



BEYOND KNOWLEDGE*



Enriching People.
Enabling Performance.

Blended Learning

The simple truths, basic mistakes and vast potential of multi-modal learning



A CEGOS/ TP3 White Paper

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The Bottom Line

✦ 1. Introduction

There's no doubt that interest in Blended Learning has been gathering pace for some time, and that there's no crescendo in sight anytime soon.

Like any good recipe, when Blended Learning is executed well—mixing different learning environments and forms of delivery such as face-to-face activities with e-learning and other technology-led learning activities like online assessments—there's a greater acquisition of knowledge, building of skills and, ultimately, greater impact on personal and business growth and productivity.

What's behind the widespread adoption of Blended Learning? The Chartered Institute for Personnel Development in the UK provides a good answer, saying Blended Learning “takes advantage of the potential offered by the myriad of new, online learning technologies, using these alongside the wide range of existing face-to-face and self-study methods to generate new combinations that outperform traditional approaches.”

Put simply, people learn differently—and Blended Learning can help to match the learner with their actual needs and cope with different personality types, preferences and requisites in a way that traditional training does not.

For many organisations, Blended Learning helps answer what to them is a fundamental question—*How can I reduce operating costs while at the same time find a way to build and maximise a high-performing workplace?*

With recent economic downturns acting as catalysts, and the increased demand for learning and development (L&D) functions to deliver greater value to organisations, faster and with fewer resources, the past few years have seen many of the individual elements of Blended Learning, such as coaching and e-learning, steadily increase in popularity. Given the sum is greater than the individual parts, it's no surprise that this is one of the many reasons behind the attraction of Blended Learning.

In fact, we could rename it “Blended and Extended Learning.” By its very nature, a blend helps move a learning intervention from ‘days’ to potentially ‘weeks’ or more, but without the disruption to day-to-day work that concentrated traditional classroom training can often entail.

This extended approach also helps in the ongoing reinforcement of learning key messages—that is, the application of new learning and skills back in the workplace—and creates a communication loop with the tutor and/or their supervisor throughout the process.

From its earlier iterations, where it simply combined classroom training with e-learning, Blended Learning today covers every form of learning. It combines a wide range of both formal and informal learning tools, and in this way, learners can select what they consider to be the perfect learning mix for their own development needs.

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What is Blended Learning and what isn't it? How are organisations like yours using Blended Learning to its full potential? What will Blended Learning look like in a future driven by increasing demands on L&D budgets and growing needs of a multi-generational workforce? These are just some of the issues covered in this paper, with focus on Asia Pacific and reference to Australia in particular as one of the more mature markets for multi-mode learning.

And while much has been written about Blended Learning and its different elements, few commentators have focused directly on what Blended Learning means to organisations today, on the future, or on how Blended Learning can be leveraged to the benefit of all. To fully answer these questions, it's perhaps necessary to first look at the key drivers behind Blended Learning and its different, and quite varied, components.

2. Some things to consider before we begin

Blended Learning means different things to different people, and even experts can't agree on what the term means.

Is it simply combining face-to-face classroom methods with some form of e-learning or computer-mediated activities? Is it defined by time or location, as in classroom, remote sites or online? Is it formal or informal, learning by osmosis or all three? And how much Blended Learning is driven by the learner, with their control over time, place, path and/or pace?

Before we jump to what Blended Learning is, its benefits and how it's being used by different local organisations, let's first consider why and for what purpose we are looking at learning or training solutions in the first place, much less blended solutions.

To begin with, each and every organisation has a strategy and a direction—even if they are not articulated and, yes, even if they are not followed. Successful businesses know exactly where they are and where they want to be. In our experience, they will have also identified any gaps in their capabilities that need to be filled in order for them to achieve their visionary 'future state.'

If you're starting to think workforce planning, capability frameworks, learning and development plans, talent and resource acquisition management growth and retention strategies, then you're getting the picture. It's that degree of detail behind organisational strategy and/or vision that drives demand (or it should) for certain skills, now and into the future.

So, whether you're considering Blended Learning or any other training intervention, the importance of having an integrated, well-structured and aligned learning strategy, one that focuses on both current and future needs of the organisation, simply cannot be overstated. And yet it is surprising how often we find that organisations large and small, public and private have a nebulous training strategy, or none at all.

The next key consideration behind the success or otherwise of any Blended Learning solution is that of a Training Needs Analysis, or TNA.

Even with a learning strategy that's perfectly aligned to the needs of the organisation, many L&D functions struggle with the all-important next step: determining where gaps exist in the capabilities and skills of their people. To avoid having a Blended Learning program that fails to meet the needs of the learner, let alone the needs of the organisation, a well-planned, systematically implemented TNA is critical. And yet, not having a TNA and not knowing precisely what performance change is required is one of the most common mistakes we see.

We also see, however, that Blended Learning programs that stem directly from identification of actual performance needs, that are well-designed, based on solid analysis of where people are compared to where they should be, and that have measurable, performance-based objectives, will almost certainly deliver outstanding results.

With both a learning strategy and TNA completed, L&D teams are ready to determine not only what learning and professional development is needed, but also what form learning should take and how best to design the learning mix in order to drive knowledge and productivity improvement within the organisation.



3. Understanding the key drivers

Now we're ready to identify the key drivers behind Blended Learning and the steps to take to determine the right mix to meet your learning objectives.

The term Blended Learning goes as far back as 2001 and since then, much of its currency has been dictated by the success or otherwise in the ancillary area of e-learning—notwithstanding the fact that e-learning is just one element of the training mix.

There are several key drivers as to why Blended Learning and e-learning are so popular today, and why they will continue to gain traction in organisations across the Asia-Pacific region.

The changing, culturally diverse workforce

Chief among these drivers is the changing face, across the globe, of today's workforce.

The makeup of today's modern workforce is undergoing significant change as organisations face the challenge of accommodating the varying needs and aspirations of different generations who are now all working together, side by side. These generations and their different needs vary according to culture, geography and other factors, yet tend to fall into four categories:

- **Traditionalists** born between 1925 and 1945, and who tend to be characterised by a sense of duty and loyalty
- **Baby boomers** born between 1946 and 1964—many of whom are in senior management positions today and who tend to be more upwardly mobile with a greater focus on advancement and status
- **Generation Xers** born between 1965 and 1981, who often believe in the values of resourcefulness and self-reliance
- **Generation Ys, or millennials** who, born after 1982, tend to be highly technology literate, positive, confident and prepared to challenge existing ideas.

The ever-changing modern workforce, with its different generations, can be seen throughout each and every business and industry sector, and it's not simply restricted to age. It is well documented that worldwide, and particularly Australia and the Asia Pacific, the workforce of the modern day is generally comprised of more highly educated individuals who are technologically savvy, highly mobile and include a higher proportion of women.

India, for example, has one of the youngest workforces among the world's largest economies with a median age among the population of 25 years of age, compared to, say, 34 years in China, according to Morgan Stanley.

On the other hand, other countries are facing significant demographic crises in terms of ageing workforces and greying populations. This is true of Australia, but particularly Japan, where more than 26% of the population is over 65 years of age. It should come as no surprise then that a more traditional approach to business, and learning, is prevalent.

In Australia, government and industry bodies have recognised this impending knowledge, skills and talent drain, and in various ways have sought to implement policies and initiatives to address expected shortfalls. In fact, this is one of the reasons for the increasing focus on vocational training and the related vocational qualifications framework being discussed in the public forum.

Clearly, significant and wide-ranging demographic disparities between countries near to Australia play well to the flexibility of Blended Learning to deliver training which meets the needs of all employees—no matter what generation, what language they speak or even, to a large extent, where they're located. That's because Blended Learning doesn't have a "one-size-fits-all" approach and because its flexible use of many different forms of learning delivery actively facilitates the productive co-existence and development of a multi-generational workforce.

“ organisations face the challenge of accommodating the varying needs and aspirations of different generations who are now all working together, side by side ”

As an example, and while not always the case, older generations might tend to be more comfortable with face-to-face training whereas younger generations who have grown up with today's technology are arguably far more willing to embrace technology-based learning. Younger learners adapt quickly to a blend of knowledge and learning options, because they're used to working, and playing, with technology. As a result, they demand connectivity and instant access to information, and while modern workplace demographics continue its inevitable shift, blended solutions offer the best chance to meet these changes.

What we have is the need to strike a balance between finding solutions that fit the organisation but which are flexible enough, right down to the individual's level, to deal with different learning styles and generational approaches to learning as well as how the learning is applied. Blended Learning provides the best opportunity to find this balance and to personalise an approach to learning as much as we can when dealing with hundreds or even thousands of learners.

In the end, if there is harmony between the human element of the learning solution and its technology-enabled part, there is a far greater chance to engage with the widest learning population and not risk alienating one group or another through an unfocused approach that uses just one format. In this respect Blended Learning helps us better develop learning content at each stage of a course or module that is appropriate to the learning goal—making that content more relevant, more applicable to those involved and less 'general' in its nature. In other words: truly outcome focused.

Exploiting advances in technology

Advances in technology over the last few years have also acted as a catalyst to the growth of Blended Learning and, in particular, e-learning as part of the overall blend.

The growth in smart phones and tablet computers such as the iPad, combined with faster and cheaper telecoms, will have an even greater impact on how people live their lives, how we work, and how we learn in the not-too-distant future. And this trend is quickly filtering into Blended Learning, reinforcing its credentials as the best way yet to adapt to and meet the needs of businesses and individual learners.

Added to this is the rapid adoption of internet-based technologies. Internet usage rates, according to Internet World Stats for example, show that nearly a billion Asians now use the internet (see figure 1). Figure 2 shows that this total amounts to 40% penetration, a figure set to increase greatly as a better infrastructure is introduced, tighter controls around IP are implemented and wider applications governing how technology is used, particularly in a business format, continue to emerge.

One of the greatest changes facing L&D professionals today is the growing use of social media tools and mobile technology. This may not be a revelation, but there's a difference: in Australia, these technologies were introduced and have now been widely used not in a learning capacity but in a social, fun or even gaming context (perhaps as they were intended?). This said, the use, and value, of gaming, simulation, networking and collaborative forums and virtual-learning methodologies alongside traditional models should come as no surprise as

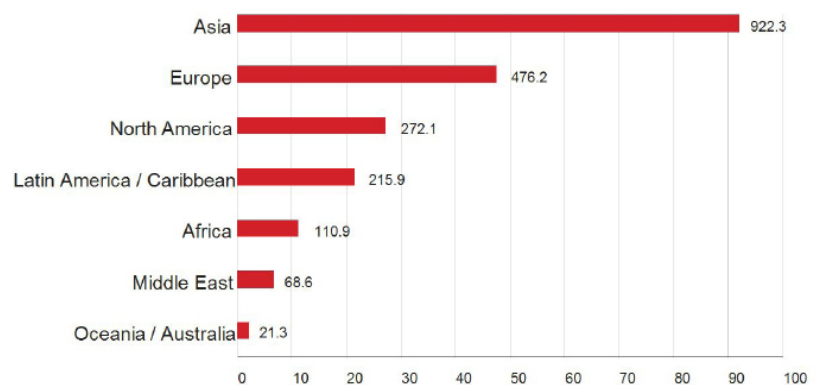


Figure 1. Internet users in the world by geographic regions – 2011. Millions of users. Source: Internet World Stat – www.internetworldstata.com/stats.htm Estimated internet users are 2,095,006,005 on March 31, 2011. Copyright © 2011, Miniwatts Marketing Group

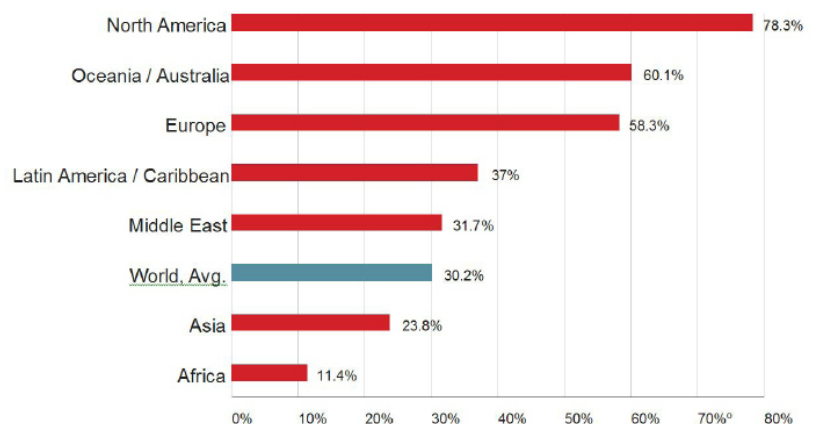


Figure 2. World Internet penetration rates by geographic regions – 2011. Penetration Rates based on a world population of 6,930,055,154 and 2,095,006,005 estimated internet users on March 31, 2011. Source: Internet World Stat – www.internetworldstata.com/stats.htm Copyright © 2011, Miniwatts Marketing Group

many sectors such as airlines, construction and the military have used combinations of methods like these for decades, and with great success. It's perhaps only in the last few years that these technologies have become more accepted in the workplace and applied to areas like group collaboration and L&D.

The pace of change of these and other technology platforms will continue to grow, and, as technology's employed more and more in workplace learning, it's the blended approach, which can be delivered by gradual implementation, that is more powerful in its output and yet can often be more selective in how technology is utilised, that we believe will support learning most appropriately into the future.

Looking at the economy through a global lens

Finally, there is the prevailing economic context. While Australia and other parts of Asia may have not suffered to the same extent as Europe and USA, the prolonged Eurozone downturn has led to lower growth across the world. So, as a result, another factor to be taken into account when considering the present and future uptake of Blended Learning is the level of corporate globalisation that directly affects decisions in the Asia-Pacific offices of organisations that have European or North American corporate headquarters.

In this respect, reduced growth has spurred the need to re-evaluate corporate training programs and to explore more flexible, cost-efficient training tools such as e-learning and Blended Learning.

There is also a clear trend for training that is condensed into bite-sized chunks, with shorter durations, which fit around day-to-day activities and, above all, will deliver significant returns on investment—all this whilst balancing the competing priorities of reducing costs with increasing performance.

Blended Learning programs, and their inherent flexibility, fit into this criterion wonderfully well. It is merely a question of finding the right blend for the desired need and outcome.

Yet another consideration is the talent and skills shortages seen in both high-growth markets such as Indonesia, China and India, and in Australia itself as well as Japan with an aging workforce. A recent global survey from PricewaterhouseCoopers found that around 40% of CEOs report difficulty in forecasting talent availability in these regions. In countries like Australia, the shortage of talent and skills is exacerbated by the vagaries of population size, location and geography, and the need for a blended mix of learning options across vast spaces and with a culturally diverse, multi-generational population is even more pressing.

All said, it is most certainly a 'buyer's market' with talent more fluid, greater levels of staff turnover, and the constant challenge to find the correct recruitment and retention strategies while keeping a cap on inflationary salary pressures. In many parts of the economy, the protection of talent is becoming critical, and L&D strategies have a key role to play in both growing local talent and supporting other retention strategies. Learning is taking on a more fluid and constant nature, moving beyond the traditional one-off training event to long-term development strategies that will be increasingly and inextricably linked to talent management and succession planning.

We believe this is more likely to happen sooner rather than later, and we the beginning of it in the lack of skilled graduates. A 2011 report by the World Bank into higher education revealed that levels of unemployment across the region are partly due to the fact that graduates 'simply do not have the right skills'. As university funding cuts continue, it is inevitable that Australian employers will search for talent from elsewhere.

At the same time, there's an ever-growing push for organisations to present a global footprint, and this can require a workforce that is not restricted by geography. Indeed, the demographics of the modern workplace are already significantly different from the past and, realistically, only a blend of learning solutions can truly meet the evolving needs of the modern workforce. Blended Learning programs also better enable local organisations to deal with critical factors to organisational success—leadership, diversity and change, to name but a few—by offering a variety of approaches and a comprehensive, inclusive approach to knowledge and skills development, sharing and transfer.



✦ 4. Key elements of Blended Learning

Let's now look in detail at the relative successes of different elements of Blended Learning today.

It's important to note that Blended Learning does not simply mean combining e-learning and face-to-face training. It means a whole plethora of tools from coaching by line managers to in-house development programs and social networking tools. While this paper won't go into detail on all these vehicles, let's briefly look at Blended Learning's key elements: face-to-face learning, e-learning and some of the emerging technology-based tools.

Face-to-face training

The classroom and other forms of personal instruction still remains one of the most popular forms of learning in most of the world. In Europe for example, a recent Cegos Group survey found over 90% of trained employees experienced classroom training and surprisingly, it is many of today's younger, tech-savvy generation who appear to be among the biggest advocates of face-to-face training.



When asked what they consider the most important contributing factors to a successful learning experience, respondents in the same survey said the expertise of the instructor or designer of the training (63%) and the appropriateness of the content (58%) were the two most important. TP3's experience over the last 30 years, and 15,000 learners participating in face-to-face activities annually, supports these findings.

e-Learning

E-learning is also one of the most important means of learning today across the world. While perhaps not living up to the hype first time round, when attention tended to focus on the technology of learning delivery rather than meeting the user's needs, e-learning today offers a very different value proposition and operates in a very different learning environment.

Once defined quite narrowly as computer-based training (CBT) or computer-assisted instruction (CAI), the term "e-learning" is now accepted to be broadly inclusive of all forms of educational technology from online and virtual education to m-learning, digital education collaboration and web-based training. When we refer to e-learning, we include the many types of media that deliver text, audio, images, animation and streaming video, and we include technology applications and processes such as online courseware, audio/video tape, satellite TV, CD-ROM and both local intranet/extranet and web-based learning.

In February 2010, Ambient Insight released a report entitled *The Worldwide Market for Self-paced eLearning Products and Services: 2009-2014 Forecast and Analysis*. This research looked at the growth of e-learning across the globe, and among the key findings included the prediction that the global market for e-learning is forecast to reach \$A46.9 billion by 2014. Critically, the Asia-Pacific region was expected to surpass Western Europe as the largest e-learning market behind North America by this time.

Emerging tools

Emerging learning tools and techniques—mobile learning, gamification, virtual classrooms and virtual worlds, multi-device learning, language learning, online communities and 3D simulated environments to name just a few—are also being rapidly integrated into L&D strategies and Blended Learning programs. Taking mobile learning, for example, we find ten of the top twenty countries in terms of mobile phone usage are in the Asia-Pacific region, with Australia near the forefront with an estimated mobile phone penetration of nearly 75% by 2015.

“ Emerging learning tools and techniques are being rapidly integrated into L&D strategies and Blended Learning programs ”

With gamification, also known as serious-games technology, more and more traditional gaming companies are now developing corporate versions. Chinese game developer Giant Interactive, for example, has collaborated with China's military to launch sophisticated game-based military training, and other gamification leaders such as Singapore-based Playware Studies Asia are leading the world in the development of enhanced learning through play.

5. The continuing evolution

One of the most important developments in Blended Learning over the last few years is the move from a technical training focus to broader professional development (PD) skills development.

When e-learning and Blended Learning were first introduced, they were predominantly considered to be ‘assembly’ learning—that is, a collection of diverse online modules cobbled together and without an overriding framework. This short-term focus resulted in e-learning being primarily technical in application, most commonly used for business areas such as compliance training and product orientation, and not to any degree for teaching broader business skills such as management, negotiation and strategic selling.

This has changed dramatically in the past four or five years, which have seen a step-change with Blended Learning incorporating e-learning now used more and more in personal and professional development and in developing those softer skills. While industry is typically spending up to five times more budget on health/safety, quality, compliance and technical training rather than on professional skills, it is the professional skills which can arguably have the greatest direct impact on an organisation’s bottom line. In the current economic climate, where building an engaged, change-ready and highly productive workforce is a critical success factor, developing management skills and delivering return on investment (ROI) is a central priority.

And in this, Blended Learning has a key role to play as HR and training professionals look for new ways to support effective leadership development and facilitate skills in key capability areas like communications, change management, diversity and innovation. It is no longer a subject of debate that Blended Learning can lead to better outcomes in terms of developing leadership and PD skills when it:

“ Blended Learning has a key role to play as HR and training professionals look for new ways to support effective leadership development ”

- Combines face-to-face learning methods, including on-the-job coaching, with technology-based interventions
- Incorporates organisational and social networking models
- Aligns to the learner’s individual needs and is driven by engagement with learners.

Let’s quickly review other key aspects of Blended Learning that are behind its growth:

The need for greater measurement

The more refined versions of Blended Learning now available are much more effective at tracking the individual’s performance and measuring the impact of training and ROI. This is now a crucial differentiator in Blended Learning’s value proposition as opposed to traditional approaches to training.

On this point, there has been great deal published on the ROI of various Blended Learning programs. In one well-publicised case, a leadership solutions firm company worked with American Express to deliver leadership training to thousands of mid-level managers, a project that compared three delivery methodologies—web-based only, blended and instructor-led—and measured which methodology best created a climate for high leadership improvement. And the results were staggering:

- In terms of satisfaction and learning retention outcomes, the three methods received similar positive outcomes regardless of how the training was delivered
- A third outcome measured, performance improvement, was greatest from a blended solution that combined online courseware with virtual meetings and 1:1 manager reinforcement
- Organisational impact and ROI analysis indicated the online learning and classroom delivery achieved similar results (both quite positive), while Blended Learning delivery achieved 200% higher impact (Source: PDI Corporation, 2010).

Meeting learner demands

Today’s learner is comfortable with a great many forms of technology, is looking to be truly engaged in the learning process, and wants a clear idea about where any training intervention will take them with regard to their personal and corporate goals. The new generation of learners wants to see training delivered through innovative, customised delivery channels—something that Blended Learning excels at providing.

Rapid access to information

Individuals, as well as, it can be said, entire organisations, are time-poor and knowledge-hungry. The need for instant access to learning is upon us. Learners want the answer to a business challenge as it presents itself, not at some time down the track. Modern technology-based Blended Learning enables us to better meet these needs through the use of mobile devices with access to technology-based learning, collaborative forums and social networking.

Aligning learning outcomes with goals

There must also be a structure and alignment between the organisation's corporate and functional goals and the learning goals of the individual. Every individual should know precisely what path their training is taking, where they are now and where they need to be. Today's learning should never drift.

Engaging today's learners

Effective Blended Learning is learner-driven, with the learner at the heart of all activities. It responds to specific needs in finding the most appropriate vehicle the individual can sign up to. The environment must be stimulating, with e-learning modules, for example, actively engaging the senses. As the learning populations become younger, there is an interest in more gaming and stimulating activities.

Focus on applying new skills

Blended Learning needs to focus on skills—the hard skills of business—that come from tailored case studies, role-playing scenarios and e-learning modules, for example, grounded in modern-day business realities. Blended Learning is highly effective in taking a set of abstract skills, embedding them in the individual and enabling these new skills to be applied at work. Developing management skills, managing change programs, selling, negotiating and enhancing customer relationships are all disciplines which are ideally suited to a Blended Learning environment.

Formal and informal learning needs

Blended Learning must be flexible, with a balance between informal and formal, a mixing and matching to meet individual needs, and the ability to move seamlessly between live online learning and other Blended Learning activities. Here it must be clearly understood that is no "right blend"—every single element of any Blended Learning solution should stand up in its own right and add to the overall learning experience.

Return on investment

As Paul Kearns, author of *Evaluating the ROI from learning: how to develop value-based training*, writes: "Real evaluation is about evidence-based learning. It is about having a crystal clear purpose, right at the outset, before any learning activity is even dreamt of, never mind delivered. It is about checking commitment to learning from the most senior levels of management and exposes those who are only too willing to pay lip service. It is about accountability as well as engaging the hearts and minds of the learner: surely the wellspring of all effective learning."

The need for customisation

Customisation doesn't mean just putting a brand logo on pre-existing training materials—it's about working closely with key stakeholders in the learning community to build relevant, appropriate content that is supported by activities and learning scenarios linked to real-work realities and challenges. And when Blended Learning is truly integrated it can be instantly measurable, with a clear focus on goals and outcomes defined at the beginning of the process. Individual needs should be tracked throughout the process and accelerated if and when necessary—something that first-generation Blended Learning offerings were light years away from achieving but which today is widely understood.



Understanding the technology

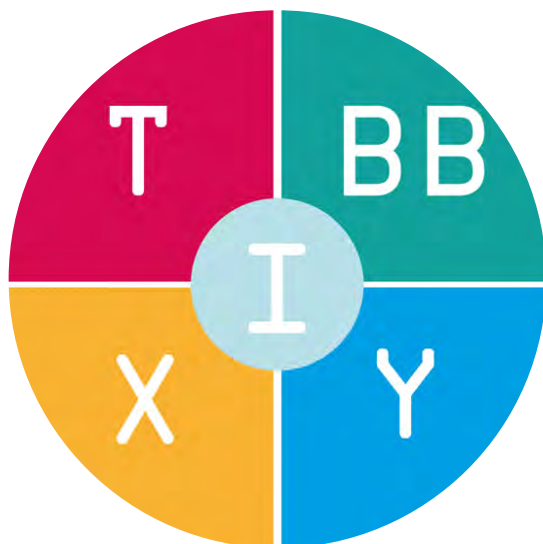
In Blended Learning, technology is an enabler, not a driver. The technology's functionality needs to be clearly understood by the user to exploit the promise of personalised content delivered in a near-live, interactive and senses-focused environment as possible. The demands on technology-based learning options are many, beginning with learners demanding functionality that includes mobility, accessibility, adaptability and easy application or transfer. Similarly, Blended Learning generally must include multiple sources of media and application to engage the senses and excite the learner into action.

Today, we are seeing a 'sea-change' in Blended Learning, one that can be described as moving from 'assemblers' to 'architects of learning solutions'. There is often now a three-way contract between the learner, the sponsoring organisation and the provider, and this ensures that the entire blending process can seamlessly integrate each component part and can be measured from day one in terms of learning outcome and impact on individual, and organisational, growth. Blended Learning is now a much more complete solution, no longer simply a delivery channel but an innovative L&D methodology.

✦ 6. Determining the "right mix"

So, what is the right mix for a successful Blended Learning program? While it'd be great to say, *just add x with y and a little bit of z*, unfortunately there's no magic formula or set recipe for success in Blended Learning.

And there's a simple answer why this is the case: truly successful Blended Learning utilises a real mix of delivery methods to provide options that engage different learners, with different needs, across geography, technologies, culture, time zones and time frames, and to meet different goals or motivations.



The key to determining the right mix for your organisation is to have your homework done up front. This is where you truly reap the benefits of:

- Knowing and aligning your learning strategy and development plans with your organisation's strategy and direction
- Having commitment from all levels of the organisation
- Clearly understanding the motivations and drivers of your learners
- Having incorporated learners' needs with capability gaps as determined by the work done during the earlier TNA process—where you've first determined what the organisation wants to achieve, where the learners actually are in their learning and where they need to get to.

Next, add factors like access to technology, time frames, deadlines, capabilities, workforce planning, development initiatives, change programs and business as usual, and then are you ready to determine the mix needed for the successful application of Blended Learning.

Generally speaking, successful Blended Learning initiatives have a healthy mix of traditional face-to-face learning with self-directed methods and technology-based e-learning and, often, even social, gaming and mobile aspects. They align with corporate needs yet are learner-focused. They engage all three partner groups (learner, organisation and facilitator), are agile, customisable and flexible, measurable and, critically, focused on the level of behavioural change that leads to post-learning productivity improvement.

From the authors' experiences as Blended Learning solutions creators and providers, here are some key learnings to help you drive successful Blended Learning programs. In our view, there are three guiding principles:

- Learning activities must combine to focus achieving behavioural change that leads to a clear performance improvement or outcome
- The learner must be involved and must see the training as relevant to their role and development
- The learning environment must be engaging and attractive to the learner.

These principles are best realised through a three-way contract or charter between the learner, the function within the organisation sponsoring the learning and the trainer or, if engaged, the external L&D partner. By agreeing on clear goals at each stage, and mutually agreeing on measurable outcomes, the result is far more likely to be a robust, commercially sound and successful learning solution.

Blended Learning is no longer just a delivery channel. It's now a sophisticated L&D methodology, one that is highly focused on the learner and highly attuned to the context in which learning takes place.

“ Blended Learning is no longer just a delivery channel. It's now a sophisticated L&D methodology ”

✦ 7. What a modern-day Blended Learning solution can look like

Let's look at a comprehensive Blended Learning solution recently implemented at a leading UK university with the goal to create an inclusive, integrated approach that would reflect the expectations of a new generation of learners. The process, built around the delivery of selected university curricula, comprised:



- Placing 350 undergraduate students into teams to explore how learning could be enhanced using freely available software including Facebook, Twitter, blogs, portable devices such as iPads and smart phones, and a widely used web-based e-portfolio, or personal learning, system
- Setting up Facebook groups as hubs to support peer learning via the Facebook Wall, discussions, sharing of links and videos, and synchronous (real-time, text-based) chat
- Online activities including posting additional subject information, interactions with team leaders, seeking feedback from other learners about learning issues to share with lecturers, and making notes available
- Rich exchanges and debate that followed on teams' walls, including discussions on information from other sources and contemporary events
- The use of a blog to distribute learning materials, and well as Twitter, e-portfolios and other social media to support students' learning
- Two-way communication between students and staff in regular face-to-face sessions supplemented by email and telephone.

The benefits realised at the conclusion of the project were immense. Firstly, it provided additional learning support for students. Secondly, it provided tremendous insight into how best to harness new technologies to support/stimulate collaborative learning, interactive content generation and content sharing. Indeed, analysis of interactions in the pilot revealed many beneficial behaviours students engaged in, including:



- Creating, extending and sharing module learning content
- Mediating between students and staff
- Peer support that filled gaps in other students' knowledge or understanding
- Creation of formative assessment learning activities with feedback
- Helping peers (for example, learners who had missed sessions or were having difficulty finding or understanding key information) and motivating and supporting each other
- Sharing ideas about how to learn and feeding these ideas into discussions

Other key learnings of the university's Blended Learning project were equally impressive:

- Increased engagement and achievement by learners, with course pass rates up to 10% higher than the previous year
- Improved attendance
- Devolved responsibility for technology support
- Cost benefits from the use of freely available software
- Very high levels of collaboration among learners.

“ academic staff felt they had a far greater feel for how learners were **progressing** and believed they were more willing to raise questions and **communicate** problems or issues “

From the perspective of academic staff, they felt they had a far greater feel for how learners were progressing and believed learners were more willing to raise questions and communicate problems or issues.

Now, were you to add the power of proven e-learning courseware and facilitated coaching/mentoring activities to this project, and you get a sense of just how potent a Blended Learning solution can be inside any organisation.

8. 12 tips for a successful Blended Learning event

1. Align your activity to guiding principles

- Are the learning goals aligned to the organisational, functional and individuals' learning imperatives – and agreed upon?
- Is the learning environment and method appropriate for the learners?
- Are actions planned that will engage learners at each step of the blended event?

2. Create a strong project coalition to guide your program

- Include participants from HR, L&D, the target audience (and its line management), the external partner if you're using one and, if possible, a senior-level sponsor with decision-making and budgetary sign-off authority
- Engage the coalition from project completion to final measurement

3. Create a high-level design based on all learning objectives and principles in point 1

- Be sure to include pre- and post-course assessment of knowledge and skills

4. Ensure your project coalition signs off on the high-level design for all elements of the program

5. Only now does the development commence—with full support and involvement from key stakeholders

6. Ensure all content elements within the blended learning track (that is, the learning journey from where you are now to where you need to be) can be aligned to your learning goals and organisational outcomes

- Populate this journey with selected learning elements be they live, online, assessment etc.
- This fully blended experience should extend over a period of weeks, not just the traditional few days in a classroom, and all of it (a) managed by the learner and (b) executed in short, manageable bursts

7. Ensure all content elements are INTEGRATED, not merely assembled

- Every part of the assessment, online learning, live learning and follow-up relates to each other
- Key content and themes are consistent, reinforced and enhanced throughout the learning event

8. Ensure each component part must fulfill its role

- Assessment must be based on measuring specific skills and behaviours required within a role in order to perform and growth
- E-learning must aim to provide the “must-have” knowledge base to ensure learners receive content that's relevant, appropriate and applicable to their context within their day-to-day operations
- Live training is best when completed over a two-day period
- The live program should focus on skills development that is aligned to course objectives and agreed goals and enable lots of practice, challenge, discussion and application to a “real-world” workplace challenge
- Post course activity (such as e-learning, on-the-job line management involvement, and assessment) must closely align to what has preceded it to enable measurement of knowledge and skills development, provide ongoing feedback and coaching, and develop the “new” ways of working

9. Always be flexible and willing to modify/refine and engage with learners

- Strive to balance between informal and formal support and action, seamless across all parts of the blended program

10. Track progress and gather ROI measurables from regular reviews by your project steering group

- Gather, discuss, summarise and present both qualitative and quantitative elements to sponsors and learners' managers

11. Remember: technology is the enabler of the process, not the driver

- Use technology that's user friendly and appropriate to learners in terms of its functionality, interactivity and ease of use

12. Be prepared to ask two questions before, during and after the learning event:

- “What if?”
- “What next?”

9. Leverage the experts

In our view, the past few years have witnessed growing acknowledgement that organisations need external help with their Blended Learning activities, particularly in their design and content development.

With many organisations downsizing their L&D functions, the need to deliver skills and knowledge training, compliance training and talent development continues unabated—leading to an even greater need to partner with learning organisations and third-party partners. And similarly, there’s correspondingly pressure on external providers to meet organisations’ demand for return on their learning investments.

External providers must ensure they have a strong understanding of the client, the client’s learning goals and needs, the market, and the developmental aims in a global context whilst still being able to localise the content where appropriate. Australia is well positioned in this regard, with a robust VET sector framework which recognises the value and use of Blended Learning as a way to achieve industry-benchmarked standards and established performance outcomes.



10. At the end of the day

Blended Learning solutions can do much more than simply help organisation’s meet compliance or tick the “our staff attended training” box. Successful blended solutions facilitate the growth of knowledge and productivity improvement, deal with change, acknowledge diversity, and meet very clearly identified individual and organisational needs.

There’s little doubt that Blended Learning is truly ‘the’ learning solution for our time—not simply because programs can be better tailored to learners’ individual needs and preferences, nor because of its undoubted cost and ROI benefits, and not just because Blended Learning has finally broken through to professional development areas—but because it fosters a genuine partnership between learners, managers and the L&D function.

Blended Learning promotes a three-way charter between training suppliers, internal training personnel (representing the organisation) and learners, all working in partnership to deliver effective, innovative, change- and performance-based learning solutions.

The result is a more innovative and effective approach to learning for organisations in the Asia-Pacific region, and an exciting and dynamic future.



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* 12. About Cegos Group

Cegos Group, established in 1926, is an international leader in continuing professional development. The organisation's consultants have expertise across all subject areas in management and developing competencies: human resources, management and leadership, performance and organisational skills, individual and team performance, marketing and commercial, project management and deployment of large training systems internationally.

Cegos's Blended Learning solution, Global Learning by Cegos®, is a fully integrated, supported and blended training solution which combines the latest skills-based, face-to-face learning techniques with relevant and interactive online training modules. Global Learning by Cegos provides self-assessment opportunities across the learning activity to help individuals track their knowledge and skills developments, and the entire blended program can be deployed internationally, is available in seven different languages, and can be tailored to a specific organisation, grounding the learning in the reality of the business challenges the learners face on a day-to-day basis. For more information, please visit www.cegos.com.sg.



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* 13. About TP3

TP3 is the leader in Knowledge and Productivity Improvement, or KPI, the term representing the intersection of two previously discrete disciplines—learning expertise and information management—to maximise the effectiveness of human capital, processes and organisations.

TP3 facilitates the development of people and streamlines systems to combine human capital skills, knowledge and attitude with organisational systems and processes. This drives lasting value in the form of motivated employees, enhanced workforce performance and improved organisational competitiveness. For more information, please call TP3 on 1300 658 388 (toll-free), visit us at www.TP3.com.au or email us at Marketing@TP3.com.au





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TP3 Alumni Group is a discussion forum about the many aspects of Knowledge and Productivity Improvement that is based on the beliefs that people work best when they have the right information, skills and expertise, and that systems work best when based on information people need that's accurate and accessible. We invite your views, news, questions and ideas on Knowledge and Productivity Improvement whether you're in HR or IT, learning or leadership, change management, line of business, compliance or documentation.

TP3 Knowledge Management Group is for people with a special interest in knowledge and information management to connect with peers and share ideas.

✳ 14. About The Authors

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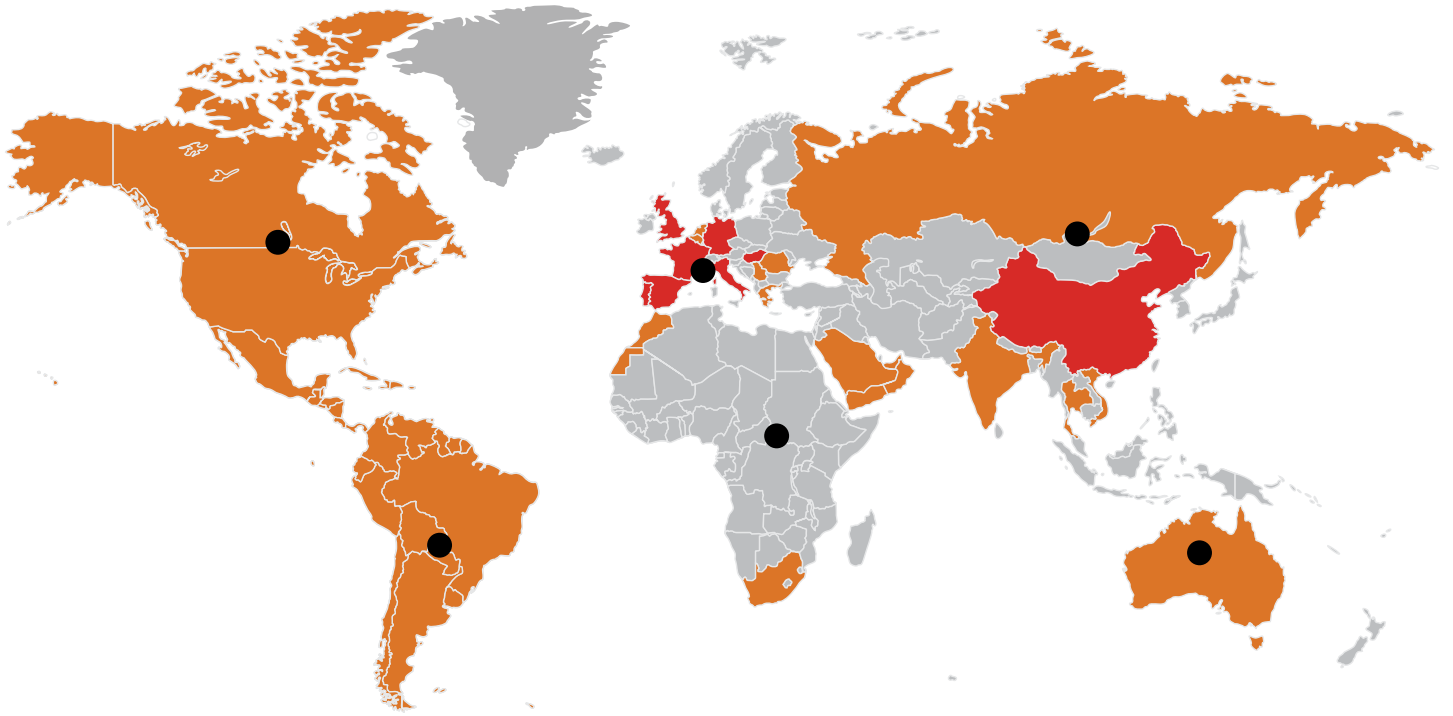
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