

Blended learning develops Hyundai's future leaders

Why company moved from classroom-only training

In vocational training, as in so many other areas, what comes around goes around.

Many during the late-1990s thought that the days of classroom-based training were limited as vocational training increasingly drifted online. Then growing numbers of learners decided that, while they did indeed want to sit down at their computers and take courses at their leisure, they also wanted to see their teachers in the flesh. Now, in 2005, the dust has begun to settle and both the limits and potential of the internet for business education and training are becoming clearer.

Hyundai Motor Company is at the forefront of developments. The company, which previously relied exclusively on classroom-based training to develop its high-potential managers, now uses a blend of traditional and computer-based methods.

Hyundai is based in South Korea, where almost 70 percent of households are thought to have broadband access. South Korea is therefore among the most fertile countries in the world for hybrid training programs mixing flesh and pixels. Where Seoul leads today, San Sebastian and Sydney may follow in the years ahead.

The first Future Global Leader program

Established in 1967, Hyundai has grown into a leader in Korea's automobile industry. In 2003, the company exported more than 1,000,000 vehicles and surpassed the \$10 billion mark in export sales. Now the company is intensifying efforts to become one of the world's top five carmakers by 2010.

Hyundai's Future Global Leader program was launched three years ago as a conventional, classroom-based program to help high-performing junior managers to develop the skills and knowledge they needed to become leaders of the future. Some 900 future leaders were to take the program – which focused on human resource management, finance and accounting, marketing, operations and technology management – over the following five years.

The first 115 junior managers enrolled on the ten-month program, made up of weekly classes on Fridays and Saturdays at local universities in Korea. Classes consisted of lectures and discussions, led by university professors.

Feedback from the first intake revealed that, because participants came from varied backgrounds and job roles, there was wide variation in their knowledge and skills. Participants therefore felt the need for a common curriculum at the beginning of the program that could provide a shared understanding of core business skills and language. These foundation skills would help participants to progress through the specialized curriculum more effectively, and to contribute more to class activities and discussion.

The first participants also highlighted the difficulty they had balancing work and learning schedules, because of the need to commute to classes and be away from the office for two

days a week. The students, and their managers, suggested that the program be made more flexible and time efficient.

The final theme to which participants drew attention was the need for more real-world experiences and activities and less theory in the course. Participants wanted more activities that would help them to link their studies to company situations and challenges, and more opportunities to experience and interact with other companies and markets.

The transition to blended learning

Based on this feedback, Hyundai incorporated a common "business foundation" curriculum which all participants would take before progressing to the more advanced, specialized tracks.

To make this expanded curriculum possible without significantly increasing the cost of the program or the time for which participants needed to be away from the office, Hyundai changed to a blended-learning approach. The company partnered EducAsia, a blended-learning provider, to integrate online courses into the program. Starting in 2003, online learning was used to conduct the foundation skills curriculum and the introductory segment of the specialized curricula. Simultaneously, the offline classes were modified to focus more on richer learning activities and projects. In particular, a real-world action-learning project was included, as well as an overseas benchmarking trip.

Blended learning design

Some 150 junior managers took part in the 2003 program. As before, it lasted ten months, but the number of learning hours was increased from 300 to 400. The first three months focused on foundation skills and introductory concepts in each of the specialized fields. This stage of the program was conducted primarily through online courses facilitated by instructors. The courses had flexible schedules, enabling participants to learn at their preferred times. Two scheduled offline workshops were also included during this stage.

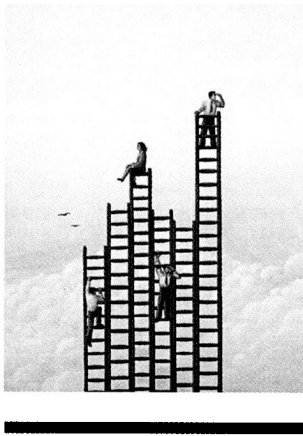
The first three months consisted of:

- A half-day orientation session, conducted at Hyundai headquarters. The session included welcoming remarks from Hyundai executives and the HR team. It was designed to communicate the program's objectives and to acquaint participants with the schedule, guidelines, and tips on how to progress through the online courses.
- A six-week online learning period, focused on foundation topics of finance, accounting, marketing, strategy and operations. Course activities consisted of reviewing online content, lessons and case materials, completing case-task assignments and submitting to course instructors for review and feedback, and participating in online discussion with classmates and instructors.
- A one-day offline session at Hyundai headquarters, consisting of a detailed assessment test and a half-day lecture and workshop. The assessment test was in multiple choice format, and designed to evaluate participants' understanding of the concepts learned during the online learning period. The workshop and lecture introduced participants to the topics to be addressed in the next phase of online learning.
- A five-week online learning period, focused on introductory topics and concepts in each of the participants' specialized tracks. This was facilitated by instructors, and required participants to review course materials and lessons, submit case assignments, and participate in online class discussion.

How blended learning worked in practice

The two offline sessions included during the first three months were designed to reinforce and support the online learning, and to provide opportunities for participants to get together face to face so they could strengthen their connection to the program, each other, and their instructors.

The online courses were operated according to a structured schedule, with weekly deadlines for the submission of assignments and discussion activities. This helped to ensure that participants moved along at a similar pace, and so allowed for continuous discussion on common topics throughout the courses.



A support team tracked participants' progress daily through EducAsia's learning management system. Information from this system was used to send personalized, daily communications to students, which included reminders on upcoming deadlines, announcements of new discussion topics, or updates on overall class progress. These communications took place through a mixture of channels and media, including telephone calls, e-mails, text messages and postings on the program web site. In addition, the support team was available by e-mail and telephone to address any problems or inquiries.

For each course, participants were grouped into teams of 15-20. Each group was assigned to a dedicated EducAsia instructor. The instructors had expertise and practical experience in their respective fields, and underwent training on how to facilitate effective online learning. Instructors evaluated and gave feedback on participants' task assignments, provided personal coaching and mentoring via e-mail, and facilitated online discussion among group participants. Through this approach, participants typically interacted daily with their instructor and peers.

Quantitative evaluation tools such as multiple choice tests were used, together with qualitative assessments (task assignments, quality of contribution to course discussion) at various points throughout this phase of the program. This helped to provide a balanced picture of how well participants were learning course concepts, and to identify when certain participants were struggling. The varied assessments also helped to ensure that participants were sufficiently motivated to participate in all aspects of the learning experience – reviewing course materials, completing assignments, and participating in class discussion.

Some 98 percent of the class of 2003 passed the online courses in the first three-month phase of the program. They then spent the remaining seven months on more advanced learning and application of topics in the specialized tracks. This stage was conducted offline, in university classes, but also included an extensive action learning project and an overseas benchmarking trip to Beijing. Around 94 percent of participants completed the offline learning courses conducted at the universities.

Challenges and areas for improvement

Surveys and interviews conducted after the program revealed that some participants were more comfortable than others with online learning. Striking a balance between online and offline learning is therefore challenging. Perhaps one solution may lie in providing learners with a choice of learning methods, but this may add complexity and cost.

Despite efforts to align the curricula and content of the online and offline courses, overlaps and inconsistencies remained. Part of the reason was that different parties were responsible for conducting the offline and online courses. This underscores the importance of ensuring close co-ordination and collaboration between providers in the early phases of designing the program.

Although the use of online courses saved participants from having to leave the office to attend classes, it also forced students to find alternative times – often after working hours or on weekends – to complete their online course activities. This was one of the reasons that course satisfaction scores given by participants for the online courses were lower than those for the offline courses. Ways need to be found to help participants to cope with, or minimize, this additional burden.

Comment

This review is based on "Developing future leaders at Hyundai Motor Company through blended learning", by Dong-Min Kim and Chris Choi (Kim and Choi, 2004). The article explains how EducAsia, a major provider of online business and management education, is working with Hyundai to deliver blended learning to cultivate future global leaders. The article is written in an accessible style and contains much to appeal to anyone involved in management development, either in the motor industry or outside.

Reference

Kim, D.M. and Choi, C. (2004), "Developing future leaders at Hyundai Motor Company through blended learning", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, Vol. 36 No. 7, pp. 286-90.

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Automotive industry,
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