Making Blended Work

The Five Key Considerations for Designing an Effective Blended Learning Program

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Contents

Teaching as a Design Science

Blended learning has traditionally been thought of as a combination of digital and face-to-face learning components. However, as we move towards a greater dependence on technology, the definition of blended learning is changing.

An effective blended learning program simply needs to contain a variety of learning elements. These can include virtual or in-person workshops, eLearning modules, learning games, and components that sit outside of all of these, like line manager check-ins and coaching sessions.

The work of Professor Diana Laurillard is central to our blended learning design process. In her book "Teaching As a Design Science"[1], she discusses how various learning approaches may be supported by technology.

We've created a blended learning methodology inspired by her work which we use to create blended solutions for a range of clients.

This ebook will talk you through the five key elements of effective blended learning design — from understanding how learning works through to the technologies we can use to enhance it. We've also included some stories from real projects we've worked on to help add some context.

[1] Laurillard, D. (2012). 'Teaching as a Design Science: Building Pedagogical Patterns for Learning and Technology', Routledge. Available to buy online.

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Factoring in How People Learn In and Out of Work

Factoring in How People Learn In and Out of Work

It can be easy to approach workplace learning as an entirely new entity.

However, in order to design truly effective learning journeys, we have to look at how people are already learning. One of the reasons that blended learning is so effective is that it includes a variety of ways to learn and participate as well as to contextualize and personalize the experience.

Ultimately, you can set as many learning and business objectives as you like. But without a real understanding of how your people already learn, where will it get you?

Opportunities to Practice Are Key

One of the most important parts of any learning process is the opportunity to put your theoretical knowledge into practice. Learning about something from an eLearning module, in a classroom, or a conversation with your line manager is one thing. But you won't really know how well the information has sunk in until it's time to take some action and your learners have had the opportunity to adapt their learnings to brand new situations.

On top of that, putting learning into practice early on in the learning process actually improves information retention and transfer of learning into the workplace. Muscle memory and repetition of tasks are incredibly important to move information from our short-term to our long-term memory and keep the information ingrained in our behavior.

Whether you're training a colleague to restock items on a shop floor, a bank employee to detect financial crime, or a sales team to improve its client relation skills, it's important to combine the practical with the theoretical in any blended learning program.

Scenario-Based Learning

Scenario-based learning taps into the brain's natural inclination towards narrative and storytelling. This type of learning allows for that practical action discussed above, but in a low-consequence, safe environment. Take our sales team as an example. Scenario-based learning could be used to improve product knowledge and help them choose the right solution for their fictional clients' needs. This allows the salesperson to practice these skills without the risk of losing prospects.

Branching scenarios can also be a great option to consider, although this will depend on your budget. Shallow branching, if you're on a tighter budget, can still be effective, allowing for decision-making opportunities and for learners to see the outcomes before returning to a central narrative thread.

They can, however, become complicated quite quickly to allow a deep exploration of a topic. Deep branching scenarios can absolutely be worth the investment, as they work on learners' problem-solving and critical-thinking skills as well as encouraging them to make informed decisions under pressure. Branching also allows them to follow the culmination of their choices through to the very end to see one of multiple outcomes.

See It In Action

A great example of a branching scenario from the world of popular culture would be Netflix's *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*. **Watch a short video** to get an idea of how the branching scenarios work.

Knowledge-Sharing and Social Learning

One of the most important elements of a blended learning journey, whether fully digital or with in-person elements, is the opportunity to collaborate. People already learn from each other. In almost any work environment where you interact with your colleagues, one of the most common sources of information is the people you work with. Make the most of this.

Designing for collaboration will look different depending on how digitally-led your blended learning program is. If you're managing blended learning at a distance, virtual whiteboards like Miro or MURAL are excellent tools for collaboration and can allow for much wider participation than in-person workshops and group activities. Breakout sessions are also really valuable, regardless of environment, as they allow your learners to work in smaller groups to achieve a shared goal. You can also incentivize engagement with the learning and collaboration through competition.

Social and Collaborative Learning Through Games

Want to know more about competition and collaboration in learning games? Download this resource created by our in-house learning games specialist: **10 Strategies for Learning Games That Work**

Buddy Systems and Mentoring

People seek to learn from each other. Learning through stories, from elders, and through communal teachings, has been part of our societal structures since humans first formed tribes. It's a natural way for people to learn, and in the workplace, employees will automatically seek guidance from others.

Introducing a buddy system and/or mentoring makes that integration easier. By giving your learners a specific personor people to go to, it encourages this very natural way of learning with the added benefit of direction and clearer behavioral reporting.

Including a go-to person or people for your learners will allow them to make the most of their blended learning journey in a way that feels supportive and less obviously tied to their training. It allows for opportunities to discuss how the things being taught work in the real world and in their specific role. This opens up the chance to really tailor the learning application. This does need a bigger commitment, though, of at least three-six months, for it to be effective.

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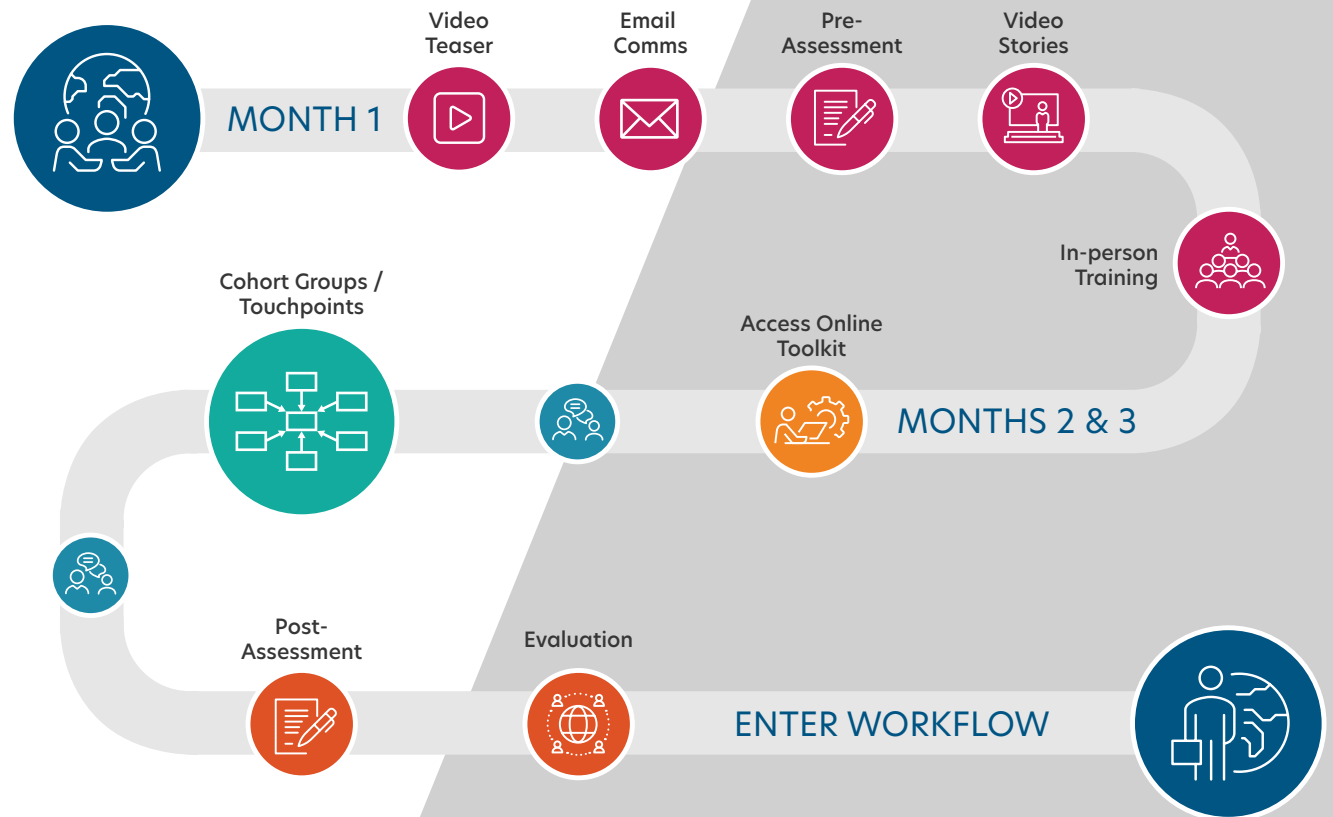# Creating Great Blended Learning Journeys

Creating Great Blended Learning Journeys

One of the best things about a blended learning journey is the opportunity to create a fully rounded experience.

Blended learning, by its very nature, offers a variety of learning modes. But in order to create a great journey, we need to focus on how we can select the right channels for delivery, the hierarchy, and ordering of information. We also need to carefully consider what binds those elements together.

Blended learning journeys will typically take place over a longer period than one-off training, so make the most of this time, add variation, and keep your learners invested.

MONTH 1 — Video Teaser — Email Comms — Pre-Assessment — Video Stories — In-person Training

Cohort Groups / Touchpoints — Access Online Toolkit — MONTHS 2 & 3

Post-Assessment — Evaluation — ENTER WORKFLOW

Tempo, Pacing, and Learning Modes

Creating a great blended learning journey begins with the components you put into it. With so many types of resources and learning available, this allows you to build a learning journey that is both highly effective and engaging.

A catalog of eLearning content simply won't cut it. Resources alone do not make for an effective journey. In the same way that you would break up an all-day (or several-day) training event with breakout sessions, group activities, workshops, and lecture-style presentations, it's important to give blended learning the same treatment. It's also really important to focus on the flow of the journey, and ensure you include time for activities as well as space to process and form connections.

Both the learning outcomes and the engagement levels will benefit from this variety. The human brain is wired to seek novelty, so changing pace, tempo, and learning modes is crucial.

For example, you could look to incorporate a combination of:

Animation/video

Coach/ manager touchpoints

Synchronous and asynchronous learning

Self assessments

Microlearning

Challenges (individual or group)

Space learning for hands-on practice of their new skills

Reflective moments

The Importance of Flexibility

The variety that comes with effective blended learning should also afford a good degree of flexibility for the learners. When considering the modes of learning you wish to include in your blended learning design, it's worth considering the types of content learners can dip in and out of, especially if the journey you've designed spans a few weeks or months. This can help them to both access point-of-need learning and adapt the learning to their working schedules.

While all learners can benefit from this prioritization of flexibility, it will have a greater positive impact on time-poor employees. For example, employees who are often on the go have unpredictable schedules, and need to access a vast amount of information in order to fulfill their roles effectively.

This is where types of content like microlearning or even podcasts can be really useful. Anything that allows your learners to learn while they're doing something else—traveling to a meeting, prepping for a call, etc.—will be a benefit to both the learner and your organization.

The most important thing is that you understand your learners, their challenges, and what their requirements are for this training **before it's designed**. This will allow you to make it as easy as possible for them to do what you're asking. Put yourself in their shoes and ask whether what you're proposing is realistic.

Combatting the Forgetting Curve

The theory of the forgetting curve originated in 1885 and suggests that alongside the learning curve (uptake of new information), there's also a forgetting curve. This suggests that as much as 80% of new knowledge can be lost within six days. Therefore, intervention must happen quickly. A well-designed blended learning journey allows a number of touchpoints, both throughout and after the program is complete to help combat this curve and aid information retention.

Extending the Learning Journey Beyond the Initial Program

Line manager involvement and coach/manager touchpoints can bring so much to a blended learning program. This is even more important when it comes to ensuring the transfer of knowledge into the role once their training is complete.

Unlike other methods of learning design, blended programs allow for wider involvement and you should be making the most of that where you can. Whether you employ a coaching model to your training or get line managers engaged, adding these check-ins and touchpoints in the weeks and months following the program can boost information retention as well as assisting with sustained behavioral changes.

Line managers are all too often not made part of the process and therefore find a disconnect when it comes to supporting their employees. Designing manager touchpoints into your blended learning journeys provides managers with full awareness and involvement

in the process, enabling them to much more effectively support your learners throughout and beyond your blend.

It's also worth considering how you can create resources for your learners to access and come back to once the blended learning program is over. For example, access to digital instructions for use of a specific tool or system, PDF resources like infographics or slide decks

for fast refresher training, and a clear go-to person(s) for ongoing assistance with the learning. When designing a great blended learning journey, we have a duty to the learner that goes beyond the product or program itself. Therefore, we need to think of ways to support this ongoing learning in the workplace.

Case Study

Transforming In-Person Training Into Blended Learning

See how we transformed L'Oréal Professionnel's prestigious Colour Specialist Course from spaced out, face-to-face training into an engaging blended learning journey that actively combats the forgetting curve.

View the case study

Managing Blended Learning at a Distance

Remote Onboarding

Distance blended learning can be useful in a number of scenarios and more organizations are recruiting for entirely remote roles. Technology and intelligent learning design have afforded us the benefit of onboarding new employees and even consultants remotely. This means managing your initial compliance and onboarding information sharing online.

Remote onboarding in this sense can include:

- Self-directed learning

- Formal compliance eLearning

- Video calls (e.g. over Google Meet, Zoom, or Microsoft Teams)

- Presentations and Q&As with different department heads

- Check-ins with assigned buddies or coaches

- Social moments and team touchpoints

Managing Blended Learning at a Distance

Onboarding can be seen as a simple compliance tick-box exercise, but in order to complete the candidate experience effectively, remote onboarding should be used to fully integrate your new employee into the organization and, most importantly, into their team(s).

Once you remove the idea that onboarding is simply about getting compliance up to scratch and showing your new people around the systems you use, you can really open up the possibilities. Combining modes of learning—for example, introduction animation/video, conference calls, eLearning, and management check-ins—will enable your new employee to get a better understanding of your organization.

The new-starter compliance training is one of the most dreaded aspects of onboarding, so widen the net and vary the way you communicate with remote employees. Think of ways to engage and excite them for their new role to help them feel like they've made the right decision.

Blended learning design elements are a great way to recreate and supplement the highly important and engaging face-to-face moments that come with onboarding an employee into the physical workplace. A blended onboarding program needs to not only take care of the compliance and the knowledge share, it needs to address the cultural side.

Onboarding remotely through a blended approach allows you to immerse that individual in the culture of your organization through formal and informal meetings, digital coffee breaks, and instant chat channels like Team, Google Hangouts, or Slack. You can't rely on this happening organically, especially when onboarding a remote employee. These opportunities need to be designed into the onboarding process.

Video and
User-Generated Content

Video is an incredibly useful tool in any learning, but when it comes to distance learning, there are so many important uses for it.

Earlier, we mentioned the ways we can use video in remote onboarding, as it's a great way to help new employees connect with the leaders of your organization, their line managers or colleagues, and get a better feel for company culture. Video adds a vital personal touch to learning at a distance.

Throughout the pandemic, as we saw remote working become the norm for many industries, lo-fi video and User-Generated Content (UGC) became more widespread. From the adverts created by global organizations through to social and collaborative learning opportunities, low-fi video provides an added element of authenticity to your content.

While high production value video definitely has its place in learning, using lo-fi and/or UGC can create a stronger sense of connection between colleagues and greater engagement in the learning process.

Virtual Workshops

Another highly important component of blended learning at a distance is virtual workshops. We have worked with a wide range of organizations to help design, create, and deliver virtual workshops for a huge variety of learning objectives.

These workshops provide an excellent opportunity for remote employees to engage and collaborate with each other. With a huge variety of tools at your disposal, from your corporate-allocated video conferencing software through to virtual whiteboards, these workshops are a vital component of any distance blend.

Best Practices for Virtual Learning Design

Want to know more about the best practices for designing virtual workshops and distance learning? Take a look at our resource, **12 Ways To Design Virtual -First Learning**.

Opportunities for Collaboration

Collaboration can come in so many forms when operating in a virtual environment. The lack of physical placement in one space may seem like it presents barriers to collaboration but it actually affords many opportunities.

For example, in our work with a multinational food and beverage organization, we collaborated with another organization to provide a multi-faceted blended learning experience. Within this, we have created Storyline content and the organization we're partnering with has suggested ice-breakers, virtual yoga sessions, meditation, and other group wellness activities.

Opportunities for collaboration can also come in the form of breakout sessions or use of virtual whiteboards. Although the learning may be taking place at a distance, you can also include activities that take place outside of the learning environment, varying the pace and space in which the action is taking place.

You could even consider gamifying these experiences through a combination of digital and real-world treasure hunts. The key is to think about how you can combine the online and offline environments in an engaging and unexpected way.

For example, you could send employees in marketing into their local shops to take photos of your organization's and competitors' products and come back together in a virtual breakout session to create a presentation or project.

Theory in the Real World

Blended learning allows your learners to transfer theory into the real world as a part of their learning practice. You should encourage experimentation with their new ideas and learnings in small ways—for example, taking a different sales approach or subtly changing interactions with clients or customers.

A key part of applying theory in the real world, and continued behavioral adjustments, is in feedback discussions with managers or mentors. You need to consider how these micro-changes or mini-experiments throughout the learning journey made a difference. What could you do to build on it? You want to create feedback loops to promote continuity of growth and further self-directed learning.

The way to make this the most effective and useful to the group as a whole is to encourage knowledge sharing. We naturally learn from each other anyway (in and outside of work), so encouraging this practice will allow your learners to learn from each other in a useful and constructive way, alongside management-driven feedback loops.

Case Study

Enabling Blended Learning Delivery During A Global Crisis

We worked with an international leadership and networking organization to transform its entirely face-to-face onboarding, learning, and networking events into blended learning journeys. What's more, we showed the organization how to create engaging learning video content at home.

View the case study

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Increasing Uptake and Engagement

Increasing Uptake and Engagement

One of the top goals for any learning program is to maintain a high level of uptake and engagement with the content.

The variation available within blended learning programs that we discussed in the previous section lends itself really well to this. But where can you start to increase the uptake and engagement levels?

Research and Focus Groups

Start at the beginning. Effective learning design ultimately comes from understanding the requirements of the people who will be using it. In the same way software companies will run user testing and creators of consumer products will run focus groups, it's important you do the same with your learners.

Yes, your objectives (learning and business-specific) are important, but what do your learners want and need from this experience? Have you asked them yet? Doing this research upfront and, if possible, testing beta versions of your learning before a full launch will give you a rich bank of information to help you move forward in the most effective and engaging way.

One organization we've worked with on a combination of learning games, eLearning modules, and gamified learning platform for product-knowledge training ran a number of focus groups with its target audience ahead of scoping out the project. On top of this, the organization tested a beta version on a selection of its salespeople to iron out usability and knowledge-retention issues before its full launch. Thanks to this research, it saw a staggering uptake in engagement with the learning initiative that resulted in significant sales improvements. Learners were getting both what they asked for and what they knew they needed.

Whatever type of learning you're designing, it's important to check in with the people who will be using it before, during, and after launch to ensure you're hitting the mark.

Usability and Organization

While we're discussing beta testing, we need to talk about usability. If you're housing some of your blended learning materials in an LMS, LXP, or digital academy, you need to ensure the system is easy to navigate and use. Equally, if you don't have that level of technology at your disposal, it's important to make sure that everyone enrolled in your blended learning program knows where to find all of the elements they need.

A simple, if time-consuming, admin process to put in place for learning that sits on one of the above systems is using appropriate tagging and taxonomies when each resource is uploaded This will allow your learners to make use of the search functionality within the system if the learning they're searching for isn't immediately available to them. Creating this governance will ensure that any future learningcan also be properly tagged, so nothing gets lost in the system.

Additionally, if you're using AI, machine learning, or recommendation engines within your systems to create personalized learning journeys or create a smoother learning experience for anyone enrolled in a specific program, this level of tagging and organization is crucial.

Prioritizing the organization of your learning materials will do so much for uptake and engagement of your blended learning program. Blends are often designed with a number of separate parts but they all need to be connected, both in content and in accessibility. Just as many people get frustrated if a web page loads slowly or the navigation on a website or app doesn't make logical sense, they will abandon their learning if you don't make it easy to access.

Case Study

Transforming Infrastructure to Cut Costs, Save Time, and Improve Learning Design

Want to know more about the nitty gritty of learning organization? Have a look at the work we did with the Ministry of Defence to organize their systems, data, and processes for a smoother learning experience.

Read the case study

Launch Campaigns

If you're looking to increase uptake of your blended learning program, why wait until it's already live? Launch campaigns are used widely across a range of industries and there's a lot we can learn from consumer-focused organizations.

When a company launches a new product, for example, it may tease the product on social media, through billboards, TV or online ads, emails, and a wide range of other channels. While the channels you use for internal training won't be the same, this multi-channel approach is a great way to encourage engagement before launch and get the word out about your new initiative.

The excitement of the teaser materials becomes a part of the overall experience and primes people for the content you'll deliver.

Launch campaigns are a great opportunity to work with your marketing and/or comms teams to drum up excitement and find ways to get people excited about your new learning program. Over the years, we've worked on a number of launch campaigns for a range of organizations and technology is a huge part of that.

Whether you're communicating with your employees remotely or through their working environment, there's a range of tools you can add to your comms including:

- Animations/messages on screens around the office
- Billboards/advertising in the staff areas of your workplace
- Competitions or games
- User-generated content-focused activities relating to the learning content
- Emails (talk to your marketing team about using lead nurturing techniques)

One of the most effective engagement drivers we've seen is running competitions, particularly those that run between departments, branches, or offices. Adding in this element of competition taps into learners' motivation and gives them a reason beyond the learning to get involved.

You can run these campaigns without the involvement of your marketing department, but as their jobs revolve around driving engagement, they can be an incredibly valuable resource. Ultimately, within your blend, and before it's launched, you want to get people talking about it.

The main question you need to ask is: "What will get people involved?"

Games, Gamification, and Competition

Research suggests that as many as 83% of employees feel motivated at work when receiving gamified training . This is true of both employee engagement on the whole and learning-specific engagement. Gamification features are becoming more common in workplace learning and can be a fantastic engagement tool in a well-rounded blend.

Gamification features can include:

- Leaderboards/league tables
- Points
- Achievements/medals/awards
- Changes in rank/status

These are often elements added into learning content that already exists. A number of learning platforms already have these features available, or they can be designed into custom learning content. These features, while simple, tap into learners' intrinsic motivation to consistently seek improvement or beat their peers.

Learning games, on the other hand, are more comprehensive. They tend to take inspiration from consumer-grade or commercial games (those played on popular consoles like the Nintendo Switch, PlayStation, or Xbox, or on someone's phone), and, therefore, pick up on tried-and-tested methods to gain people's attention/engagement and hold it for long periods of time.

[2] TalentLMS (2019), 'The 2019 Gamification at Work Survey'.

Learning games can be particularly useful for product knowledge-based training. Creating an immersive learning experience, alongside competitive gamified features is a great way to encourage your employees to learn while engaging in something they enjoy. Going far beyond PDFs, slide decks, or more traditional eLearning, learning games engage your learners in subtle ways that encourage a higher rate of information retention.

Introducing games, gamification, and competitions means that their motivations move from extrinsic (something they need to do for their job or to help you reach compliance rates) to intrinsic (something they wish to do for themselves due to enjoyment, wishing to prove themselves, or do better than others).

Case Study

Award-Winning Games in Blended Learning

Educational services provider LOMA worked with us to create an award-winning learning game featuring branching scenarios to create a baseline of industry knowledge for insurance and financial services professionals.

View the case study

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Measuring All Components of Your Blended Learning Program

Measuring All Components of Your Blended Learning Program

Key Resources: Measuring the Business Impact of Learning

If you want to know more about measuring the business impact of learning programs, you can find a curated list of top resources in the definitive guide on our website.

Read the guide

Measurement is one of the most important factors of any learning program and should inform your ongoing strategy and design.

However, if you're new to learning measurement or simply measure stats like completion rates of eLearning, it can be daunting to know where to start with something as complicated as a blend.

There's a lot to explore when it comes to learning measurement, but consider this chapter an introduction to the topic.

Begin With This:
What Are You Already Capturing?

Before we can begin to design our learning measurement strategy, we need to establish our current baseline. What information are you currently capturing? The more technology you have in place, the richer your data will be. However, if you're running blended learning with limited technology already in place and little to no budget for any more, don't panic.

There are still plenty of sources to get your data from, including:

- Completion rates of compliance training
- Monthly/quarterly/yearly logins to your current system(s)
- Average time spent on system
- Additional (non-compulsory) courses enrolled in
- Additional courses completed
- Courses enrolled in but not completed
- Pass rates
- In-person training attendance numbers
- Resource downloads
- Video views

Many of the digital components that sit on your LMS or LXP can be tracked but you may need to think of ways to capture and report on observed behaviors, workshop participation, or workplace performance. This is often a good time to loop back to line managers and the reporting mechanisms they already use. Ask yourself whether this can be leveraged or adapted for your blend touchpoints.

It's also worth gathering data around your wider business goals so you can begin the process of tying the two together. This can come from customer satisfaction surveys/feedback, NPS scores, sales figures/targets, data from annual/quarterly performance reviews, and a range of other places.

Using a Learning Record Store, especially one that also contains a Learning Analytics Platform, like Watershed, can do a lot for the effectiveness of your learning measurement and, therefore, your ongoing blended learning design.

Consider what behavioral change it is that you seek and where that need comes from within the business. This will give you a good idea of where to dig for the data you need to start making informed decisions.
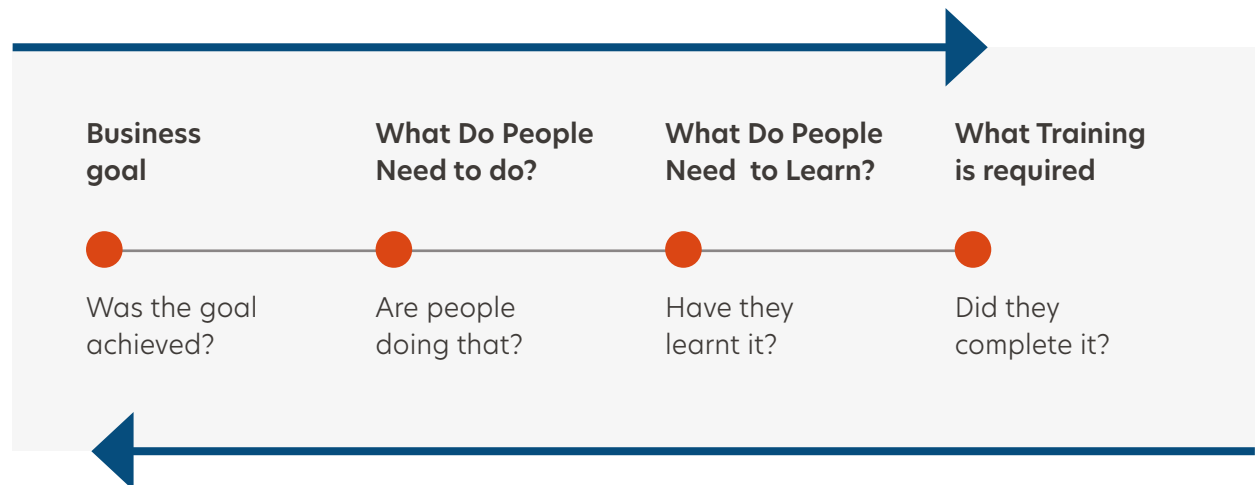
Integrate Business Impact Data Into Your Design

Outlining the current behaviors and which behavior changes you seek before designing any of your learning programs is crucial to the success of the program. You should use the data gathered in the stage described above to understand from a business perspective what needs to change, for whom, for what purpose, and if possible, within what timeframe. It's important that you establish a baseline for comparison

All of this information will help you to understand not only which behaviors to tackle, but the most effective ways to do it.

Learning measurement and design strategies should inform each other. Understanding the data you already have is crucial to learning design, but equally understanding what data you wish to capture in the future is incredibly important to the way the learning is designed.

Ensuring you add in those relevant touchpoints and data capture, whether you're covering virtual/digital learning or in-person, will keep this process as smooth as possible moving forward.

The best way to explain this is through the diagram below, put together by our in-house digital academies expert:

Business goal	What Do People Need to do?	What Do People Need to Learn?	What Training is required
Was the goal achieved?	Are people doing that?	Have they learnt it?	Did they complete it?

Learn From The Past

The next step is to evaluate the data you've gathered. One of the key components of this will be assessing your current training techniques—investigate where pass or attendance rates are dropping. It could be something as simple as a quick UX fix needed in some eLearning, a technical issue in your LMS, or something more significant like recycling the same training over and over again for a yearly in-person workshop.

Evaluating all of the learning you currently offer in the area you wish to cover will provide so much insight into what to do next. Our brains are wired to seek novelty. What worked in training 10 years ago, or even two years ago, may not work now. And it's even less likely to work if your learners have experienced the same training on multiple occasions. Try something new, and travel in the opposite direction of any learning that has driven engagement and pass levels down.

Conclusion

There are five key pillars to designing effective blended learning, regardless of whether it's going to be in-person, online, or a hybrid combination of both.

Designing for how people already learn, focusing on the overall blended journey, understanding how to manage a blend at distance, uptake and engagement, and prioritizing learning measurement all have their place in building effective blended learning.

Much of what we practice is inspired by Professor Laurillard's work, but we also continue to learn through our clients' experiences on all projects.

Designing a blended learning program from the ground up can be intimidating, so the hope is that this eBook has been helpful for you. Ultimately, you need to design around your learners and make strategic decisions based on your data.

If you want some advice on your blended learning design journey or want to work with us, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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