

# Chapter 11

## Online Training in Present-Day Conditions: Opportunities and Prospects



**Olga Banit**

**Abstract** Education and training are moving to an online format. More and more educational service providers are offering a variety of online learning activities: online lectures and online courses, online marathons and intensive courses, online trainings, web conferences, webinars, etc. Organizationally, online training courses may be the greatest challenge. Online trainings are different from traditional ones. Therefore, many unresolved issues arise in practice. First, not all classroom training topics are suitable for distance learning. Second, time and space need to be organized differently. Third, group work organization may be rather tricky. Fourth, online training provides for no physical or emotional contact, which may be a challenge for trainers. These issues have received no theoretical substantiation yet. The author describes possible ways to solve the above problems based on practicing trainers' experience. A goal of this study was to identify opportunities and prospects of online training in present-day conditions. The tasks of the study were as follows: to identify challenging aspects of planning and conducting online training sessions; to analyze online training opportunities and advantages; and to outline future development prospects of online training.

**Keywords** Online training · Online training topics · Group work · Virtual groups · Virtual platforms

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## 1 Introduction: Relevance of the Study

Intensive development of information and communication technology is making it more crucial than ever to improve teaching and learning in order to make students more active and independent when learning professions. As teaching and learning are being transferred online, more and more educational service providers are appearing on the Internet, offering a variety of online learning forms: single online lectures and online courses, online marathons and intensive courses, online training sessions, web conferences, webinars (Zoominars), etc. Researchers from different countries agree that in organizational terms online training sessions may be most challenging (Mishraa et al., 2020; Lederman, 2020). At that, online trainings have certain advantages. A study by Andreas Gegenfurtner and Christian Ebnerb (2019) found that online trainings (webinars) could be more effective than online asynchronous learning and offline face-to-face classroom instruction.

An online training session is a session that takes place on a monitor display rather than in a classroom. The participants are required to have specialized software installed on their computers, register themselves, and connect to a meeting at a set time. While trainers are conducting a session, attendees are listening and asking questions in a chat box. The questions can be answered by both trainers and moderators.

It used to go like that, at the first stage. The term “online training sessions” was often used to denote a wide range of webinars. However, nowadays it has become clear that there are fundamental differences between online training sessions and traditional ones (Kumari et al., 2021; Alsaaty et al., 2016; Mishraa et al., 2020). When trying to make the best of their training environments, many trainers face a lot of challengers at the preparatory stage, during training sessions, and at the follow-up stage. It should be noted that these issues have not been theoretically justified yet. That is why below we will detail the possible ways of meeting these challenges through the prism of practitioners’ experience and the results of our research (Smith & Brame, 2014).

## 2 Background of the Study

This study is a continuation of the research we conducted earlier with students (Banit et al., 2022) and graduate students (Lukianova et al., 2019a). A goal of this study was to identify opportunities and prospects of online training in present-day conditions. Key tasks of the study were as follows:

- Identify challenging aspects of planning and conducting online training sessions
- Analyze online training opportunities and advantages
- Outline future development prospects of online training

The used methods included observation, surveys and interviews, analysis of theoretical studies, systematization and generalization of practitioners' experience, and description and visualization of the analyzed data. Most sources used are open data sources. We also collected data by interviewing business trainers, faculty of universities and business schools, human resources specialists, and managers of companies that train their staff. The data was collected in Kharkiv, Odesa, and Lviv oblasts of Ukraine as well as the city of Kyiv. This approach enabled us to cover different geographic areas of Ukraine thus providing for a representative sample. To perform the planned tasks, we developed two questionnaires. Most questions in the questionnaires were about online training structure and timing, selection of engagement tools and activities, skills development, organization of group work, technical support, and feedback. We gave particular attention to the methods of overcoming barriers to and fears about working online, development of communication skills, trainer's charisma, etc.

Having collected the data and analyzed them, we singled out a range of the issues related to planning and conducting online training sessions in present-day conditions. This study is of importance as we will use its results to develop online trainers' competencies, raise their professional effectiveness, improve availability of new features offered by online platforms and services, and develop mechanisms to improve the quality of teaching services.

### 3 Identifying Challenging Aspects of Online Training Sessions

*Online training session includes a lot of challenging aspects: training courses that include a lot of physical activity, physical practices (e.g., art therapy), online occupational training sessions focused on practical skills and the use of real systems and new technologies, rehabilitation and medical training courses that require a direct contact with the human body or mannequins under the live guidance of a trainer can be conducted only in specially equipped rooms. Group work is rather difficult to conduct. An advantage of group work is the opportunity for all participants to simultaneously read the information and work together on tasks, to interact with each other. However, it is a problem in online space. Technical support of online training sessions is totally different from that of traditional sessions. There are no classrooms, chairs, and participants sitting in a circle. The trainer can see his/her screen and video tiles. Participants can interact with the trainer and each other using their webcams and microphones.*

At the first stage of the study, we conversed with trainers and interviewed them. We asked them to share their online training experience: the challenges they faced, the mistakes they or their colleagues made. As a result, we have identified a range of various difficulties, misunderstandings, and inconsistencies they faced (Fig. 11.1).



**Fig. 11.1** Challenging aspects of planning and conducting online training sessions. (Source: Generalized by the author)

Having generalized the data collected, we divided them into four interrelated groups:

- Topics and structure of online training sessions
- Time and space
- Group work and trainer's position
- Technical support and feedback

Key features of each group are briefly described in the following text.

1. The author reported at conferences that online sessions are not perfect for the sessions which include a lot of physical activity. The vast majority of the forms and methods used during traditional training sessions—warm-ups, games, energizers, etc.—have no effective online analogues yet. Body practices (e.g., art therapy) appear not effective enough too as it is difficult or impossible for the trainer to monitor participants. The same is about corporate team building sessions that are often brought out into nature: group environment and live communication are learning components of such sessions. Various rehabilitation and medical training sessions that require direct contact with a human body or a mannequin as well as live supervision can be conducted only in specially equipped premises. It is also a challenge to conduct online training sessions for professionals in the course of which they learn to use new mechanisms and new technologies, and develop their practical skills (Banit, 2022).
2. As a rule, traditional classroom sessions are conducted on weekdays and are off-the-job or take place on weekends and last for 6–8 hours a day. Training programs generally last from 1 day to 1–2 weeks. These schedules are impossible for online sessions since participants are unable to spend long hours in front of their screens. When taking online courses, participants have no chance to have coffee, dinner, or supper together. At that, often one of the goals of training

sessions is to encourage participants to get to know each other, communicate informally, and establish contacts.

As of space, traditional training sessions require thorough preparation: trainers have to find the premises that meet all their requirements, prepare training rooms, purchase all the necessary equipment, print handouts, etc. And participants have to get to the premises on time and find lounges if the premises are far from their home. Online training requires none of these. However, it may give rise to other problems. When preparing their sessions, trainers have to choose a suitable online platform, study how to use it and the tools available, check their devices, and customize their webinar rooms. It is also important to prepare breakout rooms, warm-up tools, and the tools that may help to keep session attendees focused. Few beginning trainers can cover all these issues by themselves. Most of them may need technical support.

3. An advantage of group work is that all the participants have a chance to get acquainted with data simultaneously and work on tasks together, closely interacting with each other. During traditional group sessions all the participants find themselves in one and the same room, and a goal of trainers is to facilitate and control their work. A key issue of online sessions is software capability. However, no existing online platform enables trainers to monitor all breakout rooms simultaneously. They have to join them one by one. But less time of personal contact means lower interaction energy.

As a matter of fact, presenters talk to the small tiles they can see on their screen rather than the audience. Moreover, trainers should not look in the eye of the meeting participants. Instead, they should look in the camera's lens that finds itself above the participants' faces on the screen. In this situation it is much more difficult to maintain a balance between the entire group and single participants. Online meeting participants have restricted live communication opportunities and almost no body or emotional contact. Besides, during online sessions all the participants can turn their webcams and sound on or off anytime they wish, or get distracted even without turning their webcams and sound off. This may make training sessions less effective for the participants.

4. Instructors transiting from traditional to online sessions may find it difficult at first to accept the fact that their professional skills and experience are not the only success factors. While during traditional sessions highly competent and charismatic presenters can hold their audience spellbound, during online sessions they may be unheard (if the microphone is off), or unseen (if the webcam is off), or misunderstood (as a result of connection problems experienced by either the trainer or the participants), or unperceived (because of their poor position in front of the screen), etc. If presenters use online training tools not masterly enough, they may feel less confident, and when the participants see their trainers' mistakes and confusion, they may be less engaged. It means that trainers should be simultaneously focused on content and presentation, maintain communication, and keep an eye on computer equipment.

The revealed problems prove online training to require a unique approach. It is impossible to keep traditional training sessions unchanged when conducting

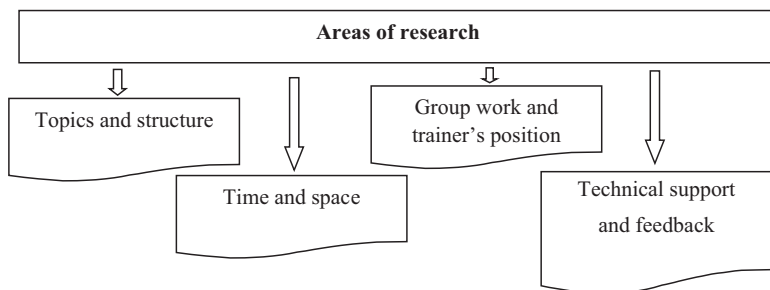
them online. It is worth noting here that online training has become an integral part of teaching and learning at all levels and is sure to be widely used in the foreseeable future. So the best option is to accept its challenges and take the best of the opportunities it offers (Banit, 2022).

## 4 Overview of Online Training Opportunities and Advantages

*Online training has a range of advantages and offers numerous opportunities. The online format is perfect for theoretical presentations and self-development of skills: time management, management (organization, staff, projects), personal development, leadership, communications, negotiation, sales, training courses, etc. Corporate team building courses that used to be outdoor are successfully moving to virtual platforms too. Online training courses may include several short parts or modules, which is a learner-friendly approach. Two- or three-hour sessions may be held several times a week, and periods between the sessions are long enough for the self-development of skills. It allows participants to develop their skills gradually, which is a significant advantage. In case of online training, all the participants interact from their own spaces. They can choose a comfortable environment, informal clothes, and have coffee breaks when they need them. At that, online training sessions feature a single space too—a virtual platform where participants can see each other, and can communicate with each other and the trainer. Online platforms enable the trainer to instantly combine participants into virtual groups and then with a single click to get everyone back together and continue a session wasting no time. The author gave an overview of this at the conference (Banit, 2022). These issues will be analyzed in detail in this section.*

Online training is a type of training that enables participants to obtain new knowledge and skills via the Internet. It is highly important that all the participants are engaged in training. Participants become part of their group and join efforts to solve particular real-world tasks. For online training sessions to be successful and fruitful, both trainers and participants should work hard. There are no ready solutions or universal guidelines—each training program requires a unique scenario. The situation is complicated by the fact that no science of successful online training has been developed yet. And since online training has received no systemic scientific and theoretical justification yet, we are mostly basing ourselves on responses of the training practitioners we interviewed. Over the past years they have accumulated extensive theoretical and practical experience in this field and are ready to share their expertise and give advice (Developing a Strategic Plan and Organizational Structure, 2020).

To keep our research clearly structured, we present our findings in the above-mentioned succession of four areas (Fig. 11.2).



**Fig. 11.2** Areas of research. (Source: Author's own elaboration)

### 4.1 Topics and Structure of Online Training Sessions

Training sessions can be conveniently divided into educational and psychological ones. And it may be a challenge to present some educational training topics online so far (as mentioned before). However, as evidenced in practice, most educational training topics have already been transformed and adopted to the online format. In particular, these topics include the following:

- Achieving corporate goals, increasing sales and customer base
- Business, personnel, project management
- Time management
- Development of communication skills, both oral (negotiations, interviews, etc.) and written ones (writing CVs, motivation or cover letters, etc.) (Banit, 2022)

Most psychological training sessions perfectly suit the online format. A goal of this type of sessions is to help participants to master the theory and self-develop their skills. These sessions are mostly about personal development and leadership as well as participants' emotional states (confidence, self-esteem, overcoming fears, self-acceptance and acceptance of circumstances, etc.).

Successful online trainings require thorough preparation. In the first place, trainers should think of their audience. For sessions to be interactive (rather than monologic), there should be up to 10–12 participants. However, in many respects it depends on the topic. Sometimes a group of as many as 20 participants can be quite effective. However, the trainer should make sure that he/she can see everyone and keep them focused, and that everyone has their say. To make meetings more engaging, trainers can send reminder emails, use social media, include invitations in the involved companies' bulletins, publish visuals or create videos, that is, use every avenue to promote their events.

The preparatory stage requires a "route chart" too. For instance, a one-week training course can include three 2-hour online sessions (Monday, Wednesday, Friday) and three self-study sessions. For each training program, the trainer should create the description of its format, topics, the roles of the individuals involved, etc., and each module description should include timing, links to all the materials used,

and an action list for the presenter, co-presenters, or moderators (pasting links in the chat box, turning on videos, desktop sharing, etc.). This detailed scenario and a session script make it easier for trainers to prepare all the materials they may need. The scenario should cover all key issues but allow for live interaction with the audience, including question and answer sections, comments, etc. The session script should detail the images, music, and other resources to be presented.

Any training session structure should develop from analysis to synthesis. The presenter should move from the tasks that analyze separate activities to those integrating them into a single action algorithm, a behavioral pattern. There should be no difficult tasks at the beginning of a session. Instead, the trainer should present the materials that participants need and answer their questions. When introducing theoretical materials, the trainer should begin with the training program overview. At the next stage, the session participants may be offered to work on typical tasks and then complex tasks enabling participants to transfer the acquired theoretical knowledge into practice and develop their skills. These can include modeling tasks that help participants to master new skills, case studies, and interactive assessments that help the trainer to measure the participants' understanding. Long role-playing games, tournaments, management, and negotiation simulation battles should be conducted in the second half of sessions or even at the very end of them.

Successful online training sessions always contain visual materials to improve participants' understanding and skills acquisition. For instance, it is a good idea for the trainer to present a visual related to the topic during the fifth minute of the session. The visual can present a task structure or the skills needed. It can include pictures, diagrams, and analytics that help participants to improve their knowledge.

Information acquisition is different for online and traditional training sessions. Many trainers are unaware of the fact that their talking time is much longer than their listening time. They may talk much to share as much information as possible or because they are not good enough in using online platform tools. But theoretical information overload is not good for participants. It makes them tired, disengaged, and reluctant to participate in group work. That is why trainers should be quite laconic and specific, do know the material they present, divide it into small sections and keep their audience engaged by asking questions.

In online sessions, theoretical and practical sections are not integrated into each other, unlike traditional ones. The 35-to-65 ratio between theoretical and practical sections is both desirable and achievable. If a trainer's goal is to help participants to not only acquire knowledge but also develop (or at least start developing) their skills, the practical section of both online and traditional sessions should be at least 50% or even 70%. When planning practical tasks, trainers should break up the content into smaller chunks at earlier stages and bigger ones at advanced stages, moving on from analysis to synthesis.

Online training session structure suits almost every major stage of traditional sessions: establishing rules, brainstorming, grouping, working on case studies, independent work, etc.

Establishing rules is an important part of both traditional and online sessions. As a rule, they are negotiable, which enables participants to have input. When



conducting an online training session, the trainer can come up with several basic rules, for instance for live participation, for example, live cameras, muted microphones, hand-raising, etc.

Brainstorming can be organized in two ways—participants can either share their opinions in the chat box or appear on video. It depends on the time available and learning goals. When participants use their video features, the discussions are longer and livelier but both options are effective enough, in our opinion. As evidenced in practice, it is a good idea to use statistics to initiate a discussion. The Believe It or Not game suits the online format too. Almost each text can be transformed for this task. Participants can respond to an offered statement in the chat box and then discuss it or comment on it.

The key rule about the trainer-to-participant and participant-to-participant interaction is the same for both traditional and online training sessions: trainers should first focus on themselves and trainer-to-participant interaction, and then gradually move on to the activities focused on participant-to-participant interaction. To engage participants, trainers can use the chat, tests, surveys, or encourage participants to speak up.

An advantage of online training is that the trainer can directly interact with the audience and engage them in learning. But participants should be ready to get engaged. There is a range of various methods practitioners use to achieve this goal. Two of them are optimal for the online format. The first option is to ask interesting questions to spark a debate on a given topic and personalize it. For instance, the trainer may ask whether the participants have learned anything new about the topic lately or whether their recently gained skills have helped them to become more productive. Another option is to test participants' knowledge and give them a chance to become aware of their priorities. Testing is a great method to make the training more valuable for participants and help them to learn from their mistakes. For instance, when a participant gives a wrong answer, it may encourage them to find a way to improve their knowledge. Quizzes can serve as an alternative to tests. Trainers can offer them as a single task or use the results to initiate a discussion.

Independent work perfectly suits online training sessions. However, the tasks should be interesting and quite small. For instance, the trainer may ask participants to watch short videos related to the topic. It is advisable to assign this task before the session starts or between sessions. An advantage of online training is that participants can take more time to think and reflect on such tasks before communicating. It may help them to better formulate their ideas and encourage them to share these ideas, which results in more vivid debate during online sessions.

Trainers should constantly remind participants that the harder they work—not only during sessions but also after them—the better results they can achieve. Attending sessions enables participants to gain new knowledge and receive advice and expert opinions. But it is the post-session period when they are expected to develop and improve their skills. It is a good idea for participants to practice the new techniques or skills they learned for 100 days. This is the time required for a skill or technique to become a part of everyday life. Apart from performing the tasks assigned, participants should search for new information on the topics studied to

enrich their knowledge, and encourage themselves for the tasks performed and the results achieved. It can help training session participants to stay motivated and focused on professional success and business victories.

## **4.2 Time and Space**

As mentioned before, there is no use conducting online training sessions for 5–6 hours a day. Long sessions make participants lose concentration. And poor concentration results in poor attendance and disengagement. An advantage of online training—for both trainers and participants—is that sessions can be conducted in small chunks. Sessions can be divided into modules, last for 2–3 hours per day, and be conducted several times per week. Participants can use intervals between sessions to self-develop their skills. Unlike traditional training, it allows for stage-by-stage development of skills, which is another major advantage of online training.

Online training sessions require careful timing. Trainers should plan the duration of each part of the session beforehand. For instance, the introduction should last for up to 10 minutes. The main part can be as long as 1.5 hours or even longer but there should be a break during it. Participants of intensive online training programs are often offered long breaks (e.g., 30-minute coffee breaks and 1-hour lunch breaks).

Trainers should remember that people tend to forget what happened a day or a couple of days before, that is why it is always a good idea to start each session (and a training program may include from one to eight sessions) with a 10-minute review of the rules and algorithms learned during previous sessions, and then move on to new topics and case studies.

Sometimes, online training can change participants' time perception. As a rule, they are focused on the trainer, and the session dynamics is up to the trainer. The pauses that may happen during online sessions seem longer than they are. That is why to divide roles clearly is a key to success. Where possible, trainers should work in a team of two or even three: two trainers and a moderator—a person who pastes links, splits participants into breakout rooms, launches quizzes, etc. However, if the trainer can use online platform tools easily, he/she can work alone. But it is important to have a file prepared beforehand with all the links placed in the order participants may need, or include all the links needed in the presentation.

Sometimes, online session participants are offered to watch pre-recorded videos, and it takes time. It is also important for trainers to estimate the time participants may need to complete homework assignments, based on the average pace of learning.

In online trainings, participants connect from various places. They can choose the environment that suits them best, informal clothing, and they can decide themselves when to have a coffee break. However, simultaneously they are sharing a common space—the virtual one where they can see each other and communicate with each other and the trainer. At that, all the session participants are limited to a

view of only each other's faces and upper bodies or even just profile pictures when webcams are off.

A great advantage of online trainings is that participants can receive all the materials in a digital format. Moreover, the materials can contain what is impossible for traditional sessions—video recordings. Session participants can download and save all the resources, presentations, and recordings the trainer shares, which enables them to watch them as many times as they need to develop and improve their skills.

### ***4.3 Group Work and Trainer's Position***

The trainers we interviewed divided on group dynamics. Some of them believe that there are actually no groups in online trainings. There are people's faces or pictures instead. These trainers agree that they gradually build relations with participants during sessions but often they are unstable, dotted, and not durable. In an even greater degree, it is true about relations between participants. While some of them do remember several other participants, others may be unaware of even the total number of attendees and their names. That is why it is open to question whether online session participants can be considered a group. Answering this question requires the development of a new section of social psychology and the field theory.

However, a lot of trainers identify online session participants with a group. The group is equal to every participant and the participant is equal to the group. When running an online session, the trainer is addressing everyone who is listening. He/she is talking to a generalized participant and looking at an imaginary person on the other side of the screen. Even when participants ask questions, the trainer can see them only while they are speaking. As soon as the trainer begins to answer the questions, he/she is looking at a generalized session participant on the screen.

Breakout rooms can serve as an exception as they enable person-to-person communication. Let us note that it takes time for participants to move in breakout rooms and start working there so the trainer should allocate enough time for the tasks planned. But even in breakout rooms, the trainer-participant communication is rather limited. Joining in to a breakout room, the trainer listens to participants for a while, monitors the group discussion, comments on progress, or answers questions—and joins in to another breakout room. If a group includes  $\pm 15$  participants, they can be split into 4–5 teams of 3–4 members each. In this a way, the trainer has up to 5 minutes for each of the teams, as long as they are engaged and independent enough, which is rare. Resistance to change occurs even during traditional training sessions. And it grows during online ones, which affects group dynamics. Unlike offline instructors, online ones have almost no instruments to reduce this resistance. And those available may be not effective enough.

For instance, if offline session participants are late or leave the room too often, the trainer can reprove them mildly, cast a meaningful glance at them, impose penalties for being late, etc. In online trainings, participants can leave by just turning their webcams off and muting their microphones. Or they may get disconnected from the

session for some reason, and the trainer is unable to follow them. And even if these participants rejoin, it would be a time waste for the trainer to ask for the disconnection reasons.

On the other hand, participants can exploit such situations. If they do not like the session or feel pressure from the trainer, they can stop listening, get distracted, say something like “Stuff and nonsense!” without being heard by the trainer because their microphones are muted, at the trainer’s request. In our opinion, such situations reveal the positive and humanistic approach peculiar to online training, which is an advantage of this type of training. The online format encourages trainers to make their sessions more interesting, captivating, artistic, democratic, and focused on interaction with participants.

To control participant-to-participant interaction is another challenge for trainers. When conducting a session, the trainer is following the scenario, keeping track of time, encouraging participants to speak up, commenting on what they say, asking questions, making conclusions. Meanwhile, the participants can be discussing some issues in the chat, sharing their opinions, or telling jokes. The trainer is unable to view every message. It would be a bad idea for him/her to stop to read and comment on every message—it may affect the session rhythm. And it would not be helpful to disable the chat or ask participants not to use it—they are sure to switch to other communication channel to share their emotions or switch to other issues. As practice shows, while attending a training session, participants can be playing a computer game or watching a movie. So it is a good idea to let participants discuss the training session rather than be distracted.

A co-trainer may help to solve this problem. Involving a co-trainer, a moderator, or just an assistant may help the trainer to better control training sessions. To keep their mind on the key task, the trainer can delegate subtasks to the co-trainer. The latter can manage the chat, moderate discussions, monitor participants’ engagement, answer questions, submit comments and observations, send reminder emails, etc.

Teaming up with a co-trainer gives the trainer the time to think of his/her style and image. Participants are known to be inspired by not only training topics and content but also the trainer’s charisma. The key character traits important for the trainer are as follows: professionalism (professional knowledge, expertise), the ability to motivate people (understanding motivation psychology and being able to get others motivated), strong leadership and pedagogical skills, and self-discipline. Trainers should be able to manage not only groups of participants but also session organization, preparation and promotion, as well as themselves.

When conducting classroom sessions, the trainer should be aware of his/her posture and movements, know the materials by heart, respond to questions quickly, present slides, manage physical activities, keep all participants engaged, etc. Requirements for the online trainers’ style and image differ. On the one hand, they can take advantage of sitting comfortably, using their notes, presenting slideshows, and having their time when answering questions. They do not have to manage any physical activities or keep all participants engaged all the time. Trainers understand that the participants who are absent can watch recordings and ask their questions

later. On the other hand, just being charismatic is not enough for online trainers to be successful. They should also be aware of their position on the screen.

The trainer talks to his/her webcam and microphone rather than session participants. The latter can see the trainer on their screens and hear through speakers or headphones. That is why it is important for the trainer to choose a comfortable sitting position, set up lighting, choose the background, and minimize background noise (street noise, other people's voices). Framing the shot is crucial. It is a good idea to position the webcam far enough away to capture the face and shoulders or the upper body with some room to spare. It is also a good idea to avoid being backlit. Having too much backlighting is a common mistake that may lead to losing eye contact with session participants. The background matters. The trainer should think of what participants can see behind him/her—shelves with business books on them, a roll up banner, or cluttered background.

In online trainings, the eye level is of special importance. The camera should be at the same height as the trainer's eyes. High camera angles make the trainer look dominating and putting pressure on participants, while low ones make the trainer look unconfident and ingratiating. If the trainer looks at the participants one by one, it may give him/her a bit odd look. So the trainer should look in the camera lens above participants' faces on the screen, for the audience to see him/her looking at each of them simultaneously. The advice of professionals is an effective help for the trainer (Burgess, 2016; Joey et al., 2022).

The only thing that does not change from classroom to online training sessions is the environment the trainer creates with thoroughly prepared materials and the content, well-thought examples, logical and clear presentation, the trust built on awareness of everyone's uniqueness, participant engagement, and avoiding personal criticism. This environment enables students to unlock their potential, feel they know, and they are able to do more than they thought.

#### ***4.4 Technical Support and Feedback***

In online trainings, technical support is completely different from that in a classroom. There are no physical premises, no desks put in rows or arranged in a circle—there are just faces on the trainer's screen. And participants can see the trainer's face and the screen on which he/she presents a slideshow or diagrams, adds arrows, etc.—like on a flipchart during traditional sessions. Participants can communicate with the trainer and the group using the chat or their microphones, and they can talk without turning their webcams on.

Effective online training sessions require reliable software that can help trainers to reach their goals and better engage the audience. The software should not restrict interactive communication or be an obstacle to using other resources or activities, for example, audio or visual effects. The technologies that the trainer chooses should support the formats needed and have in-built editing tools. Besides, it is a good idea for trainers to team up with IT professionals to make online training sessions more

effective. But it is worth noting that IT professionals have become some of the most in-demand members of today's labor force in many markets, and unfortunately there is a shortage of IT professionals in Ukraine (Lukianova et al., 2019b).

Trainers tend to use online training platforms that are customer-friendly and technologically simple—not only for them but also session participants. If it takes 10–15 clicks to join a meeting, the trainer may lose all the clients. People leave a website in 5 seconds if they find it too complicated or not interesting enough.

Currently there are a lot of online training solutions on the market. All online platforms offer such key features as trainer's video broadcasting, slideshow presenting, and chat boxes. A part of platforms enables session recording and using drawing tools. Fewer platforms support video and audio streaming, survey tools, downloadable content, breakout rooms, etc. Robust online training platforms include eTutorium, Pruffme, ClickMeeting, and Wiziq (English version). There are also nice free platforms, including Google Hangouts (GH) and Zoom. However, text chat is often delayed in GH, and registration and account confirmation processes take too long. And there is a time and participants limit in free Zoom sessions.

So there is a wide range of online training platforms from which trainers can choose. But in any case, they should study all the available features prior to use, test their sessions and become acquainted with the tools and techniques that can help to keep session participants engaged. Interactivity is a key to success in any training session.

Before launching an online course, trainers should also make sure they have a reserve channel of the Internet. Striking Internet providers, power cuts, and other unpleasant surprises may cause problems to both the trainer and participants. Besides, it is always a good idea to test all the devices used and all the tech issues involved: webcams, microphones, Internet connections, battery levels, etc. A sudden failure of any of the components may upset a session.

To attend an online training session, participants should use the link they receive from the trainer and join the meeting from a web-connected computer, laptop, or phone. Trainers may also ask participants to register for trainings on a landing page. Landing pages can redirect users to registration and payment pages. Using a mailing database is a good idea for groups of more than 100 participants, to prevent emails from going to spam. A professional registration tool is TimePad, and the simplest one is Google Forms. When joining a training course for the first time, participants may have to sign in.

Session participants do not have to be technical experts. That is why the trainer should explain to them how to use the platform, what keys to press, and where to click to enable particular features, how to fix audio and video issues, or what to do if a web browser stops while transmission is running. To save time, experienced trainers email user instructions to all the participants and provide them with virtual room screenshots beforehand. They can also explain how to use other tools and features that participants may need, for example, file sharing services, Google Drive, etc.

Most online platforms come with breakout rooms. They enable the trainer to split a session in several separate sessions and assign participants to particular breakout

rooms. When necessary, the trainer can close breakout rooms and return participants to the main meeting with a single click, without losing any time. However, some participants may appear not ready for group work or be slow achievers. For such situations, the trainer may use the feature that allows all the participants to watch one group working.

If there are no co-trainers, the trainer should be as focused as possible both during sessions and pauses between them. If the trainer forgets to turn off his/her microphone during a break, all the participants will hear what he/she is saying. Or when sharing the screen, the trainer may forget to disable email notifications or chat windows, which can be not only annoying and distracting, but also reveal personal information.

To improve group work, the trainer should be able to effectively sum up discussions and provide participants with meaningful feedback. Effective feedback is crucial for success of online sessions as a whole. The trainer should help participants to understand theoretical materials and give not only detailed but also quick answers to participants' questions. But during an online session the trainer may sometimes be unable to respond to what is happening in the group as quickly as in a traditional classroom.

During online sessions, interaction heavily depends on available feedback tools and channels. Below there are types of feedback most common for online training (Fig. 11.3).

There are features the trainer and participants can use to share files and use individual and group chats. Such features are available from Getcourse, Smartplatform, AntiTreningi, and other services. These are the most advanced and visually attractive communication and data storage solutions. Google ecosystem offers Google Classroom, which is free but a bit less user friendly.

A chat is a common space for all the participants to communicate with each other and the trainer. It is a key feedback tool used during online training sessions where participants are expected to work as a team and support each other. A private group chat is an example of a team chat that online training participants can use.

Social networks are perfect for giving feedback since most participants have social network accounts. Online training participants can use any social network to

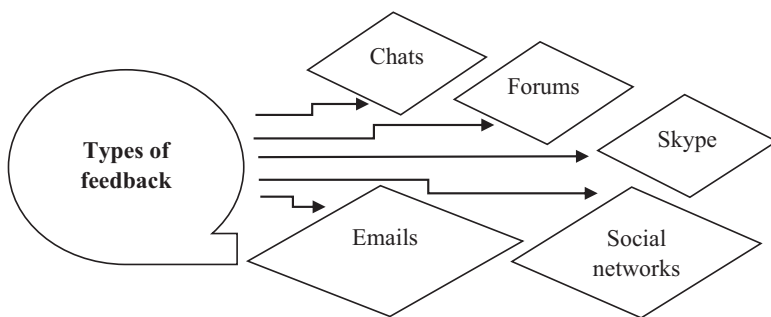


Fig. 11.3 Types of feedback. (Source: Generalized by the author)

create a private group to ask questions, share links, and exchange opinions. For instance, they can share topic-related resources they find on the Internet, discuss their experience and how they can use the skills gained. Very often, trainers conduct sessions on Facebook. Participants can publish links to their workbooks in their private groups and receive feedback there. When choosing this format, the trainer should be aware of the group size—a larger number of participants means a larger number of comments and thus a greater risk of missing some of them. Another effective tool to stimulate interaction is to create an online training hashtag.

Forums are good for giving feedback too. The trainer can create separate sections for all the modules and differentiate user access rights, depending on their role in sessions and packages bought. Participants can see general topics and their sections, where they can submit performed tasks, get feedback from the trainer, or ask questions. This approach allows participants to have the learning process accumulated in one place.

Emails can be used to give daily homework feedback. However, if there are many participants, trainers may miss some important emails. Besides, email software does not allow the trainer to store the group history in a single space. If participants are not numerous and make similar homework mistakes, the trainer can conduct a separate webinar to give group feedback and spend a couple of minutes commenting on individuals' mistakes.

Individual feedback formats are usually included in expensive packages or discussed individually. This feedback can include individual online consultations or Skype calls and is most common for long training courses that last for several weeks/months. An advantage of this feedback is that it can save time for both trainers and participants. They can ask questions and receive answers immediately. As a rule, participants consider audio feedback most substantial. Very often they are ready to pay more for it, that is why it is included in expensive packages.

As we can see, online training sessions are completely different from offline ones, from the point of view of technical support and feedback. As a matter of fact, these two types of interactions are poles apart.

## 5 Prospects of Online Training Development

*Key factors that influence prospects of online training development: the pace and areas of IT development, and online teaching and learning trends. The promising areas of online training development: gamification (virtual gamified tasks that require high-level interaction and give productive feedback), microlearning (where learning content is divided into short segments based on micro content), augmented, virtual, and mixed reality (which enables trainers to model real-world situations), smart assistants/chatbots (can significantly improve the quality of the trainer–participant interaction), and artificial intelligence (to predict participants' behavior and personalize training within the modules that participants choose). Development prospects of online training environment are designing brand-new training rooms*



*for online sessions: HIVE (Oxford Hub for International Virtual Education), Live virtual classroom (Harvard Business School), and branded 3D campuses (Stanford Graduate School of Business high school). In this way, online training development prospects and opportunities are based on ever-growing demand for online training.*

There is a range of the factors that may influence prospects of online training development. Two of them are considered key factors: the pace and areas of IT development, and online teaching and learning trends. The promising areas of online training development we can single out by integrating these key factors are as follows:

- Gamification
- Microlearning
- Augmented, virtual, and mixed reality (AR/VR/MR)
- Smart assistants/chatbots
- Artificial intelligence

Studies of modern scientists confirm this (Kharkovyna, 2019; Zakota, 2019).

Gamification is the strategy that allows participants to earn awards for each completed task or module. It motivates participants and increases engagement. Advanced online platforms offer a lot of new features and develop new systems of virtual gamified tasks that require high-level interaction and give productive feedback.

Microlearning is an approach to training where learning content is divided into short segments based on micro content—small chunks of information that focus on one specific concept at a time. These can include short videos, interactive videos, games, quizzes, or even interactive visuals. Microlearning is available to users of all types of devices, and ever-growing demand for smartphones is sure to feed this learning format.

Augmented, virtual, and mixed reality (AR/VR/MR) is replacing traditional presentations. While augmented reality is an enhanced version of the real physical world, a virtual one is a computer-generated environment, which enables trainers to model real-world situations. Using these technologies, trainers can raise the emotional and cognitive level of their sessions, gain participants' interest, and help them better develop their skills.

Chatbots and smart assistants are widely used in a lot of fields, including sales and marketing, social media, and CRM systems. In online trainings, they can significantly improve the quality of the trainer–participant interaction.

The online teaching segment is increasingly exploring the potential of artificial intelligence. Trainers can use AI to predict participants' behavior and personalize training within the modules that participants choose. Voice bots assist participants in finding key content in modules. In the future, AI can completely change the segment of education, including online training.

Development prospects of online training environment are worth mentioning too. Leading international universities are designing brand-new training rooms for online sessions. In autumn 2017, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, opened a virtual classroom called HIVE (Oxford Hub for International Virtual Education). HIVE is a physical space that takes the appearance of a high-tech

conference facility, with high definition screens that form a U shape in a seminar room. In the HIVE, trainers can engage with up to 84 participants, who can access the session via Mashme.io. The technology is fully interactive. The trainer can address the participants individually, split them into groups and conduct real time polls, and participants can see and hear one another. The Oxford HIVE technology employs a wide range of IT innovations, including AI, simulations, big data analysis and visualization, robotics by Casual Robots (Spain), recognition technology and 4D high-definition projections, an advanced sound system, 360° videos, augmented and virtual reality, 2D and 3D simulations, life-size 2D and 3D holograms of the presenter, interactive images, virtual boards, a camera tracking the presenter, performance efficiency, etc. (The Oxford HIVE, 2017).

Harvard Business School designed the live virtual classroom where the trainer can see images of participants portrayed on a curved U-shaped screen in three lines. The screen is 4.5 m high and 8 m long. The studio can host up to 60 virtual students and 1000 viewers. It is equipped with a digital board and five fixed cameras. The audio from the live feed of participants is as loud and clear as if they were in the room (HBX Launches HBX Live, 2017).

Stanford Graduate School of Business high school business opened branded 3D campuses and used 3D avatars for online students. The avatars look like students, and they can dance, applaud, move on campus, communicate with others, attend lectures, etc. Virtual campuses offer everything students may need: meeting places, notice boards, classrooms, etc. (Why top business schools, 2015).

In this way, online training development prospects and opportunities are based on ever-growing demand for online training that arises from better performance of video transmitting systems and gradual adaptation of users to this type of communication.

## 6 Conclusions

This study of online training effectiveness has given a mixed result. Online training proved to have both strengths and weaknesses. Advantages and opportunities of online training are evident. They are due to the wide range of topics that can be covered (a lot of educational and almost all psychological ones), effective organization of time and space, a positive and humanistic approach to group communication and feedback, use of advanced interactive online training tools and software, platforms, and services. Key drivers of online training development include the rapid growth of distance teaching and learning; a wider use of AI and chatbots; augmented, virtual, and mixed reality; automated machine learning; and gamification.

Online training has developed from a trendy pastime to an essential training tool. Undoubtedly, online training can be an engaging and effective mode of study. Currently it is moving to a higher development level. A direct proof of it is the impressive results demonstrated by the educational institutions that have been investing in digital technology and online education for years. An indirect proof is

the position of investors devoting money to in-demand online education, digital services, and distance learning. They believe that in the near future, online training will win over even more followers, due to their innovation readiness and the advantages that high-quality online education can offer. In this context, further research may be focused on identifying effective methods of developing new competencies of digital trainers as members of the online teaching and learning community.

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