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10 Key Considerations of Hybrid Learning Design

Why we need hybrid learning and how to design your sessions effectively

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What Is Hybrid Learning?

It's the simultaneous live delivery of learning in virtual and in-person environments. In a hybrid session, for example, you can deliver learning to eight people in the room with you and another 15 online (or any other number combination). Everyone is sharing a learning experience but joining from different places.

While it may feel like a new concept, hybrid learning has been in place in a variety of organizations for years. It's always been particularly useful for geographically disparate workforces. However, the importance and inevitability of hybrid learning became incredibly clear during remote working throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic didn't give rise to hybrid learning, but it accelerated it.

The future of work is hybrid. So, too, is the future of learning.

The Case for Hybrid Learning

Here's a common misconception about hybrid learning programs: if some people are learning in person and some are online, then it's easy to just plan for one and then the other. They may be online at the same time, but the activities will be different, right?

No, not really!

Hybrid learning is all about blending those two experiences together. The experience should be the same quality for all learners, regardless of where they're learning. For example, learners who are physically present usually get to see the facilitator/expert talking the most clearly. If you use a video of the expert explaining a concept or if the facilitator is presenting on their own computer with camera and sound, then everyone has the same experience of the expert and content.

Deliberately designing a hybrid style of learning merges virtual and in-person delivery through technology. Learners joining virtually aren't just joining an in-person experience at a distance. If you adjust the learning style and experience for everyone involved, you create a more inclusive and accessible environment where everyone, regardless of their ability or desire to attend in person, can experience learning that works.

10 Principles of Hybrid Learning Design (at a glance)

There are 10 key things you need to consider when designing hybrid learning, at both an organizational and event level:

☐ Create a culture of learning (beyond a priority—make it a value)

☐ Get the learners involved (the more they do, the more they get)

☐ Clarity is critical (this is true for the messages as well as the tech that delivers them)

☐ Provide learning activities for all learners (go further than trying to do live exercises virtually or vice versa)

☐ Use digital content (versus pointing a camera at a facilitator in front of the room)

☐ Focus on the design first, then figure out the tech (there's tech—including free versions—for nearly everything)

☐ Don't overload the experience (this is true for all learning, right?)

☐ Explain the hybrid format ahead of time (and give it some hype!)

☐ Provide instructions for everything (at the time of need versus trying to front-load everything)

☐ Ensure the facilitator is present and available for in-person and online learning (otherwise the priority will fall one way or the other)

Next time you're designing or creating a hybrid learning session, come back to this checklist. Have you covered all of these points? Is there anything else you can add?

Over the next few pages, we'll look at these items in more detail.

10 Principles of Hybrid Learning Design (in more detail)

1 Create a Culture of Learning

If learning is de-emphasized or not a priority, it will be difficult for an intentional learning experience to happen. Transitioning to hybrid learning, whether as a small part of your learning or as the main event, requires a mindset shift and a culture change in your organization.

2 Get the Learners Involved

One of the most important parts of hybrid learning is collaboration. Getting the learners involved is critical to justify using a live, simultaneous learning delivery method. Without the collaboration that is so vital to hybrid learning, it would just be a webinar delivering information. Collaboration and learner involvement should be central to your learning design.

3 Clarity Is Critical

This needs to be factored into your design choices in a number of areas. Firstly, you must make sure everyone has access to the tech needed to take part and clear instructions for how to use/install it. It's also important to have a central place, such as a shared Google Drive, to store all materials required during and after the session(s).

4   Provide Learning Activities for All Learners

Running a hybrid session means creating shared experiences and/or exploiting the differences. Therefore, it's vital that you prepare and provide activities for people learning both in the room and virtually. In some cases, this will mean creating shared online spaces for all of these activities, and in others, it will mean creating unique experiences.

5   Use Digital Content

Digital content is an essential part of bridging the gap between in-person and virtual learning in a hybrid setting. While not all of your learning needs to be conducted through digital content, providing videos, eLearning, microlearning, and other forms of digital content can be incredibly useful communication and learning tools.

6   Focus on the Design First, Then Figure Out the Tech

While all five stages of our model of hybrid learning overlap, designing your program ultimately comes first. Focus on the learning outcomes and opportunities for collaboration first, then make decisions on technology around that.

7   Don't Overload the Experience

This is an important consideration on two levels: how much information your learners can take in in one go and the time each activity is going to take. From experience, we can assure you that everything will take about twice as long as you initially expect.

8 Explain the Hybrid Format Ahead of Time

As with any new mode of learning, communication is very important. Make sure you communicate openly and clearly ahead of the session to ensure all learners have a full understanding of the hybrid format and what to expect from the session.

9 Provide Instructions for Everything

Ensure the pre-session communications include the instructions your learners need to access any tools and technology. This will need to include a brief on the tech they need to bring (if attending in person), instructions on setting up logins/accounts with any tech as needed, and access details for shared drives, documents etc. You also need to have written instructions available for each activity and tool available throughout the session. A word of caution: if you need a lot instructions, you've probably overcomplicated the session.

10 Ensure the Facilitator Is Present and Avaliable for In-Person and Online Learners

To create a shared experience, your facilitator needs to be present for all learners. A great way to ensure this availability is to have a producer on board to help with technical difficulties, logistical choreography, and online messages. This allows the facilitator(s) to focus on the session as it happens.

Want more detail about the ins and outs of designing, planning, and running a hybrid learning session?

Download our ebook, <u>The 5-Stage Model for Hybrid Learning: What It Is, How It Works, and Why We Need It</u>. Alternatively, <u>talk to us</u> about your learning needs. We'd love to help!

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