



Brandon Hall Group
**EXCELLENCE
AT WORK**

Executive Interview

with **Andrew Burns**,
Vice President,
BTS

How Organizations Scale a Culture
of Personalized Learning and Practice

About BTS

BTS is a global professional services firm that partners with clients to enable strategy execution. We provide the skills, tools and knowledge so people understand how their daily work impacts business results. We are experts in behavior change, care deeply about delivering results and inspire people to do the best work of their lives. It's strategy made personal. For more information, visit bts.com.

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- Learning and Development**
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- Leadership Development**
6 Gold Awards | 4 Silver Awards | 1 Bronze Award
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**
1 Gold Award | 1 Silver Award

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4 Gold Awards | 1 Silver Award | 1 Bronze Award
- Talent Management**
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About Andrew Burns



Andrew Burns is a Vice President at BTS responsible for partnering with clients to accelerate strategy alignment and culture change initiatives. His work spans the employee lifecycle, from developing assessment centers for hiring and leader development, to defining what great leadership looks like within an organization's unique context. Andrew has extensive experience working in industries ranging from Aerospace to Oil and Gas, Utilities and Software.



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, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 20+ years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research, and Performance Improvement industries.

Q RACHEL

What are you seeing and hearing from your clients about the future of learning?

A ANDREW

The pandemic revealed the humanity that exists in all of our organizations and all of our cultures. For the first time, we got to see each other's home offices and children running through the background. What we've seen and are hearing from our clients as we come out of that pandemic wave is, "How do we not lose some of that humanity within our organizations?" We know that the more that organizations can help individuals connect to their purpose — what they stand for — the higher engagement they're going to have. They'll also have higher retention and higher performance.

As I talk to our clients, there's a lot of excitement and anticipation with technology changes and growth opportunities for different markets. But at the same time, there's a lot of anxiety about how individuals or organizations are going to continue to perform at the same level with the rise of artificial intelligence. What are the implications of that? How do we ensure that the largest organizations can continue to grow and create amazing cultures? I might be biased, but I believe Learning organizations, for the first time, are having a seat at the table to help drive those changes within each organization. And with that comes a new set of responsibilities for Learning

and Leadership Development, whether it's within the HR or decentralized within different units within an organization. Organizations are recognizing that Learning isn't just about delivering training content and programs, but it is the engine to drive workforce readiness, to develop the skills that are needed for this future that's coming, as well as to drive just an incredible employee experience.

Q RACHEL

What is or isn't working?

A ANDREW

There are a couple of things that have come up again and again. One is this notion that if we build it, people will come. Organizations may throw a ton of investments behind technology platforms and content libraries, and try to open up and flood the organization with new learning opportunities. But there's not enough emphasis on actually teaching people how to learn. Not everybody can know exactly how do I know what I need to find or when I need to find it? How do I recognize what are the pivotal moments for me as a leader, or as an organization, where we really need to focus and prioritize developing those skills? We have to have an overemphasis on how to drive engagement and personalization, and help people connect to how they learn and when they learn.

(continued)

The second thing is, as a byproduct of the pandemic, for the first time everybody is now more fluent with digital virtual environments and learning on your own. But at the same time, we crave human connection. If an organization over-rotates on that and scales out human connection, that's also a recipe for creating an unengaged and uninspired workforce. You can watch as many videos as you want and read as many books as you want, but really what helps create sense-making and disrupt mindsets is that ability to connect with and learn from others.

The biggest shift I'm seeing with clients is they're no longer investing in just the top 20%. They are looking at how to democratize and create more opportunities for everyone, everywhere. That's an inspiring element for me. Sometimes the best leaders, and the best ideas, don't come from the most senior folks in the organization or those high-potentials. It's having an opportunity to connect, to learn from those who might be rank-and-file.

Q **RACHEL**

How are leading-edge organizations approaching learning differently?

A

ANDREW

They understand their learning culture and they know that they need to optimize delivering and supporting leaders, individuals and their organizations by connecting to community experiences and content. What we saw in 2020 and 2021 was that content was everywhere. With the rise of learning libraries and MOOCs, there's no shortage of content. But we know that content alone doesn't deliver any type of change within an organization, because nobody does it or consumes it unless they have to.

I'm an experience junkie — this is how I grew up in BTS. We've built amazing different experiences using simulations and helping people experience what their job role in the future might look like. It creates a lot of motivation and momentum, but experiences alone without content or community will offer no accountability to continue to build new habits.

We've seen a rise in investments in creating communities within organizations or even across organizations. But without that connection to experiences or content, it feels good at first, but we see a big drop-off very quickly. Leading-edge organizations recognize they need community, experiences and access to world-class content. They are constantly trying to experiment and adjust that formula to ensure that they're meeting people where they are. This is where that personalization comes in: How are you connecting people to the right content, the right experiences and the right community so that it builds upon itself and reinforces the skills that you're looking to build for tomorrow?

RACHEL

How do you see mindsets connecting to skills?

ANDREW

Our core belief is that to truly develop skills, you can't just pile on new frameworks and new tools. You do have to address that underlying mindset, whether it's creating a more productive mindset or addressing the unproductive ones. I'll give you a simple example: I've had many, many organizations talk about, "We want to create a customer-centric culture." OK, let's unpack that. What's at the root issue? And you can come up with the numbers that you need to have to be more customer-centric. "I need to be able to develop empathy maps for the customer. I need to be able to communicate with the customers in a certain way that matters to them."

But if there's a belief under there that, "I will only be rewarded if I deliver on time, on budget." That's going to immediately squash out any customer-centricity that you're trying to build in the culture. While the skills are great, we've really focused on how to emphasize and create community experiences and content that both disrupt and shift any unproductive mindsets, and then start to shift or reinforce the skills that will support that over time. That combination is something that we've seen become more important over the last 10 years.

At BTS, we have one of the largest databases of mindset research that's come from our coaching practice. When you are in a coaching conversation, so many of the challenges that come from a coach working with a coachee are mindset-related. If I'm in a coaching conversation, I'm not going to say, "Rachel, I really need to learn a feedback tool." I'm going to say, "Hey, I'm dealing with Joe over there. He's driving me crazy. I can't get through to him. I can't influence him." Well, that's the mindset talking.

In our work within the coaching practice, our coaches capture the notes from this. We actually mined that data anonymously with a university in Singapore to identify what are the common mindset shifts that organizations need to create. What are the more productive mindsets? If we can prioritize the few that make the biggest difference, that's going to have an outsized impact on your ability to get people to absorb new skills, to want to learn new skills and be open to the community, experiences and content that you may formally or informally deliver within your Learning organization.

If you think about every elite team in the world, they spend 90% of their time practicing and only about 10% actually performing. In the corporate world, or the business or companies, it's the reverse, right? You have 10% opportunity to practice to fail, learn and get feedback as well. The best way to disrupt a current mindset is to practice something differently. You need to see and experience something like, "When I try on this mindset around change, around agile or around customer-centricity, I get a different result. OK, let me try that a little bit more."

(continued)

So much of the Learning organization is focused on the individual, and individuals only get us so far. Ultimately, what delivers the business performance and the engagement are the dynamics of the team. We need to move toward enabling the team — and not just the team leader, but the actual teams — to support each other to build community across teams, to access the right content that helps them get better, and to explore different concepts and mindsets. That will allow them enough experiences to form and work through conflict and get better as a team as well. My core belief is teams are the new heroes. It's not about the individual hero, it's about the team.

moments, as well as mindsets that are going to have the biggest change or shift on where an organization is trying to go, the more effective you're going to be.

Use the right balance of community experiences and content to address those mindsets as well as those moments. Then, of course, don't lose sight of the business context and the practicality of what you're trying to deliver. Don't scale out that human connection. What is going to have the biggest return on shifting mindsets is to bring people together to help people connect with each other, whether formally or informally.

Q

RACHEL

What advice would you give to Learning leaders who are looking to get started? Where should they begin?

A

ANDREW

They should remember that the technology should complement both your learning strategy and learning culture — not the other way around. Trying to force-fit your learning culture to fit the technology is a recipe for failure. Secondly, the more that you can think about the critical

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