

The Future of Blended Learning

Adapting L&D
Programs to a
Scattered Workforce



The world of work has gone through some dramatic changes...

Yet, the need for organizational learning and development burns ever bright. Social distancing has caused many L&D programs to pivot from an instructor-led delivery model to a virtual delivery paired with an eLearning component. However, for many industries and organizations, the need for ILT remains. The workforce of the future is shaping up to a much larger percentage of remote employees than ever before. Adapting blended learning programs to meet the needs of both remote and in-house employees is a must. This eBook will address 4 ways to adjust blended learning programs to be more inclusive and accommodate all employees.



The necessity of learning hasn't diminished. New employees need to be onboarded to close any knowledge gaps and assimilate to the organization. Beyond that, demand for learning content can be found at nearly every level of the workforce, from the C-suite to rank and file employees.

According to a [2019 industry report](#), employees spent an average of 42.1 hours in workplace training, in one form or another. Frequently requested learning topics are routinely skills refinement courses as well as leadership development. Fundamental topics such as ever-changing compliance and safety training are always in need. Yet, despite the constant call to find workplace efficiencies, the reported hours and annual spending around training remains consistent. Organizational learning must also adapt.

A Quick Definition

What is “blended learning”?

There are many definitions of the term, but for this purpose it is defined as a learner using multiple modalities including eLearning and a version of a live instructor to advance a learning objective. Ideally, the process involves eLearning paired with instructor-led training or virtual-ILT, with deliberate crossover of learning content.

The purpose of the crossover is to leverage both methods to work together toward a learning objective beyond simply knowledge acquired but to illustrate true growth. After all, learning is rarely a single event, but rather a process that fulfills over time.

Offering learners a variety of learning methods not only reduces barriers to absorbing knowledge, but also enables an instructor to strategize the preferred learning method of the individuals in their care.



Why Choose “*Blended*”?

A central diagram illustrates the components of blended learning. At the center is a laptop displaying a dashboard with three icons: a pie chart, a speech bubble, and a person. Surrounding the laptop are five circular icons connected by dashed lines: a calendar with the number '25' (top left), a globe with a location pin (top right), a target with an arrow (bottom right), a group of three people (bottom left), and a small green circle (top center).

Person to person learning is still the go-to method for many companies. According to a 2019 survey, ILT was the primary method of training delivery for 90% of the organizations reporting to the survey. Social distancing restrictions as well as a rapidly expanding remote workforce is undoubtedly boosting the switch to a virtual-ILT delivery. One advantage to learning leaders adapting to a virtual ILT delivery is the potential to include larger class sizes. That’s why the consistency of training -at scale- is an inherent trouble spot for ILT. Blended learning is one way of minimizing this risk by playing to the strengths of each method.

Offering content in multiple formats is a step in the right direction, but the advantage to a blended learning method is playing to the strength of the medium. For example, the unique and inherent potential of an instructor-led event is opportunity to provide an environment for practice, application, feedback, and evaluation. This is often a shortcoming of eLearning which is largely centered around transfer of knowledge.



1. Complement Your ILT & vILT

For each learning objective, every learner enters the classroom with a different depth or breadth of knowledge. Starting the conversation at a fundamental level may cause advanced students to disengage. Adding an eLearning component and assigning curated learning content (videos, or even documents) prior to an ILT event can help create a more consistent baseline of knowledge for students entering the classroom. Blended learning allows these learning methods to complement one another, drawing up on the strengths each has to offer. It ultimately narrows the knowledge gap between members of the group, keeping the more informed learners from disengaging while waiting for others to catch up.



Optimizing classroom time through eLearning benefits not only the attendees but also the instructor. This affords the ILT event to be more interactive than instructive and more engaging than a simple lecture. This can reduce time-to-competency and increase the sought-after “a-ha moment” common in learning, and potentially lead to innovation.

2. Adapt to Modern Communication Tools

In 2020, a large portion of the workforce took a step toward completing the digital transformation. [Gallup polls](#) showed 62% of employed Americans reported working remotely in the spring of 2020. For many, this included utilizing video conferencing technology to connect with coworkers. This pattern of independent working (or eLearning) and then checking in via a video conference call (or vILT event) is not dissimilar to a blended learning environment.

Learning content is also changing. While traditional eLearning formats are still in high demand, new formats are experiencing a great deal of success. Podcasts, short video tutorials or microlearning lessons, eBooks, and shareable articles are finding their way into many curated learning programs. This shouldn't come as a surprise when looking at the changing workforce. Millennials already make up the [largest generation in the workforce at 35%](#). This generation, along with the next, Gen Z, came of age during an era of great technological advancement with computers and other rapidly changing technology more accessible than ever before.

To make blended learning programs work, it helps to meet the learner where they are. That could mean offering an ILT event and recording the training to be consumed in smaller chunks as needed. By using different modes to the same end, the probability rises that one method will work for the learner.



3. Make Programmatic Adjustments

Adapting a blended learning program to meet the needs of both in-person and remote employees doesn't mean starting from scratch. However, reassessing learning programs is not without its difficulties. For performance-based learning, this complicates how a learning leader may conduct an assessment. Where in-person evaluations were once the norm, switching to a user-submitted video recording of the process might suffice. Though it may not be as streamlined as an ILT event, the tools to facilitate this are readily available. Recording and uploading video content is well within the bounds of most learners' abilities using virtually any modern smartphone.

Another new challenge for some leaders in a remote workforce is how to effectively lead remote teams. This may be a new relationship model for some as not all leadership training covers this ground. This may be an opportunity to adjust leadership training curriculums as well as retrain existing leaders.

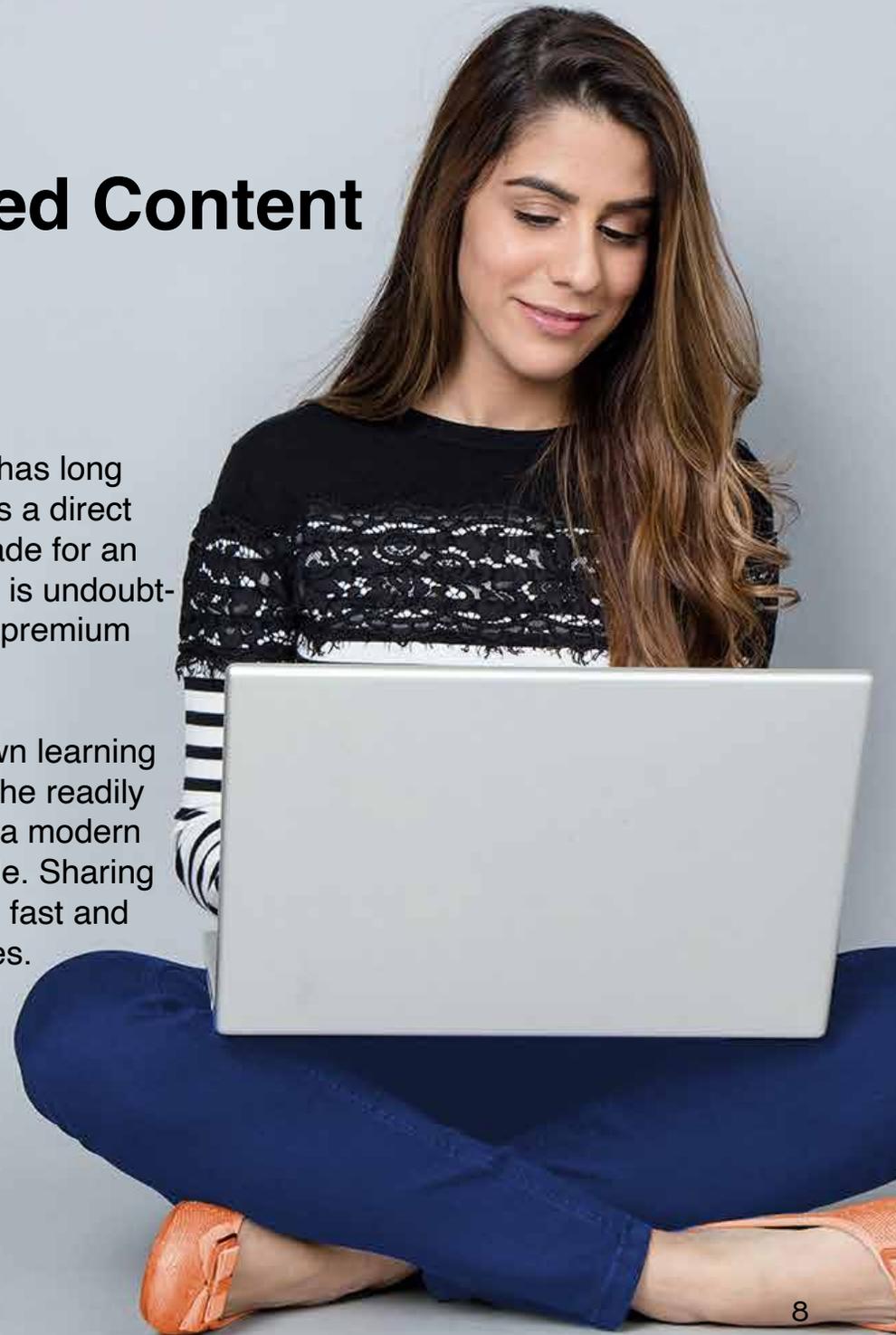
When virtual learning events occur, providing learners with a link to the recording of that event can be helpful. Many video conferencing platforms already offer the feature. In addition, packaging the video with any reference materials used can be helpful as well as notes from the event. This could come in the form as a dedicated forum on the event to further discussion. A few, simple adjustments such as these may be all that is required to be effective.

4. Embrace User-Created Content

Providing content that “speaks” to a particular learning group has long been a challenge. The value of a piece of learning content has a direct correlation to the specifics of the audience. Content that is made for an organization (or even a specific team within that organization) is undoubtedly more engaging than an off-the-shelf course. This type of premium content has historically carried a premium price to match.

The modern tech-savvy employee can easily produce their own learning content and upload it to their learning management system. The readily available tech in a smartphone and simple upload features in a modern LMS allow users to create learning content specific to their role. Sharing best practices or policy updates quickly after an ILT event is a fast and cost-effective way of aligning a workforce on training objectives.

Take advantage of “the wisdom of the crowd” by inviting learners to create their own learning content to share with their peers.



Think About This:

Instructor-led training remains a default method for many organizations *because human interaction matters.*

In the [2019 ATD state of the industry report](#), 36% of time spent in instructor-led training was devoted to soft-skills, personal development, and especially leadership development. Applying a blended learning method to this type of training can help to set up employees for success by removing barriers to engagement. This offers learners greater “buy-in” to a program by providing access to learning content outside of an ILT event, so that it may be consumed at a time, place, and pace that the learner is most receptive to it.

From there, learners can then enter that ILT event with a greater degree of preparation on the subject, and perhaps have a greater level of participation and engagement.

The goal, ultimately, is to affect real change though engaging employees.



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