

It's not just fun:

The essential guide to learner engagement



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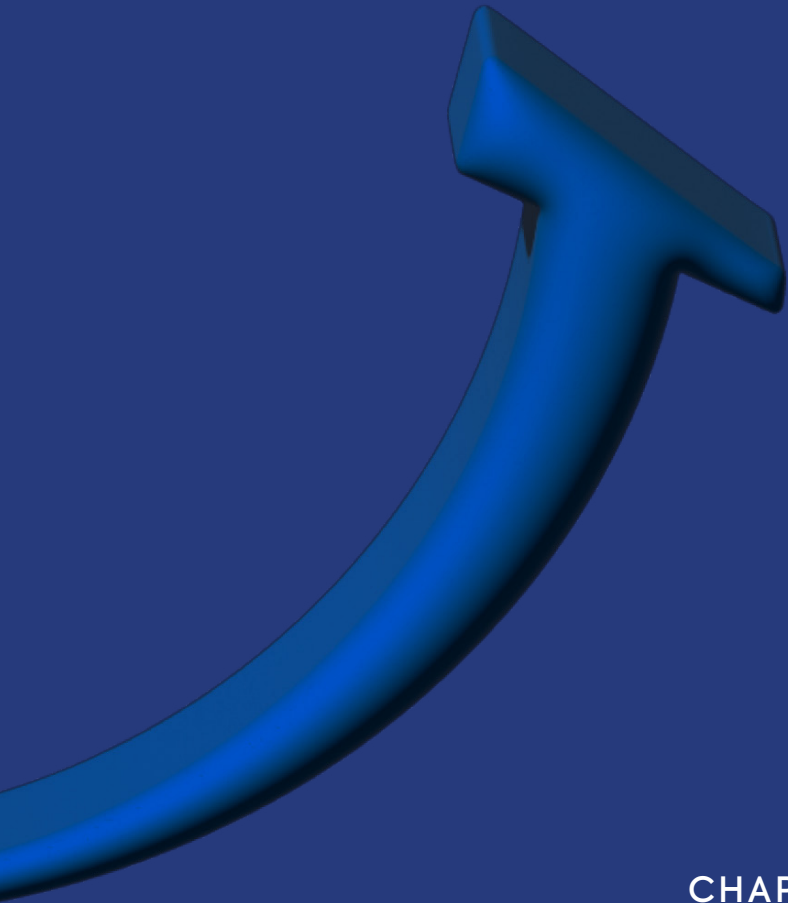
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

To be engaged in something means to commit one's full attention to it. And it's a powerful word in the workplace lexicon. That's because when applied to employees, higher levels of customer loyalty, productivity, and profitability inevitably follow. But employee engagement doesn't exist in isolation. Behind every engaged employee, you'll usually find an engaged learner.

What does engagement have to do with learning?

Employee engagement and learner engagement are closely linked. When employees are actively involved in workplace learning, they're more likely to be invested in their roles and in their work. They're more likely to succeed and become top performers. They're also more likely to have a sense of purpose, growth, and satisfaction. Which, in turn, translates into higher levels of well-being, productivity, morale, and retention in the workplace.

Sounds good, right? But achieving learner engagement isn't straightforward.

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."

But over recent years, the landscape of learning has evolved. And so has our understanding of learner engagement. With technological advances, including AI-powered learning platforms and hybrid work models, organizations face new opportunities and challenges when it comes to keeping learners fully engaged. Learning engagement is no longer just about motivation—it's about personalization, adaptability, and creating meaningful, inclusive experiences that resonate with diverse groups of employees.

- Disengagement remains a big challenge, particularly in today's fast-paced, digitally-driven world. Cognitive overload, digital fatigue, and competing priorities in hybrid work environments can pull learners in multiple directions, reducing their ability to focus on meaningful learning. As a result, learners 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.

Engaging disengaged or distracted learners takes effort. So, the key here is prevention.

The good news is that with the right strategies—such as personalized learning paths, microlearning, and leveraging technology like AI and gamification—

organizations can prevent disengagement before it sets in. And create vibrant, interactive learning experiences that keep learners focused and interested.

The many facets of learner engagement

In this eBook, we dig deep into learner engagement. We cover the full spectrum, from how it works and why it matters, to what's getting in the way and how to overcome the barriers. Here's a breakdown of our five key areas of investigation:

- 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 become highly engaged employees. However, employees who are fully engaged in the learning experience bring an added layer of benefits. What is the role of learner engagement in boosting job performance? How well do engaged learners do in a corporate setting? Discover the different ways engaged learners drive positive change across the workplace.
- The barriers preventing engagement: Learner engagement is a force for good, yet it's seldom achieved. What are the potential barriers to learning engagement? How can they be lifted to prevent disengagement?
- 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? What can AI do to help?
- Actionable techniques to increase learner engagement with a learning management system (LMS): Practical strategies to make the most of an LMS for engaging learners online. 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 the benefits.



CHAPTER 2

Beyond the conventional definition: What learner engagement actually is

Most organizations recognize learner engagement as a crucial factor in their objectives. But what does it really mean? While learner engagement has become a buzzword, it still gets confused with a bunch of related, yet very different concepts.

Let's clear things up by defining learner engagement and exploring how it applies to today's evolving workforce.

What is learner engagement?

Let's start by exploring the engaged learning definition. Engaged learning is when learners are actively involved, motivated, and deeply connected to the learning process. This includes their interactions with the course, instructors, and peers. In other words, learner engagement shows how successful a learning experience can be for everyone involved. Learner engagement ultimately leads to better understanding and application of knowledge.

Think about this: What is an engaged learner? Engaged learners don't just finish tasks. They are involved, motivated, and excited to learn. This applies to employees working in the office, from home, or in a hybrid setting.

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

What is an engaged learner?

An engaged learner is:

- **Active** in their learning process
- **Eager** to participate
- **Willing** to put in the effort
- **Motivated** to improve
- **Inspired** by the course content

For example, engaged learners consistently complete assignments, produce quality work, and participate in collaborative spaces (e.g., discussion boards)—even in remote settings. But if they only complete tasks without enthusiasm, avoid collaborative activities like webinars and discussion boards, or their results are poor, they probably lack engagement.

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

Learning can be enjoyable. But fun alone doesn't define engagement.

Flashy visuals, entertaining videos, and amusing graphics capture learners' attention. However, real engagement comes from the desire to **learn and apply** knowledge. Learners who are truly engaged see those elements as motivation to dive deeper into the training material and boost their skills. On the contrary, learners who are only on board for the fun videos and leaderboards experience engagement at a superficial level.

Dr. Heidi Kirby discusses on [“Hitting the mark: How to create top-tier training”](#) from TalentLMS' podcast series, Keep it Simple, how training should be on point, not just on trend, to truly engage learners.



The 3 dimensions of engagement

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.

Consider this: [64% of employees](#) tend to multitask during online training sessions, such as responding to emails or checking notifications. This divided attention reflects how being disengaged on even one level can undermine the overall learning experience.

So what do engaged learners look like? Let's see the three types of engaged learners:

- **Behaviorally engaged learners:** They participate by completing tasks, attending sessions, and following through on activities.
- **Cognitively engaged learners:** They are mentally invested, focusing on understanding, problem-solving, and applying new knowledge.
- **Emotionally engaged learners:** They connect with the material on a personal level and are motivated by interest and emotional involvement in the learning experience.

To better understand what works when it comes to improving engagement, we'll dive deeper into its three main levels:

1. The cognitive level



Cognitive engagement means learners are mentally invested in their learning strategies.

Imagine someone devising their own mnemonics to remember complex content, or someone drawing mind maps to organize newly acquired information. These learners take the initiative to represent what they learn in their own context. Plus, they employ diverse learning strategies to absorb information as efficiently as possible and improve their performance.

Cognitive engagement happens when learners feel confident about their work and their ability to master new knowledge. To engage learners on a cognitive level, it's important to have well-designed courses and consistent training content. Additionally, AI-driven tools can track learner progress and recommend content that fits their individual needs. This keeps learners engaged by making the training feel relevant and personalized to them.

2. The emotional level



Emotional engagement is about feeling connected. Learners who are emotionally engaged feel a sense of belonging and purpose in their learning. This means that during training, people feel connected to others and the training context, are committed to training, and experience low levels of anxiety.

This connection can be harder to foster in remote and hybrid settings, where learners may feel isolated. Social learning tools like discussion boards, webinars, and virtual peer interactions bridge this gap and foster a sense of community.

Emotional engagement is about feeling connected. Learners who are emotionally engaged feel a sense of belonging and purpose in their learning. This connection can be harder to foster in remote and hybrid settings, where learners may feel isolated. Using social learning tools like forums, webinars, and virtual peer interactions helps bridge this gap and foster a sense of community.

Also, such feelings of isolation and emotional disengagement can be prevented by investing in 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. Organizations must also provide strong support from trainers and subject-matter experts.

3. The behavioral level



Behavioral engagement is what most organizations measure because it's visible. Such learners complete their tasks, attend training sessions, and participate in discussions.

But the catch is that behavioral engagement is a surface-level view 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.

When behavioral engagement isn't paired with cognitive and emotional engagement, learners complete their courses without truly improving their skills, retaining, or applying new knowledge. This is especially true for adult learners, who often view training as another box to tick, and proceed to complete it with minimal engagement.

To spot low engagement despite active participation, look closely at the learners' efforts in training activities. You'll notice it's mostly superficial. Their knowledge retention from previous activities will prove limited in assessments. To beat this, design training that accommodates diverse preferences, as generational diversity also plays a big role in how learners engage.

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, [generation](#), location, and other factors.



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**
 In your course design, carefully consider all the factors that promote engagement in adults. Plan exploratory assignments that take learners out of the course's realm and require additional research. Assignments that push learners to research beyond the course content spark curiosity.
- Assignments are brief and convenient**
 Short, manageable assignments fit into busy schedules. When you create assignments, break them up into smaller sections that take up to ten minutes to complete.
- Content is highly relevant to real-world context**
 Real-world scenarios resonate with adults and keep them emotionally connected. 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. This is why they thrive on feedback. Acknowledge their progress to keep them motivated. Offer constructive criticism to help them learn from their setbacks. Apply principles like [positive psychology](#), acknowledgment, and recognition to their training by building opportunities for feedback from instructors and SMEs into the learning experience.
- The company fosters a culture of continuous learning**
 A supportive company culture that emphasizes continuous learning keeps adults motivated to grow and develop. Invest in ongoing professional development by offering dedicated learning programs, mentorship opportunities, and clear personal development plans. When employees see that the organization values their growth, they are more likely to stay engaged and committed to improving their skills.

And in an era where remote and hybrid work are the norm, it's important to offer flexibility in when and how employees learn and complete assignments. An [AI LMS](#) can also support adult learners by offering personalized content suggestions based on learner progress and performance.

Social engagement: Is it the 4th level?

Social engagement is a powerful motivator for adult levels, especially on an emotional and cognitive level. When people bring their own work and life experiences into their learning and share them with or learn from others, their engagement grows stronger.

[Social learning](#), aka networking with peers and learning from their experiences, is a critical aspect of social engagement. It's arguably the fourth dimension of learner engagement. Social engagement is the anchor that keeps learners coming back, motivated and inspired. And it's particularly relevant to remote employees who might feel isolated from their peers.



What is learner engagement in a corporate training context?

In corporate training, learner engagement isn't just about completing tasks—it's about gaining knowledge that can be directly applied to their job. As we've mentioned before, behavioral engagement isn't by itself an adequate measure of overall engagement, although it could be an indicator of progress.

Cognitively, emotionally, and socially engaged learners are more likely to retain information, acquire new or boost skills, and improve their workplace performance.

For example, when learners are truly engaged in, let's say, conflict resolution and teamwork training, they are more likely to improve their performance in these areas in the future. That, in turn, means that they will be more focused and productive as a team, adding more value to the organization.

Adding value for engaged learners

At its core, learner engagement measures whether or not someone has been given sufficient motivation to fully invest in learning. The next chapter will thoroughly explore the connection between learner engagement and factors like performance and workplace satisfaction.

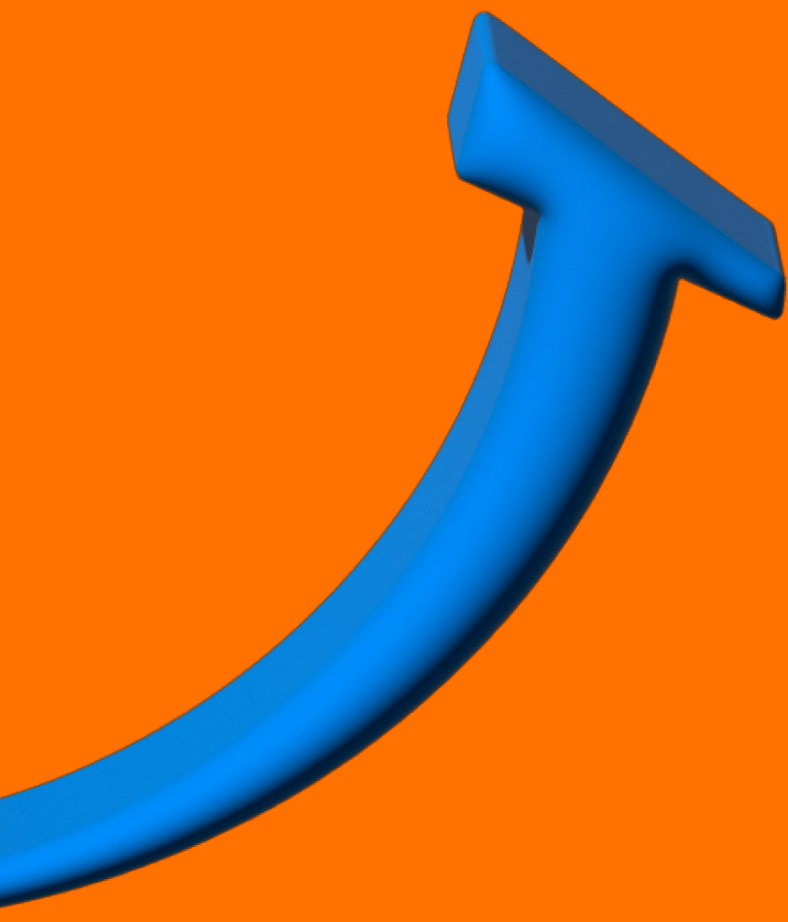
For now, think about how you can boost engagement across all levels in your training programs. What can you do to ensure learners are engaged, regardless of where or how they work?

CHAPTER 3

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.

The same goes for online courses. Engaged learners are more likely to enjoy learning, stick with the course, and become ambassadors for it. When learners are engaged, they thrive—and so does your organization.



The relationship between learner engagement and performance

Assessment scores are a useful way to measure whether or not learners are actually 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, engaged learners perform better, absorb more, and remember what they learn.

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.

Impact of learner engagement in training ROI / business ROI

Engaging learners on all 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, thus 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 interactions and [knowledge sharing](#).

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 [employee development plan](#) successfully.

So, what happens when employees are happy, motivated, and driven toward self-development? They become more efficient, more productive, and more likely to bring forward creative and innovative ideas from their newly-acquired skills. This performance improvement positively impacts the organization's bottom line, maximizing [the return on investment](#)

[\(ROI\) from your training](#). However, the benefits of learner engagement are not exclusive to the organization. Having high training engagement also significantly benefits learners.



The importance of learner engagement for learners

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 employee training mandatory, such as [compliance training](#). However, when learners aren't engaged, the risk of dropouts increases—even in required programs. This is why you should offer courses with engaging content that captures learners' interest and keeps them actively involved. Engaged learners are more likely to complete their training successfully and actively dedicate to learning.

Higher knowledge retention

As Benjamin Franklin famously said, *"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 without genuine involvement, they're unlikely to retain much.

On the other hand, engaged learners are mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally connected to their courses. This deeper involvement helps them absorb new knowledge more effectively and increases their chances of retaining it in the long term.

Improved learner performance

Organizations provide learning opportunities to help their employees improve at their jobs. But disengaged learners are less likely to gain meaningful knowledge, making it hard to apply what they learn. On the contrary, engaged learners not only perform

better at work but also boost their personal and professional development. Beyond personal benefits, high engagement in online training brings significant job-specific improvements that benefit both the employee and the organization.



How engagement positively affects the workplace

Engaged learners do more than just develop their own skills—they drive positive change across the entire workplace. Here's how:

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 who asks for their help. That way, they help instill a [learning culture](#) among employees and 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. In fact, employees find training beneficial for their engagement at work and job satisfaction. If their company doesn't provide them with training opportunities, [41% of employees](#) will look for another job in 2024.

Fostering personal development

Engaging in learning, both socially and emotionally, helps employees at any stage of their career experience personal growth and development. This leads to a more skilled, satisfied, and motivated workforce, benefiting both individuals and the organization.

Providing rewarding experiences

Engaging training content is an empowering way of 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.

What is the impact of disengagement?

The benefits of learner engagement are clear. Yet, many organizations and training providers don't prioritize it. This oversight can have serious consequences.

Disengaged learners tend to be:

- mentally checked out,
- passive in their approach, and
- unmotivated to put effort into training.

These traits hurt both morale and performance during training. And since disengaged learners don't absorb the training material, they're less prepared to apply new skills in the workplace. Which ultimately affects the organization's overall success.

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 4

Barriers to learning: How to conquer the challenge of engagement

Engaged learners bring big benefits to businesses. After all, which organization doesn't want higher completion rates, better retention, increased workplace satisfaction, and a positive training ROI?

Despite this, learner engagement isn't a given. In fact, 41% of learning practitioners say that a lack of learner engagement prevents L&D teams from supporting organizational and people goals. So why is learner engagement such a major problem?

Because barriers to learning get in the way.

Barriers to learning directly impact learner engagement and the learning process as a whole. They range in complexity and include both practical and emotional barriers to learning. Which means there's no single silver bullet solution. But with better understanding and a few strategies up your sleeve, there's a lot you can do to break them down. And even stop them before they start to take hold.



This chapter looks at some examples of barriers in learning. It addresses how to overcome the learning obstacles that threaten learner engagement from three different perspectives:

- workplace learning obstacles
- online learning barriers
- personal barriers to learning

But first, some background.



What are barriers to learning?

A barrier to learning is anything that prevents learners from fully engaging in the learning process in terms of both the content and the experience.

In an adult learning environment, barriers to effective learning are varied and often unpredictable. Think, for example, of 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 poor wifi connection. How about someone who failed a previous training assessment and is scared it might happen again? These are just a few examples. But there are many more that can be considered barriers in learning.

When learners can't fully participate in a learning activity, emotionally or practically, they can't be truly engaged in the learning process. This leads to training that fails to meet its targets. And employees who aren't properly equipped to do their jobs or progress into new, more challenging roles.

Here are examples of barriers to learning, divided into three broad categories: **personal barriers to learning**, **barriers to learning in the workplace**, and learning obstacles associated with online training.

Conquering the barriers to learning in the workplace

In the workplace, barriers to learning mainly stem from the social and physical working environment. They represent a series of everyday challenges that aren't only counterproductive but also have a negative effect on an employee's ability to engage in their training or the wider learning environment.

The most common learning barriers that employees

face can be split into three main categories:

- lack of community
- a distracting office environment
- limited access

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

Examples of learning barriers in the workplace

1. No sense of community

THE CHALLENGE: When individual learners feel part of a wider community, learner engagement grows. This is because training becomes more than an isolated task for individuals. Instead, it translates into a shared purpose. It connects to team development and organizational goals, not just personal objectives. It also fosters collaboration, support, and motivation among employees. How?

Learners who feel part of a community are more likely to engage actively in discussions, share knowledge, and support each other's development. But [social engagement in learning](#) doesn't come naturally. It takes ongoing commitment and planning from both employers and employees.

THE SOLUTION: Make the most of the onboarding period by actively showing learners how they fit into the company's bigger picture. And allow your new hire's peers to participate in the process, too. Discussions can help create a sense of community, so make them part of the learning process. If entire departments or teams undergo the same training, encourage learners to share their experiences in meetings, online chat rooms, or message forums. Finally, integrate active online learning communities into courses.

2. Distractions and lack of time affecting focus



THE CHALLENGE: When asked to explain why engaging employees in learning is challenging, [40% of executives cited time constraints](#) ("everyone is too busy") as a top contributing factor. In the modern workplace, learners often have little opportunity or time to fully focus on learning. Open-plan offices, loud

colleagues, construction on a nearby building, and visitors having a tour are all distractions. And that's not all. Workdays are also flooded with numerous forms of digital, verbal, and written communication. Phones ring, email notifications pile up, and meetings run back to back.

Trying to zone in on training while surrounded by all this isn't easy. This explains why [64% of employees tend to multitask](#) (for example, reply to emails and check notifications) when watching an online training session. With multitasking the norm rather than the exception, learners read notes without absorbing their essence and listen to presentations without paying attention to the content or message.

THE SOLUTION: When possible, remove distracting factors from the workplace and the learning environment. And promote the importance of engaged learning across the organization. Explain to employees and management how critical it is for learners to be focused 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 a "focus hour" where learners can ignore their phones, log out of their email, and reserve time in their calendars to concentrate on learning. Did you know? [87% of remote employees](#) are more likely to complete training if they have dedicated time during their workday for it.



3. Limited accessibility

THE CHALLENGE: The modern workplace is typically rich in diversity. And all the better for it. But with that diversity comes both responsibility and challenge. Training needs to be [accessible for all](#), no question. This expectation is unequivocal. But that doesn't mean it's easy. It takes ongoing commitment, consideration, and careful forethought from L&D teams to maintain full and comprehensive accessibility. This may explain why—despite best intentions—accessibility issues are still barriers to effective learning in many organizations

THE SOLUTION: Consider all requirements when designing and delivering training programs, online and offline. Create a checklist and ask yourself these questions when working on different content types and delivery methods:

- **Language and timezones:** Are my learners dispersed across countries and even continents? If so, what languages do I need to translate training content into? And how might different time zones affect access to training?
- **Written information:** Is terminology easy to understand? Have I used plain language or jargon that some learners won't understand? And have I presented written content in accessible formats such as large print, Braille, and Easy Read? Is the text broken down into manageable chunks using subheadings? Have I used an accessibility checker to identify missing titles and unclear reading order?
- **Visual content:** Have I provided alternative text descriptions for images and keyboard-based navigation? Do I have sign language interpreters to translate live content where necessary? Do I follow the same structure across different pages? Have I formatted hierarchical headings, checklists, and bullet points with screen readers in mind? Have I included symbols and text, as well as textures or patterns, instead of block colors in graphs and charts?
- **Multimedia content:** Does multimedia content include audio descriptions, captioning, and visual cues?
- **In-person training:** Is the venue accessible in terms of parking, room access, and facilities? Is information about the event accessible, and does it provide the right level of detail?
- **Digital content:** Do my learners have access to assistive technologies, adaptive hardware, or alternative input methods to effectively navigate digital interfaces? Are there opportunities for asynchronous communication? (For example, text-based communication, like emails, messages, and discussion boards) Does important information (system notifications, errors, warnings, and outcomes, for example) stand out for people with visual impairments?

Eliminating the barriers to online learning

eLearning is fast becoming the norm in terms of employee training. And there are good reasons for this. But there are still learning barriers associated with training delivered digitally. So, how do you address these?

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? Here are some of the most common learning obstacles and tactics you can use to overcome them.

Examples of learning barriers in online learning



Lack of technical skills

THE CHALLENGE: Not every adult learner is tech-savvy. Your employees will all have different degrees of technical experience. And different levels of confidence. All of this will impact how they interact with the content and the learning platform. Similarly, not all learning management systems (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.

THE SOLUTION: Create [simple tutorials](#) showing how to use your 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 they can refer back to. Even better, choose an LMS that puts user experience first. Opt for one that is intuitive, easy to navigate, and supports different user types. If you take your time choosing the right LMS from the get-go, the less time you'll need to spend training employees to use it.

Isolation

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

THE SOLUTION: Overcome this learning barrier 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.

Technical issues

THE CHALLENGE: Poor internet connectivity,

outdated technology, or unfamiliarity with digital tools can disrupt online learning, causing frustration and disengagement.

THE SOLUTION: Online training demands a tech-forward approach. Provide learners with the right digital toolkit and keep checking in to ensure it's current and meets requirements. Ensure all learners know where to go for technical support if needed.

Overcoming personal barriers in learning

Tech, and increasingly AI, may be able to relieve some of the burden of designing and [delivering employee training](#). But no amount of tech can do the learning for your employees.

Simply put, learners aren't robots. They're humans with individual emotions, experiences, instincts, and reactions. Which means every learner brings their own personal challenges and mindset to the training table with them.

Here are some examples of the most common examples of barriers to learning employees might experience on a personal level.

Emotional learning barriers can be complex. They can't be resolved with a checklist or an extra dollop of funding in the training budget. They take time and thought to overcome. But with the right strategy and continued commitment, even the most deep-rooted personal learning barriers can be broken down.

Examples of learning barriers on a personal level



Negative experience

THE CHALLENGE: On the path to learning, most of us have had at least one experience that's sparked a general distaste for learning. Whether unprepared tutors, poorly designed online courses, or inaccessible and uninspiring conferences, a bad experience can foster one of the trickiest barriers to effective learning. It can even leave adults doubting their ability to learn new skills.

Unfortunately, a history of bad learning experiences is a powerful emotional learning barrier that can't be

easily undone. But concerns and misperceptions can be identified and addressed early on to spark gradual improvements.

THE SOLUTION: Create a learning environment where learners can regularly and safely share their experiences and voice their concerns before and during their course. Use a survey at the beginning to ask learners what they value in learning and what they prefer to avoid in their learning experiences. Align their personal development goals with the course outcomes so that they understand the true benefits of learning engagement.

Age or tenure

THE CHALLENGE: Sometimes, employees who have been in their posts for a long time lose enthusiasm for learning. This can also be the case for employees reaching the end of their working lives. Some believe they are too old to learn new tricks. Others may be put off by new technologies or a “what’s the point?” attitude.

This particular learning barrier is one of a group of motivational barriers. And it can be one of the hardest to overcome because the mindset associated with it is deeply ingrained. But there are tactics you can use to address the challenge.

THE SOLUTION: Use adaptive learning platforms to create personalized [learning paths](#) that tailor training content based on employees’ individual experience, learning pace, and preferences.

Offer training in various learning formats (videos, interactive sessions, self-paced courses) to accommodate different learning styles and preferences. Underpin this by supporting flexible training schedules and [self-directed learning](#).

And encourage mutual learning and engagement by offering reverse [mentorship programs](#) where experienced employees share their knowledge while also learning different skills from younger employees.

Lack of relevance or purpose

THE CHALLENGE: If learners don’t find training material relevant or aligned with their personal or career goals, they will likely question its purpose. And, as a result, struggle to engage with it.

As far as barriers to learning learning barriers go, a lack of purpose can prove to be the most harmful of all. Without knowing a good reason to learn new things and develop, adult learners simply can’t engage in the learning experience.

THE SOLUTION: Avoid “training speak” and clarify learning intentions and goals from the start of the training session. Link these with your company vision, values, specific workplace goals, and your employee’s personal learning objectives. Show how desired training outcomes relate to each employee’s role and their success in that role.

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

Did you know? Learners who set career goals are [four times more likely](#) to engage with learning.



Learning styles

THE CHALLENGE: Every learner is unique and will prefer some [training methods](#) and teaching styles over others. A persistent mismatch between teaching style and learner preference can hinder engagement. And prove one of the most common learning barriers.

THE SOLUTION: Use a self-paced, [blended learning](#) approach. Combine different teaching methods and formats to empower learners to engage with content in ways that suit their preferences. And incorporate asynchronous learning options into the course format so learners can choose when and what they study and how often.

Cognitive overload

THE CHALLENGE: According to a [TalentLMS and Vyond L&D trends survey](#), long training sessions top the list of obstacles to learning. When too much (complex) information is delivered within a short period of time, the brain becomes overloaded and shuts down. A rapid and relentless pace of learning can overwhelm learners.

THE SOLUTION: To overcome this learning barrier, break down complex information into manageable, bite-sized pieces. Distribute it over time. And cover a single concept (no more) in each [microlearning](#) session. This spaced learning approach prevents cognitive overload. It also allows learners to revisit key concepts, which aids retention and understanding.

Lack of previous knowledge

THE CHALLENGE: When learners lack the background information needed to succeed in a training course, they may feel confused or overwhelmed. This can make it difficult for them to engage with the material or progress effectively.

THE SOLUTION: Conduct pre-assessments to gauge knowledge levels and pitch content accordingly. Apply a step-by-step, scaffolded learning approach where you start with simpler concepts and gradually introduce more complex ideas. Offer additional resources like tutorials, guides, or review materials that learners can access to build their foundational knowledge before or alongside the primary learning content. And ensure a supportive learning environment.

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.

As we've seen, overcoming learning barriers isn't simple. It takes a multifaceted approach to address all of the different types of barriers to learning. But by identifying and addressing learning barriers in the workplace, in online courses, and on a personal level, learners and businesses can maximize the learning experience. And reap the benefits that full engagement brings to both.





CHAPTER 5

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're a dream to teach. Luckily, while there are as many barriers to learner engagement as benefits, you can eliminate these barriers with a toolkit of learner engagement strategies. So, here are some examples of engagement strategies, plus some general tips for ways to increase learner engagement and keep motivation levels high.

5 simple ways to engage and motivate learners

The following five key learner engagement techniques can boost a learner's enthusiasm for new knowledge and skills. What's great about these engagement strategies is that they work across different courses. And are 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's expected of them. Setting and communicating clear [learning goals](#) is a vital learner engagement strategy.

Invest time in understanding your learners' development needs and how they relate to broader business goals. There should be some overlap between the two in any eLearning course. For example, a communications course should consider the personal goals of a learner who seeks to improve their self-confidence in high-pressure communication scenarios, such as salary negotiations.

A first step, ask learners about their previous learning experiences. You could do this through surveys, light testing, or an informal chat during onboarding. Either way, doing your research and setting clear and relevant learning goals is a powerful engagement technique and a good way to nurture engaged learners.

The next step is to convey these goals in a language learners can relate to. Starting a course with a personal goal-setting activity is a good way to encourage learners to invest emotionally from the get-go.

2. Make learning convenient

Convenience in training is no longer a nice-to-have. In the modern workplace, where workers are time-poor and often spread across the globe or even in different time zones, it's one of the most important learner engagement strategies.

Here's where [choosing a good eLearning platform](#) comes into its own. Combining a quality LMS with just-in-time and microlearning learning principles ensures training is relevant and easily digestible. Which all adds up to a powerful learner engagement strategy and more engaged learners.

How does this all work? A good LMS creates a learning environment where courses can be accessed anytime, anywhere. It provides learning material on [mobile devices](#), both online and offline. It supports multilingual functionality. It also makes [blended learning](#) and [synchronous and asynchronous training](#) easy for all.

Using an LMS, you can build a learning program where content is structured into small, manageable, easily digestible chunks. And deliver the most important content up front so learners don't have to dig for it. You can refer learners to quality external online resources, like YouTube videos. Or quick-access internal resources learners frequently want to engage with. These could be templates, tools, short videos, checklists, or even infographics summarizing a procedure. Apply this principle to assessments, and you've got another powerful learner engagement strategy.

Did you know? When an assessment takes under fifteen minutes to complete, completion rates of the learning program increase.



3. Get creative with course content

Although engagement doesn't equal entertainment, boredom can sometimes equal disengagement. The problem is that monotonous content presentation is [one of the three key obstacles](#) employees find the most challenging with training at work.

Designing courses to keep engaged learners from zoning out is a balancing act. For every learner, the boredom threshold differs. And, often, a one-size-fits-all approach equals disengagement from most participants. The good news is you can stop learners from losing interest in a course by using active engagement strategies.

First, [understand your training audience](#)—their needs and the kind of content and scenarios they find relatable and inspiring. And ensure courses and assessments are pitched correctly. They should be challenging enough to prevent boredom but not too difficult. Finally, deliver learning content that's creative and sparks a reaction. Just remember that fun is a means to an end, not the end goal. Offer

learners different ways to interact with the content by incorporating interactive elements into online learning. For example, use quizzes, discussions, and group activities to keep learners engaged. 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.

Did you know? [According to 2023 research](#), the training format US employees found most engaging was simulations. Closely followed by training videos.

4. Reward learners for engagement

As far as learner engagement techniques go, acknowledging the effort learners have invested in learning is an obvious choice. But how best to do this?

To increase learner engagement, start by understanding what motivates and inspires learners to keep improving. Is it friendly competition with peers? Is it a personal progress bar providing a visible improvement measure from one assessment to the next? Or is it, perhaps, acknowledgment from the course instructor or a subject-matter expert?

Most likely, it's all of the above.

Once you've pinpointed your key motivators, the next step to boost learner engagement is incorporating reward cycles into your learning experiences. If you're thinking about how to engage learners, leaderboards, badges, and certificates are simple but effective ways to do this. Certificates can be one of the most effective engagement techniques, particularly if signed by the instructor, a higher education institution, or the CEO.

5. Create open communication channels

Improved communication can resolve many of the common barriers to learning. As part of your learner engagement strategy, create courses that are supported by open communication channels.

As a learner engagement strategy, online communication is particularly powerful. It can support casual group discussions, guided peer learning, or informal spaces for asking questions. Both structured conversations (for example, instructor-led) and

unstructured conversations (for example, learner-initiated) can contribute to a sense of community and open communication.

Learning engagement strategies for corporate learners

Corporate learners have unique demands and expectations on top of their general needs as learners. The following learner engagement strategies address those expectations and improve the overall learning experience for adult learners.

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

In addition to the types of acknowledgment mentioned earlier, corporate learners are also motivated by rewards that impact their everyday work lives.

These rewards can include:

- 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 strategy for corporate learners. Why not take acknowledgment further by having instructors share training success stories in a meeting or through a short video?

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

Corporate learners focus on translating their learning experiences into improved job performance. They're likely to be more engaged when asked to deal with real-life [workplace issues](#) like the ones they frequently encounter in their job roles.

With this in mind, use practical ways to motivate learners, such as simulations, case studies, and scenario-based activities that ring true to experience. Where relevant, design part of the course in a more practical way to incorporate job shadowing or other forms of on-the-job training. By shaping the learning environment this way, learners can practice their new skills and deal with tricky situations first-hand.



How to engage learners using AI: 10 engagement strategies examples

Generative tech is upending processes and improving performance across the workplace. And L&D is no exception. There are a number of different ways [AI can be used in learning and development](#), particularly to underpin, enhance, and elaborate on traditional learner engagement strategies. Here's a top 10 breakdown:

1. Course creation and personalized learning paths

With access to an [AI course creator](#), L&D teams can consistently generate courses with compelling content. By analyzing learner behavior and preferences, AI can also create tailored learning experiences that match individual needs, learning styles, and pace.

2. Adaptive learning

AI-powered adaptive learning systems adjust difficulty and content based on real-time learner performance. This ensures the material remains challenging yet achievable, preventing boredom and cognitive overload.

3. Interactive learning environments

Tools powered by AI, such as chatbots and virtual assistants, can provide instant feedback, answer questions, and guide learners through complex topics.

4. Gamification and motivation

AI supports gamified learning experiences by tracking learner progress and providing rewards or challenges that enhance motivation and make learning more enjoyable.

5. Intelligent content recommendations

Using recommendation algorithms, AI can suggest relevant learning resources, additional reading, or other courses based on a learner's interests and performance.

6. Natural Language Processing (NLP) for better communication

Technologies like NLP linked to AI support more intuitive interactions in e-learning environments. They make it easier for learners to ask questions and interact with course content in a conversational manner.

7. Real-time performance analytics

Working live, AI can provide ongoing data on learner progress. This enables instructors and learners to identify areas of improvement and strengths as and when they emerge.

8. Reducing learner isolation

AI creates collaborative learning environments by connecting learners with peers or mentors based on similar learning goals. This fosters a sense of community and combats feelings of detachment and disengagement often experienced in online learning.

9. Automating administrative tasks

By taking on time-consuming tasks like grading and course administration, AI frees instructors to focus more on engaging with learners.

10. Accessibility enhancements

AI technologies can help learners with disabilities by providing features like speech-to-text, automatic translations, and customized learning environments.

Using learner engagement strategies to increase motivation

This chapter discussed some practical tips and tactics for motivating and engaging learners. These engagement strategies are important for all types of learners, including employees. But without the support of an effective LMS solution with rich features and advanced flexibility, they're engagement techniques that won't get off the ground. In the next chapter, we examine these features and how an LMS can motivate and engage learners.



CHAPTER 6

How to use your LMS to engage learners

A versatile, user-friendly learning management system (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.

For example, with features like blended learning, gamification, and feedback systems, your LMS transforms passive students into active, engaged learners.

So, let's explore the must-have LMS features to implement [learner engagement strategies](#) effectively, boost learning engagement and, ultimately, drive results.

8 features your LMS must have to boost learner engagement

While there are many [LMS features](#) 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. AI content creator: The future of learner engagement

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing learning. An [AI LMS](#) can further boost learner engagement by providing personalized learning experiences.

With AI-assisted course creation tools like [TalentCraft by TalentLMS](#), you can automate course creation, generate content like quizzes, flashcards, and interactive media tailored to individual learner needs.

This AI-driven approach saves time while delivering a more customized and engaging learning experience. AI is no longer a buzzword we throw around. It's a reality. And it's important to [leverage AI in L&D](#) not just for learner engagement, but for overall training success.

2. Interactive content: The power of SCORM and xAPI

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 xAPI is gaining favor with instructional designers. xAPI does things that SCORM cannot, like produce in-depth test results, work outside a learning management system, and transition between different platforms.



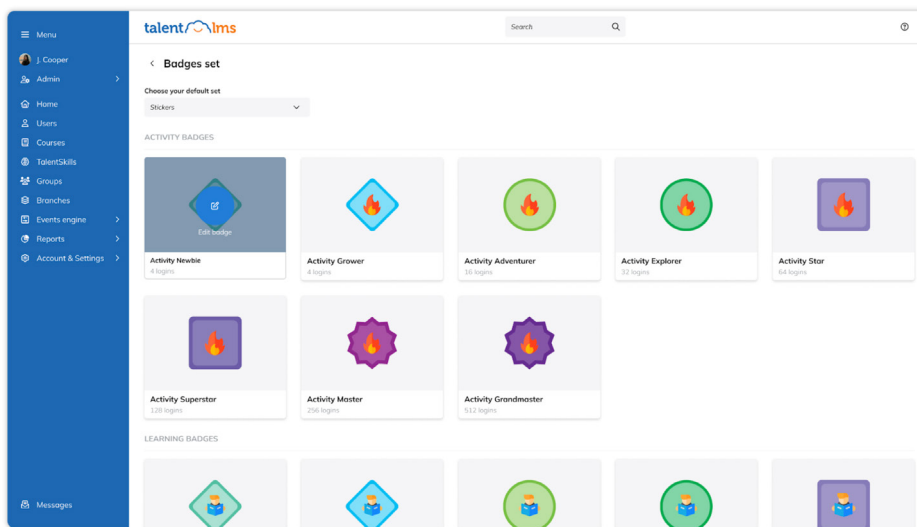


3. Gamification: Learner motivation through fun

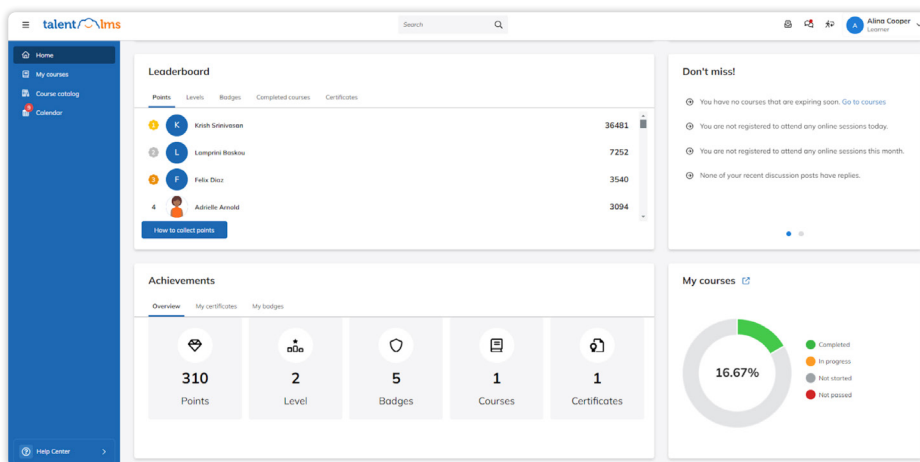
Gamification is a must-have for engaging online learners. Some of the best-known gamification features include:

- Points for progress or achievement
- Badges for learning milestones
- Leaderboards for healthy 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.



[Armstrong Transport Group](#) successfully used gamification on TalentLMS to boost engagement in learning. By assigning points to learner activities and displaying rankings on leaderboards, they encouraged friendly competition among learners. This approach made learners more motivated to complete their training on time.

Monthly shoutouts and a rotating trophy for the top learner further strengthened engagement, recognizing learners' efforts and keeping them committed.

According to Stephen from Armstrong, "TalentLMS's gamification has created a healthy competition among our learners," leading to higher levels of participation and investment in the learning process.

But remember, not all rewards are created equal. It's important to ensure that the rewards you offer through gamification are meaningful and relevant to your learners. For example, badges should signify real achievements, and points should be tied to specific learning objectives. When learners see that their efforts are recognized in a meaningful way, they're far more likely to stay engaged.

4. Social learning: Building an engaged learner community

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

On a learning platform, learners like to feel represented and heard. Therefore, TalentLMS's 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 personally 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:** [Discussions](#) remain a staple of any LMS worth its salt. Learners can share their opinions, observations, and experiences there 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:** Another 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.



5. Mobile learning: Engage learners anytime, anywhere

Convenience is undoubtedly one of the top 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's 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.

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.



6. Blended and hybrid learning: The best of both worlds

Blended learning combines online training and traditional classroom teaching. [Hybrid learning](#), on the other hand, offers a flexible mix of in-person and remote learning happening at the same time. Both approaches can be adapted to meet diverse training needs.

For example, an LMS that offers online conferencing and webinar features, like TalentLMS, can make all the difference. How? It allows online training to be paired with on-site or hybrid assessments. Testing learners can take place online with your LMS assessment features. Briefing sessions and collaborative workshops can be held either face-to-face or in a hybrid format with the help of the software.

Both blended and hybrid learning work wonders for motivating learners. They make the learning experience more diverse. This helps prevent boredom, reduces the in-person time required to complete a course, and offer more flexibility through hybrid components

Finally, these methods provide learners with more opportunities to socialize and bond with their peers, whether online, on-site, or a blend of both. This, in turn, boosts emotional engagement and strengthens their connection to the learning experience.

7. Portal customization: Personalize the learning experience

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.

8. Feedback: Giving learners a voice with 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 [post-training feedback from learners](#) is highly effective for boosting learner engagement. Also, it provides trainers and instructional designers with useful information for course improvement and fine-tuning your learner engagement strategy.



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, gamification, and AI authoring tools 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.





CHAPTER 7

Conclusion: A shared responsibility, a shared success

Achieving true learner engagement is a group effort. It starts with instructional designers crafting relevant, interactive, and, most importantly, learner-centered learning experiences. It passes to L&D experts to ensure those experiences align with organizational goals and each employee's professional growth plan. And then goes on to sync up with technology, particularly AI-powered eLearning platforms, to deliver the personalization and accessibility needed to engage a diverse workforce.

Finally, it ends up in the hands and (if engagement strategies are successful) the hearts of the learners themselves. Which is where true engagement begins.

Taking time to understand learner engagement and ways to foster it among learners is the first step to making the most of those benefits. But it's one step in a continuous journey. L&D professionals and course designers can only do so much. Ultimately, learners have a critical role in driving their own engagement. By taking ownership of their learning journey—setting goals, remaining curious, and actively participating—they can ensure that they get the most out of the opportunities available to them. Especially when a feature-rich, easy-to-use LMS is there to back them up.

In today's dynamic workplace, learner engagement isn't just about delivering content but about creating a culture of continuous learning. When instructional design, L&D strategy, technology, and learners work together, the result is an empowered workforce that's motivated, capable, and ready to adapt to the ever-evolving demands of the modern world.

Ultimately, fostering learner engagement is a shared responsibility. And when it's done well, it leads to shared success by unlocking the true potential of both the individual and the organization.

The LMS designed for your **success**

TalentLMS is the LMS built for success, enabling organizations to create a culture of continuous learning by delivering training designed with adoption in mind. With an experience that's fully customizable, easy to manage and a joy to use, teams embrace training while feeling right at home.

TalentLMS makes it easy to provide the right training for any team and context while giving expert guidance and support every step of the way. Backed by Epignosis, a global leader in learning technologies, TalentLMS is on a mission to democratize training, serving over 70,000 organizations worldwide.

[Get started free](#)