Designing Blended Programs using the Eight Phases of Workplace Learning
Executive Summary

Learning outcomes should always lead to positive business outcomes and greater organizational agility. Unfortunately, more than 50% 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 a significant problem yet it is often ignored.

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 settings. Since most learning takes place outside the formal event, more learning and reinforcement must be embedded into the workflow.

When a program is well designed, the resulting gain in learning transfer and increased performance for your organization is significant.
THREE WORKPLACE BLENDS

In order to successfully deliver the right training to the right people at the right time, blended learning programs must be designed under very specific guidelines. Programs must include support and guidance for learners as they move through each component. A 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.

BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAMS

Successful blended learning is more than simply knitting together a variety of delivery methods and assets such as self-paced eLearning, instructor-led training, virtual classrooms and electronic books. This misconception 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.

To avoid these common errors, you need a framework, Skillsoft's eight phases of workplace learning. The eight phases of workplace learning were designed with the goal of successful implantation of blended learning and 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILLSOFT’S EIGHT PHASES FRAMEWORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOSTLY FORMAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREPARATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-Prepare Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness Phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Set expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Obtain commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Preparatory skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training checkpoint</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase 1: Prepare Me - The Readiness Phase

When organizations first implement blended learning, this phase is the one most often forgotten. Unfortunately, when it is skipped, 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. Preparing learners to fully participate in a blended learning program is vital to obtaining a successful outcome.

This first phase will ensure learners have expectations about how they will transfer their new knowledge and skill into action, and an understanding of the program requirements. This readiness phase helps to ensure learner success throughout the remaining phases.

As with all training, learners must first be made aware of the program requirements and goals, and any prerequisites. 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.

Suggested Strategies for This Phase

• Explain the process. Hold ‘how to learn’ sessions that outline 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.

• Provide job and learning aids. 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.

• Use a virtual meeting tool. Pre-work information can often be delivered in a virtual session to remote learners.

• Set up a communication protocol. Use email or a LMS to distribute welcome announcements.

**PHASE 2: TELL ME – THE PRESENTATION PHASE**

This phase includes the presentation and explanation of facts, concepts, procedures and principles related to the targeted content or subject. 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 strategies are usually one-way communication with little learner interaction.

**IDEAS AND STRATEGIES FOR THE TELL ME PHASE**

• Gain attention. In order for any learning to take place, first capture the learner’s attention. Present a problem or a new situation. 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). Explain why the content is important to learners in the context of their work.

• 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.

• Stimulate recall of prior learning. 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.
• Separate content into smaller chunks. Explain smaller parts of a procedure or process individually and separately.

• Use visuals and animations. Use visuals to clarify and illustrate content whenever possible.

**PHASE 3: SHOW ME – THE DEMONSTRATION PHASE**

This 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.

**IDEAS AND STRATEGIES FOR THE SHOW ME PHASE**

• Base demonstrations on real-life tasks, problems and scenarios. We are often motivated to learn something if we see that it will help us 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.

• Debrief to clarify key teaching points. If demonstrations are complicated, be sure to follow up with a debriefing or short summary of the key learning points.

• Chunk content into smaller pieces. The content should be presented in a blend of learning ‘chunks’ that are organized in ways that aid retention and information recall.

• 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.

**PHASE 4: LET ME – THE PRACTICE PHASE**

This phase gives learners an opportunity to apply newly acquired skills, knowledge and behaviors within a structured learning environment. Eliciting performance helps learners confirm their correct understanding, and the repetition further increases the
likelihood of retention. Feedback on performance is essential. 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.
- Choose practice strategies appropriate for the content and level of learning. Use standard question types for foundational content.
- 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.

**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? 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 illustrate whether the learner is ready, or not, to move forward.

Immediate and specific feedback on assessment performance is very important. Whenever possible, inform learners of their performance immediately and as specifically as possible.

**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.
- 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.
• 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.

**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.

**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.

• Expect and support correction of mistakes. 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.

• 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.

• Provide access to additional reference or support materials.
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. 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.

IDEAS AND STRATEGIES FOR THE COACH ME PHASE

• Provide coaching instruction and tools for trainers, managers, subject matter experts and learners.

• Have learners meet regularly with their coaches to review progress and discuss performance issues.

• 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.

PHASE 8: CONNECT ME – THE COLLABORATION PHASE

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. 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. 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.
• 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.

• 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.

**SUMMARY**

To maximise the results from any blended learning program it is essential that you take a look at Skillsoft’s Eight Phases of Workplace Learning. These stages: Prepare me, Tell Me, Show Me, Let Me, Check Me, Support Me, Coach Me and Connect Me will help you to develop a training and learning program that both supports your organization's goals and provides the best ROI.
ABOUT SKILLSOFT

Skillsoft is the global leader in eLearning with a long history of innovation. We train more professionals than any other company in the world and are trusted by the world’s leading organizations, including over 50% of the Fortune 500.

We currently serve over 6,700 customers and more than 45,000,000 learners worldwide and provide continuing, hands-on support to assist them in maximizing their ongoing success.

Skillsoft has grown rapidly, with 2,500 employees across multiple locations in North America, EMEA and APAC. For more information, visit www.skillsoft.com.