



Eight Phases of Workplace Learning: A Framework for Designing Blended Programs

Dorman Woodall, Director, Skillsoft Learning | April 2013

Sally Hovis, M.ED., Vice President, Skillsoft Learning Design



Executive Summary

Learning outcomes should always lead to positive business outcomes and greater organizational agility. Unfortunately, 50% or more of the funding for training delivery is wasted because learning isn't actually being transferred into the workplace. This extremely high learning scrap rate is both a significant and hidden problem.

There is a very real need for learning professionals to take a leadership role in resolving this situation. Learning waste is greatly reduced when well-designed learning programs recognize learning occurs in formal, informal and social setting. Since most learning takes place outside the formal event, more learning and reinforcement must be embedded into the workflow.

When done well, the resulting gain in learning transfer and increased performance for your organization is significant.



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Workplace Learning Concerns

There are several ongoing changes that affect all learning professionals. We have more to do in order to be better prepared for these demanding times. In our Skillsoft Learning Growth Model paper¹, we pointed out why classrooms alone won't be enough to accommodate all of the training and learning needs of an organization's growing demands for new knowledge and skills. Here is a short list of some of these changes and concerns:

- ✓ **The Silver Tsunami** – The impending repercussions from a large aging workforce entering retirement are called “The Silver Tsunami” or “Boomsday”. This phenomenon can have a profound effect on many areas of life and potentially change society as a whole²
- ✓ **The Talent Crisis** – Having the right talent is priceless. Attracting, developing and retaining talent requires active engagement on the part of the organization. Methods which suited the baby-boomers won't work as well for our younger workers.³
- ✓ **The 70-20-10 Model** – seems we have been spending too much time on the 10% (formal training) and not enough time on the remaining 90% (informal and collaboration). We will cover more on this topic later.⁴

Who blends learning?

The answer is just about everyone. Everyone blends learning content, strategies and technology in some form or another. Learning professionals have been blending for quite a long time, even before blended learning became a buzzword. More and more, blended learning is being seen as a flexible learning strategy that integrates innovative and technological advances of online learning with interaction and participation of traditional classroom learning. Matter of fact, a survey of business organizations conducted some time ago by the eLearning Guild⁵ confirmed the prevalence of blended learning. Their survey showed 93% of the survey respondents use blended learning for the creation and delivery of educational content, and no one reported that their organizations would not use blended learning. Even then, the eLearning Guild concluded that 100% usage of blended learning is on the immediate horizon and blended learning is finally becoming the preferred and pervasive format for the design, development and delivery of educational content.

Blended learning is much more the combination of on-line and classroom training. In business, we know that people learn in different ways and most learning take place on the job. Once the scheduled formal training is over, people still continue to learn in an unscheduled way within the workplace by reading and listening, doing and observing, and through trial and error. Also they learn socially from their managers, subject matter experts, peers, customers, associates, and team members. A very large percentage, as much as 80 to 90%, of learning takes place in the workplace, not the classroom. Therefore a broader definition of blended learning must include the combination of formal, informal and social learning.

¹Woodall, Dorman. *The Skillsoft Learning Growth Model: A Blueprint for Integrating Learning into the Life of an Enterprise*. Skillsoft white paper © 2013

²The Economist. *The Silver Tsunami*. February 2010.

³King, Kieran and Mattox John R. II, Ph.D. *Challenge the Status Quo with a Smarter Approach to the Global Talent Crisis*. Skillsoft white paper © 2013

⁴Center of Creative Leadership. *The 70-20-10 Rule*, *Leading Effectively e-Newsletter*, November 2011

⁵eLearning Guild, *Trends in Blended Learning Research*. 2005

Defining blended learning

While there is a profusion of blended learning definitions, the definition of blended learning in the academic and the business worlds are very similar. Both worlds apply similar instructional theories and methods; however the intended outcomes are different in significant ways. Academic education is mostly teacher-centric and generally follows a traditional “bricks-and-mortar” model. On the other hand, training in a business environment is mostly learner-centric and informal. Sometimes these two important domains are confused and often what is called business training is actually academic education and vice versa.

The academic world blends a mix of delivery methods (e.g. online courses, formal course, bricks-and-mortar school, etc.) along with instructional methods (cognitive, behavioral, constructive, etc.) much in the same way as business might. Blending works and it works well for both worlds. The U.S. Department of Education states students exposed to the blending of both face-to-face and online education (e.g. flipped classroom or lab rotation) were more successful than students entirely in one camp or the other. Business-related reports show similar findings when performance-based learners, working in a business environment, are placed in well-designed blended programs using formal, informal and social methods.⁶

The real differences between these two worlds centers mostly on the intended outcomes and ratio of teaching professionals to students or employees. A well-equipped college or university, filled with highly trained, tenured educational professionals, seeks to build the mental capacity of the student so he or she can apply foundational knowledge (“know why”) and evolve and expand their skills though their entire working and private lives. A good education builds the students’ “know why” which is transferable into many environments and situations. The student obtains “far-term transfer” skills making them more employable. Using a manufacturing analogy, schools of higher education produce highly employable professionals for industry. A good education serves us for a lifetime.

On the other hand, in the business world blended learning is similarly defined, but there is much more to consider within a skills-focused (“know how”) environment. The business world focuses mostly on training because the desired skills are mostly “near-term transfer” in nature. In this world, skills do matter and training is about building and applying those skills within the workplace in the very near future. Also, in business the number of managers and supervisors greatly outnumber the instructors, the latter being considered a cost center. A good training program must quickly increase the transfer of skills into the workplace using a combination of formal, informal and collaborative methods.

A blended program can be the best of both worlds, and though a significant undertaking, once implemented successfully, such a program has significant benefits for the academic institution and its students... and for the business organization and its learners. Students and learners embrace flexibility, and being in a connected world that the internet provides, it’s no wonder that blended programs rank high in outcomes (learning and business) and satisfaction.

Training’s biggest problem

The biggest problem facing learning and development programs in business is the limited transfer of training into the workplace after the formal components are completed. This problem is enormous, ignored and misunderstood.

⁶Allen, I. Elaine, Ph.D. *Blending In: The Extent and Promise of Blended Education in the United States*. Babson College 2007

Clearly, if the learner doesn't apply his or her new skills as intended, then the time and cost of the delivery, no matter how well designed and blended is wasted. This waste is called "scrap learning". Skillssoft's "Moving the Needle" white paper⁷ reviews how the actual scrap learning rates ranges from 55% to 80%.

The most frequent root causes for scrap learning include:

- ✓ **Lack of reinforcement** – the learner completes the formal portion and when they return to the workplace, no informal or collaborative support is provided.
- ✓ **Lack of preparation** – the learner is either not ready for the learning experience (e.g. having access, skills, etc.), doesn't see the need for the training or has low expectations.
- ✓ **Lack of alignment** – the training isn't aligned to either a business or performance need.
- ✓ **Lack of ownership** – the trainer and the manager don't share the responsibility for ensuring that the learner is trained. Both fail to acknowledge they co-own the success or failure of training.⁸

So what can be done to avoid these pitfalls? While it is true that while the manager has control over the workplace, the learning professional has the most to lose if the training didn't produce positive results. The learning professional should take the lead in solving these problems and find a way so training will work for the manager and learner. There is a lot to be gained by taking a leadership role to create the necessary shared ownership, including a significant increase in business improvement. That's our job, right?

The Eight Phase Framework

Earlier definitions of blend learning focused mostly on incorporating e-learning with instructor-led training. As more experience was gained, this definition expanded to include instructional design and combinations of technology used in conjunction with instructor-led training.

The latest definition maintains the flavor of earlier work, but further expands it by adding a focus on applying the available technologies to the content and the learning objectives. This approach acknowledges the benefit of starting with the content and then determining the best delivery methods for both the content and the objectives.

We use Jennifer Hofman's definition which is:

"Blended learning is using the best delivery methodologies available for a specific objective, including online, classroom-based instruction, performance support, paper-based self-study, formal or informal on-the-job solutions."⁹

Using this definition, let's explore the Eight Phases Framework. Note that the names of the phases intentionally emphasize the personal nature of the journey each individual takes through the learning process.

⁷King, Kieran. *Moving the Needle: How Skillssoft Learning Impacts Performance of Individuals and Organization*. Skillssoft white paper © 2011.

⁸Wick, Calhoun, and Roy Pollock. *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning: How to Turn Training and Development into Business Results, Second Edition*. Pfeiffer. © 2010

Note that the names of the phases intentionally emphasize the personal nature of the journey each individual takes through the learning process.

SKILLSOFT'S EIGHT PHASES FRAMEWORK			
Mostly Formal		Mostly Informal & Social	
<p>Preparation</p> <p>1-Prepare Me Readiness Phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set expectations • Obtain commitment • Preparatory skills 	<p>Instruction</p> <p>2-Tell Me Presentation Phase</p> <p>3-Show Me Demonstration Phase</p> <p>4-Let Me Practice Phase</p>	<p>Validation</p> <p>5-Check Me Assessment Phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess Learning • Reconfirm expectations • Begin knowledge & skills transfer into workplace 	<p>Transfer of Learning</p> <p>6-Support Me Assistance Phase</p> <p>7-Coach Me Experience Phase</p> <p>8-Connect Me Collaboration Phase</p>
<i>Training checkpoint</i>	<i>Mostly sequential</i>	<i>Transfer checkpoint</i>	<i>Mostly non-sequential</i>

Phase 1 - Prepare Me

The first checkpoint of any training program helps ensure learners have correct expectations, degree of commitment, essential foundational skills and an overall understanding of the program requirements and goals. In this phase learners learn how to improve their learning skills and become familiar with the tools, strategies or technologies incorporated within the blended program. Learners are introduced to the learning objectives, anticipated outcomes and benefits of the program. This readiness step helps ensure learner success throughout the remaining phases. In many cases, the manager is also involved in this process. In our experience, this phase is the one most often missed.

Phase 2 - Tell Me

This presentation phase is usually intertwined with the instructional Show Me, Let Me and Check Me phases. This phase of learning includes the presentation and explanation of facts, concepts, procedures and principles related to the targeted content or subject. Objectives are often restated, and it's an ideal place in the sequence of learning to introduce or reinforce motivational information – e.g. the “What's in it for me?” message.

Phase 3 - Show Me

The demonstration phase presents examples of the facts, procedures, principles, concepts and/or processes in practice so the learner has a good understanding of how to apply the skills.

Phase 4 - Let Me

In this practice phase learners are given opportunities to engage with the new skills or knowledge, build long term retention and support transfer of learning and recall of the skills and knowledge in the workplace. Feedback on performance is important because it allows learners to make corrections along the way.

Phase 5 - Check Me

The assessment or “test” phase is a validation checkpoint which wraps up the formal process and determines the learners’ progress against the established learning objectives. Assessments provide feedback on overall achievement and are valuable tools for determining if learners have achieved sufficient levels of mastery with the new skills and knowledge to move forward in a more informal learning environment. It also confirms the learner’s readiness and intention to transfer the learning into the workplace.

Phase 6 - Support Me

In this assistive phase, learners needing additional support begin to access learning assets and materials in a more informal manner. Often referred to as performance support or just-in-time training, this phase is pivotal in transitioning learners from structured and formal training to more self-driven, informal and collaborative learning setting.

Phase 7 - Coach Me

Coaching allows the sharing of experience with others. Tutoring and coaching from managers, peers, mentors or experts helps learners mix, shape and expand newly acquired skills beyond what can be achieved through formal training.

Phase 8 - Connect Me

Collaboration allows learners to work within a community of peers and colleagues to solve problems and share ideas. This phase offers ongoing opportunities for enhanced skill and knowledge development for all learners at all levels of expertise.

As you examine the eight phases of workplace learning in more detail, consider how the strategies within each phase support achieving the intended learning outcomes and results. The phases aren’t intended to replace other design considerations such as learning activity and media selection, but instead to make these decisions easier and faster. You may not need all of the phases, but some aspect of each is advisable if the blended program is meant to support learners navigating from formal instruction to informational resources, from skills assessment to supportive tools, and from coaching to collaborative environments.

Also consider the types of learning assets and resources already available to you — from within your organization, from a partner such as Skillsoft or from other external sources. Take advantage of as many existing assets as possible to reduce the overall development effort. According to a study by Bersin and Associates, “More than half of all organizations now blend off-the-shelf content with custom content, and more than a third blend off-the-shelf content with live, online virtual classroom events.”¹⁰

Finally, the scope of your blended learning program determines the number of times you’ll have to visit each phase. A narrowly defined blended learning program on negotiation will be less complex than a more comprehensive program supporting first time managers, which would incorporate negotiation skills as well as many other content areas. In the negotiation example, considering learning strategies and assets to support each phase is most likely a one-time process, with allowances for normal revisions and changes. In the first time example, design with each of the eight phases in mind is necessary for each content area included in the program.

¹⁰Bersin, Josh. *The Blended Learning Book: Best Practices, Proven Methodologies, and Lessons Learned*. Jossey-Bass. © 2004.

Three Workplace Blends

The Eight Phases Framework addresses the application of blending in three workplace settings and depends on the degree of design effort, structure, rigor, and quality.

- ✓ **The Program Blend** - The Eight Phases Framework is used by the learning professional to develop a flexible blended curriculum for a scalable audience. Creating a rigorous design will make it easier to teach a large group the right content at the right time, using the best form of delivery. By building in formal, informal and social activities, this design will provide the necessary “Push”, where the learner is given instructions or assignments, and the resultant “Pull”, where the learner is guided to resources to assist in solving workplace situations. This approach will lead to more performer-focused involvement on the part of the learner and their manager- and to an increase of “Pull” activities within the workplace. Sample business-centered programs can include: leadership, manager or supervisor skills, sales, project management, a specific industry certification or desktop skills.
- ✓ **The Prescriptive Blend** - A manager uses various elements of the Eight Phases Framework to direct and coach team members to improve specific skills and close both skill and knowledge gaps. This is a hands-on method of blending by applying online content through an LMS to focus on learning in the context of work-related knowledge and skills. By setting expectations and making prescriptive assignments, the manager and learner will work together to improve overall workplace performance. Enlightened managers and supervisors use this blend quite often.
- ✓ **The Self Blend** - Any motivated self-directed learner can apply the Eight Phases Framework to build his/her own skills as they seek to resolve workplace problems or to enhance their career path. A multitude of learners already use online content in this manner as they continuously “pull” learning to themselves. This approach works well for new hires, supervisors, specialists, high-potentials and organizational executives or anyone else pursuing some type of industry certification. Skillsoft customers promote learners to use this type of ad-hoc blend extensively. This is the most learner-centric approach used in applying blended learning methods and optimizing workplace performance.

The balance of this paper will discuss instructional design and expand upon the description of each of the eight phases in more detail.

Designing Blended Learning Programs

Blended learning, coupled with increased demands for access to informal, formal and social learning assets, presents a significant challenge to today’s learning professionals. As with any formal learning program, today’s learning designers must identify the targeted learning outcomes with the target audience profile in mind. But now they are asked to support not only formal learning programs, but also programs to support ongoing learning after the formal training is finished. These strategies might take the form of performance support, access to reference libraries, mentoring and coaching, or communities of practice.

The process of designing and developing blended learning programs, large or small, calls for the same attention as the design and development of any learning product. According to Kevin Kruse¹¹,

¹¹Kruse, Kevin. *Introduction to Instructional Design and the ADDIE Model*. 2004.

there are over 100 instructional system design models, but almost all are based on the generic ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation). Each phase of the process feeds input from one phase into the subsequent phase. Multiple iterations are common, particularly in the design phase.

Successful blended learning calls for much more than knitting together a variety of delivery methods and assets such as self-paced elearning, instructor-led training, virtual classrooms and electronic books. This is a common misconception in the training industry that can lead to three common pitfalls:

- Learners get lost in a maze of portals, websites and learning paths that they have to navigate to get through their program.
- Learners are frustrated by redundant and/or conflicting instructor-led and self-paced material.
- Learners get overwhelmed, fall behind and drop out when they don't get any help to stay on track.

In order to successfully deliver the right training to the right people at the right time, blended learning programs must be intentionally designed to avoid these pitfalls. Programs must include support and guidance for learners as they move through each component. Selection of delivery methods must be driven by sound, measurable objectives while also considering participant demographics and knowledge levels, time to design and develop the program, budget, available technology and limitations.¹²

The complexity of designing blended learning that aligns with business initiatives and strategic requirements for ever-increasing workplace productivity increases exponentially as the designer attempts to incorporate formal and informal methods, to blend traditional classroom instruction with technology-enabled instruction used outside the classroom, and to meet the needs of learners with novice to expert levels of skill and knowledge.

The question on every blended learning designer's mind is, "What's the fastest, easiest, most effective way to make decisions about learning methods, learning assets, media and delivery methods? Once I've established the objectives and other important considerations, how do I proceed?"

Collectively, the **eight phases of workplace learning** outlined in this paper provide a framework for making these decisions.

In *The Conditions of Learning*¹³, first published in 1965, Robert Gagné identified mental conditions for learning. He also created the nine events of instruction that correlate to and address the conditions of learning. Gagné's nine events applied to the design of formal instruction.

The eight phases of workplace learning are similar in concept, but are meant to be used as a framework for the design and sequencing of blended learning that incorporates informal and formal learning methods. It can be applied whether the blended solution is simple or complex. All that is required is inclusion or omission of the phases depending on the needs of the program. The similarity to Gagné's events is hard to miss; all nine events are incorporated or suggested within the first five phases that address formal learning solutions.

¹²Woodall, Dorman. *Blended Learning Strategies: Selecting the Best Instructional Method*. Skillssoft white paper © 2013.

¹³Gagne, Robert M. *Conditions for learning* (4th ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston 1985.

The last three phases fall outside the scope originally addressed by Gagné as they move the learner and learning environment into performance-support, coaching, mentoring and collaboration – all considered more informal modes of learning. There are no hard lines, however, between the formal and informal categories. Formal learning assets are often used for informal learning, and vice versa.

Phase 1: Prepare Me - The Readiness Phase

When organizations first implement blended learning, this phase is the one most often missed by both trainers and managers. Unfortunately, when it is skipped, the employees aren't sufficiently prepared, managers have set little or no expectations, and everyone assumes that learning will take place naturally once the formal training components are completed by the employee. The omission to ensure success is also a recipe for increased rates of scrap learning.

Preparing learners to fully participate in a blended learning program is vital to obtaining a successful outcome from this experience. This first phase must ensure learners have set an expectation about how he or she will transfer their new knowledge and skill into action, the essential foundational skills, and an understanding of the program requirements. This readiness phase helps to ensure learner success throughout the remaining phases.

As with all training or learning, learners must first be made aware of the program requirements and goals, and any prerequisites. While most learners are already familiar with traditional classroom approaches, they frequently need some support to use technology-based approaches. Providing upfront guidance and familiarization can help ensure the technology is useful, versus a roadblock to learning.

In addition to basic Internet and computer literacy skills, learners must also know:

- How to access the computer systems and technology, locally and remotely.
- Who to call with questions or problems about the technology.
- How to use the hardware and software within the computer systems and technology.
- How to access helpful online resources.

When multiple technologies or computer systems are included in a blended learning design, it's important to ensure all learners are adequately prepared to use and work with all the possibilities.

Suggested strategies for this phase

- **Explain the process.** Hold "how to learn" sessions (face-to-face or virtual) that outlines the flow of the blended learning program. Show the learning path from a view of simple to complex. It is important that learners and their managers understand the potential business outcomes and benefits. If possible, present the benefits using a "What's in it for me?" (WIIFM) approach, with the "me" representing the learner.

- **Provide job and learning aids.** Design and distribute descriptions of the blended learning program that include the program goal, target audience and learning objectives. Create job aids on how to access and log onto computer systems or networks, send emails, download files, attend a chat, use and participate in virtual-classroom sessions, and any other technical skills required for the program.
- **Schedule orientation and practice sessions.** Ensure learners can use the job aids and related computer systems by setting up practice or orientation sessions in advance of any scheduled, formal training.
- **Conduct a team-building session.** Design and schedule appropriate team building activities and sessions if there is a need to establish an ongoing informal team for the duration of the program. A live classroom event is preferable, if possible.
- **Use a virtual meeting tool.** Pre-work information can often be delivered in a virtual session to remote learners. Using this approach in the Prepare Me phase also helps learners unfamiliar with the technology achieve some level of comfort before using it in more focused learning events.
- **Set up a communication protocol.** Use email or a LMS to distribute welcome announcements. Distribute program information, reminders and job aids as appropriate. Established methods of communication can provide active links to prerequisite learning material, downloadable reference and support materials, or self-service Web pages.

Suggested methods

Instructions for obtaining access to networks and computers, live or virtual orientation sessions; classroom training, face-to-face meetings, email, flyers, snail or office mail, telephone, telephone conferencing, websites, learning management systems, announcements, newsletters, online bulletins, archived events, pre-reading, prerequisites, videos, joint meeting to review expectations and schedule requirements with manager, training and learner, etc.

Skillsoft resources

Course descriptions, course objectives, course maps, user guides, curriculum maps, generic competency maps, marketing campaign materials, prerequisite reading or courses, Skillsoft's Client Community website, Skillport's learning programs, plus live and archived demonstrations.

Phase 2: Tell Me – The Presentation Phase

This presentation phase begins the formal instructional where it is usually intertwined with the Show Me, Let Me and Check Me phases. This phase of learning includes the presentation and explanation of facts, concepts, procedures and principles related to the targeted content or subject. Objectives are often restated, and it's an ideal place in the sequence of learning to introduce or reinforce motivational information – e.g. the “What's in it for me?” message.

In this phase, content is presented to the learner, either by an instructor or through other means such as books, podcasts, webinars and elearning. This approach makes use of verbal, written or visual techniques to relate, explain and illustrate material quickly and efficiently.

Presentation can be used to introduce a new topic, provide an overview, motivate learners and explain the facts, concepts, procedures, processes and principles related to the content. This is the phase of learning that defines terms; explains and illustrates the characteristics and parts of an idea, concept or principle; presents the steps of a procedure or process; and tells how and why skills and knowledge are used.

Presentation strategies are usually one-way communication with little learner interaction.

Ideas and strategies for the Tell Me phase

If you are familiar with Gagné's nine events of instruction, the similarities between those events and some of these strategies will be obvious.

- **Gain attention.** In order for any learning to take place, first capture the learner's attention. Present a problem or a new situation. The idea is to grab learners' attention so they will watch and listen while you present the learning point. Effective strategies include storytelling, presenting a problem to be solved and doing something the wrong way deliberately (being sure to show the right way later). Explaining why the content is important to learners in the context of their work is also important.
- **Inform learners of objectives.** Present learners with a list of learning objectives early in each lesson. This initiates the internal process of expectancy and helps motivate learners to complete the lesson. Objectives form the basis for assessment and evaluation and, therefore, can help learners organize their thoughts around what they are about to see, hear and/or do. A saying long-used in the training industry sums it up nicely: "First tell them what you're going to tell them, then tell them, and afterward, tell them what you told them."
- **Stimulate recall of prior learning.** Associate new information with prior knowledge to facilitate the learning process. It's easier for learners to encode and store information in long-term memory when there are links to personal experiences and knowledge. A simple way to stimulate recall is to ask questions about previous experiences or expand previously introduced concepts. This allows learners to build on their previous knowledge or skills. Although people are capable of having "creative" minutes, it is much easier to build on what they already know.
- **Separate content into smaller chunks.** Explain smaller parts of a procedure or process individually and separately. It is best to sequence presentation of information from simple to complex.
- **Use visuals and animations.** Use visuals to clarify and illustrate content whenever possible. Visuals and animations provide variety in presentation methods and help learners who learn best by seeing vs. hearing or reading. Explain complex content when possible using visuals and animations. The familiar adage "a picture is worth a thousand words" is often true.

Suggested methods

Classroom training, elearning, virtual or paper books and other reference materials, skill guides, checklists, glossaries, articles, job aids, paper workbooks, websites, CDs, audio, webcasts, podcasts, video, graphics, animations, etc.

Skillsoft resources

Instructional information from Skillsoft IT, business, ES&H, legal compliance and desktop courses; SkillBriefs and job aids in business skills courses; transcripts in courses; access to content and learning programs via Skillport; various portals, etc.

Phase 3: Show Me – The Demonstration Phase

The Demonstration phase places the content from the Tell Me phase into a real-life context so it's easier to understand how the content is used or applied. Demonstrations range from simple examples and non-examples to complex case studies, vignettes or scenarios. The demonstration phase should utilize several senses so the learner can see, hear and possibly experience the actual event. In all cases, demonstrations provide important links between the Tell Me phase and the Let Me phase in which learners have the opportunity to try using the skills or knowledge themselves.

Ideas and strategies for the Show Me phase

- Base demonstrations on real-life tasks, problems and scenarios.** Principles of adult learning emphasize learner initiative, self-management and experiential learning in contextually relevant situations or scenarios. It is therefore important to design the Show Me phase around these goals. Adults are life centered (also task centered and problem solvers). They are motivated to learn something to the extent they see that it will help perform tasks or deal with problems.
- Model behaviors and skills using strategies appropriate for the content.** It is important to use sound instructional strategies that are suitable to the content and specific objectives. For example, the approach for demonstrating communications skills is markedly different from the approach for demonstrating desktop software tasks, financial calculations or accounting skills. A vignette showing interaction between two or more people is the best way to model communication skills. A step-by-step, guided visual demonstration of a desktop application task works best for software and technical skills. A progressive explanation of a financial or mathematical operation is best shown by juxtaposing the formula or math operation beside an example in which the parts of the formula are progressively filled in with details from a work-based situation or scenario.
- Debrief to clarify key teaching points.** In some cases, key teaching points in a modeled interpersonal behavior or other skill may not be 100 percent clear to the learner. When demonstrations are complicated, be sure to follow up with a debriefing or short summary of the key learning points.
- Chunk content into smaller pieces.** Separating content into smaller pieces is just as important during the Show Me phase as in the Tell Me phase. The content should be presented in a blend of learning 'chunks' that are organized in ways that aid retention and information recall. Since it's often appropriate to switch back and forth between Tell Me and Show Me strategies in the sequence of instruction, consider combining the Tell Me and Show Me strategies by chunks if it makes sense to do so.

- **Mix it up for interest and effectiveness.** Use a variety of media and strategies whenever possible including text, graphics, audio narration, examples, non-examples, case studies, scenarios and analogies. This approach helps learners encode information for long-term storage and retrieval, and prepares them for the next phase in which learning is reinforced through practice.

Suggested methods

Animated demonstrations, behavior modeling, skill demonstrations and modeling, vignettes, personalized stories, guided demonstrations, examples in books and other reference materials, such as student workbooks.

Skillsoft resources

Examples included in role play examples, stories and simulations in the course's instructional topics; code samples, guided practice in course instructional topics; access to video and other content via Skillport.

Phase 4: Let Me – The Practice Phase

The Practice phase gives learners an opportunity to apply newly acquired skills, knowledge and behaviors within a structured (formal) learning environment. Eliciting performance helps learners confirm their correct understanding, and the repetition further increases the likelihood of retention. A natural and logical follow-up to the Show Me phase, the Practice phase reinforces learning and builds learners' confidence in their ability to use the learning in the workplace.

Practice outside of the workplace has additional value when the skills are potentially dangerous, hazardous or involve expensive equipment. Practice in a safe environment reduces hazards and minimizes expensive trial and error. Flight simulators and simulations in soft skills areas, such as dealing with an angry customer, are classic examples.

Feedback on performance is an essential part of the Practice phase. Learners must know how they performed for practice to be effective. Correct performance in practice must be verified and reinforced, while incorrect performance must be made known and modified.

Ideas and strategies for the Let Me phase

- **Try out learning frequently and appropriately.** Adults need opportunities to apply and try out learning as quickly as possible. Practice of base level knowledge and concepts is important, but primarily as a stepping stone to using knowledge and concepts on the job. Focus on application-level learning as much as possible. Include sufficient practice of “enabling” content, but provide learners with as much opportunity to learn by doing rather than by telling what to do. This means practice should be problem or scenario-based. Practice oriented toward facts and/or theory does little to support transfer of skills to the workplace. Finally, make sure practice is designed so that learners' mistakes become opportunities for more learning.
- **Choose practice strategies appropriate for the content and level of learning.** Use standard question types for foundational content. Multiple choice, matching, fill-in-the-blank or short answer questions are ideal for practice enabling content. Framing these questions

within workplace scenarios or examples is preferable. Use more complex question types for application-level content. When learners have enough base knowledge to start “using” or “applying” learning, use case- or scenario-based questions and simulations for practice.

- **Use simulations when possible.** Simulations provide interactive practice by allowing learners to retry one or more skills until they have successfully attained the targeted level of mastery. A live instructor or, in some cases, an elearning simulation is preferred if two-way interaction of learner practice with feedback is required. Simulations enable learners to explore and experiment in safe environments, free of real-world consequences. In such an environment it is less threatening to try out new attitudes and behaviors that can later be transferred to the work place. In addition, people who are in an exploration mode expect to find new things, to be enlightened and surprised.

Suggested methods

Paper-based, computer-based or web-based questions (matching, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, short answer, essay); case studies with accompanying questions; standard questions imbedded in virtual classroom delivery; simulations; follow-on activities; homework assignments; role-plays; self-graded exercises, etc.

Skillsoft resources

Practice questions, role plays, software simulations, and case studies in business, legal compliance, IT, desktop and other courses; also mentored and self-assessed exercises, Try-Its and SkillChecks in IT and desktop courses; TestPreps; access to content via Skillport; coding challenges, business challenges and practice labs in KnowledgeCenters portals.

Phase 5: Check Me – The Assessment Phase

This phase answers two questions. Has the learner successfully completed the formal phases, and do they understand how they will transfer this knowledge and skill into the workplace. Assessments (tests) are deliberate attempts by people to acquire information about themselves or others. That information, usually in the form of a score, is then compared with a specified standard or desired result. Within instructional and learning environments, tests are used to measure what people know (knowledge) and how well they can apply what they know (performance). In many cases within the workplace, it isn't so much about the achieving a letter grade or high score, but a simple pass/fail as to whether or not the learner is ready to move forward.

Learners most often use assessments to obtain accurate feedback on their understanding and mastery of the content and instruction. This type of assessment is usually based on the skills, knowledge and behaviors specified in the learning objectives. In other cases, assessments are based on objectives specified by certifying bodies within specific contain areas, such as project management, Cisco and Microsoft. In all cases, assessments help learners determine what they already know, and where they need to concentrate future learning efforts.

Immediate and specific feedback on assessment performance is as important in the Check Me phase as in the Let Me phase. Whenever possible, inform learners of their performance immediately,

and as specifically as possible. Obviously, immediate feedback is easier to accomplish in web- or computer-based tests than in paper-based tests.

Once the learning has been assessed, the manager should reconnect with the learner and review the expectation set during the first phase, Prepare me. This meeting should begin the expected application of the new knowledge and skills into the workplace.

Ideas and strategies for the Check Me phase

- **Assess certification objectives.** Assessment is particularly important when learners need to obtain academic or professional credit based on their knowledge in a particular subject matter. In many situations, the assessment is done for legal or safety compliance reasons and is used to verify the outcome of the instruction. The self-paced environment and the unlimited access to instruction and assessment provide learners with the opportunity to reach their desired level of mastery within each course. Elearning is an excellent way to prepare learners for an outside assessment or certification (e.g. Microsoft, Cisco, CPA, PMI, etc.)
- **Assess learning objectives.** Effective assessments allow learners to exhibit the behaviors specified in the objectives and provide meaningful feedback about those behaviors. Assessment strategies should be closely related to the instructional strategies used to practice the content. The same set of practice strategies used in the Let Me phase should also be used in the Check Me phase, but with different scenarios or wording. Mastery of material is typically granted after achieving a certain score or percent correct. A commonly accepted level of mastery is an 80 to 90 percent score.
- **Use pre-tests.** Tests taken in advance of learning help learners identify the content they don't already know or set expectations for the upcoming instructional experience. Pre-testing also establishes a baseline against which future learning gains can be measured, and focuses learners' attention on the content they don't know.
- **Use post-tests.** Post-tests are the norm in training and are designed to measure learners' achievement of the stated learning objectives. Post-test scores can also be compared against the pre-test score to evaluate whether a learning gain has occurred and, if so, its extent.
- **Consider other forms of assessment.** If a learner's performance on specific objectives can't be adequately evaluated with paper-based or computerized testing, consider using alternative methods. If the learning objective requires manual operation of machinery, consider observation as an assessment method. If the learning objective requires creating a deliverable, such as a project plan or a properly formatted business letter, have learners construct the deliverable as homework or as a class activity. Then the deliverable can be evaluated by an instructor or subject matter expert for mastery.
- **Avoid tricky tests.** Follow guidelines for writing good test questions to ensure learners are exhibiting performance related to the learning objectives versus trying to figure out answers to tricky, negatively phrased or ambiguous questions.
- **Create 'fair' tests.** Fair tests assess learning on content and objectives covered by the learning program. Avoid the temptation to design tests that ensure a bell curve distribution of results, or to assess content not thoroughly explained and practiced in the program.

Suggested methods

Paper-based, computer-based or web-based questions (matching, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, essay); case studies with accompanying questions; standard questions imbedded in virtual classroom delivery, simulations, homework or in-class assignments with specified deliverables, role-plays, observation, etc.

Skillsoft resources

Test questions in Skillsoft courses and simulations and TestPreps; access to tests and courses via Skillport; scored quizzes created in Dialogue Design; and test questions built with SkillStudio. Non-scored assets used for practice can be used in the Check Me phase when instructors or subject matter experts are available to evaluate the results.

Phase 6: Support Me – The Assistance Phase

The Assistance phase begins where formal training ends. The job of the learner does not end with the formal training events. Some elements of a new skill may not be used right away and can easily be forgotten, so it is important to provide ways for the learner to retrieve and review original or supplemental learning materials.

Learners may also want to advance beyond the level of knowledge or expertise achieved in the formal training by using materials and assets available outside the formal environment. Several systems may be necessary to properly support ongoing or refresher training as the learner transitions from formal learning into more informal methods. In either case, providing this support is essential to increasing learner on-the-job performance.

Ideas and strategies for the Support Me phase

- **Re-use assets from formal learning.** In many cases, the learner simply needs quick access to materials from the formal learning events. Designing and building these assets as individual learning objects rather than as entire courses facilitates this type of access. Formal training assets that easily convert to independent learning objects include job aids, transcripts or summaries of lesson material, glossaries and subsections of instruction such as independent topics, simulations and practice exercises. The closer these materials are to workplace use and application, the better chance they will be useful in support of higher level learning and application of the content.
- **Expect and support correction of mistakes.** During this phase, many learners will make mistakes and find themselves in need of a refresher of the formal materials. Making the formal learning materials searchable in a “Google” like style will facilitate their use in this manner. Providing access to an expert in the area through email, phone, bulletin boards, FAQ, Web sites or chat rooms is also a helpful support strategy.
- **Expect and support expansion of learning.** After formal training, learners increase their proficiency and level of expertise by simply starting to use and apply the skills and knowledge. Adults are motivated to learn something when they perceive doing so will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they encounter in their day-to-day lives. Furthermore, adults learn new knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes most effectively in the context of application to real-life situations. With these concepts in mind, design

support tools, assets and systems that facilitate access to new learning within the context of supporting contextually relevant workplace situations and problems.

- **Provide access to additional reference or support materials.** Make it easy for learners to conduct additional research by providing access to trusted online books (technical and business), manuals, reports, magazines, internal documents, help systems, resource centers, open labs and any performance support systems related to the blended learning content area(s). Almost any learning materials used to support any of the eight phases of learning are potential resources for the Support Me phase.

Suggested methods

All or subset of assets included in the methods for the Tell Me and Show Me phases, including virtual or paper books and other reference materials, skill guides, checklists, glossaries, articles, job aids, paper workbooks, CDs, audio, webcasts, podcasts, video, graphics, animations. Other methods for the Support Me phase include FAQ sites, ask the expert, help desks, virtual or face-to-face meetings, phone, instant messaging, organizational websites or learning portals, chat rooms and threaded discussions.

Skillsoft resources

Learning objects accessible from all content accessible via Skillport (instructional topics, job aids, SkillBriefs, transcripts, code samples, videos, portals; learning objects; mentoring chat and email features via courses; content developed and delivered using SkillStudio or Dialogue Design.

Phase 7: Coach Me – The Experience Phase

Coaching provides learners with the opportunity to enhance learning based on the real world experiences of managers, peers, mentors and subject matter experts. In this phase learners transition their knowledge and skills from novice or intermediate levels to higher levels of expertise. The Coach Me phase differs from the Support Me phase in that it requires interpersonal interaction.

Although coaching is more likely to take place with learners who have transitioned beyond novice levels of training in particular subject areas, that's not always the case. In fact, having experts and mentors available during formal and informal phases of learning not only enables immediate access to expert coaching, but also establishes a coaching protocol that is more likely to be continued after formal training has ended.

In many cases the coach is a manager, supervisor or more experienced peer, so face-to-face meetings are possible, as well as preferable, to enhance the personal nature of the coaching relationship. Technical mentors are usually experts in their field with several technical certifications and may be in another location, so the use of email, phone or virtual meeting tools may be preferred methods of contact.

Ideas and strategies for the Coach Me phase

- **Support the coaches as well as the coaches.** Provide coaching instruction and tools for trainers, managers, subject matter experts and learners. Don't leave coaching to chance. Recruit and assign coaches to specific learners.

- **Meet regularly.** Have learners meet regularly with their coaches to review progress and discuss performance issues. Having frequent conversations and a supportive relationship will do a lot to keep learners on track and encourage them to conform to performance requirements.
- **Tie coaching to development plans.** Incorporate involvement with a coach in learners' individual development plans. This link provides a more formal structure to monitor access to experts and coaching resources throughout the informal learning period.
- **Incorporate job aids and other tools.** When possible, take advantage of existing job aids or tools as part of the coaching process. Make sure the coaches and the coachees have access to job aids and tools that could increase on-the-job productivity.

The role of the coach is to provide expertise, consultation and interventions within or outside the scope of the curriculum. The power of the coach can be found in the short duration of the interactions and the influence on performance of the learner.

Suggested methods

Virtual meetings, facilitated classroom or team/project meetings, face-to-face meetings, phone, email, chat sessions, instant messaging, etc.

Skillsoft resources

IT and Project Management certification mentoring

Phase 8: Connect Me – The Collaboration Phase

The role of social learning in the new blended learning paradigm takes several forms. Some organizations have found by enhancing the social experience of learning, they are likely to get better participation from employees, especially if programs have a significant element of self-directed learning. With the ability to reach out to peers involved in the same program, or get help on a particular topic, learners are more likely to stay engaged and complete their program of study. This can also be enhanced with face-to-face or virtual group interaction at key points in the program, such as a kick-off or the achievement of a milestone.¹⁴

Providing access to a community allows the learner to fully participate in collaborative activities. Working with others to solve problems can increase the learners' success in applying their new skills within the workplace. These community-based learning events can happen at any time and it is best if the learner initiates them. Technology keeps remote learners in easy contact and allows them to discuss topics that are important to their unique learning requirements.

Ideas and strategies for the Coach Me phase

- **Optimize the use of technology.** Fundamental success of collaboration is the ability to connect with peers and colleagues. It's vital to provide learners with access to the technology and software required to link to or connect with the provided collaboration sites.
- **Encourage ad hoc meetings.** Use collaborative tools in an unstructured way to demonstrate content, solve problems, and explain concepts or conduct brainstorming or problem-solving sessions.

¹⁴ Boiros, Pam. *The Eight Truths of Social Learning. Now.* Skillsoft white paper © 2011

- **Stress the value of online communities.** Regular participation in established online groups can enhance learners' connection to their industry and allow for expanded networking.
- **Don't forget the non-technology based opportunities.** Attending industry conferences, trade shows, user groups, interest groups and participating in professional organizations are excellent ways to connect with peers and partners.

Involvement in small learning groups can benefit learners significantly. These groups provide support and encouragement along with extra feedback on course assignments. Most importantly, if needed, help is readily available.

Suggested methods

Social networking tools, email, phone, virtual meetings, conferences, trade show events, face-to-face meetings, phone, chat sessions, threaded discussions, interest groups, etc.

Skillssoft resources

Skillport, inGenius, Skillssoft sponsored seminars and webcasts, Client Community website, and Perspectives.

Mapping SkillSoft Resources to the Eight Phases of Workplace Learning

This matrix displays how Skillssoft supports each phase. You may wish to map your current resources to this matrix to determine how well you support each phase of the eight phases of workplace learning.

Skillssoft Resource	Phase 1 Prepare Me	Phase 2 Tell Me	Phase 3 Show Me	Phase 4 Let Me	Phase 5 Check Me	Phase 6 Support Me	Phase 7 Coach Me	Phase 8 Connect Me
Skillport	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Courses	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Books	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
Portals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Videos	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
Classes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
Authoring	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Events	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓

About the Skillsoft Resources

<i>Skillport</i>	This is Skillsoft's cloud-based global platform and provides access to a wide range of learning resources.
<i>Courses</i>	Skillsoft has a vast collection of high-quality instructional content to increase the transfer of learning quickly into the workplace. This content fulfills most of the eight phases.
<i>Books</i>	We have several topical collections to cover information needs of workers enterprise-wide which cover five of the eight phases.
<i>Portals</i>	Our portals allow access to extensive content all of which are within the context of a key job role or competency. All eight phases are touched upon through the use of this resource.
<i>Videos</i>	Skillsoft has a broad range of concise videos which provide advice and real-life experience from top industry experts and executives which cover five of the eight phases.
<i>Classes</i>	Our live virtual classes bring world-class experts to you anytime, anywhere. All eight phases are covered by this resource.
<i>Social</i>	Skillsoft's social learning collaborative tool encourages ongoing informal learning and expertise by focusing on work-related content within the context of various job roles. Covers five phases.
<i>Authoring</i>	We provide a range of tools and services to fine-tune Skillsoft content to be a more perfect fit with business. All eight phases can be covered using this resource.
<i>Services</i>	Skillsoft assists customers to develop effective learning programs that maximize business results from day one. Our range of services includes all eight phases.
<i>Events</i>	We are involved in our industry and host user conferences, virtual webinars, live presentations which connect us and our customers. Five phases are addressed.

More information about Skillsoft resources can be found on our webpage at www.Skillsoft.com



For more information or to learn more,
call 866-757-3177 or visit www.skillsoft.com

