2 Perspectives on Corporate Learning: Organizations and Learners

Research Brief

Brandon Hall Group Research Team
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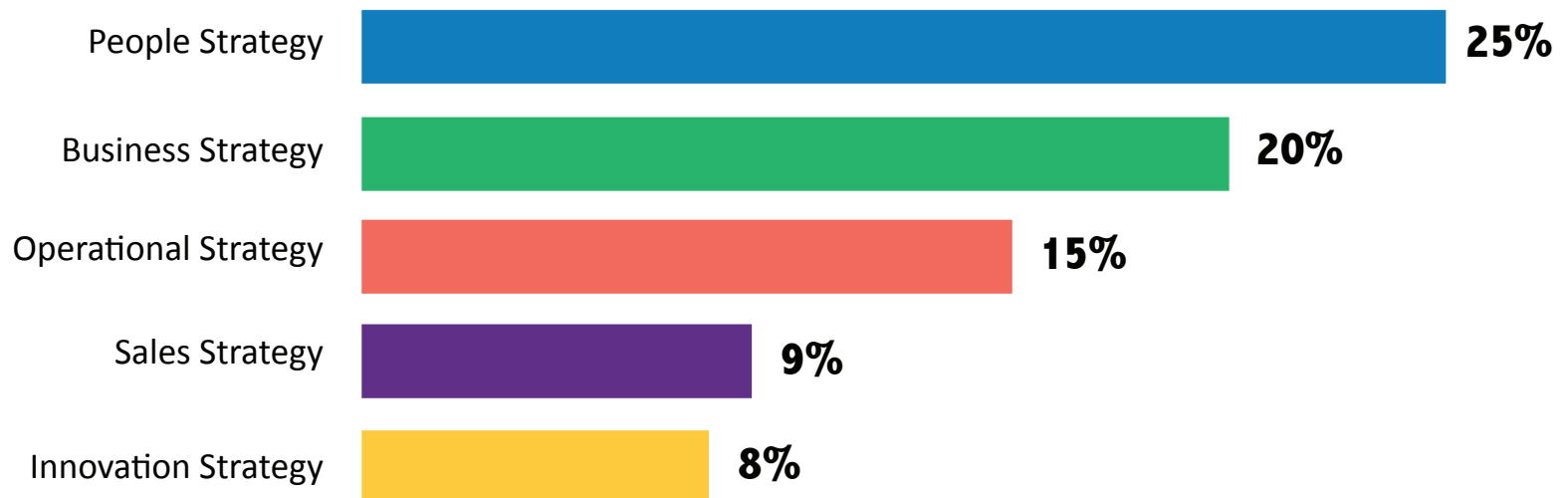Brandon Hall
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Summary

It seems strange to say, but when it comes to corporate learning, the focus, historically, has not been on the learners.

More attention has been paid to processes, design, and logistics than to the learners themselves. It has only been recently that organizations have truly become "learner-focused" in their delivery.

In Brandon Hall Group's 2017 HCM Outlook survey, **64%** of companies said that the learner experience would receive moderate to heavy attention in the coming year, making it second in importance only to aligning learning with business goals.

This shift to a learner-centric focus makes sense because the most important strategy for organizations to achieve business success is their people strategy, according to Brandon Hall Group's most recent Learning Strategy Survey.

Top Strategies for Business Success

Strategy	Percentage
People Strategy	25%
Business Strategy	20%
Operational Strategy	15%
Sales Strategy	9%
Innovation Strategy	8%

Source: 2016 Brandon Hall Group Learning Strategy Study (n=290)

If learning is to have a positive impact on the people strategy, it must focus on the learners. But learners and the organization can have very different perceptions about learning. So, Brandon Hall Group and BizLibrary partnered on studies to compare the perspectives of learners and organizations on the delivery and quality of learning, along with the technology used to access it.

2017 Training Benchmarking Study

surveyed learning leaders, learning professionals, talent management leaders and professionals, and executive/senior management about their approach to corporate learning.

2017 Learner Perspectives Study

surveyed learners in a wide variety of organizations and industries on how they saw the corporate learning function in terms of its effectiveness and relevance to them.

Ultimately, the study uncovered **2** major themes:

- Organizations have come a long way in delivering learning that aligns with the needs of their learning audiences.

- There is still a lot of room for improvement.

While companies want to deploy more user-centric technology, they are still more heavily focused on the things that make the technology appealing to the organization (reliability, cost, reporting) rather than the learner (access, ease of use, relevancy). One area where this disconnect is evident is mobile learning.

Fewer than half of companies provide any sort of mobile-friendly learning, and only **10%** of learners say they have mobile access to learning. Clearly, mobile devices are not going to be the main mode of learning delivery, but given the ubiquity of mobile devices, their expanding use in every other part of the business, and learners' desire for access to information, companies need to determine where mobile fits into their learning strategies.
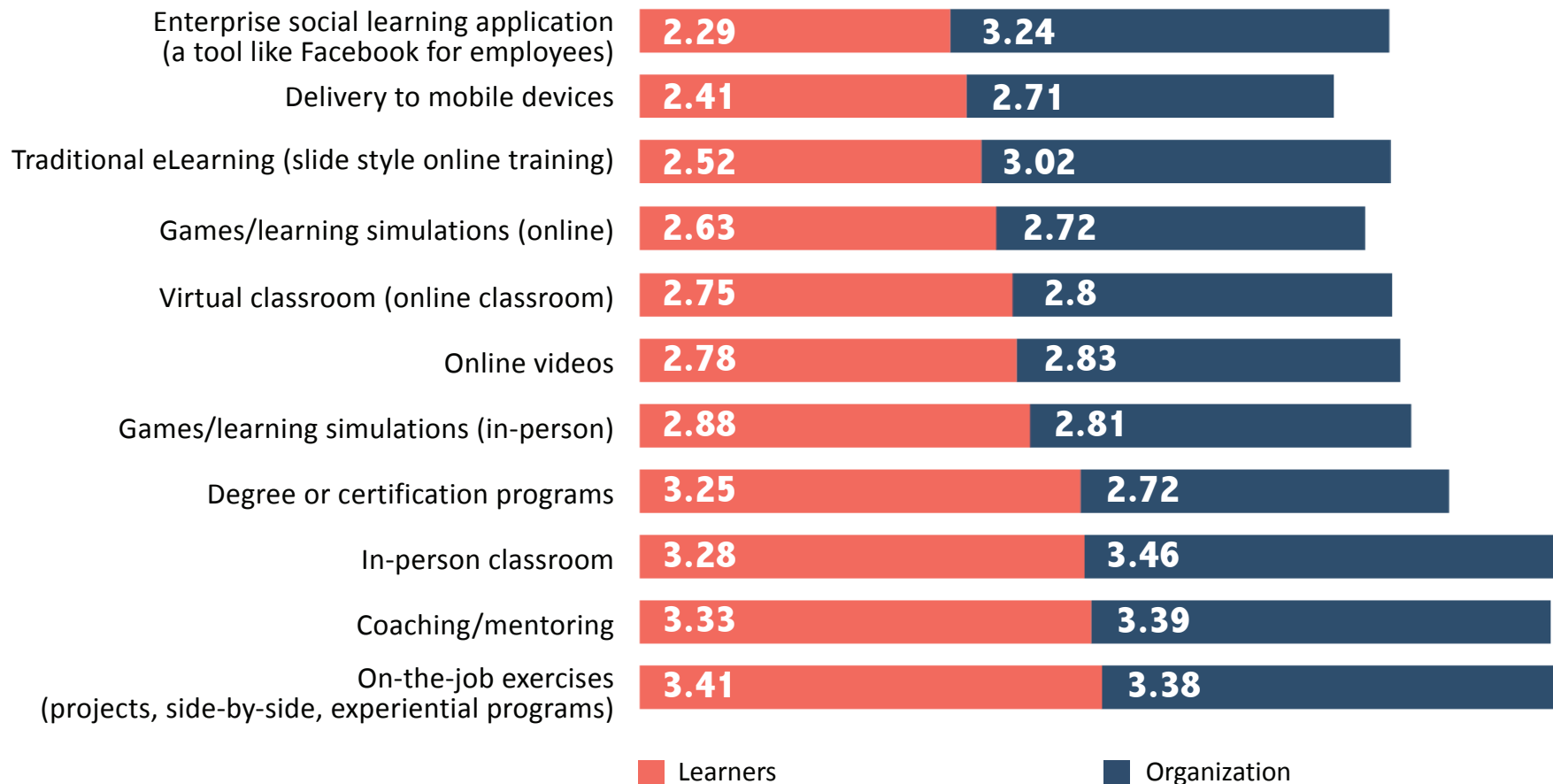
Here are the Top 4 findings:

1	**Learners and organizations generally agree on effectiveness of learning modalities, but there are a few major disconnects.**

Asked how effective they consider various learning modalities, both learners and organizations said the top three are classroom instructor-led training, coaching/mentoring, and experiential or on-the-job training.

However, while classroom ILT ranked #1 for organizations, learners ranked it third and experiential/on-the-job training as #1.

The results (next page) reflect the average score given by respondents on a 5-point effectiveness scale, with 5 the highest rating. Note that no modality rated above 3.46, which on a 100-point scale translates to 70, or C-.

Learning Modality Effectiveness (Management vs. Learners)

Modality	Learners	Organization
Enterprise social learning application (a tool like Facebook for employees)	2.29	3.24
Delivery to mobile devices	2.41	2.71
Traditional eLearning (slide style online training)	2.52	3.02
Games/learning simulations (online)	2.63	2.72
Virtual classroom (online classroom)	2.75	2.8
Online videos	2.78	2.83
Games/learning simulations (in-person)	2.88	2.81
Degree or certification programs	3.25	2.72
In-person classroom	3.28	3.46
Coaching/mentoring	3.33	3.39
On-the-job exercises (projects, side-by-side, experiential programs)	3.41	3.38

Legend: ▮ Learners   ▮ Organization

Source: Brandon Hall Group, Training Benchmarking 2017 (n=237), Learner Perspectives 2017 (n=463)

ILT gets an average effectiveness rating of **3.46** from the organization viewpoint, and **3.28** from learners. Learners find on-the-job training to be the most effective, with a rating of **3.41**. The differences are slight, but it shows that employees find it more effective to get learning in the moment of need rather than in a classroom.

There are bigger disconnects in other areas, however. Organizations may be underestimating the effectiveness of degree or certificate programs, for instance. Organizations give degree or certificate programs an average rating of **2.72**, which ranks last among the 12 modalities we listed. Learners, however, gave an average rating of **3.25**, which ranked fourth.

The different perception stems from the fact that certificates and degrees are specific to the learners (and can go with them if they leave the company). Therefore, learners hold these programs in higher regard than management.

Companies may also be overestimating the effectiveness of their traditional eLearning and their social learning efforts. For companies, these items are in the top five for effectiveness (enterprise social learning platforms are #2). For learners, however, they are at the bottom. Organizations have a lot of time and money invested in traditional click-through eLearning, which has been the core of learning programs for years. It is not surprising they believe them to be so effective. However, learners are not convinced anymore.

But that does not mean that a new emerging learning modality will win over learners simply because it is new. For example, organizations need to recognize that their social learning efforts are not yet paying off in the eyes of the learners, as this is the area where there is the biggest gap in perceived effectiveness. (**3.24** for organizations vs. **2.29** for learners).

2   **The groups have conflicting priorities about learning technology.**

While there is at least general agreement on how effective different learning modalities may be, the two groups diverge when it comes to the technology that delivers learning.

We asked both groups what they liked most about their primary learning technology platform. The results shed some light on gaps organizations still need to bridge when it comes to learner centricity.

Functionalities of Learning Technology

Organizations	Learners
5 Most-Liked Aspects	5 Most-Liked Aspects
• Stability & Reliability • Ability to launch various types of content • Cost • Ease of use of the system • Reporting feature	• Access to information • It is easy to use • Ease of sign-on • Content is relevant to me and my role • Availability of help & support

Source: Brandon Hall Group, Training Benchmarking 2017 (n=237), Learner Perspectives 2017 (n=463)

Organizations are far more focused on the nuts and bolts of the system rather than how it appears and works for the learners. This is because companies need to think about factors that learners do not, such as cost, reliability, etc. However, none of that matters if the learners do not like, or want to use, the platform.

What it boils down to is that learners want easy access to the information they need when and where they need it. And while from an implementation and administration standpoint organizations may see these as secondary priorities, they should actually be the top goals when selecting a solution. The primary purpose of a learning technology platform is not to run a report. It is to deliver learning that will change behaviors and outcomes.

3 Mobile is not as ubiquitous as thought

The first iPhone appeared more than 10 years ago, but organizations are still struggling to develop strategies around how to use mobile devices for learning. In fact, Brandon Hall Group found that fewer than half of companies are delivering any learning on mobile devices. However, when we asked the learners themselves, it is even more stark. Only 10% say they even have access to content on their mobile device.

Mobile Delivery

Companies say they deliver some amount of mobile learning **46%**

Learners say they have mobile access to learning content **10%**

Source: Brandon Hall Group, Training Benchmarking 2017 (n=237), Learner Perspectives 2017 (n=463)

These results seem to fly in the face of the conventional wisdom that declares that everything is (or should be) mobile first. For years, there has been increasing hype around the ubiquity of mobile, but learning organizations haven't caught up. Even among the 46% of companies that report delivering mobile learning, for two-thirds of them mobile represents less than 25% of the learning they deliver.

The critical question becomes, are learners not using mobile because companies are not delivering it, or are companies not delivering mobile because *learners aren't using it*?

Use of Mobile Devices

Learners *never* access learning on a phone	50%
Learners *never* access learning on a tablet	60%

Source: Brandon Hall Group, Training Benchmarking 2017 (n=237), Learner Perspectives 2017 (n=463)
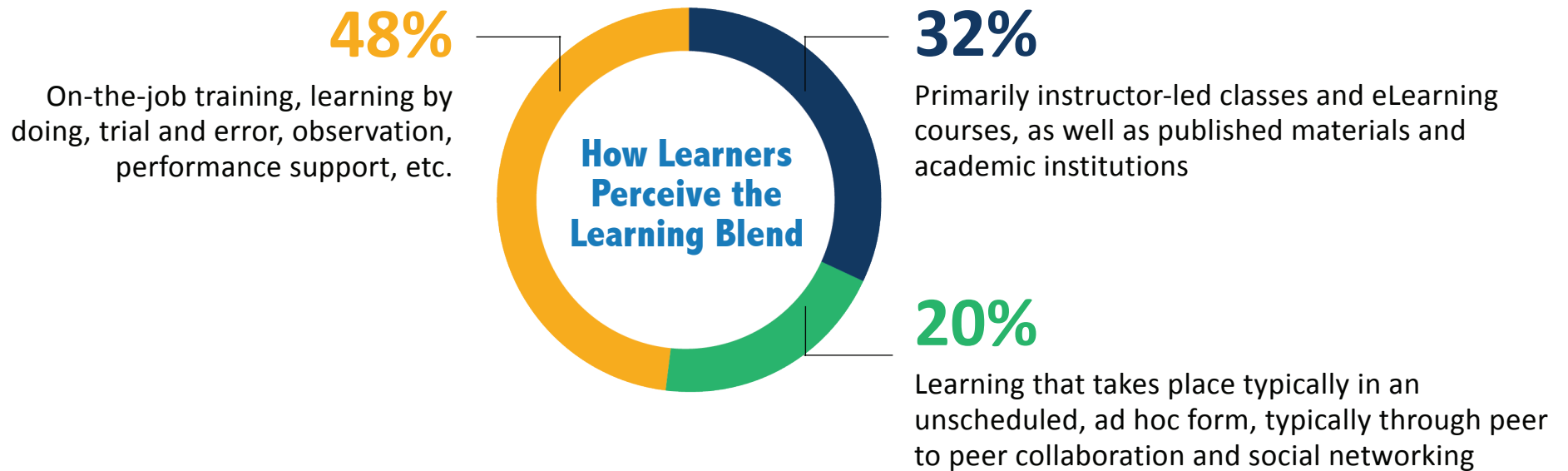
The data above highlights this dilemma, and organizations may feel that they are in some sort of Catch-22. If half of learners never access learning on a phone and 60% never use a tablet, why should they bother developing mobile learning?

However, it is much more likely that learners are not accessing the learning because it is not available, or not available the way the want it and are accustomed to in their private lives.

If we look back at the findings around what learners like most about their learning technology, access to information is #1. Mobile delivery exponentially increases access to information. If the content were available, or available in a way learners believe is suitable to their needs, they would be accessing it.

4   Organizations are doing a good job of blending learning experiences

Organizations are increasingly incorporating the 70:20:10 model into their learning strategies. The model states that 70% of what people learn comes from experiential, on-the-job learning, while 20% is from informal, collaborative experiences. The other 10% comes from formal learning experiences like classes and courses. We asked learners how much of their actual learning falls into these categories, and the results show a more realistic blend of what companies can deliver.
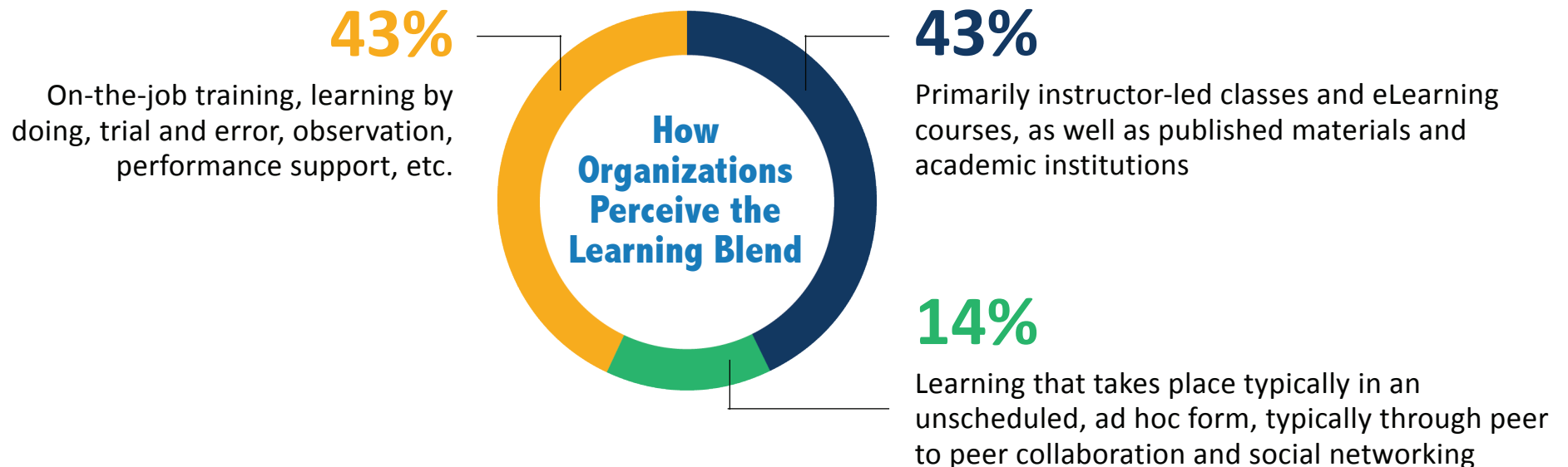
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48%

On-the-job training, learning by doing, trial and error, observation, performance support, etc.

32%

Primarily instructor-led classes and eLearning courses, as well as published materials and academic institutions

How Learners Perceive the Learning Blend

20%

Learning that takes place typically in an unscheduled, ad hoc form, typically through peer to peer collaboration and social networking

Source: Brandon Hall Group, Training Benchmarking 2017 (n=237), Learner Perspectives 2017 (n=463)

The truth is that the exact numbers "70:20:10" are not practical from a delivery perspective. Still, learners recognize that they learn more from experiential learning than formal or informal experiences.

The good news is that there is some basic alignment between learners and organizations. In the past, companies have been heavily focused on formal learning, as it was really the only type of learning they were able to create, deliver and measure. The advent of new technologies and a renewed focus on the learner have led companies to deliver learning in a more blended approach.

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Organizations are still a bit biased toward formal experiences, but again, this is the type of learning for which learning functions were created. It will take time to fully incorporate other modalities. In order to take advantage of the way people naturally learn, companies need to figure out how to expand the amount of experiential learning they are facilitating. This is especially true in light of the finding that experiential learning is considered by learners to be the most effective modality.

43%

On-the-job training, learning by doing, trial and error, observation, performance support, etc.

How Organizations Perceive the Learning Blend

43%

Primarily instructor-led classes and eLearning courses, as well as published materials and academic institutions

14%

Learning that takes place typically in an unscheduled, ad hoc form, typically through peer to peer collaboration and social networking

Source: Brandon Hall Group, Training Benchmarking 2017 (n=237), Learner Perspectives 2017 (n=463)

Takeaways

Organizations need to listen to their learners. It is critical that organiztions meet learners where they are, rather than force them into learning environments and experiences designed to meet the needs of the learning function. For instance, while everyone may generally agree on the effectiveness of ILT, companies may want to re-examine how effective their traditional eLearning offering may be.

When it comes to the technology itself, it is imperative to focus on learners and the experience they will have using the platform. All of the features, functionality, and administrative capabilities in the world will not save a platform that users find out of date, hard to navigate, and simply difficult to use. Similarly, an inexpensive solution is no bargain if learners never want to use it. `

Mobile is not some fad that the learning function can simply ignore. To an increasing degree, people rely on their mobile devices for information that they need. As part of a strategy to deliver information, an organization must include some sort of mobile strategy. Any barriers to information access should be seen as detrimental to the success of the business.

Finally, companies need to keep mixing it up. Blended learning is no longer just classroom and eLearning. It is an ever-shifting mix of technologies, modalities and experiences. Organizations should seek out platforms and solutions that help them deliver learning in ways that are more natural and seamless for learners, rather than continually stuffing them into classrooms and pushing them through PowerPoints.

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With more than 10,000 clients globally and 20 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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