



Brandon Hall Group
**EXCELLENCE
AT WORK**

Executive Interview

with **Dr. Sandra Loughlin**,
Chief Learning Scientist | Global Head,
Client Learning & Talent Enablement,
EPAM

How Learning Drives Digital Transformation

About EPAM

EPAM is a leading digital transformation services and product engineering company with expertise in technology, digital, data, product and innovation. In the past 25+ years, EPAM has grown organically into a global, 60,000-employee organization with virtually no advertising. The company’s strategy hinges on hiring, developing and retaining world-class technology talent. EPAM has invested heavily in developing a continuous learning culture, skills-based hiring and talent management, and proprietary talent-related platforms and tools.

Recently, EPAM Continuum, the consulting arm of EPAM, began sharing EPAM’s approach and resources — content, practical exercises, mentorship model, competency matrices, skill assessments and proprietary people platforms — as customizable accelerators to help clients cultivate top technical talent and grow leaders at all levels. EPAM also created a series of educational programs for technology practitioners, executives in the business and IT, and employees across the business, based on EPAM’s technical expertise and practical, on-the-ground insights.

Recognition

EPAM won two Brandon Hall Group HCM Excellence Awards in 2022 and three in 2021.

EXCELLENCE IN HCM AWARDS

2022



Learning and Development

1 Silver Award | 1 Bronze Award

2021

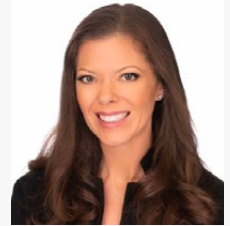
Learning and Development

1 Silver Award | 1 Bronze Award

Future of Work

1 Silver Award

About Dr. Sandra Loughlin



Dr. Sandra Loughlin is a learning scientist and organizational psychologist focused on aligning people to digitally driven business transformation. As Chief Learning Scientist at EPAM Systems, Dr. Loughlin is responsible for bringing EPAM’s many internal and external-facing educational activities under one umbrella, and ensuring they incorporate cutting-edge educational practices and collectively drive business growth, quality and results.

Dr. Loughlin is also EPAM’s Global Head of Client Learning & Talent Enablement, responsible for translating EPAM’s internal learning and talent approach into a strategy that clients can implement, helping them recreate EPAM’s award-winning culture of engineering excellence and continuous learning for their own organizations. She also tailors EPAM’s industry-recognized talent management system for clients to help them successfully attract, retain and develop technology talent. EPAM’s client learning team’s innovative approach and demonstrable impact have garnered several industry awards and led to Dr. Loughlin being recognized as a 2022 Global Leader in Consulting by *Consulting Magazine*.



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 does digital transformation mean to you?

A

SANDRA

People often hear this term and think it's technology: "If we can just adopt technology, our company will transform and everything will be great." The goal of digital transformation isn't to adopt technology, it's to make your customers happier and to meet their needs more efficiently or effectively. It even means expanding the footprint of your customer base. Technology is only a mechanism by which you are better able to support your clients. From my perspective, it really isn't even about technology. Technology is only a tool. People are the ones who must understand and implement that tool, and then evolve that tool to ensure it is continually meeting the needs of the business. EPAM looks at transformation through fundamental pillars: technology, data, people, innovation, product mindset and a new orientation toward management and leadership.

A

SANDRA

Clients were coming to us expecting that our tech services alone were going to drive the business transformation that they were looking for, and that didn't happen. They kept asking for our help: "How are you getting people at your company to stay, grow, learn and be happy and engaged? We want to recreate that within our own organization." Our practice was created out of these dual challenges of needing to develop our in-house capabilities around technology, data, product and so on, and looking for guidance and support from a company like EPAM that has seen all the good and bad with transformation.

In the past 30 years, we have worked closely with some of the world's most advanced organizations. We have seen companies succeed and some fail and as a result, we're able to pull out some of those learnings to create programs that enable our clients to develop their in-house capabilities and align their people, technology and data with their business strategies.

Q

RACHEL

Why did EPAM establish a division focused on client learning and enablement?

Q

RACHEL

What are some of the learning strategies that you recommend companies focus on as they look at digital transformation?

A SANDRA

There are a number of audiences that companies need to address from a learning perspective if they want to buck the trend of transformation, which is that something like 70 percent of transformations fail. This is millions, in some cases billions, of dollars that are spent and it's because there often isn't an emphasis on people. It's: "If we build the technology, they will come." That's just not the case. Our successful clients focus on education for all the critical stakeholders within the organization.

We found time and again with our clients that IT leaders are an often-overlooked audience for transformation education — and they're potentially the most critical aspect. You need people at the top of the organization who themselves are deeply knowledgeable in the technologies and business connections. They also need to be educated on how to take a historically back-office function and transform that into a partner and a thought leader with the business to rethink the organization.

Another area is to break down the communication barriers between technology and the business. Often, we find the business does not speak the tech and tech does not speak the business. We've seen companies succeed with programs that involve digital literacy or digital enablement. It's a crash course for the organization in the pillars of transformation and what it means for the organization.

Lastly, we see successful companies take that same approach to data. Data is an important drill-down for almost every role in an organization. People need to be less afraid of data. They must understand how to leverage it, gather it, communicate it and make decisions based on it, so data literacy is another important area. That audience is not just technologists or data scientists; it's the entire organization at the appropriate level for different roles.

Q RACHEL

How can learning and talent leaders do differently to impact the digital learning program?

A SANDRA

Only 25 cents of every dollar spent on learning programs have a really demonstrable impact and that's a big problem. Companies are facing these incredible skill gaps. In some cases, it's an existential crisis. They must have certain skills in the organization to compete effectively in the market. A lot of money is being put into education programs and training initiatives and it's not always making an impact.

(continued)

The impact that we should be measuring — and a lot of companies are bad at it — is behavior change.

That's the direct measure. An indirect measure would be business growth. I get frustrated when people try to directly connect a learning program to revenue growth. That's not how it works. You first must get to the intermediate step of people knowing and doing things differently in their roles.

In many cases, organizations are tracking the impact of programs by things that really aren't about learning: How many people? How many courses? How many hours were spent? It's really about the inputs as opposed to the outputs: How have people's behaviors changed? What do they know now that they didn't know before? As a learning scientist, that's my focus. It's not on the delivery of information, it's the change in the person as the result of an effective learning experience.

This begs the question: How do you get to that effective learning experience? I feel that humans don't believe in magic except when it relates to training and learning. It's kind of like: "If we just give people access to content, magically they're going to learn from it and absorb it, and everything will be great." As learning experts, we know that couldn't be further from the truth. But it's often how I've seen organization

approach their digital learning challenges. They get access to content, and they will give learning paths certain roles but there's no motivation that's built in, there's no practical application, there's no deep embeddedness with the role, and there's no expert feedback expert for coaching and assessment. Those are the critical things that drive real learning. Think beyond the content; organizations must focus on creating capability academies and look for expertise and not something that comes from generic content.



RACHEL

What does talent enablement look like within the context of digital transformation?



SANDRA

Talent enablement is about aligning people to your digital strategy. This means: How do you attract people who have the right skills or who can evolve their skills? Once you have them, how do you effectively ensure that their skills are aligned with strategy? Then, how do you keep them? How do you keep them engaged? EPAM's practice takes what we've learned, the tools that we've built and the rituals that we've developed, and we translate and tailor those for specific customers.

Q

RACHEL

What are some tips for companies if they want to improve to attract, retain and develop their talent in technology?

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SANDRA

It's often been the case that there's been a wall between your technologists and your people teams. One concrete tip is to develop a true partnership between HR, L&D and Technology functions to maximize the effectiveness of the retention, development and hiring approaches. It can't be just one or the other; it needs to be a true partnership and most organizations don't have that.

Also, we all recognize that not everyone is going to pick up the learning mantle and run with it. We have a lot of organizations that put out training materials — even fantastic courses — and there's not the right amount of uptake. Organizations need to think about what the appropriate motivators for employees are to truly learn, not just endure information or click through, but really engage mentally and with their time and energies to learn something new and complex that's valuable for the organization. There are a number of mechanisms that organizations can use to apply appropriate motivation to learning. Sit down and figure out what you need to do to get your employees to truly engage and learn. It's probably not just going to be intrinsic motivation.

Thirdly, you as an organization must sit down and look at your technology strategy and business strategy. For example, what exactly does a Level Three Product Manager need to know and do differently to make this vision come to life? You need to take the big picture and distill it into a clearly identified competency and skill, so people know what they need to learn and develop. The organization needs to know if you have all the right skills or if there are big gaps. This translation of strategy into role definition is incredibly important. It's not simple but it's absolutely essential to getting impact and ROI from talent and learning investments.

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 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.

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.