



Canadian Management Centre

# Best of Both Worlds: Blending New and Proven Approaches to Workplace Learning

*Meeting the Need of the Modern Learner Series*



## Executive Summary

The data clearly shows the link between workplace training, business performance and employee retention. Although we know that face-to-face training offers levels of personalisation, interaction and practice that cannot be replicated online, time for classroom-based training is limited.

The challenge for business leaders and L&D professionals is to promote effective employee development that produces real on-the-job performance improvement, while optimizing return on investment and minimizing disruption to the business.

Blended learning is an alternative approach to either eLearning or classroom courses alone, which integrates live training with digital technologies such as microlearning via mobile phones, games and virtual reality simulations,

creating a unified learning experience that is cost-effective, highly-engaging and produces real results for modern businesses and professionals.

This is the second of three articles exploring challenges and opportunities in modern workplace learning. Our next article, ***Technology and the Science of Learning: Using digital technologies to support brain-friendly workplace training***, will take a deeper dive into the science of learning and how digital technologies work with the brain's natural tendencies. It will also look closely at how technologies such as Virtual Reality, microlearning and gamification can be used in a professional learning context.

The first article in this series ***Workplace Learning: Managing the present, anticipating the future*** is available at [cmcoutperform.com/free-resources](http://cmcoutperform.com/free-resources).

## The Value of Face-to-Face Training

Leaders know that investing in employees' development is essential to success. The evidence clearly shows the link between a strong culture of learning and company performance.

Companies offering comprehensive training realize approximately **218%** higher income per employee

*(cited in Training Journal, 2017).*

A company loses between **10-30%** of its capabilities every year due to turnover, new technology and changes in business

*(IBM Corporation, 2014).*

**91%** of high performing employees cited learning and development opportunities as key to keeping them in their jobs






*(Pulse of Talent Report, Ceridian, 2017)*

Despite its proven value, finding time and resources to build the skill sets companies and employees need to thrive is a constant challenge.

Traditional training methods require taking days off work to attend face-to-face training sessions, but time is a rare resource and professionals at all levels are distracted and overwhelmed. We strive continually to accomplish more in less time, making us reluctant to put our busy lives on hold for the sake of professional development.

Current technology means that we no longer depend on traditional training models, and the pressure of time limitations makes technology-enhanced learning an attractive alternative. Technological innovation seems to offer an ideal solution, yet this is a false promise!

## Face-to-face training has valuable features that cannot be replicated by a fully-online program:

 <p><b>Active Participation</b></p>	 <p><b>Focus</b></p>	 <p><b>Engagement</b></p>	 <p><b>Personalization</b></p>	 <p><b>Interaction</b></p>
<p>In virtual training formats, learners may listen or watch passively, without thinking critically or applying insights. Face-to-face training enables participants to practice new skills on the spot and make concrete plans for change in their daily work environments.</p>	<p>Learners in the online environment may multitask, taking in only the minimum necessary information to pass the training assessments. In contrast, live trainings are relatively free from distractions and hold learners accountable for being present with their instructor and peers.</p>	<p>A live instructor uses facial expression, tone of voice, body language, eye contact, humor and storytelling to bring training content to life.</p>	<p>An instructor can also adapt the content to the individuals' specific needs and make space to address their particular concerns and challenges.</p>	<p>In a face-to-face setting, participants learn from each other as well as from the instructor's experience and the formal course content. Learning together improves team dynamics, leading to better cohesion and cooperation on the job. When participants come from different departments, these sessions can also break down silos and foster cross-functional collaboration.</p>

Learning in the classroom provides a fresh perspective on job challenges. It lets employees step out of their daily reality, reflect on challenges, learn from experts, and practice essential skills. Static eLearning may be compatible with our busy lifestyles, but in terms of providing a transformative development experience, it is a poor substitute for traditional methods.

Employees agree: 64% of those surveyed by research firm Towards Maturity found classroom courses to be essential or very useful for learning what they needed for their jobs (2015). Likewise, a 2016 study by Activia Research found that the majority of respondents prefer classroom-based training (52%) over either eLearning (18%) or self-study

(23.3%). Surprisingly, younger learners were even more likely to prefer face-to-face training, at 55.9%. This may be because the younger generation has fewer competing responsibilities to juggle, as well as because technology itself holds little novelty for these digital natives.

# The Case for Blended Learning

Taking these factors into account, how can learning and development professionals balance the benefits of face-to-face training with the flexibility, efficiency and convenience of eLearning options?

The good news is, we can choose an alternative approach which integrates the best features of online and classroom training. Blended learning is an instructional method that combines traditional classroom-based training with other formats, such as online, mobile and self-paced learning.

In a blended learning approach, classroom-based or live virtual training offers expert guidance, practice opportunities and feedback while meeting participants' need for social interaction. The face-to-face component of the program is supported by self-paced digital content, which may include short microlearning training modules, explainer videos, job aids in the form of infographics, learning games, social media forums or other innovative tools. With thoughtful planning, these learning experiences form a unified path in which the different components reinforce and build upon one another..

## The benefits to blended learning include:

- It is cost-effective and makes the best use of classroom time, maximizing Return on Development.
- It engages busy learners where they live; online and on-the-go.
- It is “sticky”: the reinforcement of information in different contexts support learning sustainment.
- It is easy to personalize and available on demand.
- Its flexible approach is adaptable to each business' specific needs.

Digital learning (aka eLearning) used to be long, slow and solitary; a way to educate employees about safety policies by clicking through decks of densely-packed power point slides, a multiple-choice quiz at the end its only form of interaction.

Times have changed!

See the sidebar for a quick guide to some key methods and concepts in blended learning.

## Key Technologies and Methods for Blending Learning



### eLearning

This catch-all term refers to any course or curriculum delivered in digital format. While there are wide variations, most eLearning involves a set path through training content delivered via videos or slideshows, with predetermined learning outcomes and assessment tools to gauge progress and mastery.



### mLearning

In this format, content is optimized for delivery through a mobile device, typically a smart phone or tablet. Images, infographics, audio files, videos and learning games predominate, while text is minimal. Because they are often accessed on the go, mLearning modules are usually short and targeted.



### Microlearning

Microlearning is closely related to mLearning. Often used interchangeably to describe bite-sized learning accessed on handheld devices, this term highlights the content rather than the means of delivery. Microlearning focuses on a single, concrete skill or concept that can be mastered, say, during the morning commute.



# Major Considerations for Implementing Blended Learning

The exhilarating array of digital tools and techniques offers new ways to keep learners engaged throughout and beyond the classroom session. It can be confusing to make sense of all these options, and it is important to take care in deciding what practices to preserve, which to phase out and which to adopt. Learning professionals should consider:

## Match between Medium and Objective:

It is essential to select the most appropriate medium for the learning objectives and avoid using technology for technology's sake. Digital delivery is a good choice for information best taken in at the learner's own pace, while other skills need expert feedback and coaching. A module might be gamified if the primary goal is recall of specific facts or details, while a behavioral objective like improving conflict management would be better achieved through in-person instruction.

## Timing, Cost and Efficiency:

While investment of time and money is always a factor, it is ineffective to base decisions primarily on cost, without planning a strategy with the depth and breadth to produce the desired change. Generally, use the simplest effective technology that adds value in proportion to its cost, both in terms of money and ease of use.

## The Big Picture:

The different elements of the program must be integrated. There should be dependency between the parts and learners need to understand how it all fits together. Learners should be held accountable for the self-paced tasks with assessments and a record of progress. Self-paced elements should be small, especially at the beginning of a blended strategy, but vital.

## Neuroscience and the Learning Process:

Blended learning is all about choosing the tools and techniques to support how people actually acquire new knowledge and professional skills. Using technology to enhance workplace learning is the future not only because of convenience, scalability and cost-effectiveness, but also because these technologies match the insights of neuroscience. We will explore the characteristics of optimal adult learning in more detail in the next article in this series

*For an example of what a blended learning program might look like in practice, see the infographic **Blended Learning in Action**.*

## Technologies and Methods, continued



### Social Learning

Cognitively and emotionally, humans are social beings who thrive on connection, communication and affirmation from the group. Both motivation and memory are improved by interaction with peers. Social learning feels natural because we have evolved to learn first by observation, then by imitation. In fact, we are more aware of other people's actions, traits and shortcomings than our own, both personally and professionally. Since we see others more clearly than ourselves, we are adapted to learning behavioral skills, such as leadership and communication, in groups rather than on our own. Leveraging these tendencies and the increased motivation that comes from social interaction is the best way to effect behavioural change on our teams.



### Virtual Reality (VR)

Virtual reality technology uses 360-degree, interactive video to immerse learners in a multi-sensory, realistic scenario. A VR training activity may, for example, simulate a stressful situation, such as giving negative feedback to an employee or colleague. The learner makes choices about how to respond to the scenario and gets feedback on the results of each choice. VR has been shown to significantly increase recall because it presents information in a context that feels real and is remembered as a true experience, unlike a written text, static image or video. The cost of this technology has been dropping and it is increasingly affordable, offering endless possibilities for workforce learning.



### Gamification and Serious Games

These terms are related yet distinct.

**Gamification** uses game dynamics to encourage progress through a course, awarding points for correct answers, badges for content mastery and ranking "players" on a leaderboard. In contrast, a **Serious Game** is a game whose primary objective is education rather than entertainment. The scenario may be real-world (such as running a profitable business) or fantastical (such as escaping a desert island) but in either case, beating the game requires mastering the learning objectives. For example, the player may need to apply principles of effective leadership to successfully lead a group of castaways stranded on a desert island to safety. In either case, game-based learning has been shown to increase engagement, motivation and improve retention.

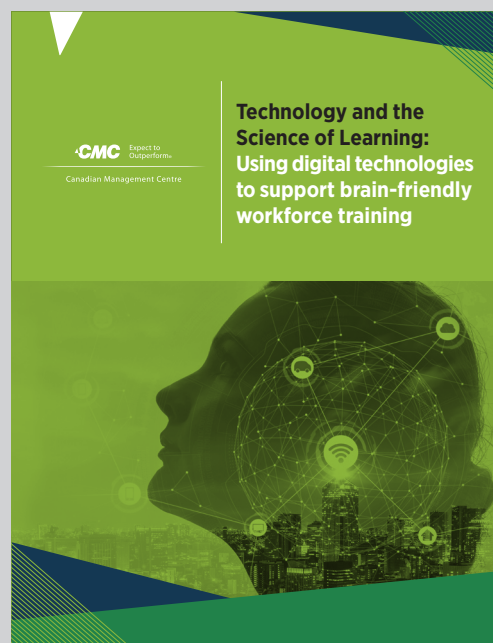
## CONCLUSION

Done well, with thoughtful design and planning, blended learning combines the advantages of online and classroom-based training and delivers real results in the modern professional learning context. Because the learning is sustained over time and provides multiple exposures to the content, it is more likely to be retained and applied.

Offloading some of the content delivery to self-paced, just-in-time digital learning cuts costs while letting learners take the lead and make progress independently between classroom sessions. This deepens the in-person component while maximizing Return on Development.

For a more detailed look at how digital learning technologies can be leveraged in the professional training context, and how these technologies can support the brain's natural learning preferences, check out the next article in this series, ***Technology and the Science of Learning: Using digital technologies to support brain-friendly workplace training.***

Download a copy at  
[cmcoutperform.com/free-resources](http://cmcoutperform.com/free-resources)



## Works Cited

Ceridian Pulse of Talent Report (25 October, 2017). *Ceridian's Pulse of Talent Report Reveals What High Performing Employees Value Most at Work* [Press Release].

Retrieved from <https://www.ceridian.com/ca/company/newsroom/2017/ceridian-pulse-of-talent-report-culture-engagement>

IBM Corporation (2014). *Training Builds Skills for a Smarter Planet: The value of training.*

Retrieved from <https://www-03.ibm.com/services/learning/pdfs/IBMTraining-TheValueofTraining.pdf>

James, J. (20 July, 2016). Professional Training – The Employee's Perspective. *Activia Training.*

Retrieved from <https://www.activia.co.uk/news-and-analysis/professional-training-the-employees-perspective>

McGruer, D. (7 November, 2017). The Importance of Digitally Upskilling Employees. *Training Journal.*

Retrieved from <https://www.trainingjournal.com/articles/opinion/importance-digitally-upskilling-employees>

Towards Maturity (2015), *The Learner Voice Part 2.* Retrieved from <https://www.towardsmaturity.org/learnervoice2>