



November 2022

Effective experiential learning for enterprises

Introduction

Only 12% of organizations get experiential learning right

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It's hands-on, project-based. You'll review, you'll learn, you'll apply and then have the chance to deliver whatever you're working on.

— **María Rojas, Field Sales Representative, Pearson**

→ Most organizations now understand that experiential learning — or learning in the flow of work — is the ideal way to develop employees.

But as every Learning and Development lead knows, there's a world of difference between seeing the value of experiential learning and implementing it effectively in your organization. Recent research suggests that just 12% of organizations are doing it effectively.*

We're trying to change that.

We started at home — by beta-testing with our own people, an experiential workplace learning product we had developed.

But this trial revealed three vital insights we believe could help all kinds of organizations to implement experiential learning. More effective learning and development is good for everyone. That's why we're sharing those insights with you right here.

* The Josh Bersin Company — The Definitive Guide to Learning: Growth in the Flow of Work

Insight #1

Match learners with advisors from within the organization

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I got to meet with a real person, very warm, open to stay in contact ... You don't have that from other courses.

— **María Rojas, Field Sales Representative**

...there were a lot of 'aha!' moments ... I came out the call feeling really energized

— **Darya Duckworth, Channel Sales Manager**

→ In our beta test, learners planned and executed a business-relevant project with support from a project advisor. Learners and advisors were all Pearson employees.

Recruiting advisors from within the learners' organization means their support can be specific and relevant, and they may be more invested in their learners' success.

Our learners enjoyed connecting with their advisors, and compared them positively to “half-hearted” advisors they'd encountered in other workplace learning experiences.

In all our trials of this product, we've never found it a challenge to recruit enough advisors, because the commitment is short-term and structured — and people are usually keen to help others. In fact, most advisors in the beta test said they would be happy to be more involved in their learner's journey.

Match carefully

The ideal advisor is close enough to the learner in the organization to understand their role and goals, but far enough outside their immediate circle of colleagues to provide an internal networking opportunity.

Provide an opt-out

Let learners switch to a different advisor if the one they're assigned isn't working out.

Be transparent

Tell advisors how they were chosen, to give them confidence that they're 'qualified' to feed back on their learners' work.

Insight #2

Be up front about the demands of experiential learning

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It helps you organize and plan your ideas, the practical things you do every day ... the things that you formally need to do to achieve your goals.

— **María Rojas, Field Sales Representative**

...rather than do two things twice, I thought why not utilize this, target an area that's more difficult, and use this project to look at that.

— **Becky T, Product Manager**

→ To get the most out of project-based experiential learning, learners need to be self-starting and take the initiative. We didn't make this clear enough to our beta testers at the start, so some were taken aback by the time and effort the course required.

Based on our testers' feedback, here's what we recommend you do differently.

Clearly explain what's involved

Describe what a suitable project looks like and emphasize the need to be highly motivated. As part of onboarding, ask learners to assess if they have the tools, skills, and time needed to complete their chosen project, and recommend they change scope or seek support if not.

Consider providing a shortlist

Present learners with a selection of known business opportunities they could tackle as their project. Even if they choose something different, the examples will give a sense of the appropriate scope.

Connect the work to learners' development

Make it clear how this opportunity fits in with learners' overall development journeys. Is it a stepping stone to a promotion, by giving the learner an achievement to point to in an internal interview? And/or a networking opportunity, with the project advisor opening doors to other divisions or regions?

Insight #3

Structure the experience to promote collaboration

→ No one in an organization works totally alone. So learning in the flow of work shouldn't be done alone either.

Learner and project advisor: Bring the learner and their advisor together early in the learning experience, so the advisor can help the learner refine their project plan. Our learners and advisors found that frequent, bite-sized check-ins — in person, via video call or over chat — were easier to fit around their other work than fewer, longer meetings at major milestones.

Learner, project advisor, and managers: Keep the managers of both learners and advisors informed, so they can offer support and guidance and celebrate success.

Learner and peers: Help learners connect with others in the organization who are learning the same way, in a forum or similar channel. This helps learners feel like part of a community, and allows them to learn from each other.

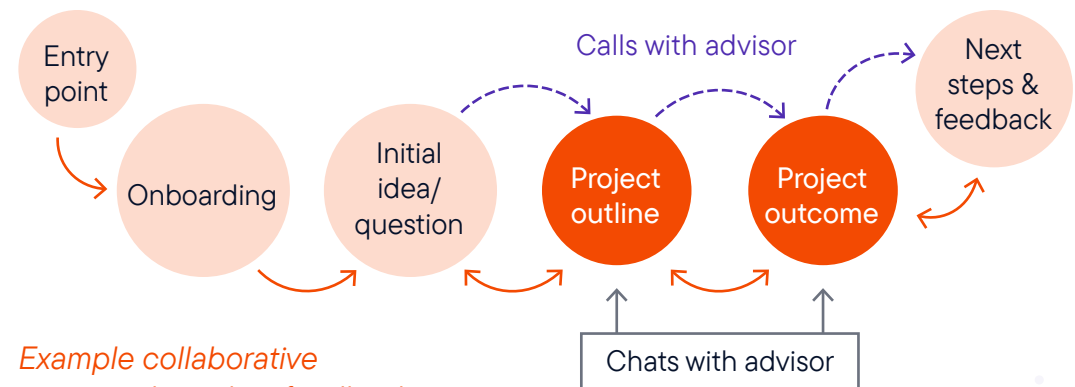
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It was great to talk about things, it helped me think about what I need to get out of it in this time frame.

— Manjiri Pujari, Product Manager

It was not about completing the course, it was about developing the learner. It's about maximizing people potential so they can progress in their career.

— Paulo Antonelli, Customer Success Team Manager



Example collaborative structure based on feedback from our beta testers

Make both learners and project advisors aware of the steps involved in the learning experience, in fairly granular detail, so they know:

- what they're expected to achieve at each stage
- when they're expected to check in with each other

Conclusion

Experiential learners are more engaged

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I would definitely do it again.

— **Stephanie Leandre, Enrollment Management Administrator**

I found that it was really positive. I had quite a clear idea of what I wanted to achieve from it, I absolutely did achieve that.

— **Becky T, Product Manager**

→ In our beta test, learners who progressed farther felt more engaged with their work, their team, and the company strategy. Implementing project-based experiential learning in the workplace isn't easy — but it's worth it.

Behind the insights

The insights we share in this white paper come from a beta test of **Pearson Skills Accelerator**. From among the hundreds of Pearson employees who helped trial the product, we used a survey and email prompts to recruit:

- 10 learners (some who signed up but never enrolled, some who saw the experience through, some in between)
- 6 project advisors
- 2 people from our Learning and Development team
- 3 managers

We conducted a one-hour interview with each of these participants, focusing on their learning journeys, the differences between their expectations and the reality of the experience, and opportunities for improvement.

About Pearson Skills Accelerator

Pearson Skills Accelerator offers organizations a more efficient and effective way to upskill employees.

Existing learning modules often fail to generate interest, and employees are rarely given enough time to learn.

Based on research into how to engage employees to learn skills on the job, Pearson Skills Accelerator offers courses that help learners choose and complete a project at work supported by a more experienced peer, maximizing the potential of learning in the flow of work.



To find out more, visit
[pearson.com/skills-accelerator](https://www.pearson.com/skills-accelerator)