



# Shift for Change: Using Co-Design for Engaging and Impactful Blended Learning Experiences

Thinking Tool Guide



# Engaging Blended Learning: A Co-Design Thinking Tool for Learning Design

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## **Disclaimer**

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## Introduction

Blended learning has become part of everyday practice in education, workplace learning, and professional development. Online platforms, digital tools, workshops, webinars, self-paced modules, and face-to-face sessions are increasingly combined in different ways to create flexible learning experiences.

Through their previous work in adult education, learning design, facilitation, impact evaluation, and professional development, the project partners repeatedly encountered similar challenges related to learner engagement, participation, and the design of meaningful blended learning experiences. Although digital and hybrid learning formats created new possibilities, they also highlighted tensions around connection, reflection, participation, and real-life relevance within learning processes.

During the Shift for Change project, we repeatedly encountered questions such as:

- How can **blended learning** become **more intentional** instead of simply combining formats?
- How can **learners' engagement** be supported by inviting them to **become active contributors** rather than passive participants?
- How can learning experiences better **connect with real-life contexts**?
- And how can **learning design decisions** become **more visible** and **discussable** within teams and organisations?

At the same time, we recognised that every learning context is different. There is no single formula that guarantees meaningful blended learning in all situations. This created a need not for another fixed instructional design model, but for a **practical thinking tool** that would support reflection, discussion, and more intentional decision-making.

**The Shift for Change project explored these questions through research, co-design workshops, testing, and iterative development in Estonia and Finland.** The goal was to better understand how co-design approaches can support more engaging and meaningful blended learning experiences.

The process began with an exploration of learner engagement, blended learning, facilitation, reflection, and co-design approaches in adult learning contexts. This initial phase helped the partnership identify key themes, challenges, and perspectives that later guided the practical development work.

The development process then continued through a series of pilot workshops and sandbox activities in online, face-to-face, and hybrid learning environments. These workshops created opportunities to test ideas in practice, explore participant experiences, gather feedback, and collaboratively reflect on how different elements of blended learning influence participation and engagement.

Through this iterative process, the guide gradually evolved through testing, participant feedback, reflection, and collaborative refinement.

The result is a blended learning co-design thinking tool designed to support more reflective, learner-centered, and intentional learning design. Rather than providing ready-made answers or one “correct” way to design blended learning, the tool is intended to help users ask better questions, notice important design choices, and reflect on how different elements of the learning experience connect with one another.



Figure 1. The Shift for Change project journey and iterative co-design process

# PART 1: The foundation - why does this tool exist?

## 1.1 The Engagement Problem in Blended Learning

After the COVID-19 pandemic, blended learning became a widely adopted approach in both professional training and education. Organisations increasingly combined online and face-to-face learning environments to create more flexible and accessible learning experiences. Yet despite this rapid uptake, many learning experiences still struggle to create meaningful engagement or lasting impact.

The challenge is often not a lack of tools, platforms, or learning formats. Instead, the issue lies in how learning experiences are designed and connected to learners' real-life contexts. Design decisions are frequently made without sufficiently understanding learners' needs, motivations, experiences, and constraints as they exist in practice. In many cases, learning is still designed for learners rather than together with them.

Another common challenge is that blended learning is often reduced to simply combining digital and face-to-face activities:

- a few online modules,
- some workshops,
- a learning platform,
- or occasional live sessions.

This can lead to design decisions being made automatically or based on habit:

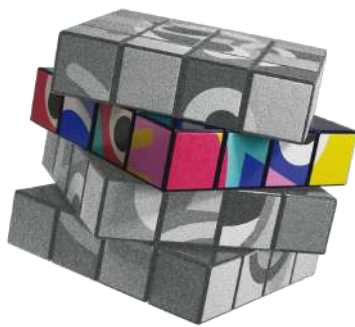
- "we always do workshops,"
- "we always use e-learning,"
- or "we need an online activity here."

As a result, the focus can easily shift toward formats, tools, or delivery methods instead of the learning experience as a whole. Important questions about participation, interaction, reflection, motivation, and real-life application may remain unexamined.

At the same time, every learning situation is unique. This makes it unrealistic to rely on one universal "best" formula for effective blended learning. Rather than searching for an all-in-one model, it becomes more useful to identify and intentionally connect the factors that shape engagement in a specific context.

This also requires a **shift in thinking**:

- **from choosing** formats → **to designing** learning experiences,
- **from delivering** content → **to supporting** meaningful engagement,
- and from designing **for** learners → to designing **with** learners.



Seen from this perspective, blended learning becomes less about selecting the “right” combination of methods and more about making thoughtful, context-sensitive design decisions.

Another challenge concerns how engagement itself is understood. In many training contexts, engagement is treated mainly as visible participation — such as attendance, activity, or completion rates. However, learners may formally participate while still feeling disconnected, passive, overwhelmed, or unmotivated.

Without intentional design, even well-structured learning programs may fail to create meaningful learning, real-life application, or long-term change.

These challenges created the starting point for developing the tool presented in this guide.

## 1.2 Theoretical Backbone of the Tool

To address the challenges described above, the tool translates research-based principles into a practical and reflective design approach. Rather than providing one fixed model for blended learning, the tool is intended to support more intentional, learner-centered, and context-sensitive design decisions.

The tool is grounded in **four connected ideas**:

1. learning as a **continuous process**,
2. **blended learning** as a **system** rather than a format,
3. **engagement** as a **multidimensional experience**,
4. and **co-design** as an important part of **meaningful learning design**.

## Learning as a Continuous Process

The first foundation of the tool is the Before–During–After (B-D-A) perspective on learning. This approach views learning not as a single event, but as a process that begins before a workshop, course, or training session starts and continues after it ends.

From this perspective:

- **before** learning, engagement is influenced by relevance, expectations, readiness, and clarity of purpose;
- **during** learning, it depends on participation, interaction, and opportunities for practice;
- **after** learning, it is strengthened through reflection, application, and continued support.

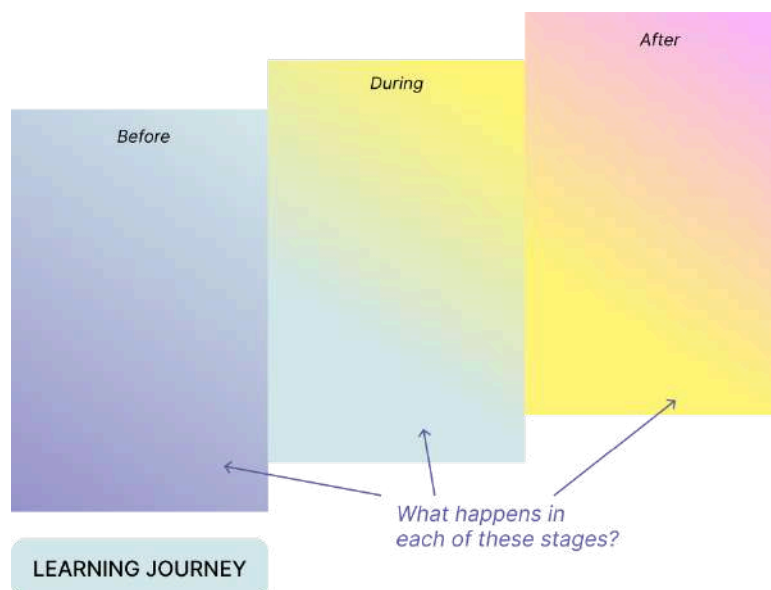


Figure 2. The B-D-A model.

This shifts the focus away from isolated training sessions toward learning as a connected experience over time. It also highlights why many learning programs fall short: significant attention is often placed on content delivery and facilitation, while preparation, transfer, and follow-up receive much less focus, even though they strongly influence long-term impact.

## Blended Learning as a System

The second foundation of the tool is the idea that **blended learning should be viewed as a system** rather than simply a format. Instead of asking whether learning should happen online or face-to-face, the tool encourages reflection on how different environments, methods, and technologies can be **combined intentionally** based on learning goals, learner needs, and context.

This helps move beyond automatic or habitual decisions such as:

- “we always do workshops,”
- or “we always use e-learning.”

To support this thinking, the tool uses a **blend matrix** approach that maps learning activities across:

- physical and digital environments,
- and lower or higher levels of technology integration.

This helps make design choices more visible, comparable, and discussable — in other words, it helps make implicit design decisions explicit.

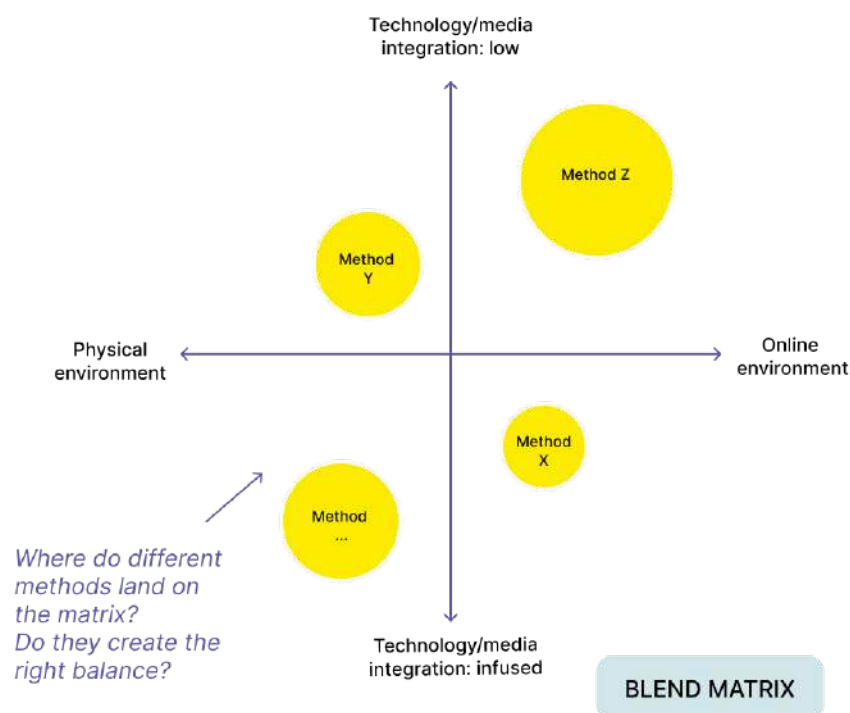
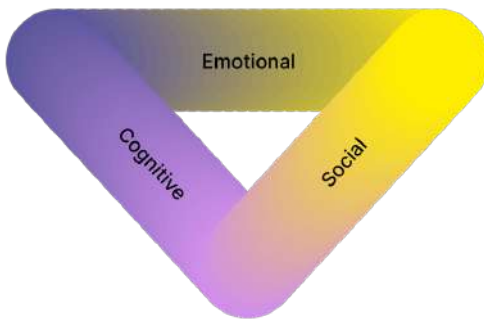


Figure 3. The Blend Matrix invites you to map the methods you intend to use in the axis to discover the possibilities of integrating environments and technology/media.

## Engagement as a Multidimensional Experience

The third foundation of the tool is a multidimensional understanding of engagement. Research on blended learning environments shows that meaningful learning is influenced not only by what learners do, but also by how they think, feel, and interact throughout the learning process.



The tool therefore approaches engagement through three interconnected dimensions:

- **cognitive** engagement,
- **emotional** engagement,
- and **social** engagement.

Cognitive engagement relates to reflection, meaning-making, problem-solving, and active thinking.

Emotional engagement relates to motivation, confidence, curiosity, frustration, anxiety, and emotional connection to the learning experience. Social engagement concerns interaction, participation, belonging, and connection with others.

These dimensions continuously influence one another. Emotions affect attention, memory, and motivation, while cognitive processes shape interpretation, reflection, and emotional experience.

Different learning environments may support these dimensions in different ways. Digital environments can support flexibility, autonomy, and reflection, but may also lead to isolation or disengagement. Face-to-face settings can strengthen interaction and shared meaning, while at the same time creating pressure or passive participation.

## Co-Design and Participatory Thinking

The fourth foundation of the tool comes from co-design and participatory design approaches. Rather than treating learners only as recipients of learning, the tool encourages involving learners and stakeholders more actively in shaping the learning experience itself.

This supports a shift:

- from designing for learners,
- toward designing *with* learners.

Together, these ideas form the foundation of the tool and support a more holistic understanding of blended learning design. Rather than prescribing one “correct” solution, the tool is intended to help users reflect on design choices, notice hidden assumptions, and make

more intentional decisions about learner involvement, engagement, environments, and methods.



## THE DEPTH OF CO-DESIGN

*Emma Blomkamp, 2025, CC BY-NC*

Figure 4. One example of the co-design tools provided that invites to think about the depth of it.

## PART 2: Blended Learning Co-Design Thinking Tool

### 2.1 The Big Picture - thinking tool outline

The blended learning co-design thinking tool is designed to support reflection on learning design decisions. It is not intended to help users build a complete learning journey step by step or provide one fixed model for designing blended learning.

Instead, the tool helps users pause, reflect, and examine how different design choices influence learner experience, engagement, participation, and the relationship between digital and physical learning environments.

There are no “correct” answers or perfect solutions. The value of the tool comes from making learning design decisions more visible, discussable, and intentional.

The tool supports reflection on:

- how learners are involved in the design process,
- how cognitive, emotional, and social engagement are supported,
- and how different environments, methods, and technologies shape the learning experience.

The tool is organised around interconnected design fields:

- learner involvement (co-design),
- dimensions of engagement,
- and the use of blended environments.

These fields are not intended as fixed steps in a process. Instead, they function as different lenses for examining learning design decisions from multiple perspectives.

The design fields are presented in a loose order that reflects the underlying logic of the tool:

1. how learners are involved,
2. how they engage,
3. and how environments support that engagement.

This structure helps users explore the relationships between different aspects of learning design rather than viewing them as separate decisions.

The movement through the tool is intentionally non-linear. Users can begin from different entry points depending on their needs, context, or current challenge. Reflection in one area often raises new questions in another.

For example:

- thinking about engagement may reveal gaps in learner involvement,
- choices about environments may not support the intended type of participation,

- or learning methods may conflict with learners' actual needs and context.

This back-and-forth movement is an important part of the tool's logic. Rather than treating learning design as a sequence of isolated decisions, the tool encourages users to move between perspectives and gradually build a more connected understanding of their design choices.

Co-design is embedded throughout the tool because learner involvement is not treated as a single activity or stage. Instead, it is viewed as an ongoing dimension that can vary in depth, timing, and form.

The tool therefore encourages reflection on:

- when learners are involved,
- how they are involved,
- and how much influence they actually have.

This supports a shift:

- from designing for learners,
- toward designing with learners.

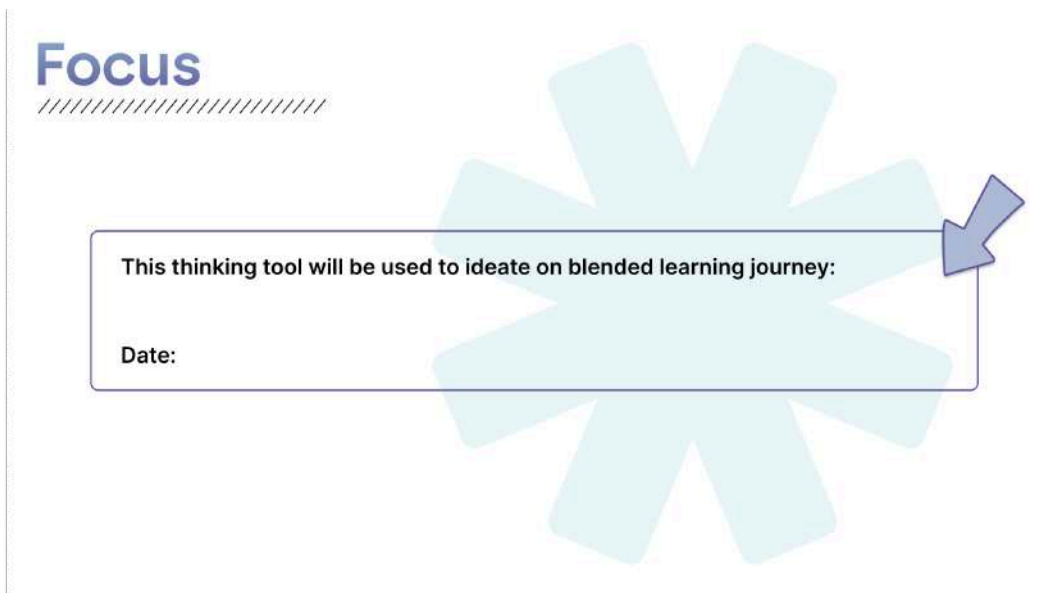
The purpose of the tool is therefore not to produce a "perfect" learning design or prescribe one correct sequence of actions. Instead, it supports reflective thinking about how different design choices influence learner experience and engagement across different contexts and learning environments.

## PART 3: Working Through the Tool

The following sections introduce the different parts of the tool and offer guiding questions and reflections to support the process. While the sections follow the structure of the tool itself, users are encouraged to adapt the process based on their own context and learning design needs.

### 3.1 Focus

#### Tool section: Defining the Learning Journey Focus



**Focus**  
////////////////////

This thinking tool will be used to ideate on blended learning journey:

Date:

This section helps you define the learning experience you want to focus on while using the tool. Before exploring methods, engagement, or co-design opportunities, it is important to establish a shared understanding of the context and purpose of the learning journey.

This section creates a starting point for reflection and helps anchor the rest of the process.

## 3.2 Needs mapping

This section helps you explore the underlying needs shaping the learning experience from different perspectives.

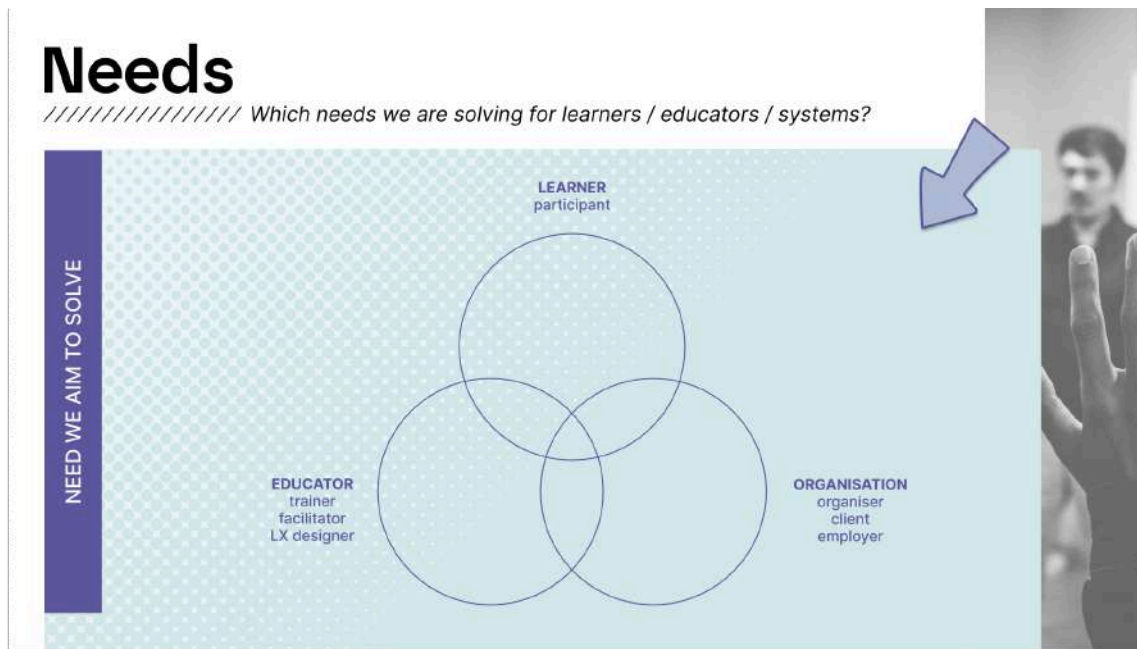
The goal is not yet to define solutions or activities. Instead, the focus is on understanding:

- what needs exist,
- where tensions may appear,
- and which learner engagement conditions may need support.

The section combines two reflection areas:

- stakeholder needs,
- and learner engagement preconditions.

### 3.2.1 Tool section: Stakeholder Needs Mapping



#### Reflect on

- What needs exist from the learner perspective?
- What needs exist from the educator or facilitator perspective?
- What organisational needs or expectations influence the learning experience?
- Where do these needs align?
- Where may tensions or contradictions appear?

#### What people often overlook

- Prioritising organisational goals over learner realities.
- Assuming all stakeholders define success similarly.
- Designing learning without understanding practical constraints learners face.
- Overlooking educator workload or facilitation capacity.

#### Helpful mindset

Different stakeholder groups may experience the same learning process very differently. This section helps make those perspectives more visible before moving into design decisions.

### 3.2.2 Tool section: Learner Engagement Preconditions

This part of the tool encourages reflection on the learner conditions that support meaningful engagement.



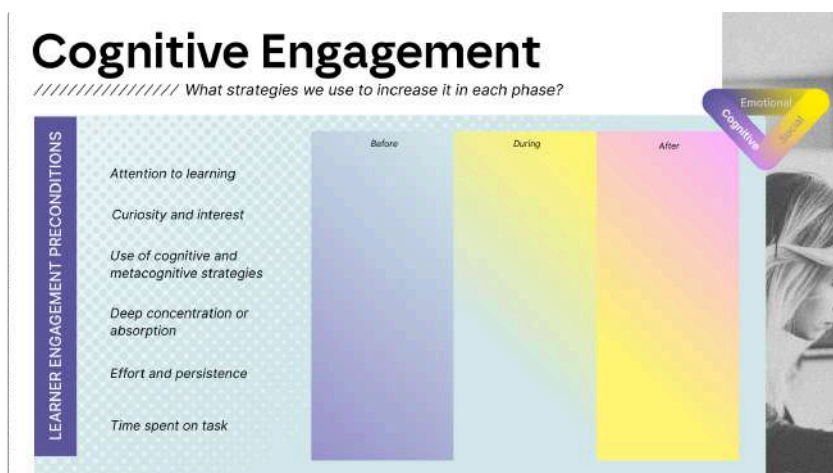
The tool approaches engagement through three interconnected dimensions:

- cognitive,
- emotional,
- and social.

At this stage, the focus is not yet on specific methods or activities. Instead, the goal is to reflect on what learners may need in order to participate meaningfully in the learning experience.

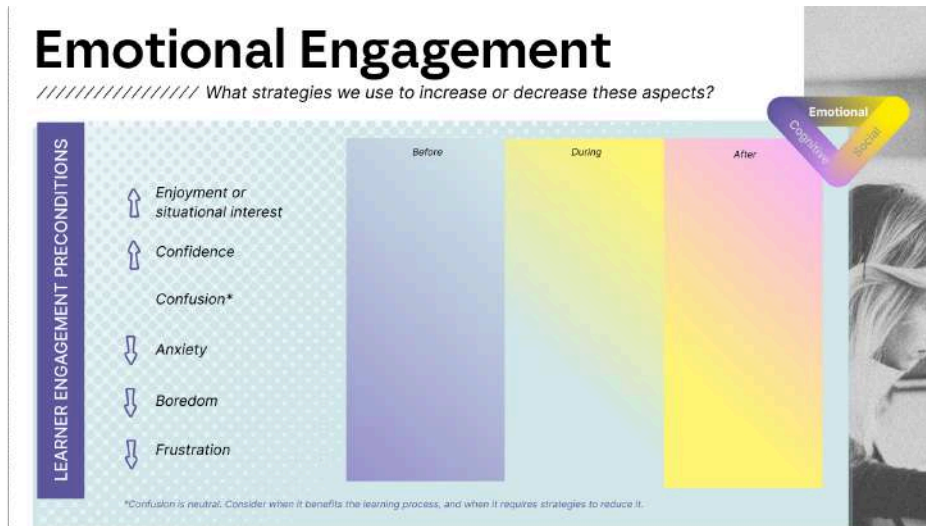
#### Cognitive needs:

- What supports learner understanding, clarity, and active thinking?
- Where might cognitive overload occur?
- What helps learners connect ideas and make meaning?



## Emotional needs:

- What supports motivation, confidence, relevance, or psychological safety?
- What may create anxiety, frustration, or disconnection?



## Social needs:

- What supports interaction, belonging, collaboration, or participation?
- What may prevent learners from contributing or engaging with others?

## Helpful mindset

Engagement does not begin only during activities or workshops. The conditions supporting engagement often begin forming long before formal learning starts.

## 3.3 Objectives

### 3.3.1 Tool section: Learning Objectives and Design Elements

This section helps you define the main learning objectives and begin connecting them with possible learning design elements.

The purpose is not to create a finalised learning plan, but to begin building connections between:

- intended learning outcomes,
- and the design choices that may support them.

This section encourages users to move beyond broad goals and think more concretely about what learners should:

- know,
- feel,
- reflect on,
- or be able to do.



#### Reflect on

- What are the most important learning objectives?
- What changes should the learning experience support?
- Which objectives relate to knowledge, behaviour, participation, or mindset?
- What kinds of learning activities, methods, or interactions may support these objectives?
- Do the proposed design elements actually support the intended outcomes?

## What people often overlook

- Defining too many objectives at once.
- Focusing only on information delivery.
- Choosing activities before clarifying outcomes.
- Treating objectives and methods as separate decisions.

## Helpful mindset

This section is intended to support exploration rather than perfection. Early connections between objectives and design elements can evolve later as reflection deepens.

## 3.4 Learners and Co-Design

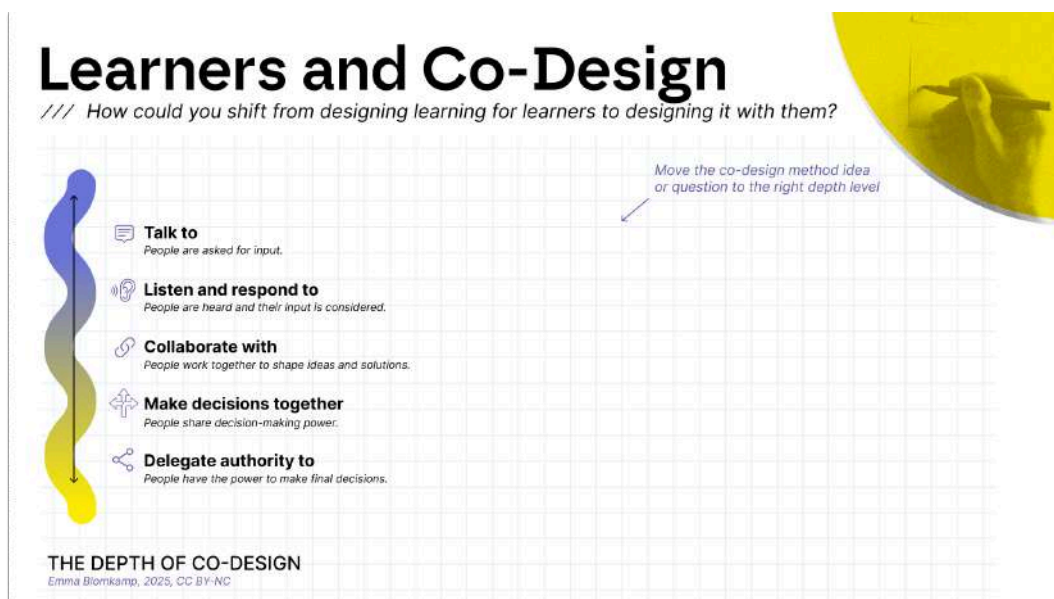
### 3.4.1 Tool section: Depth of Co-Design

This section helps you reflect on the level of learner influence within the design process.

The depth model encourages reflection on how decision-making power is shared between educators, facilitators, organisations, and learners.

The levels move from:

- talking to learners,
- toward giving learners increasing influence in shaping decisions.



## **Reflect on**

- How are learners currently involved?
- Are learners mainly consulted, or are they actively shaping decisions?
- Which decisions could realistically be shared with learners?
- Where might deeper involvement improve relevance or engagement?
- Where may full co-design not be practical or necessary?

## **What people often overlook**

- Confusing feedback collection with co-design.
- Assuming co-design always requires full shared decision-making.
- Involving learners only after key decisions are already fixed.
- Treating learner participation as symbolic rather than meaningful.

## **Helpful mindset**

The goal is not to maximise co-design at every stage. The goal is to make intentional decisions about when, how, and to what extent learners are involved.

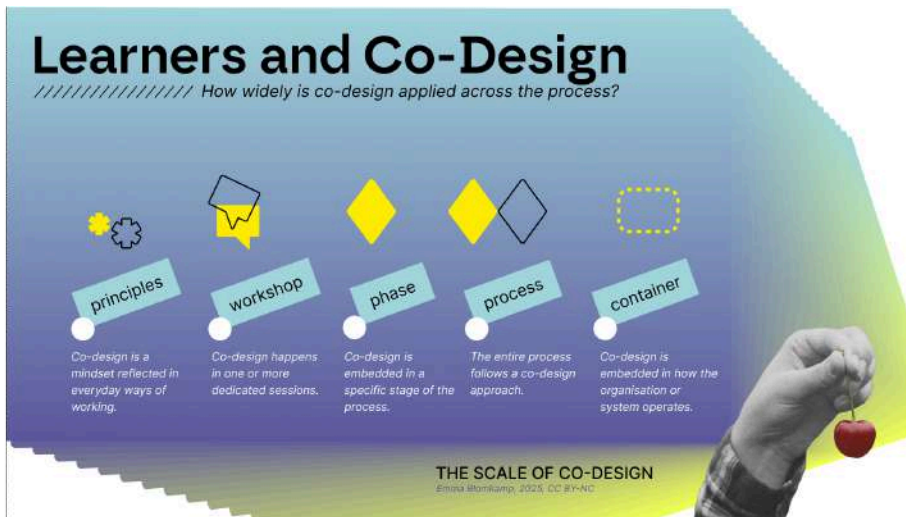
### **3.4.2 Tool section: Scale of Co-Design**

This section focuses on how widely co-design is embedded across the learning process.

Unlike the depth model, which focuses on influence and decision-making power, the scale model explores how consistently co-design appears throughout the experience.

The scale moves from:

- isolated co-design moments,
- toward co-design becoming part of the broader process or organisational culture.



## Reflect on

- Is co-design happening only in specific workshops or moments?
- Is learner involvement embedded across the wider process?
- How consistently are learner perspectives included?
- Does co-design influence isolated activities or the broader learning culture?

## What people often overlook

- Treating one workshop as evidence of meaningful co-design.
- Assuming co-design automatically becomes embedded over time.
- Underestimating the organisational conditions needed to support participation.

## Helpful mindset

Co-design can exist at different scales depending on context, resources, and goals. This section helps users reflect on how broadly learner participation is integrated into the learning experience.

## 3.5 Methods and Tools

### 3.5.1 Tool section: Learning Journey (Before – During – After)

This section helps you begin drafting the learning journey across three stages:

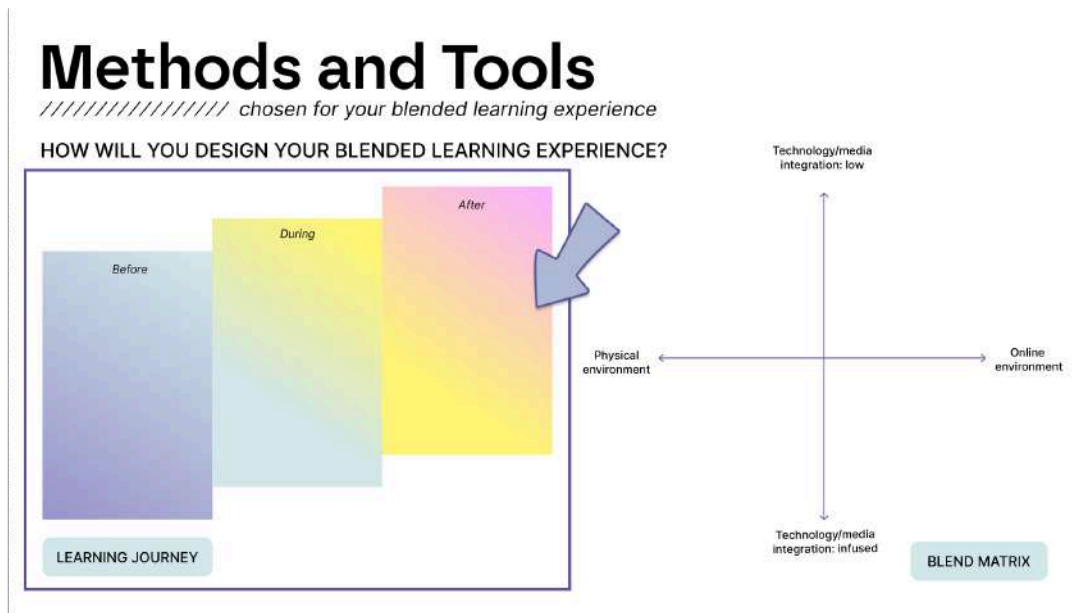
- before learning,
- during learning,
- and after learning.

This is the point where earlier reflections about:

- needs,
- objectives,
- engagement,
- and co-design

begin connecting with practical design ideas.

The goal is not to create a finalised programme, but to explore how learning unfolds across time.



## Reflect on

### Before learning

- How will learners prepare for the experience?
- What supports relevance, curiosity, or readiness?
- How are expectations introduced?

### During learning

- What activities support participation, reflection, or interaction?
- How is engagement maintained throughout the process?
- How do learners actively work with ideas?

### After learning

- What supports application and transfer into practice?
- How are reflection and follow-up encouraged?
- What helps sustain learning beyond the formal session?

### What people often overlook

- Focusing mainly on the “during” stage.
- Treating preparation and follow-up as secondary.
- Designing isolated activities instead of connected experiences.
- Assuming learning transfer happens automatically.

### Helpful mindset

Meaningful blended learning is shaped across the whole learning journey, not only during formal teaching moments.

## 3.5.2 Tool section: Blend Matrix

This section helps you reflect on how different environments and levels of technology integration are combined throughout the learning experience.

The matrix supports reflection on:

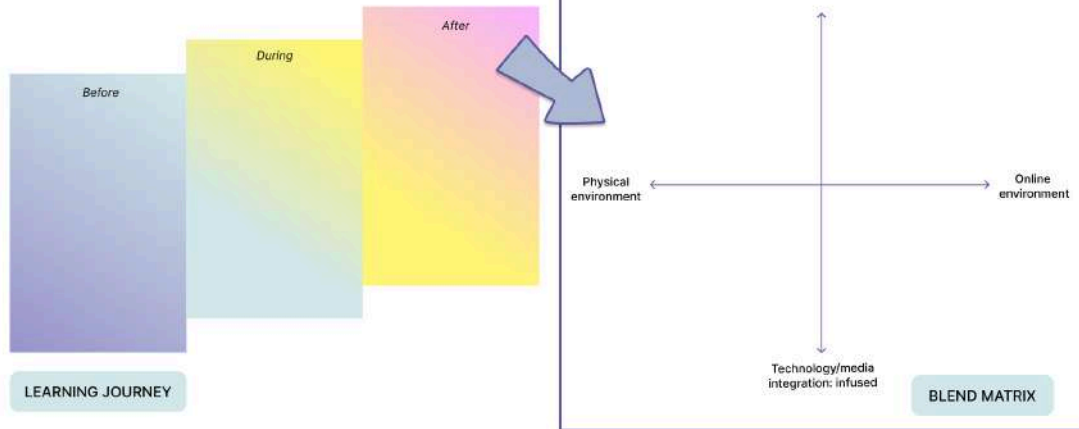
- physical ↔ online environments,
- and lower ↔ higher levels of technology integration.

The purpose is not to create a “perfect balance,” but to make design choices more visible and intentional.

# Methods and Tools

////////// chosen for your blended learning experience

HOW WILL YOU DESIGN YOUR BLENDED LEARNING EXPERIENCE?



## Reflect on

- Why is this activity happening online, face-to-face, or independently?
- What type of participation does the environment support?
- Where does technology genuinely support learning?
- Where may technology create friction, overload, or disengagement?
- Does the overall blend feel coherent from the learner perspective?

## What people often overlook

- Adding technology without a clear purpose.
- Treating online and face-to-face activities as disconnected experiences.
- Designing based mainly on habit or convenience.
- Overloading learners with too many tools or platforms.

## Helpful mindset

The most useful question is not whether learning should be “more digital” or “more face-to-face.” The more important question is how different environments support different learning goals, experiences, and forms of engagement.

## 3.6 Engagement Lenses

### 3.6.1 Tool section: Cognitive Engagement

This section helps you reflect on how the current learning design supports active thinking, reflection, concentration, curiosity, and meaning-making.

Cognitive engagement may include:

- attention and focus,
- curiosity and interest,
- deep concentration,
- effort and persistence,
- reflection and meaning-making,
- and the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

At this stage, the focus shifts from identifying learner needs toward examining whether the current design choices genuinely support cognitive engagement throughout the learning process.

#### Reflect on

- How does the design support learner attention and focus?
- What encourages curiosity and interest?
- Where do learners actively reflect, question, or solve problems?
- What supports deep concentration or persistence?
- Where might cognitive overload or disengagement appear?

#### What people often overlook

- Confusing activity with deep engagement.
- Providing too much information at once.
- Prioritising task completion over meaning-making.
- Designing reflection only at the end of the process.

#### Helpful mindset

Cognitive engagement grows when learners actively process, question, connect, and apply ideas throughout the learning experience.

### 3.6.2 Tool section: Emotional Engagement

This section helps you reflect on how the learning experience may emotionally affect learners.

The focus is on identifying what may increase:

- confidence,
- interest,
- motivation,
- and emotional connection,

as well as what may create:

- anxiety,
- boredom,
- confusion,
- or frustration.

### **Reflect on**

- What may increase learner confidence or curiosity?
- What may create anxiety or uncertainty?
- How is psychological safety supported?
- Where may learners feel overwhelmed or disconnected?
- How does the design respond to confusion or frustration in real time?

### **What people often overlook**

- Treating emotions as separate from learning.
- Assuming motivation stays stable throughout the process.
- Overlooking learner anxiety in digital or collaborative settings.
- Designing challenge without sufficient support.

### **Helpful mindset**

Emotional engagement is not about making learning constantly comfortable or entertaining. It is about creating conditions where learners feel safe, motivated, and connected enough to participate meaningfully.

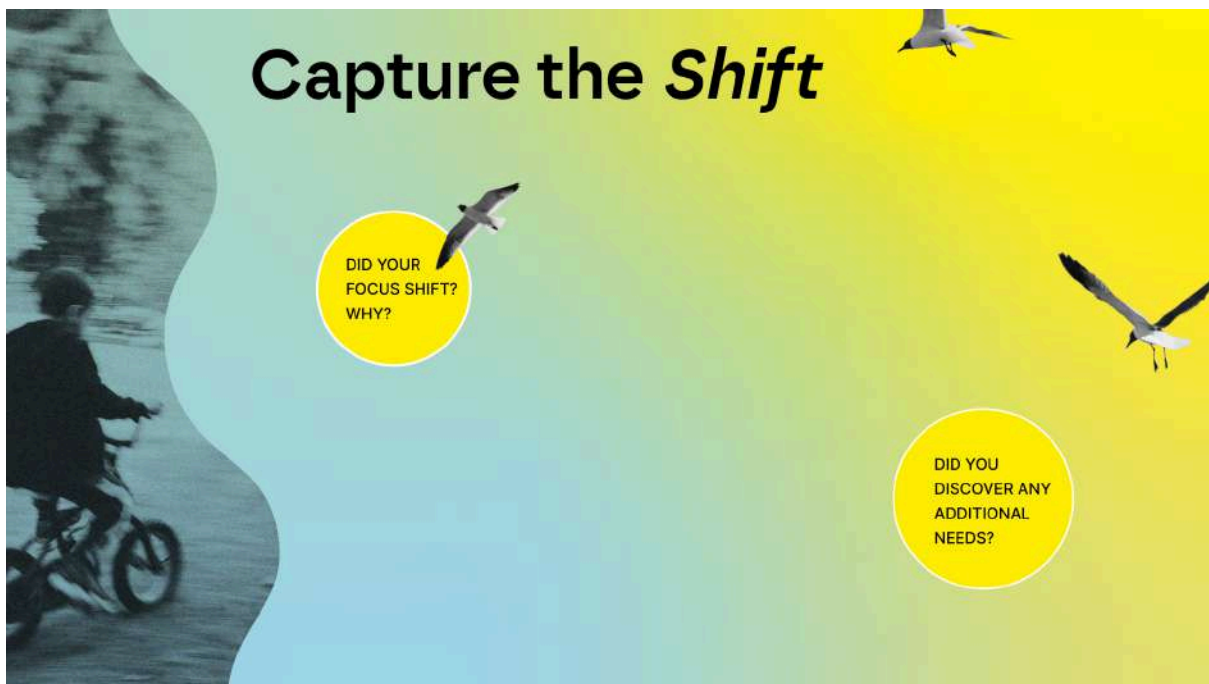
## 3.7 Capture the Shift

### 3.7.1 Tool section: Reflection and Insight Capture

This final section encourages users to pause and reflect on how their thinking may have changed throughout the process.

The purpose is not to evaluate whether the “right” answers were found, but to notice:

- shifts in perspective,
- emerging insights,
- new questions,
- and possible next steps.



#### Reflect on

- What changed in your thinking during the process?
- Which ideas or assumptions became more visible?
- Did new needs, tensions, or priorities emerge?
- What surprised you?
- What may need further exploration or iteration?

### **What people often overlook**

- Treating the tool as a checklist instead of a reflective process.
- Assuming the first ideas are automatically the strongest ones.
- Moving directly into implementation without reflection.
- Overlooking how perspectives evolved during discussion.

## PART 4: Different Ways to Work With the Tool



The tool can be used in different ways depending on the learning context, the people involved, and the purpose of the reflection process. Some users may work through the tool individually to review or rethink a learning experience, while others may use it collaboratively to support co-design discussions, workshops, or team reflection.

Because the tool is designed as a reflective thinking framework rather than a fixed process, users are encouraged to adapt the approach based on their needs, context, and available time.

Format	What this format supports	Typical process and considerations	Helpful mindset
<b>Individual reflection</b>	Reviewing an existing learning experience, preparing for redesign, exploring ideas independently, or identifying tensions and blind spots in the design process.	A full first reflection cycle may take approximately 60–90 minutes depending on the complexity of the learning experience. Users may begin from different sections of the tool depending on their needs and move non-linearly between fields as new insights emerge. Revisiting earlier reflections is often useful.	The goal is not to complete every workspace perfectly, but to support deeper reflection and more intentional learning design decisions.

<p><b>Team reflection and co-design</b></p>	<p>Collaborative reflection, shared understanding between stakeholders, co-design discussions, and collective decision-making around learning design. This format can help make different perspectives more visible and discussable.</p>	<p>Teams may include facilitators, educators, learning designers, subject experts, organisational stakeholders, and where possible, learners or participant representatives. It is often helpful to focus on one design field at a time, pause regularly for reflection, and revisit earlier assumptions throughout the process.</p>	<p>The value of collaborative use often comes less from immediate agreement and more from making assumptions, tensions, and different perspectives visible.</p>
<p><b>Physical workshops</b></p>	<p>Shared discussion, visible collaboration, group reflection, and collective mapping of ideas in the same physical space. Physical formats may support spontaneous discussion and collaborative sensemaking.</p>	<p>Helpful materials may include printed versions of the tool, sticky notes, markers, and larger print formats that support shared visibility and participation. Facilitators may choose to work through the entire tool or focus only on selected sections depending on time and goals.</p>	<p>The tool should support discussion rather than become a worksheet to “finish.” Slowing down for reflection and conversation is often more valuable than trying to complete every section.</p>

<p><b>Hybrid or digital collaboration</b></p>	<p>Reflection and co-design across locations or time zones, asynchronous collaboration, and ongoing iteration over time. This format may support flexibility and longer-term reflection processes.</p>	<p>Digital whiteboards, collaborative platforms, or shared documents may help participants contribute across different contexts and schedules. However, digital formats may also influence participation, attention, and interaction differently than face-to-face collaboration.</p>	<p>Digital collaboration is not only a technical choice. The environment itself shapes participation, interaction, visibility, and learner engagement throughout the reflection process.</p>
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## PART 5: Reflections From Practice



The examples below illustrate different ways participants used the tool to reflect on learning design challenges, learner engagement, co-design, and blended learning environments.

The examples are not intended as ideal models or “correct” solutions. Instead, they demonstrate how the tool supported reflection, discussion, experimentation, and new perspectives across different learning contexts.

The full participant stories can be found in the appendix.

### 5.1 Rethinking New Employee Onboarding

Kristel works as a training specialist in a public sector organisation where she is responsible for the learning and development of several hundred employees. Much of her work involves balancing organisational expectations with learner needs.

#### **Design challenge**

The onboarding programme for new employees relied heavily on information delivery and full training days. Kristel wanted to explore how the experience could become more learner-centred, engaging, and supportive across the whole learning journey.

#### **How the tool supported reflection**

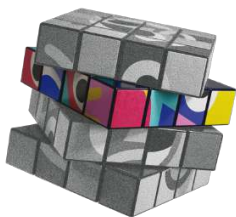
The tool helped Kristel rethink the onboarding experience through:

- the Before–During–After framework,
- the emotional engagement lens,
- and reflection on learner participation and interaction.

#### **During the process, she identified opportunities to:**

- involve learners before the training day,
- increase interaction and peer learning during the sessions,
- and strengthen follow-up activities after the formal learning experience.

## What shifted



One important insight was recognising that engagement begins before the training itself and continues after formal learning activities end.

Kristel also began paying more attention to emotional and social dimensions of learning rather than focusing mainly on information delivery.

As a result, she introduced small but meaningful changes, including more learner interaction at the start of the programme and more intentional peer discussion activities.

## Participant reflection

*"It made me think more about the learner's experience."*

## 5.2 Mapping the Learner Journey Through Emotional Engagement

Viktoria works as a learning designer responsible for creating onboarding programmes and competency development initiatives. She is particularly interested in understanding the learner journey as a whole rather than focusing only on isolated training activities.

### Design challenge

While designing onboarding and competency programmes, Viktoria wanted to better understand how learners emotionally experience different stages of the learning process and how learning design could respond to those experiences more intentionally.

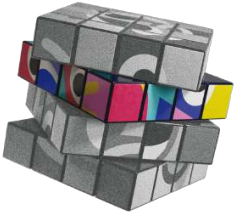
### How the tool supported reflection

Using the emotional engagement lens and co-design approaches, Viktoria began interviewing learners and gathering feedback about how they experienced different parts of the programme.

One important insight emerged after the formal training activities ended: learners experienced a noticeable drop in support and connection after completing the guided learning process.

The tool also helped create stronger collaboration between learning designers, subject matter experts, and other stakeholders by supporting shared reflection around learner needs and programme goals.

### What shifted



The programme became more flexible and iterative, combining:

- smaller e-learning activities,
- practical exercises,
- workshops,
- and continuous learner input throughout the process.

The work also strengthened shared understanding between stakeholders and helped move conversations away from isolated content creation toward broader learning design thinking.

### Participant reflection

*“These tools were very helpful, they helped track the framework, and were actually creative enough that you could add your own ideas to them.”*

## 5.3 Exploring Learner Perspective in International Online Learning

Siri runs an international organisation that develops online and blended teacher training programmes for participants from many different countries and cultural contexts.

### Design challenge

A key challenge was understanding how different learning environments and learner expectations influence engagement across diverse international contexts.

Siri was also interested in thinking more deeply about how learners experience online and hybrid learning journeys from beginning to end.

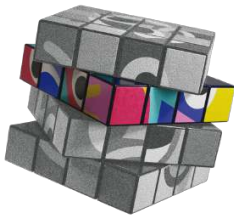
## How the tool supported reflection

The workshops and reflection frameworks encouraged Siri to examine learning experiences more from the learner perspective rather than only from the programme design perspective.

The blended learning and learner journey sections of the tool helped structure reflection around:

- online versus face-to-face environments,
- learner experience,
- and the overall flow of the learning process.

## What shifted



One important insight was recognising how strongly different learning environments shape learner experience and participation.

The tool also helped clarify how different stages of the learner journey connect and influence one another across blended and self-paced learning formats.

## Participant reflection

*"I gained good insights into how to move from a starting point to an end point and what the learner's journey should look like."*

## 5.4 From Training Event to Continuous Learning

Anton works in a public sector organisation coordinating adult training programmes in the social and health sector. His role includes the full learning design and implementation process from needs analysis to evaluation.

### Design challenge

Anton initially approached the project expecting practical guidance for combining online and face-to-face learning formats. However, the process gradually shifted his attention toward broader questions about learner experience, reflection, and long-term learning impact.

### How the tool supported reflection

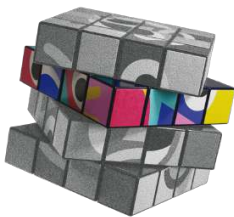
The most valuable insight for Anton emerged during reflection on the learning journey and follow-up processes.

The Before–During–After framework encouraged him to think beyond the formal training event itself and consider:

- how learning continues after training,
- how reflection and support can be sustained,
- and how participants remain connected after the programme ends.

The process also highlighted the importance of slowing down and revisiting the creative side of learning design rather than focusing only on administrative implementation.

### What shifted



Anton began thinking more intentionally about:

- supervision and follow-up activities,
- learner networks,
- and how learning experiences can continue beyond formal sessions.

The idea of “three dots instead of a full stop” became an important metaphor for thinking about learning as an ongoing process rather than a single event.

### Participant reflection

*“When I went home, my mind kept working. It set all kinds of processes in motion.”*

## PART 6: Conclusion

Designing blended learning is not only about combining online and face-to-face formats. It is about making intentional decisions about learner experience, participation, engagement, interaction, and the role different environments play throughout the learning process.

This thinking tool was created to support those decisions by helping users slow down, reflect, and make learning design choices more visible and discussable. Rather than offering one fixed model or “correct” process, the tool encourages users to explore how different design elements connect and influence one another across different contexts.

Throughout the tool, learning is approached as:

- a **continuous process** rather than a single event,
- a **relational and contextual experience** rather than only content delivery,
- and a **design challenge** that benefits from reflection, iteration, and learner involvement.

The tool also **encourages a shift**:

- from designing for learners toward **designing with learners**,
- from focusing mainly on delivery toward focusing on **engagement and experience**,
- and from isolated activities toward more **connected learning journeys**.

At the same time, the tool is intentionally flexible. Different users may enter from different sections, use only selected parts, or revisit the tool multiple times as their understanding develops. There are no perfect solutions or universally correct answers. The value of the process lies in the reflection, discussion, experimentation, and new perspectives that emerge while working through the design fields.

Ultimately, the tool is intended to help users make implicit learning design decisions more explicit – supporting more thoughtful, context-sensitive, and human-centred blended learning experiences.

The participant reflections included in this guide demonstrate that even small shifts in perspective can influence how learning experiences are designed, facilitated, and experienced in practice. Whether used individually or collaboratively, the tool aims to support deeper thinking about how learning works across different people, environments, and situations.

## APPENDIX

The following case studies are based on individual interviews with project participants. The interviews were conducted at the end of the project. Participants reviewed and verified the story drafts, which were anonymised if requested.

### Kristel's Story

#### Participant's background

Kristel has a background in andragogy and much of her career has been connected to adult learning in various roles: in a training company, organizing large-scale trainings, and as an in-house training specialist.

Currently Kristel works in a public sector organization as the sole training specialist, responsible for the learning and development of several hundred people. She has been in this role for several years. Her work covers the entire learning cycle: from budgeting and needs gathering to organizing trainings and analyzing feedback.

*"Since one person is organizing the learning of over two hundred people, you'd want to do all sorts of things much better and more deeply. But you just have to get on with it."*

Kristel has studied the topic of training needs in depth and bases her work on approaches recommended in academic literature: she looks at needs on three levels – organizational, departmental, and individual. She considers it important to look beyond needs and find the real problem.

*"Quite often the competence actually exists somewhere in the house. I've talked about peer learning, internal coaching – that it's actually a real thing."*

#### Participant's main challenges

Kristel has been trying to change the deeply rooted assumption in her organization that every training need requires a full training day with an external trainer. She has introduced more modern models of learning, micro-learning, and shorter learning bites.

*"I'm trying to create a bit of a paradigm shift – that not everything has to be solved with a long training day."*

The proportion of trainings is roughly half and half, or slightly more virtual. Classic full training days have been retained for substantial programs and nationwide gatherings. The value of physical meetings is clear.

*"The emotion and experience it leaves behind – it's incomparable. It's just a completely different thing."*

An unresolved challenge is e-learning development: for a long time there have been plans to create modern e-learning for onboarding new employees, but technical and resource-related questions remain obstacles.

## Participant's experience in the project

### Finding the Project

Information about the project reached Kristel through a sector network. She is interested in self-development and continuously looks for opportunities to learn more. Keywords like "learning" and "client" sparked her interest.

### First workshop (virtual)

Kristel assessed the experience as definitely interesting and positive: experiencing different methods and ways of co-creation, making valuable contacts, and the role of physical meetings in solidifying relationships.

*"One of the greatest values of training programs is always the people."*

At the first online meeting, using the Miro environment was not unfamiliar in terms of format, as she had experienced similar formats in an international team at a previous job. At the same time, she clearly experienced how exhausting several hours of intensive work in front of a computer can be.

*"Every trainer or training organizer should be in that situation from time to time. To truly understand your learners better."*

### Case analysis – new employee onboarding program

Kristel's case was the new employee onboarding program, whose central element is a regularly held training day for new employees. The existing format had been mainly information delivery.

Working with experienced colleagues was particularly valuable for Kristel, as she largely handles training topics alone in her organization.

*"I really liked the fact that my topic stayed on the table and I got to look at it together with smart people."*

The workshop looked for simpler changes that would make the program more learner friendly. Specific ideas that she got:

"Before" stage: involve learners before the training day – send more information in advance, ask more specifically about expectations and questions. Get learners thinking about it earlier.

"During" stage: make topics more playful and engaging. Let participants who have already been working for a while talk to each other and build up a picture of the organization. For each topic block, think about how the learner could learn more.

"After" stage: form accountability partner pairs, make subsequent webinars more practical.

Emotional dimension: give learners the opportunity to challenge themselves and experience success. Currently the day is too passive.

Kristel has already implemented one change: at the last session she got learners to talk more boldly with each other at the start of the day, which worked very well.

## Overall assessment and suggestions

For Kristel, the main value was that the project made her think more about the learner's experience and allowed her to broaden her knowledge.

*"It made me think more about the learner's experience."*

An interesting insight was connected to an existing in-house format where co-creation already works successfully – this could be transferred to other trainings as well.

*"It's always nice when you're already doing something in practice and then you see that there's theory for it too – that it's a real thing and you can actually do it that way."*

She also pointed out specific frameworks gained from the project:

Depth worksheet (cognitive, emotional, social dimensions) – a valuable reminder to focus not only on the cognitive but also the emotional and social dimensions.

Technology and physical environment matrix – a practical tool for thinking through different learning environments.

Before-During-After framework – helps to more deliberately involve learners in pre-work.

The frequency of meetings was appropriate and having the option to choose between in-person or online participation was welcome. Kristel wished the project would continue.

*"I would just like it if this kept going."*

## Participant's ideas for future development

- More conscious consideration of learner experience: the project prompted more thinking about who the learner is and how to better shape their experience.
- Expanding co-creation: the existing successful practice shows that co-creation works – this could be applied more broadly.
- Before-during-after approach: involving learners before the training day and planning follow-up activities.
- Strengthening the emotional and social dimension: offering opportunities for success experiences and peer interaction.
- Making webinars more practical: transitioning from lecture-based format to more active learning.

## Anton's Story

### Participant's background

Anton works in a public sector organization where he coordinates adult training projects. His role is extremely versatile and covers the entire project cycle from start to finish: needs analysis, curriculum development, finding experts, preparing tender documents, contracting, creating e-learning materials, registering learners, supervising training delivery, analyzing feedback, and planning changes. He also facilitates reflection groups.

The main target groups are various practitioners from the social and health sectors. His most recent major project is a training program aimed at specialists in the field of health behavior. The organization already had a similar earlier training for a different target group, which provided a starting point for developing the new one.

In terms of the practical side of his work, Anton highlights that the development of the training concept goes most smoothly: formulating objectives, thinking through structure and content. He considers public sector bureaucracy to be the biggest challenge — preparing tender documentation takes an enormous amount of time and limits flexibility.

*"In the private sector, these things would have been done half a year ago already."*

Content development has been supported by thorough research into the target group's needs, which made defining learning outcomes easier.

### Participant's experience in the project

#### Finding the Project

Anton heard about the project through an invitation that arrived by email. Initially he misunderstood the program's purpose — he thought it would teach how to combine e-learning and classroom learning, which seemed to be exactly what he was doing in his work at the time.

*„I slightly misunderstood what the purpose of it was. Not that it was a problem — I still got something out of it.“*

#### First workshop (virtual)

The first meeting took place virtually and was the most difficult experience for Anton. He had not previously used the working environment that was being used, and the technical side took up all his attention and energy.

*"That environment took all the steam out of it. We just couldn't figure out how it works."*

The tasks were multi-part and complex, which combined with the technical difficulties became overwhelming. Anton left halfway through. At the same time, the methods being used seemed interesting. Anton suggested two possible solutions: technical support from the organizers in each group, or a separate introductory exercise for getting familiar with the environment before the substantive work.

Although the first meeting was difficult, he decided to come to the second. Main reasons: the second meeting was in person (not online); the methods used in the first session seemed interesting; the international group sparked curiosity.

*"If it had been online again, it's possible I wouldn't have come back."*

### **Second workshop (in person)**

The second meeting was, in Anton's assessment, the most useful in terms of learning. It took place in person and fell during a period when Anton had a lot of administrative tasks. The meeting provided an opportunity to return to the creative side of training development.

*"For the first time I understood for myself what learners say – that it's worth coming to a training if only because you get to be in a slightly different environment. [...] I could really look at the creative side of training again."*

He found the group work particularly valuable, as it helped make sense of the different stages of training. The most important lesson was the idea of planning follow-up activities from the very beginning of the training.

*"Not a full stop at the end of the training, but three more dots."*

Anton recalls that the second meeting also involved a perspective shift, but he no longer remembers the exact content. He also remembered some interesting group methods that he is thinking of incorporating into his own trainings.

### **Second workshop (hybrid)**

At the third meeting, Anton's own project was analyzed. The meeting lasted several hours, but a large portion of the time was spent explaining the nature of the project and asking clarifying questions. The questions were relevant, but since the project had already been thoroughly worked through, not many new solutions emerged.

*"If the project had been at a different stage, there would probably have been more loose ends to unravel."*

### **Overall assessment and suggestions**

Anton assessed the program positively overall. After each meeting, thought processes were set in motion that continued even after leaving. The international community was a rich and interesting experience.

*"When I went home, my mind kept working. It set all kinds of processes in motion."*

At the same time, he suggested structuring the program more clearly. At times the content felt a little vague or diffuse, and there could be more flow between the different parts.

*"I would like it if things were a bit more clearly structured. Sometimes it was a little hazy, perhaps."*

### **Participant's ideas for future development**

The program confirmed and enriched the participants' existing ideas. Specific thoughts:

- Planning follow-up activities: thinking about follow-up from the very beginning of the training, so that the training does not remain a one-off event.
- Supervision opportunity: since the training teaches practical counseling skills, supervision could be offered after the training as well.
- Building and maintaining networks: it is important to support the continuation of connections among people who have completed the training, especially in a field where different specialists need to collaborate.
- Adopting methods: some of the group methods used in the program are ones the participant would like to incorporate into his own trainings.

# Viktorija's Story

## Participant's background

Viktorija works as a learning designer, and her role involves creating training programme concepts, designing content, and collaborating with subject matter experts and clients. She works on both onboarding programmes and programmes aimed at addressing competency gaps.

Viktorija emphasizes that it is important for her to understand the bigger picture: not simply to create individual training components, but to see where the programme fits within the context of the learner's entire journey. She is the main advocate for learning design in her organization and feels the need to involve more people in understanding learning design.

## Participant's experience in the project

Viktorija began testing the tools and approaches gained from the project immediately—she had two projects running in parallel where she could apply what she had learned.

*"I really went straight in, jumped right in, and started trying them out and experimenting with them."*

## First application: onboarding programme

The first project was the creation of an onboarding programme. Viktorija used a co-design approach and took the emotional dimension into account: she conducted interviews with new employees and tried to find out how they felt during different activities.

The results showed that after completing the training programme, new employees experienced an unexpected dip:

*"It turned out that after the training programme, they all had a major crash—they felt they wanted to receive more support. [...] We also need to address what happens after this guided learning activity."*

The programme was built to be flexible: small e-courses, learning exercises, and real-life applications alternated with one another. After each module, there was a workshop where the trainer received input in advance based on the learners' exercises.

*"Before the session, the trainer received feedback in the form of those same exercises. They received excellent input for running their day. They learned together."*

## Second application: competency programme

The second project grew out of the need to broaden the understanding of learning design within the organization. Viktorija involved subject matter experts and used the tools to reach a shared understanding of the objectives, the learner, and the problem.

*"We met several times to understand what we were actually solving. So that we were not just creating some piece for the sake of creating a piece, but understanding where it fits into the bigger picture."*

This project showed how the tools help bring different stakeholders onto the same page.

## **Overall assessment and suggestions**

Viktoria gave the project a clearly positive assessment, emphasizing the practical value of the tools.

*“These tools were very helpful, they helped track the framework, and were actually creative enough that you could add your own ideas to them.”*

Viktoria was the participant who began applying the tools in her work most directly and quickly.

## **Participants’ practical applications and future ideas**

- Mapping the emotional journey: tracking the learner’s emotional experience throughout the programme—it is especially important to understand what happens after the guided learning activity.
- Co-design with subject matter experts: using the tools to bring the client, subject matter experts, and learning designer to a shared understanding.
- Learner persona map: defining a specific learner and mapping their needs at the beginning of the programme.
- Continuous feedback loop: linking exercises to providing input for the trainer.
- Democratization of learning design: the need to broaden the understanding of learning design across the organization.

# Siri's Story

## Participant's background

Siri runs an international company that works on teacher training programs. The programs are both web-based and in the form of contact learning. The company has been operating for approximately ten years and has served teachers from over 60 countries. The target group consists of education sector workers at various levels, as well as parents and school principals.

The company's starting point was academic research examining creativity in education and comparing education systems across different countries. The research showed that the classroom environment and teacher training influence the development of creativity in different ways. From this came the idea of creating teacher training programs grounded in scientific research and a best practices model.

The company offers programs at different levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Topics include social-emotional intelligence and neuroscience. Most programs are in self-paced format so that participants can learn according to their own schedules. Some programs include the option for real-time discussions.

## Participant's main challenges

Global reach and contextual differences: courses are accessible worldwide, but situations in different countries vary greatly. Courses may not meet all participants' expectations.

Cultural differences: the educational core content is uncontested (e.g. neuroscience), but subjective topics require accounting for cultural context (e.g. differing adult views on co-sleeping, infant feeding, etc.).

Completion rates and the business side: course completion rates and sales are ongoing challenges.

In addressing cultural differences, Siri operates on the principle that the company does not offer judgments but rather provides a platform for expressing opinions and offers facts and research findings.

## Participant's experience in the project

### Finding the Project

Siri heard about the project through a colleague.

*"I thought it might be a good idea to join and see what people think about adult education and adult learning. [...] It's actually a good thinking exercise or reflection. You learn a lot from this kind of activity."*

### First workshop (virtual)

The first session had many people and work was done in groups. Challenges in adult education and desired improvements were discussed. Different roles were examined – the

perspectives of both learner and trainer. Siri considered it a good learning experience for thinking from the learner's point of view.

*"It was a good lesson for me – to think from the learner's perspective: what a learner is looking for when they want to take an online or hybrid course."*

### **Second workshop (in person)**

The second workshop focused on specific cases and used a framework. It was discussed how to design courses and what factors to take into account. The main lesson was understanding the learner's journey from beginning to end and the impact of the learning environment online and offline. Siri has kept the templates and notes.

*"I gained good insights into how to move from a starting point to an end point and what the learner's journey should look like. That was my main takeaway."*

Siri mentioned that the templates were quite good and the main goal was to map out where to position oneself.

### **Overall assessment and suggestions**

Siri assessed the project positively overall. It was clear from the very first session that this was an exploratory approach rather than a ready-made solution.

### **Participant's ideas for future development**

- AI and the future of online courses: a need for deeper discussion – how to maintain the value of online courses in the age of AI.
- Impact of the learning environment: understanding how web-based vs. in-person environments affect learning.

## Sources and further reading

The following sources and frameworks influenced the development of the *Shift for Change* thinking tool and its approach to blended learning, engagement, co-design, and learner-centred learning design.

### Blended Learning & Learning Design

#### **Cronje, J. C. (2020).**

*Towards a New Definition of Blended Learning.*

Electronic Journal of E-Learning, 18(2).

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1250468.pdf>

Explores blended learning as an integrated learning experience rather than simply a combination of formats.

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#### **Nortvig, A.-M., Petersen, A. K., & Balle, S. H. (2018).**

*A Literature Review of the Factors Influencing E-Learning and Blended Learning in Relation to Learning Outcome, Student Satisfaction and Engagement.*

Electronic Journal of E-Learning, 16(1).

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1175336.pdf>

Provides an overview of the key factors influencing learning outcomes, learner satisfaction, and engagement in e-learning and blended learning contexts.

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### Engagement & Learning Experience

#### **Halverson, L. R., & Graham, C. R. (2019).**

*Learner Engagement in Blended Learning Environments: A Conceptual Framework.*

Online Learning, 23(2).

<https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v23i2.1481>

Introduces a framework for understanding cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement in blended learning environments.

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## Offbeat Works.

*How to Use Emotions as Learning Superpowers.*

<https://www.offbeat.works/post/how-to-use-emotions-as-learning-superpowers>

Explores the role of emotions in learning and how emotional experiences influence engagement, motivation, and memory.

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## Training Transfer & Continuous Learning

**Salas, E., Tannenbaum, S. I., Kraiger, K., & Smith-Jentsch, K. A. (2012).**

*The Science of Training and Development in Organizations: What Matters in Practice.*

Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 13(2).

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1529100612436661>

Highlights evidence-based principles for effective training design, including the importance of supporting learning before, during, and after formal training experiences.

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## Co-Design & Participation

**Blomkamp, E. (2024).**

*Shades of Co-Design.*

New Know How.

<https://www.newknow.how/resources/shades-of-codesign>

Explores different depths and forms of co-design and participatory involvement in complex systems and development processes.