

Blended Learning

Kate Cobb



KATE COBB

BLENDED LEARNING

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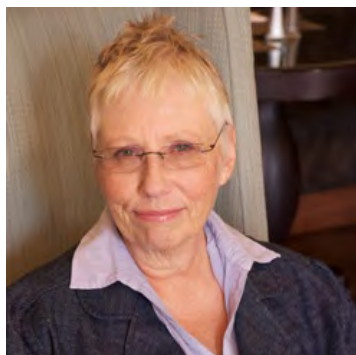
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kate Cobb is Director of The Learning Design Studio with over 30 years' experience working on L&D projects for a wide variety of clients in UK, Europe and the Middle East in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.

She came to the world of technology enhanced learning from a training design and delivery background, consulting in the corporate sector. One day she decided to offer telephone coaching to executives (there was no reliable VOIP back then!) and found it was a more powerful experience than face-to-face coaching both for her clients and herself. That was over 10 years ago and since then she has been hooked on what technology can do to assist learning.

She is a passionate advocate of blended learning and helps global corporate clients develop appropriate responses to learning challenges using blended learning methodology. Her aim is to provide solutions that embed learning in the global workplace and drive forward business objectives to develop true learning cultures.

As well as her direct client work, Kate helps trainers and facilitators develop their online skills and consults with training companies to assist them in delivering the best blended learning possible for their clients.

She designs original, tailored programmes – both online, virtual, instructor led and self-study - to meet business needs incorporating technology enabled learning methods where necessary.

Kate's philosophy: *"Answering the demands of today's learners provides us with both a challenge and an opportunity. We have a magnificent array of online possibilities to explore in delivering training but technology mustn't become the 'be all and end all' of training; we still need to choose the most appropriate method to provide what is needed. One thing is certain 'one size does NOT fit all' anymore!"*

Kate writes on a variety of L & D topics and has written on blended learning for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in UK. She has published training books and manuals: Ice Breakers 2/ Beginnings and Endings, 10 Team Builders (Gower), Indoor and Outdoor Team Development, Managing People through Redundancies, Mergers and Acquisitions and Practical Decision Making for Managers (Fenman), published in both the European and US markets. She was commissioned to write content for the Online Learning Idea Book, Volume II (Wiley).

When she's not engaged in learning, Kate is an enthusiastic choral singer and has for 15 years been involved in organising choral and orchestral events in France where she has lived for over twenty years.



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1 INTRODUCTION

Traditional approaches to workplace learning are receiving less and less attention as they fail to meet the needs of today's learners. Not so very long ago, people would talk quite separately about how to use broadcast television, film, videos, computer-based training and interactive video in learning contexts. As the technology has evolved, we have seen a meeting of these various training media in online learning. The debate about whether face-to-face or online learning is most beneficial is becoming obsolete in as organisations adopt this mix of methodologies into a blended approach.

Context

The demands of the business world have changed and become more insistent, and as a result, expensive, time-consuming face-to-face learning has become more questionable:

- Budgetary constraints are influencing changes in training patterns
- Fewer and fewer executives can spend two or three days 'in training' without being interrupted and having to respond to business imperatives
- For those operating on the global stage, delivering roll-outs of up-front training across cultures, consistent in quality and content, is a difficult objective to meet
- The 'audience' for training is more used to interactive, computer based ways of working than ever before
- The explosion in mobile technology (smart 'phones, tablets etc.) has meant that access to information and sources of learning is relatively easy.

Against this backdrop remains the importance of corporate people development both to enrich the inner working of an organisation, develop talent, engage employees and provide better client service. As we know, clients make choices between competitors on the quality of the *human* interaction they receive; thus, the human resource element is more crucial than ever.

Blended learning provision is an appropriate response to these issues but to construct programmes which are truly blended goes beyond what most organisations currently provide or envisage providing.

Is blended learning new?

The term ‘Blended learning’ appears to have been in use since the advent of the Internet and the WWW in the late 1990s. It grew up among many other Internet buzzwords around this time (like ‘e-learning’ which we’ll return to later), since when its precise connotations have morphed and merged.

In 2006, books on the subject started appearing, although they were written about blended learning in the higher education sector rather than for industry and training. But from this point on, definitions start to emerge and blended learning begins to be understood as a combination of face-to-face and technology-enhanced learning.

And that’s the story so far.

BTW At the end of each main chapter, you’ll find the key points drawn together for you and some activities to undertake so you can immediately apply your thinking at work.

2 WORDS, WORDS, WORDS!

2.1 WHAT IS BLENDED LEARNING? ACHIEVING A WORKABLE DEFINITION

You hear the term ‘blended learning’ quite a lot these days and here we are writing a book about it and its advantages, but what exactly is it?

Here we face a dilemma as there is no total clarity around what blended learning is! Any attempt to find a standard definition will elicit a myriad of responses which can explain the understandable confusion on behalf of the trainer, facilitator or learning department. Put this to the test by asking your colleagues what they think blended learning is and you will very probably receive many different answers.

Of course terminology is not, in itself, a block to making headway with this form of learning as long as *you* know what you mean. But it *can* be a block when you come up against others in your organisation who are not thinking the same thing. Let alone what happens when you go outside the organisation looking for suppliers who have their own definitions in their heads. You can find yourself commissioning something you don’t really want!

This doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t try to get clarity.

So we begin this book with a definition of blended learning just to make sure that we are all ‘on the same page’ with this.

‘Blended learning’ has come to be accepted as a blend between ‘e-learning’ and ‘traditional’ approaches so let’s look at these terms.

Traditional learning

The use of the word ‘traditional’ is also confusing and cannot entirely be confined to classroom based activities. Distance learning and home study courses have been with us for far longer than computers but have no face-to-face component. In 1728, the first recorded instance of distance learning occurred in Boston, USA, when Caleb Phillips advertised private correspondence courses in short hand in the Boston Gazette. In 1840s, Sir Isaac Pitman ran correspondence courses in UK teaching his revolutionary short hand system which is still widely used today. Does this make self-study ‘traditional’?

E-learning

Defining ‘e-learning’ is almost as tricky as defining ‘blended learning’:

The term e-learning (or ‘electronic learning’) first emerged around the year 2000.

Purists will say that e-learning is the ‘click NEXT to continue’ model where you ‘read something, click Next, read something, click Next’ in a totally linear way of learning. But there is a common belief that almost *anything* that has had any connection with computers can be considered as e-learning. As computers dominate our lives and enter into all domains of work, it could be argued that most training has, or certainly could have, an e-learning element.

So we need to break this down.

Digital learning

Digital learning includes the use of support materials that *don't* require the user's computer to be connected to a network, for example, a pdf download like a worksheet is digital content.

Online learning

Online learning is learning delivered solely through the Internet (or an intranet) where the user *must* be connected to a URL through a PC, tablet, smart ‘phone or the like. Examples are online courses with video, audio and text which are housed on a learning platform which you access through an internet connection.

Recent trends in online learning include the development of gaming technology to support learning, artificial intelligence, virtual reality and the use of cloud computing.

Where does this leave blended learning?

Let's return to our main subject.

Does this challenge of definition devalue what blended learning is or does this infinite variety offer the best and most flexible way of responding to a learner's needs? If you look at it the second way, then you open up a huge and exciting variety of opportunity to meet learning challenges.

You could say that blended learning takes advantage of the potential offered by the myriad of online learning technologies, using these alongside the wide range of existing face-to-face and self-study methods. This generates new combinations that can outperform traditional approaches.

So perhaps we can agree that blended learning means combining methods, techniques or resources and applying them in an interactive learning environment. In short, it can be defined as:

An integrated mix of learning approaches to achieve learning objectives.

Learners should have easy access to different learning resources in order to apply the knowledge and skills they learn under the supervision and support of the trainer or facilitator inside and outside the classroom. And whatever methods are chosen, they *must* all lead back to learning objectives – we'll return to this all-important point in a later chapter.

What completes the blend?

Remember we said that blended learning is a blend between face-to-face and online learning? There is a third important element that makes up blended learning and that's the **degree of participant control**.

This is often expressed as the learner deciding when and where to access their learning and can even be *how* they access it. With the blended approach, learning is no longer confined to a two-day, 9-5 course where everything happens in the training room and you either 'get it' in those two days or you don't!

This idea of participants having control over their own learning is fast becoming part of the definition of blended learning. We'll return to the revolution in learner-led learning in a future chapter but let's flag it up for now.

Learning components

Assuming that we agree that the 'traditional' approach to learning is a classroom environment in which a group of participants come together physically to receive or participate in a learning activity, we can usefully consider additional approaches to learning which may or may not constitute part of a blended learning experience.

A short brainstorm on the topic will produce the following mix of traditional and online components and more:

- Web cams for meetings and coaching
- Webinars
- Online assessment tools
- Coaches and mentors
- E-mail coaching
- Online training tools
- Social networking media
- E-learning materials
- Group forums
- Action learning sets
- Online Learning platforms
- Telephone
- Conference calls
- Web conferencing
- Video conferencing
- Self-directed learning
- Learning apps
- Pod casts
- Teleconferences
- Text messages
- Instant messaging; individually or in groups
- Downloads
- Blogs
- Wikis
- Virtual learning logs
- Books
- VOIP
- TV and video
- M-learning or mobile learning
- Informal learning
- Virtual learning

Can you think of others to add?

The extent to which any or all of these are used as part of a blended approach depends on a number of variables and we'll be examining these in further chapters.

Before we leave this overview (and you become totally overwhelmed by the choices available!), recent research has shown that face-to-face delivery is still dominant with around 25% delivered through learning technologies or blended learning.

We have quite a way to go to see blended learning as mainstream.

But we've engaged in the debate so are off and running. But if you're not running yet but are only at the stumbling along stage, then you're in the right place in this book.

Key Learning Points

- It's important to have an agreed definition of blended learning (and its elements)
- Accept that there is still confusion around the issue right now!
- Your level of confidence will drive your use of technology to enhance learning

Activity

Before we move on it's important for you to acknowledge just where you are on the issue of blended learning so we invite you take some time to reflect on the following questions:

1. What is your opinion of blended learning?
2. How do you feel about incorporating technology in learning?
 - I don't know enough to comment
 - Terrified
 - Excited by the possibilities
 - 100% confident
 - I'd prefer to stick to traditional 'classroom' activities
 - Other
3. What would you say are your greatest strengths in the area of technology enabled learning?
4. What would you say is your greatest development need in this area?

3 WHY DOES BLENDED LEARNING WORK?

If you've been involved in L&D for any number of years you'll have seen fads and fancies in learning wax and wane. You've probably tried some of them out in your organization. You may even have found some useful. But today we're all talking about neuroscience. So you might ask, how come this branch of science in its relative infancy is now showing proof that a blended approach improves learning effectiveness?

3.1 WHAT NEUROSCIENCE TELLS US ABOUT HOW PEOPLE LEARN

With the expansion of the field of neuroscience, research is showing solid scientific data to assist what we know about how people learn. And we can benefit from these discoveries when we add in digital and online content to our training programmes to make them blended.

Stimulating the synapses

Previously, educators and scientists believed that learning was cumulative; in neuroscientific terms the synapses in the brain started small and got progressively bigger and stronger. But it now seems that synapses that have recently been strengthened are peculiarly vulnerable, and more stimulation at that point can actually wipe out the effects of learning. This is backed up by recent research from the University of California which has shown that whilst, in the short-term, synapses get even stronger than previously thought, they then quickly go through a transitional phase when they weaken.

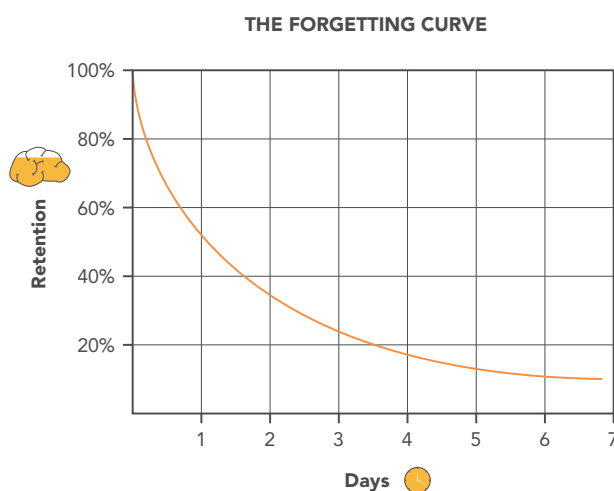
Spacing input

The importance of spacing - where the same content is intensively inputted multiple times with breaks in between, can seem a little counterintuitive to this as it smacks of overload but it's the spacing that's important.

But, nothing is completely new.

‘Spaced learning’ is a teaching approach first described by the 19th century psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus. He found that repetition is crucial for learning, but memories form more readily and last longer if these repetitions are spaced out rather than massed together.

He developed his ‘Forgetting Curve’ in 1885 which you can see below. It’s important to mention that he was plotting his own memory so his sample group wasn’t exactly extensive. But you’ll be familiar with the idea that the longer we move away from the actual input, the more we forget (as average human beings that is).



Ebbinghaus's Forgetting Curve

21st century neuroscientists, while investigating memory, stumbled across the spaced learning effect by examining simple reflexes in sea slugs, crayfish and cats – and by probing and stimulating the neurons in thin slices of rat brain. They discovered that repeated stimuli, with precisely timed gaps, are one of the most reliable ways to convince neurons that an event is worth holding on to in the memory.

Studies with humans (not with slices of brain obviously!) found that 90% of participants had better performance after spacing than cramming but even so, 72% of the participants reported that they still thought that cramming was more effective due to old patterns of belief surrounding cramming for exams. Live human subjects are a little more complex than crayfish and sea slugs and not as easily studied but neuroscience is continuing and could come up with some interesting insights.

What can we learn from these studies when we design blended learning?

OK, the jury’s still out on this one at the time of writing and we need to wait some time longer for the hard and fast scientific evidence that will 100% underpin the adoption of blended learning.

However, we *can* draw some conclusions based on what we know so far about stimulating synapses and spacing input.

- Adding in digital content to reinforce a point or take learning further, may be counterproductive if done too soon after the initial input or if provided as part of an intensive training approach. Research shows that revisiting the information just once, after a few days brought memory up to about 40% on a test a month and half later. However, revisiting the information three times and with a handful of days between each session brought memory on that test up to about 55% - 60%.
- A content-crammed, one-off intensive event is less likely to yield long-term behaviour change than a series of events related to the same topic with some space between learning and review sessions.
- Little and often input (or 'micro-learning' or 'bite-sized training') where you deliver short bursts of learning over a period of time, maximizes the brain's potential for learning and retaining relevant information.

Neuroscience may make the process of learning a little less mysterious and may provide some evidence to back up what you've always known works. But it still has a way to go. What is sure is that in providing a blend of face-to-face and online content in a modular series of spaced interventions, training professionals are in the best place ever to ensure that the training blend they put together maximizes the way the brain learns and retains information and processes experience.

Key Learning Points

- Don't try to cram everything into a short one-off learning experience if your aim is long-term behavior change
- Space out interventions evenly over a period of time to assist retention
- Neuroscience is worth keeping an eye on!

Activity

1. Choose one programme you already provide and review its success in the light of what you now know from neuroscience.
2. In view of the above research, what points do you need to pay close attention to when you are designing an online learning activity so that it meets its learning objectives *and* maximises how the brain works?

4 THE DRIVERS OF BLENDED LEARNING IN THE CORPORATE SETTING

4.1 IN WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES IS BLENDED LEARNING USED?

Before we look at drivers, let's take a step back and look at where we already see blended learning in place.

We can understand how a blended learning approach has emerged as a response to many imperatives. This is not to say that the resulting programmes are totally blended but attempts *have* been made to use other formats for delivery other than the traditional classroom approach. For example:

- *A company needs to deliver its new company mission to all 7,500 staff based at 10 sites over Europe within the next week so they hold a web conference to avoid employing a fleet of free-lance trainers and paying their on-costs.*
- Managers have less time to spend in the 'classroom' but still need to cover the same management development programme. To cut down the face-to-face element of the programme, pre course preparation, mid-course review and post course follow up is delivered by an online training tool to which individuals add their comments by identifying their learning to date.
- *You have a sales force on the road for the majority of its time but the sales reps need to be trained as new products continually come on stream. Delivering a 30 minute webinar is a more efficient use of time than recalling them each week to head office for product updates and promotes increased sales.*
- Your organisation believes in self-fulfilment and promoting individual development opportunities but cannot afford for people to be off work taking courses unconnected with the business. You pay for the tools but ask the person to study in their own time by a distance learning method using tailor-made self-study material.

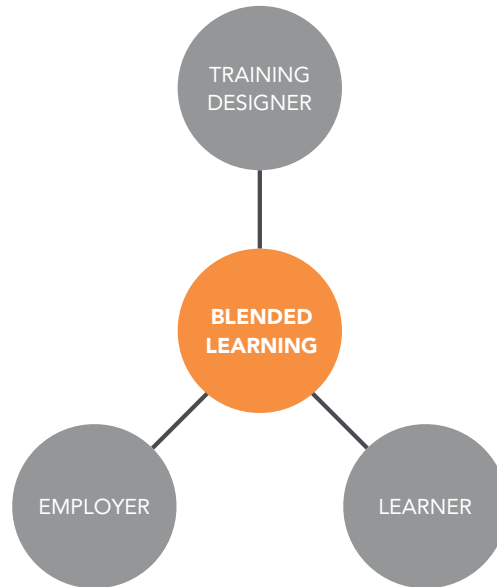
You may well have other examples from your own organisation that you could add.

The drivers of blended learning

The impetus for a change in learning provision comes from the organization. But are the needs of the employer the only deciding factors when a choice needs to be made between traditional and blended methods of providing learning interventions? In other words:

Who drives the choice of the blend?

There are normally three key players. The outcome is usually determined by one or other of the three or ideally a combination of all three influences working together.

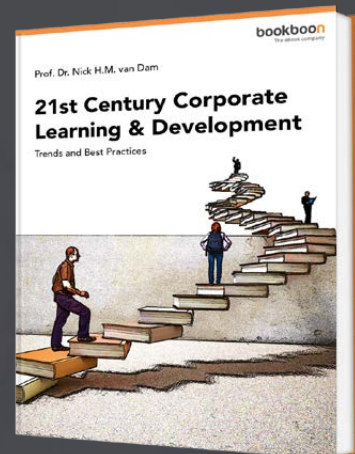


The drivers of blended learning

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We're going to dig more deeply into the learner's part in all this in the next chapter so for now let's concentrate on:

1. The training designer
2. The employer

Training designer

You may think it odd to begin with this one but it's important not to forget that you and your department have your role to play in this!

Many L&D professionals and training departments particularly in the current climate are expected to do more with less, so is blended learning the saviour of the training team? Depending on the methods chosen, this can be the case.

Where trainers and facilitators are supported by their hierarchies in terms of resources, investment and enthusiasm, they can develop new professional skills by accessing blended learning strategies and exercise a creativity that has not always been present for them as a profession. Of course your design team may not be an integral part of your department but you may outsource to instructional designers whose profession it is to design blended programmes. As learning events are becoming more complex and a wider spectrum of understanding and knowledge is required, then this can be a very wise move on behalf of the L&D leader.

Employers

That brings us to the usual main driver which moves us towards a more blended approach; that is the employer, the company, the corporation, the organisation.

4.2 THE BUSINESS CASE

It has often been suggested that blended learning made its debut (this time round!) because of a desire to save money; on trainers, training premises, participants' travelling costs and so on. This is no doubt the case for some organisations, whilst for others, the economic imperative for change is coupled with a genuine desire to improve training provision and meet learning objectives in different ways.

Does blended learning save money?

This is a bit of a myth as it cannot be said that blended learning *always* saves upfront outlay of money; it is more complicated than that. What can be said is that in the long term, the returns are generally greater as learning is more deeply embedded within the organisation and the business benefits are increased as a result; in other words, further down the line, the profits go up.

What about returns?

We'll look at ROI in more detail in a chapter later on. But we need to mention it here. You can't just measure cost; it is also important to record the benefits and returns on expectations so that you can evaluate and illustrate their effectiveness in supporting business objectives.

The changing face of working practices

Multinational and global corporations who have work forces scattered over the world have been using technology in the form of tele- and video conferencing for many years to avoid the costs of travelling, but they are now more and more susceptible to the use of blended learning to meet the needs of *learners* who are required to work as teams with people they may never actually meet and who are required to absorb the same corporate message whether in Tokyo, New York or Paris.

Blended learning involving the application of online and digital training is, as we've said, of great use to all workers but could be *most* appropriate for those involved in:

- Home working
- Hot desking
- Flexible working
- Remote working
- Shift working
- Virtual teams
- Global corporations

Workers with disabilities

Employers are finally discovering that the provision of accessible training opportunities to workers with disabilities makes economic sense; this is a group whose talents have often been overlooked and whose skills have not always been developed as a consequence.

The inclusion of online learning as part of a blended learning package opens out the opportunities so much further to those who have, in the past, been denied access or found access challenging.

Beware of thinking of people in groups however. The *individual* need, just like an individual learning style, should be served by its training provision. People with disabilities are above all individuals with specific needs and the best way to try to meet these needs is to talk to the individuals concerned. For some the blended learning approach may not be viable or they may need a greater element of online-learning than others; above all they should be *helped* by the blended learning approach and not hindered by it. The importance is to make available as many different learning methodologies that the budget and practical considerations will allow so that *any* learner can choose the options best suited to their particular learning needs.

Other categories of workers

Blended learning packages may in all senses be excellent but it is not sensible to assume that they will be physically accessible to *all* groups of workers.

Shift workers eg cleaners or care workers, often work in 'satellite' buildings, not head office where the training centre is located and factory workers may be spread out across sites in different countries and on different time zones. These workers have infrequent, if any, workplace access to a static computer so for them blended learning, needs to be mobile which normally means smart 'phones, possibly provided by the company so they can access their training.

Many methods exist covering learning and training needs ranging from, for example, customer service training for call centre operators to continuing professional development programmes for specialist and professionally-qualified staff.

The choice of method for each particular need will depend on several factors including:

- the nature and degree of priority of the learning needs
- type of occupation and the respective needs and accessibility

- background of learners
- organisational culture
- evaluation of the effectiveness of previous learning interventions
- costs and budgets available
- learner preference.

What does the employer get out of blended learning?

There are some clear pros and cons:

- I can get my message to the whole company easily and quickly if I use a blended approach
- I can save money on trainers and training days
- I can save money by keeping people in their workplaces and not out on training
- I can encourage staff to take their development seriously
- I can at last build a complete learning organisation!
- Motivated and fully developed staff will be more effective
- I can offer and encourage much more accessible ways of learning
- I have a resource that is easily updated
- I can get training content adapted to suit changing business needs
- There's greater strategic alignment
- More proactive teams can deal better with changing environments

BUT

- I mustn't just concentrate on savings; what is the *real* cost?
- I may have to make an investment in the technology in the short term
- I will need to ensure that we keep up to date with new developments as technology advances
- I must ensure I use the right people to design and deliver blended learning programmes which may include up-skilling my L & D people or outsourcing
- Learners may still need the face to face contact to establish relationships
- I should make sure that training still takes place within working hours as much as possible and that staff is not expected to work outside normal hours just because they *can*
- It might represent a very new learning path for our organisation and I'll have to sell it
- It means taking training really seriously!

Key Learning Points

- Blended learning might not mean saving money upfront but it *does* mean that your training budget will be more effectively spent.
- Blended learning can open up access to groups of workers and their potential which hasn't been available previously.
- As with all decisions, there are pros and cons to the use of the blended approach.

Activity

1. What pros and cons from the above list do you agree with and why?
2. Highlight 3 specific advantages and 3 specific disadvantages that you would flag up for your particular organisation?



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5 LEARNER-LED LEARNING

5.1 THE IMPACT OF THE INTERNET ON LEARNING

As we've already said, the idea of blending different learning methodologies is not new. However adding in digital materials offers a huge opportunity to transform learning and meet new learning challenges.

What *is* new is the fact that the content of learning is moving to the cloud, becoming accessible across multiple devices and teaching environments and often being generated, shared, and continually updated by users themselves.

Not surprisingly research shows that younger employees - millennials and post millennials, or 'Generation Z' - are the most comfortable with online tools and mobile technology. But this move towards more self-direction isn't confined to the 'younger generation' any more as we all have access to the internet through a multitude of devices and are increasingly 'tech savvy'. This makes it inevitable that we will all at some point use the internet to find solutions to problems.

This is quite a challenge for the L&D community as the control of how, where and what people learn has passed from the organisation to the individual.

How are corporations meeting this, potentially disruptive, trend?

The initial response to this was to create password-activated learning portals which were basically online sources of information on relevant business and industry topics provided by the company. They still exist but their use was patchy to say the least and often because there was just too much information available and the learner found it hard to steer a pathway for themselves through the content.

We'll look later in this chapter of a way to counteract this overload by curating content but let's look first at the logical next move for these internal learning portals.

Corporate academies

As more content was added and the idea of blended learning began to take a small foothold, organisations revamped their platforms into centralised learning hubs and what has become known as corporate academies or corporate universities.

These are now entering their second century believe it or not, and today's true learning institutions are people such as Apple, Shell, Mars, IKEA and Danone to name but a few.

Of course these academies and universities are expected to include the use of the most up-to-date learning technologies. They also need to include knowledge sharing and employee interaction as people still want to communicate with people even away from the ‘classroom’.

5.2 IMPORTANCE OF CONTENT CURATION

While an unprecedented amount of information is now available to people from internet search engines on virtually any subject, adding to the richness of the learning experience, the flip side involves ‘content overload,’ where the deluge of available information, much of it unverifiable, can easily overwhelm learners.

Information on learning portals and intranet sites must be collected, grouped and presented in a relevant and usable way. Whether this is part of the general L&D function or whether you have a designated content curator will depend on your organisation. But you need someone who is accountable for gathering, organizing and updating relevant information included in the portal. This will be content like courses, articles, videos, photographs/drawings, blogs, research reports, case studies, and other types of digital learning material.

And you need to give a clear steer to the user to guide them through the available information so that they find the content they need for their particular learning journey.

Social media

Social media is part and parcel of nearly everyone’s lives these days. It plays a part in how people learn, what advice they receive from their peers, how they network with colleagues and generally how people keep in touch not just locally but globally.

In September 2012, the market leader Facebook was the first social network to surpass 1 billion registered accounts. It currently sits at around 2 billion monthly active users. YouTube has 1.5 billion users. Twitter, ranked 11th worldwide averaged at 330 million monthly active users towards the end of 2017. These platforms are banned in China of course where WeChat is the largest social network. It has over 900 million users daily.

By the time you read this, these figures will have risen.

Use this to your advantage and embrace the familiar technologies that your employees are using every day to provide the accessible, convenient and rapid-fire knowledge that they have come to expect in everyday life.

What does the learner get out of blended learning?

Let's recap:

- I can study some of the content when I want
- I can work at my own pace
- I get to experience different learning tools
- I can use the internet which I use a lot at work and home anyway
- I like the balance between face to face and individual work
- I like the variety of approaches
- I like to have the time to explore a topic, do some research and mull over the results before I have to give an answer to the trainer
- I can work on my training when it suits me
- It's solutions focused rather than problems focused
- I can build a network of allies through group forums
- It keeps me flexible and agile which is useful to model in my management role.

BUT

- I need to be more self-motivated than if I was in a classroom with others
- I need to make sure I don't let distractions in the office interfere with the outcomes of my training programme
- I need to stick to deadlines set by myself or my tutors and not let other things get in the way.

As a by-product, we might almost say that blended learning gives the learner the chance to learn new technical skills or develop skills of self-motivation, time management and focus (all important transferable skills useful in other roles).

Key Learning Points

- Accept that your learners have access to multiple sources of learning
- Don't overwhelm learners with too much, un-curated online content
- Embrace technologies that your employees are using every day to provide learning.

Activity

1. What challenges does learner-led learning present to you and your team? How can you address these challenges?
2. How can you help create learning environments that encourage participation and provide learners with the opportunity to collaborate and share their learning?

6 HOW TO INTRODUCE BLENDED LEARNING IN A CORPORATE SETTING

We looked at the drivers for blended learning in an earlier chapter and of course the business imperatives we discussed there, apply here.

So let's concentrate on the 'how' rather than the 'why' in this chapter.

The business world is changing. Companies must adapt their strategies rapidly in response to competition. This is the challenge for senior leaders, having to rethink how to continuously improve their employee skills using conventional learning and less conventional means.

When investing in L & D, their questions will always be:

What is the value?

How do I know I'm getting a return?

How can I make it more efficient?

6.1 COSTS OF THE LEARNER'S TIME

Cost is inevitably going to be one of your main negotiating points when persuading senior management to support a change of methodology.

As we said in an earlier chapter, people often think that blended learning is cheaper to provide which is a bit of a specious argument. However it is an argument that can help you in negotiation. But you need to know the figures for 'traditional' learning events first.

Regardless of whether learning is internal or external, formal or informal, there are costs associated with delegates' time away from work. It may be straightforward to identify the costs if temporary staff are brought in or if overtime payments are made. But it is less easy to calculate the cost of losing employees' time on day-to-day work duties.

However, these costs are usually estimated as:

Cost/day = salary ÷ number of working days (often taken as 228 days a year) + overheads.

As a common rule of thumb, overheads are often calculated as between 30% and 50% of salary costs. In some organisations a loss of profit is included, but this makes a more complex calculation.

6.2 YOUR COMPANY CULTURE

Depending on the particular culture and core values of your organisation, you may identify certain aspects that will help build your case for blended learning.

We'll assume that cost will be of interest to *any* organisation. However, in addition, you may have a senior management that is looking to its:

- green credentials
- diversity and inclusion values
- customer service support
- and so on.

Generally speaking you'll find you can argue that blended learning will help achieve these ends (because it does). For example, what better way to lower your carbon footprint than to provide training by virtual means? What better way to ensure your training is inclusive and accessible than to provide learning events that can be accessed from the learner's home? What better way to ensure that your staff are all quickly trained up in response to your customer satisfaction surveys through global training available online?

Introducing blended learning by stealth

Moving towards a blended approach is not about complete culture change unless you want it to be.

Most L&D departments will want to try out the approach before going global. So choose one or two core courses that can be adapted to blended learning and run a few pilot groups.

Then gather feedback carefully to provide you with good evidence that you can use to convince your board and get its support for more widespread changes. As an L&D expert,

part of your job is to push the move towards piloting new learning methods. Find ways to identify how employees' post-training decisions add value to the organization.

Once the pilot is proved successful, your participants will be your best allies in publicising future programmes. A good learning event sells itself!

Some common issues

You will, of course, need the support of senior and line managers if your blended programmes are to be effective. There are wider issues involved that move far beyond the L&D department.

The online elements of a programme and self-study activities will not all take place at the same time. So are employees expected to do this in their own time or will time be set aside for individual training as part of the working day (as it would if that person was attending a face-to-face event)? This needs some sort of agreement at senior level or it will be left to line managers to decide what's appropriate.

Talking of line managers, it's best to get them on your side from the outset. They can be motivational tools for participants navigating their way through their programme.

And don't assume it's enough to provide a raft of videos, online tools, articles and the like on an intranet site and leave people to find their way around unaided. As we said in the last chapter, there is such a thing as information overload! You'll need to guide them to appropriate, curated sources.

Key Learning Points

- Work out the cost of "traditional" learning events
- Choose one or two core courses that can be adapted to blended learning and run pilot groups
- You will need the support of senior and line managers if your blended programmes are to be effective across the board.

Activity

1. Which of your corporate core values could be advanced by introducing a blended approach to learning?
2. You have to cut costs by cutting down the face-to-face time on your management development programme. It can be delivered over any time frame you consider suitable.

With reference to one of your own programmes, consider what parts of the content could be delivered by learning technology to meet the learning objectives.

Answer these questions:

- What sessions need to be kept face-to-face and why?
- What online methods would you choose to replace face-to-face sessions and why?
- What would the challenges be for the learners and how would you address these?

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7 HOW DO YOU GET A BLEND?

7.1 THE BLENDED LEARNING PROCESS

You have made the decision, for whatever good reason, to use a combination of training interventions to achieve your learning objectives and have completed an audit of the available resources within your organisation. How do you choose the right components for the right effect?

In other words, how do you blend your learning so that the outcomes are the most effective you could hope for from the point of view of the learner?

Let's agree that every blended learning programme will (or should) comprise the following elements:

- A combination of learning methodologies
- Methods selected to meet learning objectives
- Methods appropriate for all learning styles
- Methods chosen to reflect the profile of the target group
- Training design which is a true blend and not just a hotchpotch of training methods mixed together
- Tools and methods for assessment and evaluation designed and included from the outset.

The difference between a blend and a mix

At the risk of falling into the trap of the culinary metaphor but in an attempt to clearly illustrate the difference between blending and mixing, consider the following:

Oil and water can be mixed together but they can never be blended. Even when they have been shaken up together, they soon separate out as they have very different properties.

The temptation is great to join two processes together and call it 'blended learning', what has been called the 'Velcro' approach. It has been repeated in training departments all over, especially in the early days of this phenomenon. Now, hopefully, we are rather more sophisticated and we consider how to blend our ingredients so that they form an integrated learning experience.

How to build the blend

Your basic questions need to be around the following issues (as with 'traditional' training):

- The learning objectives for the programme
- How the training will be assessed and evaluated
- How value will be added to the business by the programme

When you are building your blend you will need to consider all three aspects and they won't always be apparent or easy to fathom as some will be out of your control. The objectives will come out of training needs assessments, business imperatives, managers' requests and so on, just as usual. *It is what you do next that makes the difference.*

Assessment and evaluation

We will be looking at evaluation later but it is necessary to reiterate the need to develop assessment and evaluation tools at the *beginning* of the process once learning objectives are established. "*Begin with the end in mind*" as Stephen Covey said in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, and it applies very well in this instance.

7.2 ADDED VALUE

Whenever processes are changed or altered, it is important to be able to demonstrate the added value gained by the operation. And *you* may be faced with the task of justifying your choice of training methodology (and the possible cash investment to bring the technology up to the required level).

In a later chapter, we will consider return on investment, so for now let us concentrate on added value. The arguments range from the purely personal ("*Our employees get the chance to learn anything they want*") to the purely financial ("*We will save 50 trainer days this year*") but will probably include:

- The programme will motivate people to become more effective in future
- The programme will allow for personal development, and more rounded employees are more effective employees
- It utilises people's strengths as learners and seeks to minimise the weaknesses
- The outcome will more closely follow the organisational mission than has happened hitherto
- The flexibility allows us to respond rapidly to new training needs.

Once you begin your programmes you will be required both to *deliver* value and to *demonstrate* value.

How best to meet the learning objectives?

This is where you can begin to be more creative now you have the opportunities of blended learning at your fingertips!

For example, you need to inform employees of some new legislation which will affect their work, and you must make sure they take the implications on board. With only traditional classroom methods on offer this scenario was a challenge as delivering on legal or policy issues where the material is dry, technical but nevertheless important did not present the most motivating, participative opportunities for a training group (Do you remember trying to make health and safety and pre-retirement courses exciting?). Now, with blended learning, a myriad of possibilities open up through which you can meet this need in a more appealing and engaging way.

In the next chapter, we'll present a multi-stage framework to you which will bring all of the elements in this chapter together.

Key Learning Points

- Your choice of blend should form an integrated learning experience.
- It is important to be able to *demonstrate* the added value gained by going blended.
- Assessment and evaluation tools need to be developed at the *beginning* of the process once learning objectives are established.

Activity

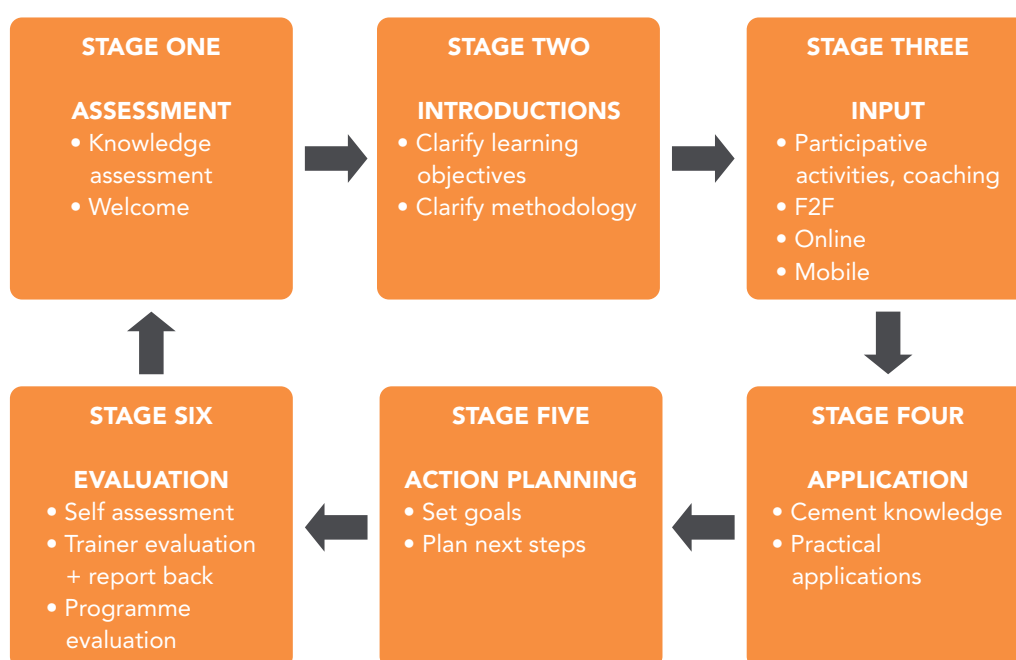
Your management board want to upgrade the organisation's training provision and believes that introducing digital learning content is the way forward. You have to include digital learning content in your blended management programme. Budgets and timeframes are pretty generous so your choice can be wide, but you must report back with answers to the following questions before approval can be given. (Think about your own programmes in your answers).

- a. How will you assess that the digital learning content meets the learning objective for the session?
- b. How will you monitor the progress of learners through the digital learning content?
- c. How will you compare the effectiveness of this content compared to traditional classroom content?

8 A MULTISTAGE FRAMEWORK FOR INTRODUCING BLENDED LEARNING

Like all forms of learning, blended learning follows a cyclical process.

The framework below is a multi-stage solution to learning challenges. The terms will be familiar to you.



8.1 HOW TO APPLY THE FRAMEWORK FOR BLENDED LEARNING TO EXISTING PROGRAMMES

Here’s an illustration of how this framework can be applied. It will probably not be an exact fit for your requirements but you’ll get the idea. We have taken People Management as the example as it is a fairly standard programme offered by most organisations.

This will help you:

- compare a ‘traditional’ F2F (face-to-face) programme with a blended learning way of delivering the same content and achieving the same learning objectives (or more)
- see the multi-stage blended learning framework in action so you can apply it to your own programmes
- judge the benefits of the blended learning approach for yourself.

'Traditional' Approach (face-to-face)**Two-Day People Management Workshop: Aim, Objectives and Methodology**

Aim: To explore issues and develop skills of people and team management

Objectives. By the end of the programme participants will:

- Understand what leaders do and appreciate the range of leadership styles
- Understand their own preferred leadership style
- Appreciate difference between leadership and management
- Appreciate what makes a high performing team
- Understand the benefits of effective team working
- Know how to manage performance and set meaningful objectives
- Appreciate issues associated with motivation
- Understand the importance of communicating effectively
- Recognise barriers than can impair effective communication
- Know how to give and receive feedback
- Have established a concrete action plan for future development

Methodology: This programme is highly participative. It will involve the use of exercises, case studies and pairs work as well as plenary. Live work examples will be used wherever possible.

Two-Day People Management Workshop: Course outline

Day 1 (9.30-17.00)	Day 2 (9.30-17.00)
<p>Introductions & expectations; structure & ground rules Programme aims & objectives</p> <p>Leading and Managing:</p> <p>What do effective leaders do? The difference between management and leadership Management & Leadership Styles – What are they? How effective is each? Action centred leadership What is your leadership style? Linkages with your role and responsibilities</p> <p>Effective team working:</p> <p>What is a team? Characteristics of high performing teams Your role as team leader Overcoming barriers to effective team working Delegating in teams</p>	<p>Questions/comments from Day 1</p> <p>Managing Performance and Motivation:</p> <p>Why do people underperform? Setting goals and SMART objectives Addressing key performance issues at work What motivates people at work? Individual and team motivation</p> <p>Communication:</p> <p>The communication process including NVC strategies Listening, questioning and probing techniques – practical exercises Effective communication techniques: case studies and best practice</p> <p>Feedback – giving and receiving</p> <p>Skills of effective feedback-practical exercises How to persuade and influence</p> <p>Action planning</p> <p>Next steps –For you/ For your team Programme evaluation & Close</p>

Blended Learning Approach

Now let's take the same programme with the *same* learning objectives but the methodology is different.

Methodology:

<p>An online learning platform with a simple Learning Management System -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessed by Internet from anywhere. To this would be posted training materials, handouts, questionnaires, downloads, video and audio clips, resources page, links to company site/policies and procedures etc. • The approach is highly participative; questions, scenarios, case studies etc. are posed to which the participant is expected to reply/take action. • Trainer has access to all responses and conducts an accountability check to monitor the participant’s progress throughout and to motivate them. End of programme reports can be made to the organisation accordingly. The chosen system should also give support to mobile devices so information could be accessed from mobile ‘phones, tablets etc.
<p>Webinar – either the company’s own or the trainer’s system</p>
<p>Online group forum –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants can communicate between themselves, and the trainer has an input and is available once a week for live discussion. • This could be available to participants indefinitely to allow continued networking and support once the designated training period has been surpassed.
<p>Buddies – a system of pairing between group members which would reinforce F2F element and embed learning outcomes</p>
<p>Face-to-Face (F2F) –traditional classroom based activity</p>

Blended learning is, by its nature, very flexible so other methods could be used; e.g. a digital self-study workbook could replace the online platform where participants would work through given exercises at the same rhythm, or a static online delivery could be chosen. Webinars or virtual classrooms could be used to discuss implementation of learning/challenges encountered in place of the midway F2F element. One-to-one telephone coaching could be added as follow-up/follow-on.

PROCESS (based on an overall programme time of 8 weeks; this could be varied to suit)

STAGE	TOPIC	LEARNING OBJECTIVE	METHOD	POSSIBLE TIMEFRAME
1 ASSESSMENT		Determine candidates' suitability for the programme Determine training need	360°/similar	Week 1
2 INTRODUCTIONS	INTRODUCTIONS	Introduce the programme/ participants Clarify learning objectives Clarify methodology for programme	Webinar Forum Online	Week 3
3 INPUT	LEADERSHIP	Understand what leaders do and appreciate the range of leadership styles	Online Forum – leadership theory	Week 3
		Understand your own preferred leadership style	Questionnaire -forum	Week 3
		Appreciate difference between leadership and management	Online	Week 3
3 INPUT	TEAM WORKING	Appreciate what makes a high performing team	Belbin questionnaire –forum Forum – team development theory Online	Week 4

STAGE	TOPIC	LEARNING OBJECTIVE	METHOD	POSSIBLE TIMEFRAME
		Understand the benefits of effective team working	F2F –team working exercise and debrief	Week 4
4 APPLICATION		Identify effective ways to delegate to your team	Online	Week 4
3 INPUT	MANAGING PERFORMANCE AND MOTIVATION	Learn how to manage performance and set meaningful objectives	Online	Week 5
		Learn skills associated with motivation	Online	Week 5
3 INPUT	COMMUNICATION	Understand the importance of communicating effectively	Forum F2F-skills exercises and debrief	Week 6
		Recognise barriers that can impair effective communication	Forum F2F	Week 6
3 INPUT	FEEDBACK	Learn how to give and receive feedback	F2F -practise	Week 6
4 APPLICATION		Identify effective communication strategies	Online Buddy exercises	Week 6
		Develop a feedback plan	Online Buddies	Week 6
5 ACTION PLANNING	ACTION PLANNING		Online Forum	Week 7

STAGE	TOPIC	LEARNING OBJECTIVE	METHOD	POSSIBLE TIMEFRAME
6 EVALUATION		Assessment of progress (participant) Evaluation of programme (trainer and participant) Moving forward	Online Forum	Week 7

Specific gains from this approach include:

- less face-to-face training (a maximum of half a day is suggested) ensuring reduction in participants’ costs (travelling, accommodation etc.)
- compatibility with familiar computer based elements already in use by managers
- more effective embedding of learning as programme is spread over a period of time and includes review and feedback facilities
- deepening of different themes to a more profound level than is possible on two days F2F
- flexibility for the participant who can complete majority of the programme in their own time frame
- individual progress accountability to the trainer (and hence the organisation) via the online platform
- balance of individual and group activities
- high level of motivation and engagement sustained for participants
- ability to deliver programme worldwide (the half day element could be replaced by video conferencing or similar).

Key learning points

- Blended learning isn’t ALWAYS the ideal choice for delivery but more often than not it adds enormously to the learning outcomes
- YOU choose what methods are most appropriate (and available) for the blend as long as the methods meet your learning objectives.

Activity

1. Review the illustration above and note the advantages and disadvantages of each method.
2. Take an existing programme from your own organisation and apply the framework to it.?

9 TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES BEFORE LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

Let's recap the 3 key aspects you need to consider when introducing blended learning:

- The learning objectives for the programme
- How the training will be assessed and evaluated
- How value will be added to the organisation by the programme.

There's an unfortunate fashion to leap to the technology as a solution *before* writing the learning objectives, – “*Why don't we do a series of webinars on this topic?*” or “*I know, let's use video!*” Naturally this won't work if your choice of technology isn't linked to what the learning will achieve!

Once learning objectives have been clearly identified, then the L&D practitioner can consider each objective in turn and make decisions about the most effective way or ways of achieving that particular objective from the variety of technological learning ‘enhancements’ available or whether the objective is best met by face-to-face working.

There are, generally, constraints to this process of course. You have to take into account cost, resource availability, technical capacity, time available, size of group, geographical location and so on, and *most importantly*, how the other learning objectives will be met so that the components will truly be blended and not just stuck together in a haphazard, bolt-on fashion.

Why isn't there more blended learning about?

We know that technology has the potential to change the way we provide learning experiences. Even so some companies have yet to even dip their toe in the water.

The reasons given for this are multiple but often boil down to just not knowing where to start, and that's understandable. There are a multitude of learning platforms available and a confusion of LMS platforms on offer, available at all price points but not all doing what you might want. New solutions are being developed all the time, especially in the mobile learning space, and it is easy to get lost in the maze spending time and energy investigating a solution which might not be the most appropriate for your needs.

You can spend hundreds and thousands or virtually nothing and still end up with an end product which doesn't meet the needs of your learners or your business bottom line.

As an L&D practitioner you can't know the ins and outs of all the technical platforms and applications that are 'out there'; no-one can keep up. Bear this in mind when you're challenged to come up with a quick solution to a training problem! By cultivating good sources of information and being confident enough to say "*I don't know but I'll find out,*" you'll retain your professional credibility.

When you're at the stage of wanting to go further, then find a few websites or blogs written by respected people in the field and follow them. You'll find some ideas in the reference section of this book.

9.2 WHAT TECHNOLOGY?

Technology is moving so fast that it would be of no use to list specific technological applications and what they do in this book. By the time you read it, they will be out-of-date and something better will have come along.

But what we can usefully do without going into the nitty-gritty of technical specifications, is to look at some general issues when using technology enabled learning to meet training objectives that HR and L&D professionals need to be aware of.

Key points to bear in mind

- Where you are providing training to a global audience, you (or your IT department) have to check out the capacity in other countries (or areas of your own country) where perhaps bandwidth is very low or access to the internet is erratic so participation will be difficult or impossible. This will soon demotivate learners and they will disconnect from the experience. You might need to provide support in a different way for these audiences.
- It is useful to research the technical 'capabilities' of your own organisation before you begin to plan a range of internet-based training solutions. Otherwise you might find that the training you have carefully planned cannot be delivered. Here are some actual examples from recent years (from my own experience) – a nuclear power station where employees had very limited access to the internet because of the firewall in place for security reasons so they couldn't follow online training. A multinational using old versions of a browser which meant very slow running so webinar training wasn't viable and there was no budget to upgrade.

- Not everyone is totally tech-savvy. Don't make assumptions, and provide support. Make sure learners know how to use the programme so provide clear instruction and ensure all methodologies are easy and appropriate to use e.g. when there's a video replay with exercises, make sure they can pause it! Also remember that many people use their smart 'phones so check that what you are providing is mobile enabled.
- As with all learning don't assume you know the particular needs of the learner. If amongst your group you have a blind or partially sighted person, providing a lot of your content in visual form just won't work for them. It's obvious but needs thinking about in advance.
- Have you heard about SCORM? This was the e-learning standard for packaging e-learning packages but can affect other online learning too. It has been superseded by Experience API or xAPI (sometimes referred to as TIN CAN API). *That is all you need to know!* BUT you may need to check this out with your tech department to make sure that materials you develop are compliant to current standards.

Key Learning Points

- Establish your learning objectives before you start looking at technology
- You don't have to know it all but build alliances in your tech department where you can go for help
- Develop links with well-respected sources of information.

Activity

Think about the technological challenges your company could face. Answer these questions:

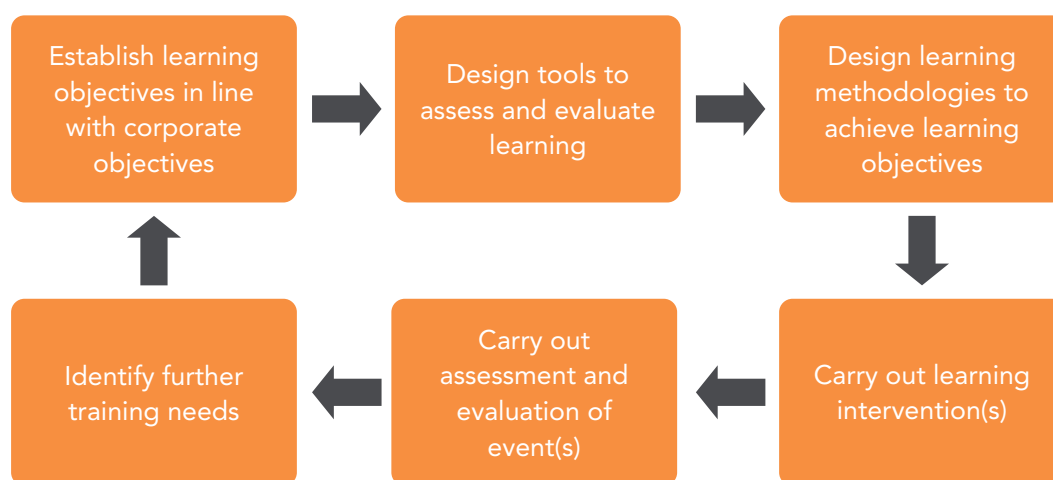
- What's your budget?
- What's your infrastructure like?
- Will students be accessing from work or from home? Are they expected to undertake their training in work time, personal time or travelling time? How can work time be allocated to online training?
- What other issues might be relevant?

10 RETURN ON INVESTMENT

10.1 THE EVALUATION CHALLENGE

L&D professionals have always recognised the need to evaluate the effectiveness of learning and development interventions.

The evaluation cycle is simple to detail:



The evaluation cycle

This cycle may be simple but true evaluation of any training intervention remains a challenge. When dealing with blended learning and therefore with a blend of a number of different training interventions, the opportunities for evaluation are increased but so are the challenges!

Is your online learning delivering results?

Overall, organizations are not very skilled at measuring learning, whatever form it takes.

Once you get beyond completion rates and smile sheets, measurement gets somewhat complex. Because it can be difficult to understand the impact that a learning programme has had on the organisation or determine the Return on Investment, the majority of companies don't undertake it in any structured way.

It's an ongoing debate in the L&D community and there are no magic bullets – not yet, anyway! But a word needs to be said about measuring the impact of blended training in particular. Whilst digital learning content and online learning methodologies may increasingly *support* other learning, there are difficulties in interpreting the outcomes.

How can blended learning be evaluated?

In blended learning, as with any evaluation of learning, the particular aspect of performance to be measured is determined by the objectives of the course. So evaluation should be made based on the specific online activity and its learning objective. (Never forget the learning objective comes *before* the method chosen and the method serves the achievement of the learning objective –or should do.)

The L&D practitioner needs to think long and hard about this, especially if the norm within the organisation has hitherto been a ‘happy sheet’. Your advice will be sought or your opinion will be expected.

When will you evaluate?

First you need to establish a clear baseline measurement of performance and value *before* you start any learning intervention. If you don’t have this then you obviously can’t measure any change brought about by the training.

So, that will be the initial challenge for many organisations!

There are several possible evaluation points:

- at the end of the programme
- at pre-designated interim points
- after each intervention
- at the annual appraisal stage
- once KPI’s are announced
- other

10.2 IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT KIRKPATRICK AND HAPPY SHEETS

There are a variety of measures available. Some measure in a more ‘scientific’ way and are quantifiable based on results, whereas others are measuring qualitative change. For example:

- Trainer observation and feedback
- Paper based evaluation by participants
- 360° feedback after training completed
- Learning logs

- Appraisal review discussions
- Staff surveys
- Customer surveys
- On-line assessments to check knowledge and understanding gained
- Ask managers to comment and follow up improvements
- Post event assignments to check learning had been understood
- Use of models like Kirkpatrick’s model, Philipps ROI calculation, the Kearns Baseline Evaluation Model
- Balanced scorecards.

Your overriding questions need to be:

“Why are we doing this training/development?”

“What might happen if we don’t?”

If measurement is limited to the defined objectives, the evaluation may fail to identify other incidental learning which may take place. No-one has yet come up with a fool proof way to measure the ‘soft’ intangibles: personal development, increase in self-confidence, more understanding and empathy towards staff and so on.

When we take into account the multiplicity of ways people now learn and the increasing impact of informal learning and the rise of the 70/20/10 organisation, determining the business return on investment as an exact figure or percentage stretches the challenge even further.

Key Learning Points

- Establish a clear baseline measurement of performance and value *before* you start any learning intervention
- Evaluation should be made based on the specific online activity and its learning objective
- Digital and online learning may increasingly *support* other learning but presents difficulties in interpreting the outcomes.

Activity

1. How do you do ROI in your organization and how effective is it?
2. Review a core programme by asking yourself
 - a. Why are we doing this training/development?
 - b. What might happen if we don’t?

11 CONCLUSION

If you're still reluctant to take a fresh look at your training provision, then beware! You're being left behind on a tide that's rising.

Perhaps blended learning is not yet the preferred way of providing training for many companies but, given that it's increasingly the preferred way of learners to *receive* training, then I advise you to jump on board before you miss the boat.

Read more, research more but above all be proactive and lead. Experiment and practise with technology. Build your confidence through experience. The professional satisfactions are worth it.

In conclusion, I'd like to share some information sent to me by a corporate L&D Manager recently.

It shows blended learning is working, and how!

"We've definitely seen a shift towards more blended learning delivery here over recent years - cost and convenience were definitely the main initial drivers. We used to fly people around for lengthy classroom courses (or fly trainers around to deliver them), increasing the cost of training with travel and accommodation, and taking people away from their busy jobs.

But as a result of incorporating virtual learning methods into our mix, we've experienced many other benefits too - physical location of the learners becomes much less of an issue, learners can refer back to the session recordings to refresh their memories, and often more people can attend the same session as there are not the same capacity constraints as with a physical classroom.

Another benefit I've found is that the communication channels available in virtual learning open up more options for interactivity, particularly for more introverted attendees. Being able to sit and listen and interject when they feel comfortable without feeling under pressure is a boon. They may also feel more comfortable to use a chat function to ask questions and interact than they might in a physical classroom, where they may feel they are interrupting or do not feel confident to speak up. I've seen folks in virtual learning sessions whom I know would just sit there and passively take in the learning in the classroom, really spring to life with questions and observations when these other channels are available."

To me this is an endorsement of technology enabled learning and the blended approach to learning. What do you think?

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