



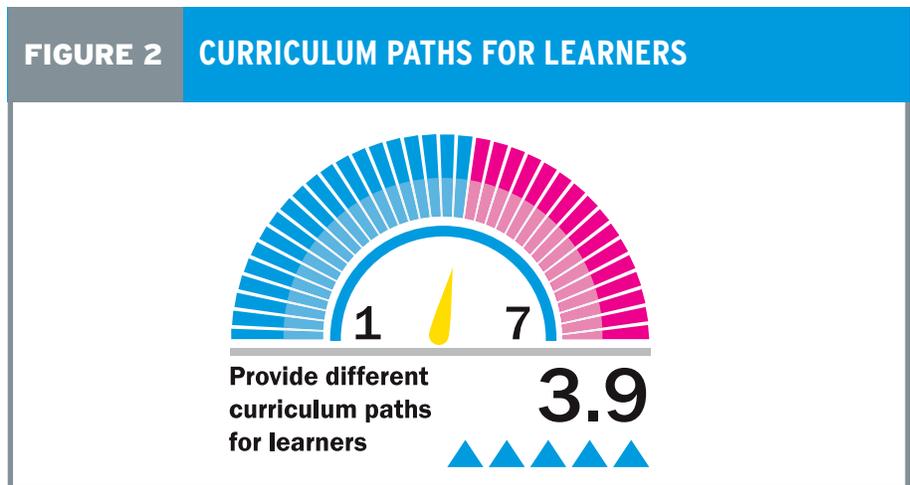
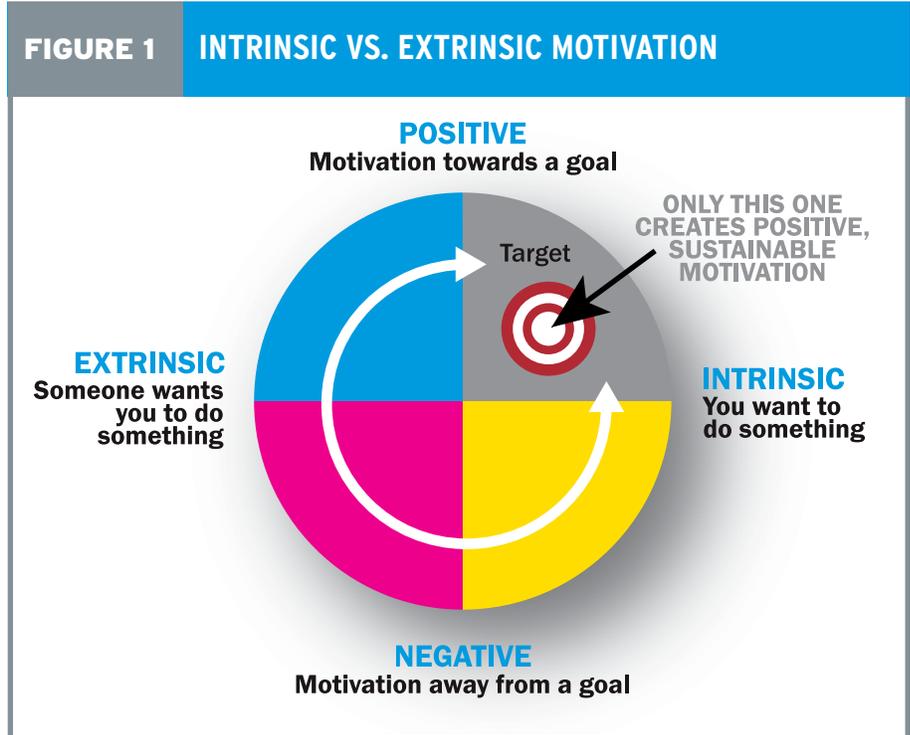
# The Evolution of Learning Engagement

By Rich Waite, M.Ed.

**T**he learning & development industry has been talking about the importance of learner engagement for many years, but how much progress has actually been made in driving highly engaging learning solutions? The life sciences industry is quickly changing. With increased global competition, a changing healthcare landscape and limited resources and budget, companies often find it challenging to design truly engaging solutions. In many cases, the business stakeholders just want the project done and are not well versed in the latest learning and development methodologies. This leaves the question: Why should learning and development professionals push the envelope?

The goal of building learner engagement is ensuring that the learner is driven intrinsically (Figure 1), as opposed to extrinsically. When learners are genuinely driven from within, they will be curious, active and passionate, embracing the learning at a much deeper level. One way to accomplish this is to give the learners more control over the content and how they proceed through the learning. A recent TGAS Advisors study shows that companies are allowing for this only some of the time, or 3.9 on a 1 to 7 scale. (Figure 2) In a regulated environment, providing different curriculum paths can be a challenge. The key is to use approved content and still maintain accuracy with consistent testing and certification, but allow learners to spend more time in areas where they don't perform well.

Another method to encourage engagement is to provide an



instructional framework that allows for end-to-end evaluation throughout the curriculum content. This provides continual feedback to the learner to improve engagement, producing

further reaching metrics that will inform adjustments to the curriculum and post-training content to close performance gaps. The end-to-end assessment is another area where the

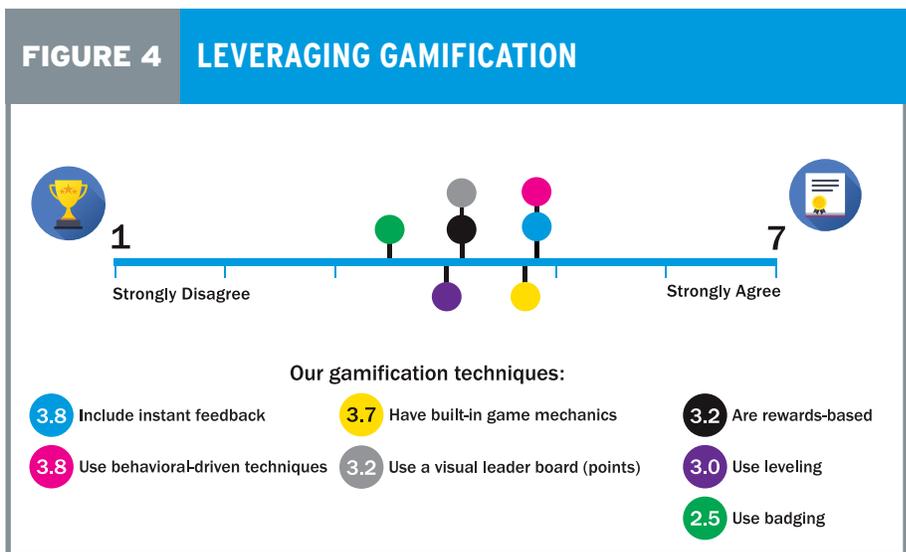
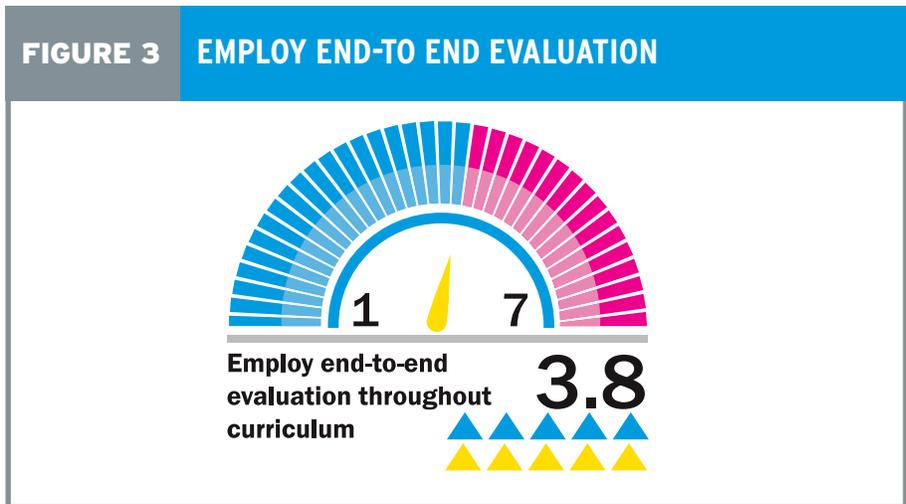
companies participating in the study showed moderate use of this method, rating 3.8 on the 1 to 7 scale. (Figure 3)

In the life sciences industry, the testing and evaluation approach has changed very little over the years. The focus remains a summative evaluation and verbal certification approach after the core content is completed. In order to take advantage of a different methodology, the core must be designed so that multiple evaluation techniques are built in from the initial pre-work throughout the content. If done well, the learner should see the mini-evaluation approach as fun and engaging as opposed to punitive.

Gamification is another methodology that has received endless attention but is still underutilized. This refers not merely to “games,” but rather the engagement framework that sits behind the activity. Gamification offers the ability to drive profound levels of engagement and contribute to the development of the front-line customer-facing employees. This is accomplished through building solutions that drive friendly competition, offer rewards and have leveling/badging to actively engage learners who thrive on peer-to-peer recognition. Despite the potential, gamification is often not applied in the myriad ways it could be. In the latest landscape study, industry ratings revealed levels of utilization of different gamification mechanisms. (Figure 4) The rates reveal that many organizations still do not take advantage of gamification mechanisms in a way that drives learner engagement.

To fully leverage gamification, organizations need to do the following:

1. Educate stakeholders on the value of gamification in driving performance that leads to improved business outcomes.



2. Create a strategy that defines how you will employ gamification principles to build capabilities over time.
3. Begin with the end in mind and reverse engineer your design approach and solution.
4. Pilot first and build over time, based on results.
5. Get the organization and senior leadership involved in the process.

Learner engagement is critical to the success of any learning initiative, but in many cases, it is still on the back burner. Organizations are always battling resources, budget and time challenges in building new learning

solutions. If organizations want to improve performance and build new behaviors, they need to invest in and support the learning and development function in creating and maintaining programs that produce desired results. ■

**About this Study:** Working in partnership with LTEN, TGaS Advisors, a benchmarking and advisory services firm, conducts studies of learning and development in life sciences companies. For more information on this study, contact Rich Waite, vice president, learning and development solutions, at Rich.Waite@tgas.com.