# Executive Interview

with **Dr. Jill Stefaniak**,
Chief Learning Officer
Litmos
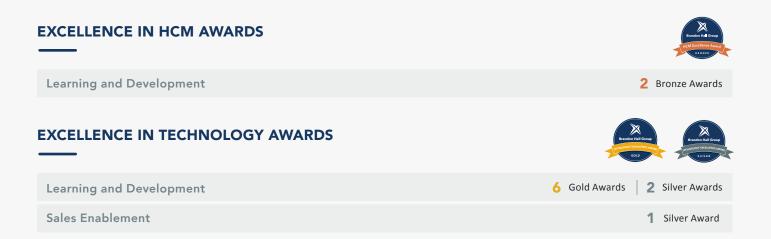
Personalized Learning for Teams,
Departments and Organizations

## About Litmos

Litmos develops learning solutions for top-performing companies. An established leader in the market since 2007, Litmos offers the world's easiest-to-use LMS, comprehensive learning content libraries, integrations with top workflow tools and services to support success. Thousands of companies trust the solutions to create, curate and connect learning content to employees, customers and partners. The solutions are used by more than 20 million people in 150 countries, across 35 languages.

## Recognition

A Brandon Hall Group™ Platinum Smartchoice® Preferred Solution Provider, Litmos won 10 awards in the 2023 Brandon Hall Group Excellence Awards®, including two in HCM Excellence and nine in Excellence in Technology.

**EXCELLENCE IN HCM AWARDS**

| Learning and Development | **2** Bronze Awards |
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**EXCELLENCE IN TECHNOLOGY AWARDS**

| Learning and Development | **6** Gold Awards | **2** Silver Awards |
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| Sales Enablement | | **1** Silver Award |

The Brandon Hall Group™ Preferred Provider Program is specifically designed as a single source of truth that can validate your technology selection decisions.

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## About Dr. Jill Stefaniak

**Dr. Jill Stefaniak** is the Chief Learning Officer at Litmos. Her interests focus on the professional development of L&D professionals and instructional design decision-making. She also serves as an Associate Professor in the Learning, Design and Technology program at the University of Georgia. Content represents the opinions of Jill Stefaniak. It carries no endorsement of the University of Georgia.

## About Rachel Cooke

**Rachel Cooke** is Brandon Hall Group's Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst. She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences and the company's project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 20+ years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research, and Performance Improvement industries.

**Q RACHEL**

What is personalized learning?

**A DR. JILL**

Personalized learning is a long-term commitment to our employees and our overall organizational success. As L&D professionals, it is cultivating and developing these learning experiences that are going to meet our employees and learners where they're at, when they need it most.

Personalized learning helps empower employees to take some ownership in their learning experience as well. That may mean trying to identify training opportunities that are relevant to their current roles within the organization, but also looking to the future and what we are anticipating for them in the future within those roles and for their own career development.

**Q RACHEL**

How can instructional designers build training that meets the needs of learners?

**A DR. JILL**

It's looking at what we want to do, but also thinking about the end result in mind. Too often I hear the term "learning styles" getting mixed in when talking about personalized learning. The researcher in me always cringes a little bit because I don't prescribe to learning styles. It's really about looking at what our learners actually need. What is it that we want them to be able to accomplish and achieve?

When we do that, it's looking at the ways we can scaffold instruction into meaningful chunks to establish some type of a learning path and a learning journey for our employees who are figuring out what they need to know. Is this a long-term learning experience? Is it something where it's an immediate task completion due to safety requirements? It's taking into consideration the unique training needs of the learners, the unique training needs of the organization and what needs to be happening at that time.

**Q RACHEL**

What are some strategies and practices to evaluate and measure learning impact at the individual, department and organization level?

## A DR. JILL

I see needs assessment and evaluation going hand in hand. You can't do one successfully without keeping the other in mind.

When we look at a lot of instructional design processes, the very popular instructional design processes are referred to as ADDIE — analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation. Analysis and evaluation are typically looked at as the bookends of the instructional experience that we're designing. But it's so much bigger than that particular instructional experience that you're designing at that moment.

One of the challenges shown in my research is how organizations do needs assessments and challenges that other L&D professionals have. Advocating for a needs assessment includes finding the time and the resources to do it.

Oftentimes, there's such a push to jump right into designing and developing training. We can do that by scaling those needs assessment efforts. As L&D professionals, it's something that we're continuously revisiting. If we're going through beta testing and piloting training materials with particular audiences, it's constantly going back to asking ourselves, "Are we addressing the needs that we initially intended to address?" Because like any project, we experience scope creep or there may be something new we have to add, or someone's asked for another technology or another format to deliver that content.

Sometimes when those adjustments get made in that design and development process, things get lost in translation. It's always helpful to have those needs at the forefront. We need to keep our learners at the center of everything that we do and ask ourselves, "Am I contributing to organizational efficiency and effectiveness? Am I contributing to ease of learning for my employees who are going to be taking time away from their jobs to complete this training? How is this going to help in the long run?"

When I'm talking to L&D professionals, I recommend asking, "If you could only ask five questions at the beginning of a kickoff project, what would they be? And to really think about that." It's hard to limit it to five questions — but those are the five most important questions.

A lot of times when we look at L&D training materials, there are knowledge checks embedded within those learning modules that will give learners and HR professionals immediate feedback as to how that employee participated or engaged with that module. But if we were to think about it long-term, it's asking, "If we were looking at what's the return on investment with the training that we're putting forward, what do those metrics look like six months from now or a year from now, especially when we're trying to enact change or improvements within our organization?"

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That's not going to happen immediately after someone's completed a training module. Keeping the end in mind, how are we going to evaluate the success of this over the next couple of months or this next year so we can continuously look to make improvements within our organization? When we look at a needs assessment and evaluation as those bookends, we're thinking about how they tie together.

The needs assessment should be about identifying those opportunities for improvement or for enhancing employee performance within our organizations. That should be driving the initial design of instruction. Then we should also look at how are we going to evaluate that. How successful were we at mitigating, minimizing or hopefully eliminating whatever that performance gap was that we identified through a needs assessment?

Q **RACHEL**

When employees have more and more time-critical demands, what are some ways training can be developed to fit into their workday, rather than as another thing on the to-do list?

A **DR. JILL**

If we look back, it was more common to see employees take days off, attend trainings and then come back. We're starting to see a shift where all those events still may be occurring when necessary, but we're also starting to see immediate, just-in-time trainings being integrated into the actual role.

L&D professionals need to work with different supervisors within their organizations, along with their HR teams and Talent Development, and look at some of those tasks that employees may have to complete — they're not necessarily a regular part of their routine, but when they have to complete it, they're going to need resources immediately.

It's anticipating some of those challenging times that may be infrequent tasks within their roles and then trying to identify what types of training and resources are needed. That could be a learning module or it could be a demonstration video. It could be a job aid where there's an infographic just reminding them of certain steps. But you need to think about what those formats are so that if I'm an employee and I'm going through my daily tasks and I stumble across something that I haven't done in a while, I know where I can go to get the resources I need so that I'm not having to halt my performance for that day.

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With just-in-time training, we can't anticipate every single issue that's going to come up within an organization, but it's about focusing on the necessities associated with that training. It's looking at ways we can reduce cognitive load to support our employees' abilities to engage in problem-solving.

From a long-term standpoint, we want our employees to be able to embrace just-in-time training and value that. But we can't just expect our employees to do that, so it's important that organizations promote a culture of continuous learning.

## Q RACHEL

What are some of the challenges that companies face when developing learning material for just-in-time learning?

## A DR. JILL

The hardest thing is trying to meet the needs of every learner. A lot of L&D professionals want all of their learners to go through a training experience and see the value in it, appreciate the design behind it and say, "Yes, this is of use to me."

That can be hard, especially when there are times L&D professionals are developing courses where you're never going to know who your learning audience is because you're never going to know who those customers are. It's still a challenge even if you are familiar with the employees within your organization and you're familiar with those learners.

To be able to meet individual needs and preferences can be a challenging task. A way that we can work around that is to focus on the necessities related to the tasks at hand, but also provide opportunities to promote reflection in goal setting. Maybe it's providing opportunities for employees and learners when they're going through training to stop and pause for a moment. What are the challenges associated with their jobs? Remind them about how this is related to a particular task at hand.

It's good to sometimes have disclaimers. I always call them relevancy disclaimers to remind employees that this will help them do this or that. It can help them start looking at ways in they can value and perceive utility in what's being presented to them. This can allow time for them to reflect so that it doesn't have to be 100% identical to what they're currently doing, but gives them time to process what adjustments might they need to make. Maybe it's encouraging them to pause and talk to a supervisor along the way.

## Q RACHEL

As we head into 2024, what does that look like for Litmos?

## A DR. JILL

Litmos is continuously looking at ways to improve and continue to provide innovative solutions to our clients. We're constantly looking at ways we can improve our course development tool, and so we're looking at ways we can enhance accessibility and reach a wider audience.

We're also looking at ways we can leverage AI technologies in a meaningful way that not only helps support the design of instruction but also helps support personalization in a company's learning program.

**Here are some ways to listen to the interview on Brandon Hall Group's Excellence at Work Podcast:**

iTunes    Spotify    YouTube

Brandon Hall Group
**EXCELLENCE AT WORK**

# About Brandon Hall Group™

With more than 10,000 clients globally and 30 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.

**Membership**
Individual and Enterprise Membership Options: Includes research assets, advisory support, a client success plan and more.

**Professional Certifications**
Self-paced certification programs. Virtual group sessions for companies. In-person conferences and summits.

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Three annual programs recognize the best organizations that have successfully deployed programs to achieve measurable results.

**ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**
recognizes world-class HCM programs that transform their organization and achieve breakthrough results. This designation is the next step beyond the HCM Excellence Awards, which focus on a single program, and looks at the department as a whole.

**SMARTCHOICE® PREFERRED PROVIDER PROGRAM**
uniquely places HCM service and technology companies at the top of organizations' consideration list of vendors. It adds an unmatched level of credibility based on BHG's twenty-eight-plus years of experience in evaluating and selecting the best solution providers for leading organizations around the world.