



# The Rise of Learning Operations

A Research-Based Framework for Modernizing L&D

**RESEARCH BRIEF**  
2025

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# Introduction

With growing pressure to improve efficiency, CHROs and CLOs must demonstrate measurable impact while optimizing limited resources. Learning Operations (LearnOps) represents a strategic shift in how Learning and Development (L&D) functions operate as business enablers. This research, based on insights from analyst firm Brandon Hall Group™ and LearnOps software provider Cognota, establishes LearnOps as a critical emerging category.

Key findings include:

- Structured learning operations link L&D efforts to business outcomes.
- Organizations see measurable ROI through formalized LearnOps practices.
- Widespread maturity gaps exist, especially as chief financial officers (CFOs) push for cost efficiency.

The report blends market research with Cognota platform data from over 500 professionals, offering the first behavioral benchmark for LearnOps maturity and a practical framework for advancing operational excellence.



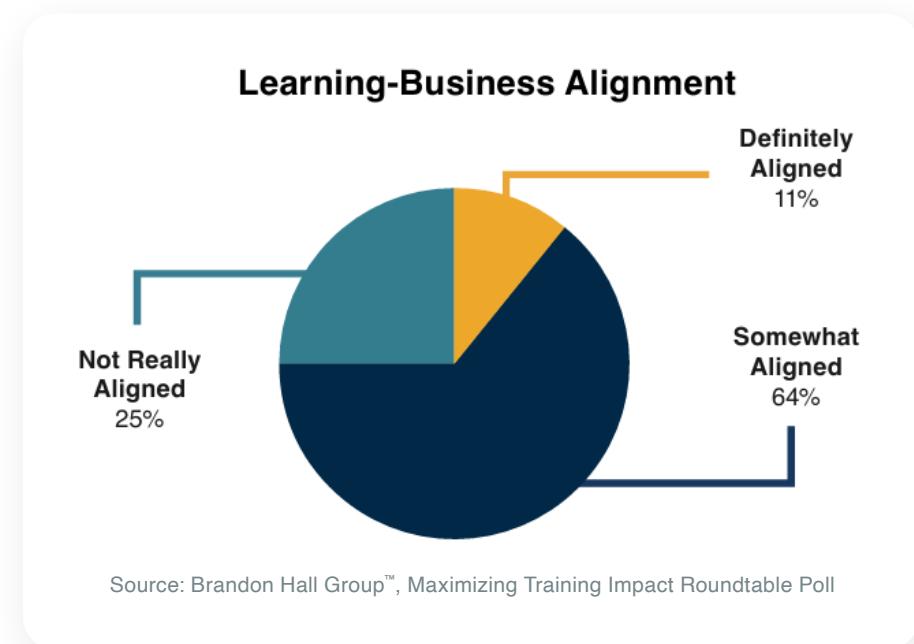
## Brandon Hall Group™ Perspective: Why LearnOps is a Category

Talent and L&D functions across organizations face persistent challenges that limit their strategic impact. More than half (56%) of organizations report a challenge when collaborating across functions and stakeholders <sup>1</sup>, marked by:

- 01 Scattered intake processes that create bottlenecks.
- 02 Lack of visibility into resource capacity, which hampers planning.
- 03 Inconsistent collaboration across stakeholders, leading to misaligned priorities.

Nearly half (49%) of employers recognize that budget and resource management are a challenge. <sup>1</sup> These challenges are not unique to L&D — they represent operational gaps that have been recognized and addressed in other business functions.

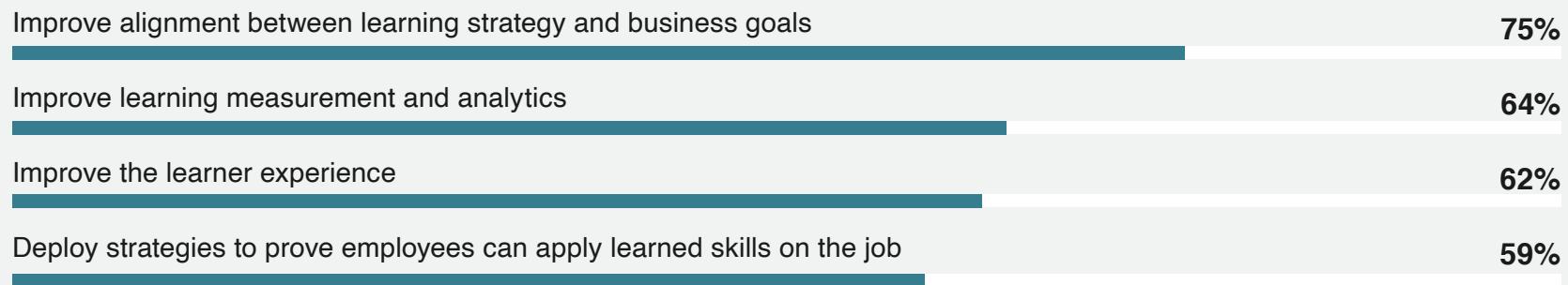
Most concerning is the percentage of organizations unable to consistently track impact and ROI or demonstrate business alignment. Without defined frameworks, L&D teams cannot establish clear connections between learning initiatives and business outcomes. This limitation often relegates L&D to being perceived as a cost center rather than a strategic value driver. Brandon Hall Group™ research shows that only a small fraction of enterprises report learning and business as fully aligned.



1. Brandon Hall Group™ Learning Revolution Study

Without structured mechanisms to connect learning initiatives to business goals, L&D teams struggle to demonstrate strategic relevance and manage governance. This misalignment often results in learning programs that, while well-executed, fail to address critical business needs or support organizational priorities. Brandon Hall Group™ research, shows improving alignment is the most urgent priority for improving L&D effectiveness.

## Priorities for Improving L&D Effectiveness



Source: Brandon Hall Group™ Study, HR Outlook 2025

The research findings provide a compelling case for recognizing LearnOps as a distinct category within the learning technology landscape. However, only 25% of organizations now leverage a learning operations platform or tool.<sup>1</sup>

1. Brandon Hall Group™ Learning Revolution Study

# The Compelling Business Case

Traditional L&D platforms — such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), Training Management Systems (TMS), and content — were built for learning delivery and tracking, not for managing the operational complexity of enterprise L&D. While they support scheduling and learner experience, they lack visibility into resource allocation, project planning, and strategic alignment.

As business functions like Marketing, Revenue, and Software Development introduced operational disciplines (MarketingOps, RevOps, DevOps), L&D is now following suit. LearnOps has emerged as a parallel, designed to bring structure, standardization, and visibility to learning operations.

Cognota research shows that 46% of L&D leaders struggle to meet project deadlines, often due to unstructured intake, lack of capacity forecasting, and disconnected workflows. Without a unified operational layer, teams are forced to rely on spreadsheets, manual reporting, and fragmented tools.

LearnOps platforms provide a centralized system for intake, planning, execution, measurement, and optimization. At the core is a structured data taxonomy that enables consistent workflows, cross-functional alignment, and better decision-making.

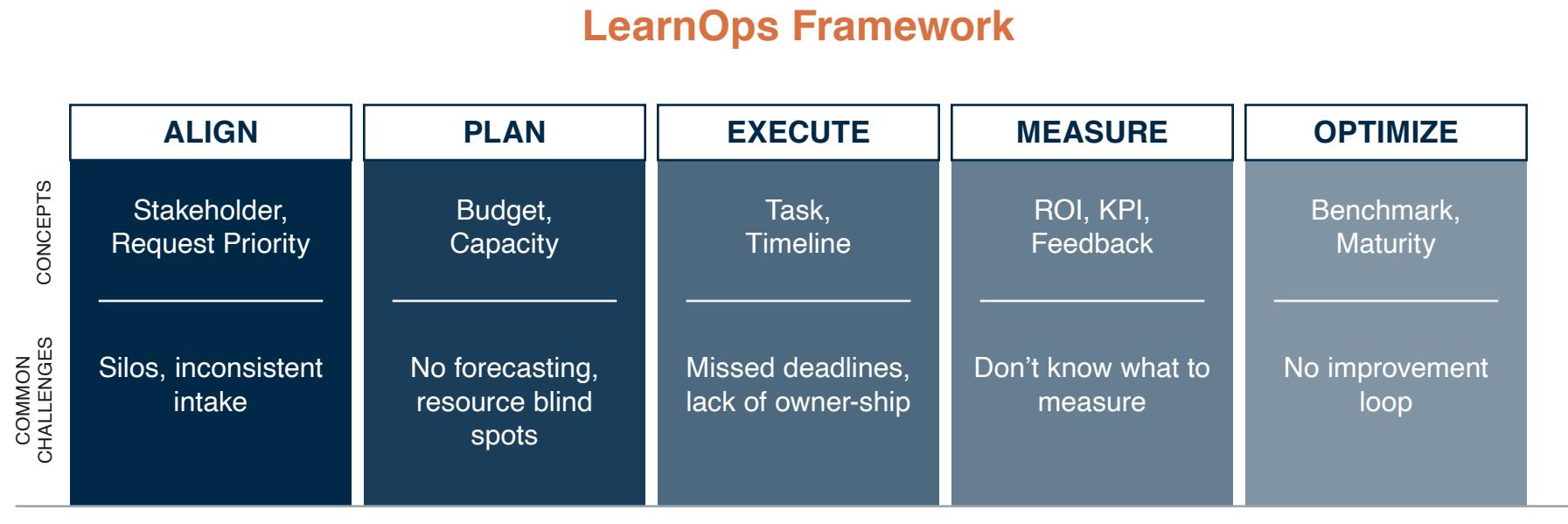
“Without formalized operations, Talent and L&D remain reactive and struggle to meet strategic business demands. LearnOps elevates L&D from cost center to strategic driver.”

**Brandon Hall Group™**

This evolution is urgent: As organizations face increased pressure to develop talent at speed, demonstrate ROI, and adapt to business change, LearnOps delivers the operational foundation to scale with agility, efficiency, and impact.

# LearnOps Methodology

This report draws on research from Brandon Hall Group™ and Cognota, including data from the [LearnOps community](#) and anonymized trends from Cognota's platform. Findings reflect a cross-industry sample spanning various team sizes and roles. Insights from CLOs, CHROs, and learning practitioners provide qualitative depth, organized around five operational pillars.



This structured approach to analysis ensures that the findings represent the current state of learning operations while establishing a foundation for future research and benchmarking. This framework will be explained in more detail later in the report.

# Key Research Findings: The State of Learning Operations

Cognota field research highlights key operational friction points for L&D teams:

**38%** of L&D leaders report operating within a federated model, resulting in these organizations making decentralized decisions and providing inconsistent intake and prioritization.

**47%** cite organizational silos as a top challenge in aligning learning strategies to business goals.

**30%** identify a lack of strategic prioritization.

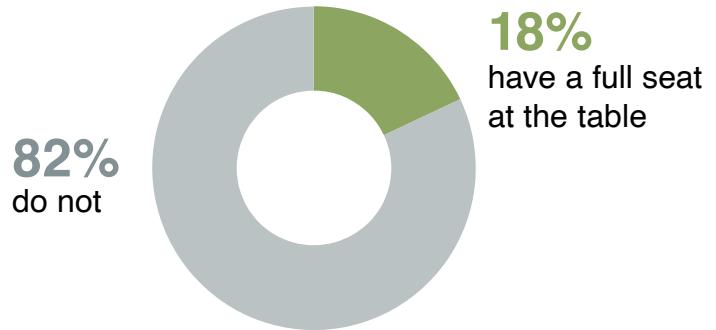
For measuring learning impact:

**41%** cite lack of time.

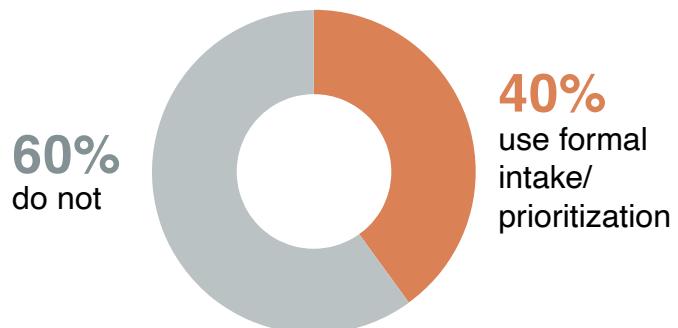
**33%** struggle with knowing what to measure, indicating persistent measurement immaturity.

These frictions lead most L&D functions to believe they are not strategic partners.

## “Full Seat at the Table” Status



## Use of Formal Intake & Prioritization



## Current State Data and Gaps

Research shows that many organizations still use spreadsheets, email, and disconnected tools for intake and planning. This leads to inconsistent prioritization, limited visibility, and poor alignment with strategic goals.

### Cognota Research Snapshot

AREA	DATA POINT
Intake	Only 40% use formal intake processes.
Tool Consolidation	Only 17% use a dedicated LearnOps platform.
Measurement Maturity	33% don't know what to measure; 41% lack time to measure.
Capacity Visibility	64% lack visibility into team workload and planning.
Efficiency Gains	LearnOps users report a minimum 10–30% efficiency improvement.
Maturity Levels	Only 9% of teams are operating at the Predictive maturity level.
Executive Alignment	Formalized operations = 2–3x more likely to achieve executive alignment.

Source: Cognota, benchmarks from more than 500 learning professionals across industries

These aren't abstract problems — they reflect the day-to-day reality of managing learning operations without a unified system. Many organizations lack visibility into budgets and resource allocation. Without tracked budget fields, L&D teams struggle to manage resources or justify investments. Despite \$130 billion in global L&D spend, only 25% is considered effective, and nearly half of teams report budget and staffing shortages.

**“When I reflect on my role at Comcast — supporting 120,000+ employees globally — I would have given anything for a platform like Cognota to manage learning operations. We managed intake, budgets, and impact storytelling across Smartsheets, Workday, SAP — even the backs of napkins. Having a single digital system that centralizes all of that work? It’s absolutely magical. Cognota helps teams tell the story of learning impact in a way that finally makes sense to the business.”**

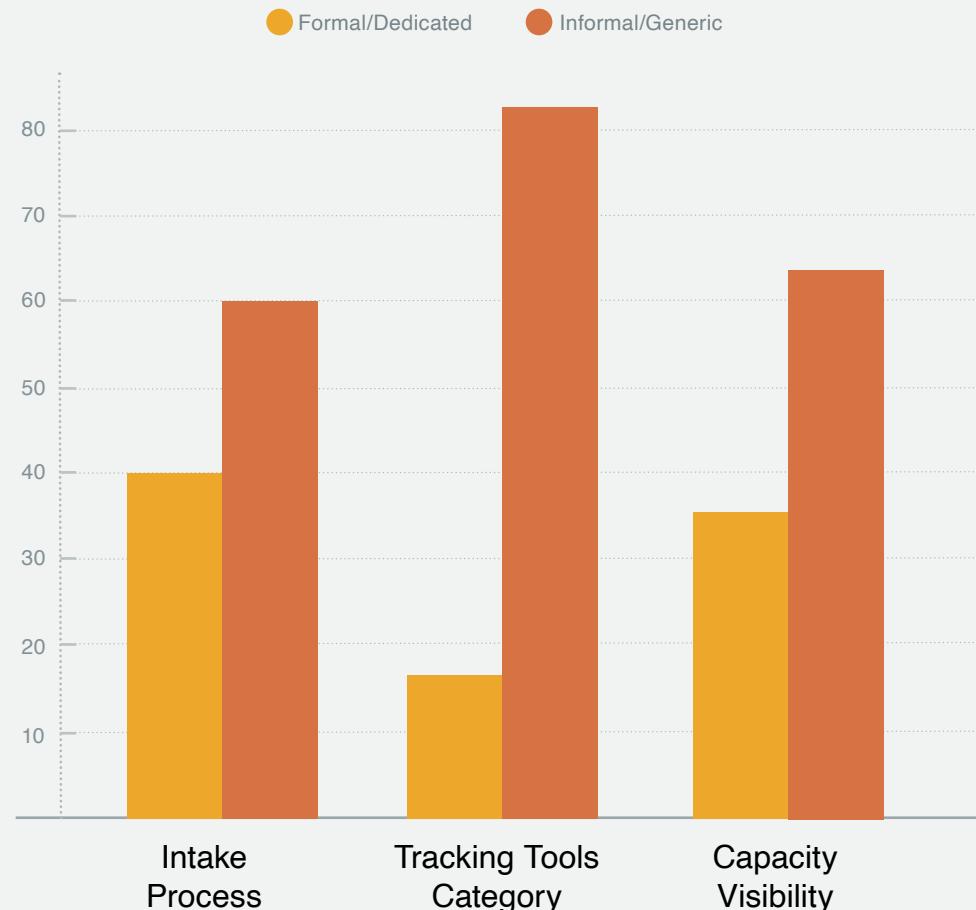


**Martha Soehren**  
Former Chief Talent Development Officer  
Comcast

# Operational Pain Points Identified

Research highlights common pain points limiting L&D effectiveness. Ad hoc intake leads to capacity bottlenecks and poor prioritization, worsened by the lack of standardized request processes. Teams also lack real-time data on project status and resource use, resulting in reactive execution and cascading delays.

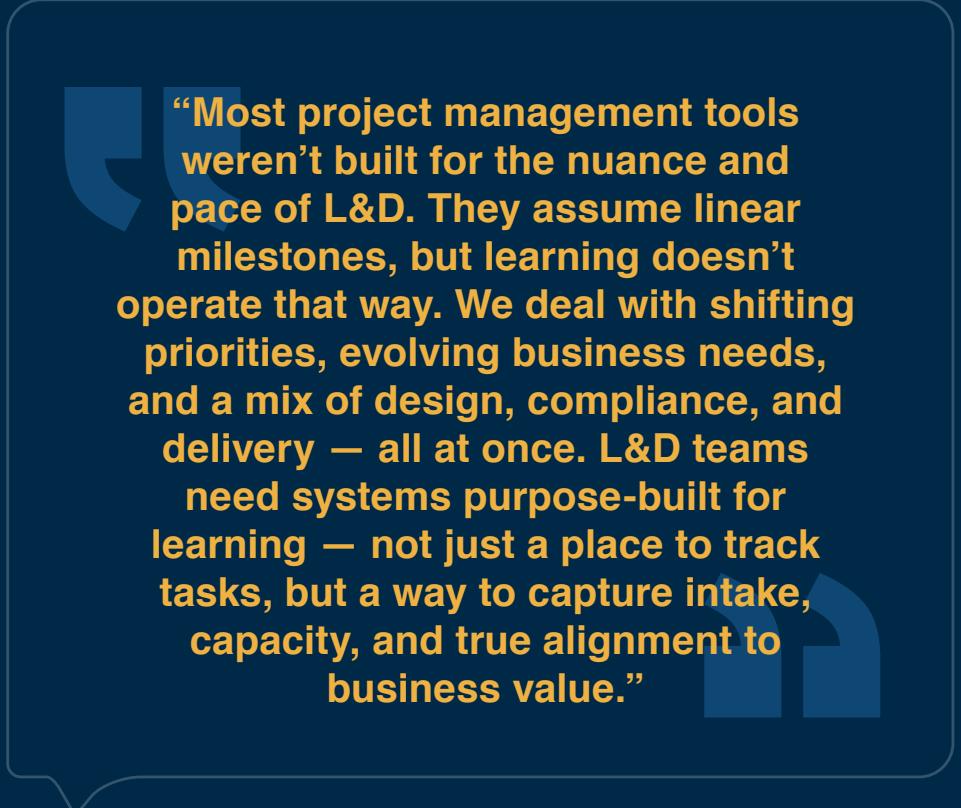
## Comparison of LearnOps Practices Across Key Categories



Source: Cognota

Note: "Formal/Dedicated" indicates structured processes and purpose-built tools supporting LearnOps disciplines like intake, planning and measurement. "Informal/General" represents teams using ad hoc methods and general tools not designed for L&D operations.

Research highlights that organizations using structured learning operations see measurable gains. Organizations with formalized processes report 10–30% efficiency gains over those using manual methods. These improvements support faster delivery, stronger alignment with business goals, and increased executive buy-in. A growing number of teams are also connecting budget and capacity data to business outcomes, laying the groundwork for more strategic ROI measurement and investment decisions.



**“Most project management tools weren’t built for the nuance and pace of L&D. They assume linear milestones, but learning doesn’t operate that way. We deal with shifting priorities, evolving business needs, and a mix of design, compliance, and delivery — all at once. L&D teams need systems purpose-built for learning — not just a place to track tasks, but a way to capture intake, capacity, and true alignment to business value.”**



**Rob Lauber**  
Former Chief Learning Officer  
McDonald's

# What the Industry Is Really Doing

## LearnOps in Practice (Based on 2024 Cognota Usage Data)

AREA	WHAT'S WORKING	WHAT'S MISSING	TAKEAWAY
Intake	Standard forms, clear ownership	More prioritization logic, ROI alignment	Add strategic scoring to improve value.
Planning	Program tracking, measurement criteria	Budget, capacity, ROI	Integrate financial and forecasting data.
Execution	Task status, ownership, capacity tracking	Additional agile methods, scenario planning	Adopt agile and dependency models.
Measurement	Foundations for data capture, program feedback	Feedback, evaluation, and impact data	Start with basic post-program surveys.
Optimization	Structured data	Dashboards, automation, benchmarking	Leverage existing data to inform action.

Source: Cognota

Looking at practices in the context of the LearnOps Framework, here are the gaps:

## LearnOps in Practice

(Based on 2024 Cognota Usage Data)

PILLAR	CONCEPTS	KEY GAPS
Align	Stakeholder, Request Priority	Only 40% use formal intake processes; 47% cite silos as a barrier to strategy alignment.
Plan	Budget, Capacity	64% of teams lack visibility into workload and capacity.
Execute	Task, Timeline	Only 17% use dedicated LearnOps platforms; most rely on generic or manual tools.
Measure	ROI, KPI, Feedback	41% lack time to measure impact; 33% don't know what to measure.
Optimize	Benchmark, Maturity	Fewer than 10% of organizations consider themselves mature in optimization practices.

Source: Cognota

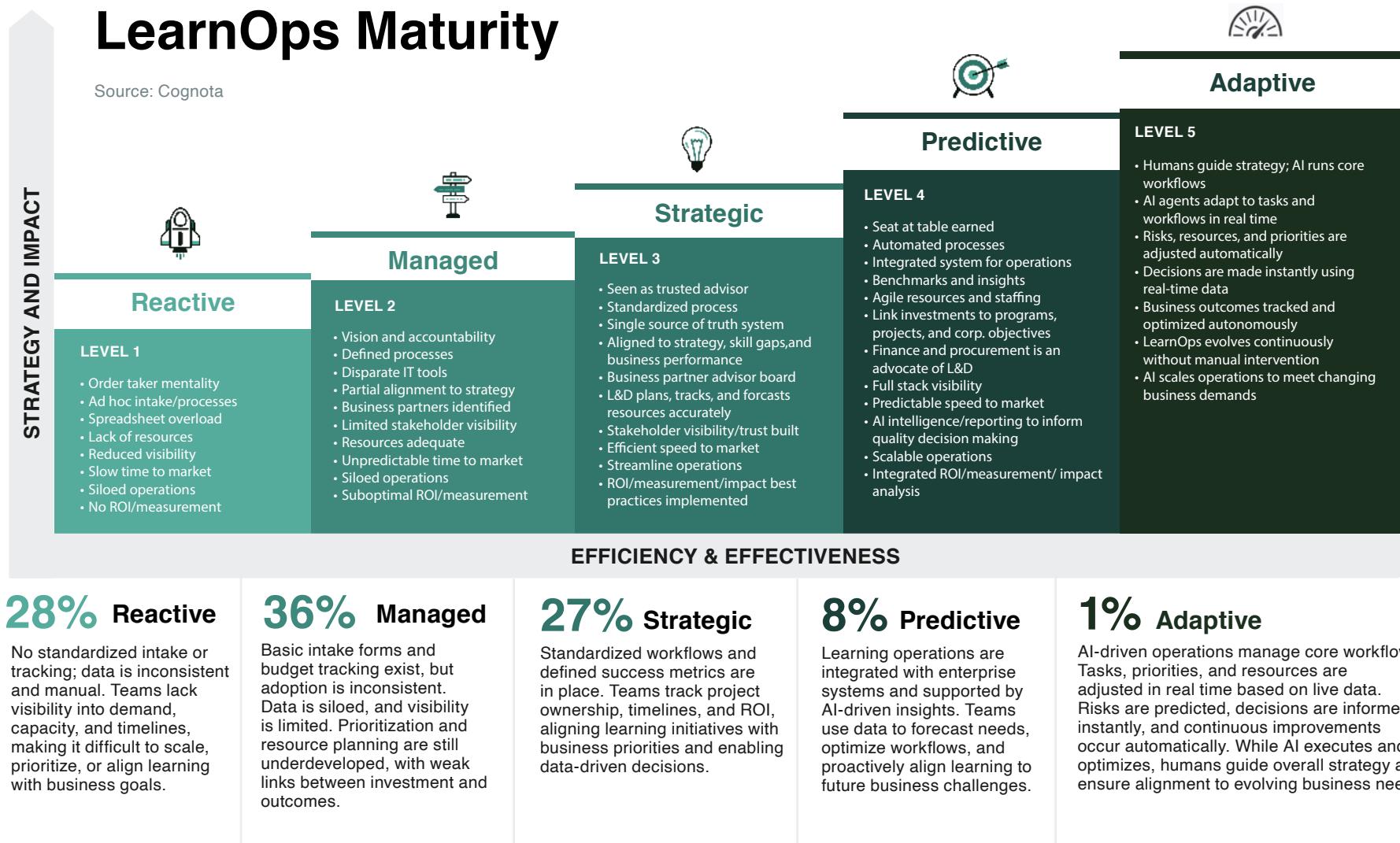
## Key takeaways

- **Execution is strong:** Task tracking and ownership are well established.
- **Measurement is weak:** Few teams capture impact or outcomes.
- **Strategic prioritization is rare:** Most requests are treated equally.
- **AI readiness exists:** Metadata is structured, but security concerns slow automation.
- **Cross-functional work** is present but lightly managed.

These trends suggest that many L&D teams have the foundation — centralized intake, tracked execution, and structured workflows — but now need to activate measurement, prioritization, and integration to drive strategic outcomes.

# LearnOps Maturity Model and Alignment

The LearnOps Maturity Model outlines four levels of operational capability, helping organizations assess and improve how they manage learning operations and data. Each maturity level reflects a step forward in operational capability, improving efficiency and strategic impact. The model serves as both a diagnostic tool and roadmap to help L&D teams identify gaps and guide investment.



Building on the LearnOps maturity model, the next phase for leading organizations is clear: the integration of artificial intelligence. Organizations must transition toward adaptive operations, where AI not only supports but works to automate, optimize, and adapt processes in real time.

The Table below outlines this progression—from decision support to fully autonomous learning operations.

LEVEL	CAPABILITY FOCUS	AI ROLE	HUMAN ROLE
<b>AI Counselor</b>	Natural Language + Decision Support	AI interrogates structured data (intake, programs, budgets, projects).	Human refines decisions based on AI insights.
<b>Agentic Workflows</b>	Self-Executing Routine Tasks	AI acts on project/task/workflow based on conditions.	Human reviews and adjusts automated work.
<b>Workflow Operators</b>	AI Micro-Operators Inside Workflows	Specialized AI agents embedded in each major workflow.	Human defines strategic rules, then oversees.
<b>Autonomous Optimization</b>	Self-Improving LearnOps System	AI monitors KPIs, reallocates resources, predicts risks, suggests innovations.	Human strategize, manages change.

## SUMMARY

**AI Counselor** → AI analyzes and advises. Human decides.

**Agentic Workflows** → AI acts on simple tasks. Human supervises.

**Workflow Operators** → AI runs core workflows. Human sets policy.

**Autonomous Optimization** → AI runs and improves the system. Human drives strategy.

# Overall Maturity Rating: Industry Benchmark

Based on anonymized data from thousands of learning initiatives, this assessment maps real-world activity to the LearnOps Maturity Model across the five pillars: Align, Plan, Execute, Measure, and Optimize.

Most organizations have moved past ad hoc practices. Intake is structured. Execution — especially in task and project management — shows strong maturity. However, gaps remain in measurement and optimization, where outcome tracking, feedback loops, and AI use are still rare.

On average, industry maturity sits at Level 2.5, between Managed and Strategic. This benchmark helps leaders identify where they stand and where to focus for greater efficiency and impact.

## Pillar-by-Pillar Operational Maturity Summary

PILLAR	MATURITY	STRENGTHS	IMPROVEMENT AREAS
Align	Level 2	Intake is structured; roles are defined	Add prioritization and cross-unit governance
Plan	Level 3	Programs tracked by capacity and budget	Add resource planning and ROI forecasting
Execute	Level 3	Task ownership and project health are visible	Introduce agile workflows and scenario planning
Measure	Level 3	Foundations for data capture and program feedback	Add evaluations, feedback, and impact tracking
Optimize	Level 4	Data capture spans functions	Apply benchmarking, reporting, and AI tools

Source: Cognota

Organizations can use this maturity snapshot to:

**01** **Assess current state**

Identify gaps in intake, measurement, and alignment.

**02** **Prioritize investments**

Focus on areas like ROI tracking, AI, or agile forecasting to increase impact.

**03** **Advance gradually**

Start small (e.g., improve intake or feedback) and build toward full maturity over time.

While many L&D teams have the data infrastructure for AI and automation, few are using it to forecast, prioritize, or benchmark. Activating existing data — not collecting more — is the next frontier.

# The Rise of the Learning Operations Role

As LearnOps matures, new roles are emerging — Learning Operations Manager, Director of Learning Operations, VP of Learning Enablement, and Head of Learning Strategy — across industries like finance, healthcare, tech, and more. These professionals sit at the intersection of L&D, HR, Finance, and Data, driving efficiency, alignment, scale, and measurable impact.

Organizations with dedicated LearnOps leads report, according to the Cognota research:

**34%** faster delivery

**28%** lower costs

**42%** better tech utilization

**39%** higher stakeholder satisfaction

This shift marks a broader trend: L&D is moving beyond content creation toward operational excellence, and LearnOps leaders are now essential to business success.

# Recommended Next Steps for Practitioners

Organizations looking to advance their learning operations should take the following steps:

- **Assess maturity** across the five LearnOps framework pillars, with a focus on data visibility and intake structure.
- **Implement core foundations** like standardized intake, budget/capacity tracking, and project workflows using a structured data model.
- **Track and report KPIs** — both operational (e.g., time-to-market, resource use) and strategic (e.g., alignment to business outcomes).
- **Build the business case** using real data to show efficiency gains and strategic impact, securing executive buy-in for continued investment.

## Why It Matters

LearnOps enables Talent and L&D to scale with confidence, optimize spend and drive measurable impact, which is critical in today's CFO-driven climate.

### ACCORDING TO COGNOTA RESEARCH

**Organizations with formal intake and project visibility processes are 2–3x more likely to achieve executive alignment and faster decision-making. These capabilities move L&D teams beyond ad hoc execution and into proactive, data-informed operations that deliver measurable value.**





## Conclusion

Learning Operations is becoming essential for L&D teams aiming to operate as strategic business partners. Organizations with mature LearnOps capabilities gain efficiency, visibility, and measurable impact.

Cognota's LearnOps Taxonomy provides the structure to standardize processes across the five pillars, enabling operational cohesion and strategic alignment.

Operational benefits include:

- Standardized, efficient workflows.
- Visibility into resources and outcomes.
- Stronger alignment to business goals.

As business needs evolve, LearnOps provides the operational foundation for agility, scale, and strategic relevance, transforming L&D from a cost center into a value-driving function.

# Appendix: Case Studies & Real-World Impact

These case studies show how structured learning operations can transform L&D from a reactive function into a strategic asset.



AMERICAN WATER

Training requests were informal and tracked inconsistently. After Cognota, the team established a unified intake and gained visibility across requests and stakeholders.

*“Now we can see who requested training, what they need, and share that visibility across the team.”*

Jeff Balmer



**AMERICO.**

A two-person team struggled with manual tools. Cognota enabled a shared platform for collaboration with stakeholders and SMEs.

*“It’s so much easier to have everything in one place. Cognota really is next level.”*

Maddy Poletis



**CURBELL**  
PLASTICS

With 600 employees and a lean L&D team, Cognota centralized requests and improved task management.

*“Now we can split tasks among the team and manage everything from one location.”*

Ashley Riley



**STERIS**

Serving 3,000 employees across 60 sites, Steris needed consistency and visibility. Cognota brought centralized tracking and global transparency.

*“Cognota gave us transparency, ease of use, and a platform our global team can rely on.”*

Ginger Zappa





With inconsistent intake, no capacity planning, and manual reporting, the L&D team lacked visibility into workstreams and struggled to align with strategic goals.

In 2024, they replaced Jira with Cognota — centralizing intake, streamlining collaboration, and delivering real-time dashboards to executives. The result: clear capacity-based decisions, structured backlogs, and increased transparency across compliance and business stakeholders.

*"We finally have the data to say what we can and can't take on — and why."*

*Bekah Roberts, Program Manager, Talent Management*



With over 10 disconnected tools, Sun Life's global L&D team lacked visibility, capacity planning, and operational alignment, making it difficult to prioritize, scale, or demonstrate impact.

By centralizing intake, tracking, and capacity planning with Cognota, the team replaced 10+ systems, reduced admin work, and improved focus on strategic initiatives.

*"Cognota makes our team more efficient, strategic, and aligned. It's not just a tool — it's the foundation for how we deliver value."*

*Krista Sim, Learning Strategic Initiatives*

# Authors and Contributors



**Michael Rochelle** ([michael.rochelle@brandonhall.com](mailto:michael.rochelle@brandonhall.com)) wrote this report. He is Chief Strategy Officer and Principal Analyst at Brandon Hall Group™. 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.



**Claude Werder** ([claude.werder@brandonhall.com](mailto:claude.werder@brandonhall.com)) contributed to this report. He is Senior Vice President and Principal Analyst at Brandon Hall Group™. Claude contributes insights in all areas of human capital management and shapes and refines content for research reports, blogs and virtual and live events.



**Mike Cooke** ([mike.cooke@brandonhall.com](mailto:mike.cooke@brandonhall.com)) is CEO and Principal Analyst at Brandon Hall Group™. Mike has more than 20 years' experience in human capital management and the research, software and technology industries. Before running Brandon Hall Group™, Mike was co-founder of AC Growth, a research and consulting firm, and VP and General Manager of Field Operations at Bersin & Associates, a global analyst and consulting services firm in all areas of HCM.



**Rachel Cooke** ([rachel.cooke@brandonhall.com](mailto:rachel.cooke@brandonhall.com)) is the Chief Operating Officer and Principal Analyst at Brandon Hall Group™. As the COO, Rachel oversees client and member advisory services, design strategies, annual awards programs, conferences, and project management functions.



**Ger Fajardo** ([geraldine.fajardo@brandonhall.com](mailto:geraldine.fajardo@brandonhall.com)) designed this report. Ger is an art director who has 8+ years of working experience in the design industry. She specializes in branding, illustration, motion graphics, and photography. As a graphic designer at Brandon Hall Group™, she handles all design-related tasks.

## About Cognota

# Run **Talent & Learning** with Operational Excellence

In a world of rising expectations and shrinking resources, Cognota helps you do more with less. One purpose-built system that unlocks capacity, streamlines operations, and delivers ROI.

Efficiency. Impact. Accountability — Powered by AI.

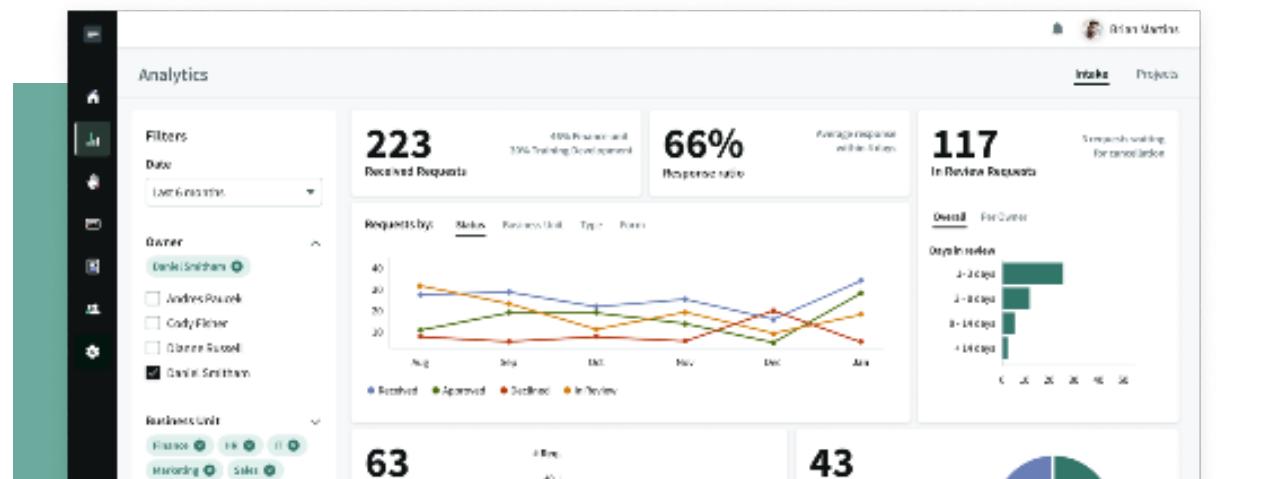
**+200%**  
ROI by Investing Smarter

**<4 Months**  
Payback by Planning Better

**5x**  
Dollars Saved with  
Consolidation



[Book a Demo](#)



# About Brandon Hall Group™

With more than 10,000 clients globally and 30 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group™ is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

## Professional Certifications

Self-paced certification programs. Virtual group sessions for companies. In-person conferences and summits.



## Excellence Awards

Three annual programs recognize the best organizations that have successfully deployed programs to achieve measurable results.

## Membership

Individual and Enterprise Membership options: Includes research assets, advisory support, a client success plan and more.

## Advisory Offerings

Custom research projects, including surveys, focus group interviews and organizational needs assessments for transformation, technology selection and strategy.



## ENTERPRISE EXCELLENCE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Recognizes the best HCM programs that transform their organization and achieves breakthrough results. This designation is a step above the HCM Excellence Awards® which focuses on one program within a company. Enterprise Excellence is a hybrid of award winners who are also members.



## SMARTCHOICE® PREFERRED PROVIDER PROGRAM

Uniquely places HCM service and technology companies at the top of organizations' consideration list of vendors. It adds an unmatched level of credibility based on BHG's thirty-plus years of experience in evaluating and selecting the best solution providers for leading organizations around the world.



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Provides comprehensive marketing solutions for human capital management solution providers. We offer strategic services to establish a strong foundation for your marketing efforts.