

## How much longer can your organization afford classroom training?

### *A True Story*

A few weeks ago I attended a three day training session in Dallas, TX. Between the times I left my house and I arrived at my hotel, over six and a half hours had elapsed even though it was just under a two and a half hour flight. No doubt I would have arrived at the hotel earlier had I not had to parley with the airline's customer service about my lost luggage, how quickly they might locate it and the potential that I would receive it before the class began the next day.

At the training session were eighteen leaders and executives who had traveled from locations as near as Plano, TX and as far as Portland, OR and Mexico City, Mexico. It was an interesting session with engaging class discussions, readings, group activities, case studies and three videos. The instructor was very skilled, experienced and engaging. Overall, it was an enjoyable and stimulating learning experience.

When I returned home (after a two-and-a-half hour flight delay) and prepared my expense report, my travel expenses totaled nearly \$1250.00. Multiplying that amount by the 18 participants made me realize that over \$22,000 was spent simply on getting participants to and from the learning experience along with housing, meals, etc. It occurred to me that the era of "glamorous" business travel was long gone and that organizations have to find a better way to leverage those travel budgets in ways that bring greater value and learning to training participants.

As you consider the future of classroom training in your organization, ask yourself:

- In how many different locations are your employees—U.S. and/or international?
- How many dollars are being spent to cover travel costs?
- How often do you hear employees say they can't take time away to attend training?
- How many leaders/managers does your organization have who lead virtual teams?

While there are certainly more questions to ponder, these can begin some important dialogue about the future of training delivery in your organization.

### *Curbing Travel Expenses in the Short-Term*

It has been reported that as much as forty cents of every dollar spent on in-person corporate learning is eaten up by travel and lodging costs.<sup>1</sup> There are some fairly easy, short-term ways to reduce travel expenses associated with training. According to the ASTD 2007 State of the Industry Report, one organization reduced the number of traditional training classes for a four-day course, centralized the classes in locations easy to reach by driving, required double-occupancy at the hotel, and restructured the course to begin late on Monday morning. The result was a savings of a whopping \$162.5 million!<sup>2</sup> No doubt these savings are impressive, but they are at best short-term fixes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Building a Business Case for E-Learning. GeoLearning.

<sup>2</sup> ASTD 2007 State of the Industry Report, 19.

## ***What's Wrong with this Picture?***

In 2006, live, instructor-led (in-person) training accounted for 71.36 percent of the learning hours delivered.<sup>3</sup> The consolidated average for technology-based learning reached 30.28 percent of learning hours provided in 2006. Of this online learning, roughly 80 percent was self-paced.<sup>4</sup> The problem with self-paced learning as a whole is that most of it is never completed. According to Development Dimensions International, 50 – 90% of web-based courses are never completed.<sup>5</sup> For some aspects of technical training, this completion rate may be acceptable if we believe that people should simply access the information they need to learn based on their existing knowledge and experience. That approach is not so effective when people must learn processes and skills that build upon one another such as coaching, interviewing, and leadership styles in order to successfully apply them.

## ***There Is Another Way***

Too often those of us in the workplace learning and performance profession find ourselves caught in this dilemma of having to choose between instructor-led classroom training and self-paced e-learning. But there are other options. E-learning, blended with other performance development techniques and structure, can significantly improve both completion rates and learning-to-performance application. The rest of this article explores an approach that takes some of the best of both classroom instruction and e-learning and blends them into a highly organized, highly-interactive, time-specific learning experience that participants complete.

First let's distinguish between e-learning and blended learning. For this article, we will use the following definitions.

**E-learning** is the use of internet technologies to deliver a broad array of solutions that enhance knowledge and performance (Rosenberg, 2001).

**Blended learning** is a combination of learning methods that help to advance and promote learning. Some of these learning methods may be delivered via the web, while others engage a variety of technologies. Additionally, these can be supported by face-to-face instructor-led training that focuses on skill practice and application.

This learner-centered model illustrates some of the components that might be part of a blended learning experience.



<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>5</sup> Pete E. Weaver, "Avoiding e-Learning Failure," White paper, 2004.

## ***A Blended Learning Approach***

For ordinary people to be able to accomplish extraordinary things, they need a combination of structure and support. A successful blended learning course provides both of these to participants so that they are more likely to complete and apply their learnings to their work. This sort of blended learning of approach draws on the best of classroom and e-learning. To be more specific, this approach is instructor-led, organized, time-specific and highly interactive. Participants enroll as a class and, together, participate in a variety of methodologies that provide learning and performance application of the content.

Let's look at a comparison between an instructor-led classroom course and a blended learning course in leadership. Note that the content is the same for both courses.

	<b>Instructor-led Classroom Course</b>	<b>Blended Learning Course</b>
<b>Number of Participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20</li> </ul>
<b>Course Length</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 ½ days (12 hours)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3-4 hours / week over four weeks</li> </ul>
<b>Participant Materials Costs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same</li> </ul>
<b>Travel costs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$300 – \$600 (or more) for out-of-area participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>
<b>Training Delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor-dependent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology-dependent</li> </ul>
<b>Instructor Facilitation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducted in the classroom during class time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducted anywhere at anytime during the course</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor-managed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-managed and instructor-managed</li> </ul>
<b>Learner Equipment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telephone and PC with audio and video functions</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Structures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course schedule</li> <li>• Classroom exercises, case studies, and discussions</li> <li>• Discussion groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course schedule</li> <li>• Weekly exercises, case studies, and online discussions</li> <li>• Virtual discussion groups</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor-facilitated discussions</li> <li>• Verbal feedback and support from the instructor and other course participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor-facilitated webconferences</li> <li>• Online and telephone coaching</li> <li>• Other course participants—either in person or online</li> <li>• Text feedback and support (discussion boards and e-mail)</li> <li>• Online Q &amp; A</li> </ul>
<b>Skill Practice Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During class time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During webconferences</li> <li>• Virtual team case studies</li> <li>• Individual applications between weekly assignments</li> </ul>

When participants have an opportunity to learn over time and to apply the concepts and skills as they're learning, they report a higher level of confidence in their ability to perform these on the job. In addition, they develop a sense of community (support) with other participants located anywhere in the world which broadens their organizational perspective and commitment.

### ***Shifting from Instructor-led Classroom Training to Blended Learning***

As your organization begins to budget and make plans for the year ahead, think about ways in which you may be able to shift some of your resources to the development of blended learning courses. For any learning and development intervention to be successful, it has to be positioned within the broader context of the business strategy.

#### ***Some Factors to Consider***

**1. Have a strategy.**

To make blended learning successful in your organization, consider where it fits into your overall performance improvement strategy. This may involve an organizational analysis to identify workplace performance opportunities and gaps.

**2. Consider where blended learning fits into your strategy.**

Do you have an organizational culture that's conducive to blended learning delivery as well as the resources available to support it? Identify costs in terms of both hard dollars being spent and soft dollars related to staff salaries and expertise needed to develop course material for a blended learning format.

**3. Set some performance goals, plans and measures.**

Develop goals to address performance opportunities and gaps. As you consider potential ways in which blended learning can support these goals, identify target audiences, content, and resources required.

**4. Start small**

Select an audience and performance gap to address with a blended learning approach. Start slowly and gain experience. Like most things, it's never as easy as it seems.

**5. Expand**

Once you have built some successes, look for opportunities to expand. Be sure to market and communicate the results and impact of the courses to the organization.

### ***Balance Your Budget and Your Options***

E-learning and blended learning are not panaceas or magic bullets. But they do provide opportunities to leverage your learning and development resources beyond classroom training. They also have the potential to improve the application of learning-to-performance above the fifteen percent typically gained from classroom training only. Can your organization afford not to offer blended learning as part of your workplace learning and performance strategy?

### ***Author Bio***

Lee Johnsen, SPHR, CPT, CPLP  
Partners in Development  
889 S. Dwyer Ave.  
Arlington Heights, IL 60005  
847-255-1031  
[johnsenL@ameritech.net](mailto:johnsenL@ameritech.net)



### ***Biography***

Lee Johnsen is President of Partners in Development (PID), a consulting firm specializing in leadership, management and organizational development. He has held officer and management positions in Fortune 500 corporations and government agencies and has managed people for over 20 years. He has authored and facilitated several blended learning, web-based courses focusing primarily on leadership and management development. His experience encompasses strategic planning, succession planning, needs assessment, design, delivery and evaluation. He is a published author in the book, “Real World Teambuilding Strategies That Work” (Insight Publishing).