

Cohorts Studio

Cohort Planning and Design Toolkit

Design overview

Before launching your cohort, it's crucial to invest in careful planning. This involves understanding your learners, gathering detailed requirements, evaluating options, and finalizing the cohort schedule. Consider the following questions to ensure alignment between your organization's objectives and learner goals for a successful cohort experience.

At the end of the planning session, enter the design outcome in the table below:

#	Design questionnaire	Reviewed (Y/N)	Describe the outcome in detail
1	What are your organization's goals?		
2	What are your learners' goals?		
3	Default template or tailored course?		
4	Are learner prerequisites met?		
5	How long is the cohort?		
6	Do learners have the availability?		
7	Is a live subject matter expert (SME) needed?		
8	If you answered "Yes" to a SME, then what day and time works the best?		
9	Is there room for a Jam?		
10	Is there room for Cloud Quest, the Escape Room, or SimuLearn?		
11	Is there some other way to spice it up?		
12	Is there organization-specific content that can be added?		
13	Is there an incentive for the learner?		
14	Is there any collaboration tool or messaging platform available for use?		
15	What are the overall success criteria?		

Cohorts Studio

Cohort Planning and Design Toolkit

1. What are your organization's goals?

Setting clear organizational goals is essential for aligning your cohort-based training with the company's broader objectives. These goals will guide the entire training process, ensuring that the learning outcomes contribute to the overall success of the organization.

Questions to consider:

- **Short-term and long-term goals:** What are your organization's immediate objectives? How do you envision this training contributing to sustained growth and development within your company?
- **Priority alignment:** How do these goals align with employee training? How does training align with these goals? Identify the key areas where training can directly support your business objectives. Prioritize these areas to ensure that your cohort design is focused and effective.
- **Retention and development:** Consider how the cohort can help improve employee satisfaction, and retention by supporting career development and skill advancement.
- **Productivity and performance:** How will the training impact productivity and performance? Determine how the training will enhance the skills and knowledge of your workforce, leading to improved business outcomes.

Outcome: By clearly defining and prioritizing your organization's goals, you can design a cohort that not only meets your training needs, but also drives your business forward.

2. What are your learners' goals?

Grouping learners based on shared characteristics and aspirations, such as preparing for AWS Certifications, provides a more effective and tailored learning experience. Cohorts emphasize collaboration and team-building, creating an environment where learners can overcome similar challenges together.

Questions to consider:

- **Common characteristics:** Have you grouped learners based on shared characteristics? Organizing learners into groups with similar goals or needs provides a more tailored and effective cohort experience.
- **Collaboration and team building:** How can collaboration within the cohort enhance their learning experience? A collaborative learning environment can help learners overcome challenges together, making the learning process more supportive and effective.
- **Addressing challenges:** What challenges might learners face, and how can the cohort help address them?

Outcome: Designing the cohort with these goals in mind ensures a deeper understanding and collective achievement of objectives.

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Cohort Planning and Design Toolkit

3. Do you want predefined or tailored course?

An learning strategy can be a single course or multiple courses combined with other experiences. Predefined templates and schedules are available for convenience, but these can be tailored to meet specific needs.

Questions to consider:

- **Predefined or custom path:** Will you use a predefined template or create a tailored course? Choose a template that suits your needs, or mix and match content to create a customized learning journey that meets your specific objectives

Outcome: Use this flexibility to create a customized learning journey.

4. Are learner prerequisites met?

Ensure learners meet the necessary prerequisites, if any, before enrollment. This is crucial for maintaining the value of the learning experience, especially for associate-level certifications or higher. Ensuring that learners have the necessary background knowledge is crucial for a successful learning experience.

Questions to consider:

- **Prerequisite requirements:** Have you confirmed that learners meet the prerequisites? Verify that all participants have the required knowledge or experience before enrolling them in the cohort to prevent frustration and to ensure a valuable learning experience. Although foundational-level certifications might not have strict prerequisite guidelines, it's essential to review them before finalizing the cohort. For associate-level certifications or higher, confirm that the learner meets the prerequisite requirements, whether through academic learning or real-world experience.
- **Cohort composition:** Should learners be grouped based on experience levels? Consider organizing cohorts with learners who have similar backgrounds to enhance the learning experience.

Outcome: Grouping learners with similar experience or knowledge levels can enhance the overall learning experience.

5. How long is the cohort?

When determining the cohort length, consider both the need for immediate certification and any upcoming projects.

Questions to consider:

- **Timeline and certification needs:** Is there an immediate need for learners to get certified? If time is a critical factor, consider an accelerated template so that learners can prepare more quickly.
- **Pacing:** What pace will best suit your learners? Determine whether a steady, comprehensive or fast-track template is more appropriate based on your learners' availability and the urgency of your training objectives.

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Cohort Planning and Design Toolkit

- **Weekly commitment:** How many hours per week can learners realistically dedicate? Although certification or project needs might demand a specific cohort length, consideration must be given to learner availability. (See next topic on availability.)

Outcome: Choose the appropriate cohort length and structure to meet both organizational and learner goals effectively.

6. Do learners have the availability?

Learner availability is critical for cohort success. High attendance and engagement are vital, and scheduling conflicts should be minimized.

Questions to consider:

- **Scheduling conflicts:** Are there any major holidays or vacations during the cohort timeline? Address potential scheduling conflicts early to ensure high attendance and participation.
- **Cohort timing:** Does the cohort schedule accommodate all learners? If necessary, adjust the timing or consider multiple smaller cohorts to fit learners' availability.

Outcome: Ensuring availability helps prevent learners from falling behind and enhances overall engagement.

7. Is a live SME needed?

Asynchronous learning is valuable, but adding a live subject matter expert (SME) component can enhance the learning experience by providing real-time guidance and support.

Questions to consider:

- **SME integration:** Would a live SME improve the learning experience? Consider whether adding live sessions for Q&A, technical discussions, or exam preparation would benefit your learners. You can use custom activities to create learning events and activities that occur outside of Skill Builder.

Outcome: Consider incorporating live SME sessions for real-time guidance and interaction by utilizing custom activities.

8. If you answered “Yes” to a SME, then what day and time work the best?

Deciding to include a live SME in your cohort is a positive step, but it's crucial to choose the right days and times for live sessions to ensure their effectiveness and engagement.

Questions to consider:

- **Global time zones:** Where are the majority of learners located? Where is the SME located? Learners might be located in different regions and time zones, making it challenging to find a time that works for everyone. Avoid scheduling sessions too late in the evening or too early in the day, as this might interfere with learners' personal or professional commitments. Late sessions might cause learners to skip dinner or rush to join, while early sessions could conflict with their job responsibilities or meetings. Similar considerations need to be given for the SME.

Cohorts Studio

Cohort Planning and Design Toolkit

- **Learner availability:** What times align best with learner availability? It's important to accommodate their schedules to maximize participation and ensure meaningful interactions.
- **Session duration:** What session duration is optimal? Agree on a duration that works for everyone. Typically, a 1-hour session per week is optimal, but depending on engagement and needs, you might extend this to 2 hours. The key is to ensure that the time and duration fit the learners' availability and encourage their commitment.

Outcome: High attendance, active participation and engagement in live sessions are crucial for the success of the cohort. Sessions filled with discussions, questions, and answers contribute significantly to a flourishing learning experience.

9. Is there room for an AWS Jam?

Consider adding gamified learning experiences like AWS Jams to enhance engagement. Jams offer hands-on challenges that give learners the ability to apply their skills in a simulated environment. AWS Jams or Jam Journeys can offer engaging challenges where individuals or teams apply their skills to solve real-world, open-ended problems using AWS services.

Questions to consider:

- **Gamified learning:** Would incorporating a Jam benefit your learners? Consider adding a JAM to provide hands-on experience and enhance engagement through real-world challenges.

Outcome: Incorporating a Jam can make learning more dynamic and practical.

10. Is there room for AWS Cloud Quest, the AWS Escape Room, or SimuLearn?

Consider incorporating one or more highly interactive, game-based learning for better knowledge outcomes for your learners.

Questions to consider:

- **Interactive learning using Cloud Quest:** Would Cloud Quest enhance your learners' experience? Consider incorporating Cloud Quest to provide a more immersive and practical approach to learning AWS Cloud skills through role-playing scenarios.
- **Interactive learning using SimuLearn:** Would SimuLearn enhance your learners' experience? Consider incorporating SimuLearn using AI-powered simulations with hands-on training to help people translate business problems into technical solutions.
- **Interactive learning using the Escape Room:** Would the Escape Room enhance your learners' experience? The Escape Room provides an immersive virtual escape room to answer exam-style questions, build solutions in hands-on labs, and solve interactive puzzles to escape virtual rooms within the game environment.

Outcome: Incorporating one or more interactive learning option can make learning more dynamic and practical.

Cohorts Studio

Cohort Planning and Design Toolkit

11. Is there some other way to spice it up?

Additional resources and interactive elements can enrich the learning experience, making it more engaging and effective.

Questions to consider:

- **Builder Labs:** Have you considered adding Builder Labs? Incorporate additional hands-on practice through self-paced labs to reinforce key concepts and skills.
- **Supplemental resources:** Have you considered adding additional resources? Include links to relevant documentation, podcasts, whitepapers, and other resources to provide learners with a broader understanding of the topics.
- **Interactive elements:** Have you considered adding other interactive elements? Add quizzes, homework assignments, and projects to engage learners and assess their understanding.
- **Integration:** These elements can be included as asynchronous work or integrated into weekly live sessions for a more dynamic learning experience.

Outcome: By incorporating these additional resources and activities, you can create a more engaging and comprehensive learning journey that caters to diverse learner needs and preferences. You can utilize custom activities if that activity is outside of Skill Builder.

12. Is there organization-specific content that can be added?

Incorporating organization-specific content can make the cohort more relevant and valuable to your learners.

Questions to consider:

- **Custom modules:** Can you include in-house content modules? Add organization-specific modules that align with the training objectives and reinforce key concepts.
- **Case studies:** Can you include in-house case studies? Include real-world case studies or scenarios that are relevant to the organization's industry or practices.
- **Internal resources:** Can you include other in-house resources? Incorporate organization-specific resources, such as internal documentation, tools, or processes to provide practical context.

Outcome: Tailoring content to your organization's needs ensures relevance and practical application.

13. Is there an incentive for the learner?

Incentives can drive engagement and commitment. Consider incorporating rewards and recognition throughout the training process. Offering incentives can boost learner motivation and engagement throughout the cohort.

Questions to consider:

- **Rewards and recognition:** Have you planned for learner incentives? Consider providing rewards for completion, milestone achievements, or certification to encourage active participation.

Cohorts Studio

Cohort Planning and Design Toolkit

- **Completion rewards:** Have you planned for completion rewards? Offer recognition for completion of training, such as completing 80% or more of the learning content. This could include certificates, badges, or other forms of acknowledgment.
- **Milestone incentives:** Have you planned for milestone incentives? Provide incremental rewards at key milestones throughout the learning journey. For example, rewards could be given for completing specific modules or achieving certain performance metrics.
- **Attendance recognition:** Have you planned for attendance recognition? Create an attendance leaderboard to recognize learners who achieve 100% attendance in optional live SME sessions. Unique recognition or rewards can be given to top performers.
- **Certification rewards:** Have you planned for certification achievement rewards? Reward learners who pass the AWS Certification exam. This could include both intrinsic rewards (such as a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction) and extrinsic rewards (such as aligning the certification with organizational goals or offering tangible incentives).

Outcome: By incorporating incentives, you can boost learner motivation, encourage active participation, and help ensure a successful and engaging training experience. You can use the leaderboard, teams and points awarded to encourage competition.

14. Is there any collaboration tool or messaging platform available for use?

Using a collaboration tool can enhance communication, accountability, and community-building within the cohort.

Questions to consider:

- **Communication platform:** Can you use Slack, Microsoft Teams, or another platform within your organization? Choose a tool that facilitates interaction, supports accountability, and fosters a collaborative learning environment.

Outcome: Incorporating a collaboration tool or messaging platform into your cohort can significantly improve information flow, enhance learner interaction, and build a supportive learning community.

Cohorts Studio

Cohort Planning and Design Toolkit

15. What are the overall success criteria?

Align success criteria with both organizational and learner goals to measure the cohort's effectiveness.

Questions to consider:

- **Alignment with goals:** What data will ensure success criteria that reflects the objectives of both the organization and the learners? This alignment helps in evaluating whether the cohort meets its intended outcomes.
- **Key success metrics:** What are your key cohort success metrics? Identify and monitor key success metrics that are relevant to the cohort. This might include completion rates, learner engagement, performance on assessments, and feedback from participants.
- **Regular evaluation:** How often do the metrics need to be evaluated? Track these metrics on a weekly basis to stay informed about the cohort's progress. Regular evaluations help identify any issues early and allow for timely adjustments, preventing surprises at the end of the training.

Outcome: By maintaining a focus on these success criteria and regularly reviewing progress, you can ensure that the cohort delivers valuable results and meets its goals.

Next step: Now that the planning session is complete, scroll to the top of this toolkit and enter your design outcomes in the table on page 1.
