Blended Learning in Corporate Training

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With new technologies and rapid disruptions in the workplace, the future of corporate learning is a hot topic for CEOs and HR leaders.

Transitioning to new paradigms is not easy for incumbents, especially when it is not clear what lies ahead. This book aims to provide some guidance to HR, L&D and training professionals as to where the journey for traditional classroom training is going, and how best to adapt and thrive in this brave new learning world.

The focus of this book is on blended learning, as I believe this is the educational paradigm of the future. More and more we move seamlessly between online and offline environments, even mixing them – consider retail customers checking a price in the store on their phones - and so we must provide a learning experience that supports this new behavior.

So what is blended learning? Simply put, it is any training modality that combines classroom instruction - where both teacher and learner are physically present - with digital learning to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

The mix can be heavily skewed to classroom training and have only a small portion of online learning, e.g. watching a video as a follow-up post to the event, or, it can be heavily online-dominated, e.g. the key content is delivered via a webinar but a coach is available for face-to-face tutoring.

Last but not least, blended learning is considered a particularly effective approach, as it offers the potential to mix and match the best of face-to-face instruction and online learning. It can ensure not only the cost-effective acquisition of knowledge but also application and longer-term behavior change.
The Evolution of Learning Methods

Learning methods and instruction are continuously evolving in response to changes in the workplace. Traditionally, young craftsmen acquired professional skills and knowledge through apprenticeships and on-the-job learning in the workshop of a master. The industrial revolution gave birth to not only factories and mass employment but also the first factory schools where employees were trained in classrooms at the factory site. The biggest shift in the workplace in the 20th century came with the growth of the services industry and office jobs. Computer-based training was introduced in the 1980s, enabling employees to take courses on their PC. Today’s workforce is required to be mobile, flexible and open to lifelong learning, so once again training will evolve in support of the new requirements.
The Evolution of Learning Methods

The Evolution of new learning methods is also closely related to innovation in technology. Whilst the first computer-assisted instruction was launched in 1961 on mainframe and minicomputers, the breakthrough for online learning came only with the rise of the internet in the mid 1990s. With mobile internet access and the proliferation of mobile devices, we are witnessing maybe the start of the biggest disruption in corporate learning yet, enabling learning anytime, anywhere.

**Early 1960s**

PLATO, the first computer-assisted instruction system, is launched at the University of Illinois on mainframe and minicomputers.

**1970s**

The invention of the microprocessor heralds an explosion of computers for commercial and personal use.

**Mid 1980s**

Organizations begin using computer-based training (CBT). CD-Roms are the key media to store and distribute course material.

**Mid 1990s**

With the rise of the internet, ‘elearning’ gains traction, allowing employees to engage in self-paced online learning. Learning Management Systems (LMS) emerge to manage and track all corporate training.

**Mid 2000s**

New web conferencing technology enables the ‘virtual classroom’, allowing instructors to deliver a live-training type of experience to offsite training participants.

**2012**

MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) are born and enable learning on demand via the web. Whilst they are cheap and provide unprecedented access to knowledge for everyone, completion rates are poor.

**2015**

Informal learning is rapidly gaining momentum on the back of the explosion of the mobile internet and mobile devices. Microlearning and social learning are defining the new paradigm of learning anytime, anywhere.
The Evolution of Learning Methods

Instructor-led programs have been and still are the predominant form of training. They represent 66% of all corporate training and development, but this percentage can reach as high as 80% in high consequence industries such as finance or healthcare today. ¹

If teaching is done well and the group not too big, the instructor will not only lecture, but also encourage questions and facilitate discussions, helping individuals test and deepen their understanding.

A trainer in a corporate environment may go further and use group exercises, simulation games or role plays among participants to help bridge the gap between theory and practice, helping learners move from ‘knowing something’ to being able to ‘transfer’ and apply new knowledge.

A final benefit of the traditional instructional format is that the learners not only learn but also socialise. Nowadays, corporate training days are often most appreciated by learners not for the learning of content but as networking and social learning events.

Virtual Classrooms disrupted the traditional paradigm with technologies such as Webex and GoToTraining, allowing instructors to deliver a live-training type of experience whilst training participants are remotely located.

Online learning gave also birth to blended learning, where traditional classroom training is ‘blended’ with digital platforms and tools. The so-called flipped classroom, where learners acquire knowledge before the online training, became especially popular. This allows the instructor to then use the time in class for engaging in problem-solving and group activities, e.g. leveraging a case study, a simulation game or role play.
The Evolution of Learning Methods

Challenges

The key challenges with traditional classroom training solutions aimed at executive education are: high cost, unclear learning outcomes and lack of agility.

As modern enterprises look for ways to deal with digital disruption and business transformation, they increasingly require more sustainable, more nimble and flexible training solutions.

High cost of implementation
You need to consider not only instructor fees, travel expenses and cost of training facilities but more importantly, time away from work for travel and training time.

Unclear learning outcomes
Only input can be measured but not what the training output is. CEOs voice doubts about learning transfer and business impact. HR leaders face the challenge of inconsistent training delivery - not all employees receive the same message and same quality of training.

Learning not accessible when needed
Learning is scheduled and learners need to wait for the next training. This often means that learning is not available when and where it is needed most.

More often than not, digital learning offers solutions to these challenges.
The Rise of Digital Learning

Digital Learning refers to any type of learning that leverages technology to build or strengthen an employee’s learning experience.

The last thirty years have seen a rapid evolution of digital learning. In the early days of computer-based training, software was installed on the mainframe, later it was distributed on a CD-ROM.

The move to web-based digital learning gave employees easier access to learning and a new term was coined: ‘elearning’. Learning Management Systems (LMS) support the administration and tracking of all online and offline training courses.

It was only in 2012 when the first MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) was launched, giving everybody with an internet connection access to high-quality courses. Whilst curiosity was strong and many signed up, completion rates remained low.

Nowadays, employees have an unprecedented choice of content – but to a certain degree they are overwhelmed by the explosion of data, information, tools and channels such as as YouTube, Facebook, blogs and email.

Increasingly, both employers and individual learners are purchasing digital course subscriptions that enable them to learn what they want, when they want, via website content, video training or content-rich mobile learning apps.

The increased desire for digital learning coincides with decreasing costs for hosted-content digital platforms, microlearning platform subscriptions, and production of video-based courses.

Not least because of these shifts in the training industry, offerings that blend live or virtual training with digital assets are growing in importance.

Currently, digital platforms support media such as videos, reflections, chat, assessments or images for learning. Emergent technologies promise even more immersion for employees, including:

- Interactive videos
- Virtual or augmented reality simulations
- Personalized learning paths
The Rise of Digital Learning

Digital Learning Opportunities

From an employer perspective, there are several advantages to a digital learning solution. These can be broken down roughly into three main areas:

**Save Cost & Time**
- Reduces or eliminates the need for travel.
- Reduces time away from the workplace.
- Economies of scale: courses can be distributed to large numbers of employees with minimal extra cost.

**Leverage Agility & Consistency**
- Easy access and self-paced learning allows learning on demand.
- Staff in remote locations can fully participate promoting a consistent training experience.
- Content is multi-media and can be easily created, updated and shared.

**Measure & Improve**
- Tracking and reporting of learner progress on a digital platform is easy.
- Engagement can be tracked in real time and learning programs tweaked accordingly.
- Smart profiles support customized learning.

Additional benefits worth noting are a reduction of the carbon footprint – online quizzing & assessment vastly reduce the need for paper printing and have a significant positive environmental benefit.
“Digital Learning provides distinct advantages for companies. More than 40% of Fortune 500 companies use eLearning, and 72% of organizations claim that eLearning provides them with a distinct competitive advantage.”
The Rise of Digital Learning

Challenges of Digital Learning

Digital learning also has downsides that need to be managed. Whilst time, technology and completion are factors unique to online learning, other factors are the same for any training, be it on or offline.

### Time

This may sound counterintuitive – digital learning is supposed to, and can, save time. The challenge is if learning or any other activity is not scheduled, it risks being crowded out in a busy day. Breaking down the learning journey and asking for regular deliverables helps the learner plan and perform.

### Access

The infrastructure must make accessing and engaging with digital learning easy. Lengthy and complicated sign-in procedures at an employee’s office PC will put up a new barrier and deter many employees from starting or continuing their learning. This is comparable to classroom training that requires a sign-up well ahead of time and long travel hours.

### Completion

With no instructor looking at you, some participants lack the discipline to complete an online course. This can be resolved by using appropriate incentives to progress, such as making the certificate a condition for a promotion or offering a reward for the first 50 who complete the course.

### Motivation

Motivation to complete any training is largely driven by purpose. If an employee is not clear as to why they are being asked to take a certain course, or develop a certain skill, this will often limit engagement. As with any training, to be effective it is critical to get your employees to buy in.

### Technology

Employees with limited IT literacy may find digital learning intimidating at first. Older employees are more likely to struggle to use learning software, while millennials tend to eagerly embrace any activity linked to their electronic devices.

### Experience

Sound instructional design is imperative to make content engaging and learning sticky. The learning experience must be enjoyable and content relevant to the context. Chunking information helps learners remember. Problem solving and reflections support application of knowledge; spacing and repetition are essential to make knowledge and behavior become sticky too.
In the last few years, new trends able to shift the paradigm of online learning have emerged in corporate training. Mobile learning, Microlearning and Social Learning are three notable trends that are currently being discussed and implemented across different platforms and tools in support of learning-on-demand.

**Mobile Learning**
A new approach that brings learning to where employees are. It’s a new way of learning, enabled by mobile platforms and mobile internet.

**Microlearning**
Microlearning is a way of teaching that delivers content to learners in small, very specific bursts. The learners control what and when they are learning.

**Social Learning**
Social or peer-to-peer (P2P) learning means learners are empowered to learn from each other, as fellow learners. Learning is informal and often spontaneous. The instructor is absent in this model.
The Rise of Mobile Phones

Worldwide, 75% of all internet usage now originates from a mobile device.

Smartphone adoption is rapidly rising, doubling in APAC from 1 billion to 2 billion users in only five years.

In 2016, the average user spent 3.1 hours engaged, an increase of 2 hours per day since 2011.

As device ownership reaches peak saturation and continues to grow into 2018, it’s natural that a shift has occurred whereby many people prefer to consume and engage with content via their mobile devices.

And as consumer engagement with mobile enjoys rapid growth, also digital learning has been trending towards delivery via mobile devices.
Microlearning is a way of teaching that delivers content to learners in small, very specific bursts. The learners control what and when they are learning.

Microlearning is fast and convenient as it is delivered in bite-sized content chunks. It appeals to the learner as it fits into a busy schedule and is available exactly at the time of the learning need.

From the learning sciences we know that frequent short bursts are much more effective than ‘binge’ learning. Ebbinghaus was the first to show with his pioneering experiential studies of the memory that we tend to forget 80% of what we learned within 30 days if there is no attempt to retain the new knowledge. Therefore, active recall or spaced repetition of content is essential to ensure knowledge retention.

Why are organizations embracing microlearning? For two reasons: firstly it is often simpler and cheaper to build, deploy and update content compared to a traditional e-learning course.

Secondly, and more importantly, it supports a new learning culture of continuous development and improvement.

Microlearning can be used as a standalone approach or a supplement to traditional classroom training. Mobile learning often leverages microlearning as it supports bursts of learning on smaller screen sizes.

The challenge is to rethink how learning content is designed. Whilst ‘short’ can often equal higher engagement, having short bursts of content available to learners isn’t enough. Each session or piece of content should have a single, measurable learning objective and be able to stand on its own. Similarly just truncating pieces of larger lessons is not ideal and will likely result in lower engagement metrics than those of the original full-length course.

Microlearning often features elements of gamification that reward the user as they progress through a course. The collection of badges or other tokens as learning progresses can be an important incentive to ensure engagement is maintained until course completion.

A number of different educational technology providers are now leveraging microlearning for a wide range of different uses:

Grovo is a platform dedicated to microlearning and giving people access to a library of bite-sized knowledge.

Qstream is leveraging microlearning in support of sales training.

Gnowbe supports, on its app or on the web, the design and delivery of entire learning experiences in a structured manner, with ten-minute chunks of learning a day.
Mobile Learning

Essentially mobile learning is not about delivering training on mobile phones, but is a new approach that brings learning to where employees are. It’s a new way of learning, enabled by mobile platforms and mobile internet.

As the consumer/learner are shifting towards mobile devices, many elearning tools and platforms are now attempting to offer optimization for content displayed on mobile devices. However, this is not as straightforward as simply ‘adapting’ content developed for the desktop experience to smaller mobile screens.

There are a few challenges: the most obvious being screen size – content developed for an HD widescreen display often loses impact when translated to a much smaller screen, even if it is 100% responsive on all devices.

For example, longer videos and rich graphics may present well on the desktop but be impossible to digest on a mobile device.

The fact is: traditional ‘elearning’ courses of up to an hour in length do not engage well on mobile devices.

Whilst there are strong instructional design frameworks developed over many years that address the development of elearning on the web, learning anywhere, anytime works rather differently.

With the advent of the smartphone, learning apps such as Gnowbe, Mykro, Umo, Fuse or Edapp are pioneering a ‘mobile first’ approach. They leverage the new capabilities of the smartphone platform, (think video recording and sharing content anytime) and are creating a new, active learning experience for the modern workforce.

Whilst mobile learning is a new way of learning that will eventually impact most, if not all, training strategies, there are some clear early adopters. Mobile learning is making rapid progress where location-independent delivery and dripped content are key, namely:

**Employee onboarding:**
With intuitive, easy-to-use learning apps, new employees can quickly learn what they need to know even before they get started in their jobs.

**Customer-service training:**
Customer-service employees are key to creating positive customer experiences. They need to practice and internalize the right behaviors. Learning on the smartphone facilitates small, frequent training modules onsite or at home.

**Sales training:**
Many organizations today frequently require sales agents to work outside the office - with partner organizations or as independent agents. Learning about new products on mobile devices helps keep sales agents current, connected and engaged.

The New Frontier
Social Learning

The New Frontier

But mobile devices also create new opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration and social sharing within a training context. With new tools and platforms, it has become much easier to create environments or situations that encourage and foster P2P learning.

The benefits are big. Social learning:

- Leverages the knowledge and experience of the workforce
- Reinforces institutional knowledge and combats the ‘forgetting curve’
- Promotes engagement, motivation and teamwork
- Promotes agility and a rapid exchange of knowledge
- Can reduce educational content costs

Social learning tends to work best when targeted at a specific sector or area, especially when a community of practice already exists to mobilize peers to participate in the learning process.

Social learning is versatile and can be put to many uses, particularly when it is combined with a microlearning and/or mobile learning approach. While there are many web-based platforms for knowledge sharing, there are only a few pioneering start-ups offering a mobile-first experience.

One example is the learning app Gnowbe which provides structured learning programs for teams and organizations. Participants learn as a cohort and are encouraged to create and share content as they go through their learning journey. Another example is Smartup, a mobile peer-to-peer knowledge sharing platform.

Social or peer-to-peer (P2P) learning means learners are empowered to learn from each other, as fellow learners. Learning is informal and often spontaneous. The instructor is absent in this model.

P2P learning is not a single educational strategy. It includes a wide range of activities, including chatting, exchanging knowledge and views, mentoring, a buddy system, counselling, peer-assessment schemes, collaborative project work and community activities.

Social learning is important, doubly so it appears – 20% of learning is social, compared with only 10% formal and structured. (70% is learning on the job)*. Social learning is particularly effective as it supports learning in context, dramatically increasing attention, memory and motivation. It is an underutilized resource that has only seen a huge surge in interest since the advent of the mobile phone and social media platforms.

Outside the formal training context, learning is exploding with employees sharing content on Slack, viewing videos on YouTube or searching context-relevant documents on the web.
The Perfect Blend: Blended Learning

For blended learning courses to be effective, they must address the specific organizational and learner needs and blend the mix of training modalities accordingly.

For example, an insurance company with thousands of sales agents dispersed across the region, needs a scalable solution and thus may deliver a big part of its product training program online. To make it engaging and accessible, they select a mobile-first microlearning solution. Only occasionally will they invite the sales force to face-to-face trainings, to drive motivation and networking.

On the other hand, a corporate university co-located in the company headquarters may want to keep classroom training at the center of its instructional approach but blend it with a learning app to sustain training outcomes.

Many ways to Rome

There are many ways to blend classroom training with digital learning - the potential combinations are almost endless.

Blended can be nothing more than adding a digital course as homework with the objective to revise and train what has been taught in class. Or it can be an online platform that is supporting a series of different – online and offline – learning experiences.
The Perfect Blend: Blended Learning

Examples

Classroom-driven

**Supplement** classroom lessons with self-directed online learning *post event.*

Live training events often contain reams of information that participants must understand in a short amount of class time.

Digital offerings can extend the learning past the live session by reinforcing the information with digital learning.

**Enhance** classroom instruction with digital learning *during event.*

Enhance face-to-face training with digital tools such as simulation games, learning apps or VR.

Real-time data measurement allows the trainer to check the progress of all participants and make adjustments, if necessary.

**Flip** the classroom, employees prepare online *before the event.*

The digital components enable students to acquire the basic knowledge before the live event.

The instructor uses the precious face-to-face time for answering questions and facilitating problem-solving exercises and group collaboration.

**Accelerate** with mobile learning *in between* face-to-face sessions.

Use a mobile app to facilitate a blended online/offline learning journey.

Live events, digital content and social interaction are set over a period of time and build off one another.

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**Enhance** a MOOC with a trainer facilitating live group exercises.

An online platform delivers most of the training via a webinar or recorded video.

Trainers facilitate live workshops where participants apply their learning and solve problems in a team.
If you want to drive engagement and support a ten-month long leadership training with a mobile learning app, it is not enough to just upload the existing boring PowerPoint decks onto the app. To become engaging, the digital content on the app must be short, exciting and multi-media. Likewise, the face-to-face training must not rely on PowerPoint but promote active learning through exercises and discussions.

On a practical level: start with mapping the learner journey in the specific work environment, then think about the end-to-end learning experience. Learning must be easy and active and the learner should be supported in the best possible way at each stage of his or her learning journey. Once you have this, designing engaging learning actions is rather easy. Pick the best tools for the job and integrate them into one seamless experience, all working towards the same end goal.

Any effective learning intervention needs three key ingredients:
- Content
- Infrastructure
- Experience Design

Many make the mistake to focus on content or infrastructure only. To get blended learning right, maybe the biggest shift is towards employee-centric experience design. Understand your learner and integrate learning into his or her workflow. Rethink how your employees learn and how you teach.

For example, flipping the classroom requires a rethink of the classroom approach. Core knowledge is not delivered in the classroom but online at home. Valuable classroom time is reused to discuss questions and apply learning, e.g. through exercises and games.

The Perfect Blend: Blended Learning

How to Blend?

Pre-Course
The learner can prepare knowledge at home in their own time using desktop, laptop, or mobile device using the precious time in classroom for discussion and simulation.

During The Classroom
Digital devices can play a role in giving individual, real-time feedback and engaging everyone at the same time. (e.g. to share a certain experience – if done online, everybody is forced to do it and it can be easily shared with the entire group.)

Post Course
Targeted post-course content and engagement can enhance learning transfer. The learner can practice and apply what has been taught in class.

Peer-to-peer support provides further motivation and deepens knowledge.
The Perfect Blend: Blended Learning

Case Study – Leadership Development in 365 Days

Mazars is a global audit, accounting and consulting group with more than 18,000 employees in 79 countries.

As Mazars University Asia was relaunching its leadership development program, its director was looking for ways to leverage digital technology to actively develop leaders not just a few training days a year but throughout the year. His aim was to develop and transform the future leaders of the firm more deeply, with more support and reinforcement between face-to-face sessions.

Mazars Corporate University Asia selected Gnowbe, a microlearning app, and leveraged the platform to enhance and transform the leadership program with the following three objectives:

- Facilitate the learning process, e.g. participants have 24/7 access to their personal development plan and other key content in the Gnowbe app, receive and do their homework in the app, capture all mentor feedback in here as all as receive reminders of personal goals.
- Continue engagement, e.g. participants are asked to reflect on their personal progress and receive feedback and support from a coach.
- Accelerate and deepen learning with bite-sized content throughout the year, e.g. practical exercises, short videos or quizzes.
Blended Learning is ideal when you have one of the following objectives:

- Enable learning on demand
- Customize learning
- Support social learning
- Drive application of knowledge in the workplace
- Measure and assess learning outcomes

If done well, blended learning is a superior learning model with the key benefits of producing better learning outcomes whilst potentially also reducing costs.

Blended learning for corporate training is not only cost-effective, but can also be a more natural way to learn and work concurrently.

Last but not least, combining digital with classroom-based training to form a ‘blended learning’ solution can avoid the major pitfalls of using either of these formats as the sole delivery mode.
Checklist

Is Blended Learning for you?

1. Are your learners traveling offsite to attend live training sessions?
2. Are your learners dispersed across several different worksites?
3. Do you train more than 200 people a year?
4. Do you launch new products frequently?
5. Is your content rich and complex and learners would benefit from learning on demand?
6. Are you launching the same training to multiple cohorts (over time, across locations)?
7. Are your training sessions stretched over a period of time?
8. Is your training aiming to evoke behavioral change?
9. Are more than a third of your learners millennials?
0-3 points
Your organization is likely to be small, all your employees work in the same office and do not travel much. Under these circumstances, you still benefit from digital enhancement but you want to establish the business case first. Talk to an expert to help you identify the biggest opportunities and most cost-effective digital tools to support your organization.

4-6 points
Your organization is likely facing a few training challenges. A blended learning approach would help enhance your training and learning outcomes. You should investigate next steps to explore options how to get started with blended learning.

7-9 points
Your organization is delivering training at scale, and effective learning is important for your business success. A blended learning approach will deliver better learning outcomes, that in turn will drive business outcomes such as customer satisfaction and sales. You should talk to an expert and get started today.
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Anne-Ev Enzmann is the Chief Growth Architect of Gnowbe, inspiring teams and organizations to grow with a new learning experience.

She started her career in management consulting with A.T. Kearney and has since facilitated numerous training workshops across many industries, with and without technology. As a corporate leader in big retail companies, she enjoyed a lot of training herself and took a lot of inspiration from here for her second career in educational technology.

Anne-Ev enjoys angel investing, traveling and, above all, learning new things!
About Gnowbe

Gnowbe is a mobile-first microlearning solution enabling learning anytime, anywhere. Designed to meet the modern learner’s needs, Gnowbe supports continuous training and development, employee engagement and productivity.

If you have questions or comments, please reach out to us at hello@gnowbe.com

www.gnowbe.com