



Brandon Hall Group
**EXCELLENCE
AT WORK**

Executive Interview

with **Bob Szostak**,
Director of Customer Solutions, VPS

and **Steve Thompson**,
Director of New Business Development, EMEA, VPS

and **Talat Riaz**,
Learning and Engagement Consultant, VPS

and **David Spano**,
Senior Lead Software Engineer, VPS

and **Michael Rochelle**,
Chief Strategy Officer, Principal Analyst, Brandon Hall Group™

AI in Learning and Development — Myths and Misconceptions

About VPS



VPS's Value Proposition for their clients is simple and rooted in the understanding that, while there are commonalities between organizations and challenges, there is no "one right thing" that serves as a panacea to these challenges.

Working with 90+ clients each year across a dozen commercial industries, the government and the military, VPS cross-pollinates best practices and creates enduring learning solutions within a client's ecosystem, infrastructure and budget to solve real business challenges.

VPS's solutions accelerate performance within a changing world. Their approach is summarized under the three pillars of Consult, Engage and Deliver. These pillars ensure that clients get the right outcomes appropriate to their needs — regardless of the size or scope of engagement.

Q

MICHAEL

What do you think are some of the biggest myths or misconceptions around using AI and learning?

A

BOB

Probably the biggest one out there is that AI is going to put us all out of a job. And to address that, I want to go with some recent implementations and experiences we have had. What we're finding is AI allows people to focus on the value-added aspects of their job; for instance, allowing subject matter experts to focus on information validation instead of generation activities that AI can be very useful in.

A

TALAT

One thing that springs to mind is the perception that AI is really difficult and expensive to implement. And, of course, that's true if you're trying to develop your own LLM from the ground up. But most businesses can benefit from AI; you don't need to train your own models to be the size of ChatGPT or Gemini or any of the other models. However, a lot of AI services can be accessed at relatively low cost. You can even set up your own little AI GPTs fairly rapidly and easily with little to no cost as well, and no technical or specialist skills required. It can be as big or as small as you need it to be.

A

DAVID

AI is everywhere; we've been using it for the last 30 years. Every time your kid takes a video for TikTok and puts on some sort of filter, AI is the reason why they're able to do that. It's in our everyday lives and a big part of it is you're going to see AI popping up in numerous areas. You're going to be using it and not realizing you're using it. What we're going to see is, anybody who can drive a car can drive a Ford Focus. They can also drive a Ford Mustang. Now you're going to get that Ford Mustang for the price of the Focus.

A

STEVE

We don't realize just how much AI is actually within the community, the business community, and in our private communities — from simply uploading videos, to taking advantage of certain social media, to more traditional tasks like night driving. AI's out and it's here to stay. There's a myth that it's something new and exciting and to be feared, but the interesting thing for all of us in business is to realize that AI is across business. There are areas where the treatment of data, the presentation of data and the convenience of accessing information that AI provides are something that we can embrace.

Q

BOB

When I talk to clients, I hear a lot about concerns around data safety and data security — where's my information going and who has access? So there's this fear that everything becomes available to everyone. Can you talk about that as a myth a little bit?

A

DAVID

There's a lot of concern around big companies like OpenAI and ChatGPT, and things of the like. But it's very easy to set up your own 7- up to 70-billion-parameter large language model in-house behind your own network so that your data never leaves the safety and security of your own servers. And on top of that, there are new ways of handling proprietary data with the benefits of a 4-trillion-parameter system like ChatGPT.

If it's in-house, maybe you can't afford that. So you build a little 7-billion-parameter system and that smaller system is trained on your data. You can ask the general question to the large system and as it comes behind the firewall, you get a refined answer from your smaller 7-billion-parameter system. You get the benefit of both worlds and your data never leaves the security of your network.

A

STEVE

It's interesting to see the scalability aspect. We've seen increasing ways in which you can use the power of something as large as ChatGPT or some commercially available tools. When you actually come back into your organization to help support your needs behind your organization's firewall, then you can really leverage what it is you need for your business to the size that you want for your business, the information flow you need for your business, and most importantly, keep that information within your business and knowing what you're looking for. We're increasingly seeing where the power of AI can help you thrive.

A

TALAT

There is this move toward more federated learning services. You've got this setup where the organization database is separate from the actual LLMs that they work on, so the data isn't transferred over to the LLM. You're going to see a lot more of that coming out as well because I think data privacy security is a huge topic when it comes to AI specifically.

Q

MICHAEL

Before you throw open the front doors of your organization to AI, what do you need to do to get ready?

A

TALAT

One of the key ones is the organization needs to understand what its aims are and what it's trying to achieve with AI — essentially, just be able to define what the objectives are for that organization.

A

STEVE

Without oversimplifying it, we can use AI like any tool in business and understand if the outcome that you're looking for is to be able to spend less time physically moving data yourself — but more time implementing your interpretation of data, or you're looking to shorten a certain process, or you might be looking to help yourself with translation or whatever — all of those are important AI tools, but it's not what you want to do with them in the business.

People in the business can help understand and realize the power that AI can have to improve the efficiency in their job. It's really dangerous if you just unleash AI in an untethered manner, like swimming in the Wild West. People need to understand what the business is looking for, feel supported and, so culturally, businesspeople can embrace what is available to them in some ways,

as we all did 25, 30, 40 years ago when we first got our word processors and we learned that we could write our own memos instead of having a secretary. And then we had spreadsheets, and then got the internet.

I remember in the organization I was with that the internet was a dangerous thing. How dare you have the internet and be doing stuff when you should be working? Over time, some of the efficiency gains that we're seeing and think are marvelous today will become the norm. They'll become the norm if we encourage people from a cultural perspective in the business to embrace it and experiment, but also understand the pitfalls and the challenges with data management and constriction.

A

BOB

This is a change management effort. It's no different than any other change that comes through our systems or imposes itself upon the way that we work. I always feel like I'm on a podcast called "Back to Basics with Bob," because it's always getting back to agree upon what success looks like — communicate with your stakeholders. It's assessing your capabilities and your skillsets internally and recognizing where you need to get help to make that vision come to life.

We're fortunate to have people like David and Talat within our organization who understand how to engineer and design solutions. Not every organization has that, which is why VPS exists to help in those situations. You have to understand what you're trying to do, and understand what tools are out there to understand the skill sets that you have.

Q **MICHAEL**

How does a team that's just getting up to speed on the skillset to look at AI simultaneously know how to do a very highly technical implementation correctly?

Q **MICHAEL**

Can you give some best practices on how you've seen organizations embrace and get ready for change — particularly this brand-new change management model we're looking at for AI?

A **DAVID**

The first thing to know is it's not as technical as it sounds. It can be a little alarming when you hear somebody using words like proxy tuning, fine-tuning and large language models, and all of that. But what it comes down to is anybody capable of having a conversation with a 5-year-old is capable of having artificial intelligence do what it wants.

The birth of the large language model and just the spotlight that's been shined on it since ChatGPT was released has shown that anyone who can talk through a prompt in whatever language — English, for instance — can have an AI do whatever they want. The real key factor is that you speak to it like it's a 5-year-old; it needs to know everything you want it to do.

Getting that system installed with your little 7-billion-parameter Llama 2 LLM in place may require a little bit of assistance to have it installed. But once it's installed, actually using the AI is really about asking it the right questions. That's what we're here for. The real magicians of AI are the individuals who can craft a prompt to ask the machine to do exactly what they want it to do. For those of us on the backend with the technical knowledge and who set up the hardware and figure out the processing and stuff, it's mathematics really as opposed to the individuals on the front end who can craft that perfectly worded prompt.

A **BOB**

Just as you would with any other change initiative, you need a campaign, a communication plan and a strategy for different levels and stakeholders in the organization. One of the most important things is setting up the proper expectations so that you can be successful and you can measure success.

I'll give you an example. We ran a competition with the U.S. Navy at the end of last year. The U.S. Navy said, "Hey, you know what? We want to decrease the time between when we come to you with an idea and the learner gets the learning." Now, if they just left it at that and said, go use AI to do that, who knows what they might've gotten? But they didn't leave it at that. They said, "Come to us, we want you to use large language models specifically to reduce the amount of time and effort in the analysis process to increase speed to the learner." They specified the tool and specified which part of the process they want affected. Organizations have to be very specific and purposeful in naming those conditions to get results.

Q

MICHAEL

What do you do about the change curve when it comes to AI?

A

TALAT

Just make sure you understand what you're trying to achieve. That's got to be the starting point and from there, everything else will follow. It's not exactly an alien process; it's very similar to what we do with most other rollouts, with just a few caveats. It will be familiar to most people who have gone through change. It's knowing that it's not that dissimilar to what we've done before. I learn as I go, absolutely, but there is that distinct framework that we can use and adapt it slightly, but that will take us where we need to go.

Q

MICHAEL

Are there metrics that you can share on what to shoot for to know that you're successfully managing the change?

A

STEVE

Microsoft's work trend index shows that at least about 70% of people have said that they'd like to delegate as much of their work as possible to AI to lessen their workloads so that they can be more productive in other areas — which is great. Other organizations have said that they see AI taking away mundane tasks, which is in itself a good thing to enable people to consider other outputs of their work. When they can communicate together, they can share ideas and brainstorm.

Ironically, the quite interesting metrics that we see in our office in the UK are recent behaviors for people working remotely, which goes back to the pandemic. The rise of remote working has brought a behavior that's very task-oriented. What we're finding now with AI coming in is some of those tasks have been taken away, which is freeing up people and giving them an excuse to come back to the office and talk to each other, which is breeding a better level of collaboration and creativity fueled by the AI tool that is around them. So in a twisted way, it's helping overcome one of the challenges as an employer of getting people back in the same room talking to each other. So if that was a metric, I'd love it.

DAVID

A I'll take it from another perspective. My wife is a teacher, so she deals with the students and the next generation. If you consider that ChatGPT launched in November 2022 and there were studies done in the spring of 2023, just about a half a year in, that showed 27% of students had already adopted AI, but by October that number jumped over 50%. More than half of students out there — the next generation — are going to come into the workplace already having adopted and started using AI writing tools.

We're just talking about writing tools, which is where the large language models shine. And that's what we're really talking about here. The large language model is what was so different about ChatGPT versus other AIs we've used in the past. It allowed anybody to be able to go in and start communicating with these AIs, and start asking them to do things for them.

In terms of adoption rates and change management, when it comes to a big business, start off small. You find those monotonous parts of a job that can be handled by a slightly intelligent machine, and you have that machine do that part. Then what you'll see from there is people more willing to say, "OK, well, what else can I do? What other parts can I have it do that'll free me up to focus on the aspects of my job that really require my attention? It'll allow me to go back to the office to have conversations." That's the direction we are heading and that's the best way to handle it.

MICHAEL

Q That's classic change management — get those quick wins and build momentum for bigger wins.

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



**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.

Professional Certifications

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

Membership

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

Advisory Offerings

Custom Research Projects, including surveys, focus group interviews and Organization Needs Assessment for Transformation, Technology Selection and Strategy.

Excellence Awards

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.