



Brandon Hall Group
**EXCELLENCE
AT WORK**

Executive Interview

with **Theresa E. Zeller**,
Global Head of Integrated Learning Experiences,
Global Learning and Development,
Merck

Merck and Co. Reveal Their
Talent Growth Framework



About Merck

[Merck](#), known as [MSD](#) outside of the United States and Canada, is unified around its purpose. For more than 130 years, Merck has brought hope to humanity through the development of important medicines and vaccines. Its purpose is to use the power of leading-edge science to save and improve lives around the world. Merck aspires to be the premier research-intensive biopharmaceutical company in the world — and today it is at the forefront of research to deliver innovative health solutions that advance the prevention and treatment of diseases in people and animals. Merck fosters a diverse and inclusive global workforce and operates responsibly every day to enable a safe, sustainable and healthy future for all people and communities.



Recognition

A Brandon Hall Group Corporate member, Merck won 16 awards in the 2022 Brandon Hall Group HCM Excellence Awards.

EXCELLENCE IN HCM AWARDS



Learning and Development	6 Gold Awards 5 Bronze Awards
Leadership Development	2 Gold Awards 1 Silver Award
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	1 Gold Award
Talent Management	1 Gold Award

The Brandon Hall Group Corporate Membership provides a host of resources and services and — most importantly — a seasoned team of thought leaders and client support professionals dedicated to your success.

[Learn More](#)

About Theresa E. Zeller



Theresa E. Zeller leads Merck's Integrated Learning Experiences Team (ILET) to build workforce capability by creating engaging learner-centered experiences that drive speed, agility and business value. Theresa has transformed the learner experience to anticipate and provide growth and development throughout an employee's career lifecycle for Merck's approximately 70,000 employees globally across the enterprise.

Before this role, Theresa was the Global Head of Learning and Development for Merck's Manufacturing Division, which included over 55 sites and 21,000 employees worldwide. Theresa also held various strategic and client-facing leadership roles in the US Market and Global Commercial Learning & Development to develop commercial capabilities across all roles in marketing, market access, account management, business development and sales. Theresa led several cross-enterprise learning teams to enable business and culture transformation across the enterprise.

Prior to Merck, Theresa worked as a learning leader for Nutrisystem's corporate and franchise businesses and at NovaCare Rehabilitation Services for contract and outpatient services. Theresa received her BS in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from the Pennsylvania State University and her MA in Training, Communication and Organization Development from the University of Maryland.

Theresa will be a speaker at Brandon Hall Group's [2022 HCM Excellence Conference](#) Jan. 31-Feb. 2, 2023, in West Palm Beach, Florida.



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.



RACHEL

Why reimagine learning? What are some of the trends you are seeing?



THERESA

We've been looking outside the organization and continue to be on a journey to becoming a high-performing learning organization. The growth in our Brandon Hall Group awards has shown that. We've been on this trajectory for a while, but we're not just looking to continue the steady growth but to fundamentally transform how we can reimagine learning. We looked at some outside trends and how they fit into Merck's strategy.

We just finished a study with our AMS partners as we start to think about how to grow Learning and Development around the globe. That study focused on the landscape of talent acquisition and retention in the organization. What we see is that candidates value skill development first and foremost — ahead of things such as the rate of promotion, compensation and work-life balance. This means CEOs all over the globe are looking to their L&D organizations to produce the right skill development for their talent to make sure they're growing and developing their career. As a result, we're also seeing the demand for Learning and Development professionals double over the last 12 months as companies turn to L&D as a huge lever in retaining talent.

We also looked at some other trends. We're beginning to see a reduction in remote work since the start of the pandemic, but hybrid work is truly establishing itself. In the last four months of 2022, one in four people are working in a hybrid environment. This is a very different talent proposition for leaders of the organization in terms of how we can create and build a culture. Another trend we're seeing, according to ADP's 2022 Workforce Report, is 52 percent of the 32,000 respondents said they'd actually be willing to take a pay cut — as much as 11 percent — to guarantee flexibility in a hybrid working environment. While many of us thought there'd be a shift after coming back to the office following COVID, we're not coming back to work exactly the same as pre-pandemic. We're starting to look at different ways of working. With the pandemic and as digitization and technology advance as a whole, we're seeing that folks learn, interact and work differently. All those trends led us to rethink and reimagine the way that we learn in the organization. Those are the outside trends we're responding to.



RACHEL

How do you engage new talent?

A THERESA

It brings us into a whole new world where it's a true advantage from the standpoint of productivity, diversity and inclusion to get the best talent from anywhere in the globe. It opens up the talent pool. The challenge is getting the same level of collaboration with these new employees to help them feel part of this amazing legacy and company, and help them learn to navigate. With our new executive and CEO team, we've refocused the organization to look forward in terms of a strategic framework. We've looked at our purpose and our aspiration for key priorities.

We have six ways of working and that's going to require us to fundamentally transform the way we develop people and think about the capabilities that are going to be very important in the future. Certain values will always remain the same, including being patient-first, having ethics and integrity, respect for people, innovation and scientific excellence. However, the capabilities that we gear our folks up with must change fundamentally. At the heart of it, it's our people leaders who are going to drive that real focus on engagement and career development. Our Global Talent and Leadership team introduced six ways of working which will help us to start thinking differently about what work looks like in the future. They are: have a team focus on what matters; act with a sense of urgency; experiment; learn and adapt; embrace diversity and inclusion; and speak up and be open-minded. We've defined expectations for people leaders and all individuals in the organization.

That has a huge implication for a culture that's been built over 130 years and now must transform how we work together. Some of these things have worked in the past but some of them are areas where we need to continue to evolve the culture and the way that we work. We've also introduced a talent growth framework that's important because it puts the development conversation at the center, between the leader and the employee. Like many companies, we've had a bit more formalized programmatic approach to development plans, checking in throughout the year and making sure that you're really focused on everyone's career growth. This shifts it to an ongoing dialogue. We realized the speed at which folks are identifying new interests and new ways of developing themselves can't wait for that next conversation on the calendar. We need to prepare our leaders to have that fluid dialogue and pay attention to the way folks grow. These were all the key elements that got us thinking differently as a big part of reimagining learning. We've also been looking at how Talent and L&D work together to continue to drive skill development and make sure the talent growth framework takes hold in the organization.

Q RACHEL

How do you develop your talent and leaders?

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THERESA

We just launched a transformed employee learning experience worldwide across the enterprise.

This is a way of thinking about learning so it wasn't programmatic and a "wonder I could pull that out of a catalog?" approach. It's a way to connect and tie to the talent growth framework. It provides growth and development throughout an employee's lifecycle. We identified five development areas: company and culture; career acceleration; in-role growth; mandatory training (because we're a highly regulated organization); and leadership development. We look at development across those five areas with the functional and technical employees because they have different needs. We're also putting a technology ecosystem underneath that to ensure we can deliver an employee experience that's frictionless, engaging and innovative.

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RACHEL

How do you measure your success?

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THERESA

I will focus on one of our Brandon Hall Group award-winners, our RISE leadership development program which won Best Unique or Innovative Leadership Development Program. We measure how participants feel we've achieved the goals of the program. The goals of this program, for example, were to generate the top 200 readiness of our organizational leaders to improve innovation, skills and mindsets to build an enterprise and deliver tangible results against business challenges. When we interview leaders who were in the program, 92 percent of them feel they better understand the future of healthcare; 87 percent feel they have increased innovation mindsets and behaviors; and 92 percent feel more comfortable reaching out divisionally to their colleagues across the globe.

But we don't stop there because we always like to measure. We've retained 97 percent of the talent in the program and that's even more exciting in a year of mass resignations. We've seen 12 percent promoted. Based on the innovation challenge we had in the program, we've begun to see the business impact — 50 percent more in sales plus a 57 percent rise in net income from the first quarter of 2021 to the first quarter of 2022. We know there's a lot that goes into that impact, but we can trace some of the business challenges and innovations from the program directly to those numbers.

(continued)

We're looking across all our programs and experiences to measure engagement and the movement from literacy to fluency to mastery. We also ask what people are more interested in to build programs that meet them where they are in terms of skills and capabilities so we're delivering business value. Those KPIs are always something we have in the front of mind. We're rolling out program development area by development area so we can focus on the experience we want. Even in our Compliance area, we've seen a greater reduction in seat time but higher results in capability and competency.

Here are some ways to listen to the interview on Brandon Hall Group's Excellence at Work Podcast:



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About Brandon Hall Group

With more than 10,000 clients globally and 28 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.

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 Organization Needs Assessment for Transformation, Technology Selection and Strategy.

Excellence Awards

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

SOME WAYS WE CAN HELP

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

recognizes world-class HCM programs that transform their organization and achieve breakthrough results. This designation is the next step beyond the HCM Excellence Awards, which focus on a single program, and looks at the department as a whole.

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 twenty-eight-plus years of experience in evaluating and selecting the best solution providers for leading organizations around the world.