Blended Learning in the Workforce

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Introduction

As technology continues to develop, training in the workforce has evolved to adapt within changing economies. Incorporating technology in corporate training environments has boasted many benefits to employees and employers. While not all companies incorporate technology in their training the same way, training within a blended learning model has shown to be very effective. This review analyzes blended learning models of the Flipped Classroom and Enriched Virtual Learning and how blended learning impacts employee development and organizations.

The Flipped Classroom

Blended learning uses a combination of conventional teaching and technology (Fegade & Sharma, 2023; Horn et al., 2015). Some teaching is delivered in person, while other teaching is delivered online. (Fegade & Sharma, 2023; Horn et al., 2015). In a blended learning model, the students should have some form of control over their speed, where they learn, and how they navigate their learning (Horn et al., 2015). There are four main models of blended learning: Rotation, Flex, A La Carte, and Enriched Virtual (Horn et al., 2015).

The Flipped Classroom is a category of the Rotation model (Horn et al., 2015). In a Flipped Classroom format, students typically review lecture material online and participate in project-based tasks in person with the teacher (Biech, 2022; Bredow et al., 2021; Horn et al., 2015; Maros et al., 2021). This strategy has a strong focus on maximizing the time a teacher spends with their students in person, which encourages active learning (Biech, 2022; Bredow et al., 2021; Horn et al., 2015; Maros et al., 2021).

Active learning is effective in creating long-term memory (Bredow et al., 2021; Horn et al., 2015; Maros et al., 2021). It can be achieved through a variety of project-based activities in the classroom (Bredow et al., 2021; Horn et al., 2015; Maros et al., 2021). Research has shown that face-to-face project-based learning fosters critical thinking, self-belief, and helps students

make connections to what they are learning (Bredow et al., 2021; Horn et al., 2015; Maros et al., 2021).

In addition to emphasizing active learning, Flipped Classrooms can help prevent students from feeling overloaded by new information (Bredow et al., 2021). The combination of lecture-based teaching online and in-person projects increases a student's ability to take in new information in a more efficient manner (Bredow et al., 2021; Maros et al., 2021). This has a positive ripple effect on the students, causing them to feel a sense of progress, which increases their motivation and performance (Bredow et al., 2021; Maros et al., 2021). Freeman et al.,'s (2014) research indicated students who participate in active learning had better performance on assessments and were likely to pass their course (as cited by Bredow et al., 2021).

Enriched Virtual Learning

Enriched Virtual Learning shares some of the same features of the Flipped Classroom, except the in-person requirement primarily serves to support struggling students, build student relationships, and create a sense of belonging among peers (Horn et al., 2015; Selvaraj et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2021). Most of the learning takes place online rather than face-to-face (Horn et al., 2015). In this model, the teacher may deliver content live online and in person (Horn et al., 2015), unlike the Flipped Classroom where live content is delivered only in person. Enriched Virtual Learning goes further with online delivery, where learning isn't simply filled with lecture content but offers engaging interactions in discussions, activities, and reflection (Selvaraj et al., 2020).

A key component of Enriched Virtual Learning is the use of a learning management system (LMS) (Selvaraj et al., 2020). The LMS is designed to house all course-related content in one place (Bari et al., 2018; Pass, 2021). It can hold presentations, lectures, discussions, activities, and assessments (Pass, 2021; Selvaraj et al., 2020). Documenting and tracking

course-related work is set up conveniently for the teacher, sometimes also having automation features (Allen, 2016; Biech, 2022; Pass, 2021).

Automated documenting and tracking is one of the many advantages Enriched Virtual Learning has to offer (Allen, 2016; Biech, 2022; Pass, 2021). From a teacher and operations perspective, other pertinent advantages of online teaching include reduced costs, less overall time needed to teach the lesson, and lessons can be delivered at any time and any place (Allen, 2016; Biech, 2022; Sandlin, 2013). From a student perspective, online learning offers the advantages of having control over the pace, opportunities for deep reflection to connect with the material, and receiving live feedback on progress (Biech, 2022; McNair, 2019; Means et al., 2010).

While there are many benefits to the online component of Enriched Virtual Learning, Biech (2022) mentioned some disadvantages that come with this strategy. Creating an effective Enriched Virtual Learning system does require time and resources (Agrawal et al., 2017; Biech, 2022). Online learning may not be suitable for all the content being taught, it can take more effort to build relationships, and not all learners may be adaptive to online learning technology (Bari et al., 2018; Biech, 2022).

Blending Learning and Employee Development

With the advancement of online technology, blended learning has become more integrated with employee training and development in an effort for organizations to stay competitive (Eighteen et al., 2023). Similar to blended learning using the Flipped Classroom and Enriched Virtual Learning in school systems, many of the same benefits and risks are found when applied in the workforce (Agrawal et al., 2017; Allen, 2016; Beinicke & Kyndt, 2019; Sandlin, 2013). Research studies have demonstrated the positive impact of having successful blended learning models for employees in their organization (Agrawal et al., 2017; Collis et al., 2005).

Collis et al. (2005) reported a case study of 130 employee participants in 12 blended courses from the Surface Faculty reporting employee blended learning benefits such as an ability to work at their own pace, support, and coaching from their trainer on work-based activities, and feeling connectedness with their peers. Additional feedback included employees reporting the overall efficiency of the training delivery and an ability to quickly apply what has been learned (Collis et al., 2005). A study by Agrawal et al. (2017) reviewed 294 bank employees who relayed their experience learning online. Over 80% of employees felt the online content was practical and increased their skill sets to perform their responsibilities (Agrawal et al., 2017, p. 354). Both studies found increased employee performance and employee confidence to complete their assigned tasks (Agrawal et al., 2017; Collis et al., 2005).

Employees participating in blended learning programs report an overall positive experience (Allen, 2016; Ashraf et al., 2021; Sandlin, 2013). MacLeod (2023) pointed out that having a blended learning environment for employees promotes positive mental health, giving employees a judgment-free space to learn and grow. The biggest impact blended learning seems to have on employees is the promotion of high motivation by having the trainer accessible to them as a coach and mentor (Ashraf et al., 2021; MacLeod, 2023; Sandlin, 2013). The face-to-face training component encourages growth amongst peers and offers additional attention for those who need more guidance (Allen, 2016). Collis et al. (2005) mentioned that blended learning gives employees a sense of empowerment. Keeping face-to-face teaching as part of the learning experience may help to maintain employee satisfaction (Sandlin, 2013).

Much of the research points out that effective blended learning in work environments requires extensive planning, resources, monitoring, and guidance to relevant content (Agrawal et al., 2017; Allen, 2016; Beinicke & Kyndt, 2019; Collis et al., 2005; Lothridge et al., 2013; Mubayrik, 2018). Regardless of how well-constructed a training program is, it will not be successful if the employee is not motivated to learn (Agrawal et al., 2017; Allen, 2016; Fegade & Sharma, 2023). Therefore, encouragement from management, supervisors, and peers helps

spark an employee's motivation to participate in the learning process (Collis et al., 2005; Fegade & Sharma, 2023; Mubayrik, 2018).

Organizational Impact of Blended Learning

Blended learning has profoundly impacted an organization's ability to compete in the marketplace (Agrawal et al., 2017; Eighteen et al., 2023). Eighteen et al.'s (2023) research involved over 100 companies worldwide to determine the impact an organization experienced when they invested in using technology for employee learning and development. Eighteen et al. (2023) mentioned that organizations that embrace technological advances for their employees' learning and development "are over 53% more likely to have experienced growth during the last year, they have 14% higher reported career opportunities, their senior leaders are rated 15% higher by their employees, and their overall Glassdoor ratings are 13% higher" (p. 7). To continue successful growth, organizations need to shift from traditional training to integrating online technology in employee learning and development to outpace their competitors (Agrawal et al., 2017; Eighteen et al., 2023).

An increased retention rate is a competing edge for organizations that embrace blended learning (Allen, 2016; Rossett & Frazee, 2006; Sandlin, 2013). Because the benefits of blended learning contribute towards employee motivation, satisfaction, positive experiences, mentorship, and confidence in acquired skills, retention rates are positively impacted (Allen, 2016; Anand et al., 2023; Ashraf et al., 2021; Rossett & Frazee, 2006; Sandlin, 2013). With over 90% of organizations concerned about retention rates (Anand et al., 2023, p. 22), it makes sense that organizations are increasing their funding toward blended learning and development opportunities (Allen, 2016).

While organizations are making room in their budgets to develop blended learning programs for their employees, a cost-savings component is involved (Allen, 2016; Eighteen et al., 2023; Lothridge et al., 2013; Rossett & Frazee, 2006; Twigg, 2005). Eighteen et al.'s (2023)

research study concluded that “companies with adaptive learning teams spend 27% less and deliver far greater business outcomes” (p. 7). Online training resources are easier and less expensive to manage, make updates, and distribute (Rossett & Frazee, 2006). Bogg’s (2015) research states that when online learning components are implemented properly, it can bring a return of 50 percent or higher compared to traditional classroom training (as cited by Allen (2016). The National Center for Academic Transformation studied 30 schools that changed from traditional teaching to blended learning (Twigg, 2005). The study found the following:

> All 30 institutions reduced costs by 37 percent on average, ranging from 15 percent to 77 percent. Collectively, the 30 redesigned courses affect more than 50,000 students nationwide and produce a savings of $3.1 million in operating expenses each year. (Twigg, 2005, p. 3)

Lothridge et al. (2013) mentioned Wells Fargo had converted their call center training into blended learning for their employees and successfully reduced their expenses by $2 million (p. 412).

Alongside the benefits of cost-savings, another significant result of blended learning in the workforce is achieving higher productivity from its employees (Agrawal et al., 2017; Eighteen et al., 2023; Laurano, 2015). Properly incorporating online learning components increases the employee’s proficiency, resulting in better work performance (Agrawal et al., 2017). These findings are in alignment with the meta-analysis from the U.S. Department of Education, which concluded that blended learning produced better proficiency in skillsets than standalone face-to-face instruction (Means et al., 2010). An employee’s ability to access the latest training information allows them to upskill, increasing their performance and productivity (Agrawal et al., 2017). With a strong onboarding process using blended learning, Glassdoor’s research found that organizations experienced increased employee performance “by over 70%” (Laurano, 2015, p. 12).

Conclusion

The benefits of blended learning applied within corporate environments have proven essential for an organization’s ability to adapt to changing economic environments and outpace its competitors. Learning and development takes on new forms, empowering employees to master the skillsets needed to succeed within their own position. While blended learning can take on many forms, organizations must consider which blended learning model or combination of models may best suit their needs. The advantages of the Flipped Classroom and Enriched Virtual Learning formats of blended learning align with organizations' generally desired outcomes.

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