

# Why Learning Has a New Logic: The Rise of Blended Workflow Learning

By Craig Perrin



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“Through extensive research and interviews with organizations around the world, AchieveGlobal has discovered that the increasing popularity of Blended Workflow Learning is the direct result of several current pressures facing businesses.

These include economic pressures, technology advances, changing demographics in the workplace, government regulation and globalization. This confluence of forces makes implementation of the blended approach, a logical choice, and even necessary in optimizing organizational learning and development.

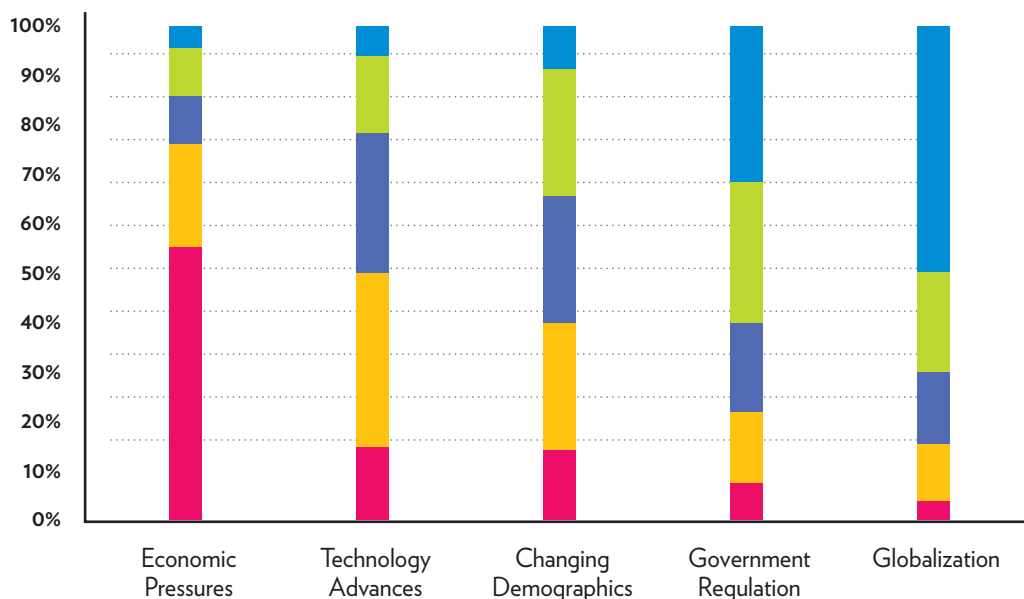
By building on the strengths of its component alternatives, Blended Workflow Learning transcends the challenges of flexibility required, time needed, and budgets allocated for learning and development programs to be effective.”

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## Why Learning Has a New Logic: The Rise of Blended Workflow Learning

Clichéd though it may sound, the constant that defines today’s business environment is change. For the organization that strives for exceptional performance in this new paradigm, learning plays an integral role in achieving and maintaining competitive positioning. With ruptures in economic topography, changes in organizational technologies, and major shifts in workforce dynamics, even the way organizations learn has evolved to keep pace.

Blended Workflow Learning, a fairly recent trend in organizational learning, integrates two or more ways to learn with immediate opportunities to use a skill, tool, or concept on the job. Blended Workflow Learning has become increasingly relevant in recent years. But what has provoked the recent rise in organizational use of Blended Workflow Learning? Why is this approach gaining popularity now? What specific environmental factors are making this an integral component of competitive strategy in today’s business climate?



**Figure 1.**

Factors ranked by degree of impact on learning strategy: 1 = most, 5 = least



AchieveGlobal set out to answer these and other questions recently by conducting a survey of human resource professionals. The study revealed compelling trends in attitudes toward an organizational use of Blended Workflow Learning.

### Why Blended? – Multiple Factors

What has provoked organizations to seek new approaches to organizational learning and development?

Participants in the AchieveGlobal study ranked several factors as impacting their organization's learning strategy. Significantly, among the human resource professionals polled, 56 percent identified economic pressures as being the top factor influencing their organization's learning strategies.

When asked to what degree these factors affect their organization's learning strategy choices, respondents noted the following factors, listed in decreasing order of impact (See Figure 1):

- Economic pressures
- Technology advances
- Changing demographics
- Government regulation
- Globalization

These findings clearly indicate that human resource professionals draw a direct link between choice of learning strategies and the organization's ability to prosper despite economic pressures. If an organization can learn more efficiently and can gain valuable knowledge more effectively, then learning is more likely to contribute to organizational success.

### Why Blended? – The Technology Factor

Today's worker sits at the center of a complex web of hardware and software that transcends boundaries of time and place. In effect, we have the ability to transact all aspects of business across space and time – yet technology in the workplace is far from new. Even blogs and wikis, which still teeter on the cutting edge of workplace communication technology, have their precursors in digital com-

When the economy slows or contracts, organizations seek ways to cut costs and maximize productivity through greater efficiency. By implementing a blended initiative, organizations suffer fewer disruptions of their day-to-day work, since learning can take place in the same environments as everyday work. Blended Workflow Learning also reduces the need for employees to travel for learning. By allowing fewer disruptions in the workday and promoting cost savings through reduced travel, Blended Workflow Learning offers ways to build fiscal efficiency, making it particularly attractive as a learning strategy during times of increased economic pressure.

munities and collaborative databases, and have been around for more than a decade. With today's proliferation of digital media, it comes as little surprise that the number of students enrolled in online degree programs has more than tripled in the past five years. For some of the very same reasons, digital technology is also used increasingly in organizational learning. More than ever, it's true that successful organizations learn—and do so both effectively and efficiently. When it comes to learning, digital technology is the great facilitator, allowing learners remote access to a wealth of educators and resources. Technology provides the channels through which learning strategies are made more efficient and more cost-effective.

The top two factors cited as influencing organizational shifts in learning strategies are changes in the economic context and advances in technology.

### Why Blended? – Changes in Learning Methods

Among the trends contributing to the increased use of Blended Workflow Learning are the major shifts in the ways organizations set out to learn, and how they see their use of technology changing in the year ahead. Asked how their use of training methods would change over the coming year, 39 percent of participants in an earlier AchieveGlobal study noted that they would decrease their use of classroom training. Meanwhile, 56 percent of respondents indicated that they would likely increase their use of self-paced online learning or eLearning, and a full 60 percent anticipated increasing their Web-based live training (Virtual Instructor Led Training or vILT). Somewhat surprisingly, 56 percent of study participants indicated that they would likely increase their use of conference calls.

In effect, these trends point to an increase in the use of the training methods and technologies that constitute Blended Workflow Learning. It stands to reason that if organizations are more likely to make use of these components, then they are also more likely to use a combination of them, which would constitute Blended Workflow Learning.

### The Benefits of Blended

Successful organizations make learning a priority so that they can adapt to change in the world around them and stay ahead of the competition. But learning must be strategically designed to benefit the wider organization in its use of time, money, and the human resource.

Key to the increasing acceptance of Blended Workflow Learning is that this new approach to organizational learning offers benefits to both the learner and the organization. In effect, the broader analysis points to the fact that Blended Workflow Learning benefits the learner by:

- Appealing to new demographics
- Allowing learners to gain knowledge from experts and peers
- Providing practical results through immediate skill application

The organization also benefits on several levels when Blended Workflow Learning is put into practice. Because workers can access learning modalities remotely, this approach to learning generally means less disruption of day-to-day work. Blended Workflow Learning is also easier to update, revise, and customize, meaning that the organization can fine-tune methodologies to suit its specific needs.

In sum, Blended Workflow Learning offers organizations several tangible benefits, including less disruption of work, greater appeal for new demographics, enhanced learning from experts and peers, and better business outcomes as a result of immediate and integrated skill use. Respondents to the AchieveGlobal survey further noted that Blended Workflow Learning is easy to revise and customize, is an effective use of available technology, and results in cost-savings through reduced travel for training on location.

### The Importance of Implementation

Only if organizations value Blended Workflow Learning positively do they consider it a successful learning strategy. When organizations understand Blended Workflow Learning as offering effective transfer of knowledge and skills, there is a greater

<sup>1</sup> Source: AchieveGlobal pulse survey, March 2009.

likelihood that those organizations will put Blended Workflow Learning into practice. The reverse of this is also true: respondents who had not yet implemented Blended Workflow Learning fully were still waiting to see the tangible evidence that these tools would deliver full time or money return on investment. In this study, 53 percent of the participants indicated that Blended Workflow Learning is effective. Respondents who classified Blended Workflow Learning as “Somewhat Ineffective” or “Very Ineffective” tended to be among those organizations that had just begun to experiment with learning technology or using non-classroom learning activities. The organizations also admitted that the learning activities had not been well integrated with each other. In short, Blended Workflow Learning is effective when implemented fully and correctly, or when it is completely integrated with proper attention to all the requirements and potential pitfalls.

### Your Learning and Development Partner

The days are long gone when organizations engaged training simply for the sake of it, or as part of an organization’s mostly-unformulated desire to keep abreast of changing trends and stay ahead of the competition. Today, learning must be fully rationalized and completely strategized as part of an integrated competitive vision. Learning plays a strategic role, delivers practical value and is seen as part of the wider arsenal of a company seeking to optimize its competitiveness.

To help ensure that Blended Workflow Learning is designed as a strategically integrated component of an organization’s vision, that organization should seek the expertise of a Learning and Development partner who offers appropriate expertise. In particular, an effective Learning and Development partner should:

- **Take a strategic approach to Blended Workflow Learning.** Your Learning and Development partner should do more than simply prescribe tactics. Only by looking at the larger business issues facing your organization can you pinpoint the learning delivery options best suited to address them. Your partner

should help you to be strategic about what makes sense for your organization.

- **Have proven learning expertise.** To ensure that your Blended Workflow Learning strategies are efficient and effective, you’re wise to rely on Learning experts who know how people learn and apply new behaviors. To avoid a trial and error approach, your organization should choose a partner that has helped many organizations realize the sort of outcomes you seek.
- **Seamlessly integrate content and technology.** Today’s complex roles require skills often taught separately. Your Learning and Development partner should link key content areas and deliver engaging training in a range of modalities.
- **Deliver consistent results in different locations.** A unified strategic effort requires leaders and employees who apply the same skills and philosophy regardless of location. Your Learning and Development partner needs to deliver the same learning outcomes wherever you operate, across town or worldwide.

### Conclusion

The broader findings of this study illuminate four key rationales for using Blended Workflow Learning, which include:

- Changes in the economic environment, which demand a more cost-effective approach to Learning and Development
- Increased globalization that provokes a more strategic approach to Learning and Development
- Availability of technology that can facilitate Blended Workflow Learning
- The effectiveness of Blended Workflow Learning, once implemented correctly, particularly with the guidance of the right Learning and Development partner

## Further Reading

To access more information on Blended Workflow Learning, be sure to read the compelling AchieveGlobal report titled, *Smart Strategies and Tested Techniques: Ensuring Blended Workflow Learning Success!*

## About The Research

Conducted in the second quarter of 2009, this study consisted of a survey. Respondents included 258 human resource professionals of mostly large organizations (with 5,000 or more employees), representing a variety of industries. Participants were asked to respond to nine questions that focused on their company's use of technology, and their experiences with Blended Workflow Learning and its components.

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## About Craig Perrin

As AchieveGlobal's Director of Solution Development, Craig is a thought leader who works cross-functionally and with clients to guide creation of a range of responses to market needs. Since 1986 he has played a central role in developing the company's flagship programs in leadership, sales, and customer service; co-authored two best-selling books; written many articles and position papers; and produced eLearning and video that have earned scores of national and international awards. In 1998, Craig was named Times Mirror Editor of the Year. Craig's positions before AchieveGlobal include curriculum designer, stand-up facilitator, college instructor, and art curator. Craig holds a B.A. and M.A. from San Francisco State University.

## About AchieveGlobal

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the level of human skills will determine organization success. AchieveGlobal provides exceptional development in interpersonal business skills giving companies the workforce they need for business results. Located in over 40 countries, we offer multi-language, learning-based solutions—globally, regionally, and locally.

We understand the competition you face. Your success depends on people who have the skills to handle the challenges beyond the reach of technology. We're experts in developing these skills, and it's these skills that turn your strategies into business success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

These are things technology can't do. Think. Learn. Solve problems. Listen. Motivate. Explain. People with these skills have a bright future in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. AchieveGlobal prepares you for that world.



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