

An illustration on the left side of the page shows several stylized human figures in a meeting. One figure in the foreground is wearing a blue shirt and is looking at a laptop. Other figures are shown in profile or from behind, wearing various colored shirts (orange, white, grey). The background is a light green color.

NOT YOUR MOTHER'S BLENDED Learning

BY RANDY EMELO

Made up of communities, cohorts and pairs, this is not the blended learning you know so well. It's a different breed, one focused on people, that today's companies likely need.

Despite advancements in technology — collaborative learning platforms, mobile and virtual options, gamification — and an emphasis on informal vs. formal knowledge-sharing tactics, the learning industry remains by and large entrenched in the tried and true.

The Association for Talent Development's 2014 "State of the Industry" report shows that organizations spent \$1,208 per employee on training and development on average in 2013, and employees spent about 32 hours on learning. For employees at large organizations, that number jumped to 36 hours of training.

Learning typically occurred through classes with a live instructor, with 70 percent of training hours led by an instructor (either in-person or virtually), according to the ATD report. Some 55 percent of learning took place in-person via a live instructor-led class.

ON THE WEB

Learning leader Allison Rossett says learning delivery is about to get more personal, mobile and on-demand than ever before. CLOmedia.com/Blended101

These learning leaders may be setting themselves up for disaster. A 2008 Corporate Executive Board study titled “Sales Executive Council: Introduction to Talent Development” showed that within a week of a formal training event, people forgot 70 percent of what they learned. A month after the event, people forgot 87 percent of what they learned. That was seven years ago. Given the positive glut of information available today and the increasingly fast pace of global business, those numbers may well have increased. That’s not good.

“Currently, L&D is mainly delivering a 20th century refinement of a 19th century model, when information was scarce and connections were limited,” said Donald Taylor, chairman of the Learning and Performance Institute. “We have to reinvent ourselves for a 21st century where information is abundant and we can reach almost everyone on the planet.”

Organizations need to evaluate what they can do to not only deliver learning, but also make it stick. A new form of blended learning could tap into employees’ innate desire to learn while

they work, apply concepts on the job in real time and learn from the people around them who can help concepts go from theoretical to applicable.

Of course, blended learning is not a new idea. Since the advent of e-learning systems, trainers have expanded their scope and made training more flexible using a mix of physical classrooms and virtual learning systems. What is new is that blended learning today is moving away from courses and moving toward application.

The new form of blended learning emerging in organizations focuses on learning on the job and pulling people together to learn from one another right when they need to. As such, structured peer support and virtual learning networks are increasingly valuable.

A comprehensive blended learning approach consists of three modalities (Figure 1):

1. Learning communities providing on-the-job support.
2. Learning cohorts providing on-the-job action.
3. Learning pairs providing on-the-job guidance.

Learning Communities

Learning communities, or support communities, are groups of people who come together to focus on

FIGURE 1: NETWORKED LEARNING MODES



Reader Reaction

Are learning leaders missing the mark when it comes to blending social learning into the mix?



@loriniles:

Engage w/community BEFORE to build credibility and establish community. Only then begin learning components.



@allisonryder:

Maybe craft a twitter chat to take the learning and conversation online and bring in outside voices.



@EPierce100:

Be flexible to utilizing technology beyond how it was originally intended. Conference app >> Onboarding program.



@LauraZeligman:

Encourage discussion on enterprise social network in between formal learning sessions — reflect on key learnings & seek advice.



Mike Reedy:

Moving forward to the true future of learning is identifying where synchronous and asynchronous learning provide value along with the proper tools for each; this is how blended learning will be defined. Often training organizations believe blended is a mix of online and classroom, but we now have many, many more options than just those two. You can use various types of technology to blend learning in ways that you could not in the past. More important, people are ready to use these tools now in order to learn.



Cora Lonning:

Informal learning is a missed opportunity quite often overall; therefore, if one does not consider social learning a part of the blended learning mix, then yes, the mark could be missed! Of course, as usual, this depends on the audience, the topic, the objectives, the domain, and the overall learning goal.

What do you think? Join the discussion at tinyurl.com/defineblendedlearning, follow us on Twitter [@CL0media](https://twitter.com/CL0media) or join our *Chief Learning Officer* LinkedIn group.

one area of development they all have in common. Personalized learning in these communities is typically on the lower end of the spectrum because the concepts are broad or considered more basic information that people need to know.

People can take and use information and participate in activities at their discretion. For example, all new hires at an organization could be placed into an onboarding learning community that spans divisions, locations and roles, and focuses on such things as becoming familiar with and ensuring compliance with HR policies. The people who make up this community will typically self-organize, and people will rotate in and out of the community as their needs and availability dictate.

Using technology to facilitate a learning community can facilitate human and inanimate resource use. Smart software can easily provide insights to community members regarding who in the company is willing and available to act as appropriate advisers to help others learn. It also can curate content to generate suggestions on the most relevant resources to peruse and share with community members to make the learning contextual.

Xerox Corp. implemented a comprehensive blended learning approach within its Xerox Services University that takes full advantage of learning communities. XSU contains five schools that guide participants through a learning process that incorporates formal, social and experiential learning, and addresses their overall level of proficiency. Employees can follow any learning path in XSU, such as The School of Creativity and Innovation or The School of Business Foundations.

Each school uses an intelligent algorithm to offer smart recommendations for people on which learning

groups to join, what courses they should complete, what content they might want to review and more.

The learning community acts as a larger performance support group where people can ask questions of other practitioners across the Xerox organization; they spread best practices, learn from past mistakes and triumphs, and ultimately build a better company through their shared learning experience.

Learning Cohorts

Learning cohorts, or action learning groups, are smaller, more focused groups of usually no more than 12 that concentrate on specific developmental goals, curricula and agendas. The targeted agenda and adviser facilitation drives the application-based learning. Learners are required to participate in group activities, and learning is more personalized because people apply the learning to actual work, report back to the group on their progress and observations, and solicit feedback from both adviser and peers.

Data storage firm EMC Corp. brought this concept to life with its blended learning program for newly hired technical support engineers. Learning leaders blended online instructor-led training with structured social learning activities to build a learning environment where people could learn from one another, reference materials and discuss development concepts in the context of their jobs. The goal was to ensure training helps employees solve customer problems quickly and efficiently; that happened by extending online instructor-led learning's value through post-training virtual learning cohorts that put concepts into action.

EMC created a more contextual and continuous

BLENDED LEARNING continued on page 48

FIGURE 2: POST-BLEND RESULTS



learning process, and its blended learning method provided structure for asynchronous online collaboration and conversations. Instructors had a new way to assign work, provide resources, monitor progress, check understanding, and solicit interaction and feedback.

Conversely, students could ask questions, contribute to discussions, and document assignment progress. Passive attendance could not mask actual progression through the material, and the results prove that (Figure 2, p. 21). The company saved roughly \$270,000 by not paying for people to travel to attend a training course in person.

Learning Pairs

The third modality of this new blended learning concept is learning pairs, which provide on-the-job guidance for learners. These pairs are one-on-one rela-

tionships between learner and coach, mentor, peer adviser or supervisor, and focus on goal-driven activities tailored to individual learner's development needs. Goals can be set by the learner, supervisor, instructor, mentor, adviser or coach.

Learners get immediate feedback as they put their new knowledge into practice. The person acting as the guide in the relationship can observe the learner's work, vet actual work product or provide new opportunities to apply learning on the job. This makes it important to bring the supervisor into the fold with the learning pair in some capacity to communicate progress, address challenges and provide appropriate opportunities for growth. This also can make the individual's learning opportunities more practical and applicable to daily work.

Telecommunications firm Wide Open West, or WOW, uses on-the-job guidance with its re-envisioned process for performance support conversations. Leaders ditched their traditional performance management process because they wanted a flexible system to support ongoing and frequent performance feedback in conversational form. They now use social learning software to help make performance management an ongoing dialogue that occurs regularly between managers and direct reports.

"Our new performance process is not just a process change; it's a culture change," said Allyson Crawford, manager of organizational development at WOW.

Ongoing performance conversations provide structured coaching and performance feedback that affects daily work. Together, managers and employees create learning engagements and development plans that embed skills for development and incorporate prescheduled check-ins to ensure feedback happens. This process keeps all parties accountable and progressing forward.

Now is the time to be bold. If learning leaders really want to change, they must start building a different learning reality for their organizations, and develop learning networks using different learning modalities. To start:

1. Connect the new blended learning model to an influential program.
2. Use at least two of the three learning modalities with that program.
3. Move away from course-centered activities. Start pushing connections.
4. Realize that learning through each modality is not delivered through the same person.
5. Use learning modalities to ground learners in practical understanding and application. **CLO**

Randy Emelo is president and CEO of River, a social learning and mentoring software company, and author of "Modern Mentoring." To comment, email editor@CLOmedia.com.

Onboarding With a Blended Learning Treatment

By **Kate Everson**

Jill is a new hire in the information technology department. She is assigned to a broad onboarding learning community for on-the-job support with all of the other new hires from various departments, locations and roles. It gives her a chance to meet people from all over the company.

The onboarding community focuses on learning the ropes at the company and ensuring compliance with HR policies. Jill is also required to participate in the IT learning cohort focused solely on IT-based learning goals. This allows her to connect with her peers and colleagues in IT and work with them as they explore departmental practices, technologies and expected cultural norms for their department. The learning is practical and immediately applicable to her day-to-day job. The cohort can share, learn, reflect and apply practices and procedures together.

Last, Jill's manager creates a paired learning relationship with her to set developmental and performance expectations for her current role. The manager sets learning goals for Jill's first 90 days and keeps an eye on her progress so he can challenge her with new opportunities as they arise. Jill receives on-the-job guidance that is personal and tied to her individual goals.

It's an almost perfect blend.

Kate Everson is a Chief Learning Officer associate editor. To comment, email editor@CLOmedia.com.