



A Blanchard Point of View

Three Ways to Make Learning Journeys Soar



A learning journey is a series of spaced, multi-modal, cohort-based learning experiences that build mindsets and skillsets necessary for measurable professional growth. Learning journeys deliver impressive results including a deeper understanding of a topic, increased productivity, a greater sense of community, and more.

The challenge is to build and deliver learning journeys that generate the promised return.

This learning process can be much more demanding than one-off, event-driven programs. It has numerous moving parts, is broader in scope, and is far more complicated. Consider managing cohorts over weeks or months through numerous and varied experiences rather than a one-day development session.

Implementing learning journeys can be daunting, especially for a lean L&D team. Blanchard has honed the art of the learning journey over the past decade. As our clients can attest, the results have been consistently impressive.

Here are three design principles that uphold our learning journeys.

Spaced Learning Offers



Improved long-term
memory consolidation



Knowledge transfer



Recall without prompts

1. Spaced Learning

More than 200 research studies have examined the benefits of spaced learning (breaking learning experiences into smaller pieces and delivering them over time) versus massed learning (all at once/event driven).

When compared to massed learning, spaced learning has been shown to be far superior as it offers improved long-term memory consolidation, knowledge transfer, and recall without prompts. It is a learning environment that is much more likely to generate insights.

Below is evidence demonstrating why spaced learning is more effective than massed learning:

- Repetition of information, in different situations using multiple modalities, encodes information in long-term memory.
- Spaced learning experiences unfold over a longer period, giving individuals many opportunities to not only practice what they've learned but also scaffold higher-level skills onto ones they've previously developed. This helps to build skills.

- More time means more chances for learners to incorporate their new knowledge and skills into their work lives. This greatly increases the chances of long-term behaviour change by making the new skills immediately relevant and linking them to each learner's most important tasks.
- Compared to massed, one-time learning events, [spaced learning](#) keeps learners more engaged, fights off learner fatigue, creates more connections in the brain, and imparts greater context to the material.
- Rest is critical to the formation of memories. It allows the brain to integrate information and makes it easier to remember the content. [The longer the rest, the greater the benefit](#). Spaced learning offers these needed breaks.
- Spaced learning gives people the chance to *think without thinking* about a new idea. More informally, they have time to noodle or marinate on a concept. This fosters the creation of insights.

Spaced designs provide learners with greater opportunities to apply new skills to work projects and relationships, which makes the learning far more relevant. Learners are more likely to form new habits and turn their learning into workplace behaviours.

Spaced learning gives people the chance to think without thinking about a new idea.

Applying a multi-modal approach provides different learning touchpoints that span formal and informal learning. This builds a holistic skillset that is valuable in a myriad of situations.

2. Layering of Content

Layering skill development through multiple modalities allows learners to make connections across time and skill areas, which fosters sense-making. For example, if participants are learning about building trust, a learning journey could also cover relevant topics such as communication skills. Applying a multi-modal approach provides different learning touchpoints that span formal and informal learning. This builds a holistic skillset that is valuable in a myriad of situations.

Leadership development cannot happen in a one-topic vacuum. It is a journey where skills are refined and perfected over time. During the best learning journeys, topics or modules are presented as different layers under the overarching framework. For example, as leaders progress through a learning journey, they learn how trust is a prerequisite for honest conversations, which are a requirement for leading situationally, and so on. Each layer is like a thread in a tapestry.

This approach has numerous benefits including improved comprehension, better retention, increased application, a more positive attitude toward the content, and increased awareness of how to use the content in different settings.

As participants progress through a learning journey, they are encouraged to form their own opinions about what they have experienced and share them through social learning (see #3).

The layered approach is powerful. Learners discover the content is interrelated and forms a comprehensive web of information. The various courses become a toolkit leaders can use daily or in a moment of need.

Inside this process, learners complete a brief, interactive digital overview that introduces core concepts. Then they take a self-assessment for the purpose of identifying their most pressing leadership challenge. This information is used to create a personalised learning road map.

From there, participants will join a live virtual session where they discuss what they've learned and its relevance in the workplace. They'll get feedback/ reaction from peers and the facilitator. Small groups are also utilised to work through challenges, plan conversations, practice, and create next steps.

Next comes topic-contextual leader 1:1 conversations using prompts. This builds connection and allows for sharing how the material is relevant to the learner. *Try It* activities encourage practice independently in the flow of work. Meetings with a learning partner and group coaching sessions help to overcome learning barriers. Small group discussions also connect the application from one topic area to another





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3. Cohort-based

Humans are social beings. Our brains, emotions, and nervous systems are wired for social interaction. It is a key survival strategy and a defining quality of our species. Cohort-based leadership development experiences create deep social connections between cohort members.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) was developed by Dr Albert Bandura in the 1960s. Bandura posited that all learning happens in a social context and that our relationships with others motivate us to learn. For example, we learn a new skill so that we can help a loved one, protect our team, earn more for our family, gain status, etc. And our natural learning process often involves responding to or emulating the behavior of others.

Social dimensions can range from breakout activities to long-term cohort relationships. Building these elements into learning experiences activates powerful motivational and cognitive mechanisms in learners. They enjoy social learning activities and benefit from the support and accountability these activities generate, and their organisations benefit from the breakdown of silos when peer groups form.

Humans have evolved to be fearful of being isolated or banished from our group. This is an evolutionary limbic response that grew from the low likelihood of survival in the wild if one were to be ejected from the tribe.

As it relates to learning, people want to be part of a group and will actively participate when trying something new or unknown.

All Blanchard programs and journeys recognize these facts and feature a significant social learning component. This gives people an opportunity to contextualise what they are learning and apply it to their job. Furthering this component are digital or in-person forums where people learn together collaborate, and grow. Dedicated places for sharing best practices and swapping tips are safe spaces where people can confide their challenges to their colleagues and get help. This empowers learners to form their own opinions about the content.

Research supports the value of social learning:

- Social learning stimulates attention, promotes retention, makes it easier to use new skills, and fuels motivation.
- Social learning boosts performance and supports just-in-time learning.
- Social learning fosters a sense of accountability, which helps learners overcome resistance and distractions and put their new skills into practice.
- Social learning encourages the sharing of knowledge.

Benefits of Social Learning



Stimulates
attention



Promotes
retention



Easier to use
new skills



Fuels
motivation



Boosts
performance



Supports
just-in-time
learning



Accountability



Knowledge
sharing



Continuous
learning

Blanchard has built a successful practice using social learning drivers in all our curricula. For example, we build small group activities into every program, including breakout rooms for virtual learning and table discussions for in-person sessions. These activities jumpstart the social learning process and promote bonding.

- [Social learning](#) can inspire people to become continuous learners by taking advantage of the in-group/out-group phenomenon. When learners see the in-group making the effort to try new behaviours will naturally be more likely to do the same.

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Small in-class support crews of two to four accountability partners, who commit to helping each other for a brief period of one to two months, are extremely successful at promoting learning transfer—especially when this practice is followed by a group discussion a month or two after the learning.

Another powerful tactic is to create self-sustaining learning communities. Start by identifying a handful of learners who were especially inspired by the material, and have these super learners show up to other discussions. Invite a few of them to form a team and start a community of learners focused on a specific theme; e.g., new managers. These communities can attract a crowd and are a powerful way to sustain learning—with minimal time investment from L&D.

Taking the First Steps

A successful learning journey doesn't happen by accident. It is the result of individuals learning, spending the time to dig deep into preexisting skills, and then combining those skills with new, scaffolded knowledge. This results in unique insights and actionable behaviours.

Blanchard's models and practices stand on the pillars of spaced learning, multi-modal layering of content, and cohort-based programs. What is learned is practiced. This opens the door to long-term retention by asking learners to consider the meaning of the new information in their lives. They make a commitment to apply what they've learned and get immediate feedback on their skills.

Every learning journey is unique and requires a fresh perspective. These three strategies can build successful journey experiences and increased skill development for every learner

About Blanchard

Blanchard® is a global leader in leadership development, consulting, and coaching. For more than 40 years, Blanchard has partnered with organisations to maximize individual achievement and organisational performance – bringing measurable progress and true transformation. Blanchard's SLII® is the global leadership model of choice, powering inspired leaders for more than 10,000 organisations worldwide. Blanchard also offers a suite of award-winning solutions through flexible delivery modalities to meet the specific needs of clients and learners.

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