EXCELLENCE AT WORK
Podcast by Brandon Hall Group

Executive Interview

HCM's Hall of Shame: Seven Mistakes That Won't Go Away

2026

TraineryHCM 1™

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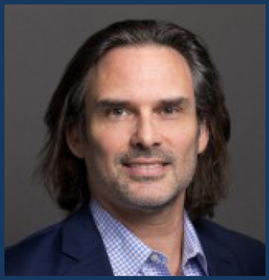

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About TraineryHCM

TraineryHCM is a cloud-based human capital management (HCM) SaaS technology company headquartered in New York City. The company traces its roots to Training Network, founded in 1980, which was acquired by JER HR Group in 2018 and subsequently evolved into its current form. TraineryHCM offers an integrated suite of product solutions spanning learning management (TraineryLMS), training management (TraineryTMS), coaching (TRAKCoaching), video-on-demand learning (Streamery), performance management (ReviewCloud), compensation management (CompBldr) and core HR operations (TraineryCORE). The platform serves more than 300 clients and 50,000 users across the United States, with clients spanning financial services, healthcare, manufacturing, retail and other sectors.

About Mahesh Kumar

Mahesh Kumar is the Founder and Managing Director of TraineryHCM and Managing Director of JER HR Group LLC. Before entering the human capital management space, Kumar spent more than 20 years in global financial services at JP Morgan, Deutsche Bank and Goldman Sachs, working across Asia, Europe and the United States on change management, strategic planning and organizational development projects. That career gave him deep experience in large-scale technology delivery, enterprise project management and go-to-market strategy. He transitioned into entrepreneurship when a consulting engagement led him to acquire a consulting firm and subsequent client demand for content solutions prompted the acquisition of Training Network, from which TraineryHCM was born.

Host: David Wentworth

Today's conversation is moderated by **David Wentworth**, Managing Director of Learning and Talent at Brandon Hall Group™. He brings nearly two decades of experience conducting research, interviews and data analysis in the learning and talent space. David originally joined Brandon Hall Group™ in 2012 as a Principal Analyst, establishing himself as one of the industry's foremost authorities on learning and development before departing to serve as VP and Talent Platform Evangelist at Schoox. Prior to Brandon Hall Group™, he served as a senior analyst at the Institute for Corporate Productivity. In his current role, David works with technology providers and enterprise organizations to understand learning and talent challenges and what it takes to overcome them. He is a podcast host, a regular speaker at industry events and has authored numerous articles across HCM and learning publications.

Fix the Foundation

Q David

One of the most common issues we see is companies treating the job description like a historical document, something they create once and never revisit. What has your experience been with that?

A Mahesh

The job description is the most important component of hiring someone into an organization, yet in 15-20 years of consulting work it is one of the most common problems we see with clients. It quickly goes stale. Employees will tell you that what they actually do is different from what is written down and the damage compounds over time because nobody can trace the problem back to its source. You build performance standards, pay ranges and training programs on top of the job description, but the job evolves and the document does not keep pace.

If the foundation is wrong, everything built on it is wrong too. Add skills into the mix and the problem becomes even more critical, especially now with AI tools and regulatory shifts raising the stakes. Managers struggle to keep career paths and competency training aligned, because where the plan starts is different from where employees actually are and there is no matching. SHRM found that only 42 percent of HR leaders say the job description accurately reflects the role's requirements. That means for more than half of employees, what they actually do is very different from what is on paper and that mismatch costs organizations real money when they hire the wrong person for a role.

The Documentation Gap

SHRM found only 42% of HR leaders believe their job description accurately reflects the role, meaning for most employees, what they actually do and what's on paper don't match.

Q David

When companies shift toward focusing on skills and capabilities instead of jobs, the first thing they do is look at those job descriptions to inform the work. Does that compound the problem?

A Mahesh

Exactly. Most organizations do not start with good architecture and job descriptions are not a glamorous topic to fund or fix. Combine that with the broader job architecture and there is even less appetite for the work, but it is the foundation everything else in HR sits on. It has been an ongoing problem in the HR space for a long time.

Q David

Let's move to the second mistake: Companies remaining locked into the annual performance review even though the industry has been calling for something more continuous for years. Why does that ritual persist?

A Mahesh

I think we are confusing a document with a discipline. The annual review is a documentation event, it captures what happened in the prior year, but performance management itself is something completely different: an ongoing conversation of coaching and correcting issues as they happen, whether that is a weekly check-in or an informal conversation over coffee. Instead, organizations collapse everything into one annual event and forget that performance could have been tracked and coached much earlier and much better.

The annual review has become one milestone tied to compensation decisions and one study found that only eight percent of companies say their performance management process drives high value. It has become more of a ritual people go through because it is expected, not because it works.

A Ritual, Not a Discipline

Gallup has found that only 14 percent of employees actually agree

86% Don’t Recognize the Review

Gallup found only 14% of employees agree with the performance documentation they receive — the annual write-up rarely reflects the actual year.

with the performance review documentation they receive, meaning 86 percent do not think the year end write-up reflects their actual performance that year. That is a stunning number and it persists because changing the culture to support continuous performance management and building the technology to support it, is a lot of effort for any organization.

Q David

Beyond the cultural shift, is there a technology piece organizations need to solve for continuous performance management?

A Mahesh

Yes, there is a cultural change and a technology solution required together. If a manager and an employee have an informal conversation over coffee about performance, that discussion needs a way to be documented and folded into the review process, rather than requiring a formal sit-down in a conference room. Organizations that combine informal and formal feedback into a culture of continuous feedback can achieve the ideal most companies say they want, but making that cultural shift is difficult for many of them.

Q David

Mistake number three is rewarding results while ignoring the behaviors behind them. Since outcomes are the whole point, what is the mistake in also rewarding purely on that basis?

A Mahesh

This is where organizations create a culture problem they built themselves. Compensation is the most honest signal a company sends an employee and when the reward structure is not connected

Funding the Wrong Behavior

to how someone actually performed or behaved, you end up funding the exact behavior that will eventually break the organization. If a sales rep is cutting corners or violating norms but still making their number and you reward them because they made the number, you are ignoring how they got there.

Coming from Wall Street, I can say anecdotally that was the culture on the Street: if you made your number, nobody questioned how, until it became a real issue. Things have improved somewhat, but that pattern still shows up in many organizations and it eventually comes back to hurt the company. The core issue is that most organizations measure only one attribute, like the number of calls handled or deals closed and never measure things like client retention or long-term relationship value. Organizations need more than one metric and they need to account for the behavior behind the number, not just the number itself.

Q David

Let's talk about technology. Companies keep buying more HR software instead of integrating what they already have. What have you seen drive that pattern?

A Mahesh

One Metric Isn't Enough

Measuring only the number — calls handled, deals closed — ignores the behavior behind it, and that gap eventually comes back to hurt the business.

Your own Brandon Hall Group research found that only 22 percent of organizations believe their HR technology is actually integrated, which means roughly 78 percent do not. Gartner has found a similar range, with 70-80 percent of organizations saying their HR technology is not integrated at all. So instead of connecting what they have, companies keep buying more. This is an evolution that happened over time: organizations start by buying best-of-breed point solutions and it turns into what I would call best of chaos and most organizations are living with the consequences of those decisions.

Best of Breed, Worst of Chaos

On average, organizations have around eleven different HR technology solutions and every single one was purchased to solve a real problem in isolation. What is missing is the connective tissue across the whole HR architecture. Technology gets bought quickly because organizations do not have the funding or the process in place to integrate properly, so each system ends up standing alone rather than talking to the others. It becomes Band-Aid after Band-Aid rather than fixing the problem at its root, partly because there is rarely enough budget to look at the architecture holistically.

Every integration between two systems is also a potential failure point, which adds maintenance cost, but that rarely enters the thinking at the time of purchase. Once it is bought, the organization keeps using it, often without fully understanding whether it is delivering a return.

Eleven Systems, No Connective Tissue

Only 22% of organizations believe their HR technology is actually integrated — the rest are patching one point solution onto another.

Q David

Let's shift to a bigger-picture mistake: one-size-fits-all training. Why do organizations still deliver learning the same way to everyone, regardless of role or career stage?

A Mahesh

Part of it is operational simplicity. If an organization buys ten courses in bulk, everyone gets the same set regardless of their career goals or the skills they actually need and it becomes a compliance checkbox exercise rather than real development. A finance employee and an HR employee do not need the same courses, because their backgrounds and career paths are different and a first-year analyst does not need the same training as someone who has been in the role for 15 years.

Same Courses, Different Careers

Organizations struggle to calibrate training to those differences and to build the content and tooling to support it, so it is operationally easier to assign the same courses to everyone. I do think this will change. With AI, every employee can eventually have a personalized career plan: here is where I am, here is where I want to be and here are the courses and timeline that get me there.

Large organizations have also swung the opposite direction, buying access to thousands of courses and letting employees pick with no guidance, which just leaves people unsure what to take or how it maps to their career plan. I have seen many clients continue to select the same content across the board even when it clearly is not landing and it is honestly surprising that this still happens as often as it does.

Q David

Even in areas like compliance training, where people are afraid to change anything, is there room to personalize?

A Mahesh

Yes and that fear is exactly why the problem persists in compliance in particular. People are afraid to touch it because it is compliance, so they assign it to everyone without asking whether it is actually relevant to a given employee's role or existing competencies.

Personalization Is Coming

AI could soon give every employee a personalized career plan, but for now operational simplicity keeps most organizations assigning identical content to everyone.

Q David

Mistake number six is about how organizations recognize top performers, specifically promoting your best individual contributor into a management role they are not prepared for. Why does this keep happening?

Different Job, Different Skills

A Mahesh

It is not a mistake to promote high-performers, the mistake is promoting them without preparing them for what is fundamentally a different job. Being excellent as an individual contributor does not guarantee success in a management role, because the skill set required is different and neither the candidate nor the organization always recognizes that going in. If someone is a great sales rep and gets promoted to sales manager without the right preparation, they may not be the right fit for that new role at all.

Some progressive companies, particularly in the Valley, have built solutions to this by creating parallel career tracks, so a strong individual contributor can be promoted to a more senior version of the same role rather than being pushed into management. That gives them the recognition of advancement while keeping them in a role where they excel and it also improves retention.

When organizations promote someone into a management role they are not suited for, that person often becomes a poor manager and the organization can lose a strong performer entirely, because they were placed in a job they were not capable of doing or interested in and their old job has already been given to someone else.

Parallel Tracks Keep Talent

Progressive companies promote strong individual contributors into senior versions of the same role instead of straight into management, protecting both the person and the business.

Q David

Let's finish with the last mistake, one that might not obviously look like a mistake: managing talent decisions by gut feel instead of using real workforce intelligence. What does that look like in practice?

A Mahesh

When decisions, like deciding someone will be a good sales manager, get made purely on gut feel without any analysis of

No Analytical Framework

whether that person is actually capable of doing the job, there is no analytical framework behind it. There are plenty of tools available: assessments that can gauge whether someone is the right fit for a role, succession planning processes and career pathing that lays out how long it will take someone to get from where they are to where they want to be. What happens instead, most of the time, is a shotgun approach: someone did well in one function, so the assumption is they will do well in a completely different one and that is not necessarily true.

The Cost of Guessing

When a promotion decision is made on gut feel, the candidates who weren't chosen are left with no real explanation — and that's when people start leaving.

Workforce intelligence means combining analytical data, succession planning data and an honest assessment of an employee's performance against the attributes and training relevant to where they are headed. None of those things alone solve the problem, but together they give an organization a framework and some quantifiable basis, for making better decisions. It is not easy to do, which is why a lot of gut-based decision making is still happening.

There is also a real cost to it: When you make a promotion decision purely on gut feel, you disenfranchise the employees who did not get it, because there is no rational explanation you can give them for the decision. If there were five candidates for a role, the four who were not chosen are left disappointed with no real answer as to why and that creates its own cycle of problems, including people leaving.

Brandon Hall Group EXCELLENCE AT WORK

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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