

# EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

## MODULE 33



### THE PERFECT BLEND

**THE SERVICES Selection Board conducts an extensive exercise involving a wide variety of tests during the interview process:**

Blended learning offers us the best learning methods from the world of traditional learning and that of e-learning.

**TECHNOLOGY MEETS THE CONVENTIONAL:** Blended learning combines traditional methods with the modern ones.

The styles of teaching and learning nowadays go far beyond traditional pedagogic efforts within the four walls of the classroom. During the past couple of weeks we had discussed the significant aspects of e-learning. It may be a standalone-style under certain circumstances. But it can be effectively combined with elements of traditional learning methods.

Such a combination is called blended learning. In other words it integrates e-learning techniques, including online delivery of materials through web pages, discussion boards and e-mail, with traditional teaching methods, including lectures, in-person discussions, seminars or tutorials.

Such multiple approaches are often employed in the training of professionals engaged in vocations such as management. Language teaching also gainfully employs this style to a large extent. Blended learning may even include m-learning (mobile learning) that takes place via wireless devices such as cell phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs) or laptop computers. Sometimes the terms hybrid learning and mixed learning are used instead of blended learning.

Though e-learning stands for electronic learning, it has, as we have seen, come to mean learning using the computer and Internet.

## The concept

One may argue that blended learning is not a new concept. Teachers have been using multiple resources for teaching - textbooks, audio/videotapes and different kinds of projectors, laboratory experiments, workshop tasks, tests and examinations, apart from face-to-face classroom instruction. The only new element is perhaps e-learning.

In the modern environment a proper blend may cover properly organised events such as face-to-face instruction from a teacher, online lessons, discussions either online or in a physical group of participants, seminars, or online communities.

The demands of new technologies and the 24/7 global environment cannot be satisfied with the only source of classroom instruction, with its inherent limitations. Blended learning on the other hand is an evolving process for the development of human capital.

It may be noted that the style is more employed in industrial or business environment for training rather than in conventional school-level teaching, although it can be applied in any situation. The concept of learning and development has become more important than training and development. Although there is a lot of talk about knowledge management, knowledge-bases strategy is often more about nurturing people with knowledge.

For achieving success with blended learning, there has to be considerable enthusiasm and commitment - much more than in organising a classroom lecture. But once you have jumped into the water, you are in a process with great potential. The boundaries are global. The resources are boundless.

A great merit of blended learning is that it can cater to individual preferences in learning style. We know that shirts tailored to suit individual measurements are far better than the 'free size' shirts we may buy from a readymade shop. The case of learning is similar. In normal institutionalised learning environment there is no such option.

Peter Honey and Alan Munford, experts in learning styles, have classified learners into four categories - Activist, Reflector, Theorist, and Pragmatist. Their attributes are briefly indicated below.

### **ACTIVISTS** Activists learn best when:

Involved in new experiences, problems and opportunities  
Working with others in business games, team tasks, role-playing  
Being thrown in the deep end with a difficult task  
Chairing meetings, leading discussions

### Activists learn less when:

Listening to lectures or long explanations  
Reading, writing or thinking on their own  
Absorbing and understanding data  
Following precise instruction to the letter

## REFLECTORS

### Reflectors learn best when:

Observing individuals or groups at work they have the opportunity to review what has happened and think about what they have learned  
Producing analyses and reports  
doing tasks without tight deadlines

### Reflectors learn less when:

Acting as leader or role-playing in front of others  
Doing things with no time to prepare  
Being thrown in at the deep end  
Being rushed or worried by deadlines.

## THEORISTS

### Theorists learn best when:

They are put in complex situations where they have to use their skills and knowledge they are in structured situations with clear purpose. They are offered interesting ideas or concepts even though they are not immediately relevant They have the chance to question and probe ideas behind things

### Theorists learn less when:

They have to participate in situations that emphasis emotion and feelings The activity is unstructured or briefing is poor They have to do things without knowing the principles or concepts involved They feel they are out of tune with the other participants, for example with people of very different learning styles.

## PRAGMATISTS

### Pragmatists learn best when:

There is an obvious link between the topic and job They have the chance to try out techniques with feedback, for example role-playing They are shown techniques with obvious advantages, for example saving time They are shown a model they can copy e.g. a film or a respected boss

### Pragmatists learn less when:

There is no obvious or immediate benefit that they can recognise There is no practice or guidelines on how to do it There is no apparent payback to the learning, for example shorter meetings The event or learning is `all theory' Most of you have in you the elements of more than one learning category. You can think and find out your strongest style and your weakest style to identify how you learn best. The optimum strategy can be adopted in each individual case.

### Make the best

Each one of you is a different person in the matter of learning preferences. The learning style that suits you best may be chosen by each one of you by ensuring effectiveness.

What are the different steps that you should undergo to achieve this goal? The first requirement is accepting the possibility of styles that are different from what is currently being followed by you. Some of you may have an obsession that the style you have been following is the best. The need and quality of learning in a particular situation should determine the most suitable style. Blended learning providers have to offer learning solutions and delivery systems to meet diverse requirements. Tailoring to meet the customer needs would involve offering a wide range of options and necessary coaching support.

In the world of changing patterns of educational effort, the best styles of learning have to be adopted by those who desire to maintain their competitive edge in various professional fields. The days when one could survive successfully for decades on the strength of educational assets and qualifications acquired in early life are over. Updating knowledge and skills in your preferred fields is indispensable for professional success. Blended learning is a blessing in achieving this objective.