

MAKING HYBRID LEARNING WORK

BEST PRACTICES FOR TRAINING
A DISPERSED WORKFORCE

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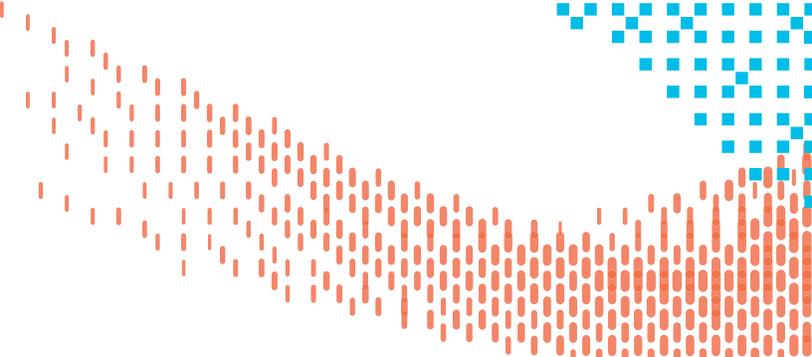
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INTRODUCTION

Making Hybrid Learning Work

The world of work is evolving at a rapid pace – from shifting to a remote work environment to leveraging technology to enhance existing business processes. The way we work and learn has changed in the past few years, requiring organizations to develop more innovative learning solutions to prepare employees for changes in their role. **Hybrid learning** has emerged as a viable option to train and develop a dispersed workforce – but has proved challenging.

Facilitating a hybrid learning program, where learners are both remote and in the physical classroom, is logistically difficult. Facilitators need **new skills** to engage dispersed learners in the learning process, while leveraging technology and tools to create an environment conducive for learning for all participants. This includes having clear audio and visuals, engaging and relevant content, and interactive discussions among learners. These are just a few of the challenges facing learning leaders as they develop and deliver hybrid learning programs.

Hybrid work seems to be here to stay, so learning leaders must be prepared to execute effective hybrid learning programs moving forward. Through that lens, we curated a collection of best practices to help training professionals develop engaging hybrid and remote programs that connect dispersed learners across the organization. While there's no one-size-fits-all approach to hybrid learning, these tips can provide insights and guidance as you build your learning programs.

Within this e-book, you'll find articles that appeared on [TrainingIndustry.com](https://www.trainingindustry.com) that share actionable tips on optimizing learner engagement, evaluating learning effectiveness, creating equitable and inclusive learning, and the implementation of learning technologies and tools to reach hybrid and remote learners. You will also find real solutions to hybrid learning challenges from learning leaders like you. We hope this content will spark inspiration as you navigate the future of work and strive to meet the evolving needs of your workforce.

3 Ways to Maximize Hybrid Learning Effectiveness



By **Yishan Chan**, who works for the National Australia Bank (NAB) and has a passion for leveraging modern learning approaches to help employees adapt their skills in a rapidly changing work landscape.

In a hybrid workplace, employees will need flexibility in being able to learn in the office or remotely at home, and learn through a variety of formats that are easy to use – learning formally together, as well as asynchronously at their own pace. This learning and development (L&D) model is known as hybrid learning, which combines digital and face-to-face learning, in person and remote, live and synchronous.

When designing a hybrid learning program, it's important to select the most relevant learning activities and resources that prepare the audience for real-life tasks. The value delivered from **hybrid learning** is achieved when individuals can demonstrate they have the knowledge or skills required to achieve the desired business outcome.

While the coronavirus pandemic has accelerated digital-led approaches to employee engagement, people are more engaged when there is active communication. Live interactions are better than broadcasts for collaboration and providing support. This is another important consideration when determining how content is delivered, so that time spent online is balanced between engagement and self-discovery.

Creating a learning community centered around the hybrid learning program encourages knowledge sharing, enabling individuals to access a support network or seek guidance from a facilitator on the activities if needed.

Addressing these design considerations requires leadership buy-in on the advantages of hybrid learning, and timely access to subject matter experts who can work with you to develop practical learning resources and provide ongoing support.

If you encounter challenges in these areas, here are three tips to build a case for change, demonstrate value and improve the effectiveness of hybrid learning.

TIP 1: FOCUS ON TARGETED, RELATED NETWORKS

One way to incrementally build a case for change is to evaluate the job functions in your organization's job architecture framework. Assess the job functions that are going through significant change in terms of skill sets required and how hybrid learning solutions can help reskill employees.

Timelines for onboarding programs relating to these job functions can help create urgency and commitment for leadership support. Trial different approaches and seek feedback from stakeholders and subject matter experts who are invested in successfully onboarding new employees.

To gain buy-in for hybrid learning, identify multiple related job functions and roles where you can demonstrate benefits, such as improved collaboration and innovation across these roles to achieve a common goal. Establishing change agents across related parts of an organizational network where they can reinforce one another increases the willingness to learn from one another, explore new ideas and foster innovation.

By demonstrating improvements in cross-team outcomes enabled by hybrid learning, this will help you gain support in the expansion of hybrid learning solutions across your organization.

“Assess how hybrid learning solutions can help reskill employees.”

TIP 2: BUILD CONTENT HEROES IN TEAMS

The **subject matter experts (SMEs)** needed to create performance support resources are likely to be time poor and need support with translating their technical and domain knowledge into learning resources.

The combination of these factors may create a dependency on project-based resources to maintain the learning resources. To counteract this, look for team members who are adept in skills such as digital communication, sense-making, continuous improvement and change management, who can continue collaborating with SMEs to improve the program.

Engage these team members up front so that they have an opportunity to develop relationships with the necessary stakeholders and build confidence in contributing their skills toward developing and improving hybrid learning solutions.

These team members are an integral part of your change agent network to sustain a continuous learning culture, as they will be key translators of new information into value-adding resources that benefit the wider team.

TIP 3: WEAR THE LENS OF A PROFESSIONAL BEGINNER

In a work environment where team members have varying levels of experience and learning preferences, it can be challenging to determine which type of performance support resources will achieve the greatest value. Before generating ideas, it's important to understand what problems your learners are facing, and how they are likely to ask questions in relation to the topic.

What might your learners need to unlearn and relearn? At which step of their workflow will they realize the need for more learning to improve their performance? What would motivate them to **share their knowledge** and enhance learning resources on the topic?

Taking a human-centered approach to designing hybrid learning solutions will help not only with prioritizing ideas based on value add, but also with understanding how to tailor the training delivery approach so that different personas can easily find relevant answers to their questions in the flow of work.

IN CONCLUSION

The success of a hybrid learning model is as much about building learning engagement as it is about strategic change management. Applying an Agile approach to delivering value ensures not only that learner engagement is at the center of decision-making, but also that training achieves business results, faster.

“What might your learners need to unlearn and relearn?”



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Get Real-time Feedback



Andrew L. Brewer, M.S.

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CHALLENGE

During online sessions, there were issues that we were not aware of until days after the activity. We needed a more immediate way to receive learner feedback, instead of waiting for the course evaluation. Getting feedback immediately following an activity allows us to promptly address any issues and resolve them prior to future events.

SOLUTION

Our team developed a post-event feedback form that provides participants with a quick way to rate the activity and submit any concerns related to their experience, such as any issues accessing the activity or regarding the quality of content, presenters and/or delivery.

We used a post-event landing page to enable learners to take the survey, allowing them to further engage and provide commentary on the live event, beyond what they may feel comfortable typing in the chat or questions and answers (Q&A). This evaluation is not the same as the course/activity evaluation, rather a quick way to strike while the iron is hot to promote and collect immediate feedback from participants, with the option to be anonymous. These evaluations have been vital to gauging the quality of our programming and responding quickly to any concerns.

A Modern Approach to Hybrid Onboarding



By Danielle Murdaugh, an associate editor at Training Industry.

With the shift to hybrid work, gone are the days of 100% employer observation. For many organizations, managing a dispersed workforce can pose as a challenge — especially when onboarding new employees.

Onboarding new hires in person allows employers to have a more hands-on approach with learning and development (L&D) opportunities and gauge new team members' skills levels. However, with a hybrid work environment, it can be difficult for learning leaders to target specific skills gaps in new hires and track performance goals.

Hybrid onboarding may rely on modalities like video chat, PowerPoint or email to deliver training and orientation. Though convenient, these modalities fail to instill a team connectedness and the confidence new hires need to successfully perform their job. Without **social support**, new team members will lack the confidence and support to do their job, thus reducing productivity — and possibly even retention.

To effectively train new hires in a dispersed environment and foster a culture of connectivity, learning leaders should turn to these practices.

DEVELOP A NEW APPROACH TO HYBRID LEARNING

Learning in a hybrid work environment is different than learning in person, so training should not be identical. Learning leaders should identify unique strategies, tailored to job roles and functions, to onboard hybrid employees, instead of using a one-size-fits-all approach.

“The big mistake employers make is trying to take what they did in person and do the exact same thing online or hybrid,” says Dr. Katie Brown, the founder and chief executive officer of EnGen, a language upskilling platform that helps organizations train limited English-speaking workers. “They think we have to put everything online [and] do exactly what we did face to face only [with] Zoom.”

When designing hybrid onboarding, many employers rely on slides, synchronous video and prerecorded lectures to deliver training. While these are great modes of learning, they are not sufficient to creating an effective onboarding experience.

“Forward-thinking employers are thinking about the tools we use for remote work and remote collaboration and leveraging those tools,” Dr. Brown explains.

Bharani Rajakumar, the chief executive officer of TRANSFR Inc., a virtual training company that provides immersive learning experiences, says, “Training is a critical part of the onboarding process. When you bring on a new team member, if you invest heavily in that training that team member will feel welcomed, like they belong and like they know what they’re supposed to do and their purpose ... that’s where technology can help.”

At TRANSFR, learning leaders work with subject matter experts (SMEs) to create videos that utilize **virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR)** to provide a much more interactive and memorable experience. For instance, the training uses a digital coach who talks the learner through the simulation and works to improve their performance. “I think there’s just so much opportunity to use technology to scale up the ability to have everyone learn from your SMEs,” Rajakumar shares.

TRANSFR also implemented a buddy system to give new employees a seasoned team member to help them adjust to their new role and use as a source for questions, and even to attend meetings with them.

When it comes to designing an onboarding process fit for today’s world of work, learning leaders should leverage knowledge from SMEs, as well as practice forward-thinking to develop innovative methodologies.

“Learning in a hybrid work environment is different than learning in person, so training should not be identical.”

REPLACE EMPLOYER OBSERVATION WITH GOAL-BASED TRACKING

Many employers still feel uncomfortable managing a dispersed work environment — especially when it comes to onboarding. Working in person allows the employer to visually observe what skills the new hire has and what skills they may need. However, when the team is dispersed, it can be challenging to track performance level.

That is why a lot of learning leaders are using a goal-based approach to track employee performance and productivity. Dr. Brown says, “I think it’s much better to manage people to goals than it is to manage them to arbitrary constructs, like the amount of time they sit in an office. A leader of a team that’s working in a distributed [workplace] ... should manage them [based on] outcomes.”

Leaders can feel more comfortable managing and onboarding a dispersed workforce by remodeling their approach to **measuring performance through goals**. At the start of onboarding, learning leaders can give new hires a 30/60/90-day roadmap with set performance goals. Managers can track how well their employees are settling into their role and skills level through their goal achievement.

Rajakumar says that TRANSFR focuses on outcomes and holds its people accountable to the goals they set. For example, each quarter they have company-wide meetings where they ask their people to share their individual goals and compare them to their current performance. “So, it’s more about people [choosing] how they want to contribute,” he said. When their people report back on goals achieved, it becomes clear who is meeting performance goals, and who may need either a new way to contribute or a learning opportunity.

By using goals, rather than visual observation, leaders can better manage and track their hybrid team’s productivity.

FOSTER TEAM CONNECTIVITY WITH SOCIAL SUPPORT

Hybrid work models can mean different work hours and schedules for employees, creating a social barrier. Team connectivity is vital for collaboration and the organization’s growth. This is why fostering connectedness during onboarding is such a critical part in not only an employee’s career cycle, but the organization’s life cycle.

“When you’re trying to build a work culture and you’re completely at a distance, a sense of community is the most important part for success, so what I’ve seen successful employers do is find ways to build a community at a distance,” Dr. Brown says. EnGen’s workforce is completely distributed, and the company hired and onboarded each employee remotely during the pandemic. However, Dr. Brown says that the company has a close-knit culture because leaders go out of their way to instill support.

For example, every Thursday afternoon EnGen has a meeting where everyone shares what they did that week, any highlights and anything they struggled with. They use that meeting to build a culture that promotes cohesiveness and open communication. They also have monthly team building activities where they'll play games, like virtual escape rooms or trivia to strengthen team connections.

The company also uses a collaboration tool to keep the team connected and informed on birthday announcements, work anniversaries, new hires and so on. Dr. Brown explains that having a communication channel ensures that everyone feels comfortable communicating, despite not being together in person.

When it comes to how social support can help with onboarding, Rajakumar says, "An effective onboarding process helps by removing a ton of anxiety." With TRANSFR's buddy system, it allows their employees to have someone to go to and can give them a source for questions that pop up during the workday.

Once a week, the team at TRANSFR schedules a company campfire where they celebrate birthdays, welcome new people to the company and give shout outs to other team members. "It helps with building that team-oriented culture of collaboration," Rajakumar says.

Every month, the company also sends pulse surveys to their people requesting feedback on what is going well and what can be improved. Rajakumar says that this helps new employees feel valued at the company and like a contributing member.

When designing hybrid onboarding, it is important to take a new approach, rather than rely on traditional methodologies. By using forward-thinking and new insights, learning leaders can give new hires an effective and engaging experience and get them excited about contributing to the company's future success.

"Hybrid work models can mean different work hours and schedules for employees, creating a social barrier."

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Divide and Conquer



Amanda Van Der Heiden

Chief Learning Solutions Consultant and Coach
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CHALLENGE

We recently consulted for a client who needed to revamp their onboarding practices for DAY1 training (which consisted of 10-50 person cohorts weekly). Historically, this training was conducted on-site. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, they simply transferred the program to a virtual platform. Recently, due to regulatory requirements, part of their population was required to be on-site and the rest were remote.

Through assessment and analysis, we determined the main purpose of the DAY1 program was to create excitement, engagement, build comradery and culture from DAY1. It was also necessary to ensure all compliance paperwork, technology requirements and housekeeping items were completed.

Therefore, how could we create all of that while some people were on-site and others were at their computers at home?

SOLUTION

The client chose to have two facilitators support the program, one who was primarily focused on the on-site employees and one who was focused on the virtual learners. Some sessions of the day were designed to split the group into on-site or virtual, while other sessions were purposely developed for virtual/on-site pairs to work together as a team. This inclusive creative variety not only broke up the day but created bonds for people inside the classroom and out.

5 Ways to Become an Effective Hybrid Workplace Leader



By Danielle Wallace, CTDP, the chief learning strategist at [Beyond the Sky](#), a provider of custom learning solutions.

Companies around the world are turning to hybrid teams to manage the current employee demand that started with the COVID-19 pandemic. Hybrid teams are built using a combination of in-office employees and remote workers. As you might guess, this combination comes with many unique challenges.

Employees became used to working in a flexible environment, and many are demanding that it continue. As a result, it's trickier to retain top talent because many employees prefer to work from home. Compounding this challenge is the fact that there are different needs that remote vs. in-person employees have, and they are often at odds with each other.

The result is that leading hybrid teams is becoming more complex. Leaders are tasked with creating a collaborative, cohesive culture that merges remote workers with in-office teams while maintaining consistently high performance. Leaders are often caught in the middle of these two volatile factors and struggle to find common ground.

[Managing a hybrid workforce](#) effectively requires a unique skill set. Leaders must follow several steps to merge all these elements and ultimately create an environment that works for everyone.

1. SET CLEAR POLICIES AND GOALS TOGETHER

Ambiguity is a common issue with hybrid teams. All team members need to understand the role they play and their responsibilities to avoid confusion and disengagement.

Examples of this role clarity includes accurate job descriptions, hiring procedures, [onboarding](#) processes and defining the organizational culture. The foundation of team collaboration is built on clarity. Companies lacking in this area will have employees who are stressed or feeling anxious, and that leads to potential conflict.

The team can hold a meeting to establish their overall hybrid working expectations once policies have been developed and posted. For example, what instances warrant in-person meetings, when team meetings are scheduled and what format hybrid team meetings will be in (e.g., a video meeting for everyone, including those in the office).

Leaders should serve as facilitators so the whole team can communicate their thoughts and assemble goals collaboratively. **As a leader**, you'll need to ensure the final expectations are clear in hybrid teams' working norms and it is essential to compromise.

2. CREATE INTERPERSONAL TIME WITH THE TEAM

Another common challenge with hybrid teams is building interpersonal relationships. In-house teams have higher levels of comradery amongst themselves than they have with anyone working remotely. That's not necessarily flawed, but there are several ways to promote cohesive relations among all employees and avoid future silos of "in-office" versus "remote."

For starters, schedule regular video conferences with the entire team. Have group calls where the team can discuss certain job-related tasks. Furthermore, allow and encourage non-job-related discussion through virtual coffees, small talk before calls, enterprise **collaboration tools** and social-focused team meetings.

When you or any in-office team member needs to have a tough conversation with a remote member of the team, don't do so through text chats. Call them for these conversations. It's hard to convey tone through text messages, so the conversation can easily be taken out of context.

3. EACH MEMBER SHOULD HAVE A UNIQUE HYBRID WORK PLAN

Everyone is different, and as a result, brings a unique set of skills to the team. There isn't a single approach that works for everyone. Your job as a leader is to identify each person's strengths and then identify the challenges they are likely to face.

"As a leader, you'll need to ensure the final expectations are clear in hybrid teams' working norms."

Set every member of your team up for success. Ask these questions to prevent challenging situations.

- Is the task suited for remote work, or would it be better to assign it to an in-person employee?
- What support might the employee need to start and complete the task?
- What is their line of support in case of questions?

There will always be obstacles to overcome, so your job is to equip everyone with the right tools to help navigate those stumbling blocks.

4. DON'T MICROMANAGE TEAM MEMBERS

While there are certain managerial styles that can transition flawlessly in a remote environment, micromanaging is not one of them. At the beginning of the pandemic, some companies tried implementing tracking software, but it created more problems than it solved.

Give your in-office employees and remote workers enough breathing room to do their job. Micromanaging their every move results in a toxic work environment because they feel they can't be trusted to do the job that they were hired to do. Remote workers already feel as if they are under scrutiny for not working in the office, so it's unnecessary to compound this feeling by micromanaging them. Many companies learned this lesson the hard way and lost key employees.

Once your team understands their responsibilities, track results through [open communication](#) and regular updates. These can be addressed directly if there are problems.

5. BUILD A SYSTEM OF TRUST AMONG YOUR HYBRID TEAM

One of the greatest challenges of building a hybrid team is fostering the trust of both in-office teams and remote workers. Remote workers often feel as if their in-office colleagues have more trust. Leaders must take the appropriate steps to ensure every member of the team is equally important.

Leading a hybrid team comes down to [building trust](#) with all team members. At the onset of the pandemic, many leaders were afraid their employees were not being productive from home. Effective leaders overcame this initial fear by providing clear expectations to avoid ambiguity, providing support and focusing on results not the time spent. A great leader instills trust in the team. They create a system of accountability that ensures the job is done correctly and efficiently.

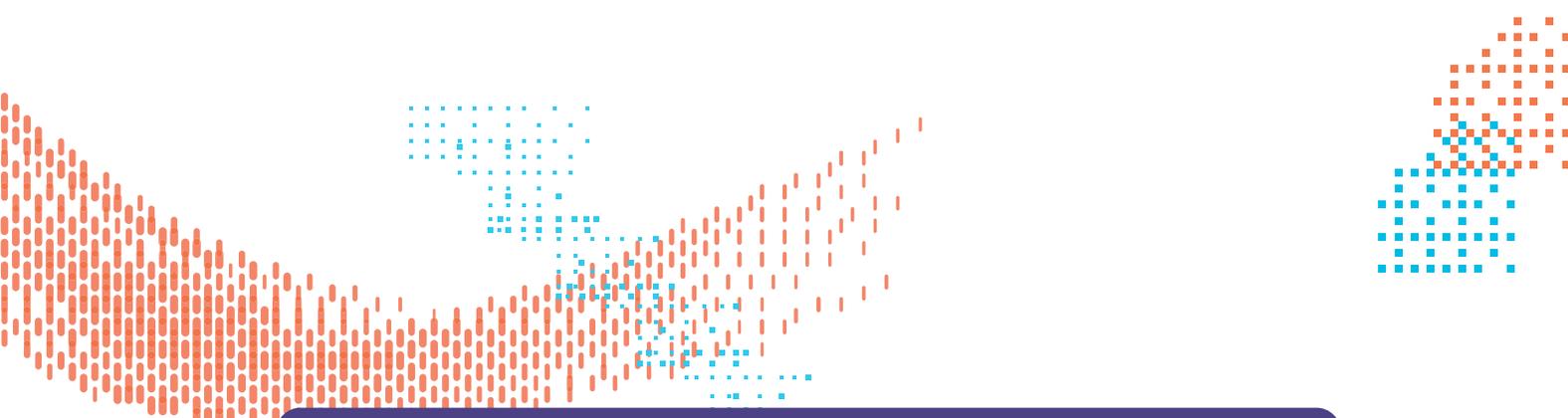
Address the issue if you feel efficiency is sliding because of the at-home conditions of a remote member of the team. However, the key is to build a strong foundation that provides direction to everyone on the team.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This current work environment has brought about questions that have left many companies struggling for answers. Many employees say they prefer working remotely but don't consider that it's creating a disconnect that is dampening motivation. Surveys reveal that **46% of employees** have considered leaving their current employer. The pitfalls of a hybrid workforce contribute to this situation.

It's up to leaders to find innovative solutions to make hybrid teams happy and productive as this model is more complicated than a fully remote team. There are unprecedented issues that will put it to the test. Pay close attention to your team members and continue to find ways to address their unique position. Your team will flourish and thank you.

“Once your team understands their responsibilities,
track results through open communication.”



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Leverage Coaching Support



Kelly Rider

Chief Learning and Talent Officer, People Team
PTC

CHALLENGE

At PTC, the majority of training was delivered in person by human resources business partners (HRBPs) and organizational development. As we shifted to a remote and hybrid work environment, many of the learning and development (L&D) offerings were moved to virtual delivery – yet managers still craved a higher-touch experience.

SOLUTION

To provide support for our managers with their development with personalized feedback, we invested in an external coaching provider to work with. These coaches are available on demand and are supporting our managers with conflict resolution, goal setting, career development and more.

Within a hybrid and virtual environment, many managers found themselves without their community or support system from a physical environment. In providing virtual 1:1 coaching, our managers can connect live with professionals who can provide feedback and help set actionable goals. Following these sessions, 92% of managers said they learned a new skill or strategy they can apply. Bringing in outside coaching has been a highlight of our learning strategy to bridge the gap of connection in a hybrid/virtual environment.

Plugged In: How Learning Technologies Can Support Hybrid and Remote Workers



By Hasti Mehta, a senior learning specialist at HubSpot, and Meghan Castillo, a learning experience design team lead at HubSpot.

The past two years have propelled hybrid and remote work to the forefront, and it's clear that they are here to stay. The flexibility, autonomy, and equitable opportunities that remote and hybrid work provide will only continue to separate companies that offer these benefits from those that try to return to “the way it was.”

Learning technologies, although often overlooked and underutilized, have the ability to define how successfully a company can adapt to this new, but inevitable future. In response to this new future, one of the best benefits employers can offer include flexible hours and the ability to work remotely. In some cases, this has included creating options for longer-term remote work, which has led to **increased productivity**, lower environmental impact, better employee branding and lower turnover. Now that the world is entering a new phase of the pandemic armed with additional information and experience, some workers find themselves in a hybrid work situation where they have the flexibility to work from home and in the office as needed. With remote, hybrid and office workers in mind, how do we solve for the blend of these situations while providing an equitable experience? A major way to solve for this hybrid way of working is **through learning technologies**.

THE POWER OF TECH

While learning technologies were never intended to replace in-person interactions, they have had a significant impact on remote and hybrid workers onboarding to a new company, growing their career and developing relationships across the business. We've come to a point where learning technology has the ability to make or break a company's future as we move to a hybrid work environment because its impact is no longer constrained to the onboarding or professional development portions of an employee's tenure, but learning technology now has the potential to impact all parts of the employee experience. Let's take a deeper dive into how learning technologies affect a **remote or hybrid worker's experience** across three core areas: onboarding, continuous skills development and company culture.

ONBOARDING

Gone are the days when companies were able to fly employees out for a week-long onboarding experience at an office location. Not only does this require a new hire to leave their home and responsibilities, but it has a negative impact on the environment and is quite costly. It is well known that **onboarding** is a critical part of an employee's initiation into a company and culture. A Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) article claims that 69% of employees are more likely to stay with a company if they have a great onboarding experience. It's imperative that we use technology effectively to provide an exceptional onboarding experience and help employees onboard where they will work from long-term. Doing so is more inclusive of those who are disabled, neurodiverse, parents, caretakers or those experiencing mental health conditions. It helps employees gain first-hand experience on how the company approaches remote work while enabling real connections.

To support a remote and hybrid onboarding experience, technology solutions must include increased accessibility functionality to be equitable. Accessibility can mean many things when referring to learning technologies. Basic accessibility functionality that all systems should have include **Section 508 compliance**, support for screen readers, and closed captioning for videos. With hybrid workers needing increased flexibility, especially in these times of uncertainty, it is important to broaden our definition of accessibility to allow for technology that can be consumed on-demand. For this reason, it is important to leverage learning technologies that can host eLearning and other multimedia content, and that allow for asynchronous communication and collaboration.

CONTINUING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER GROWTH

Career growth opportunities have taken on a new level of importance when it comes to **attracting and retaining talent** compared to years past. Professional development sets learners up for success, enables personal and professional growth, and **leads to 15% higher engagement and 34% higher retention rates** than organizations that do not offer these opportunities. With a more distributed workforce, it is important for employers to provide technology solutions options that can reduce barriers to information, increase growth opportunities and foster connectedness.

Overall, learning technology plays a major role in hosting, facilitating, nudging and bringing awareness and an aspect of localization to professional development opportunities.

Let's take a tech enablement platform, for instance, which can elevate awareness and increase sign-ups for professional development opportunities and includes the ability to host content, live events, and filter learning opportunities by topic, date, or region. It's important to consider technology that can aid in pairing employees with one another for more formalized mentorship opportunities, create cohort experiences or enable informal social connection, all of which assist in bridging the gap between the hybrid workforce.

“We've come to a point where learning technology has the ability to make or break a company's future as we embrace hybrid work.”

COMPANY CULTURE

Although learning technology isn't the first solution that comes to mind when trying to improve or build company culture, if onboarding and continued skills development solutions are in place, they become the building blocks to enabling a culture that is inclusive of everyone, regardless of tenure, role or location. Technologies that offer some aspect of social learning can be instrumental in helping to not only enable remote and hybrid employees to feel included but to aid in building a culture of learning by democratizing it. As industries become more global in nature and the workforce expands to include new generations that place **higher importance on organizational values and flexibility**, it is important to provide opportunities and resources that can be accessed anywhere in the world.

There are ways to leverage synchronous and asynchronous video or broadcasting technologies (i.e., for company meetings, “executive ask-me-anythings,” external speakers, etc.) to better communicate the mission and vision of the company, allowing employees to create a direct connection between the work they do and the impact on the company thus fostering a feeling of connectedness and driving home the point that the company's success is tied to the individual's success. Opportunities to grow with one another, not just within the context of work but to grow as individuals on a personal level (through meditation, journaling seminars, sharing experiences, and other non-traditional connections) can increase feelings of inclusion because employees are able to bring their full selves to work. This, in turn, increases employee happiness and improves overall culture. After all, **HubSpot's 2022 Hybrid Work Report** found that “culture thrives when it's tied to employee experience, not location.”

ADVICE FOR BEGINNERS

We caution you to start with a true understanding of the opportunity you're aiming to solve rather than beginning to plan your tech offerings based on the features of the technology or testimonials from others. As Donald H. Taylor proposed in "Learning Technologies in the Workplace," "Too often, learning technology implementations fail because they start with Planning, rather than Understanding, then jump to Implementation skipping over the need to Test first. By leaping straight into the intricacies of the implementation itself, and ignoring the need for scoping, the L&D team fails to understand the precise business needs, and the people who may support or impede the implementation."

Furthermore, ease of use and connectivity from one technology to another can make or break adoption and the benefits technology brings. Take the time to fully understand your unique business needs, those of your learners, and what is currently lacking before making a purchase. And be intentional with the creation of communication guidelines and expectations as these are critical to success in a hybrid world which lacks the context previously obtained in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

As the world continues to find itself in the thick of a major reckoning of what it means to be a good employer and a good employee, L&D can become a major player in transforming the corporate landscape by implementing technology that allows for the experiences and connections that happen in person to occur asynchronously. The bottom line is that companies want the same level of productivity, connectedness and engagement that the in-office experience brings but they need to meet employees where they are now: That's the key to attracting and retaining great talent.

"It is important to provide opportunities and resources that can be accessed anywhere in the world."

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The Power of Pull



Lisa Meece

Learning and Development Manager
STANLEY Security

CHALLENGE

In 2020, our team and learners were struggling to focus among all the regular distractions, plus unprecedented uncertainty and change wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. We knew our people had new things to learn, many of which they (and we) were figuring out as we went. When business partners pushed us to make learning mandatory, we pushed back. What was needed, we insisted, was an opportunity for learners to access information that was of interest to them.

SOLUTION

We built a searchable toolkit and focused on adding performance aids to it. We invited our learners to share their approaches to new pandemic-related problems, either through tool creation or through Zoom sessions designed with little lead time. We focused on making information available and allowing our learners to pull what they thought would help them, instead of us trying to decide and mandate what our learners needed.

Trusting our content to be used because it was useful rather than because it was required worked. Our team (1.3 FTE) was able to deliver 3,000 learner hours (live and asynchronous) in less than six months. Leadership cited our content as a positive factor in the team's impressive results.

Is VR the Answer to Your Hybrid Training Challenges?



By Sophie Thompson, the chief executive officer of VirtualSpeech, an award-winning soft skills training platform that blends eLearning with practice exercises in virtual reality and online simulations.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, no one could have imagined how quickly and drastically the world would shift to remote working. Now that we're emerging in the post-COVID era, many workplaces are offering flexible working solutions, from entirely remote working to hybrid working, or choosing to be in the office full-time.

With this new approach to the workplace, comes a need for a new approach to train the modern workforce, too.

This article will address the key challenges faced with hybrid training in particular, where some of the workforce is working remotely and others are together in person.

COLLABORATION

One of the biggest challenges of hybrid work is that the workforce can be very geographically dispersed, making it difficult to generate the sense of connection and collaboration required for effective learning to take place.

One solution is to meet in **virtual reality (VR)**. This has been proven to replicate the feeling of connection and presence **similar to being** physically present with someone else. Some companies hold weekly meetings in VR to facilitate the feeling of bringing everyone together.

This can be translated into training as well, so that everyone can be in the same virtual environment and interact in real-time with each other. Here are three ways in which VR can facilitate collaboration:

- **Role-play exercises** where one person acts as the client, while the other person tries to sell them the company's product or service. In VR, participants can easily switch roles and therefore viewpoint, and more easily take on the different roles through virtual embodiment. This makes the role play exercise as close to the real situation as possible and enables learners to psychologically adjust to being "in the client's shoes."

- **Virtual classroom learning** where a physical classroom is replicated in VR. This enables people to meet from around the world and be immersed in a virtual learning environment together with the same facilitator. [Stanford University](#) has used this method to teach an entire module in VR for the first time.
- **Technical skills training** can be taught collaboratively in VR as well, bringing a hybrid workforce into the same virtual space. Even [surgeons are using VR](#) to practice operating on patients virtually as part of their training.

“One of the biggest challenges of hybrid work is that the workforce can be very geographically dispersed.”

ENGAGEMENT

It can be challenging for training facilitators to manage a hybrid workforce and keep all learners engaged because best practices for delivery vary between face to face and remote learning. This is where VR can provide an interactive, [experiential learning](#) approach for everyone.

PwC research [found that](#) VR enables people to actively learn through experience, allowing them to complete training up to four times faster than classroom training. In addition, learners are four times more focused during training in VR than their eLearning peers, and 1.5 times more focused than their classroom colleagues, the research found.

Some VR scenarios can even replicate the exact same physical office environment that learners are familiar with. For example, a company-specific meeting room or training facility could be replicated so that managers can realistically practice giving feedback to their colleagues [for their annual review](#).

MAINTAINING QUALITY AT SCALE

[Hybrid training](#) means that organizations need to ensure that the quality of learning and opportunities for learning are equal for staff both in the office and those working remotely.

The benefit of VR learning is that self-paced learning exercises can provide standardized, interactive and high-quality learning material, regardless of where the learning takes place.

Key training topics like **diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)**, leadership communication and sexual harassment prevention can be developed in VR with an online simulation option too, and then issued to employees across the globe. This provides the organization with the security that everyone in the company has undergone the same quality-assured learning experience, without sourcing numerous facilitators for each region.

MEASURING IMPACT

Measuring the impact or behavior change of training with a hybrid workforce brings its own challenges, but by using VR to provide a standardized learning experience, companies can provide personalized feedback and impact for each individual learner.

A significant amount of real-time performance data can be collected in VR, which can be analyzed to identify skills gaps and areas for improvement, helping to bring a more **quantitative approach** to learning and improvement.

For example, someone undergoing **public speaking training in VR** can get real-time feedback on their eye contact, how quickly they were speaking, if they were speaking loudly enough, and more. This quantitative data for soft skills is difficult to obtain otherwise in solely in- person or online training settings.

CONCLUSION

As with any technology, there are a range of factors to consider before diving in headfirst. All learning and learning methods should start from a place of being solution-led and goal-focused for the best learning outcomes and cost efficiency.

Effective training extends beyond technology and research has shown the behavioral change of VR learning is more effective in the long-term than traditional classroom or purely online learning.

“Hybrid training means that organizations need to ensure that learning opportunities are equal for all.”

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Hybrid Learning Challenges and Solutions

From Learning Leaders Like You



Focus on Employee Engagement



Lisa Hutcherson, CPTM, SHRM-CP

Senior Vice President, Director of Human Capital Strategies
First Federal Bank

CHALLENGE

Our hybrid learning challenge was employee engagement. During training, employees would multitask on their cell phones and check emails while on camera. Also, managers were not protecting a learner's time to "be here now" for the training session. Learners would have to excuse themselves to take care of customers in between learning.

SOLUTION

Trainings are planned well in advance to give managers time to schedule for protected time coverage. We used several engagement techniques through Zoom: whiteboard, chat, polling, break-out sessions, role-playing in breakout sessions as well in the general session, reactions and open-ended questions where students are called on to share or read from the slides.

We also include time for attendees to practice what they have learned as well as increase engagement with these best practices:

- Beach ball toss: We send everyone a beach ball. When the facilitator calls a learner's name and throws the ball at the screen, the learner does something with their beach ball, then responds to the question or conversation.
- Box of treats: We send a goodie box of snacks for the learner to enjoy during breaks. We will also award points through our internal reward and recognition portal for the learner to buy lunch if training is during lunchtime.
- Recognize training completion: We celebrate completion of workshops through our internal reward and recognition portal.
- Outline expectations before class: We gain manager approval for attendance so they can reinforce expectations and we conduct a pre-course and post-course debrief with the learner's manager.

DEI in a Hybrid Work Environment: Tips and Best Practices



By De'Lisa Stringer, CPTM, a senior program and training manager at DPR Construction.

In the last three to five years the business case for **diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)**, accessibility and justice has become stronger than ever before. We know that research shows organizations that have positively embedded diversity and inclusion have stronger performance over time.

However, an organization's ability to adapt and reimagine workplace engagement for all, followed by bold action, are viable predictors of sustaining strong performance.

DEI plays a critical role in business recovery and resilience and now more than ever, organizations have an important decision to make – to ensure that DEI work remains a core part of doing business. As we embark upon what we hope to be a downturn in a global crisis, it's time to reaffirm our commitments to DEI work and shift conversations beyond the realm of representation within the organization to what is our strategy for how we will bring in, encourage, engage, advocate for and lift up people from all walks of life in a hybrid environment.

Fostering DEI itself is a challenge but how do organizations maintain momentum and increase impact within an evolving hybrid work environment? Consider these tips to get started.

REAFFIRM COMMITMENTS TO DEI AND INTERSECTIONAL PRIORITIES

Clear communication that seeks to emphasize the purpose, reach and action to advance diverse talent, reskill the workforce and enhance the economy at large increases morale, and boosts creativity and innovation. Organizations are constantly hiring talent and expanding into new markets, which means the commitment to DEI and the employee experience should stay at the forefront. The vision, followed by bold action, should be communicated constantly.

STRUCTURE GROWTH AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES INTO THE FLOW OF WORK

Learning and development (L&D) helps to develop competencies and skills that, when done well, will improve the company's bottom line. From organization to organization, this shows up in different ways. Most commonly, it shows up in a

company's brand and reputation, talent pipeline, productivity, optimization and future marketplace opportunities. On a fundamental level, organizations exist to provide a service, maintain a competitive advantage and/or make a profit. L&D is essential to supporting their efforts.

With the rise of remote and hybrid work, learners' time zones and geographies are less relevant now than ever before. To meet learners' needs and drive behavior change, which is necessary to support business needs, L&D professionals need to partner with stakeholders to develop, manage and scale solutions that are structured into the flow of work.

What does learning in the flow of work look like? Consider this example: Let's say a member on your team has been promoted to the sales team. However, this employee has little experience with technical skills like negotiation and account management. In this situation, it's important to ask critical questions to ensure that learning adapts to the current environment. For example:

- What training is accessible in the moment of need?
- How is training accessed?
- What technology is used and how does it play a role in the experience?
- Does training take neurodiversity into account given the individual's needs?
- How can the learning translate into a situational experience on the job?

Another potential way to structure learning in the flow of work is to tie continuous learning experiences to a [professional development plan \(PDP\)](#). This builds in accountability, measures motivation over time and incorporates an assessment -- it's also psychologically satisfying to see your progress.

You can take it one step further by building diverse representation into cohort-based learning experiences. After all, people learn from the personal experiences of others in a more fruitful way. Asking these questions will help your organization identify whether or not it's optimize L&D for learners of diverse backgrounds.

“DEI plays a critical role in business recovery and resilience.”

MEASURE AND EVALUATE INCLUSION

There's a difference between diversity metrics and inclusion metrics. In today's business environment, it is simply not enough to measure diversity for representation alone. Organizations should also invest in measuring inclusion — an indicator of uniqueness and belongingness. While remaining diverse matters, organizations should **pay greater attention to inclusion** and establish how to measure it. This goes above and beyond measuring the impact of a single program or portfolio of programs.

Measuring and evaluating inclusion calls for a broader approach. Why? Remote and hybrid work — while flexible, convenient and able to improve talent pipeline— may erode inclusion. Research shows **that more than 68%** of organizations will shift to a hybrid work model. So, it's imperative to look at inclusion in the context of hybrid work.

How are your DEI efforts measuring up in a hybrid work (and learning) environment? Are your organization's strategies, processes and methods as effective as they could be given the way we work today? Paying close attention to these questions will highlight if your overarching DEI strategy is working and whether or not people truly feel included.

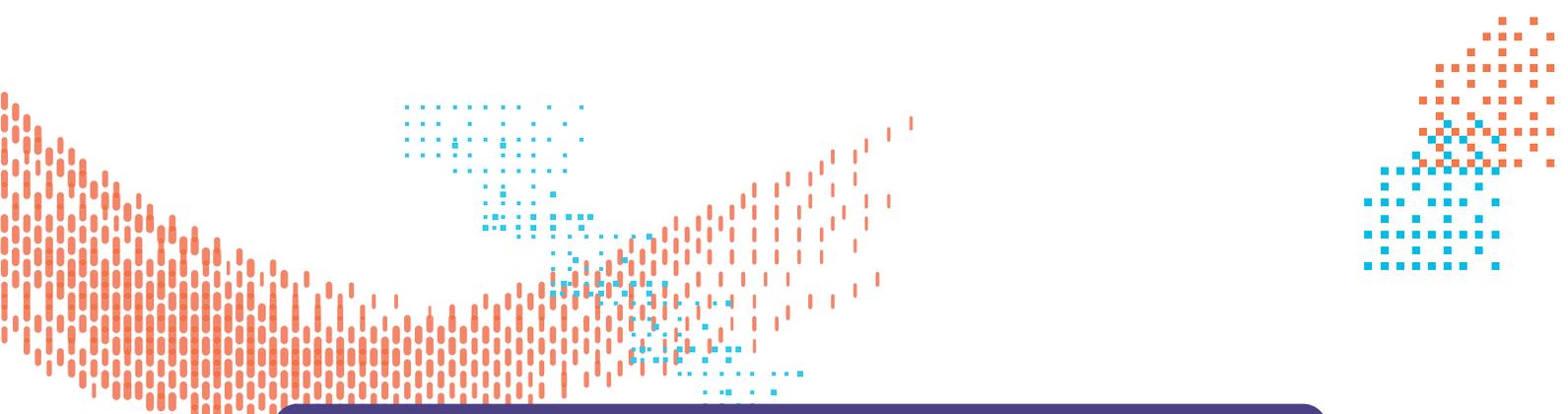
To measure inclusion in your hybrid work context, consider the following questions:

- How does a hybrid environment shape the path of career opportunities and promotions for employees?
 - Does spending more time on site lead to more promotions and advancements?
 - Does your organization reward, promote or advance employees for effort more than for results?
- Is there a perception of bias against workplace flexibility and productivity?
 - Do employees feel more psychologically safe working remotely, in person or in a hybrid model?
- Your diversity data may show that you have a spectrum of intersectionality, but how engaged are your diverse employees?
 - What is their motivation level for being involved in organizational events and groups, beyond their day-to-day responsibilities?

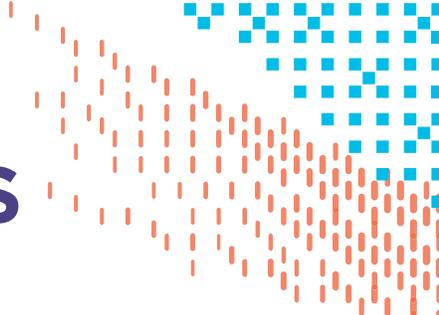
RETAINING DIVERSE TALENT

It not effective to invest in hiring a diverse pool of candidates for the sake of hiring, if those employees are exiting the company as soon as they join due to gaps in what the organization says it stands for in relation to employees' lived experience. Thus, it's imperative to dig into the experiences people are having across the organization to better understand where the challenges are in terms of engaging and retaining diverse talent for the long-term.

“It's imperative to dig into the experiences people are having across the organization to better understand where the challenges are in terms of engaging and retaining diverse talent for the long-term.”



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Developing hybrid and remote learning solutions is challenging. Check out these additional resources from [TrainingIndustry.com](https://www.trainingindustry.com):

Hybrid Learning Is Here. Are You Ready?

This episode of The Business of Learning, the Training Industry podcast, explores hybrid learning challenges and solutions, how training can connect hybrid teams and how to ensure an equitable hybrid learning experience.

Managing Remote Learning Certificate

This research-based certificate program will address common challenges with managing remote learning programs and share best practices to develop, deliver and measure successful remote learning programs that drive business outcomes.

3 Hybrid Learning Challenges and Solutions

This infographic shares three hybrid learning challenges and solutions in a bite-sized format. This graphic can serve as an overview for best practices to consider when deliver training to connect a dispersed workforce.

Giving Feedback in a Remote Workplace

This episode of The Business of Learning, the Training Industry podcast, explore the challenges leaders may face when giving feedback to remote employees and the skills they need to deliver effective and meaningful guidance.