

A Survey of the Present and Future State of Blended Learning in Corporate and Other Training Settings – UK Respondents

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Dr. Kyong-Jee “KJ” Kim received her Ph.D. in instructional systems technology from Indiana University in 2005 and is currently a distributed learning instructional designer at Portland State University. Her research interests are in the pedagogies and technologies for e-learning and blended learning. Dr. Kim has over 10 years of experience in research and development in e-learning. She designed and developed face-to-face and online courses for several corporations and educational institutions in the Asia-Pacific region, including Korea and the United States. She has also conducted several e-learning consulting projects for institutions of higher education in the United States on evaluating the quality of online education offered in their institutions.

To get a sense of the current status and future trends related to blended learning in corporate and other training settings, an online survey of 202 adults in various workplace settings (e.g., education, IT services, government or public administration) in the U.K. was conducted. Approximately, 60 percent of the survey respondents were male. In this survey, over 50 percent of the participants were employed in small-to-mid sized organizations with less than 1,000 employees. Most of the participants held a position related to training and development in their respective organization. The survey was conducted from January through March of 2006 using an online survey service, SurveyShare (<http://www.surveymshare.com>). Included here are a few of the many interesting findings from this survey.

Among the more important findings, the survey clearly revealed that a majority of respondents are already using blended learning approaches in their organizations. In fact, they view blended learning as critical to the strategic planning of the training and development within their organizations. They tended to view it as a solution which would be appropriate, acceptable, and familiar for trainees, not one that is fast, scaleable, cost effective, or highly efficient. Hence, the benefits seem to be more on the learner side than related to the bottom line.

The survey respondents also expected that their budgetary spending on blended learning within their organizations would grow in the coming years. Meanwhile, they recognized that many issues still need to be addressed to deliver blended learning successfully in their organizations. Despite their optimism that their organizations would increasingly utilize blended approaches, the most pressing issue is a lack of understanding of just what blended learning is! Other obstacles include a lack of support and commitment from management as well as a cultural or organizational culture that is resistant to such a new format of learning.

The newest generations of learners and trainees entering the workforce are more technologically savvy and less patient with traditional lecture-based forms of instruction. Not surprisingly, the respondents to this survey expected to see more learner-centered, authentic, and individualized learning approaches in workplace learning by using a blended learning approach. They heavily favored coaching and mentoring, virtual teaming, self-paced learning, problem-based learning, and authentic cases and scenario learning over lectures, role play, Socratic questioning, and instructor modeling.

Just as all learning involves both nature and nurture, it is also crucial to determine the technologies (i.e., nature) which might deliver such instruction (i.e., nurture). Many new technologies find their way into training environments every year. Among the twelve emerging technologies listed in this survey, the respondents predicted that knowledge and content management tools, online games and simulations, mobile and handheld technologies, and webcasting and video streaming would most likely impact the delivery of blended learning in the next few years. While such technologies are undoubtedly important, the respondents rated highest promoted technologies such as podcasting, wikis, blogs, intelligent agents, electronic books, and massive multiplayer online gaming, quite low.

In terms of the type of skills deemed most suited to a blended environment, among the 20 choices provided, over half of the respondents selected computer application and software skills and job related skills while nearly 4 in 10 selected communication skills and teamwork and

personal development skills. However, at the bottom of the list was ethical skill training at a mere 5 percent. Interestingly, in our parallel studies of blended learning in Korea and the United States, ethical skill training fared much better and was selected by 24 and 21 percent of the participants, respectively. Are there fewer ethical problems in the UK or are there different delivery formats than blended for such training in the UK? Other areas not currently being addressed in blended environments in the UK were new hire orientation training, basic skill training (i.e., reading, writing, ESL), and executive education and development courses. In terms of comparison data, new hire orientation and executive education and development were near the top of the list for our US respondents, and basic skill training was near the top in our study of blended learning in training settings in Korea. Clearly, there are cross-cultural differences in the types of skills taught in blended environments.

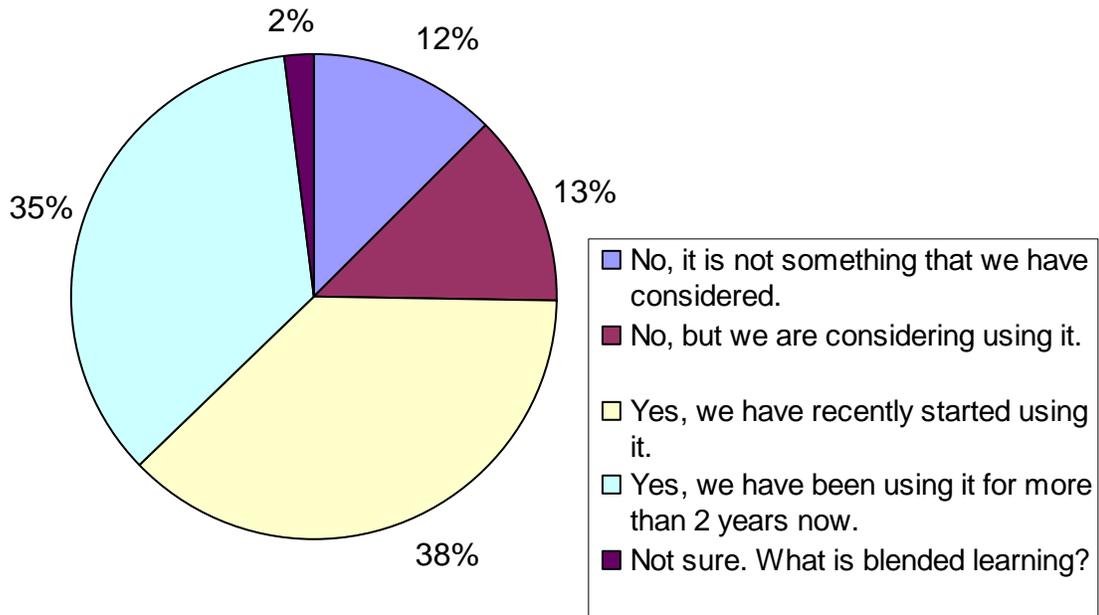
Of course, with the proliferation of e-learning and blended learning in corporate training settings, the quality of online environments remains a pressing concern. When asked how blended learning will be most effectively measured during the coming decade, most anticipated that employee performance on the job would prove much more useful than any other measure including return on investment, cost-benefit analyses, employee satisfaction, time to competency, and learner achievement in course.

Blended learning continues to evolve. Studies like this one provide one snapshot of it at a moment in time. It will be interesting to continue to compare its impact by company as well as by country or region in the world.

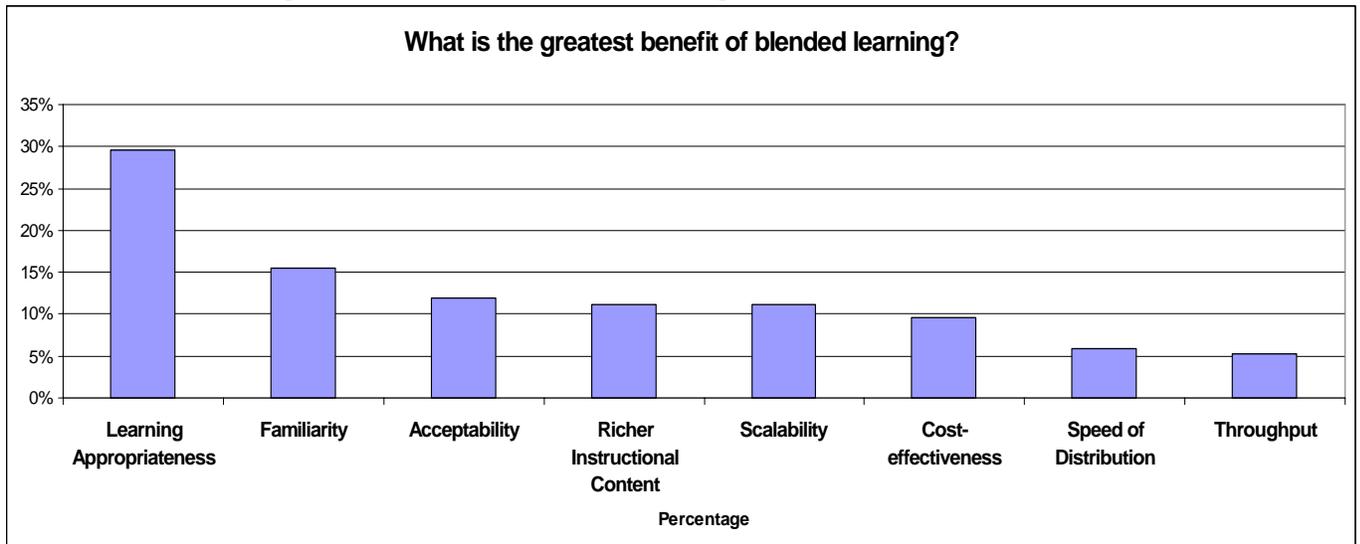
Question: Is your organization using blended learning as part of its employee training?

Responses:

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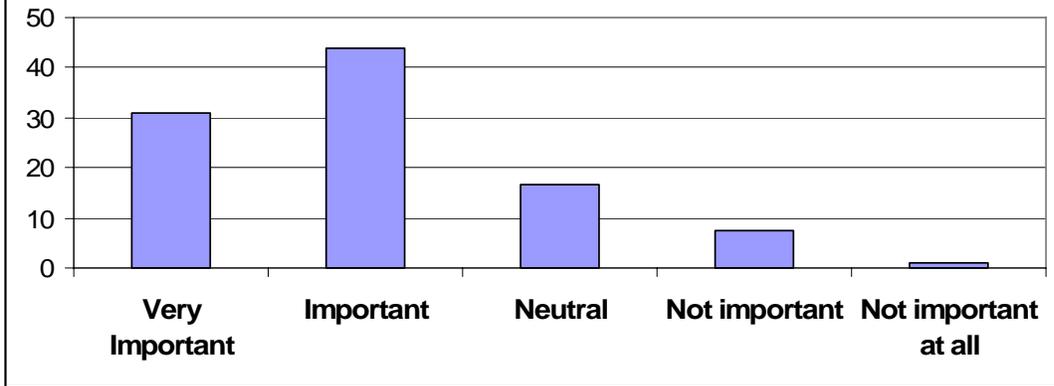
Question: What is the greatest benefit of blended learning?



Question: How important is blended learning for the strategic planning for training and development in your organization for the next few years?

Responses:

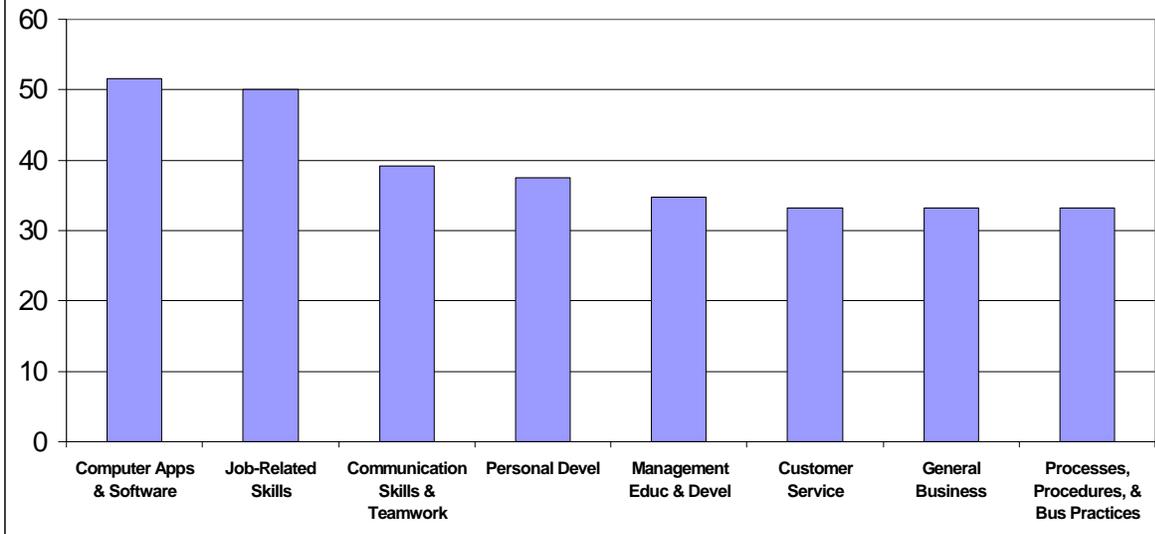
How important is blended learning to the strategic planning for training in your organization in the next few years?



Question: Which of the following skill areas are currently taught by your organization through blended learning? (Check all that apply)

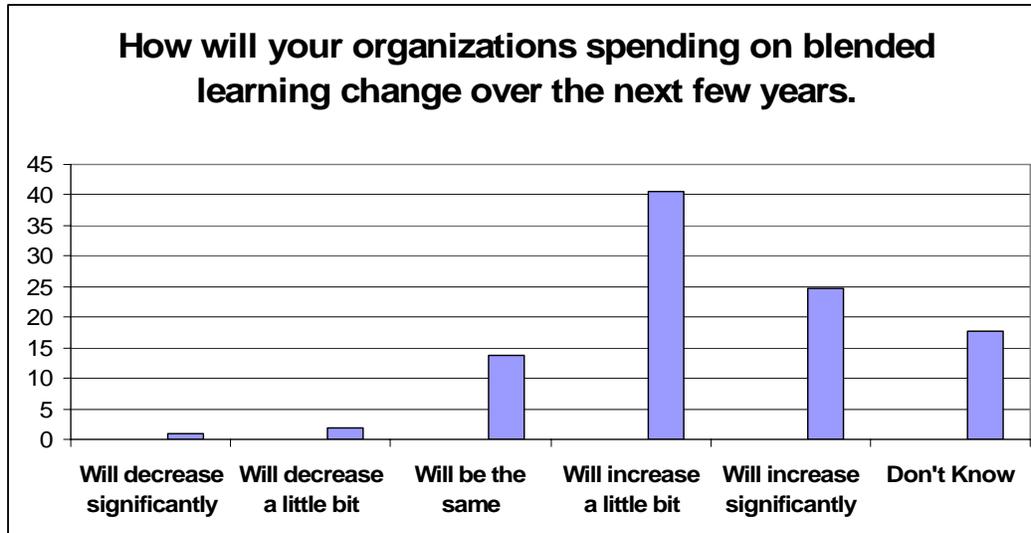
Responses:

What skill areas are taught in your organization through blended learning?



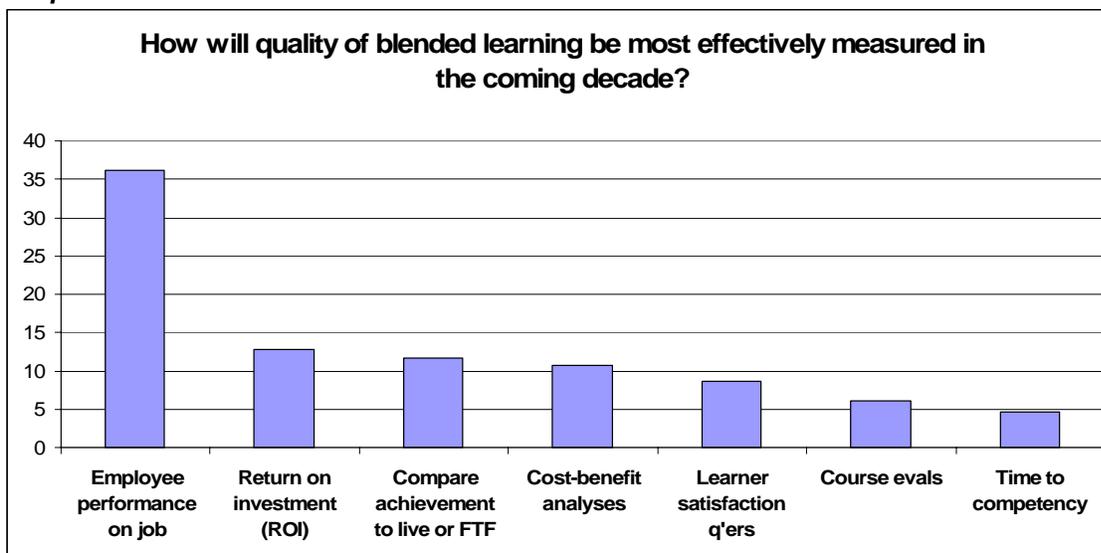
Question: How will your organization's spending on blended learning change during the next few years?

Responses:



Question: How will the quality of blended learning be most effectively measured during the coming decade?

Responses:

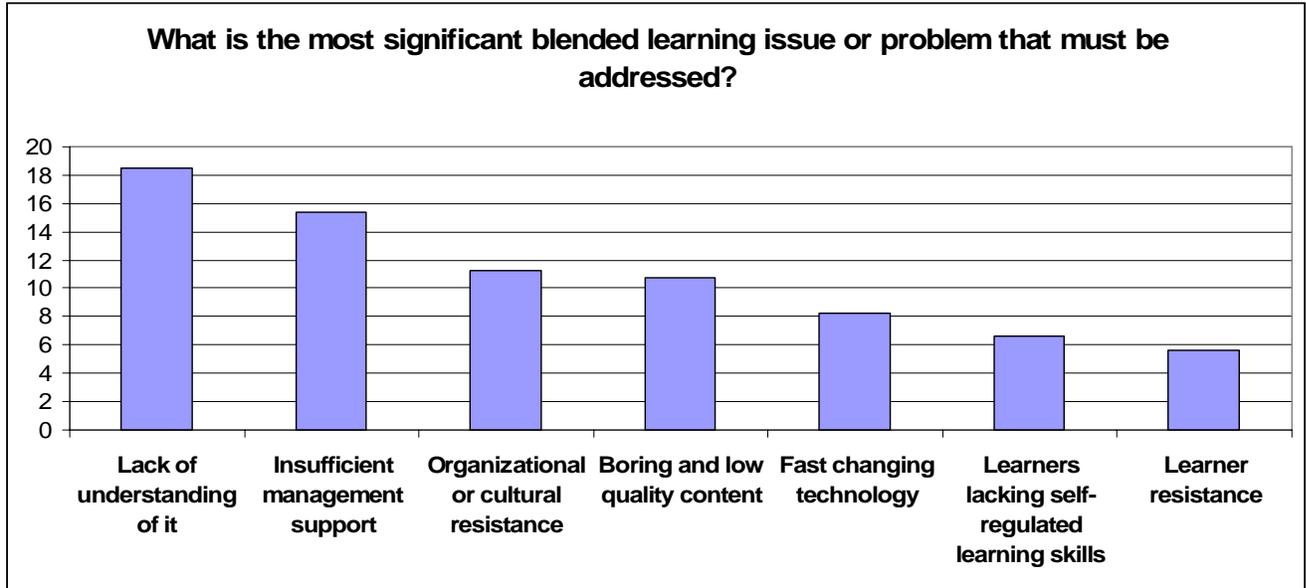


Question: From the perspective of your organization, what is the most significant issue or problem with blended learning that must be addressed during the next few years?

Responses:

Answer	Responses	Ratio
Lack of understanding of what blended learning really is	36	18.46
Insufficient management support and commitment	30	15.38
Organizational / cultural resistance	22	11.28
Boring and low quality content	21	10.77
Fast changing technology	16	8.21
Learners lacking self-regulated learning skills	13	6.67
Learner resistance/hesitancy	11	5.64
High costs of delivery	10	5.13

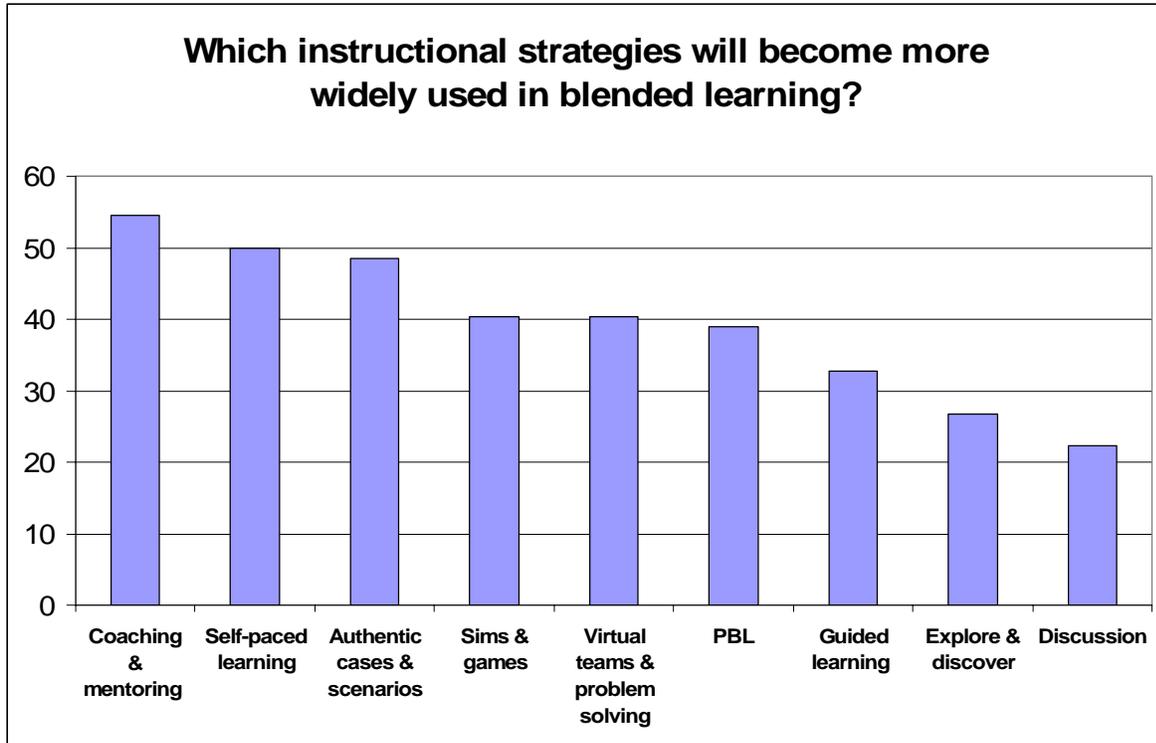
Other	8	4.1
More hype than fact	7	3.59
Limited bandwidth	6	3.08
Limited organizational vision and planning	6	3.08
Lack of quality instructors	5	2.56
Lack of standards	3	1.54
Unethical vendors	1	0.51



Question: Please check up to 4 of the following instructional approaches or strategies that will become more widely used in blended learning during the coming decade. *(Please select no more than 4)*

Responses:

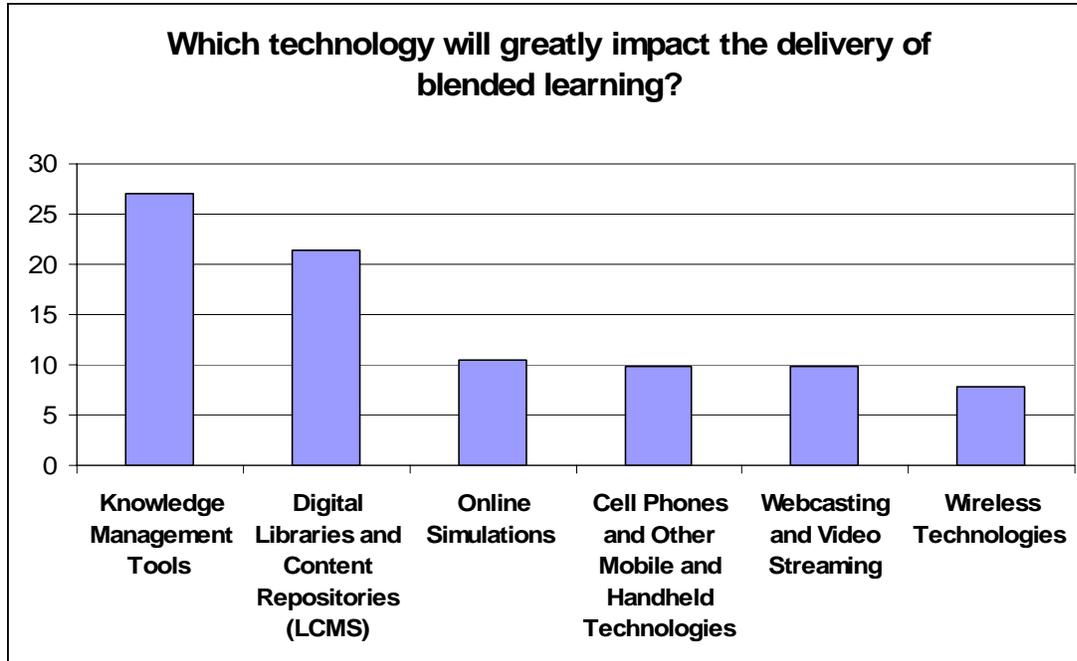
Answer	Responses	Ratio
Coaching and mentoring	108	54.55
Self-paced learning	99	50.0
Authentic cases and scenario learning	96	48.48
Simulations or gaming	80	40.4
Virtual team collaboration and problem solving	80	40.4
Problem-based learning	77	38.89
Guided learning	65	32.83
Exploration and discovery	53	26.77
Discussion	44	22.22
Lecturing and instructor-directed activities	28	14.14
Debates and role play	26	13.13
Modeling of the solution process	24	12.12
Socratic questioning	3	1.52



Question: In your organization, which one of the following emerging technologies will most greatly impact the delivery of blended learning during the next few years?

Responses:

Answer	Responses	Ratio
Knowledge Management Tools	52	27.08
Digital Libraries and Content Repositories (learning content management tools)	41	21.35
Online Simulations	20	10.42
Cell Phones and Other Mobile and Handheld Technologies	19	9.9
Webcasting and Video Streaming	19	9.9
Wireless Technologies	15	7.81
Pod Casting and iPods	7	3.65
Intelligent Agents	4	2.08
Weblogs (i.e., blogs) and Online Diaries	4	2.08
Wikis	4	2.08
Massive Multiplayer Online Gaming	3	1.56
Electronic Books	2	1.04
Language Training and Support Tools	2	1.04



NOTE: This same survey was also conducted of over 500 HRD (human resources development) professionals in China, Korea, Taiwan, and the U.S. in an effort to understand the global trends in blended learning and also to explore possible cross-cultural comparisons of such trends. The survey of HRD professionals in the U.K. was key part of this multinational research effort.