Blended Learning - the Good, the Bad, and the Not-so-ugly

Presented by Kim Bahr and Rebecca Bodrero
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As the industry continues to integrate online, mobile, social, and other methods for learning into our culture, many hold tight to the traditional instructor-led approach. This session explores the challenges of converting an instructor-led course to a course that incorporates blended learning techniques that can be used face-to-face (F2F) and with distance programs. Learners can benefit from a blended learning approach as different learning tools, both formal and informal, are combined to create an optimal learning experience. Through interactive activities and case studies, the session will provide lessons learned, recommendations to accommodate transition to a blended approach, and ideas for best practices.

Objectives

- Identify benefits of the blended learning approach
- Discuss and practice blended learning techniques that can be adopted into F2F
- Identify how informal learning tools can enhance formal learning activities.

Definition

Blended learning refers to a mixing of different learning environments. Blended is also known as “hybrid” and “mixed-mode.” It combines traditional F2F classroom methods with more modern computer-mediated activities. A blended approach could include meeting F2F less and incorporating online learning activities or structuring activities around online resources and interaction with distance learners.

Computer-mediated resources include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Computer-mediated Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blended Approach</strong></td>
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</table>
| On-demand Learning and Knowledge Management | • Multimedia promotional material, learning bursts  
• Webinars  
• Wiki, frequently asked questions (FAQs), job aids  
• Bookmarks  
• Shared files and online resources |
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blended Approach</th>
<th>Resource Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Learning</td>
<td>• Blogs&lt;br&gt;• Discussion forums and interest groups&lt;br&gt;• Profiles and networking</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-learning</td>
<td>• Self-paced tutorials and practice exercises&lt;br&gt;• Online assessment and certification&lt;br&gt;• Advanced webinars</td>
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**Blended Learning Modes and Techniques**

Learning tools and delivery modes range from formal to informal. With informal learning, learners tend to pull and extract what they want or need to learn. In traditional formal learning, content is typically pushed to the learner. Informal learning tools can enhance formal learning activities.

Online activities can include real-time discussion and social learning resources. Table 1 summarizes various social learning resources, their definitions, and possible strategies.

**Possible benefits of a blended learning approach include:**

- Increased learner engagement
- Improved learning effectiveness; better outcomes for learners
- Increased efficiency of in-class time and optimizes resources
- Cost-effective way to relieve overcrowded classrooms
- Convenient alternative to the traditional classroom experience; accommodate various learning styles and support learners at different phases in the learning process
- Increased variety of delivery and learning strategies, informal and formal
- Decreased delivery limitations by having a mix of delivery modes
- Increased flexibility in managing schedules, task loads, and out-of-class factors
- Increased learner participation and accountability in the learning process

**Benefits of Blended Learning**

Table 1 summarizes various social learning resources, their definitions, and possible strategies.

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Table 2: Social Learning Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Possible Strategies</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
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| Ability to organize work, plan next steps, execute tasks, and track projects; easily tap an expanding professional network to help execute everyday deliverables faster. | • Execute a checklist for a solution or project.  
• Track progress through an established list of activities.  
• View a learning burst or promotion/demonstration. |
| **Blogs** | | |
| Web page to present or access ideas, receive feedback, and learn from the expertise and experience of others who blog. | • Benefit from expert knowledge and experiences noted in an expert’s blog.  
• Brainstorm innovative ideas.  
• Share information. |
| **Bookmarks** | | |
| Ability to save, organize, and share web content; discover bookmarks that have been qualified by others with similar interests & expertise. | • Use bookmarks to organize and tag information and media resources from the Internet.  
• Access expert-filtered bookmarks. |
| **Profiles** | | |
| Who’s who; search across your organization using tags to identify expertise, current projects, and responsibilities; quickly find the people you need. | • Support experiential learning by granting real-time access to leaders, instructors, and subject matter experts (SME).  
• Help learners establish a network of experts, users, and other parties of interest. |
| **Shared Files** | | |
| Files accessible to all team members; tag files so that they’re easy to find. | • Collect information files and resources for just-in-time learning. |
| **Forums** | | |
| Web presence for groups of shared interests; exchange and share information with one another via web browser, instant messaging, and email software. | • Enable learners to explore and discover best practices. They can collaborate and learn from each other through interaction, team building, and peer feedback. Learners can brainstorm, refine innovative ideas, and note lessons learned and best practices.  
• Foster on-the-job social learning through communities of practice (common interest) or purpose (common goals).  
• Present crowd-source real-time “HowTo”-type information with YouTube videos, images and URLs. |
| **Wikis** | | |
| Web page for collaboratively authored content. | • Efficiently collaborate to produce job aids, best practices, and lessons learned resources. |
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References