

# Training & Development

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## e-learning maturity

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AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT



# Multiple methods for effective learning

Dr Michael Leimbach

Multiple methods are now being used to ensure effective learning, moving beyond blended learning which saw learning as a two-part mix of classroom and online learning. Dr Michael Leimbach from Wilson Learning says corporate learning strategies now seek to identify the most effective way to integrate traditional and non-traditional methods.

Leimbach and colleagues studied over 1,000 research articles to determine trends in learning and development (L&D), and interviewed practitioners and researchers. One of the top concerns of L&D professionals was how to optimise the transfer of learning from training contexts to the workplace. Previous studies had shown that much of the learning that occurs through traditional training methods (seminars, self-directed e-learning, etc) does not lead to changes in workplace or organisational performance.

Their review of the articles found that multiple methods had evolved beyond what was commonly known as blended learning (a combination of classroom and e-learning). The multiple methods in their study captured all aspects of learning beyond the formal training program. It involved utilisation of methods like coaching, e-mail reminders, informal learning, structured on-the-job training, etc, to promote learning that delivered results.

The multiple methods included both traditional and non-traditional methods that could be employed to ensure that learning led to improvement in organisational performance. Discussion has moved away from a focus on one or two specific methods towards how all learning methods can be strategically integrated so that learning always leads to improved organisational performance.

There is a growing trend in the utilisation of non-traditional methods used to deliver learning, including Web 2.0 approaches such as avatars, e-coaching, social networks and blogs, along with podcasts, structured on-the-job training, informal learning and communities of practice.

The top five methods of learning transfer cited by L&D practitioners in the articles reviewed were:

- multiple methods (62 articles)
- strategy integration (47)
- impact measurement (30)
- competency assessment (15)
- knowledge management (15).

Leimbach examined 49 professional publications and found a total of 514 articles dealing with learning transfer methods.

## ■ Online learning methods

The role of online learning was also examined in Leimbach's study. The conclusion he says is now solidly supported by research is that the decision whether or not to use online learning depends on many factors in the organisation, but one of the important factors is the nature of the content of learning. Three kinds of content can be distinguished, as shown in the table.

Type of content	Choice of method
Declarative knowledge (facts)	e-Learning is effective and efficient
Processes and procedures	Both the classroom and e-learning can be effective, but the classroom still seems to have a slight advantage
Changing or enhancing interpersonal skills	Face-to-face (interpersonal) experience in classrooms, groups and one-to-one situations is both more effective and more efficient than e-learning. The return on investment is better for interpersonal methods, even though the cost itself may be higher than e-learning.

These are broad generalisations based on analysis of a number of studies. In any particular situation, all the factors have to be weighed up before making a choice.

## ■ Report

Trends in workplace learning and performance, Wilson Learning Worldwide, 2008. Website: <http://wilsonlearning.com>. ■