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Continuing education in tough times: Think online and modular

Introduction

Many software training departments have been noticing a shift in demand since 2023/24: customers want to reduce costs and downtime – and are therefore increasingly requesting **live online training** instead of travel. At the same time, there is a growing preference for **modular learning journeys** (blended/cohort programmes, e.g. one fixed training day per week) over long block seminars. **Rising travel costs** are reinforcing this trend: in Germany, total business travel costs rose **by 72% to €46.2 billion** in 2023. This makes travel-free learning formats more attractive from a business perspective – for both clients and providers. (vdr-service.de)

Cost pressure & substitution of travel

Virtual formats are replacing a significant proportion of traditional business trips – and with them travel, accommodation and absence costs. The **Öko-Institut** estimates the **long-term substitution potential of virtual meetings at around 30%** of business trips (further supported by ifeu calculations). For training courses, this means that anything that does not necessarily have to take place on site is migrating to **VILT** (virtual instructor-led training) or hybrid settings – with significantly lower budget requirements per learning success unit. (oeko.de)

Didactic shift: distributed formats instead of blocks

In addition to the cost logic, there are tangible **acceptance and participation advantages** to distributed learning rhythms: A vignette study (Osiander/Stephan) shows that employees **are significantly reluctant to attend longer block courses** –

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compared to variants that take place, for example, **one day a week for four weeks**; the weekly schedule reduces perceived opportunity and commuting times.([EconStor](#))

The industry trend supports this picture: the **mmb Trend Monitor 2023/24** sees **micro-learning, video tutorials and (virtual) classrooms/webinars** as the **backbone of digital learning**; in the long term, the focus is shifting towards **individualised, continuous** forms of learning – ideal building blocks for modular learning journeys lasting several weeks.

Internationally, too, L&D is moving away from 'big bang' programmes: the **LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report 2025** emphasises that **large-scale upskilling initiatives are 'across the board less common'**, while **agile, continuous** practices (cohorts, project-based learning paths, internal mobility) are gaining relevance. For training providers, **serial cohorts with regular touchpoints** are now more connectable than one-off mammoth projects.

Fit for the customer's everyday working life

The **IW-Weiterbildungserhebung 2023** (IW Trends 2/2024) cites **lack of time as the biggest obstacle** to continuing education; at the same time, **digital learning opportunities** are **firmly established** in companies – especially **interactive web-based learning**. Consequence: **shorter units** in predictable **weekly cycles** are easier to reconcile with projects and customer operations, increase participation rates and reduce last-minute cancellations.

Business logic for software training providers

Online and modular formats are not only didactically plausible – **they pay off**:

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- **Higher contribution margins per appointment:** elimination of travel/hotel costs for trainers, lower room/catering costs; variable costs decrease, margins increase. (These cost drivers reflect the sharp overall increase in travel costs in the market.) (vdr-service.de)

- **Better utilisation** through higher participation rates with weekly sessions (fewer no-shows, more stable cohorts). (EconStor)

- **Predictable revenue and cash** flow via multi-week **cohort programmes** instead of individual day courses; upsell potential via follow-up modules.

- **Economies of scale**: Reusable digital assets (labs, recordings, handouts), standardised onboarding processes and automation (LMS, email journeys) reduce customer acquisition and delivery costs per participant..

- **Competitive advantage** in tenders: 'Travel-free + distributed learning units' meets the budget and availability criteria of many departments – and supports sustainability goals (less travel CO_2). (oeko.de)

Implementation: Three practical levers

1. **Refine portfolio**: Core courses as **learning journeys (6–10 weeks, 1 day/week)** with a clear outcomes path (use cases, assessments).

2. **Professionalise cohort operations**: fixed start dates, minimum number of participants, waiting lists, standardised communication; labs via browser to avoid local IT hurdles.

3. **Optimise blended mix**: live sessions for transfer/coaching, interspersed with **micro-learning** and **exercises** in the flow of work.

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Conclusion

Economic headwinds are forcing customers to minimise travel and downtime – and making **live online** and modular **weekly rhythms** the **new standard**. Studies confirm the **cost arguments**, the **acceptance** advantages of distributed formats and the strategic shift towards **agile**, **cohort-based** development. Those who deliver online-first and modular solutions now will improve learning outcomes and margins – and be ideally positioned for their customers' next budget cycles. (vdr-service.de, oeko.de, EconStor)