

Executive Interview

**Beyond the Platform: What
It Actually Takes to Build a
Skills-Driven Organization**

2026

Instructure.



Melissa Loble
*Chief Learning Officer,
Instructure*



David Wentworth
*Managing Director of
Learning and Talent,
Brandon Hall Group™*

About Melissa Loble



Melissa Loble brings a career-long passion for learning and meaningful development to her role as Chief Learning Officer at Instructure. With experience spanning K-12, higher education, educational technology and corporate learning, Melissa has consistently focused on creating moments where people can apply what they learn to real-world contexts.

She is fascinated by the connection between learning experiences and career success and has taught in continuing education programs for adult learners transitioning into instructional design and learning roles. Her work combines strategic thinking about skills development with a deep commitment to understanding learners and creating personalized, impactful learning experiences.

About Instructure



Instructure is an educational technology company that partners with schools, universities and enterprises globally to build better learning experiences through its integrated suite of learning and talent development solutions. The company's platform serves millions of learners across the world and enables organizations to create meaningful, connected learning experiences that drive business outcomes and support talent development at every level.

About David Wentworth



Today's conversation is moderated by **David Wentworth**. He is Managing Director of Learning and Talent at Brandon Hall Group™ and leads research and advisory work on learning strategies, talent development and organizational performance.

With deep expertise in learning and development, David has worked extensively with organizations across industries to improve learning effectiveness and drive business outcomes. He hosts the Excellence at Work podcast, where he explores trends, innovations and best practices in learning and talent with leaders and practitioners from around the world.

Learning That Lasts

Q David

Tell us about your career path and what brought you to focus on how people learn and grow.

A Melissa

Throughout my career, I've been grounded in teaching. My mother was a teacher and I've always been drawn to the idea of helping connect the real world, context and application to how you teach something. I've taught in many different contexts: K-12, higher education, educational technology and now in the corporate space. The thread throughout all of that has been: how do you create moments in people's lives that are applicable and meaningful when they go to apply what they've learned?

Learning Must Lead to Application

The true value of learning is measured by what employees can successfully apply, not simply what they complete.

Most recently, what's really drawn me to skills work is my experience teaching in a continuing education program for adult learners transitioning into teaching and instructional design. What fascinates me is figuring out how a project in class actually helped someone get a job. I'm captivated by piecing apart how that happened and why. That's been the theme of my entire career: connecting people to what makes them personally and professionally fulfilled and successful.

**"... they
all mean
differently."**

Q David

You've touched on something powerful: When somebody actually applies something they've learned in their life, that's the goal. But when we talk about skills, everyone says they're focused on skills. Is that actually true, or does everybody have a different definition?

A Melissa

Everyone says yes, they're aligned to skills, that all their learning work is about skills development. But when you unpack what skills means, it's very different to people. That's what's creating this urgency around needing to be skills aligned. You see different definitions of skills and different collections.

Skills Create Value

Skills only become strategic assets when they are explicitly connected to measurable business outcomes.

For some, skills are hard, discipline-specific skills. For others, they're soft or durable skills. Some call them resilience or readiness skills as a separate bucket. Even traditional learning environments call them learning outcomes or skills. The industry is grappling with the fact that these all mean different things. And the critical piece is: how do they actually result in outcomes orientation? How do they drive business outcomes or impact? The industry is struggling to connect the dot between skills and those outcomes.

Context Shapes Capability

Q David

When organizations define skills, they often default to just building more content and libraries. How has that worked?

A Melissa

It hasn't worked because we just keep adding to those libraries without asking: are those relevant today and will they be relevant in the future? Let me give you an example. We were leading work on what it means to be a leader in an AI-enabled world. We could have dusted off our existing leadership skills and technology skills, but instead we sat down as a team and talked through it.

Context Defines Critical Skills

Every organization must build its own skills architecture based on strategy, culture and future business priorities rather than adopting generic competency models.

That conversation highlighted that we needed to refresh what leadership means and more importantly, we realized there isn't a pre-diagnosed set of skills we can just adopt from someone else. There's a contextual set of skills that's meaningful to us, where we are now, where we want to go and the culture we've built. That's very contextual and aligned. The most important part is then asking: how do these skills directly connect to our business outcomes? How do leadership skills in an AI-enabled world connect to revenue targets, growth targets, or efficiency targets? That piece is crucial.

"... know our learners."

Q David

We often focus on business needs and organizational goals, but do we actually bring employees along on this journey? Do they even understand or care about skills?

A Melissa

This is such an important question. If we think about backwards design, starting with the outcome and building learning activities to that outcome, we need to understand who's actually going to achieve that outcome. We have to know our learners.

Many learning professionals think they know their audience, but that's another place where we need to refresh our understanding. You might have three to five generations of employees with different preferences and engagement styles. You have different functions; what a sales team needs is different from what a support team needs.

Design Around the Learner

Effective learning begins with understanding who your learners are, what motivates them and how they prefer to engage.

I tell my students to think of it like writing a screenplay: write down who your audience is, who you want seeing this and who you want to feel impacted by it. When you do that in your organization, looking at generational preferences, roles and other pieces, you can start to set the stage for what learning needs to look like. Then decide: do we talk about skills or do we talk about empowerment or growth or what motivates them to engage?

Growth Through Challenge

Q David

There's been a lot of focus on ease of use in learning technology, often for administrators rather than learners. But there's also an important question about cognitive challenge and struggle. How do we balance that?

A Melissa

Yes, there's a really interesting conversation happening around cognitive challenge and struggle. We want to deliver easy, efficient learning because learners have busy days. Most organizations don't even segment out learning time, which I think is a mistake. But we also have to ask: Is ease and efficiency always the best path? There's a big dialogue happening because of issues AI has surfaced. Is it good to have cognitive challenge or struggle? It can be important.

Productive Struggle Builds Capability

Learning experiences should balance accessibility with meaningful cognitive challenge to develop lasting capability.

Not all learners want things to be hard. Many come to you saying they want things easy so they can be successful or get promoted. But that doesn't always develop the skills we're talking about. We have to be careful about how and where we lean and who we're designing for. There are places where challenge or struggle can be meaningful because it actually gets learners there, but they don't understand that's what will get them there because they're not reflecting on themselves as learners. It comes down to under-

**"... this is
how we
grow."**

standing who and how we're designing for, whether that's the technology, the content, the learning experiences, or all of the above.

Q David

Completion rates and smile sheets are easy to collect but essentially useless without context. What should organizations actually be measuring?

A Melissa

We should be measuring impact on the organization. I'll give an example. In my own organization, we have quarterly check-ins for compliance certifications like SOC2 and ISO. You'd get an email saying, "complete this course," which tells me nothing about why it actually matters for our organization or how it helps me contribute better.

**Measure
Business
Impact, Not
Completion**

Compliance metrics and completion rates matter far less than demonstrating how learning improves organizational performance.

We've shifted that narrative. Now we're engaging people by saying this is how we grow, drive outcomes, or create an environment where you feel safe to do your best work. When you change that narrative, people engage differently. They go into the learning thinking "I want to contribute more effectively" rather than "I was told to do this for a certification." The way we talk about this needs to change throughout the organization, not just in learning. We need to make it clear how compli-

A Learning Manifesto

ance matters to the work we do and how we serve customers. Then the learning experiences themselves can reflect that larger cultural experience.

Q David

You talk about a learning manifesto. What is that and how does it help?

A Melissa

A learning manifesto is your declaration of what learning means for your organization. It's not generic. It should answer: What are our non-negotiables? Is it always contextual? Always engaged with customers? Personalized?

Every Organization Needs a Learning Philosophy

A clearly defined learning manifesto creates consistency across learning experiences while allowing flexibility in delivery.

There are all sorts of pieces to it depending on your organization. Once you have that manifesto, you can slowly use it throughout your business. It guides what does new learning look like in departments experimenting with experiential learning. It guides what forklift training looks like, and it doesn't all have to look the same way.

The manifesto can guide it. Starting with something like "what do we believe learning looks like" and "what do we want our employees to understand about themselves as learners," and then accepting that at the executive level, you can start to see benefits

**"... pick
passion."**

trickle throughout the organization. If you're in an organization that started in a compliance place, this is how you start to shift. You don't have to change overnight dramatically.

Q David

As companies are thinking about these big issues, what steps should they take? Who owns the change?

A Melissa

Incremental change is really important and it depends on who's excited about it. You need to start with somebody passionately excited about the change. If it's mandated and handed down without passion, it's going to be really hard to implement meaningfully. The chief learning officer is increasingly sitting at the executive table, directing more than just learning, but part of overall corporate strategy and vision. That person can be part of this change. But it can also be any individual saying, "I want to see something different in my teams and employees and I want them more engaged with learning."

Transformation Starts Small

Sustainable learning transformation is driven by passionate champions who demonstrate success through focused, incremental change.

I'd say: Start with either a single department or a single team to experiment with these practices, or start with one piece you could do. For example, our customer success team realized they needed

Beyond Job Mapping

different skills given where the learning industry is. We targeted that outcome; improving conversations with customers that would impact CSAT. We started with that one team and worked through how learning shows up to get to that outcome. Pick small and pick passion. The hope is the passion and excitement gets other people's attention and they want to apply that same framework to their areas.

Q David

When you look at organizations getting this right, what are the hallmarks you're seeing?

A Melissa

Skills Must Live Inside Career Growth

Organizations create stronger learning cultures when skills, career pathways, coaching and development are designed as one connected system.

First, beyond job-to-skill mapping, we're seeing companies take the next step: map those skills into career ladders and fold them into one-on-one coaching conversations managers are having. Then align that to learning so employees get contextual understanding of skills within a larger career ladder and their everyday work. That job architecture extends into a learning culture.

Second, we're seeing a shift from compliance-as-checkbox to outcomes-based. They're baby-stepping into how they talk about it, then experimenting with delivery. Instead of the same content every year, they're creating more experiential learning opportunities around compliance.

**"... gather
the data."**

Third, we're seeing more personalized learning; though I'll clarify: personalized meaning not just adaptive. We often think of personalized learning as adaptive learning, which is amazing. I mean more personalized to the subject area and the learner. We're seeing more scenario-based, simulation-based learning. AI is unlocking the ability to create content that was previously held back by simulations' complexity.

Q David

Let's talk about AI. Everyone wants to use it for content creation and efficiency, but how should companies think about using AI to understand and develop talent?

AI Should Reveal Learning Insights

AI creates the greatest value when it uncovers learning patterns, supports better decisions and personalizes development rather than simply generating content.

A Melissa

The AI enablement piece is crucial; it's not about bolting on new AI tools, but about using AI to unpack what learners need and how they're successful. First, make sure your systems capturing the full experiences of learners, whether online, asynchronous, synchronous, or in person. You want meaningful data. AI now enables capturing data from physical classrooms by recording and parsing out the cognition and process happening there. Gather the data, then use AI to parse patterns and ask questions of it.

Support in the Moment

For a long time, we'd stand up and show engagement graphs while making assumptions about connections. Now conversational exchanges with data are really powerful. You have to help people understand how to prompt, push for objections, ensure what's coming isn't biased or hallucinating. Then have real conversations around what the data shows: where is impact happening and where isn't it?

There is also the AI coach capacity. Employees often learn outside workdays and don't have support when stuck. AI tools trained on your company's knowledge base and philosophy can help when employees are engaging, especially in remote environments. This helps close the gap between learning and skills while supporting performance in the moment.

AI Coaching Extends Learning Beyond the Classroom

Intelligent coaching enables employees to receive contextual support whenever learning is needed, reducing the gap between knowledge and performance.

Q David

What excites you most about the future of learning?

A Melissa

For Instructure, I'm excited about putting agency in learners' hands. While the organization creates the environment, content and scaffolding, learners can now actively center themselves. Technology shifts now mean learners can make choices about their career path. If they know where they want to go or what fields they're exploring, they can see

Learner Agency Will Define Future Success

Organizations should prepare employees to continuously learn and adapt rather than attempting to predict every future skill requirement.

what skills align, understand why and take agency to build their own path. That learner agency excites me because we have to take action to be fully engaged.

Personally, this is an era where we're finally asking ourselves: How do I learn meaningfully? When I ask guests about favorite learning moments, they usually mention late teens or college or the workplace. But we're not reflecting on earlier moments where we learned to adapt and change behavior.

We're now in a space where it's acceptable to ask meta-level questions about ourselves as learners. In the next three to five years, you'll be expected to know how you learn, because the world is changing so fast we can't prepare you for what your job looks like in a year or two. But we can prepare you to be a learner in that world so you can quickly adapt, feel comfortable and have resilience. That bigger meta-question of "who am I as a learner?" is finally acceptable and exciting.



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

Spotify



Podcasts



Youtube





Shaping Excellence in the Future of Work

Our Vision

A world where every HR organization drives business transformation through human capital excellence.

Our Mission

To provide CHROs, CLOs, and workforce leaders with the intelligence, tools, and community they need to drive business transformation through human capital excellence.

What Organizations Gain

Organizations partner with Brandon Hall Group to:

- Make human capital decisions with greater confidence.
- Reduce risk in workforce transformation and strategic investments.
- Accelerate the execution of HR, talent, leadership, and learning initiatives.
- Build organizational capabilities that create lasting business value.
- Learn from proven practices of organizations recognized by the Excellence Awards Program.

Move Forward with Confidence

The Brandon Hall Group Eminence Program brings together the intelligence, guidance, and executive collaboration leaders need to navigate today's workforce challenges and prepare for what's next.

[Explore the Eminence Program](#)

Elevating the World of Work

institute.brandonhall.com

HCM Conference 2027 | Awards | Summits

