Designing Successful "Hybrid" Virtual Training Sessions

Note: "Hybrid" training sessions are those where some are together in one or more locations and others are scattered across remote locations. These tips apply to instructor-led real-time virtual training sessions.

1 **Use video when you can.** For those in the room, this can mean using individual webcams or a videoconferencing system that may be set up in the training room. Remote callers can use videocams if they have them or a videoconferencing system if they're convening in another office that has one available. Nothing integrates remote and onsite participants together like the use of video, but it's not a showstopper if you don't have access to it.

2 **Project a video presence if only one or two people are remote.** For example, if you're leading a training session with most people in the room and just a few people joining remotely, you can ask them to use a videoconferencing service like Skype and then project the videoconference on a shared screen for all to see. Make sure to position your cameras to allow remote people to see areas of interest during the training.

3 **Be sure the virtual participants can be heard.** Use a good-quality speaker phone, making sure it is well positioned and away from distracting table noises for people who call in. Make sure speakers are centrally placed. Test audio capability at the start of the call so you can calibrate whether in-person participants need to shift location when they speak. Check in with virtual participants every so often to do a sound check.

4 **Repeat questions or comments made by people in the room to make sure all can hear clearly.** This is especially important if it's a large room and participants are seated far from the speakers.

5 **Pay attention to making the virtual participants feel "present."** If video is not possible, try using a visual reminder of phone participants. For example, make a large tent card with the virtual participants' names, and ideally, their photos. Place them around the table, or around the phone, and make sure they can be seen by all. When going around the room to ask for questions or comments, start with those on the phone to make sure you don't inadvertently leave them behind.

6   **Include remote participants in breakout sessions.** There are a few ways to do this. Ideally, you would have your remote participants join via Skype video, with someone at the table positioning the screen so all can see. If this isn't possible, you can have someone place a cellphone on the table with the speakerphone on (loud enough to be audible only to those at that table), and have the remote callers participate via phone.

7   **Compensate for non-verbal cues.** Ask all face-to-face participants to describe any activities that cannot be guessed at without visual cues—such as writing on a flipchart, drawing a picture, or underlining important words on a flipchart. Make sure that you describe out loud any observations that convey important nonverbal communication, such as: "Everyone is nodding" or "People are rolling their eyes."

8   **Make sure that productive virtual participation does not depend on people seeing what is happening in the room**, unless you plan to use high-quality videoconferencing or some other means of "sight." For example, if people are writing on a flipchart, position the camera accordingly. If video is not possible, capture the image and send to remote participants so they can see what's going on inside the room.