardless of the skills that may be required. It's akin to the difference between selling cars 10 years ago to selling them today. A decade ago, not much changed in cars year to year, so salespeople could memorize and practice what they needed to know. Now, modern cars not only change dramatically year to year, but technology also enables them to change during the model year with firmware and software updates. The old approach to learning about them can't keep up.



But organizations are saddled with outmoded technology that can present multiple challenges:

- **A current LMS that is very hard to maintain, requires labor-intensive workarounds**
- **A lack of efficiency and accuracy**
- **A poor learning experience hindering adoption**
- **Little to no voluntary courses are taken even if the company heavily promotes continuous learning**
- **Systems are built for formal training, not social or experiential learning**

For too many organizations, the definition of continuous learning is simply a continuous stream of compulsory, check-the-box training. There's not a lot of voluntary exploration, self-paced development because the frameworks and the tools that most organizations have in place just aren't built to do these things.

## Consequences

People are accustomed to quickly finding information and answering questions via Google and YouTube. **Learning at work needs to emulate this experience.**



An inability to quickly find accurate answers impedes the possibility of creating the habit of continuous learning. We live in a time where there simply is no “not knowing.” If someone does not have the answer to a question, the information is seconds away with the click of a mouse or the touch of a screen. If information is

not readily available from a trusted source, employees will seek it out elsewhere.

Additionally, a poor learner experience separates the learning from the work and the learner from the learning. The act of engaging with learning is perceived as an event outside the scope of the job and often

disruptive to it. Without a connection to skills, competencies or business needs, learning lives in a vacuum, serving only its own ends. It can be difficult to connect learners with what they need to do their job and develop.

When learners are presented with bad user experiences

that are difficult to navigate, present too many options, or create information overload, most will leave the platform without having derived the all-important value that prompts them to return. People are busier and more distracted than ever. They can't spend time hunting for the right information across multiple platforms.

## Critical Questions

**Organizations seeking to improve learner engagement to drive performance outcomes must address these key issues:**

- How do we develop a learning strategy that focuses on the learner?
- What do learners need from learning programs to be engaged and successful?
- What must be included in learning programs to ensure an effective experience?
- Which tools and technologies should organizations leverage as part of the learner experience?

## Brandon Hall Group POV

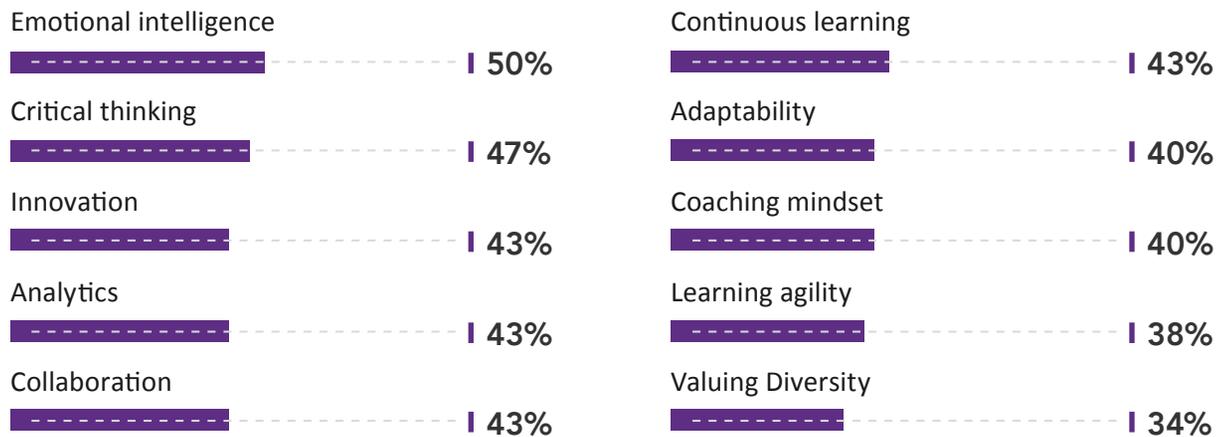
What is the right approach? There isn't a single solution that fits every organization but there are several consistent truths. Chief among them is that people need and want access to information. In an environment where employees require connections to learning resources daily, weekly or even

multiple times a day, a static, event-based training and learning strategy does not suffice.

In fact, when we look at the skills that organizations are most interested in developing, many of them align precisely with this kind of learning environment:

If organizations expect people to develop skills such as continuous learning and learning agility, why don't they provide them the tools to do this? It's counterintuitive to expect people to achieve these outcomes if you're not also using them as inputs. And while some people may innately possess these qualities — and companies try to hire for them — if they are not providing an environment that's set up to develop these skills, they won't grow and may even deteriorate.

### In the age of digital transformation, what new competencies and skills are you developing or targeting for development to keep employees ahead of the curve?



Source: Brandon Hall Group, Skills & Competencies Survey



## Focus on Continuous Learning

To foster and sustain a continuous-learning mindset, organizations must tap into people's natural inclination to learn. Traditional onboarding and learning programs often run counter to this mindset, making it nearly impossible to build it back up. There are two fundamental parts to this:



### ACQUISITION Get learners bought in

- Having leadership and line management role-model adoption of the platform can help pave the way.
- Run campaigns to generate awareness and interest.
- Start early. Continuous learning habits can be built by applying engagement strategies in the onboarding stage.



### EXPERIENCE Keep them coming back

- Maintain a steady cadence of new content to keep the experience fresh.
- Make recommendations for what they should look at next.
- Ensure there is little to no friction caused by technology that prevents learners from what they need/want to know.
- Leverage notifications and nudges to alert learners of new opportunities.

Despite what recommendations or nudges might suggest, the strategy cannot be solely about pushing people to complete a course. If learners only get pushed and do not decide on their own to pull, something's wrong with the environment.



The data tells us that when an organization gets the whole picture right — the platform, the culture, the content and the design of the whole environment — **performance goes up.**

It is critical to have leaders buy into the culture and ensure technology is an enabler, not a barrier.



## Give Learners What They Need to Be Successful

Far too often, organizations believe the connection between employees and learning programs is implicit. They assume that because learning is offered to employees, it is valuable by definition. In reality, people need to know the “what’s in it for me” for the experience to be meaningful.

This means laying out the expected goals and outcomes so learners can contextualize what they will experience. Providing a link between the learning and personal objectives gives another level of context.

Learners also should be able to take ownership in their learning. Personalized learning programs that allow for progress-tracking can help, as well as robust search capabilities that allow learners to search, explore and discover.

Using what the organization knows about the learner, including role, learning history and preferences, it is possible to deliver specific recommendations to each learner. This creates a personalized experience that drives home their connection to learning.

## Design Programs with the Learner in Mind

There are four critical elements in creating an engaging learning environment that can drive performance:



**Created and curated knowledge**



**Context**



**Practice and feedback**



**Flow-of-work learning**

Learners must have opportunities to practice and apply their new skills and knowledge. Ensuring these are built into learning programs will enable people to perform better in their roles. These opportunities can also be used as refreshers and reinforcement to sustain knowledge retention and improve performance.

Learner feedback is also a key element of an effective learner environment. Likewise giving learners the opportunity and mechanisms to provide feedback themselves should

also be an integral aspect of the learner experience.

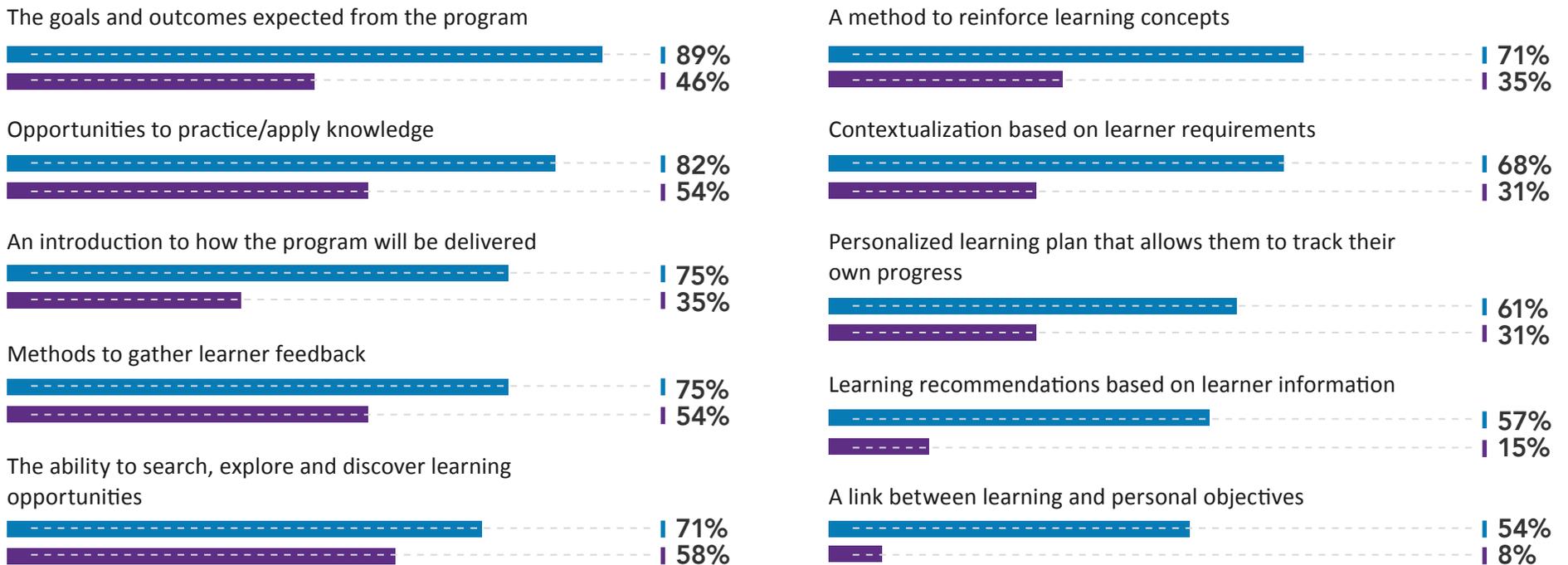
This feedback keeps learners engaged and involved in their own learning, while at the same time providing data and insight to help shape future programs and the overall strategy.

Companies that do all of this achieve better results than those that do not. In our research, we have been able to isolate those companies that say their learning efforts have had a positive impact on the following outcomes:

- Time to productivity/ effectiveness
- Voluntary turnover/ employee retention rates
- Employee engagement
- Individual performance
- Manager/supervisor observations
- Team effectiveness

These “High Impact” learning companies are far more likely to provide things like context, personalization, opportunities to practice and opportunities to provide feedback.

## Elements Provided in the Learning Experience



Source: Brandon Hall Group, Learning Strategy Study

## Explore Multiple Tools and Technologies

Relying solely on classes and courses will not ensure people have what they need to do their jobs. Learning is a continuous, ongoing process and people must connect with learning on a much more frequent basis than the traditional model allows. We are in an era where people are accustomed to instant access to the information they need and learning must be able to operate on that level.

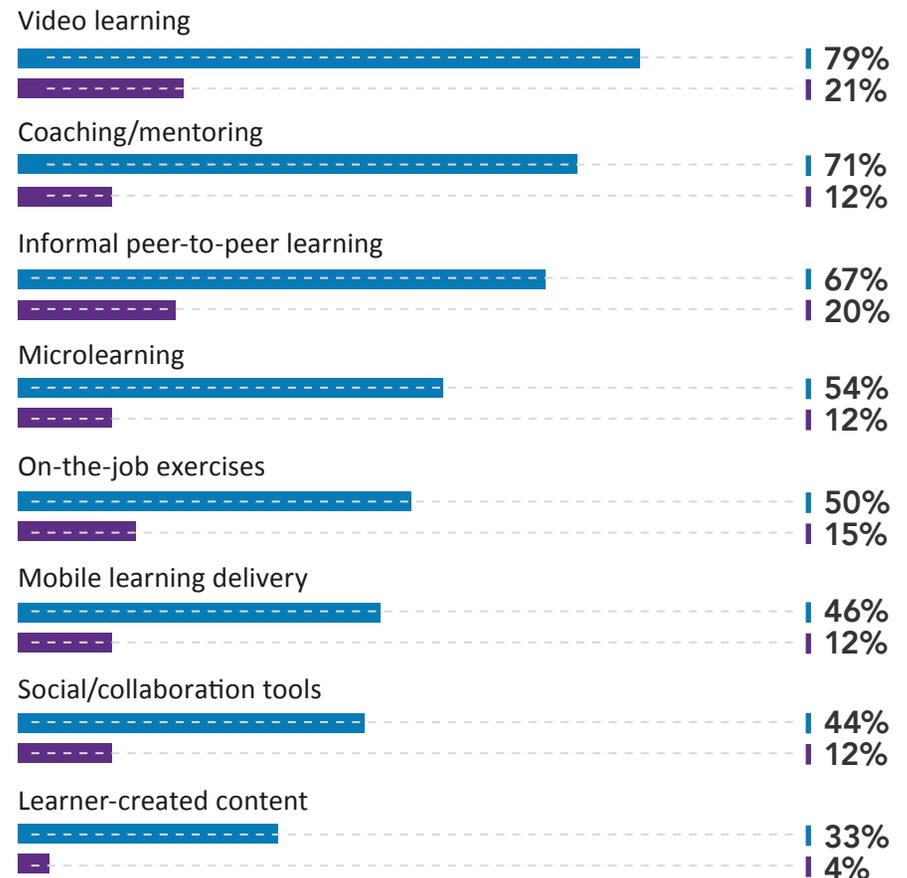
An effective learner experience includes multiple pathways and learning opportunities available to all employees, regardless of level or role. Some of the elements found among effective environments include:

- **Hands-on, active, real-world, on-the-job instruction**
- **On-demand online courses, at your own pace**
- **Self-directed/informal from others or on your own**
- **Anytime/anywhere mobile-friendly learning**
- **Audio/video tutorials or demonstrations**

Looking again at the “High Impact” companies in Brandon Hall Group research, we see that these organizations are also much more likely to use a wider array of learning tools and technologies.

### Learning Tools Used Regularly or Consistently

- High Impact
- Low Impact



Source: Brandon Hall Group, Learning Strategy Study

## Avon: Learner Engagement Drives Measurable Performance

### CASE IN POINT



Avon is the original direct-to-consumer beauty giant and has **more than 5 million beauty entrepreneurs spanning 53 international markets.**

It's a fast-moving environment and Avon's sales representatives need to continually learn about new products and campaigns. To do this at scale and with speed was proving increasingly difficult and the team had identified a number of learning-related issues that were hindering business performance:

- Multiple Learning Management Systems (LMS)
- Training was formal and sporadic
- No social/collaborative learning
- Poor measurement of learning

In transitioning to a more modern and engaging learning platform, the Avon team had two specific objectives: increase beauty entrepreneurs' average order value (AOV), and improve retention rates beyond an identified 90-day tipping point. The idea was that by improving learning experiences and creating a stronger sense of community, Avon's beauty entrepreneurs would be more likely to stay on and subsequently deliver more value.

The Avon team knew that a platform centered around social and collaborative

learning would enable beauty entrepreneurs with 24/7 access to the knowledge and information they would need — and in a way that would fit seamlessly into their busy lifestyles. The approach did not eschew formal training, but rather augmented it with accessible bite-sized content and in-the-moment peer-to-peer and peer-to-expert learning. By connecting learners with each other, Avon could tap into a previously inaccessible wealth of tacit knowledge.

Another important goal was creating an environment that would encourage beauty reps to return to the platform, either to learn something new or to refresh their knowledge on a product or campaign. To help build and cement these positive learning behaviors, the Avon team also recognized a need to cater to different learning styles and

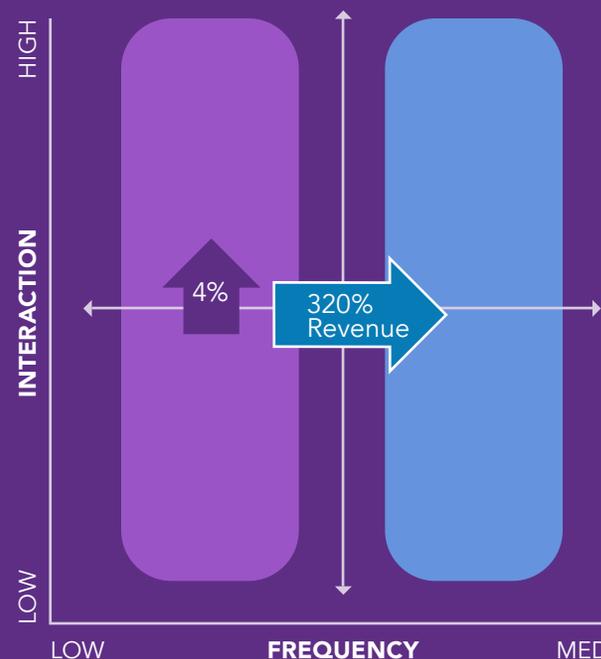
customize experiences in line with local market preferences and cultural norms.

Just a year after implementation, the new platform was successfully rolled out in 45 of Avon's 53 markets, and more than 700,000 beauty entrepreneurs were using it for active learning in the flow of work.

And while these results alone are an impressive demonstration of the power of collaborative learning, the biggest revelation came when Avon realized that frequency of visits to the platform were fueling improved business performance. In fact, over six months, beauty reps who visited the platform with either low (one to two visits per month) or medium (three to four visits per month) regularity, were outperforming non-visitors with aggregate sales of +320%.

*The benefits to business were quick to follow:*

Comparing beauty entrepreneurs who joined Fuse at the same time and in the same country with those who did not join, **the Avon team noted a significant 20% increase in retention among platform users.** The same data also revealed an increase in average order value of 6%.



The Avon story provides further evidence in the case for learner engagement as the key factor that drives wider business performance. Building that engagement is therefore essential to success and data from Avon Connect also revealed an undeniable “follow the leader” effect here: beauty reps whose sales leaders were engaged in and benefited from the learning platform were also engaged themselves. The data showed a near carbon-copy correlation.

Based on analysis from Avon UK users who joined Avon Connect in January 2020.  
Sales revenue calculated Jan-June 2020

## About Fuse Universal

On the Fuse learning platform, people connect with the knowledge and expertise they need to improve their skills and perform. Used by over 150 progressive organizations worldwide — including Hilti, Vodafone, Panasonic, Scandic and Avon — Fuse sparks active engagement for deeper learning experiences that ignite your people's performance. Fuse is immensely proud of FuseSchool, its global open education charity.

The logo for Fuse, featuring the word "fuse" in a lowercase, rounded, pink font.

[www.fuseuniversal.com](http://www.fuseuniversal.com)

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## About Brandon Hall Group

With more than 10,000 clients globally and 27 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.

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