

Blended learning: the future isn't one format



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Fresh thinking for learning managers

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Blended learning isn't a new idea. But after talking with a group of enterprise learning managers at our latest meetup, one thing stood out:

👉 The *why* behind blended learning is shifting. It's about digging ourselves out of the digital-first hole we seem to have fallen into, and meeting people where they are, with smart learning experiences that feel more accessible and more human.

One key insight from the conversations? Blended learning is where *accountability lives*. A blend can be a sequence of meaningful moments that encourage reflection, drive conversation, and create a sense of responsibility to act.

As one participant put it:

"You work harder at your learning when you know someone will follow up, ask questions, or care about what you think."

Here's my take on why we need to think afresh about blends, and bring them back, for good!

Why blends matter more than ever

At the Meetup, we heard again and again that learning isn't "one and done". With dispersed teams, limited attention, and varied working patterns, one-shot training just doesn't cut it. (Did it ever?)

A thoughtful blend can:

- **Support performance over time** – helping people apply knowledge in context.
- **Create space for connection** – through coaching, social learning, or feedback loops.
- **Build in accountability** – by signalling that someone will care about what's learned.

But here's the tension...

Accountability is powerful but time is tight. Especially for retail, frontline, and shift-based workers, there's limited space for learning during the day.

So how do we strike a balance?

💡 What the group agreed on was that accountability doesn't have to mean loads more time. It can be light-touch:

- A 5-minute team huddle
- A quick "tell me one thing you learned" follow-up
- A short reflective workbook that's used later in a coaching conversation
- Or even a surprise email that says "You said this in your training - do you still agree?"

It's not about catching people out. It's about showing that the learning matters, that someone cares, and encouraging people to talk about it afterward.

Common pitfalls to avoid

As you'd expect, everyone had tried blends that didn't quite work too. Here are a few traps to watch for:

- **Spamming across too many channels:** Choice is good. Overload isn't. Be intentional. And balance 'push' content with 'pull'.
- **Lacking cohesion:** Each element should add something new and link clearly to the big picture.
- **No clear purpose or performance focus:** Don't build a beautiful blend around content. Start with what people need to do differently.
- **Designing for a single user:** Field teams, desk-based roles, senior managers - have different working patterns, contexts, platforms, and needs.
- **No follow-up:** If there's no feedback loop or sense that learning will be seen, it's easy to disengage - especially for remote or shift-based employees.

"We've found that when there's a session in the diary - when you know someone will check in - you take the learning more seriously."

Example blends

Blend #1:

Product knowledge for retail / sales floor example

(Typically digital only)

Learning time is limited. Staff need to 'learn' the product fast and be effective at selling it.



Why it works: flexible, light-touch, and rooted in checking skills - not just consumption.

"We gave staff new products and asked them to share videos of their experience. It exploded! They owned the learning - it felt real."

Blend #2:

Leadership training for emerging managers in supply chains

(Typically face to face)



Why it works: layered over time, varied touchpoints, and visibility from senior leaders = meaningful and motivating.

💡 **Tip:** Planning face to face? Use it wisely. Simulations, practice scenarios, story sharing, group tasks.

"Our experiential leadership program throws them into high-stress simulations. They're standing in a room, being briefed by the CEO via a video with no time to prepare, and they start learning there and then."

Takeaways? Blend with purpose

The best blends don't just mix formats - they create a rhythm, expectations, and accountability.

It's tempting to throw multiple formats into a learning experience to tick the "blended" box, or to climb out of the trough of digital content overload by spamming other channels!

Effective blends are about **connecting the dots** between moments of learning, reflection, conversation, and application - so people don't just *consume* content, they *use* it.

So if you do one thing:

🔍 **Ask:** What will this blend help someone *do* better?

If your blend includes:

- A clear performance goal
- A thread of human interaction
- A light accountability moment
- A moment of practice

...you're on the right track.

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