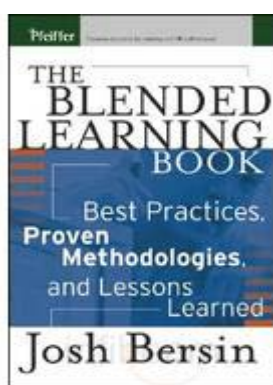


## THE BLENDED LEARNING BOOK: Best Practices, Proven Methodologies, and Lessons Learned

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“What Works” in large corporate e-learning programs with the goal of identifying the best practices, lessons learned, and repeatable methodologies that others can use? As the author, Josh Bersin stated, this book is the result of this work, looking for answers to that question. Before introducing the book, I'd like to introduce the book's author. Josh Bersin is president and CEO of Bersin & Associates, a leading research and advisory services firm in enterprise learning and talent management. He spent 25 years in product development, product management, marketing and sales of e-learning and other enterprise technologies at companies (Bersin & Associates, 2010; LT, 2010).

The book includes ten chapters and a “moving forward” section. Each chapter has a “Lessons learned in this chapter” section like a summary which is helpful to reader. And at the beginning of each chapter, author reminds us where we are, this is also a helpful navigation clue.

The book starts with the introduction section explaining Internet based learning adventure and e-learning evolution. He defines Blended Learning (BL) as the combination of different training “media” (technologies, activities, and types of events) to create an optimum training program for a specific audience. Afterwards, Bersin presents us history of BL by asking “How did we get here?” in Chapter 1. He introduces the evolution of technology-based, instructor-led and main-frame based training and explains satellite-based live video, PC CD-ROM Era, development of LMS and AICC, the first generation in Web-based training and today's wide range of options. This chapter tells us that BL is not a new concept, but the tools available to us today are new.

The key issue is to fit “technology seamlessly into a program appropriate for the problem at hand”. And standards like AICC (and SCORM based on AICC principles) helps excellently track student progress in LMSs.

Chapter 2 gives readers the framework and tools to refine their business strategy so they can understand how to make BL investments and notes that BL is a powerful tool that improves performance, not a tool that reduces cost.

Chapter 3 presents BL practices and introduces four types of corporate training for building the framework of right blended model. These types are as follows (Bersin, 2004:46):

- Type 1: Information Broadcast
- Type 2: Critical Knowledge Transfer
- Type 3: Skills and Competency Development
- Type 4: Certification Programs

Chapter 4 provides us proven blended learning models by integrating the design concepts from Chapter 3. Besides, two approaches to blended learning are presented and compared with each other. These approaches include *Program Flow Model* and *Core-and-Spoke Model*. Bersin implies that (2004:94) program flow or content flow is a more traditional approach while core-and-spoke is appropriate for highly motivated and independent learners. In IT training second approach is widely used as he mentions. He also presents fundamental models for building BL programs which are:

- E-learning self-study with other blended media or events
- Instructor-led program blended with self-study e-learning
- Live e-learning centered with other media added
- On-the-job training (OJT) centered
- Simulation and lab-centered

In Chapter 5, Bersin addresses eight major criteria to consider when defining your blending mix: *program type, cultural goals, audience, budget, resources, time, learning content and technology*. Chapter 6 discusses the economics of blended learning and how to develop a reasonable budget that meets your program needs. With many examples from different corporations, five cost components are identified as follows:

- Content development costs
- Infrastructure costs (LMS, hardware, and software)
- Delivery costs
- Program management costs
- Learner time and travel.

Bersin implies that budgets should be set based on the size of the business impact, not size of the learning problem.

Chapter 7 helps us selecting media, designing and developing the program. The author identifies 16 different types of blended learning media in detail and discusses when to use which media type (live media vs. self-study media..etc.). For media selection, he claims that critical issues are scalability, content durability, urgency, time to build, avoiding long development cycles, tracking and reporting, rapid e-learning.

Moreover, Chapter 8 presents many of the strategies, processes, tools and techniques for content development. The author provides guidelines for content development process and discusses pros and cons of content development tools. Chapter 9 deals with learning technology and infrastructure. The author starts this chapter with this statement: "No book on BL is complete without discussing the important role of technology and infrastructure" (Bersin, 2004:207). He implies that there is no "complete solution" for BL and he recommends that "less is better" when thinking about infrastructure.

Chapter 10 tries to show how to manage program rollouts to drive excitement, high levels of participation, completion and overall satisfaction. The author implies that “The best design, media, and content cannot succeed if you do not adequately plan, launch, market, and measure your program” (Bersin, 2004:242). I agree with him in this issue.

Throughout the book, I mostly enjoyed examining the large but instructive tables and “lessons learned” sections. It is a well-organized book and it is considered to be a useful guide for those who are interested in implementing blended learning since it provides many real examples such as Accenture, BI, Cisco, FedEx, Kinkos, Grant-Thornton, IBM, Novell, the U.S. Navy, Verizon..etc.

In conclusion, why blended learning is so important? Bersin’s answer is that BL give us the flexibility to use principles such as:

“The core of training is instructional design.  
People learn by doing.  
People learn differently (no medium is perfect for everyone).  
Management is paramount”

and apply them when and where they are necessary. As I noted previously in Bonk & Graham’s book review, traditional face to face learning environment is beneficial for social aspect in teaching and learning however synchronous and asynchronous technologies are able to provide learners and instructors more flexible and interactive learning environments independent from time and space (Ateş, 2009). Therefore, planning and implementing blended learning is important for effective learning settings. Bersin also answers where BL is going. He mentions that innovation in tools of BL will go on and as bandwidth gets higher the quality of our online learning will be higher. He concluded that emergence of BL “platforms” can provide easily blending programs and monitoring, measuring, and assessing learning easily across different media. I think that such developing platforms can enable and encourage more and more educators to use blended learning tools even they do not have much technical skills and background.

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