

Chapter 2

Building Effective Blended Learning Programs

Harvey Singh
Instancy, Inc., USA

ABSTRACT

The term ‘remote learning’ became very common during the COVID-19 pandemic as remote work and remote learning became common practices across the globe. Education and training programs have shifted to self-paced eLearning and virtual classrooms. Post COVID-19, even when learning returns to the physical classroom, the trend toward blended learning will continue. In this chapter, the authors explore how eLearning has evolved toward blended learning and how we can use modern technologies like artificial intelligence and learning models such as microlearning and spaced learning to improve blended learning.

INTRODUCTION

The term ‘remote learning’ became very common during the COVID-19 pandemic as remote work and remote learning became common practices across the globe. Education and training programs have shifted to self-paced eLearning and virtual classrooms. Post COVID-19, even when learning returns to the physical classroom, the trend toward blended learning will continue.

This chapter is the updated version of the article (Singh 2003). In this chapter, we explore how eLearning has evolved toward blended learning and how we can use modern technologies like artificial intelligence and learning models such as microlearning and spaced learning to improve blended learning.

The first generation of eLearning or Web-based learning programs focused on presenting physical classroom-based instructional content over the Internet. Furthermore, first-generation e-learning (digitally delivered learning) programs tended to be a repetition or compilation of online versions of classroom-based courses. The experience gained from the first-generation of e-learning, often riddled with long sequences of ‘page-turner’ content and point- and-click quizzes, is giving rise to the realization that a single mode of instructional delivery may not provide sufficient choices, engagement, social contact, relevance, and context needed to facilitate successful learning and performance.

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In the second wave of e-learning, increasing numbers of learning designers are experimenting with blended learning models that combine various delivery modes. Anecdotal evidence indicates that blended learning not only offers more choices but also is more effective (Harvey, 2003).

This article has two objectives:

1. To provide a comprehensive view of blended learning and discuss possible dimensions and ingredients (learning delivery methods) of blended learning programs.
2. To provide a model to create the appropriate blend by ensuring that each ingredient, individually and collectively, adds to a meaningful learning experience.

Badrul Khan's blended e-learning framework, referred to here as Khan's *Octagonal Framework* (see Figure 1) enables one to select appropriate ingredients (<http://BooksToRead.com/framework>). Khan's framework (Harvey, 2003) serves as a guide to plan, develop, deliver, manage, and evaluate blended learning programs. Organizations exploring strategies for effective learning and performance have to consider a variety of issues to ensure effective delivery of learning and thus a high return on investment.

BLENDED LEARNING

Learning requirements and preferences of each learner tend to be different. Organizations must use a blend of learning approaches in their strategies to get the right content in the right format to the right people at the right time. Blended learning combines multiple delivery media that are designed to complement each other and promote learning and application-learned behavior.

Blended learning programs may include several forms of learning tools, such as real-time virtual/collaboration software, self-paced Web-based courses, electronic performance support systems (EPSS) embedded within the job-task environment, and knowledge management systems. Blended learning mixes various event-based activities, including face-to-face classrooms, live e-learning, and self-paced learning. This often is a mix of traditional instructor-led training, synchronous online conferencing or training, asynchronous self-paced study, and structured on-the-job training from an experienced worker or mentor (Harvey, 2003).

DIMENSIONS OF THE BLEND

The original use of the phrase "blended learning" was often associated with simply linking traditional classroom training to e-learning activities, such as asynchronous work (typically accessed by learners outside the class at their own time and pace). However, the term has evolved to encompass a much richer set of learning strategies or "dimensions." Today a blended learning program may combine one or more of the following dimensions, although many of these have over-lapping attributes.

Blending Offline and Online Learning

At the simplest level, a blended learning experience combines offline and online forms of learning where the online learning usually means "over the Internet or Intranet" and offline learning happens in a more

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