

When e-learning is appropriate

There has been a great deal of discussion about distance learning as a viable alternative to traditional classroom learning for acquiring new skills and qualifications, for example, [Online MBA Programs](#) are now being more widely accepted, and of course The Open University in the UK has been operating this model since 1971. However, the demand for distance learning has increased as a result of the recession, with people looking to gain new skills as a way of developing career skills that employers are willing to pay for or as a way of future-proofing themselves to avoid redundancy.

The increased use of distance learning and in particular, e-learning has been fuelled by the increasing stability of web-based communication and storage services. Solutions such as Skype, WebEx, and YouTube mean that distance and time zone are no longer critical barriers; rather these services are accepted as essential support tools and as an effective way of delivering information. Furthermore, the provision of these services is expected by the web natives of Generation Y, who see it as a very acceptable method of learning because of their own experiences of modern education.

While e-learning is seen as the modern way, in-classroom learning is seen as the traditional approach to training and learning. Note the use of the term traditional, not old and this is key. It's still a very relevant method of learning. Even the most optimistic of studies will demonstrate that e-learning trails behind classroom learning as the preferred learning environment.

Of course, there is always the option of using a 'blended' learning approach, whereby any learning or training programme is made up of both classroom and distance activities.

Which route should you choose?

There will be trade-offs with whichever route you adopt and listed below are some of factors you will need to consider.

Potential advantages of classroom	Potential disadvantages of classroom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individualised approach ● Real-time discussion and idea exchange ● Immediate response and feedback ● Team-building and networking ● More disciplined and structured environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited by geographic location ● Can prove costly when training large groups ● Greater focus on the instructor
Potential advantages of distance	Potential disadvantages of distance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Convenience: participate when and where you want ● Affordability: save time and money ● Accessible by distant or disadvantaged locations ● Greater focus on the learner ● Scales to train as few or as many participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discipline required ● Lack of immediate feedback ● No social cohesion

As you can see from the table above, there is no right answer. In our experience, the adoption of training is based on two main criteria:

- Individual learning preference
- Money

Most people have a preferred method of learning, be it via a teacher or via a book. Nevertheless, there is very rarely a one-size fits all approach. Cost is also a key factor. For example, we have seen large groups (10+) adopt e-learning, as it helps them realise cost savings, with smaller groups preferring the classroom route.

In summary, it's not really a matter of right or wrong delivery method; rather it's a matter of choice.

So, before deciding on your learning approach, take the following in to consideration:

- What is the goal of your training programme?
- What is it you are teaching and who is your audience?
- What is your budget?
- How is your current learning programme being delivered and can it be improved?

To see our range of both online and offline training solutions visit our [change management training section of our website](#).

This paper is one of a series on a number of change related topics all of which are available from the [Knowledge Centre](#) on the Changefirst [website](#).

You can also follow our progress in the following ways:

