



“A short guide to Blended Learning mistakes and how to avoid them”

Blended learning can be a powerful strategy for businesses who want to build employees’ skills. It can also be a recipe for disaster. If you or someone you know is responsible for ensuring a successful blended learning strategy, read on.

The use of blended learning—the thoughtful combination of training methods—is on the rise. An increasing number of companies that rely on traditional training are seeing the need and benefit of building in the electronic component. At the same time, organizations that rely on technology-enabled solutions are seeing the need and benefit of adding traditional methods into the mix.

Think ahead

Blended learning isn’t a new concept. For years we’ve been combining classroom lectures with facilitated exercises, case studies, role plays, and audio and video recordings, not to mention coaching and mentoring. However, when the primary mode of delivery is e-learning, adding other methodologies to help optimize learning and performance is often an afterthought.

Many times it’s only after an e-learning initiative falls short that thought is given to additional training methods that might be blended in to fix the problem. When you take a proactive approach, you pay attention to what the e-learning does and doesn’t do well and then build an integrated solution using the appropriate mix of applicable training methods.

Develop clear training objectives matched to the appropriate methodologies

To ensure the success of your training objectives, 1) conduct a thorough performance analysis on the area to be improved—such as service, customer satisfaction, compliance, and/or sales—2) clarify your training objectives including the skill and knowledge gaps that need to be addressed, and 3) select the most appropriate learning methodologies to accomplish your objectives.

Once you establish training objectives, work backwards from the performance analysis results and analyse further the knowledge or skill gaps needing development.

Next, you must match the training objectives to the most appropriate training methods, a task that sounds easier than it is. Those with strong backgrounds in e-learning tend to view every training objective as a nail to be hammered with e-learning. Others might be classroom aficionados who see little merit in e-learning because they don't understand it or have had a bad experience with it. They might implement e-learning begrudgingly or ineffectively only if they're directed by management to include it to reduce training costs.

Integrate and prepare the right blend of expert resources

Surprisingly many organizations fail to bring the right people with the right expertise together to ensure that the blended learning truly focuses on the participant and his or her performance improvement.

It's important to ensure that design and development expertise is up-to-date and developers are experienced in utilizing and blending training methods. Quality content is crucial--a great mix of training methods will never compensate for inferior content

Because facilitation is often a part of an organization's blended e-learning strategy and can greatly influence (negatively or positively) the outcome of your training initiative, the topic warrants additional discussion. Time and attention must be devoted to preparing trainers in advance for their new role as facilitators--a role that might be quite different from what they might be accustomed to in providing stand-up training.

Within the context of e-learning, a trainer's role will change from that of a knowledge provider to a facilitator and performance coach. Before the e-learning occurs, trainers may help align initiatives with key organizational processes like performance management; during the training, they may help learners develop action plans for applying their newly developed skills on the job.

Executing a blended implementation approach

Some organizations focus too much on the e-learning component and forget to blend in other learning elements during and after the initial training. An implementation strategy with a cohesive performance action plan is needed to ensure on-the-job skill application. That action plan must include how and where other methodologies will be used throughout the initial training and it must address the right blend of coaching, monitoring, and measuring after training for ongoing and sustainable performance improvement.

In Summary:

A successful blended e-learning initiative needs to recognize that true performance improvement can only occur when you balance the e-learning component with all other elements and take the time to do it right.