It's Not Just About Fun:

The essential guide to learner engagement

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Contents

Introduction

To be engaged in something means to commit one's full attention to it. People can become deeply involved in many things, from hobbies and sports to their projects at work. And the better they feel about the task they engage in, the more focused and invested they are in doing it well.

When deeply engaged people feel motivated to try harder and improve themselves. They actively seek ways to increase their performance and develop knowledge and skills in their areas of interest.

That kind of engagement can be incredibly empowering in all spheres of life, including personal development, work-life satisfaction, quality of personal relationships, and opportunities for advancement in the workplace. However, some would argue that engagement plays its most crucial role in the area of learning.

What does engagement have to do with learning?

Many believe that we should never stop learning because life never stops teaching us lessons. From technology to fashion, the modern world continuously shows us new ways of doing, seeing, and creating things. So, to cope with that, we must be able to engage in learning again and again, and again.

According to [The Glossary of Education](#) Reform, learning engagement is "the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that learners show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education."

It seems that engaged learners are more dedicated, motivated and likely to succeed. They often become top achievers, who put their learnings into application and continue to develop their skills beyond what they are formally taught.

On the other hand, when learners are disengaged, they become "lost." They pass any opportunity to push themselves, always go for the bare minimum, and distance themselves both from the learning experience and their fellow learners.

To engage disengaged learners can take an enormous effort. So, the key here is prevention.

At the same time, the growing disengagement crisis in learning, as well as the workplace, makes things more complicated. The increasing demands of technology and the distractions of social

media and non-stop communication pull the learners' attention in opposing directions. That leaves little room for focusing on meaningful learning experiences. The good news is that all these negative factors can be addressed and mitigated.

Before taking any action though, it is imperative to understand that the responsibility for achieving learner engagement does not rest solely with the learners themselves. Course designers and instructors must develop a deeper understanding of how to increase learning engagement, and how to avoid losing the interest of learners.

To that end, we will explore the many facets of learner engagement, and how training professionals can equip themselves with the right tools to draw learners in and keep them engaged.

The many facets of learner engagement

In this eBook, we introduce the key factors that influence engagement and explain how they work. Those are:

- **The true nature of engagement:** Learner engagement is a multilayered process that occurs on a cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social level. How does each layer work? How do they affect each other?

- **The importance and benefits of engagement:** Deeply engaged learners tend to become highly engaged employees. However, the benefits to learners being fully engaged in the learning experience are even greater. What is the role of learner engagement in learning and job performance? How well do engaged learners do in a corporate setting?

- **The barriers preventing engagement:** Learner engagement is very important, yet seldom achieved. What are the potential barriers to learning engagement? How can they be lifted to prevent disengagement?

- **Using online training strategies to promote engagement among learners:** How can you overcome the obstacles to efficient learning? Which learner engagement techniques actually pay off? How does this translate to a corporate setting?

- **Actionable techniques to increase learner engagement with a learning management system (LMS):** Finally, we suggest practical strategies to make the most of an LMS for engaging learners in an online environment. How can you select the right features based on your training objectives? How do different features apply to both general and corporate learners?

Now, it's time to engage! Let's delve into the true essence of learner engagement and learn how to reap all of its benefits.

Chapter 1.

Beyond the Conventional
Definition: What Learner
Engagement Actually is

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Most organizations and training providers believe that learner engagement is essential to their objectives. However, few grasp its true meaning.

And, while learner engagement has become a buzzword, it still gets confused with a bunch of related, yet very different concepts. So, to clear things up, let's take a look at the learner engagement definition below.

What is learner engagement?

Learner engagement is a measure that reflects the quantity and quality of a learner's participation in their courses and every other aspect of their educational program. Also, it echoes a learner's interaction and cooperation with co-learners and instructors. In other words, learner engagement is the measure of a potentially successful learning experience for everyone concerned.

To better understand this, let's examine what engaged learners look like.

What does an engaged learner look like?

An engaged learner looks:

- Active in their learning
- Eager to participate
- Willing to expend effort
- Motivated
- Inspired

How does all that manifest in practice though? To put it simply, if your learners all complete their assignments on time, produce excellent results, and participate in collaborative spaces like discussions, you can confidently say that they are engaged.

On the other hand, if they only complete assignments, but neglect other activities like webinars and forum questions, and their results are poor, then they probably lack in engagement.

If a learner is having fun, does this mean they are engaged?

You might have noticed that "entertained" is not among the features listed under the learner engagement definition. More often than not, it is assumed that the answer to the question "what is learner engagement?" is "having fun". While learning can definitely be fun, that is by no means an accurate or helpful definition of learner engagement.

Amusing graphics, flashy scenarios, and funny videos can all add to the "fun quotient" of a course without really affecting engagement. Learners who are only on board for the fun videos and leaderboards, experience engagement at a superficial level.

In contrast, learners who are truly engaged not only enjoy these fun features, but also feel more motivated to acquire new knowledge and skills from the course.

The 3 dimensions of engagement

To better understand what does work when it comes to improving engagement, we'll dive deeper into its three main facets.

Engagement is not like a switch that's either on or off. Rather, it occurs simultaneously on multiple levels.

When a learner is engaged on one level, but not on the others, their performance and knowledge retention are bound to suffer.
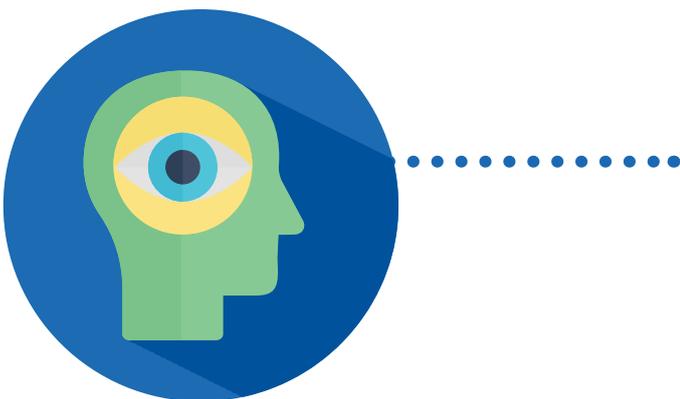
1. The cognitive level
Cognitive engagement means taking an active, committed approach to coming up with learning strategies. But what is that exactly? Well, imagine someone who devises their own mnemonics to remember content that is complex. Or someone who draws mind-maps to organize newly acquired information. These learners take the initiative to represent what they learn in their own context and employ diverse learning strategies to absorb information as efficiently as possible and improve their performance.

Cognitive engagement requires learners to feel good about their work and their ability to master new knowledge. Engaging learners on a cognitive level can be achieved through robust course design and consistent training content.

2. The emotional level
What is learner engagement on an emotional level? It's when, during training, someone feels connected to others (as well as the training context itself), feels committed to training, and experiences low levels of anxiety.

However, sometimes learners can feel isolated during their learning journey and, therefore, emotionally disengaged. These learners are very likely to feel detached from course objectives and uninvested in how they and others perform in it.

Preventing these feelings and fostering emotional engagement can be achieved

through careful course design and implementation.

If a learner is given sufficient explanation of why their training is important and how it could improve their work with others, they are more likely to engage with the content emotionally.

To increase emotional engagement and prevent feelings of anxiety and isolation, organizations must provide strong support from trainers and subject matter experts and encourage the use of social learning tools, like forums and webinars.
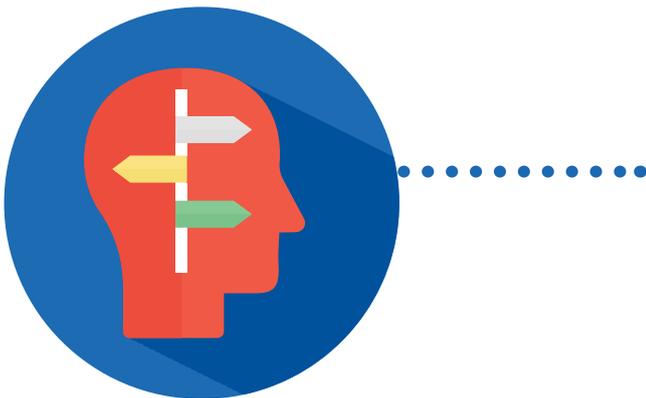
3. The behavioral level

Behavioral engagement is very easy to observe. Behaviorally engaged learners always complete their tasks and show up to their sessions. Also, they are relatively active on social forums.

The catch is that behavioral engagement is also the shallowest form of engagement. Simply completing activities and working through content is not the same as retaining or applying new knowledge. In fact, behavioral engagement can still be quite passive, despite the learner doing whatever is required of them. Without enough cognitive and emotional engagement, learners might

complete a whole course without having improved their skills and knowledge at all. That is especially true for adult learners, who often view a course as an extra responsibility or another box to tick, and proceed to complete it with minimal engagement.

So how can you spot low engagement despite active participation? Just take a closer look at a learner's effort in training activities. You'll notice it is mostly superficial, while their knowledge retention from previous activities mostly proves limited in assessments.

Engagement in adult learners

Teaching adult learners can be an uphill battle. Not only do they have many responsibilities and duties, but their needs and preferences vary depending on their experience.

Shaping adult learning to increase engagement on all levels

Adults are motivated to stay engaged on all three main levels when:

- **They have the opportunity to explore**
  Take all the factors that promote engagement in adults under careful consideration in your course design. Plan exploratory assignments that take learners out of the course's realm and require additional research.

- **Assignments are brief and convenient**
  When you create assignments, break

them up into smaller sections that take up to ten minutes to complete. That makes them more convenient for learners with a busy schedule.

- **Content is highly relevant to real-world context**
  Scenarios are a great teaching tool to engage adults emotionally. Make sure to make them realistic and link their learning objectives to real-life situations.

- **They receive frequent positive reinforcement**
  Adults expect positive reinforcement for a job well-done in the workplace. Apply the same principles to their training by building opportunities for feedback from instructors and SMEs into the learning experience.

Social engagement: is it the 4th dimension?

Adult learners are more engaged on an emotional and cognitive level when they bring their own work and life experiences into their learning. Their engagement grows even stronger when they share those experiences with others.

Networking with other learners and learning

from their experiences is a critical aspect of social engagement — arguably a fourth dimension of learner engagement.

Social engagement can be the anchor that keeps drawing adult learners in, keeps them motivated, and even inspired.

The question is how can organizations increase not only social but also cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement through business training?

What is learner engagement in a business-training context?

In corporate training, learner engagement makes all the difference between merely participating in learning activities and gaining knowledge from them.

As we have said already, behavioral engagement is not by itself an adequate measure of overall engagement. For learners within an organization to flourish, they must engage in learning personally on a cognitive, emotional and social level. By engaging on every level, their training is more likely to lead to improved skills and knowledge to be applied directly in their roles at the workplace.

For example, when learners are truly engaged in conflict resolution and teamwork skills training, they are more likely to improve their performance in these areas later on.

That, in turn, means that they will be more
focused and productive as a team, adding
more value to the organization as a whole.

Adding value for engaged learners

At its core, learner engagement is the
measure of whether or not someone has
been given sufficient motivation to fully
invest themselves in learning.

In the next chapter, we will thoroughly
explore the connection between learner
engagement and factors like performance
and workplace happiness.

Before that, pause and take a moment
to rethink our original question: "what *is*
learner engagement?" Also, how would
you describe a learner that is engaged in
your training? On what levels do you need
learner engagement to improve in your
organization?
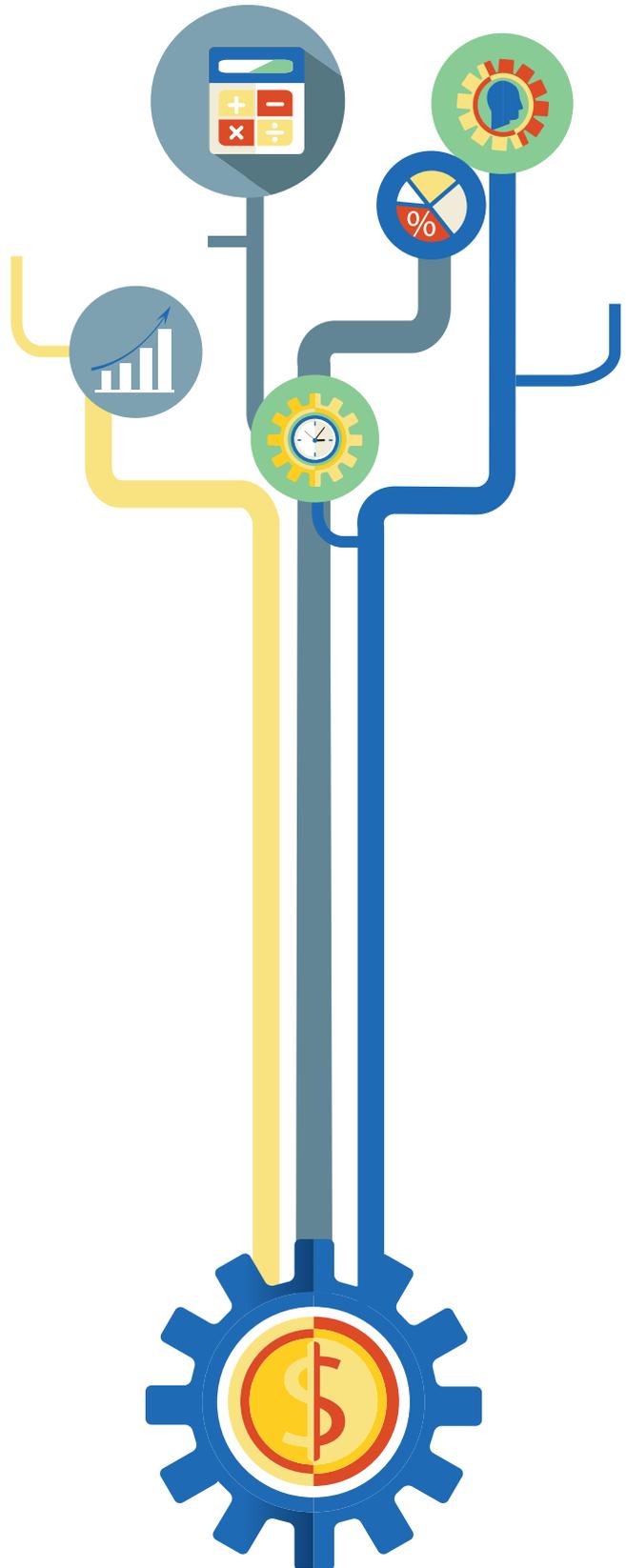
Chapter 2.

The Importance and Benefits of Learner Engagement

Online learning is a bit like dinner parties. When they are boring, people tend to interact less and leave early. When they are lively, people are more likely to participate with excitement and stay until the night is over. Courses that engage audiences are more likely to attract learners who are eager to learn and enjoy the learning experience. Similarly, engaged learners are more likely to perform well in the course itself and become very good "course ambassadors".

The relationship between learner engagement and performance

Assessment scores are a useful way to measure whether or not learners are learning. High performance on activities, like tests, is usually evidence that employees have gained new knowledge and skills from a course. But how do you predict learner performance?

The obvious answer would be by taking into account the amount of time that learners spend on studying training content. Others might suggest that previous assessment scores can help you predict learner performance. Nevertheless, research has found that learner engagement is a stronger indicator than either of those for predicting someone's learning performance.

This correlation points to more than just high test scores. When highly engaged learners have the opportunity to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills in the workplace, they are more likely to perform better on their job. Improved course and job performance combine for a positive return on that training investment.

Engaging learners boosts training (and business) ROI

Engaging learners on all four levels, as discussed in the previous chapter, takes some careful planning. Fortunately, the many benefits of full-scale learner engagement make this effort well worth it.

Engaged learners are more likely to enjoy learning so they are more likely to stay committed to completing their courses. They are also more likely to engage with other learners and spread their newly acquired knowledge through peer-to-peer interaction.

The importance of learner engagement and its positive impact are not limited to the training experience. Highly engaged learners usually become deeply engaged employees. They also feel appreciated, positively challenged, and better equipped to follow their personal development path successfully.

So, what happens when employees are happy, motivated, and driven toward self-development? They become more efficient, more productive, and less likely to take all

of their sick leave days. By exercising direct and positive influence on the organization's bottom line, you can obviously maximize your training's ROI.

However, the benefits of learner engagement are not exclusive to the organization. Being highly engaged in training also benefits learners significantly.

The importance of learner engagement for learners

It is hard to ignore that, without learners, there would be no reason to deliver any training. That makes the learner a top priority in course design and development.

A learner's level of engagement determines their commitment to completing their courses and gaining new knowledge and skills.

Here's what happens when learner engagement increases:

Lower dropout rates

Many organizations make their training compulsory for employees. But despite the compulsory nature of some courses - like compliance training - when learners decide they don't want to learn, there's very little to be done about it.

Courses that pack engaging content keep learners interested, involved, and eager to complete their training successfully.

Higher retention of knowledge

As the saying goes, "*Tell me, and I forget, teach me, and I remember, involve me, and I learn.*" Learners who are not engaged might tick all the boxes, like watching videos, reading notes, and even participating in discussion forums. But no matter how good their intentions, as long as they're disengaged, they won't remember a thing.

Engaged learners are mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally involved in their courses, they absorb new knowledge better and are more likely to retain it.

Improved learner performance

Organizations provide their employees with opportunities to learn and develop so that they become better at their job. But disengaged learners are not very likely to gain knowledge that is deep and substantial. Therefore, they aren't able to successfully apply it to their work.

Learners that commit to investing themselves in their training program not only perform better at their job but increase their chances at personal growth and moving up the organizational ladder.

While these benefits apply to all learners, there are many work-specific benefits that come with employees being highly engaged in their online training.

How engagement positively affects the workplace

Reaping the benefits of being engaged and leveraging learner engagement's positive influence on employees leads to a more constructive workplace. This is achieved by:

- **Building a culture of learning:**
  Engaged employees are more likely to encourage their colleagues to participate in learning, too. These "learning ambassadors" are also willing to assist any colleague that asks for their help. That way, they help instill a culture of learning among employees and across the workplace.

- **Promoting communication and collaboration:**
  Learners that are engaged in a course often participate in social learning activities like discussions or webinars. Such online engagement fosters communication and collaboration among employees, even those who might not have been engaged otherwise.

- **Triggering workplace creativity:**
  The first level of engagement involves proactively thinking of effective learning strategies. Simply put, cognitive engagement means that employees become creative with the way they learn. These sharpened creative skills could then be applied to other aspects of work, like contributing ideas for new products or improved ways to streamline processes.

- **Boosting employee efficiency:**
  Engaged learners are motivated to complete their courses and perform well along the way. That often requires problem-solving skills used to comprehend challenging content and improve performance. They are also eager to use their new skills in the workplace. By solving problems to learn, they sharpen their problem-solving skills and become better at their day-to-day job.

- **Fostering personal development:**
  Today, millennials are on their way to dominating the workforce. By engaging in learning, both socially and emotionally, these young employees benefit from self-development and personal growth. That results in more highly skilled and happy employees.

- **Providing rewarding experiences:**
  Engaging training content is a way of empowering learning. When employees are engaged on all levels, they begin to hold themselves accountable for meeting milestones and achieving performance goals. And reaching their goals provides them with a sense of personal achievement. It makes them happier,

and studies have shown that happy employees are *12% more productive* than their unhappy colleagues.

What is the impact of disengagement?

It is difficult to argue against learner engagement when there are so many obvious benefits. Still, improving learner engagement is not always a priority for organizations and training providers. That can lead to negative implications because disengaged learners usually are:

- psychologically detached,
- passive learners, and
- unwilling to expend effort on training activities.

None of these characteristics are good for morale or performance during training. And since they are not learning as much as they should, disengaged learners are also poorly equipped to apply new skills in the workplace.

Avoiding learner disengagement

Learner engagement is as good for learners as it is for employees, and the business itself. However, the world today bombards us with changing expectations, distracting technology and multiple channels of digital communication. That makes it harder to keep learners engaged and reap all the benefits that come with learner engagement. In the following chapter, we will discuss creative ways to avoid disengagement and overcome the challenges of keeping learners engaged at work.

Chapter 3.
Barriers to Learning:
How to Conquer the
Challenges of Engagement

The benefits that come with engaged learners are plenty. Which organization doesn't want higher completion rates, better retention, increased workplace satisfaction, and positive training ROI?

With the many learner engagement benefits being that convincing, one has to wonder why engagement is so seldom achieved. The reason is that there are various and, sometimes, complex obstacles standing in the way of achieving learner engagement.

There isn't a silver bullet to "solving" these obstacles, but when they are properly understood, they become easier to overcome. In this chapter, we examine the challenge of achieving and maintaining learner engagement from three different perspectives: barriers to learning, workplace challenges, and barriers to online learning, specifically.

Overcoming the barriers to learning

A barrier to learning is anything that prevents learners from fully engaging in learning. During training, most learners have to face several different barriers to learning.

Think, for example, a student who has left their textbooks at home or an employee who hasn't received the preparation notes for a training workshop. Or, a learner who cannot complete their final online assessment because of a distraction-filled workplace. All these can be considered barriers to learning.

When learners cannot fully participate in a learning activity, they cannot be truly engaged in learning.

In an adult learning environment, the barriers to learning can be many and quite unpredictable. Here are some of the most common cases of barriers to learning and how to overcome them:
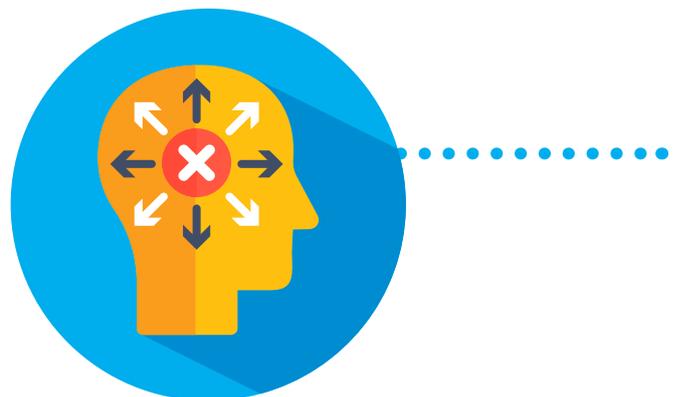
1) Lack of focus:
Every learner has been there. Most workdays are flooded with numerous forms of digital, verbal and written communication. Phones ring, email notifications pile up, and meetings run back to back. That often leaves learners distracted and unfocused. They read notes without absorbing their essence,

and they watch videos without actually paying attention to the lessons.

In the modern workplace, the distractions of digital technology and the demands for multitasking in most jobs leave little opportunity for learners to fully focus on learning.

✔ *Solution:*
Lack of focus can be overcome with a few simple tactics. During the online course orientation, advise learners on when and how to find space to focus. Additionally, recommend setting aside a "focus hour" where learners can ignore their phones, log out of their email, and reserve time in their calendars to concentrate on learning.

2) Negative past experience:
Bad teachers, sloppy online courses and a history of boring schooling are all factors that can foster one of the trickiest barriers to learning: poor past experience.

Many adults have had experiences that gave them a distaste for learning. Some experiences even leave adults doubting their ability to learn new skills.

Unfortunately, an entire history of bad learning experiences cannot be undone. However, the learners' concerns and misperceptions can be identified and addressed early on.

✔ *Solution:*
Create an environment where learners can regularly and safely voice their concerns both before and during the course. That can be done with a survey at the beginning

of the course that asks learners what they value in learning, and what they would prefer to avoid in their learning experiences.

Align their personal development goals with the outcomes of the course, so that they understand the true benefits of learning engagement.
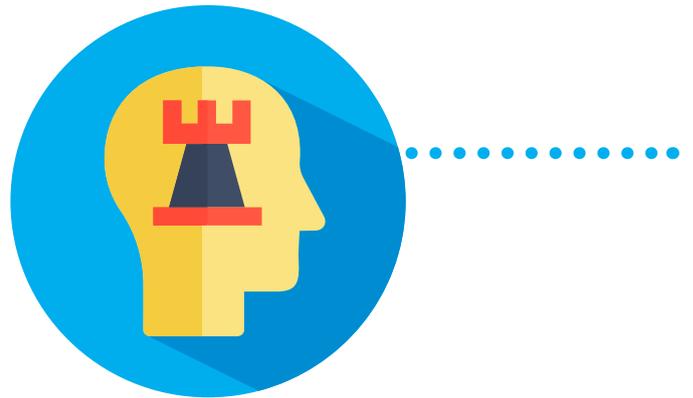
3) Personal mindsets:
Whether it is due to negative past experience or low self-esteem, many adult learners simply believe that they are too old to learn new tricks. Sometimes they are just resistant to online learning and new technology.

These individuals can be disengaged learners from the very start of the course. On top of that, their own negativity can even foster disengagement among their co-learners.

✔ *Solution:*
As with addressing past experiences, make sure that the learning environment offers learners the room to discuss concerns in a constructive manner. If the resources are available, offer live support for both technical and content concerns, so that learners are not delayed by technical glitches or content queries. Some barriers to learning are of a personal nature

and stem from the learners themselves. Others, though, are raised exclusively in the workplace. Let's take a look at some of the most tricky workplace challenges and how to address them.
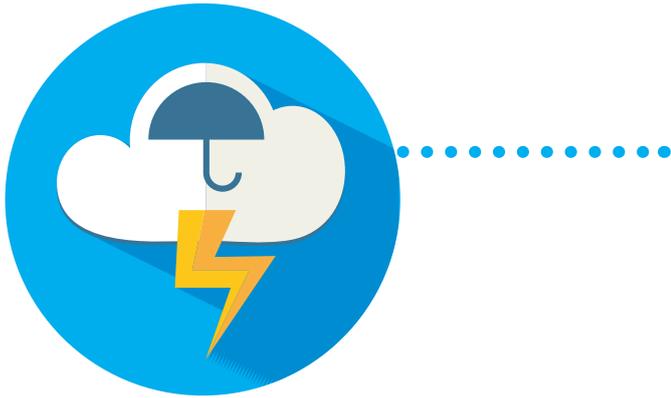
Conquering the barriers to learning in the workplace

In the workplace, barriers to learning mostly stem from the social and the working environment. Those everyday challenges are not only counterproductive but also have a negative effect on the employees' ability to engage in their training. The most common workplace challenges that learners face are:

- lack of community
- lack of purpose
- distracting office environment

To better understand how those challenges work and what we can do to address them, let's break them down one by one:

1) Lack of a sense of community:
Social engagement in learning is impossible to achieve without a sense of connection among learners. In the workplace, a sense of community also translates into a stronger

sense of connection to the organization and its goals. This is especially important when training adult learners because sharing experiences, lessons, and observations with others is known to motivate them.

✔ Solution:
Make the most of the onboarding period by actively showing learners how they fit into the company's bigger picture and allowing their peers to participate in the process.

Also, take advantage of the learners' personal experiences and their desire to share by building active online learning communities into the courses.

Discussions can go a long way toward creating a sense of community. If entire departments are undergoing the same training, encourage learners to share their experiences from the course in their meetings.

2) Lack of purpose:
As far as workplace challenges go, a lack of purpose can prove to be the most harmful of all. Without being aware of a good reason to learn new things and develop, adult learners simply cannot engage in the learning experience. Who could blame them, though? We all prefer to be sure of *why* we do something before we proceed and learners are not an exception.

✔ Solution:
Address a potential lack of purpose by making the goals of any learning experience clear upfront. Avoid "training speak" and provide learning outcomes that are connected to specific workplace goals instead.

For example, in *sales training*, use the opening material of a sales course to explain to learners how mastering the principles of negotiation will help them improve their sales numbers and commission by 10-15%.

3) Distracting office environment:

Open plan offices, loud colleagues, construction on a nearby building, visitors on site - all those factors are potential barriers to learning. They distract learners not only from their work, but also from learning.

✔ *Solution:*

When possible, remove distracting factors from the workplace and promote the importance of engaged learning across the organization. Explain to employees and management how critical it is for learners to be focused in order to engage with learning. That way, you foster a culture of respect for the needs of others.

Consider creating a separate space, free from noise and disruption, for learners to complete their training. Combine this with the "focus hour" recommended earlier, so learners can engage in learning without distractions. Even when all the barriers to learning in the workplace have been addressed, the online environment can still present its own

challenges. Fortunately, they can be easily identified and mitigated.

Eliminating the barriers to online learning

The first step to overcoming the barriers to online learning is to examine them from a learner's perspective. Does technology hold them back from engaging with content? Do they feel alone on their learning journey? Are they bored, even?

1) Lack of technical skills:

Not every adult learner has the same degree of technical experience or digital savvy. Similarly, not all LMSs are designed to be user-friendly. When learners struggle to navigate the platform, they waste precious time and energy that should be spent on learning.

✔ *Solution:*

Create simple tutorials that demonstrate how to use the organization's LMS. Learners who dread the fully-online experience usually appreciate a more personal walkthrough of the system, either in-person or through a recorded webinar that they can refer back to.

2) Isolation:

Even when learners experience a sense of community in the workplace, they can still feel isolated when they are alone facing their computer screen. Actually, isolation is one of the most common fears when it comes to online learning.

✔ *Solution:*

Overcome this barrier to learning by making social features, like Discussions, a key

element of your course design strategy. Incorporating team competitions, group work and leaderboards can further reduce feelings of loneliness.

3) Boredom:

Although engagement does not equal entertainment, boredom can sometimes equal disengagement.

✔ *Solution:*

Prevent having disengaged learners by first understanding your training audience needs and the kind of content and scenarios they find relatable and inspiring. Ensure that the assessments' difficulty level is challenging enough to prevent boredom, but also not too difficult, so that the majority of learners can complete or pass them.

Engaging learners despite the barriers to learning

When learners are prevented from fully participating in learning, the many benefits of learner engagement can't be realized. So, act immediately towards removing workplace challenges and understanding your learners' personal barriers to learning.

By identifying and addressing the factors that prevent engagement in online courses, both learners and businesses are able to get the most out of the learning experience.

Chapter 4.
How to Motivate Learners:
7 Surefire Learner
Engagement Strategies

Engaged learners are motivated, inspired, and willing to invest effort in learning. In other words, they are a dream to teach. Luckily, while there are almost as many barriers to learner engagement as there are benefits, they can be eliminated with a few smart learner engagement strategies.

So, here are a few general tips for increasing learner engagement and keeping learners motivated, no matter the course or the target audience.

5 simple ways to engage and motivate learners

There are five key learner engagement tactics that can make a huge difference to boosting a learner's enthusiasm for new knowledge and skills. What's great about these tactics is that they can be applied across different courses.

In fact, these learner engagement tips can be considered as best practices for motivating every learner, no matter the type of training content.

● ●

1. Set clear learning goals

Learners perform better when they know what exactly is expected of them. Setting and communicating clear learning goals in a language that they can relate to is one of the key learner engagement strategies for capturing an audience's attention right from the start.

Understanding your learners' development needs and how they relate to broader business goals is an important first step. That could involve simple surveys asking learners about their previous learning experiences. Light testing also helps determine the gap between current skill levels and those required by business standards.

Invest some time in understanding the unique needs of each learner. In any eLearning course, there should be some overlap between the goals of a course and the personal goals of the learner. For example, a communications course should take into account the personal goals of a learner who seeks to improve their self-confidence in high-pressure communication scenarios, such as salary negotiations.

To really encourage learners to invest emotionally in the course from the get-go, consider opening the course with a personal goal-setting activity. For instance, learners could be asked to outline their expectations of their upcoming learning experience.

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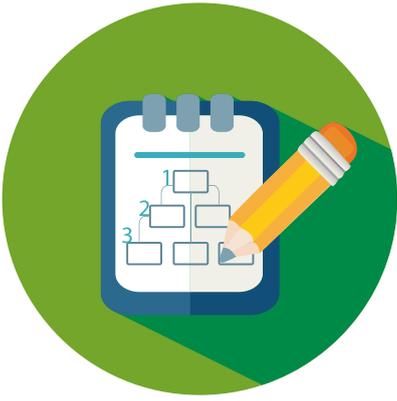
2. Make learning convenient

Convenience is no longer just a nice-to-have. Today, keeping learners engaged and motivated is a necessity. A quality LMS is one of the most important tools for creating courses that can be accessed anytime, anywhere.

Choose an LMS that provides access to learning material on mobile devices, both online and offline. Combining a quality LMS with just-in-time learning principles that focus on giving learners what they need, when they need it most, can be a powerful learner engagement strategy.

Structure content in small, manageable chunks that are easy to digest. Then, consider the types of quick-access resources that learners want to engage with frequently. These could be templates, tools, short videos, checklists or even infographics that summarize a procedure.

Do the same with assessment activities. When an assessment takes less than fifteen minutes to complete, completion rates always increase.

3. Get creative with course content

Boredom is a catalyst for causing learners to be disengaged. Stop learners from

losing interest in a course by using active engagement strategies. Deliver learning content that is creative and fun to interact with. Just remember that fun is a means to an end, not the end goal itself.

Content formats that keep learners coming back for more include infographics, short, sharp video content, and scenario-based training activities that simulate real-life high-stakes decisions.

Combine creative learning material with microlearning principles to deliver the most important content up front (do not make learners dig for it), and refer learners to quality online resources, like YouTube videos.

4. Reward learners for engagement

As far as learner engagement strategies go, acknowledging the effort learners have invested into learning looks like an obvious choice. But how often is it actually applied?

Start by understanding the things that motivate and inspire learners to keep bettering themselves. Is it a friendly competition with peers? Is it a personal progress bar that provides a visible measure of improvement from one assessment to the next? Or is it, perhaps, acknowledgment from

the course instructor or a subject-matter expert?

Leaderboards, badges, and certificates are simple but effective ways to incorporate reward cycles into learning experiences.

One learner engagement tactic is to offer a badge for each activity or piece of content completed. Another is to use a leaderboard to showcase high achievers.

Certificates can be the most meaningful of rewards when it comes to motivating adults to learn because they not only want to build their skills but also to have something to show for it. Consider how completion and achievement can be acknowledged through certificates. If possible, have certificates signed by an authority figure, such as the instructor, a higher education institution, or the CEO.

Take acknowledgement a step further by having instructors share learner success stories in a meeting or through a short video. Here, they can highlight insightful observations made by learners, remarkable improvements, and other noteworthy achievements.

5. Create open communication channels

Many of the common barriers to learning can be resolved with improved communication. Design courses so that open communication channels are prioritized from the start and make sure that learners understand how to use them. Design these channels to allow feedback and opinions to be shared and make clear that each opinion is valued and heard.

As a strategy to promote learner engagement, online communication can involve casual group discussions, guided peer learning or informal spaces for asking questions. Both structured conversations (e.g., instructor-led) and unstructured conversations (e.g., learner-initiated) can contribute to a sense of community and open communication.

Learner engagement strategies for corporate learners

Corporate learners have additional needs next to their general needs as learners. The following learner engagement strategies are great for addressing these needs and improving the learning experience.

1. Offer real-life rewards for successful training and improved performance

Besides the types of acknowledgment mentioned earlier, corporate learners are also motivated by rewards that impact their everyday work life. These rewards can include:

- Certifications
- Promotions
- Job expansions
- Paid time-off
- Performance bonuses
- Discounts in favorite stores
- Gym memberships

Other forms of reward can be more personal and employee-specific. For example, some employees are motivated by the opportunity to train other employees and share their knowledge and skills.

Public praise can also be a successful learner engagement tactic for corporate learners. Consider announcing the training courses' highest achievers in a team or company meeting, so that the others are aware of their colleagues' dedication and success.

2. Use on-the-job training and relatable simulations

Corporate learners are especially focused on translating their learning experiences into improved job performance. They are likely to be more engaged when asked to deal with real-life workplace issues like the ones they encounter in their job roles frequently. Use practical ways to motivate learners, such as simulations, case studies and scenario-based activities that ring true to experience. That will keep corporate learners interested.

Where relevant, design part of the course in a more practical way to incorporate job shadowing or other forms of on-the-job training. That gives learners an opportunity to practice their new skills and deal with tricky situations first-hand.

Supporting strategies to increase learner engagement and motivation

In this chapter, we discussed some practical tips and tactics for motivating and engaging learners. These strategies are important for all types of learners, including employees. However, these strategies are only achievable when supported by the most suitable LMS solution that comes with rich features and advanced flexibility.

In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at such features and how an LMS can be used to motivate and engage learners.

Chapter 5.

How to Use your LMS to Engage Learners

talent ⌒ lms

A versatile, user-friendly <u>learning management system</u> (LMS) provides several ways to motivate learners and keep them engaged in the learning experience. However, successfully employing tactics like open communication channels, creative content formats, achievement rewarding, and convenient learning largely depends on the features offered by our preferred LMS.

So, let's explore the must-have LMS features for implementing advanced learner engagement strategies efficiently.

How an LMS can complement online learner engagement tools and strategies

While there are many <u>LMS features</u> that can boost learner engagement, some have more of an impact than others. Here's a look at the most important features for increasing learner engagement.

1. The best of both worlds: blended learning

<u>Blended learning</u> combines online learning and traditional classroom teaching. These two approaches can be combined in various ways according to the given training needs.

For example, an LMS that offers online conferencing and webinar features, like TalentLMS, can make all the difference by allowing online teaching to be paired with on-site assessment. In other cases, testing can be done online with an LMS' assessment features, while briefing sessions and collaborative workshops can be held in a face-to-face manner.

The blended learning approach can work wonders for motivating learners. Firstly, blended learning diversifies the learning experience to prevent boredom. It also reduces the in-person time required to complete a course and provides more convenience and flexibility through the online components.

Finally, blended learning provides groups of learners with more opportunities and a flexible platform to socialize and bond with their fellow learners. That way, it increases their emotional engagement and strengthens their connection to the learning experience.

2. Motivating every learner through gamification features

These days, gamification is quite the hot topic, and gamification features are considered a must-have for engaging online learners.

Some of the best-known gamification features include:

- Points for progress or achievement
- Badges for learning milestones
- Leaderboards for peer and team competition
- Levels to "unlock" as a learner progresses through a course

Features like points, badges, and leaderboards motivate online learners to compete for recognition, thereby increasing emotional and social engagement. Other features like course levels that have to be unlocked by meeting performance standards appeal to the learners' curiosity and quest for knowledge.

Many organizations have found gamification to be one of the most effective ways to motivate learners. For example, gamification can be used to engage and motivate learners by creating competition between different companies under the same organizational umbrella or various departments within a business.

Real-life examples of how gamification can lock down learner engagement

Many of our users have "gamified" their online training by using the numerous gamification features of TalentLMS in their portal. Using avatars, points, rewards, badges and levels, they have managed to make the learning process exciting both for both the instructor and the learner. Here's how they've described their gamification experience:

### Western Governors University

"We love TalentLMS' gamification options. We use the points system to drive user excitement and gain their buy-in. We set things up so whenever any of our employees finishes a course, they receive a specific amount of points. We created a points catalog housed in TalentLMS where employees can 'cash' in their points for various WGU-branded promotional materials. Thank you TalentLMS for providing a platform where we can provide training in a fun, creative, and exciting way!"

Visma Software Finland

"We offer our software user training within TalentLMS, and have taken advantage of the white-labeling option, so our customers recognize their portals as Visma Talent. We use gamification in a quite simple but effective way: users collect points and we reward the most active ones regularly (once every quarter). We also have many elderly software users, who are not so confident using technology, and their feedback is that gamification makes using an LMS less serious", more fun and much more motivating. So we will definitely continue using TalentLMS' gamification features for sure."

While gamification is promising, it is important to remember that the rewards it offers need to make sense to the learners and fit in the course's context. Take care in designing these rewards so that they are truly motivating, and even inspiring.

Carefully consider the behaviors or achievements learners should be rewarded for. Should completion be enough to earn a badge? How about a certain level of achievement for an activity? Should achievement relative to other learners be emphasized? The answers to these questions will depend on the learning outcomes of the course.
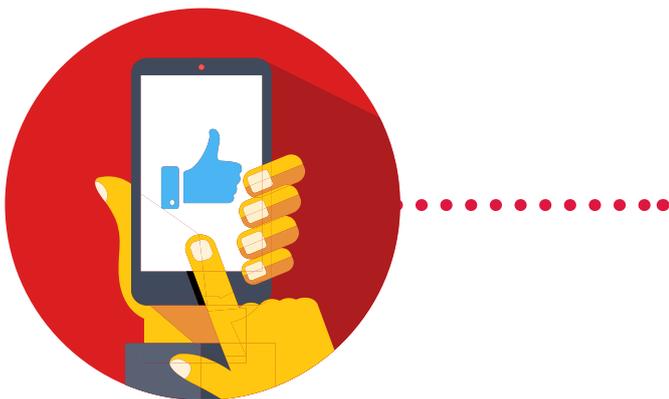
3. Features that support social learning

Social learning is a powerful tool for reducing isolation and engaging online learners emotionally.

On an online learning platform, learners like to feel represented and heard. Therefore, TalentLMS' features that support social engagement can make all the difference in boosting learner motivation:

- **User profiles:**
  Profiles allow learners to share information about themselves

and feel more personably represented on the platform. By choosing an avatar to represent themselves on the LMS and writing a short bio containing their experience, personality, and expectations, learners become more invested in the learning community.

- **Discussions:**
  Discussion forum features remain a staple of any LMS worth its salt. Learners can share their opinions, observations, and experiences on these forums (Discussions) in both structured and unstructured conversations. Instructors can lead focused topics firmly related to learning outcomes, and learners can start their own threads for casual discussion.

- **Certificates:**
  A more recently introduced social feature is the ability to share Certifications earned on the LMS via social media platforms, like LinkedIn. That can be a meaningful reward for completing the course, especially for adult learners seeking recognition in their professional community.

4. How learners learn using mobile features

Convenience is undoubtedly one of the top online learner engagement tools and strategies today. Who doesn't want learning to be readily accessible at their fingertips?

Mobile learning is accessible anytime, anywhere via polished learning management systems that support a wide variety of smartphone and tablet formats.

TalentLMS' native mobile apps for Android and iOS provide learners with the flexibility they search for. And when learners are allowed to complete their courses in the comfort of their own home, on their way to work or even on lunch breaks, their engagement is bound to improve.

5. Using SCORM for more engaging content

One of the best ways to motivate learners is to provide content that is interactive, eye-catching and stimulating.

SCORM content is widely used in the eLearning and online training industries. SCORM stands for Shareable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM). It is a set of technical standards for presenting content on online training platforms and LMSs.

TalentLMS allows for a wide variety of content to be created using SCORM, including presentations, videos, interactive activities, and assessments. SCORM authoring tools also allow instructional designers to create content that is even more advanced, tailored to a course's learning outcomes and given audience.

The most important takeaway here is to choose an LMS that is SCORM compliant, like TalentLMS. Creative, engaging content created with a SCORM authoring tool can be imported to your eLearning portal seamlessly, ready to be accessed by learners.

Today, an even more advanced tool called Tin Can API is gaining favor with instructional designers. Tin Can does things that SCORM cannot, like produce in-depth test results, work outside of a learning management system, and transition between different platforms.

6. Online portal customizations

We all have our favorite websites that we visit many times over. Those websites often attract us because they combine a unique visual identity with a user-friendly layout.

A learning environment that is customized to match the organization or a specific course further invites learners to engage with the platform. Keep in mind that learners spend a significant amount of time on an LMS. Therefore, the platform's design and layout are crucial to maintaining the interest of learners.

Branding can be a key factor for engaging online learners. Not only do customized interfaces look better, but they also leave a lasting impression.

That's why TalentLMS offers a broad range of options for creating a unique look and feel. That includes the ability to create separate training portals (Branches), each with its own unique logo, theme, color scheme, and more.

7. Feedback features: surveys and rating systems

We all want to know what learners truly think about their learning experience. Providing an opportunity to voice opinions and be heard on the LMS is one of the key ways to motivate learners.

Tools like surveys can help determine how successful a particular module or content component has been in engaging learners or provide constructive criticism to help improve what doesn't seem to work.

TalentLMS also provides a rating feature where learners are prompted to rate a course on a scale of one to five stars. That feature provides instructional designers and trainers with a quick overview of learner experience. It can also be set so that learners can see how their peers have rated the course.

Open feedback is highly effective for engaging online learners. Also, it provides trainers and instructional designers with useful information for course improvement.

Choosing the best LMS for engaging online learners

By using your LMS to its full potential, you can achieve and maintain increased learner engagement, overcome the barriers to learning, and employ the best strategies for motivating learners.

The TalentLMS features listed here all provide effective ways to motivate learners, from friendly competition and gamification to honest and open feedback opportunities in course design.

So, when choosing an LMS, it is important to consider its features and whether it provides the flexibility and customizations necessary for successfully engaging learners.

Even better, make sure to choose an LMS that is easy to use. That way, instructional designers can experiment with techniques for engaging online learners until they find what works best for their course.
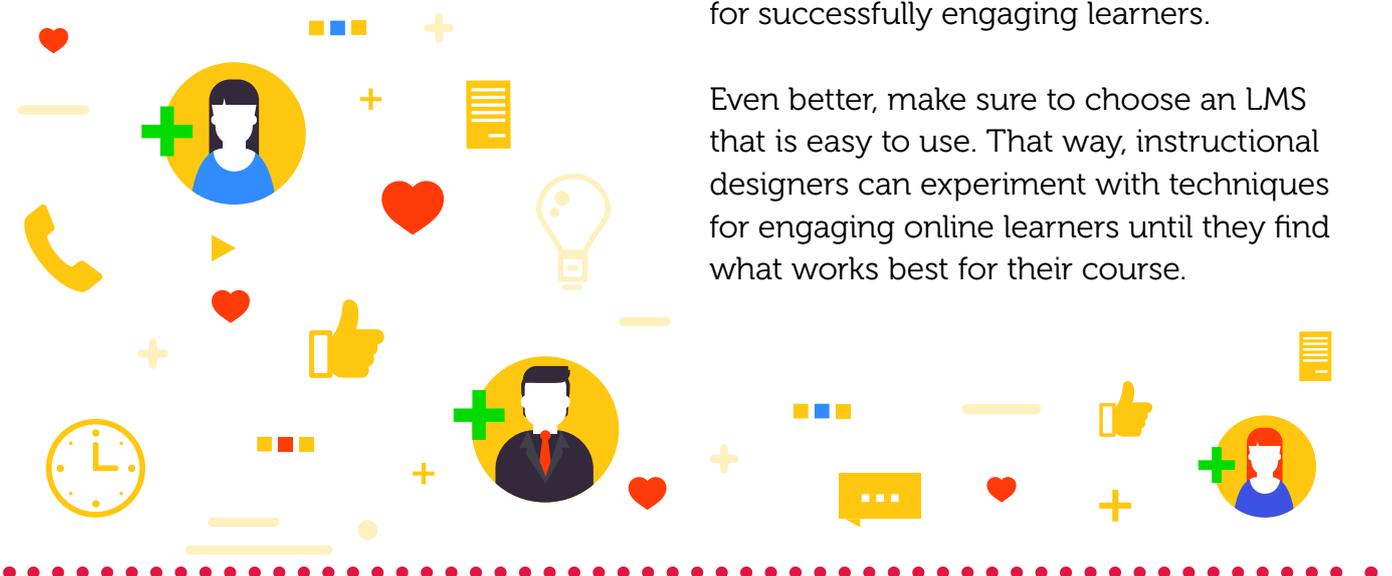
Conclusion

Learner engagement can be tricky to grasp and even trickier to implement. The many benefits that come with having engaged learners, however, make the extra effort worthwhile.

Taking the time to better understand how learner engagement works and how to foster and increase it among learners is the first step to making the most of those benefits.

Understanding the true essence of learner engagement

Learner engagement is the product of instructional strategies that promote active learning and provide learners with constant motivation. As a result, engaged learners are:

- active in their learning
- eager to participate
- willing to expend effort in their learning
- motivated
- inspired.

The idea that learning engagement occurs on multiple levels may sound surprising, but true learner engagement, especially in adult learners, is achieved simultaneously at a cognitive, emotional, behavioral and social level.

By engaging learners on all levels, organizations can reap the many benefits

of learner engagement in full. Furthermore, they can prevent learner disengagement and neutralize its consequences.

Preventing disengagement and making the most of engaged learners

Learners can be fully engaged, partially engaged or disengaged entirely. In that case, they mostly look psychologically detached, passive in their learning, and unwilling to expend effort on training activities.

But, in practice this is not an option for any organization, as there's a direct, inevitable connection between learner engagement and job performance. Preventing disengagement and successfully promoting learner engagement leads to lower dropout rates, increased knowledge retention, and many social benefits across the workplace, like establishing a culture of learning and collaboration.

Benefits that come with increased cognitive engagement include learners improving their problem-solving skills and sharpening their on-the-job creativity. Also, learners that are engaged become invested in their personal development which makes their productivity soar. For an organization, that means that increasing learner engagement leads to a higher training ROI.

Nonetheless, putting effort and resources into increasing learner engagement comes with a few challenges.

Eliminating the barriers to learner engagement

The factors that prevent learners from engaging in learning can be grouped into three categories: barriers to learning, workplace challenges, and barriers to engaging online learners.

Many barriers to learning, like lack of focus, negative past experiences, and personal mindsets depend on the learners' individual traits. Workplace challenges, like lack of community, lack of purpose, and distracting surroundings are the responsibility of the organization. As for engaging learners in online learning environments, an organization may have to confront a lack (or perceived lack) of technical savvy, possible feelings of isolation, and the fear of boredom.

Fortunately, all these barriers can be eliminated by using simple learning engagement strategies.

Motivating learners: 8 proven strategies for increasing engagement

Tried and tested many times over, the following strategies can either be applied to learners in general or (as is the case with the last three) corporate learners specifically:

1. Setting clear learning goals
2. Making learning convenient
3. Getting creative with course content
4. Rewarding learners for engaging
5. Creating open communication channels
6. Offering real-life rewards for engagement
7. Using on-the-job training and simulations

8. Prioritizing LMS accessibility and convenience

To put these strategies into action, an organization should pick an advanced LMS solution, one that comes packed with the right features for the job.

Using an LMS to engage learners

To enable learning engagement among learners, an LMS should offer a particular set of advanced features, just like the ones supported by TalentLMS.

Blended learning, for instance, offers flexibility and helps cultivate a sense of social connection. Gamification, on the other hand, with its competition features (i.e., badges, points, leaderboards, etc.), has been proven to create a healthy competitive culture within and between organizations.

User profiles allow learners to personalize their LMS presence, Discussions help them connect with each other and form lively communities, and Certificates provide recognition on social media and professional networks.

On top of that, mobile learning capabilities allow learners to complete their training at their convenience, while interactive SCORM/TIN CAN content enables instructional designers to deliver more compelling learning experiences. Fully customizable LMS platforms allow for tailored training environments that draw learners in, and survey/rating capabilities enable the learner's voices to be heard and possibly co-author he future of their training.

Pick a top-notch LMS and boost learner engagement.

An LMS can have a major impact on increasing learner engagement, overcoming barriers to learning, and motivating adults to learn. So, why risk using a learning management system that is less than the best?

TalentLMS offers a wide variety of advanced, easy-to-use features for boosting learner engagement and reaping all of its benefits. Don't waste any more time!

Create your forever free TalentLMS account and find out for yourself.

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