Short Report on Virtual Learning Challenges

Prepared By

Report part 1: How to get participants to attend and fully engage in virtual trainings

Introduction

MONERE has been in operation since 2011 and has been delivering virtual content for nearly six years via Zoom, GotoWebinar, Citrix, and other similar platforms. Pre-pandemic, MONERE's training delivery strategy consisted of 90% face-to-face and 10% online. When the pandemic hit in March 2020, the transition shifted to 100% online and was a huge learning curve for us.

While this crisis created a devasting ripple effect on our business, our primary focus was our clients and how we could continue to serve them by delivering quality, seamless and impactful training. Adapting to the new reality and adjusting our business model, we replaced our traditional face to face training for that of virtual training using Software platforms such as Zoom, GotoWebinar, Teams and Webex.

We sailed through unchartered waters and found new business opportunities which has helped to sustain the business. Over the course of 2020 MONERE delivered nearly five hundred trainings/webinars to over 40 clients using six different platforms, so we have learned a lot, and continue to learn well into 2021 as we are still 100% online as businesses consider the future of work as restrictions begin to ease.

We are defined by our resilience, as well as our ability to survive in the midst of this crisis. Here at MONERE we made the choice at the beginning to be proactive and create our future; we pivoted quickly and successfully and continue to serve many diverse sectors and work with public and private sector clients. For many of our clients we found that in the early days of the pandemic, participants were reluctant to try virtual training, however, once attended their attitude changed significantly.

Over the past 18 months we have learned how to overcome challenges and setbacks and as a result grow even stronger. We have also learned that people can adapt to change once given the opportunity, the correct tools and technology to do so. MONERE is a beacon of light that continues to inspire and uplift our clients and learners.

Our Current Reality

It is important to acknowledge that the near-immediate shift from in-person training sessions into a virtual environment that we saw in March 2020 required adaptability, resiliency and courage from companies, learners and training professionals. While over time, trainers at MONERE have seen the shift in people becoming more comfortable engaging in a virtual learning environment, there are individuals who find it uncomfortable, and is important to acknowledge the vulnerability people may feel in virtual learning.

It is also important to acknowledge that people are experiencing many forms of fatigue:

- Change fatigue (government restrictions changing, companies returning to office as restrictions lift, family and carer responsibilities changing)
- Zoom/Meeting fatigue (moving from one virtual meeting to another throughout the workday without sufficient breaks)
- Inability to switch off (work/life balance challenges)

What are some of the reasons that virtual learning can be so challenging?

1. **Non-verbal overload**. Interactions we usually reserve for intimate relationships, such as periods of extended gaze and faces up close, are now the norm for meetings, webinars and training sessions every day
2. The **constant gaze** we experience when watching other faces virtually is draining. While this dynamic works well for productivity when full attention is required, it is nonetheless uncomfortable.
3. We experience **loss of personal space**. When we meet in the real world, we have opportunities to adjust how and where we sit so that we can be more comfortable, relative to the speaker and other participants, as well as to screens and whiteboards. That control goes away in a video conference when you're tethered to your screen at a specific distance and is compounded by the lack of control over your physical surroundings, which are often shared with family, roommates, and pets.

According to a recent study that was done among Third-Level University students regarding online learning:

- 69 percent said they considered online learning **less** effective than in-person instruction.
- 53 percent said they were unable to **stay motivated and engaged** with their education and coursework outside of class time
- 75 percent blamed a **lack of engaging in-class** activities and a **lack of face time** with faculty and students for their general sense of lethargy
- The use of **video** connections has helped "somewhat" or "significantly" to create a better online learning environment, according to 79 percent of students
- Only 8 percent of respondents said they had experienced NO difficulties in adjusting to online learning.

https://campustechnology.com/articles/2020/11/16/survey-interactive-in-class-engagement-makes-a-difference-to-students.aspx

These statistics resonate with the realities of what corporate employees are experiencing:
- Online learning feels less effective than in-person training courses
- Working remotely is tiring and employees struggle to switch off at the end of the day
- Using video in virtual meetings/training courses is tiring but enhances connections between colleagues
- Most people struggle in some form with a virtual learning platform

MONERE Recommendations

In this section we will review some tips and strategies that could be considered for your workplace in improving the attendance of your employees.

- **Prepare the attendees for the Virtual/Hybrid training** – MONERE generally sends a pre-course invitation with a short course overview and a brief about the trainer. We do this to build rapport, excitement and to put participants at ease. If you don't already use these, start! If you do use them already, consider refreshing your course branding and overviews with a short snappy introduction or a welcome video by the trainer.

- **Create a culture of training and development** – Engage in regular conversations with management and colleagues about previous training courses that have been attended, and available courses on offer. The aim here is to enable a buzz about training courses attended to create learning excitement and build new habits. The key is the emotive reaction in making the idea of positive training memorable and making the habit stick. This could be a place to ask employees who have attended past training courses to write a testimonial, share a story in a company newsletter or give feedback to their supervisor/manager regarding the valuable training they have received in the past.

- **Engage the management to discuss CPD in one-to-ones** – Deliver a communication update to management to keep them in the loop with learning development, suppliers and data from LMS for average attendance and cost of no-shows. Make them accountable for a minimal CPD, so they can add to performance conversations and templates used. Set a minimal CPD timeframe attendance for all staff, i.e. 2 workshops per month.

- **Quality Check Suppliers** – Spot-check suppliers to ensure they are delivering as to agreed expectations, while engaging the participants to ensure learning transfer is being enabled.

- **Engaging with Key Stakeholders/Influencers –** Turn Influencers into learning ambassadors by involving them in on decisions and getting them involved. Meet with them regularly so all stakeholders are being heard, use what you hear to gain buy-in from employees. It will also help keep your trainings fresh and relevant.

- **Create Accountability** – Worst case scenario, implement a consequence for managers, the department, or the participant. Inform all that for trainings to take place a minimal number of eight participants must be confirmed at least five days in advance of the workshop. If a no-show for training, allocate cost to department cost-centre. If a learner is a repeat offender, create a mark on LMS so if participant wants to sign up for a training, approval must first be given by Learning or Department Head.

- **Ensure a participative and engaging deliver of the workshop –** Traditionally training was delivered in a highly lecture/talk style, where information was given and expected to be absorbed. Research over the last decade has confirmed that ensuring a more

active learning approach can enable learning recall and retainment. This can be done by using a multitude of techniques, some include:

    a. Engage participants with pre-reading- Request for any heavy reading to be done in advance so that the training delivery can be conversations and skill-focused rather than theory and lecture-styled

    b. Ensure you use skills activities through-out the training; including discussions, strategic questions, case-studies, situational activities and so on

    c. Use the technology available and within your remit for engagement. Over the last two years our access to free or low cost engagement tools has exploded. Consider using Polls, Menti-meter, concept board and other online tools to make it a memorable experience.

We hope that this short report will help guide and inspire thought for a new direction on your training and in return, encourage your participants to increase training attendance. We are happy to discuss any of the above points in detail if you feel you need further clarity, please let us know.

Thank you for being a MONERE Customer.

Kind Regards,

The MONERE Management

Further reading and data for your interest

- Deloitte Report on Hybrid working

  https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/sk/Documents/human-capital/Brochure_Hybrid_work_survey.pdf

- Guide to Hybrid Working- From Poppulo:

  https://www.poppulo.com/resources/communications-planning-template-for-a-hybrid-workplace?utm_medium=email&_hsmi=154485560&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-_EnlF935XalgCfdrZZCG5Skuzb_JHiwoK1eCxR2RU9fb1uK2yQ5s29JGacPgIYQUxeyvLvC-lFYQ1lC9RnDHd4nDUcbFGV2xOEZA3hi2hZaA4Alk&utm_content=154485535&utm_source=hs_email

- Report from Wundamail

  https://www.wundamail.com/blog/coronavirus-business-impact-work-from-home-report-2020

- Corporate Learning Predictions, trends and observations
  http://act.cgsinc.com/rs/756-XUI-889/images/CGS_Learning_IndustryTrendsReport2016.pdf

- August 2021: Podcast, NeuroLeadership Institute experts David Rock, Joy VerPlanck, and John Edwards talk about Navigating the Hybrid world
  https://neuroleadership.com/podcast/new-frontiers-for-leadership-navigating-the-hybrid-world-confirmation

- The realities of learning engagement in a virtual environment
  https://www.novoed.com/resources/blog/learning-engagement-in-a-time-of-zoom-fatigue/