



Brandon Hall Group  
**EXCELLENCE  
AT WORK**

# Interview

with **Mehdi Tounsi**,  
Senior Regional Director, EMEA  
OpenSesame

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The Global Challenges Facing L&D



## About OpenSesame

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OpenSesame helps develop the world's most productive and admired workforces. With the most comprehensive catalog of eLearning courses from the world's top publishers, OpenSesame helps every step of the way, from finding courses, mapping them to core competencies and syncing them with LMS, to increasing utilization and improving L&D programs.



## Recognition

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## About Mehdi Tounsi



With over 20 years of experience in the Learning industry, **Mehdi Tounsi** has successfully implemented learning and talent management strategies for various industries, including content providers and LMS platform specialists. Mehdi assists global organizations in meeting the challenges linked to cultural diversity, improving communications within global operations and developing learning programs to enhance workforce mobility. A seasoned traveler and passionate linguist, Mehdi has held various international positions in Australia, Africa, the US and now London, where he oversees OpenSesame's European operations as the Senior Regional Director, EMEA.



## 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's the culture like at OpenSesame?

**A** **MEHDI**

OpenSesame is probably the most inclusive and diverse-by-design organization I've worked with. The environment allows for that diversity to translate into high-performance teams. There are a lot of ideas on how we can do things and approach things. Not only do we apply what we preach, but there's also a lot of diversity and inclusion at every level. This is the least "American" company I have worked for — and I mean that in a nice way, because of being open to other ideas and perspectives and allowing us on the EMEA side to impact our culture and who we are as an organization and redefining that.

**Q** **RACHEL**

With the new normal, how do we get more companies to see that they have the abilities to develop their people?

**A** **MEHDI**

First of all, there's a great need for L&D to be a stakeholder in the business and impact business outcomes. There's this legacy that learning, which used to be called training, is that you're in a classroom and we're going to force-feed knowledge. Thanks to technology, the pace of work is insane. To keep up with that, you need to have very agile employees who can learn within the flow of work. Up until recently, learning was seen as something where you had to stop working and be able to go and do your learning.

L&D must demonstrate how they can impact the bottom line and demonstrate to learners that learning is a natural part of work. You cannot work and not learn. At the same time, you may have a one-size-fits-all approach where everyone will learn in the same way. That's not how people consume content. Maybe I want a video, maybe I want an eLearning module or an interaction around the coffee machine. The challenge in L&D is to recreate those exchanges for that informal learning, but also understand that learning is not set in one way. It's a constant that needs to be delivered through multiple means, whether it's technology-driven or people-driven.

Before, the L&D community had to focus on people and competencies; now, you have to be versed in technology and delivery, and you need to upskill and reskill yourself as a learning practitioner to help your learners. And if you're catering to groups of learners in different countries, there's also a cultural impact on how they prefer their learning to be delivered to them.

Q

**RACHEL**

What is your perspective on The Great Resignation and how we move away from it?

see People. People now are back on the agenda. It's taken all we have gone through, especially the past two years, for organizations to realize that their best asset is their people, and investing in their people is the best way to thrive in the current economy.

A

**MEHDI**

A lot of things — inflation, the war between Ukraine and Russia — have a direct impact on our employees. Last year, we talked about The Great Resignation and how up to 45 percent of the workforce was considering a new career. When “The Great Resignation” was coined, the demographic was people early in their careers reconsidering their options. Then it turned into what they call The Great Midlife Crisis because that demographic changed. We are seeing people seasoned within their jobs — they have a great set of competencies and plenty of experience and expertise — they're also considering, “Do I want to do that for the rest of my life?” The challenge that creates is that we have a whole bunch of highly-qualified workers who are leaving the workplace without any succession planning in place.

For L&D, there's a lot of in-house knowledge and the challenge is, “How do we get that to the surface so it can be used by everyone and what are some of the tools that allow us to do that? How do we impact the culture so there's more collaboration and more exchange between people for a better competency transfer?” For over 10 years, the top priorities of CEOs were Innovation, R&D and New Markets; only in the past couple of years, do we

Q

**RACHEL**

How do we improve this war for talent and ensure we have people in place with the right skills?

A

**MEHDI**

It's no longer about having a ping-pong table and a catered lunch every Friday. That doesn't cut it. The focus is now on well-being — stress management, anxiety, counseling and well-being. In the past, it was more about focusing on leadership or compliance. We see organizations investing in well-being for three reasons: to retain good people, attract people and demonstrate that you treat your people well. It's not about bean bags or basketball hoops, as a lot of people are working remotely now. Microsoft did a test in Japan with a four-day workweek and saw an improvement in productivity of 45 percent. In Europe, a thousand companies have moved to four-day weeks. I'm not saying that four-day weeks are the solution. What's more interesting is the freedom you allow employees to manage their time as they see it.

*(continued)*

If you compare Europe to the US, there's a very different ethos and work culture. In the US, there are still way too many companies where being the first in and last out is worn as a badge of honor. If you can work smarter — and at the same time have the organization understand that you can work smarter if you allow the people the freedom to do the work how and when they want to — it's a win-win solution. Saying they expect to see everyone back in the office by a certain time, I doubt that's going to pay off.

demonstrate some flexibility and understand that some people prefer working from home, others might prefer going to the office and some might prefer doing a bit of both. One of the things we saw during the pandemic is that we are social creatures; we need to interact with other people. The minute we were able to go back to our in-person events made a huge difference. Even with a Zoom or Teams call, the focus was on, "What are the restrictions on your end? Are you wearing a facemask? Have you had COVID?" It really came down to that more human side of who we are. That's where the focus is going to be for years to come.

## Q RACHEL

How do we give employees that autonomy but ensure they're still performing?

## A MEHDI

A couple of years ago, there was a book written by a LinkedIn executive explaining that after Gen X, people were not tied to their employer as previous generations have been. That aspect of loyalty, where I want to start at a company and spend the rest of my life, does not even exist now. We're in a situation where if you find good people and you're not able to offer them that right balance between being able to do their work and at the same time, allow them to be themselves and lead their lives as they see fit, there's very little reason for them to say, "I'm sticking with you." Work-life balance is going to be that key differentiator. Organizations have to

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