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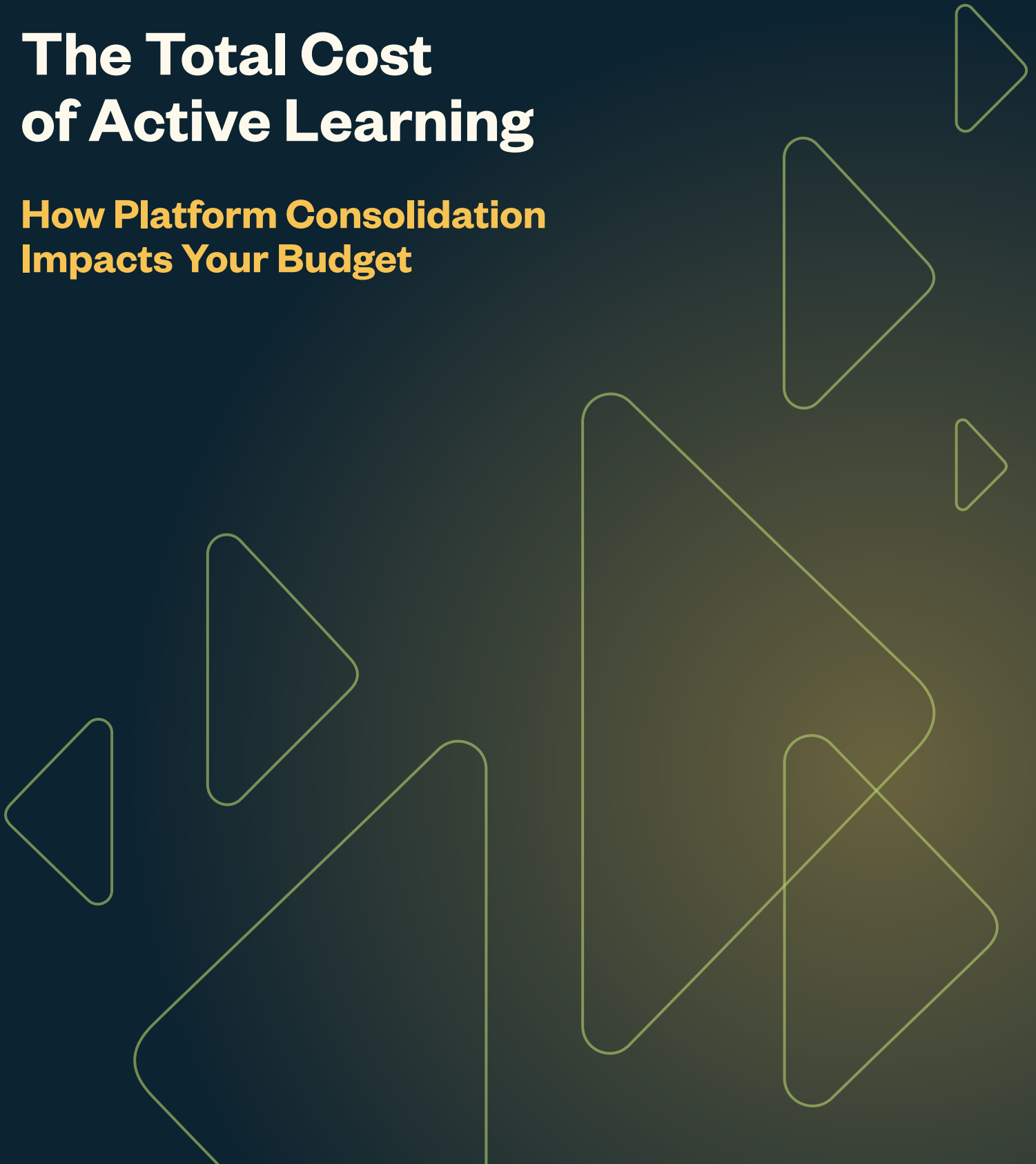
The Total Cost of Active Learning

How Platform Consolidation Impacts Your Budget

Active learning has been proven to drive better engagement, stronger retention, and more meaningful skill development than traditional lecture-based methods. Yet implementing active learning online and at scale is often harder and more expensive than it first appears.

Most organizations attempt to piece together active learning experiences using a mix of standalone tools: one for polls, another for breakout discussions, another for collaborative documents, and yet another for tracking participation. Each additional tool adds cost, complexity, and friction for both instructors and learners. What starts as a well-intentioned effort to deliver more engaging learning often turns into a fragmented, overwhelming experience.

These hidden financial, operational, and cognitive costs can erode the very benefits that active learning is meant to deliver. Instead of empowering instructors and learners, a patchwork approach to technology strains budgets, increases time and workload, and limits the effectiveness of training programs.

This paper explores the true cost of delivering active learning through disconnected systems and shows how Engageli's unified platform provides a simpler, more cost-effective path to delivering high-impact learning experiences.

The value of active learning

Students engaged in active learning reported more than 50% less confusion and misunderstanding compared to those in passive lecture settings and scored nearly 50% higher on assessments.

Active learning consistently outperforms traditional lecture-based approaches in driving better outcomes for learners. Rather than passively absorbing information, learners are engaged in problem-solving, collaboration, reflection, and real-time application of knowledge. This method not only improves understanding but also significantly boosts performance and retention.

Research strongly supports this. A meta-analysis of 225 studies found that students in classes using traditional lectures were 1.5 times more likely to fail than students in active learning environments. Another study found that students engaged in active learning reported more than 50% less confusion and misunderstanding compared to those in passive lecture settings and scored nearly 50% higher on assessments that measured their mastery of the material.

These results are not marginal. They highlight that active learning is not simply a more engaging experience; it leads to substantial, measurable gains in comprehension, confidence, and overall success. Organizations that prioritize active learning methods position their learners to retain knowledge more effectively, apply skills more confidently, and perform at a higher level both immediately and over the long term.

The true costs of active learning with a fragmented tech stack

Building an active learning ecosystem by stitching together multiple tools may seem practical at first. However, the direct and hidden costs of this approach add up quickly and often exceed initial estimates.

Direct technology costs

Each layer of the tech stack brings licensing fees, management burdens, and operational overhead. For example:

- **Learning management systems (LMS):** $200 to $2,000 per month depending on platform capabilities.

- **Video conferencing tools:** $15 to $300 per month based on user count and features.

- **Content creation software:** $200 to $1,000 per year for each tool needed to build interactive lessons or assessments.

- **Analytics and engagement tools:** $1,000 to $10,000 per year for licensing access to participation tracking or outcome measurement.

- **Content licensing:** Additional third-party content fees can add $1,000 to $10,000 annually, or up to 20% of course revenue.

Moreover, when organizations build their active learning ecosystems by layering multiple independent tools, costs do not simply add together. They multiply. Each new tool introduces additional licensing fees, new training requirements, further IT maintenance needs, and greater data management complexity.

Over time, the total cost of ownership balloons, while operational inefficiencies and administrative burdens compound across teams. What initially seems like a flexible, affordable approach often becomes a fragmented, expensive system that drains resources and slows down learning outcomes.

Indirect costs

While direct technology costs are easy to calculate, they represent only part of the financial burden. Hidden operational challenges, inefficiencies, and staffing impacts quietly drive up the true cost of active learning. These indirect costs often go unrecognized but can have an even greater impact on budgets and outcomes over time.

Assessment and evaluation complexity

Gathering data across disconnected systems creates major reporting challenges. Pulling participation, performance, and engagement metrics from separate tools often requires extra administrative labor. Even when data can be unified, it often requires additional spending on usage analytics software that can cost between $1,000 and $5,000 per month.

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This fragmentation also makes it harder to track learning impact accurately, slowing down decision-making and reducing the ability to continuously improve programs.

Training and professional development costs
Training instructors to navigate multiple systems is another major cost driver. Traditional professional development workshops cost an average of $160 per teacher per session for virtual formats and up to $3,450 per full-day in-person session when accounting for trainer travel and materials. When multiplied across an organization, these training sessions represent significant recurring investment.

IT management and integration costs
Managing multiple systems places a significant burden on IT teams. For a small IT team of five, with an average salary of over $100,000 per person, salary costs alone start at $500,000 annually. A typical IT administrator loses 42% of their time managing fragmented platforms and tool integrations. This means that organizations effectively spend about $210,000 per year of IT salary resources just maintaining disconnected systems instead of focusing on innovation, support, or strategic initiatives.

Operational impact and wasted employee time
Fragmented technology environments create substantial operational drag. Nearly 70% of employees report spending more than 20 hours per week — half of a standard workweek — chasing information across disconnected systems instead of focusing on their primary job responsibilities.

For a mid-sized L&D or project management team with a total salary investment of $475,000 annually, the cost of time lost to system fragmentation quickly adds up. Even conservatively estimating that a third of their time is spent navigating between tools, that translates to approximately $158,000 per year spent managing disconnected systems instead of driving learning outcomes and innovation. This hidden cost not only strains budgets but also slows program delivery, reduces agility, and increases the risk of missed opportunities for improvement.

Cumulative cost breakdown of fragmented active learning

(per user, annually)
The table below outlines a typical per-user annual cost when active learning is delivered through multiple disconnected tools.

COST CATEGORY	ESTIMATED ANNUAL COST PER USER
Learning management system (LMS)	$2,400 ($200/month baseline)
Video conferencing tool	$180 ($15/month baseline)
Content creation software	$600 (midpoint between $200 and $1,000/year)
Analytics and engagement tools	$5,500 (midpoint between $1,000 and $10,000/year)
Content licensing fees	$5,500 (midpoint between $1,000 and $10,000/year)
Usage analytics software (for pulling unified reports)	$36,000 ($3,000/month midpoint)
Training and professional development	$500 (virtual sessions averaged)
IT management and integration burden	$2,100 per user (based on $210,000 spread across 100 users)
Operational inefficiencies and employee time	$1,580 per user (based on $158,000 spread across 100 users)
Estimated total cost per user per year	**$54,360**

When you add up both the direct technology fees and the hidden operational burdens, it becomes clear that a multi-tool active learning stack carries substantial and often underestimated costs. The good news is there is a better way to deliver active learning experiences without the financial, technical, and instructional strain.

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The opportunity: streamlining active learning with Engageli

Engageli delivers everything instructors and learners need in one seamless platform.

Engageli was designed to eliminate the complexity and hidden costs that come with piecing together multiple active learning tools. Rather than layering system upon system, Engageli delivers everything instructors and learners need in one seamless platform.

Polling, collaborative discussions, breakout sessions, real-time feedback, asynchronous engagement, content sharing, and engagement analytics are all built into a single environment. There is no need to switch between different systems or juggle multiple logins. Everything happens inside one unified, easy-to-use classroom space.

This integrated approach does more than simplify logistics. It drives real savings:

- **Lower direct costs:** Institutions and organizations avoid the licensing fees of maintaining separate platforms for engagement, collaboration, content creation, and analytics.

- **Reduced IT and operational burden:** With fewer systems to maintain and integrate, IT teams can focus on strategic initiatives rather than tool management and manual data synchronization.

- **Streamlined training:** Instructors and learners need to master only one platform, minimizing training costs and reducing cognitive load.

- **Faster data and insight access:** Engagement metrics and learning outcomes are captured automatically within Engageli, enabling instructors, trainers, and administrators to make faster, data-driven decisions without additional analytics software.

- **Improved learner experience:** Participants remain engaged without technological distractions or fragmented experiences, leading to better learning outcomes and stronger program success.

By consolidating the active learning journey into a single platform, Engageli helps organizations significantly lower their total cost of ownership while delivering a higher quality, more engaging learning experience.

The result is clear: less complexity, lower costs, greater impact.

ROI of platform consolidation

While pricing for a unified platform like Engageli varies by organization, team size, and use case, the business case for consolidating tools is clear. Even modest reductions in total cost of ownership can translate into substantial savings at scale.

Let's consider a learning organization supporting 100 active users, with a fragmented tech stack currently costing $54,906 per user annually, based on the average costs outlined earlier.

> **That results in a total annual cost of:**
> **$54,906 × 100 users = $5,490,600 per year**

Now let's model the potential financial impact of reducing total costs through platform consolidation:

Cost reduction	New annual cost	Annual savings
15% reduction	$4,667,010	**$823,590**
30% reduction	$3,843,420	**$1,647,180**
50% reduction	$2,745,300	**$2,745,300**

Even a 15% reduction in costs results in over **$800,000 in annual savings**.

In addition to the financial savings, organizations using Engageli's unified platform would benefit from:

- **Faster onboarding and fewer training hours** for instructors and learners.
- **Reduced IT ticket volume** and support demands.
- **Greater ability to scale learning programs** without scaling tech overhead.
- **Better learner satisfaction and engagement metrics**, leading to stronger program outcomes and business impact.

Organizations that streamline their learning ecosystems unlock significant cost savings while freeing their teams to focus on what matters most: delivering exceptional learning experiences that drive real results.

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How to evaluate your active learning ecosystem

ROI is important. But choosing the right technology for active learning is about more than just pricing. It requires a strategic evaluation of how each tool supports engagement, efficiency, scalability, and measurable outcomes. Organizations that take a deliberate approach to tool selection can avoid fragmentation and maximize both learning impact and return on investment.

Here are five key criteria to guide the evaluation process:

1   **Integrated engagement features:** Look for a platform that includes live interaction tools such as polls, quizzes, collaborative documents, and breakout discussions all within one environment. Reducing the need for third-party integrations helps minimize complexity and cost.

2   **Built-in collaboration and peer interaction tools:** Active learning thrives when participants can work together easily. Prioritize platforms that allow for structured group discussions, team exercises, and peer-to-peer feedback without requiring additional plugins or switching platforms.

3   **Scalability across teams and locations:** The platform should be able to grow with your organization. Whether training 50 or 5,000 learners, the experience should remain seamless. Make sure the system can handle large groups, multiple cohorts, and evolving learning needs without performance issues or ballooning costs.

4   **Real-time and post-session analytics:** Access to engagement and performance data should be built in, not bolted on. The ability to view participation metrics, learning trends, and progress reports in real time allows for faster decision-making and stronger continuous improvement efforts.

5   **Strong support and training resources:** Even the best platform needs effective support. Look for providers that offer robust onboarding, documentation, live support, and community resources to help instructors and administrators get up to speed quickly and maximize the platform's value.

By focusing on these criteria, organizations can move away from fragmented, costly technology stacks and toward a unified active learning ecosystem that improves efficiency, enhances outcomes, and delivers sustainable business value.

> **Organizations that take a deliberate approach to tool selection can avoid fragmentation and maximize both learning impact and return on investment.**

The clearer, faster, and more sustainable path to active learning

Delivering high-quality active learning experiences should not come at the expense of operational efficiency or financial sustainability. Yet for too many organizations, the hidden costs of a fragmented tech stack make active learning harder, more expensive, and less effective than it needs to be.

Engageli offers a better way. By consolidating the essential tools for active, collaborative, and measurable learning into one integrated platform, Engageli helps institutions and corporate training teams lower costs, simplify operations, and improve outcomes.

The hidden costs of a fragmented tech stack make active learning harder, more expensive, and less effective than it needs to be.

For more information, download the full **Active Learning Impact Study**.

Active Learning Impact

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If you are ready to transform your active learning programs while protecting your bottom line, **book a demo today** and see how Engageli simplifies active learning at scale.

Visit our website to learn more about aligning active learning with business goals and measurable outcomes.