



Designing Effective Learning Journeys: 3 Strategies for Real Change

Organisations invest billions of dollars each year on learning initiatives with the goal of fuelling growth and improving organisational vitality. However, learning programs won't make a difference if participants don't learn—and apply—their new or improved knowledge and skills.

A well-designed learning journey is a series of spaced, cohort-based, multimodal learning experiences that build the mindsets and skill sets necessary for measurable professional growth. Done right, learning journeys can deliver impressive results including a deeper understanding of a topic, increased productivity, business impact, a greater sense of community, and more.



The challenge is to build and deliver learning journeys that generate the promised return.

This learning process can be much more demanding than one-off, event-driven programs. It has numerous moving parts, is broader in scope, and is far more complicated.

Implementing learning journeys can be daunting, especially for a lean L&D team. Blanchard has honed the art of the learning journey over the past decade. In this Blanchard Point of View, we share three keys to creating a successful learning journey:

- **The Power of Spacing, Cohorts, and Multimodal Learning:** Discover why learning journeys need to be spaced *over* time, cohort-based, and multimodal to generate behaviour change.
- **Contextualisation vs. Customisation:** Learn how to strike the perfect balance between using proven content and tailoring it to reflect your organisation's unique needs, which ensures relevance without sacrificing effectiveness.
- **The Five Drivers of Learning Impact:** Understand the mechanisms that ensure your learning journey not only is directly applicable to organisational objectives, but also drives measurable behaviour change.



Spacing, Cohorts, and Multimodal Learning

To build lasting mindsets and skill sets, learning experiences need to be spaced over time, cohort-based, and multimodal. These three elements capitalise on how people learn best, making the learning process more engaging and effective.

Spacing Learning Over Time

While intensive learning sessions can be useful, they also can lead to cognitive overload, where learners struggle to absorb and retain the information. Research in cognitive psychology has shown how spacing learning over time—known as *spaced repetition*—can significantly improve long-term retention.

Spacing allows learners to revisit and reinforce concepts at intervals, which helps embed the learning into long-term memory. This method also provides time for reflection, enabling learners to connect new knowledge with existing understanding and apply it in their work context. In practice, this could mean assigning intersession *Try It* challenges followed by individual reflection and live peer discussion, or providing ongoing access to learning resources that encourage continued engagement with the material.



The Blanchard Approach to Spaced Learning

- **Learning in Phases:** Rather than one continuous session, content is delivered in smaller segments. Learners get exposed to new concepts, practice them, and then revisit the material after applying it in real-world settings. This improves both understanding and retention.
- **Practical Application and Reflection:** Each session is structured to allow learners to apply what they've learned in their workplace or with peers. Reflection on these experiences helps deepen learning and supports long-term retention.
- **Facilitated Social Learning:** Regular live sessions provide opportunities for learners to interact with their peers and receive direct feedback from facilitators. This social aspect ensures ongoing engagement and allows learners to share experiences and insights.
- **Tools for Reinforcement:** After completing each phase, learners are given access to additional tools and resources to reinforce the learning. This ensures they continue practicing and refining their skills long after the formal sessions are over.

This spaced learning approach, utilised in various Blanchard programs, is grounded in research that shows how distributed learning leads to better long-term retention and application of skills compared to traditional compressed training formats.



The Impact of Multimodal Learning

People learn in different ways. By engaging multiple senses and learning styles, multimodal learning ensures content is accessible and engaging for all learners. It also helps reinforce key concepts by presenting them in different formats, which can improve understanding and retention.

For instance, a learning journey on leadership skills might include a mix of video lectures, case studies, role-playing exercises, and reflective journaling. This variety keeps learners engaged and allows them to explore the material from multiple angles, leading to a more holistic and effective learning experience.

Multimodal can also apply to making connections across skill areas, which fosters sense-making. For example, if participants are learning about building trust, a learning journey could also cover relevant topics such as communication skills.

Topics or modules are presented as different layers under the overarching framework. Participants learn how trust is a prerequisite for honest conversations, which are a requirement for leading situationally, and so on. Each layer is like a thread in a tapestry.

This approach has numerous benefits including improved comprehension, better retention, increased application, a more positive attitude toward the content, and increased awareness of how to use the content in different settings.



The Blanchard Approach to Multimodal Learning

- Inside this process, learners complete a brief, interactive digital overview that introduces core concepts. Then they take a self-assessment for the purpose of identifying their most pressing leadership challenge. This information is used to create personalised learning goals.
- From there, participants join a live virtual session where they discuss what they've learned and its relevance in the workplace. They get feedback/reaction from peers and the facilitator. Small groups are also utilised to work through challenges, plan conversations, practice, and create next steps.
- Next, imagine tools that connect learners to their new skills in the context of their work. This could include conversation guides that provide prompts for the leaders of participants to continue the conversations about what their people are learning, how they're using it, and why it matters. *Try It* activities encourage practice independently in the flow of work. Meetings with a learning partner and group coaching sessions help to overcome learning barriers. Small group discussions also connect the application from one topic area to another.

The layered approach is powerful. Learners discover the content is interrelated and forms a comprehensive web of information. Contextualised, multimodal approaches improve engagement, retention, and understanding by catering to diverse learning styles. Immediate feedback and real-world applications further solidify knowledge transfer, making learning more dynamic and effective.

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The Role of Cohort-Based Learning

Social learning opportunities provide an opportunity to participate in digital or in-person forums where people learn together, collaborate, and grow.

Dedicated places for sharing best practices and swapping tips are safe spaces where people can confide their challenges to their colleagues and get help. This empowers learners to form their own opinions about the content.

Cohort-based leadership development experiences create deep social connections between cohort members.

Cohort-based learning introduces a social dimension to the learning process that enhances motivation, accountability, and engagement. When learners go through a journey together as a group or cohort, they benefit from shared experiences, peer support, and collaborative learning. This communal aspect of learning can drive deeper understanding as learners discuss, debate, and apply concepts in a group setting.

Moreover, cohort-based learning creates opportunities for networking and building relationships within the organisation. These connections can extend beyond the learning journey itself, fostering a culture of continuous learning and collaboration. Organisations can facilitate cohort-based learning through group projects, discussion forums, and peer-to-peer coaching sessions.



The Blanchard Approach to Cohort-Based Learning

- Blanchard has built a successful practice using social learning drivers in all our curricula. These activities jumpstart the social learning process and promote bonding as cohorts build lasting connections because of the extended time they spend together during a journey.
- Small in-class support crews of two to four accountability partners, who commit to helping each other for periods of one to six months, are extremely successful at promoting learning transfer—especially when this practice is followed by group discussion a month or two after the learning.
- Another powerful tactic is to create self-sustaining learning communities. Start by identifying a handful of learners who were especially inspired by the material, and have these super learners show up to other discussions. Invite a few of them to form a team and start a community of learners focused on a specific theme; e.g., new managers. These communities can attract a crowd and are a powerful way to sustain learning—with minimal time investment from L&D.

Cohort-based social learning fosters collaboration, shared experiences, and deeper understanding through group discussions, peer support, and collaborative learning. Learners benefit from networking, building strong relationships, and exchanging best practices in a safe space, which enhances motivation and accountability.



Contextualisation vs. Customisation: Striking the Perfect Balance

One of the biggest challenges in designing effective learning journeys is finding the right balance between contextualisation and customisation. While both are important, overemphasis on one can lead to suboptimal outcomes. Understanding the distinction between the two and how to apply them appropriately can help create relevant and effective learning experiences.

Understanding Contextualisation

Contextualisation involves framing learning content in a way that resonates with the specific challenges and realities of the organisation. It means presenting information within the context in which learners operate, making it more relevant and easier to apply. Contextualisation can include examples, case studies, and scenarios that reflect the unique environment, culture, and goals of the organisation.

Effective contextualisation helps learners see the direct relevance of what they are learning to their day-to-day work and broader organisational objectives. This relevance boosts engagement and motivation, as learners are more likely to value and apply content that feels directly applicable to their roles.

The Role of Customisation

Customisation, on the other hand, involves revising the learning content to meet the specific needs and preferences of the organisation or individual learners. This could mean altering existing content to reflect organisational priorities or creating net new content.

While customisation ensures the learning experience is highly relevant and targeted, it can also be resource intensive. It increases the time and cost associated with developing and delivering the learning journey. Over-customisation can lead to fragmented learning experiences that lack coherence and consistency, making it difficult to achieve broad learning objectives.



The Blanchard Approach to Contextualisation

Blanchard targets three areas of a learning journey for contextualising—launch, integration, and activation.

- At *launch*, a Blanchard learning journey starts off with getting learners prepared for what is expected of them. Participants and their managers get together for a 60-minute launch to make those connections right at the start. Why are they being invited to join this cohort? What purpose does it have for the organisation? What's going to be the benefit for them?
- *Integration* is a consistent process that flows throughout the launch, activation, and content modules. Blanchard uses a visual map to remind everyone where they are on their learning journey and revisits the program's connections to the organisational goals at each live touchpoint.
- *Activation* happens at the end of the learning journey—the last session. The focus is on synthesising what's been learned and creating an action plan to commit to applying the new mindsets and skill sets to meet the learners' professional development goals.

The key to effective learning design lies in striking the right balance between contextualisation and customisation. Rather than fully customising every aspect of the learning journey, organisations should focus on contextualising proven content to fit their specific needs. This approach allows organisations to leverage the effectiveness of established learning models while ensuring relevance to their unique environment.



The Five Drivers of Learning Impact

To ensure learning journeys drive real change and align with organisational objectives, it is essential to incorporate mechanisms that reinforce learning and facilitate lasting behaviour change. The five drivers of learning impact—key influencer support, strategic integration, effective design and delivery, follow-up and reinforcement, and demonstrated tangible value—are critical in achieving this goal.

Addressing these five drivers ensures that our content is directly applicable to the organisation's goals and that we are creating the holistic supports needed to make the learning stick. In other words, we bake in the change management factors that ensure the success of our talent development initiatives.



1. Key Influencer Support

Sponsorship and Involvement from Executives and Supervisors

The first driver of learning impact is the support of key influencers within the organisation such as executives, managers, and supervisors. Their involvement and endorsement can significantly enhance the effectiveness of the learning journey. When leaders actively support learning initiatives—by discussing the content, encouraging application, and recognising progress—learners are more likely to engage and apply what they have learned.

Key influencer support also helps create a learning culture within the organisation, where continuous development is valued and promoted. Influential leaders are encouraged to attend the launch session to explain to the learners why the program is important to the organisation and how they can be an integral part of the company's success. To garner this support, organisations should involve key influencers early, seek their input, and provide them with the tools and resources needed to champion the learning journey.

Blanchard Takeaway: If leaders approve of the learning, ask about learning progress, and provide even light support for applying new skills on the job, learning transfer can soar. Don't underestimate the influence learners' managers can have on learning impact.



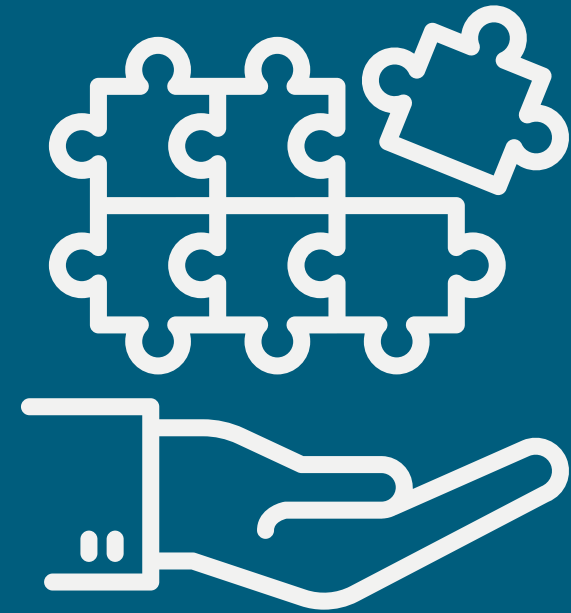
2. Strategic Integration

Clear Connections to Organisational Objectives

Strategic Integration ensures the learning is directly connected to the organisation's strategic initiatives and/or objectives. Learners are more likely to embrace and apply new skills and behaviours when they understand how these align with the broader mission and strategy of the organisation.

To achieve strategic integration, learning designers should clearly communicate the relevance of the content to learners' roles and the organisation's goals. This can be done through the launch, ongoing communication, and facilitator playbooks, and by linking learning outcomes to performance metrics. When learners see a direct correlation between their learning and their contributions to the organisation's success, they are more motivated to apply what they have learned.

Blanchard Takeaway: Learners are much more likely to implement learning on the job when they can see a direct correlation to the work they are doing. Strategic integration creates clear connections to organisational objectives and directions.



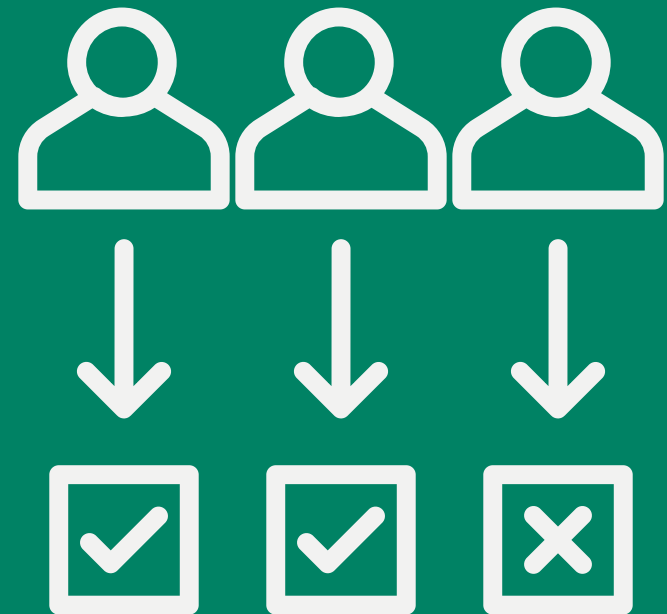
3. Effective Design and Delivery

Learning Approaches Optimised for Impact

Effective design and delivery are crucial to maximising the impact of a learning journey. This driver encompasses the methods and strategies used to deliver content in a way that is engaging, accessible, and conducive to long-term retention. As discussed earlier, spacing, cohort-based learning, and multimodal delivery are essential components of effective design.

In addition, effective design should be grounded in modern adult learning principles, which recognise adults learn best when the content is relevant, practical, and self-directed. Incorporating opportunities for reflection, discussion, and application can enhance the learning experience and ensure the content is internalised and applied on the job.

Blanchard Takeaway: Effective design that is multimodal, spaced over time, and cohort-based needs to be grounded in modern adult learning principles. These experiences should include a blend of formal and informal delivery approaches for cohort or group learning as well as digital, self-directed learning.



4. Follow-up and Reinforcement

Encouragement and Accountability That Drives Behavior Change

Learning does not end when the formal learning session is over. To drive real behaviour change, it is essential to have mechanisms in place for follow-up and reinforcement. This could include follow-up sessions, coaching, peer support groups, or online forums where learners can continue to engage with the content and each other.

Reinforcement helps bridge the gap between learning and doing by providing ongoing support and accountability. For example, managers can play a critical role in reinforcement by discussing learning goals with their team members, providing feedback on their progress, and encouraging them to apply new skills in their work.

Blanchard Takeaway: Effective follow-up and reinforcement helps bridge the gap between learning and doing. When development is solely event-based with no sustainment measures, learners typically struggle to apply new skills and behaviours on the job. Be sure to build in time for reflection—reflecting on experiences, coming together to share, and holding one another accountable.



5. Demonstrated Tangible Value

Credible Progress and Success Measures

Last, but certainly not least, is having and being able to verify your tangible value.

Organisations need to measure the effectiveness of their learning journeys to ensure they are achieving the desired outcomes. This can involve tracking completion rates or satisfaction scores as well as assessing the impact on behaviour and performance.

Well-designed learning initiatives create behaviour change and long-term impact for individuals and for the organisations they serve. We recommend a straightforward, powerful approach to measurement that includes success-case interviews and pre- and post-learning multi-rater assessments, together with pulse surveys held over time to demonstrate value.

Blanchard Takeaway: By demonstrating the tangible value of the learning journey, organisations can validate their investment and make data-driven decisions about future learning initiatives.



Conclusion

Designing effective learning journeys is essential for driving real change within organisations. By leveraging the power of spacing, cohorts, and multimodal learning, striking the right balance between contextualisation and customisation, and incorporating the five drivers of learning impact, HR and L&D professionals can create learning experiences that are not just educational events, but powerful catalysts for professional growth and organisational success.

These strategies ensure learning journeys are relevant, engaging, and directly connected to organisational objectives, leading to measurable behaviour change and long-term impact. As organisations continue to invest in talent development, these best practices will be critical in regard to maximising the return on that investment and achieving sustainable success.



Blanchard® is a global leader in leadership development, consulting, and coaching. For more than 40 years, Blanchard has partnered with organisations to maximise individual achievement and organisational performance – bringing measurable progress and true transformation. Blanchard's SLII® is the global leadership model of choice, powering inspired leaders for more than 10,000 organisations worldwide. Blanchard also offers a suite of award-winning solutions through flexible delivery modalities to meet the specific needs of clients and learners.



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