

## The Skillogy approach to blended learning

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December 2006

## Introduction

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Blended learning is a methodology that combines a number of different delivery approaches (collaborative software, web-based courses and knowledge management practices), on the one hand, with a mix of event-based activities such as instructor-led workshops, live e-learning and self-paced learning.

The Skillogy programmes are designed to provide sufficient theoretical knowledge to the learner, where this aspect of the learning can be managed comfortably in a self-paced environment using on-line delivery, combined with a high level of job-focused practical work supported through peer group involvement and guidance from a learning adviser.

This approach has shown, from experience, to provide the most effective balance between the utilisation of time, cost of training and transfer of knowledge into measurable results and performance improvement.

This paper sets out to explain how the Skillogy approach has been designed and is managed.

## The Blended Learning Model

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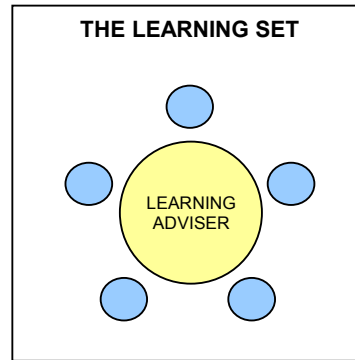


The Skillogy methodology is based on a combination of the following approaches:

SKILL-DRIVEN LEARNING	Learning specific knowledge and skills that requires regular feedback and support from the trainer, facilitator or peer group member	Establish learning sets of 5/6 that follow a group learning plan that is self managed but within a specific timeframe that has to be met.  Augment self-paced learning material with instructor-led overview and closing sessions.  Demonstrate procedures and processes through synchronous on-line learning laboratories or a traditional workshop setting.  Provide email support.  Introduce projects and case studies customised to local needs.
ATTITUDE-DRIVEN LEARNING	Learning content that deals with developing new attitudes and behaviours requiring peer-to-peer interaction.	Run synchronous web-based sessions (webinars)  Assign learning set projects to be completed off-line  Run facilitator-led workshops to review outcomes.

The structure has been specifically designed to support the skill-driven approach.

The prime focus for learning derives from the learning set. The learning set comprises a group of around five managers who are studying a common module or set of modules within a working environment. The learning set may be managers from the same function or differing functions. The main aim is to integrate the self-paced learning of the individual, with peer and learning adviser support. By this means, the learning experience and transfer of ideas and solutions into the workplace stands a much better success rate.



The self-paced learning is accessed via a personal logon and password to the learning management system. This learning is then supported by an interaction with a learning advisor (facilitator) through email contact, discussion forums and face-to-face meetings. The combination of the peer group interaction and the facilitator-led interventions acts as a powerful catalyst in developing ideas, tangible outcomes and a change in behaviour and performance.

The advantage of this approach is that the learner is kept within a 'support loop' that maintains their motivation and momentum during the self-paced elements of the programme. This is particularly effective in the Skillogy approach to learning where there is a high degree of emphasis on the transfer of knowledge to action-focused results.

Recommended techniques for skill-driven learning include:

- Establishing learning sets
- Creating a learning plan schedule that is well managed by the Learning Adviser
- Running instructor-led overview, review and closing sessions
- Delivering synchronous webinars
- Providing on-line support to learners through the learning management system.

Element	Technology-based techniques	Non technology-based techniques
Programme launch	Learning Management System Email push	Flyer Mail Phone
Overview session	Email Webinar	Learning Adviser led Workshop
Self paced learning	Skillogy <i>PERFORM</i> modules Web-based links	Case studies Projects Reference articles On-the-job development
Query resolution	Email FAQ (frequently asked questions) Instant messenger	Face-to-face meeting with expert
Demonstration	Webinar	Learning Adviser led Workshop
Practice	Simulation	Workbook assignment On-the-job development
Feedback and review	Email Webinar	Learning Adviser led Workshop
Closing session	Email Webinar	Learning Adviser led Workshop
Measurement	On-line assessment	Job-based outcomes

This approach blends instructor-led development within a workshop-type forum with on-line collaborative learning events. The Managing SELF and Managing PEOPLE elements of the programme, for example, cover issues that require the development of attitudes and behaviours and these are better facilitated in a face-to-face environment involving just the learning set or with the inclusion of the Learning Adviser as a facilitator. These sessions take the form of either workshops or technology-enabled collaborative events.

Activities that should be incorporated into these sessions include:

- Discussion forums
- Webinars
- Group projects
- On-line debates that use chat modules

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Query resolution	Email FAQ (frequently asked questions) Instant messenger	Face-to-face meeting with expert
Assessment	On-line assessment	Print test
Practice	Simulation	Role playing with peers
Feedback and review	Email Webinar	Learning Adviser led Workshop
Closing session	Email Webinar	Learning Adviser led Workshop
Measurement	On-line assessment	Job-based outcomes

**The learning cycle**

Skillogy has been running a blended learning format for some ten years, even before it gained popularity towards the end of the 1990's. The learning content structure has been specifically designed with an in-built process – assess – learn – apply – measure that is ideally suited to a blended learning approach. From the launch of the first programmes we considered that the most effective approach to learning was to combine self-managed or self-paced with instructor-led invention. Consequently, the CD-ROM delivered learning content was integrated within a series of development workshops.

Today, technology has advanced so that the delivery format is built around the GeoLearning Learning Management System, incorporating a wide choice of functionality and presentation options. Furthermore, the administration management provides facilities for real-time tracking and monitoring of user progress against the learning plan and schedules. However, the basic learning cycle and scheduling remains the same. The key elements of the cycle are:



The Skillogy blended learning cycle is illustrated more fully, below.

There are three key ingredients:

- The learner (and the learning set)
- The learning adviser
- The learning management system (an ASP hosted platform from GeoLearning)

The process is built around:

**ASSESS**

Involves a baseline assessment, at the outset of the programme and an assessment of knowledge gained, on completion of the module.

**LEARN**

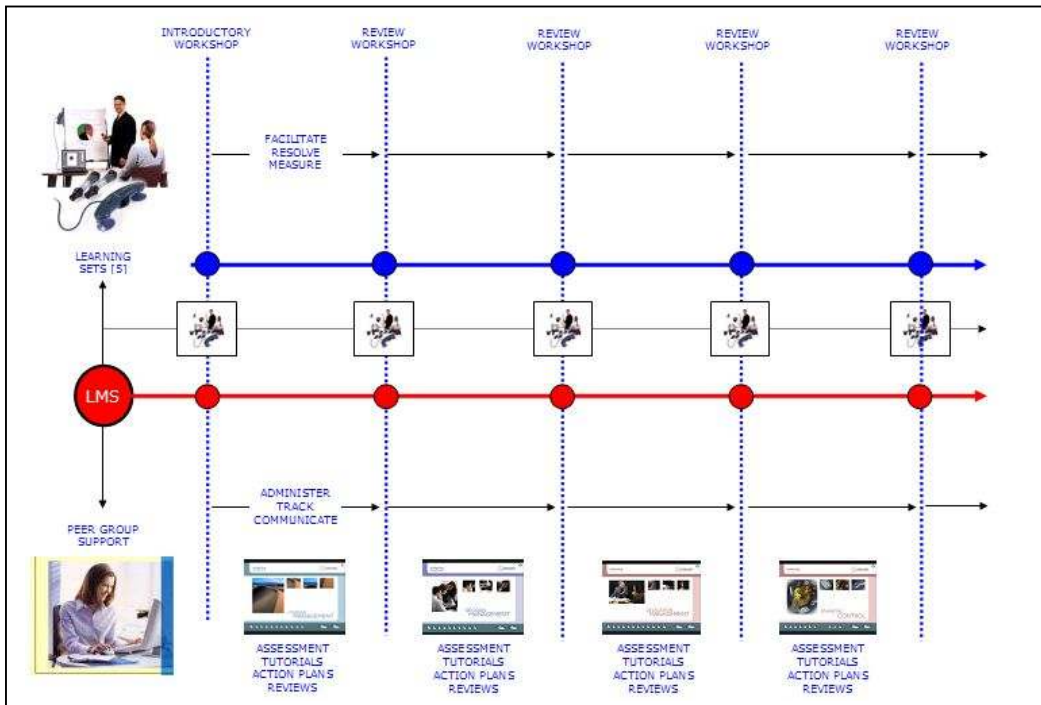
Involves self-paced learning by the learner set within a support structure and specific timeframes, tracked and monitored by the learning adviser/administrator via the learning management system. To assist with learning development, the learner works within a learning set, normally comprising five peer group members. The learning is supported by interventions from the learning adviser and on a day-to-day basis, through the involvement of peer group members on a mutual self-help basis.

**APPLY**

Involves the learner taking the knowledge gained and, through the use of action points and plans, applying what has been learnt within the context of their job and adopting the behaviour and practice on an on-going basis.

**REVIEW AND MEASURE**

The learning adviser reviews the learning set performance at both an individual and group level. This is normally carried out between four and six weeks from commencement of the module and involves a half-day off-the-job workshop. At the workshop, the learning adviser reviews what has taken place in terms of individual performance, learning set performance and the changes that have taken place. Problems and issues are also highlighted at individual, team and organisation levels and steps agreed to resolve the issues. A measuring device is built into the LMS that analyses performance against five criteria.



The structure of the blended learning may vary depending on local circumstances and needs.

However, a typical framework may involve the following structure, as a guide:

### 1 PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The Learning Adviser will meet with the key stakeholders within the client organisation. The exact nature of the programme is decided at this meeting. There is an exchange of information with the client organisation describing what they wish to achieve through the programme and the Learning Adviser will explain how the programme works. Normally, the client's trainers would run the programme and where this is the case, arrangements are made for the Train the Trainer programme, any additional Mentoring Programme and for the Launch Meeting. [a separate paper is provided on how to run the Train the Trainer Workshop].

A number of options are available for selecting the modules to be used during the programme. In some cases the client organisation will have a specific aim in mind for the skill development programme and they will select arbitrarily the modules and priority order.

For example, they may be working through a major change and be using the skill develop modules to facilitate the change.

Where the project is designed to work at generic management and leadership skills, the participants may be supplied with an assessment tool that combines questions about the importance of a particular module to a person's job with their current level of understanding, to produce a priority order.

Some modules of skill development model are interrelated and work on one topic inevitably improves performance in another subject area. For example, Time Management, Personal Organisation and Priority Management are closely linked and working on one will improve performance in the others.

The extent to which the internal trainer is involved in determining what modules are prioritised will depend upon the particular nature of the programme as dictated by the company and other similar client organisation requirements. These issues would form a part of the Client Planning Meeting.

At this stage the Learning Adviser would also plan the programme in terms of timetable, administrative requirements, logistics and bespoke content (case studies, projects, role-playing requirements, etc).

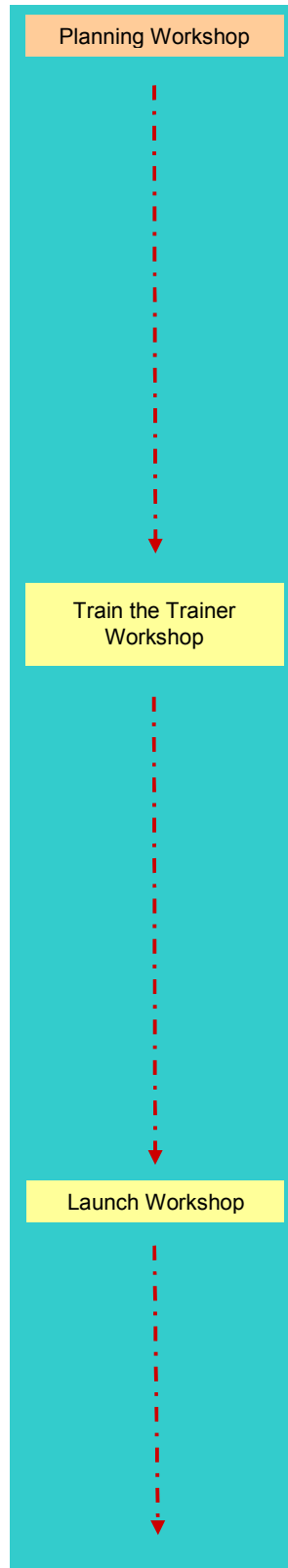
Contract details would be prepared and authorised covering the terms and conditions of the programme.

### 2 LAUNCH

The launch meeting is used to communicate the intent and expected benefits of the programme. It is essentially about persuading people throughout the organisation that the programme will be well worth the investment of time and money.

Experience shows that the following questions/statements will be uppermost in the minds of those attending the meeting:

- How will I benefit from this programme?
- Will I be made to look inferior to colleagues undertaking the programme?
- How do they expect me to undertake this programme when I am already grossly overworked?



- What am I expected to contribute to the learning of my team members?
- How will this programme improve production, service, effectiveness etc?
- Is this just the latest management gimmick
- Are the people on this programme going to be after my job?
- What happens if my circumstances change and I cannot complete the programme?
- How will we know that the programme is achieving what we set out to achieve?
- How much work time will be lost?

This list is not exhaustive, but as in all communication processes, the internal Learning Adviser should plan to deal with all of these issues and any others that are identified prior to the meeting.

### 3 INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP

At the introductory workshop the internal trainer introduces the participants to the programme and inducts them into using the 4-stage process. We feel that there should be a ratio of Learning Advisers to participants not exceeding 1 to 5. It follows that where there are more than 5 participants and only one internal Learning Adviser, additional workshops should be arranged.

It is vital that by the end of the introductory workshop(s) the participant(s) have been through the four stages of assessment, tutorial, action plan and review, and that they have a degree of confidence in using the programme.

The learners should also be competent in accessing the learning content via the LMS as well as use of the key platform functions.

As part of the Introductory Workshop the Learning Adviser should agree a timetable for the various interventions and set a review date for the next workshop – normally between four and six weeks from the Introductory workshop.

### 4 WEBINARS/OTHER WORKSHOPS

Consideration should be given to the use of webinars as an additional tool within the support process. A webinar can be delivered on a tutorial-by-tutorial basis within each module and would normally have a duration of one hour [45 minutes for the presentation and 15 minutes for questions].

The webinar would be either live or pre-recorded and delivered by the Learning Adviser or subject matter expert.

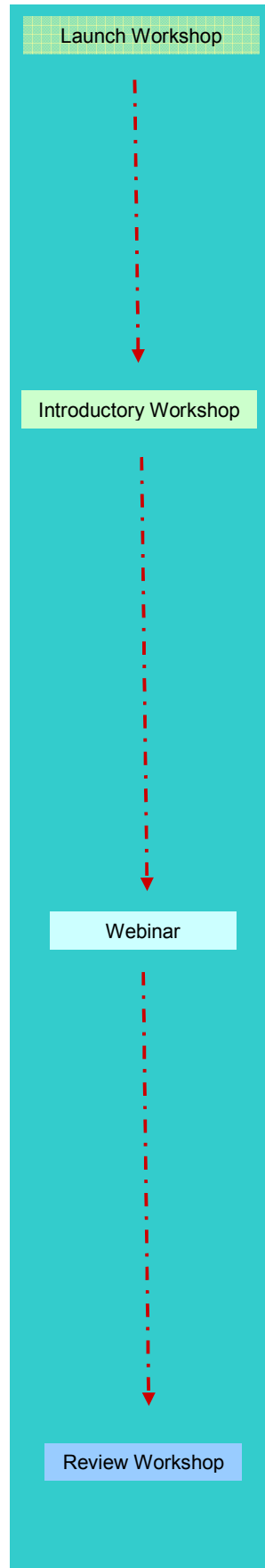
Pre-recorded webinars will be made available by Skillogy on the use of the LMS for learners, Learning Advisers, Administrators etc and these will be accessible at any time, 24/7.

All the webinars are run through the Geolearning LMS via an integrated system provided by Webex. The system uses VoIP [Voice over Internet Protocol] allowing the presenter to communicate via the Internet as opposed to the telephone network.

The module support webinars would normally be run seven days after the introductory workshop for the module.

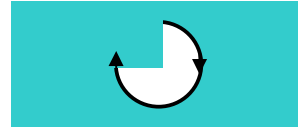
### 5 REVIEW WORKSHOP

There is considerable evidence that distance learning is most effective when the learner is supported and encouraged on a regular basis. The monthly reviews allow the internal Learning Adviser to check on progress and resolve outstanding problems.

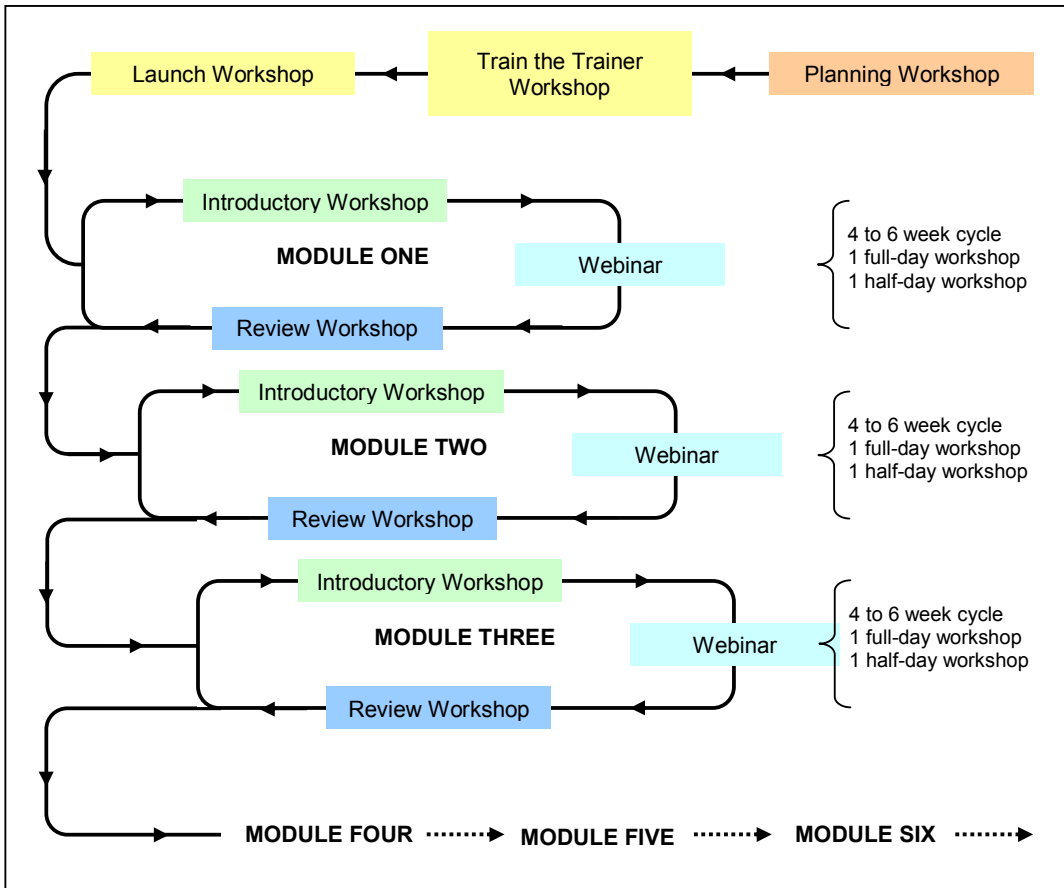


## The learning cycle [continued]

Skillogy recommends that mentors are also appointed in respect of all skill development programme participants and that those who carry out this important role attend the additional mentor training course.



## BLENDED LEARNING STRUCTURE AND CYCLE



This structure is flexible and can be adapted to the needs of the client. The success of the programme rests with the expertise of the Learning Advisers in understanding the local culture and their management of the blended learning approach. Equally important is the manner in which the programme is 'sold' to the learners involved and how this translates into a commitment to develop their performance and achieve a successful outcome. Ultimately, this is the best measure as to the benefits of using a blended learning approach.

## The Modules

At the core of the Skillogy PERFORM programme is the Model of Performance Skills.

The Model of Performance Skills® is based on substantive research into the key characteristics or drivers that underpin management competence and performance. See paper entitled 'Model of Performance Skills – Research Overview'. [ResearchExtractMoPS.pdf].

The programme has thirty-four modules, structured into three key performance groups:

- Managing SELF [Behaviour]
- Managing PEOPLE [Interpersonal]
- Managing WORK [Process]

The modules have been developed for web-based delivery, compliant to SCORM 1.2 International Standard, for delivery from the GeoLearning LMS.

The instructional design and learning methodologies are based on Gagne’s Nine Events of Instruction. Gagne is widely regarded as the foremost researcher and contributor to the systematic approach to instructional design and training. Gagne’s approach is focused on the outcomes – or behaviours – that result from training.

Gagne’s book, ‘The conditions of Learning’, first published in 1965, identified the mental conditions for learning. Gagne created a nine-step process referred to as the events of instruction which correlate to and address the conditions of learning.

The following table set out the instructional event and the mental process associated with it.

Instructional event	Internal mental process
1 Gain attention	Stimuli activates receptors
2 Inform learners of objectives	Creates level of expectation for learning
3 Stimulate recall of prior learning	Retrieval and activation of short-term memory
4 Present the content	Selective perception of content
5 Provide learning guidance	Semantic encoding for storage in long-term memory
6 Elicit performance [practice]	Responds to questions to enhance encoding and verification
7 Provide feedback	Reinforcement and assessment of performance
8 Assess performance	Retrieval and enforcement of content as final evaluation
9 Enhance retention and transfer to the job	Retrieval and generalisation of learned skill to new situation

Each of the modules have been designed and structured to take account of these factors with the aim of optimising the learning experience and consequential results in performance. The blended learning process balances and enhances the conditions of learning. A summary of how the programme modules reflect the Gagne criteria:

1 Gain attention

The presentation of each module has been designed to capture the attention of the learner with audio and visual stimuli. A heavy emphasis is placed on visual stimulus through the use of interactive animations that engage the user and capture their attention through instruction and response. The aim is to motivate the learner to obtain knowledge through curiosity. The combination of a visual image that relates to the text and subject matter assists the learner with memory retention.



2 Inform learners of objectives

During the introduction to the module the learner encounters a presentation of the learning aims and objectives. This is designed to initiate the internal process of expectancy and helps motivate the learner to complete the tutorials. These objectives form the basis of the assessment and review process.



3 Stimulate recall of prior learning

Associating new information with prior learning or experiences facilitates the learning process. It is easier for learners to encode and store information in long-term memory when there are links to personal experience and knowledge. The programme stimulates recall by incorporating questions in specific exercises or within the action points at the end of each tutorial.



4 Present the content

The Skillogy PERFORM programme content has been designed to adapt to a variety of learning styles, stimulate interest and motivate the learner so as to ensure that what is learned is translated into meaningful job-based outcomes. The learning content is delivered on a screen-by-screen basis in 'bite-sized' chunks aimed at providing the learner with the right level and focus of information to support the learning and initiate work-based actions. To appeal to differing learning modalities the graphical presentations are designed as interactive animations [using Macromedia Flash MX].



5 Provide learning guidance

To assist learners encode information for long-term storage and practical application, additional guidance is provided through the use of examples, case studies, projects, graphical representations, comparisons and mnemonics.



6 Elicit practice and performance

The learning process within the programme places a heavy emphasis on the transfer of knowledge gained into practicing the new skill or behaviour. This is achieved by means of action points and plans contained within each tutorial. The learner is prompted to implement work-based actions that are designed to change behaviours and aid performance. Additionally, the learner works within a peer group [learning set] so as to encourage an exchange of ideas, problem-solving and mutual support. The Learning Adviser provides further support and facilitates the review of outcomes.



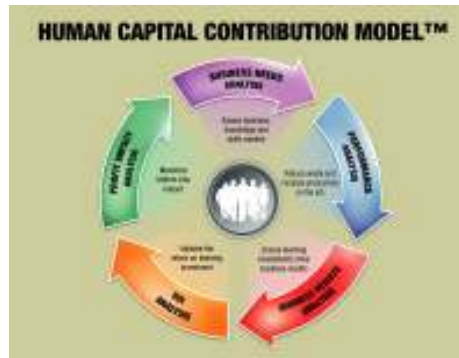
7 Provide feedback

As learners practice new behaviour it is important to provide specific and immediate feedback of their performance. In this regard, exercises within the tutorials are used for comprehension and encoding purposes. The Learning Adviser also tracks learner progress and provides on-going formative feedback through email and face-to-face contact.



**8 Assess performance**

Assessment takes place at the start of the module and on completion. There are two levels of assessment. An assessment of knowledge gained and a separate assessment of how much knowledge has been converted into work-based performance. The knowledge-based assessment comprises multiple-choice questions with a target of 80% correct responses. The performance-based assessment is based on an assessment of learner portfolios and a review of work-based changes in performance. The programme also uses the Human Capital Contribution Model as part of the evaluation process and reporting.



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**9 Enhance retention and transfer to the job**

Effective training programmes have a performance-focus and this philosophy is at the heart of the Skillogy programme. The media delivery and the processes are specifically designed to facilitate retention and transfer knowledge to the job. The emphasis is to develop the key performance skills by understanding the principles and applying these through practical application in the workplace. Learners are encouraged to work as part of a group in the belief that a sharing of ideas, collective problem solving and team-building are important factors in the process of developing competent managers.

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**Supporting information**

Blended Learning Design: Five Key Ingredients [Jared M Carman]

[http://knowledgenet.com/pdf/Blended%20Learning%20Design\\_1028.pdf](http://knowledgenet.com/pdf/Blended%20Learning%20Design_1028.pdf)

Blended Learning: What Works? [Bersin & Associates]

[http://www.e-learningguru.com/wpapers/blended\\_bersin.doc](http://www.e-learningguru.com/wpapers/blended_bersin.doc)

Building Effective Blended Learning Programs [Harvey Singh]

<http://www.bookstoread.com/framework/blended-learning.pdf>

Library: Blended Learning

<http://www.e-learningcentre.co.uk/eclipse/Resources/blended.htm>

Bloom's Taxonomy [Benjamin Bloom]

<http://officeport.com/edu/blooms.htm>

Conditions of Learning [R Gagne]

<http://tip.psychology.org/gagne.html>

