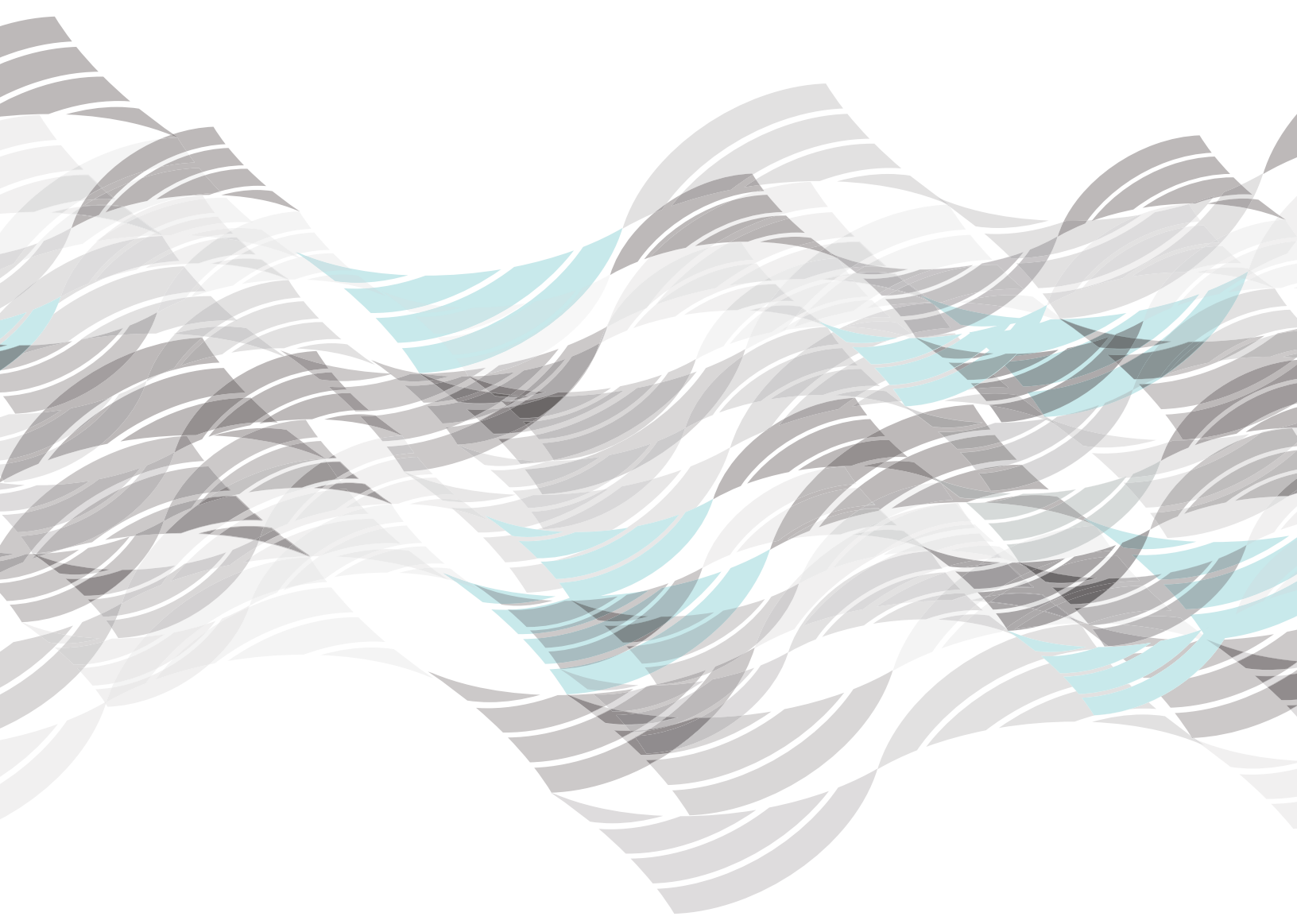


WHITE PAPER

# Blended Learning for Leadership

## The CCL Approach

By: Ron Rabin





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## Executive Summary

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Blended Learning is often defined as a mix of classroom and virtual training events. But Blended Learning for leadership must go beyond coursework to engage leaders in the domains of developmental relationships and challenging assignments, which research shows is critical for leader development.

Redefining the blend to bring learning closer to the workplace—and provide appropriate “scaffolding” for the learner’s needs—is still a struggle for most organizations. Though no one has this completely figured out yet, the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL<sup>®</sup>) is starting to see results in several key areas.

# The Learning Challenge

CCL believes that leadership is learned. Today, more than ever before, a manager’s ability and willingness to learn from experience is the foundation for successfully leading with impact.

How do you become a leader? Consider the 70-20-10 rule that emerged from 30 years of CCL’s *Lessons of Experience* research, which explores how executives learn, grow, and change over the course of their careers. This rule suggests that successful leaders learn within three clusters of experience: challenging assignments (70%), developmental relationships (20%), and coursework and training (10%). Most organizations acknowledge that formal training alone can be limited in impact. Yet they continue to invest most of their training budget in classroom events and eLearning assets. They struggle with how to systemize and evaluate a learning strategy that also includes workplace experiences and relationships.

Many organizations embrace Blended Learning, which is typically defined as a combination of traditional classroom training with some form of virtual learning, such as eLearning modules, webinars, or virtual classroom events. The amount of classroom-based, instructor-led training in U.S. companies has recently dropped below 50%, accompanied by a rise in virtual classroom events and online self-study (O’Leonard, 2013). And it’s true that by combining the strengths of the classroom experience with the on-demand features of virtual learning, this form of Blended Learning can enhance workplace-based learning.

However, many of these Blended Learning programs—classroom or virtual—still fall into the 10% “coursework and training” cluster: a sequence of activities designed by a trainer to achieve specific learning objectives. While the on-demand or flexible elements are certainly more convenient to the learner—and often less expensive for the training department—traditional Blended Learning solutions often leave the critical 90% of leadership development experiences untouched.

## The 70-20-10 Rule for Leadership Development



Personally, I'm always ready to learn,  
although I don't always like being taught.

—Winston Churchill

# 70-20-10

## Redefining the Blend

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True Blended Learning isn't merely mixing classroom and virtual training events. Instead, it's a combination of formal learning combined with workplace-based or "informal" learning opportunities—addressing all segments of the 70-20-10 rule.

This is not to minimize the impact of classroom-based training—far from it. The classroom offers unique opportunities for skills building, peer learning, assessment, experiential activities, coaching, and critical reflection time, all in a safe and confidential environment removed from the distractions of the workplace. Over the years CCL program participants have described these classroom events as life-changing experiences. Online elements like short video lectures, single-player simulations, and virtual classroom events can offload lecture content and better prepare participants for a face-to-face classroom experience focused on interaction, skills building, and rich feedback. Post-classroom tools like job aids, "apply the learning" packages, one-on-one coaching, and check-ins via social media can extend the learning beyond the classroom.

But informal learning adds spontaneous, unstructured, learner-driven experiences to the mix. It leverages assessment, challenge, and support (CCL's "ACS Model") for the unique workplace challenges and opportunities of each leader. Transfer of training becomes less critical as learning is actually embedded in the work environment. Context forms a critical part of learning.

**True Blended Learning is a combination of formal learning combined with workplace-based or "informal" learning opportunities—addressing all segments of the 70-20-10 rule.**

Informal learning is often haphazard and triggered by external events (job assignments, market conditions, mergers, etc.). But you can support and enhance informal learning significantly. Leaders can engage in more critical reflection to surface tacit knowledge. They can become more proactive in understanding how they learn best and identifying additional opportunities for informal learning. You can add outside perspectives to avoid the blind spots most of us encounter in our assumptions about ourselves and our career plans, as well as to better interpret mistakes and social and cultural norms (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

Learner scaffolding must enter into the leader's own workplace environment.

## The Learning Challenge

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The challenge is to support the learner with appropriate materials, technology platforms, and other “scaffolding” in the critical leadership domains of assignments and relationships. Leadership does not happen in isolation. In addition to traditional leadership competencies like communication and influence, CCL research suggests that great leaders demonstrate skills like:

**Network perspective:** looking beyond the organization chart to the invisible, informal connections in the organization

**Political savvy:** leveraging new and existing relationships to achieve organizational, team, and individual goals

**Boundary spanning:** operating at the white spaces or gaps across teams, functions, organizations, or geographies to help diverse groups achieve a larger shared vision

These topics and others can be discovered in the classroom or through virtual learning. But learner scaffolding must enter into the leader's own workplace environment for these types of skills to be practiced and improved. All components need to address behavior change in the workplace.

10%  
of Learning  
FORMAL

10%  
Coursework  
and Training



**Coursework and Training**

- classroom-based skills building
- virtual classroom events and check-ins
- games and simulations
- eModules
- books, articles, and white papers

Blending formal and informal learning experiences for better results

**On-demand Learning**

eModules, Webinars, Video Vignettes, Job Aids, Assessments

**Social Learning**

Yammer, Twitter, Blogging, Games and Simulations

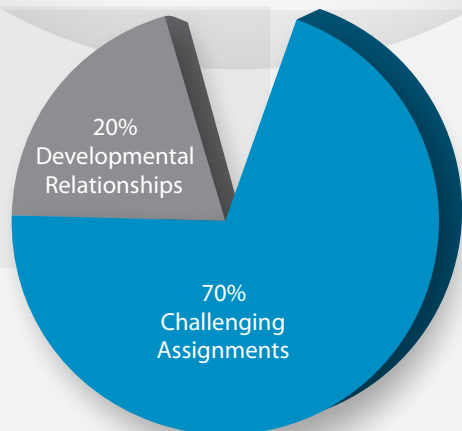
**CCL® in the Workplace**

Action Learning, Reflections, Post-program Coaching, Learning Cohort Check-ins

The Best  
of Both  
Worlds

90%  
of Learning  
INFORMAL

20%  
Developmental  
Relationships



70%  
Challenging  
Assignments

**Developmental Relationships**

- communities of practice
- networking
- executive coaching
- workplace coaching and mentoring
- bosses and superiors

**Challenging Assignments**

- increases in scope
- horizontal moves
- new initiatives
- turnarounds
- mistakes and ethical dilemmas

The way leaders learn will change dramatically in the next few years. No one has this figured out completely—but we’re starting to see results based on our understanding and research of leaders and how they learn. Specific areas that CCL is exploring include:

### Feedback

Honest feedback is critical to performance improvement yet difficult to obtain and give. Tools and job aids for delivering (and receiving) effective feedback can be brought back from the classroom to the workplace team. Online tools offer convenience, template-based assistance, even anonymity when desired, and can help make continuous feedback a reality.

### Apps and Mobile Learning

Apps are now embedded in the flow of our lives and are arguably the number one learning tool used outside the workplace. Apps for leadership include performance support tools and job aids, learning “nuggets,” and quick reminders and effective examples that can be summoned up in a moment, not remain buried in a learning management system.

### Social Media

Social media in the workplace means different things to different people: expertise location, community building, online teaming, virtual water cooler, my online “brand,” relationship building. Pick your favorite—in the end it’s about connectedness. And aside from self-awareness it’s difficult to think of a leadership skill that doesn’t tie directly or indirectly to connectedness. In an increasingly virtual world you can’t neglect this channel for leadership.

### MOOCs

The current excitement in higher education is the massive courses (thousands or tens of thousands of students enrolled in a single virtual class) available for free from organizations like Coursera or EdX. The size and global scope of a Massively Open Online Course (MOOC) offers the opportunity to explore and question cultural ideals of leadership, to engage in peer learning on a massive scale, and to experiment with behavior change in the workplace and provide feedback and adjustment while the course is still underway. CCL’s first MOOC opened for enrollment in September 2013.





## Lessons of Experience

CCL has decades of research and analysis of the types of experiences that create great leaders—as well as the derailers that keep people from reaching their potential. Embedding this knowledge into the workplace, working with bosses and coaches and mentors on project and career path decisions, and proactively cultivating key relationships ensures that these lessons won't be lost on the next generation of leaders.

## Action Learning

It's impossible to separate learning from work—nor should you want to. But adding some directed reflection time, having a personal or team coach available to surface what you might be missing, and working with teams that focus on peer learning as well as generating results—all this accelerates learning dramatically. Action learning projects are real work, not case studies or academic exercises. These projects are chosen with team and stakeholder involvement to have maximum impact for the organization. At the same time, they are opportunities for reflection, coaching, practice, and discussion of leadership skills and what it takes to be effective in the actual job environment.

Blended learning for leadership isn't just about technology or mixing classroom with online experiences. It's not about social media or the latest trends that promise to transform learning forever. It's about building, in a thoughtful, systematic way, a structure to enable and support how leaders learn best.

## Additional Resources

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*Note: The 70:20:10 rule is adapted from the 70:20:10 Learning and Development Model created by Michael M. Lombardo and Robert W. Eichinger, based on research conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership.*



## About the Author

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**Ron Rabin, PhD**, is a Senior Learning Technologist at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). He combines his passion for innovative technology and experience as a software developer with his background in instructional design to make learning more effective and impactful. Ron leads CCL's Blended Learning efforts; recent projects include introducing performance support apps into the classroom and co-designing the Center's first Massively Open Online Course

(MOOC). He has also created over 20 hours of highly interactive eLearning modules for leadership competencies and has brought innovative learning approaches like Problem-Based Learning (PBL) to custom program designs. Prior to joining the Center Ron worked for nine years as an educational technologist and IT architect for IBM.



Center for  
Creative  
Leadership®

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) is a top-ranked, global provider of leadership development. By leveraging the power of leadership to drive results that matter most to clients, CCL transforms individual leaders, teams, organizations, and society. Our array of cutting-edge solutions is steeped in extensive research and experience gained from working with hundreds of thousands of leaders at all levels. Ranked among the world's Top 10 providers of executive education by *Bloomberg Businessweek* and the *Financial Times*, CCL has offices in Greensboro, NC; Colorado Springs, CO; San Diego, CA; Brussels, Belgium; Moscow, Russia; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Johannesburg, South Africa; Singapore; Gurgaon, India; and Shanghai, China.

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