

A customer success story

Virtual classrooms
Blended learning
Web-conferencing



Certified Online Learning Facilitator (COLF) programme improves quality of web-based learning by 40%; contributes to 90% savings in travel and accommodation costs

After a company-wide implementation of live online learning and web-conferencing facilities, Working Links sees significant savings across the business by radically transforming their learning offer to include more blended options and reducing face-to-face training and meetings.

User adoption of virtual classrooms and engagement with blended learning also improves, as does course creation turn-around and business agility.



“ We are not classroom-bound anymore...we have so much more flexibility which allows us to channel our expertise really quickly and really cheaply.

Pamela Donnelly
Head of Learning and Talent Development

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What learning challenges did you need to solve?

Following a recent business integration, we had to transform and bring four L&D departments together into one function that provided a cohesive and affordable Learning and Development team to support the business.

Another challenge for us as an organisation was some of the existing Learning and Development functions were conducting around 90% of training face-to-face. They had had limited exposure to learning management systems, eContent and live virtual classrooms, so we had to take the business on a journey. We began by taking some of the existing training content and translating it into more blended options, and rolling out a learning management system. We also rolled out the use of eLearning so people got used to using blended learning options. The final part of the transformation was to introduce and increase the use of live virtual classrooms to replace some of the training that we did face-to-face.

It was quite a transition for the employees to make, but it was also essential for us as an organisation to modernise the function, and to bring people up to standard in terms of how learning and development should work.

Why did you choose the virtual classroom approach as part of your solution?

I had been considering the use of distance learning as part of the transformation, but I was looking for something innovative and engaging - so when I received an invitation for a free webinar on virtual classrooms from the Learning and Performance Institute, I immediately registered. The presenter, Michelle Parish, was invaluable in dispelling any scepticism about the use of live online learning, and clearly highlighted the differences between the virtual classroom and a webinar. She also introduced the LPI's certification for live online facilitation, COLF.

During the session I invited two of my team members to dial in and we all saw the benefits straight away. We came away from the webinar motivated, reassured and excited to move forward. Michelle modelled 'what good looks like' during the session, and this really helped me understand what we needed to do to make the transition from just delivering webinars, to delivering more interactive sessions which were quality-driven and valuable to the learners. Shortly after, we started to put the team through the COLF certification and began our journey towards fully implementing live online learning.

What was your team's experience of the COLF course?

From the start, the team was highly motivated and eager to begin the COLF certification. Many of them had experienced resistance from delivering traditional virtual webinars because they hadn't been delivering them in most effective way. The team was keen to deliver content that added value; to make a difference within the business. So, when I talked about investing in them and developing their skills in this area, every single member of the team was delighted about it. The course itself was a really positive experience for the team. Every single person got better at delivering and designing online content as a result.

How did you build internal support for the project?

The biggest piece of work was getting other parts of the business receptive to the benefits of live virtual classrooms. The most important thing was to acknowledge that we needed to change the existing model in order to improve - and that we had identified a better way to deliver online sessions.

Organisationally, the executive board were really supportive of what I was trying to do, because it was aligned with what I had set out to achieve as part of the learning and development transformation. I did set out a business case showing what the ROI would be in terms of savings on travel and accommodation. I also showcased what a quality session in the live virtual classroom would look like. These resources were key to getting the support of the senior team and the L&D team.

We held pilot sessions with people who were sceptical about what live virtual classrooms could do, and from that, we were able to gain more influence from those people. Once they experienced live online learning, word began to spread that we were doing something fresh, new and innovative. The feedback was extremely positive and this positivity permeated throughout the workplace, dispelling any remaining doubts and fostering a highly engaged culture which was entirely behind the programme.

Since implementing COLF and using the virtual classroom approach, what ROI have you seen?

Of the many platforms available that support the COLF approach, we chose the WebEx platform, which was rolled out company-wide at the same time we rolled out the use of live virtual classrooms. As part of the COLF certification one of my trainers developed a module on how to enable managers to use WebEx, to reduce the number of meetings taking place. It was a really sensible approach: people were learning WebEx through live virtual classrooms, which in turn drove the adoption of live online learning for other courses and programmes.

We use WebEx now to replace nearly all face-to-face meetings across the organisation. Prior to this rollout the business was spending significant amounts of money on travel and accommodation for meetings and training delivery. This has been notably reduced - around 80% of our training is now delivered using blended methods. This is quite a shift from where we started.

On top of this, we've been able to get more subject-matter experts involved with delivery. Because we are not classroom-bound anymore, we can bring someone in from one of our international sites to deliver parts of the content as a host. It has given us so much more flexibility and it allows us to channel our expertise really quickly and really cheaply. It allows us to do this really easily, whereas with the classroom it was much more difficult.

For more detailed ROI figures and success measures, please refer to page 4.

What are the next steps for you from an L&D perspective, how are you going to build on this?

We are now embedding the use of live virtual classrooms into everything we do. For example, I am working on using live online learning to upskill the team around the creation of engaging e-learning content and video production. The aim is to create more personalised content, with a blended approach, to support individual learning.

Finally, it is critical to show that our training is delivering tangible results, and that it is driving performance outcomes. We already know, from evaluations and feedback, that workers are enjoying the learning, but now we are looking at ways of objectively evidencing our approach to see if it is resulting in better performance and an enhanced service at the front line.

Measures of Success

At the time of transformation, at least 90% of all training within the Justice business was delivered in face-to-face classrooms. The Learning and Talent team developed 9 new fully blended job-specific pathways combining the use of Live Virtual Classrooms, E-Learning, videos, stretching work-based assignments and project work aligned to improving business performance. We have overseen the standardisation of foundational programs such as company induction to communicate our 3-year business strategy, vision and values as well as how our person can play a key role in supporting the future success of the business. Our new learning platform makes learning accessible and easy to find and it offers self-service to enable our people to take responsibility for their own development.

The general response time for development has significantly improved since introducing our new ways of working. The team can now author, review, edit and publish and deliver courses within a matter of days or even hours.

- Increase of 1000%+ in the relevant content creation and curation, since January 2016
- 32% increase in learner interest in engaging in optional developmental opportunities
- 844 combined courses launched over the past 24 months, which has exponentially increased to an average of 65 courses created in the last 90 days.

By creating job specific pathways linked to performance and future career development, the uptake in optional courses has significantly increased through self-direction. Over a 24-month period, we have found:

- An 80% completion rate for required courses, trending a 13% increase.
- Learners took an average of 527 courses in optional learning courses over the past two years which indicates a massive improvement in self-directed learning. This is demonstrated by the 440% increase in user adoption of our learning platform.

Return on Investment

- At present, at least 85% of all L&D activity is delivered using blended options including live virtual classrooms. This has led to significant departmental **saving of up to 90% in travel and accommodation** for training with a 40% improvement in the quality of web-based learning.
- In addition, the L&D team supported a company-wide rollout of web-conferencing facilities to encourage more remote working and to reduce face to face meetings. These combined savings have resulted in **59% decrease in travel costs** across the business in the last 24 months.

Feedback

Following the launch of new joint-venture in Scotland delivering the entire learning academy using our new blended approach (including live virtual classrooms), the feedback from participants has been very encouraging.

"The highlight for me is the quality of training and the levels of learning gained from it. It builds my confidence knowing that the training is of such high quality, which will only continue to support us all to reach business objectives."

- Chris Young

"The L&D Facilitators are genuinely passionate about their topic, learning objectives and always encourage participation. I really liked the use of WebEx to engage an audience across a large organisation with geographical differences. It was great to see all the different elements of WebEx being used. Previous companies I have worked with did not utilise it as creatively or effectively - Great work L&D!"

- Lyndon Smith

"For me the style of presenting and facilitating was spot on, everyone was encouraged to participate – a very refreshing and inspirational environment I felt – and a welcome one."

- Robert Jaekel

"This web based training has been more engaging than previous online training. When working properly it allows for great candidate interactions."

- Scott Hendry

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