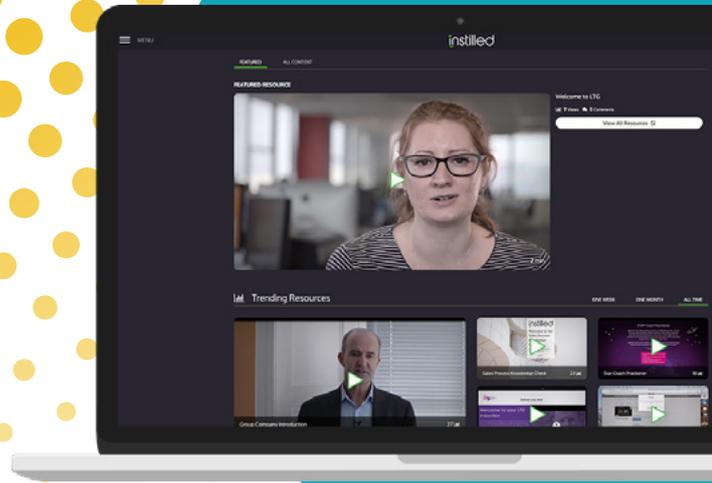


LEO



How to Deliver Effective Learning Journeys at Distance

In the current climate, we're having to respond quickly to the challenge of operating in a fully virtual, at-distance, world of learning. This insight addresses the challenge of how to take a blended learning journey—a sustained learning experience that blends a mix of media, events and channels, over time—and cater for when face-to-face engagement is no longer an option.

L&D teams around the world are having to adapt, and to adapt quickly. Global organizations are adjusting rapidly due to the unprecedented impact of COVID-19, and there's an increased urgency to support change and deliver effective transformation while working and learning at distance.

The impact of this transformation is likely to leave a lasting legacy beyond the immediate crisis. If organizations can embrace and deliver effective virtual learning at this time, the benefits (reducing unnecessary travel, for a start) will surely shape the future landscape of 'business as usual'.

And while it may be relatively straight-forward to simply replace a single face-to-face component with a virtual or digital equivalent, we know that a sustained learning journey over time is the only way to engage learners and drive behavior change. This insight looks at the steps you'll need to explore to take your virtual learning to the next level.



We will explore and answer:

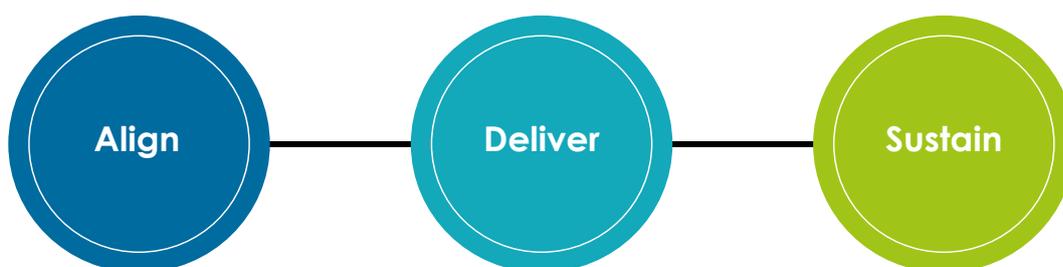
- What are the key strategic steps when designing effective learning journeys?
- What face-to-face components in a traditional blended journey may need replacing?
- What strategies can you deploy to drive engagement with virtual learning over time?

What Are the Key Strategic Steps When Designing Effective Learning Journeys?

Based on over 30 years of experience designing learning journeys, LEO Learning designers use a foundation methodology that we call **Align, Deliver, Sustain**. As learning journeys (i.e. looking beyond single-event learning) are the only way to deliver meaningful and profound change, the core principles of this approach apply equally to both virtual and traditional blends.

The principle of the methodology is to look at how we address learner preparation (including motivation and knowledge alignment), followed by best practice learning delivery (in whatever mode) and then how we support, sustain and embed new behaviors in the workplace.

An effective blend at each step uses the right components, tools and content to deliver the right 'learning modes' that maintain and sustain engagement over time. This will integrate learned change into your 'business as usual' flow of work.

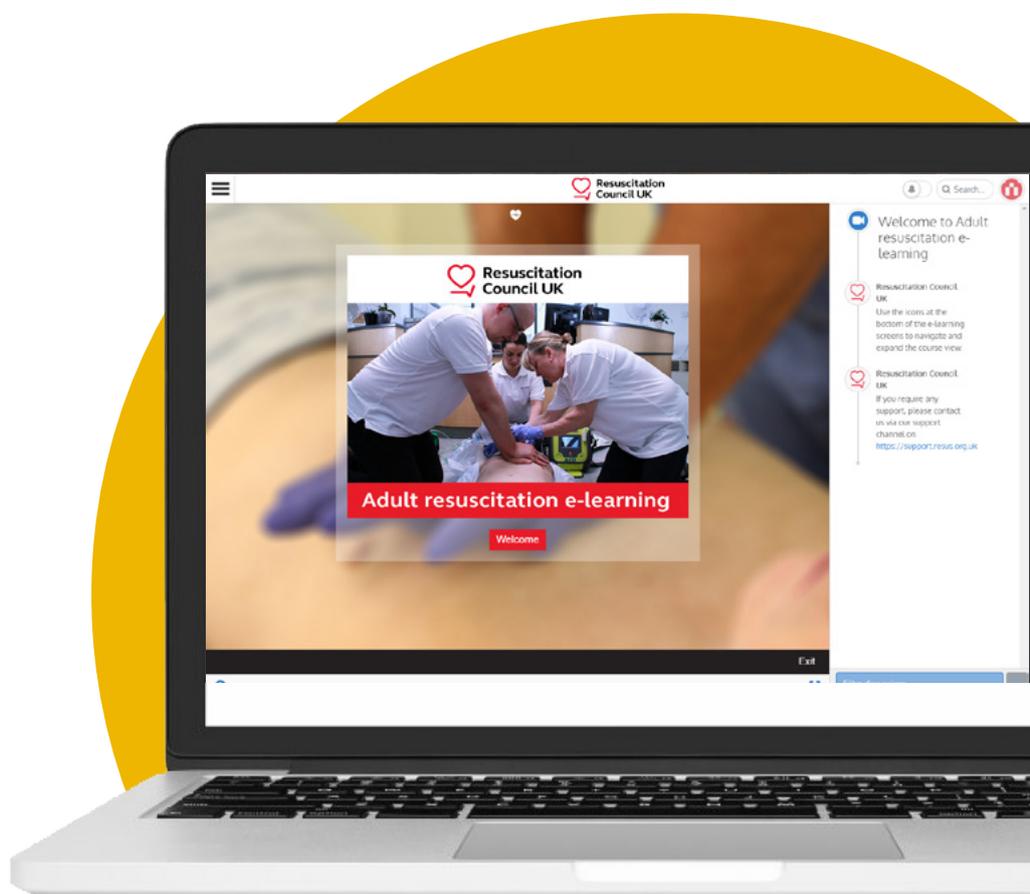


Align

Central to [successful transformation](#) and learning delivery is the preparation of the learner. The 'align' phase focuses on learner motivation and getting buy-in through context setting. This is where the 'What's in it for me' message is most important.

Media and tools used in this phase typically include video, diagnostics and self-reflection, pre-reading and pre-learning. These can set the scene of the challenge and goals coming up. As such, many of the learning modes of the 'align' phase are often done virtually anyway, following the principles of [learning campaigns and communications](#).

This step also plays a vital role in bringing a potentially diverse range of learners to the right level of knowledge, skill and attitude to optimize the effect of the core delivery phase. We may use self-assessments or refresher resources to do this.



Deliver

The 'deliver' phase is about **delivering effective behavior change through learning**. This is done by driving and enabling new concepts and skills, providing the knowledge management and performance environment to enable effective operation in the future. Learning modes like 'show', 'practice', 'apply', 'solve', 'find', 'play', 'assess', 'network' and 'share' would all be considered here.

Applying these learning modes in a blended journey requires a range of channels, media, tools, content and strategies, which would often traditionally include face-to-face elements. We'll take a closer look at how to adapt these elements for a virtual journey shortly. Your designed steps will be planned according to your specific learning needs and objectives.

One area where special consideration is required, in a purely virtual context, is how to incorporate the 'apply' modes. This is largely because these tasks may traditionally involve applying learning within a real-life work environment and getting feedback and support from managers and colleagues as you do so.

Building branching scenarios or simulations in a digital format is one effective way to circumnavigate this challenge, allowing learners to reflect on their decision-making and receive feedback during the learning journey, as they practice application in a safe environment. Discover more about this in our blog post ['Embracing the Power of Scenarios in a Virtual Learning Journey'](#).

Sustain

Establishing how to sustain learning and embed new behaviors, attitudes and skills in the long term is an essential stage of delivering learning that has genuine impact. What may have started life simply as refresher training has evolved into the most critical phase to drive profound behavioral change.

Both 'deliver' and 'sustain' steps may benefit from the provision of opportunities for spaced practice and 'nudges' to keep learning at the front of mind. Do this little and often, and you'll integrate new practices into everyday work activities.

These design elements within the 'sustain' phase would typically involve a blend of virtual and live touchpoints, so real consideration is needed here when converting to a wholly virtual journey.

What Face-To-Face Components in a Traditional Blended Journey Need Replacing?

Many [effective blended learning journeys](#) relied on human interactions interspersed with self-driven digital learning events such as eLearning. The challenge we now face is how do we effectively replace activities such as face-to-face workshops, an interaction with a manager, or applying learning in a work environment?

And in a 'social learning' context, the option for a learner to quickly turn to a colleague and ask "how do I do this?" is no longer there. So it's the job of our learning design to facilitate these social learning norms in a practical way, at distance, to achieve the same results.

With that in mind, here are some of the key face-to-face components that may be used in a traditional blend, with suggested alternatives for a virtual learning journey:

1

Presentations and Expert-Led Talks

Presentations and expert-led talks allow information or center-out messaging to be communicated at scale. **Their natural replacement is a webinar format**, which may host, say, 30 to upward of 100 attendees. Typically run by one presenter (or more, for 'panel webinar' formats), they offer an effective way to broadcast information, or a narrative, to large groups.

Webinars will already be familiar territory for many organizations, as they are the first port of call for any synchronous mass-communication. We know many people are running deeply engaging, effective webinars, and learning has been fast in this area.

Interactive elements can be added to increase engagement with your audience, using features such as surveys, opinion polls, group chat, and live questions to reflect on the content and draw a level of personalization out of the format.

There are, however, some challenges when using webinars. It can be hard to gauge how involved your audience is if they don't participate with questions or in discussions, and it's likely that some of your audience may multitask during the broadcast. Yet this doesn't necessarily mean that your message is lost to the 'lurkers'—people engage in different ways, for different reasons, and we are generally OK with that. There's a theory that states that [only one percent of an online audience will typically actively engage](#).

To discover more on how to make your webinars engaging, including practical tips on presenting, adapting content for the format and how to create low barriers of entry to maximize attendance, watch our webinar ['Future of Learning 101: The Panel – High-Impact Distance Learning'](#).



2

Classroom Learning

The digital equivalent of their namesake, virtual classrooms are different from webinars in that their primary focus is to be smaller, more interactive, collaborative and fully participative.

Virtual classrooms aim to replicate, as closely as possible, the experience of a well-driven live classroom session, but at distance. No mean feat!

To maximize engagement, we believe attendees should really be limited to a maximum of 12 people and run for no longer than 90 minutes, preferably an hour, max.

The sessions should be designed for participatory learning, and there are a number of digital approaches that allow you to focus on providing an engaging and effective experience, depending on the tools you're using. These include facilitated group discussion, reflection exercises, collaborative whiteboards and document sharing for co-creation, pre-prepared video inserts, Q&A/interview sessions and creating specific creative breakout rooms.

You can adapt your sessions according to the features available to you in the software you use. Ranking, rating, waving and raising hands, as well as surveys and polling are all commonly available features used in webinars that can also be designed into good virtual classrooms.

As with webinars, a confident, passionate facilitator is key—and it's important to build trust and confidence to create a safe place to engage as you would in a real classroom.

3

Workshops, Discovery and Creative Sessions

For us, workshops, discovery, and creative sessions are often key parts of a traditional blend, allowing learning to be derived from group sense-making, creativity and emotional involvement with others in a group. For further context on the purpose and features of a traditional, face-to-face workshop within a learning program, see our description of [LEO's Innovation Workshops](#).

Virtual workshops focus on the creative, collaborative outcomes, and can still be effective when run virtually, with a few special considerations regarding facilitation, length and structure. To replace what may have been a half-day physical workshop, we often segment into three to five individual sessions focused on separate short goals.

A typical series of three virtual sessions may be structured like this:

Session 1 – Insights: Position a problem, agree a goal, gather insights and research from the whole group

Session 2 – Design: Follow this with smaller, facilitated breakout groups who solve the problems and create together; reflect, challenge, iterate and consolidate

Session 3 – Reconvene to report back, reflect and discuss as a whole group again, with the aim of drawing group inputs into a collective solution.

Note that at the reconvene stage, it's useful for the facilitator(s) to have documented the outputs and created clear concepts and summaries that can be easily understood by all.

4

Supporting and Sharing of Experience

Learner cohorts are the groups of learners working together on an extended program, typically small communities of between eight and 24 learners, who share their experience while they apply their learning in practice.

This can be informal 'share and support' or a more formal learning activity based around a specific task or goal, which is worked on collectively and collaboratively over a period of time, as a group (often referred to as an Action Learning Set). Narrative and storytelling become important in these groups, so building trust is imperative.

In a virtual context, the interaction between individuals in a group of this sort would happen on a chat or a forum in a Learning Management System (LMS). This could be corporate, moderated or unmoderated, or completely open. Each brings advantages and challenges. The important consideration is how you support (or 'scaffold') your learners as they begin to connect in this way.

Building learner confidence is especially important if they aren't used to social learning in a work context (we'll look at this in more detail later).

5

One-To-One Connection

One-to-one engagements typically feature heavily in an effective traditional learning blend. This may involve a learner reporting back and discussing their progress with a line manager, formal coaching or mentoring programs, or simply reflection and conversation in the course of usual work-related activities.

Because these events don't happen as readily in a virtual work context, when considering virtual learning design it's important to purposefully build in these important moments.

Where 'water cooler' chats aren't happening unprompted anymore, they will now need to be pre-booked and arranged. This is particularly relevant and important when first transitioning to digital, as you can gauge and discuss how the individual is adapting to the virtual format itself, as well as the content of the learning.

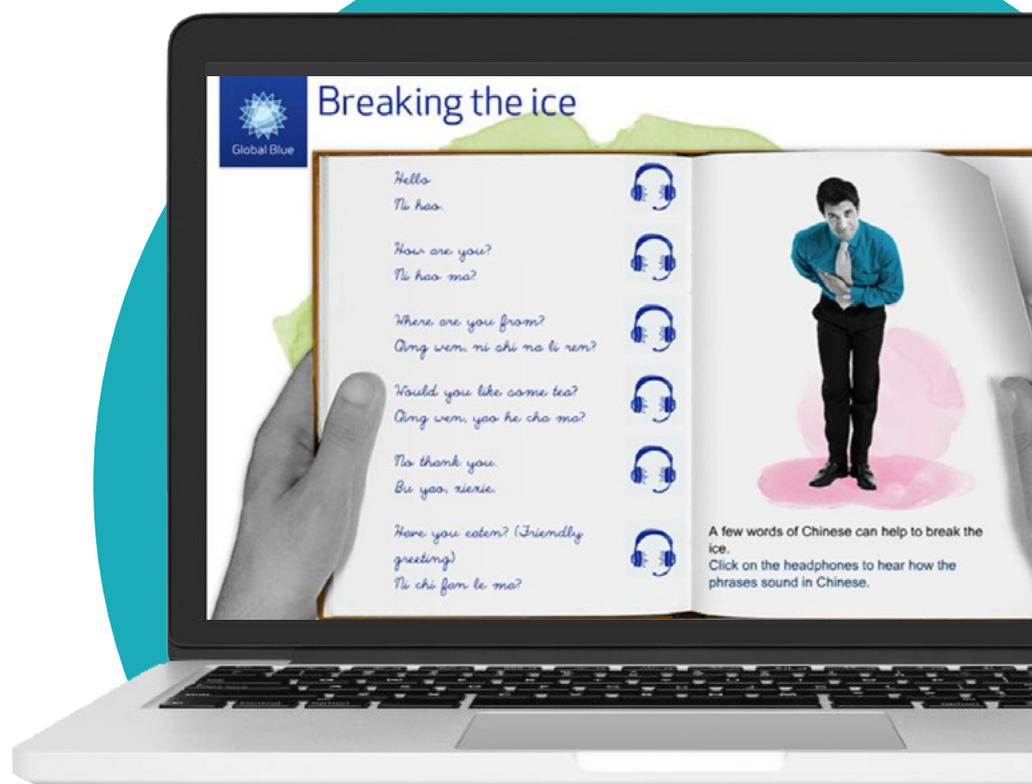


6

Replacing the Power of 'Play' in Face-To-Face

The power of 'play', as an important learning mode, cannot be underestimated. From ice-breakers, to role-plays to form quizzes and live scenarios, they may seem light-hearted on the surface, but they have an essential role in building a relationship of fun and confidence with your learner, and in many cases may drive the learning itself.

'Play' can serve to build team spirit while fostering an environment that gains commitment from the individual. Traditionally play-type exercises would take place in instructor-led sessions, whether in a classroom or a workshop.



So how do you build 'play' into a program when learners cannot easily interact with each other as they would when in the same room?

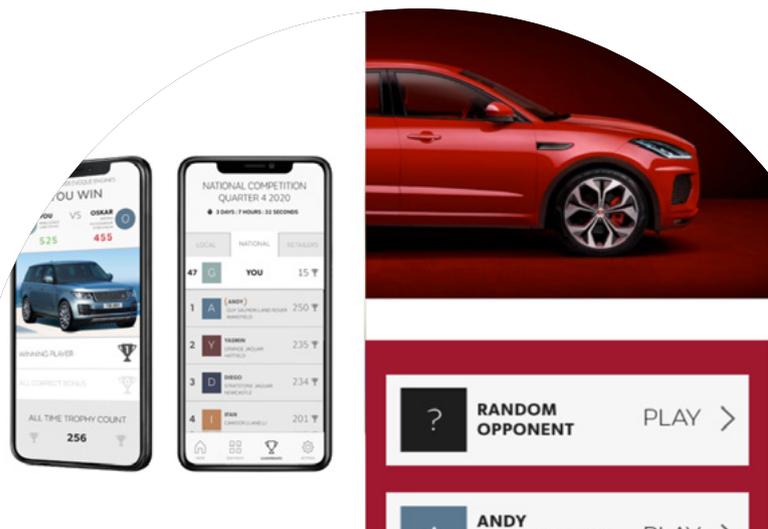
You can start by designing in play and gamification, as we already do within the design of eLearning components. That is, by embracing [immersive and entertaining game strategies](#).

Effective gamification can give your learners a stronger sense of motivation, achievement, and a clear vision of progress. The successful application of gamification strategies has been shown to sustain learner engagement and drive up course completion rates when applied to distance learning.

What else? Leaderboards can let learners compete with others even when based all over the world—adding a touch of competition that works for many learners. We took this approach with a global automotive manufacturer, pitting individual sales operatives and dealerships against each other. By scoring points upon completion of 'new product' training, participation and learner buy-in was achieved by tapping into the natural competitiveness of the learners.

By gamifying virtual components in this way, you can integrate these highly engaging learning modes throughout your virtual learning journey. These human, light-touch components go some way to filling the significant hole that's left when face-to-face interactions are taken out of the equation.

See [our work with Novartis for a visual example of gamified eLearning](#), and for a deeper dive on this topic you can watch the recording of our webinar, [The State of Play – Games With Purpose](#).



What Strategies Can You Deploy to Drive Engagement With Virtual Learning Over Time?

So you've assessed and planned the events and components you'll need for your virtual learning journey. Now the challenge is to make sure you keep your learners engaged, active and challenged over time. Not an easy task, with so many distractions we face every day, but an essential one.

It's good to start by understanding that an effective learning journey is about connected touchpoints over time, and not simply a number of single events. As these touchpoints are designed to take your learner on a journey of change, the approach you take to the formal tasks and events, as well as to the self-directed tasks that sit between them, can have a massive impact on the overall shape and success of the journey.

Set your touchpoints too far apart, and you lose momentum. Set too many of the same type, and you'll lose interest. Striking the right balance and pace of tasks and activities is key. You want your learners to embrace the journey in the way you designed it.

To do this effectively for our clients at LEO Learning, we look at a number of different key strategies (there are more, but these are a good start!):

1. Context and Motivation
2. Action
3. Collaboration
4. Pace and Variety
5. Emotion and Vision

1

Context and Motivation

This is all about effective signposting that 'sells' each micro event. By clearly explaining learning objectives, outcomes and connections, you build learner understanding, buy-in and motivation. This helps learners see how the individual tasks fit into the wider learning journey, goal and vision. A typical context-setter explains the challenge, sets the learner expectations for the experience (time, effort, media etc.), and indicates how the event lines up the learner for the next steps in their journey.

Setting the context in this way plays a key contribution to building onward learner engagement with your program, as it helps to understand the value it brings and the role in meeting the end objectives. It also serves a deeply practical purpose in structuring your training, making sure your learners know their progress and where they are in their journey.

2

Action

Even though learning is ultimately about behavior change and application, it's amazing how easily distance learning can become too passive. Think hard about how every event in your journey can develop or trigger a specific activity, goal or deliverable that directly contributes to the learning process.

Choosing the right type of task is essential. You want your learners to be actively engaged throughout, appropriately challenged and supported, which means ensuring scaffolding (i.e. supporting tasks clearly between touchpoints), is considered.

Watching a webinar may be relatively passive, but if you set a small smart action task to follow, then the learning is applied and processed in a very different way. Keep thinking about action and output throughout your learning journey planning and design.

3

Collaboration

People learn socially. They learn by sharing knowledge, sense-making together, supporting each other and collaborating in creative and decision-making processes. In times of rapid change, it's comforting for a learner to share their experiences with a peer, or seek guidance from 'the more knowledgeable other'. Driving this behavior now has never been more important, as people isolate from each other as they work.

Connecting your learners when they aren't physically together is more than just using email, social media and virtual meetings in 'work mode'. It's about connecting in a 'learn mode', using creative collaboration to drive further understanding. This requires more commitment from the learner and, therefore, more design and support to make it happen in a way that's useful.

A deliberate and considered approach is required to design and scaffold social learning throughout your virtual learning journey. In our ebook, ['Connected Learning: How To Harness The Power of Social, Data, and Networks'](#), we explore the opportunities and enablers required to scaffold social learning into your learning program, the fundamental principles of which still apply virtually.

4

Pace & Variety

The pace and variety of the learning modes you deploy should focus on delivering a balance between stretching and challenging your learner, without overwhelming them, providing a mix of experiences that keeps them interested. There's no set answer to what is the right pace, as it will depend on the scale, length and complexity of your learning program, as well as the learning objectives and expected outcomes.

Variety is also important, and there's a huge range of approaches and tools available (many of which we've already mentioned) that you can consider, depending on your learning needs and budget. You can find out more about some of these from other LEO resources:

- [Games and interactive scenarios](#)
- Virtual [workshops](#)
- [Webinars](#) and [virtual classrooms](#)
- [Digital learning courses \(eLearning\) and micro-modules](#)
- [Mobile delivery of on-the-job training](#)
- [Virtual Reality \(VR\) experiences](#)
- [Augmented Reality \(AR\) apps](#)
- [Video and rich media](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [Infographics](#) and resource packs



5

Emotion and Vision

The final strategy that we always use as we design a compelling virtual learning experience is making sure we tap into our learners' emotions through narrative and storytelling. Closely linked to that, we always think about how we can keep returning to the vision and objectives for the whole learning program—what we often refer to as the 'golden thread' through the learning journey.

Stories can be used to bring learning to life, show behaviors in practice, and drive application in action. This shows how the content applies to the individual in a real-world/work context. Stories can be delivered through a scenario, graphics and text, animation and—increasingly—through [user-generated video](#).

Building on the power of stories, developing a connected narrative throughout a journey can be a powerful way to develop learner's engagement as they progress. We often use a 'soap opera' drama format in this way, to bring learning to life over time through a small number of characters (that can be illustrated, in video, or in photos). This has the added bonus of being an emotive way to maintain attention over time ('what happened next?'). You can discover how strong narrative underpins effective scenarios in our blog post '[Embracing the Power of Scenarios in a Virtual Learning Journey](#)'.

Finally, and possibly most importantly, Vision. Keeping a set of learners engaged over time, at distance, is hard. You will need to make it very clear upfront to your learners what the value of the learning is—to them, as individuals, but also to your organization. Why is this program important? What are we trying to achieve? How does this relate to our strategy? What happens if we don't engage? As you develop the journey, revisit this message time after time, as a repeated thread throughout all the content. Make sure your learners always know what the objectives are at the very highest level.

Tasked by the UK government to address leadership in healthcare in 2016, a consortium of partner companies (which included LEO as digital learning lead) developed a flagship blended learning program to change the way leaders in the UK National Health Service (NHS) made key decisions. For context, this came at a time when it was widely recognized that the NHS had become too bureaucratic, and leadership had been pushed to focus attention on costs and budget management, rather than patient care.

Throughout the program, which lasted 18 months, the messaging was clear: patient care should be front and center of all decisions. Repeated at every opportunity, the message almost became a mantra for the learners, and drove the importance of the learning to the future of the service and to people's lives. Eighteen months later, the course had achieved completion rates of over 98%.

While few learning programs have such a powerful underlying theme, you should always set the golden thread message upfront and make sure it's reflected throughout the journey.

A Final Word on Virtual Learner Journeys

At LEO Learning, we've been delivering blended digital learning for many years, and we hope that some of the strategies and approaches we've learned as we've gone virtual have been useful to you.

As we're hearing so often, however, the times we're in are unprecedented, and like most teams, we're innovating fast—quickly trying out new approaches, tools and technologies to see what works best for different audiences. Our advice is to do the same. Look at what others are doing and keep experimenting. Keep asking your learners for their feedback and wherever you can, measure the results. Most importantly, share what you learn. We want to hear what works for you!

In the meantime, if you're looking to deliver effective learning journeys at distance, our experts are here to show you how, right now.

[Get in touch.](#)

About LEO Learning

LEO Learning believes that technology-enabled learning innovation has the power to deliver transformational results. Our purpose is to help clients deploy learning technology to deliver outcomes precisely aligned to their business goals. Backed by more than 30 years of experience, we design engaging learning architectures that fit seamlessly into businesses and improve performance throughout the entire organization.

LEO Learning has the deep understanding of learning design and technology, and pioneering creative approach, necessary to drive learning transformation.

LEO Learning's expanding global customer base includes organizations such as the NHS, Civil Service Learning, Jaguar Land Rover, Volvo, Suncorp, Fidelity, Virgin Atlantic, Novartis, Godiva, Volkswagen, Dunhill, KPMG, Roche, and Mars.

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