

# Executive Interview

2021

NovoEd's collaborative learning platform empowers organizations to design and deliver experiential learning that accelerates business performance on a global scale.



Since the company's founding at Stanford's social algorithm laboratory in 2012, global corporations, executive education providers and training firms have relied on NovoEd to develop high-margin capabilities through purposeful practice and application, coaching and mentorship and group collaboration. NovoEd's proven approach to learning connects diverse groups of learners, mentors and leaders in a high-impact online environment.



**TODD MORAN**

Chief Learning Strategist  
NovoEd



**RACHEL COOKE**

COO and Podcast Host  
Brandon Hall Group



**MICHAEL ROCHELLE**

Chief Strategy Officer,  
Principal HCM Analyst  
Brandon Hall Group



## About Todd Moran

**Todd Moran** is a learning strategist, business transformation evangelist and digital workplace expert with more than 20 years of industry experience. His passion and expertise lie in educational technology, digital customer experience, organizational change management and employee engagement. His professional career has spanned startups to nonprofits and large multinationals, and his current role at NovoEd as the Chief Learning Strategist. From the megatrends in learning and enterprise collaboration to technology evaluation and implementation, to the “people” side of organizational change and talent development, he covers the gamut of understanding what it takes to enable a successful digital workplace and deep employee engagement. Todd holds a B.A. in Organizational Psychology from Middlebury College, and an M.A. in Information & Learning Technology from the University of Colorado.

## About Rachel Cooke

**Rachel Cooke** is Brandon Hall Group’s Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst. She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences and the company’s project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 15 years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research, and Performance Improvement industries.



## About Michael Rochelle

**Michael Rochelle** is Chief Strategy Officer and Principal HCM Analyst at Brandon Hall Group. Michael leads a wide range of advisory support and strategic engagements for Fortune 1000 and small- to medium-sized organizations as well as leading and emerging solution providers across the HCM industry. Michael has more than 30 years’ experience in HR, IT, sales, marketing, business development and strategic and financial planning in Fortune 500 and venture-backed start-up organizations.

**RACHEL**

Todd, can you share a little bit more about your background?

**TODD**

For the better part of 23 years, I've been working in L&D, talent and HR. For the first significant portion of that 10, 12+ years, I was on the customer side, running largescale R&D teams, executing on external services work and then spent a long stint at Schneider Electric, running their Office of Digital Transformation. How do you take up a 175-year-old French firm that makes gray boxes and pivot to the nature of digitization and a world around software and services, and upskilling and reskilling multiple generations that operate in 100 different countries? I shifted out of the customer side and joined the provider side of the house about eight years ago and got heavily involved in the communication collaboration space, and did a long stint at Jive Software. I've been with NovoEd for just about 11 months, coming up on my one-year anniversary.

**RACHEL**

What is your perspective on upskilling and reskilling?

**TODD**

At Schneider, it was a huge focus. It has become an absolute dominant, centralized focal point for largescale enterprises across the globe, and rightly so when we talk about the nature of the shelf-life of skills being two to three years. People talking about having six-decade-long careers is the norm now; that the level of job change is astronomical, having to address that, not to mention the multiple generations in the workforce. The bigger emphasis should be is on the capability side, and it's not just semantics.

**RACHEL**

Michael, is there anything you'd like to expand on?

**MICHAEL**

It's borne out in our research. In the recent study that we did, 85-90% of companies said they need to have their learning be individual and business outcome-focused. They get it, and they know that personalized learning is part of the journey. Skills and competencies take two different paths with learning and I think companies have come around to that.

*(continued)*

Capability is building potential, developing someone's future and current and potential. Skills is the now. Our research shows that only 50% of companies believe that their current approach to learning gets them in the right position for future work, which is going to be all about the potential of people, knowing what they could do with minimal learning. How can they jump in and contribute?

## RACHEL

How do you develop the organizational capabilities?

## TODD

It's a challenging one, because a lot of the focal point when I was living and breathing in the L&D space is this focus on democratizing, where you could be your own CLO. You can go out and anything that you wish to sort of learn and edify and educate upon is at your disposal. The challenge is if that is done purely in isolation, and it's not reflective of a larger team dynamic or the constructs that are critical to the firm across an entire geo or tie to an entire set of functional entities, it just becomes the individual pursuit of knowledge. Does that help move the needle on some things around job performance, productivity, efficiency, topline revenue and operational excellence? We see a lot of our clients trying to tackle bringing the power of learning together. This idea of this

pure construct and trying to collectively upskill entire swaths of the workforce population means they have to spend some time together, and they can't do that in a face-to-face setting in offices around the world anymore. At least not as the current norm, because the hybrid office is here to stay. The idea of creating those opportunities for shared experiences, not exclusively in a virtual setting so that you can scale that over different time zones and geographically dispersed entities, becomes part of the key to unlocking not just an individual level but doing that in a much larger group, team, business unit or geographic footprint level.

## RACHEL

How do you bridge that connection between the individualized and organizational capabilities? How do you create a framework where you are transparent and show the goals and the objectives are the learning outcomes from the individual? How does that tie into the performance of the organization? Is there some suggested approach or framework? Let's say, for example, you have a call center and/or you had a storefront, and during the pandemic no one could go into the store. So, you had to move everybody comfortable with in-person interactions to virtual or telecommunication, and maybe that's just a different skill set for some. What are some of the things that companies aren't considering that you saw in some of your clients, and how did you approach that? What kind of strategic guidelines are a process and what would you recommend?

## TODD

**A** One of the biggest areas that search stems from is being purposeful, having an intentional design of those areas of critical focus. Folks had to make these pivots over the last 18 months and they're saying, wow, we need to put a much greater degree of emphasis on universal leadership across the company, and developing things around adaptability and resiliency and empathetic listening. And we have to do that at scale, because this change is going to be sustained over a period of time. The idea of being intentional about the types of skills, moving to capabilities that you want to target, is step one. The second piece of this is something that's been a long challenge; L&D is oftentimes the order takers.



**What you're seeing in our clients that were most successful was having to change the fundamental paradigm of L&D, HR and talent. And now, we are here as true partners of the business.**

What are those critical challenges? Do we need to cascade and nurture these four or five critical skills and capabilities across leadership or at all levels of the organization? Then we'll partner with them to do that. We'll do some very intentional design and it won't just be throwing content assets upon content assets at our

entire workforce population and that they can make that progression to collective, individual capacity-building across the organization. That, intentionally, is number-one — this idea of a much closer partnership with what are those critical needs and initiatives of the business, and getting close to those in a granular fashion.

## MICHAEL

**A** Organizational capability is oftentimes overlooked. When you talk to a Chief Learning Officer, at least at the Fortune 50s, if you ask them what's their job, they don't say it is to develop better learning; they say it is to raise the level of potential of the talent within the organization through learning. They have that organizational capability and talent readiness to meet the challenge. It has to get deeper into other organizations. If you don't have a CLO, you still have to have the same mindset and it starts with someone at the top saying, "learning isn't for the sake of learning, it's for organizational capability." Learning is an individual competency that we can demonstrate, but then there's all these other organizational accounts. You'd have to be able to do something with it. You're running an initiative or improve the customer satisfaction score and lead a team to do that. We focus on use cases that are happening in companies every day. How do you apply learning in the flow of work to achieve those outcomes through use case development and demonstrate it? That's the best practice now.

**TODD**

**A** The idea of shifting beyond just learning efficacy, that's not what companies are talking about. Better learning is more engaged learning, but it to what end in pursuit? That is the question organizations should be asking themselves more meaningfully in support of the business.

**RACHEL**

**Q** It needs to align with the objectives of what's the bottom line for the business to perform. Then how do you map that to your learning priorities? It's fun, though, to test out some of these new approaches. Tools out there have never been easier to access and cheaper; they're not as cost-prohibitive. You don't have to necessarily be a developer to produce grid programs. That's exciting because there's a lot of flexibility that companies can have and learning professionals can have. It all goes back to reskilling and upskilling.

**TODD**

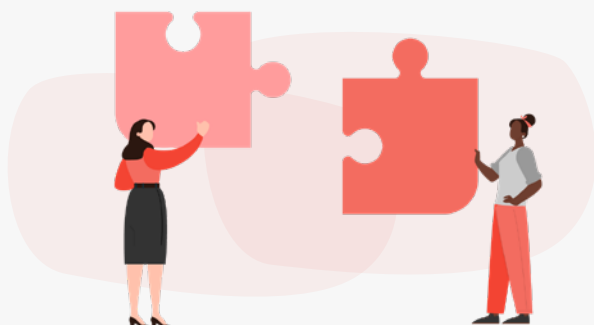
**A** The other piece that stands out is the upskilling and reskilling research. What are the internal L&D, HR and talent teams doing with their own reskilling efforts in support? It needs to be a new paradigm of content creation, partnering with the business and putting it together purposefully to collectively upskill and reskill in support of some of those big organizational changes for the rest of the workforce population.

**RACHEL**

**Q** How do you communicate and share the value of learning?

**MICHAEL**

**A** Our research shows a couple of things to your point. One is organizations said they're less prepared for the future of work. They felt as though their processes are more traditional in their approach to developing learning. They're using traditional instructional design methods. 50% of companies said that the current capabilities within their L&D Department are what's holding them up.





## RACHEL

**Q** What would you recommend today if someone's rethinking their approach to learning? What are some of the guidelines or tips that you offer?

## TODD

**A** Let me give you three quick ones. The first is, if you're not close to your business leaders, get close to figuring out what's keeping them up at night. What are the biggest challenges? Don't wait for that request to come in to say, I need to develop 500 new agile project managers. How does that tie to our critical initiatives for a five-year plan? The second is, there's a ton of technology out there. There's a lot that you can do with what you have in-house. Be creative and clever with leveraging the existing nature of your tech stack, but also recognize you might have some gaps. Be thoughtful and purposeful about how you're building an ecosystem for the sustained effort. If your charter is that of sustaining talent and capability over long periods of time, make sure that you've got the right tools and systems in place to do that. The third one I would offer is, get creative with staff and your teams. We're seeing some of our customers with the most wild success. Over these past 18 months, grappling with the nature of the pandemic and its total tumultuous approach on learning and development, they have re-thought how they organize their teams.

Do you need more instructional designers? Or is it experienced designers? Do you need folks that just lightly understand analytics, or do you want folks who are data analysts at heart and can mash up different data inputs from learning to business, etc.? It's creating these centers of excellence in support of the business, but less traditional. Those are big pieces.



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