

Tips for implementing successful blended learning

25 considerations and pointers



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Tips for implementing a successful e-learning strategy

"Online learning is not the next big thing, it is the now big thing."

Donna J Abernathy

"We need to bring learning to people instead of people to learning."

Elliott Masie, Masie Center

"Tell me, and I'll forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I'll understand"

- Chinese Proverb

"Technological change is the only constant in our work today"

"People love to learn but hate to be taught"

Michael Yacobian,

1. E-learning can be a disaster if it is not managed correctly. It is not the panacea, it is just a means to an end. To be successful, e-learning has to have the right fit with the organisation.
2. It should not be chosen because it is fashionable. It should be chosen because it is the most efficient and effective way to meet the identified learning need.
3. Like most change implementations in organisations, success comes from careful planning and execution.
4. The normal project management principles apply. Special attention should be placed on managing expectations, ensuring management commitment, identifying and involving all key stakeholders throughout the process.
5. The credibility of the e-learning implementation team is critical. The introduction of new methods and technologies can create hesitation at both the employee and management levels. This hesitation can be overcome if people have confidence in the people leading the change.
6. Change management involves planning for the change itself as well as planning for the introduction of the new techniques or processes.
7. The starting point for an e-learning project involves consideration of both individual and organisational issues.
8. At the individual level, the likely reaction to e-learning by employees needs to be identified. Have they had exposure to e-learning previously? Are they computer literate? How do they generally react to change? These are just some of the questions that should be considered at the individual level.
9. At the organisation level, the key business drivers should be identified. How will we give access to learners? Are employees geographically dispersed? How critical are cost factors? How critical is ROI (Return on Investment)?
10. If the needs of individuals are satisfied, then there is more likelihood that organisational needs will also be met.
11. Resistance to change will be minimised if the e-learning is aimed at the right level and the correct organisational cultural fit has been determined. Cultural fit includes consideration of the employee profile, organisational approach, communication style, technology adoption and so on.
12. Some e-learning implementations are basic, others very complicated and detailed. The right implementation builds on an established base. If existing learning methods are basic, then the initial e-learning implementation should be basic as well. If the organisation is sophisticated, then the e-learning system can also be sophisticated. In fact, it will probably be expected. This does not mean that we should only aim for the basic level - e-learning is a wonderful opportunity

"Learning is more than just content or delivery software. It needs to be integrated into a broader learning process involving instructional support and collaboration, and designed with emphasis on the learning objectives. It also needs to be seen in the context of the broader strategy for training and skills development within a company and in many cases this means that it needs to be integrated into existing training delivery, creating a blended solution."

Sheila McGovern, senior research analyst for IDC

"Organisations will never have a truly sustainable advantage that's based on products or prices. You need to focus on the rate at which people learn. It's the learning speed of the slowest, not the learning speed of the brightest few, that will set the pace for your company."

Jim Haudan

"E-learning gets information out there faster and can be modified more easily than the traditional long-term, lecture-based training class."

Greg Heeter, Director of e-Learning Services, Siemens ICN

13. to stretch the organisation, by introducing new methods and approaches that take advantage of technology.
14. The management of expectation and success applies to both management as a group as well as individual employees – promoting your successes helps bring others on board.
15. Keeping expectations at the right level throughout the project is critical. Statements and claims made must be achievable. In conversations, misunderstandings have to be clarified immediately. Communication has to be ongoing and feedback mechanisms need to be in place. You need to know how your message is being interpreted.
16. High management expectations will also reinforce management commitment. High expectations help in gaining support. If expectations are too high or unrealistic, problems will occur when the situation is corrected and actual achievements are made known. Management support can quickly falter, so avoidance of misunderstanding is critical.
17. Similarly, other stakeholders have to be kept informed. Reports should be accurate and up-to-date. Good communication and ongoing engagement are essential. Having 'a finger on the pulse' encourages ongoing, positive commitment.
18. There are many variables in an e-learning project. Each one will be different. A solution that has worked for one organisation may be problematic for another.
19. The learning topic must be suitable for an e-learning approach. Traditionally, this has been information type training - new products, policies, approaches, etc. The ability to include simulations and other avenues for dealing with skills issues has broadened the types of training that can be covered. The first questions to be asked concern the suitability of e-learning to the topic area. Is the topic suitable for an e-learning approach? Is the training predominately information or skills based?
20. Compliance training is a typical e-learning application. In some cases, employees may have some existing knowledge and skills. E-learning can include pre and post course testing. The pre-test means employees can start at their own level and the post-test provides concrete evidence for compliance audit purposes. This design feature encourages the use of e-learning in compliance training.
21. The second group of questions relate to the proposed target group - the people who need the training. What is their exposure to e-learning? What is their attitude towards the subject area? Is the training need information or skills based, or is there some attitudinal change required as well? If attitudinal change is required, the level of sophistication of the learning design grows dramatically. In some cases, e-learning may not be suitable.
22. Participant background is important. Participant numbers and location also add to the situation. The larger the number, the more cost effective e-learning can be. The greater the geographic spread, the more cost effective e-learning becomes.

"Learning is a process not an event"

Elliott Masie, Masie Center

23. Consideration of the learning topic and the proposed participants means that the learning method has to be considered. Should the project rely solely on e-learning, or should there be some face-to-face training as well –blended learning? The design of an e-learning module requires the designer/programmer to anticipate all the likely issues that may emerge and include the content accordingly. An experienced trainer in a classroom might not anticipate every question, but he or she should have the knowledge and skills to be respond in a way that satisfies the enquiry.
24. Although the concept of quickly developed e-learning (rapid training) is being promoted as new software tools emerge, properly designed and executed e-learning can be expensive to develop. However, implementation costs (apart from the participant time costs) by comparison are negligible. If large numbers are to be trained, it can be very cost effective.
25. In the end, success depends on a motivated enthusiastic project team, winning “buy-in” across the organisation, identifying all the issues and developing appropriate responses. The credibility of the implementation team will be greatly enhanced if this approach is adopted and implemented.

Remember that the ultimate purpose of blended learning is not to just reduce the cost of training, but to drive business performance. If you cannot identify the business goal of a blended learning program, you should ask why you are doing it in the first place.

Remember - Blended learning is a business performance improvement tool, not a training tool – constantly position it strategically with alignment to the business needs!

THE END