



Blended Learning: Diversity Training

an SSE case study

Applying Technology...Improving Performance

Balancing Instructor-Led and Net-Based Learning Can Be Key to Training Success

Blended Learning Provides Flexibility to meet Varying Needs of Employees Customers and Stakeholders

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Blended learning is an important movement in modern business learning. But while the term seems revolutionary to some, blended learning is really a logical and very practical convergence of modern technology (Internet) with the dynamic aspects of instructor-based education.

In today's global and highly competitive economy, it is essential for organizations to effectively share knowledge, strategic processes and expertise – especially within their own workforces and customer communities. Blended learning is a highly effective tool in accomplishing this goal. Its success lies in breaking down the learning process to take into consideration people, time, interaction, location, and the challenges specific to an organization or business.

Designing a Learning Strategy for Content and Feedback

Learning strategies vary depending upon the audience. For example, in developing training for a homogenous group of corporate managers on critical business processes, it may be best to utilize a self-paced, self-driven, explorative learning design that is geared toward a group with both general academic and specific subject matter expertise. Conversely, in creating training for 3000 global sales reps other factors such as, technology, optimal consumption time and place, peer collaboration and support infrastructure may be more important factors to consider.

It is critical to understand the learners' needs; how to best leverage their reasoning capabilities, work processes, resources and environment. A thorough analysis should consider users' backgrounds, demographics, job-related skills and learning styles. The study should also account for time available for learning, the accessibility of technology, availability of training resources and the desired performance outcomes. It all comes down to the most efficient cognitive path to get from point A to B.

Both designers and users must be able to measure the program's results just as one would with conventional training and pure eLearning. Feedback, however, from blended learning sessions may be more complex to analyze because of overlapping learning approaches.

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If asynchronous interactive learning, for instance, is followed by a series of live virtual chat sessions, the assessment strategy has to be designed in such a way that it differentiates the impact or success of one mode versus another. If designed well, the established learning metrics should indicate areas to be tweaked, rather than a major intervention overhaul. Finally, most major Learning Management Systems (LMS) are at least to some degree AICC and SCORM compliant and have varying abilities to combine assessment information from multiple learning media. Regardless of the LMS, blended learning solutions can be effectively measured if they are well designed.

Learner retention and objective achievement are usually the most obvious metrics of a program's success. Organizations, however, should also measure such things as: the resonance of training throughout a diverse audience, the development of a learning culture, the efficient use of existing training assets, and global cost effectiveness.

Most blended learning programs will benefit from conclusive assessment feedback that permits refinements to the overall initiative. A dynamic blended learning paradigm enables a company to continually enhance learning tools, optimize resources and manage a learning initiative that will grow steadily and sometimes exponentially.

Benefits of Blended Learning

Unlike its predecessors, blended learning enables organizations to slice the learning process into multiple dimensions, like shifting from 2D to 3D. Blended learning leverages a full spectrum of multi-dimensional learning approaches from the best of instructor / "human" interventions to the most interactive use of technology. Blended learning is effective not only for reaching a dispersed audience, but also for saving explicit training costs, providing self-paced learning, and matching diverse and complex learner needs with focused learning events. Learning events are designed to systematically and collectively support the defined performance requirements, while reflecting the audiences' current knowledge and capability. Through blended learning analysis, the optimal medium, style, timing and sequence for learning is pinpointed and tested.

Blended learning leverages the power and pervasiveness of the Internet to offer new options to learners and to better address concerns and challenges, such as cost of training, just-in-time deployment changing or updating programs and diverse learning styles. The internet also allows better-targeted performance support, self-paced and distance learning and the ability to easily revise content and adjust learning resources.

But blended learning is not only Internet-based. There are limitations to web-based delivery and there are times when human intervention is clearly more effective. Blended learning allows organizations to address a wide range of learning needs including corporate

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management, product knowledge / competency, business processes / strategy, customer support and stakeholder communications in a flexible and appropriate framework.

About SSE

Based in St. Louis, Mo., SSE is recognized as an industry leader in delivering blended learning solutions for the Fortune 500. The company's customized eLearning modules have been recognized by its clients as being both highly engaging and interactive. The company provides a proprietary eLearning Portal solution, SSeLearn PortalSM, to manage learning modules, administer students and courses, track and evaluate results, and interface with clients' existing business and learning systems in a self-service and self-paced environment. For more information, visit SSE's Website at www.SSeLearn.com or call 888-875-6442.

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