

Various Approaches to Successful E-learning Implementations

Arzu Baloglu

University of Dogus

arzubaloglu@ixir.com;

abaloglu@dogus.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this paper is to present a critical review concerning some advice concerning e-learning implementation. Training or web based learning will become one of the most important sectors in future. The purpose of this study is to suggest workable guideline to adapt e-learning to the practical needs and conditions of the business sector.

A Global economy needs the capacity to constantly update the education and essential skills of its work force. That is why web based training projects are being supported by government, lecturers and the private sector. However, when e-learning programs have been successfully implemented, they have known increased productivity and than they saw that it met the expectation of management. When the implementation is unsuccessful, investment on various components such as time, resource and capital can be wasted. That is why there are some critical factors which need to be taken into account. We are learning from the experience of those who have applied various methods in their workplace.

In this paper, together with a working definition of e-learning and its importance as well as factors critical for success various approaches to its satisfactory implementation have been included. Later on we use conclusion with a critical requirement and a number of individual suggestion for improvement.

Finally, we document improvements, which have resulted from the application of several different approaches to training in e-learning.

Keywords

e-learning, implementation, efficient, teamwork, factors

INTRODUCTION

APECS Leaders' meeting, in Shanghai, (2001) was interesting for attendances because President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell were participating and talking about training and web based training.

The Department of State and Education have underscored US support for an APEC e-learning initiative that will use the internet to share best practices in education and to promote international collaboration on internet-based learning among countries whose economies form APEC (*Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation*).

"A global economy demands a workforce that has the capacity to continually update its education and skills through access to the latest development in a variety of fields, from engineering to fiber-optics", said US Secretary of Education Rod Paige. "President Bush has made education his top domestic priority, and the e-learning initiative advances the education goals and further strengthens the economies of our APEC neighbors, as well as our own" [1]

Furthermore, we learnt in the conference that US is involved, (2001) in three web-based APEC education projects that bring governments, educators and the private sector into partnerships to support education and learning.

The following is a case study, hypothetical sample designed to explore the possibilities of an e-learning program.

ADC is global supplier of equipment, software and integration services that make broadband communications a reality worldwide. They are supplying high-speed internet/data, video and voice signals to homes and businesses.

ADC needed to provide up-to-date training to 16,000 employees scattered all over the world. In light of the highly competitive marketplace in which it must operate, employee retention as well as employee performance was at issue, and ADC knew that training was an important component in addressing both issues.

ADC concluded that its existing instructor-led training was not meeting its needs at a time when, the company was growing very fast.

The solution was not difficult to identify. ADC felt it could extend its reach a thousand fold by taking advantage of online learning technology. But, how to do it effectively was the real challenge. To create its initial online learning programs, ADC decided to apply a business model, which was the most convenient. With the help of this effective model, ADC was able to develop a configured site that could meet its specific needs. Success in such complex projects depends on experienced people as well as on a clear, proven methodology.

Then, implementation model should be set up based on low cost, high impact learning solution that would deliver training to large user populations. To extend the business, company's learning and development organization created a three-year plan. First, it would develop an online learning infrastructure. The plan called for 60 percent of course work to be online within four years, reducing overall training costs by 40 percent in the process. [2]

Some Definitions about e-learning

Before hits of successful e-learning implementations, we would like to mention some e-learning definitions and approaches.

e-learning is some form of learning using an electronic carrier. This electronic carrier brings the right piece of information to the right individual or group at the right moment.

e-learning is less intrusive to the daily work duties of a company and learner, saving time and money though less interruption of employees.

e-learning represents a wide range of business activities and technologies, including distance education, computer-based training (CBT), Web based training (WBT), internet-based training (IBT), courseware delivery and online learning and testing. [3]

The terms "distance learning" or "distance education" have been applied by many different researchers to a great of programs, providers, audiences, and media. Its hallmarks are the separation of teacher by the student rather than the distant instructor and noncontiguous communication between student and teacher.

e-learning is a way of life. e-learning also a way of providing the right information to the right person at the right time. Learning is an ongoing process, it is never ending. New learning experiences will enlarge an individual's knowledge base and adjust his or her view of the real world. [4]

e-learning's greatest selling point- flexible, round the clock online access to any number of courses-makes it especially attractive to multinational companies. [5]

Now, let us examine some main adverse factors for the future of e-learning;

Although a future is predicted for the e-learning business, there are still a few adverse factors;

e-learning industry is a very young industry. Changes really take place every day. Every change in

technology is reflected in the way e-learning is perceived.

Terminological confusion is huge. What do e-learning companies/institutes offer?

The technology is ahead of the content.

There is still a lot of resistance to using technology in learning. Lecturers are very conservative when it comes to the instructional process. Teachers will have to coach each other with respect to e-learning. Fortunately, we already see the emergence of communities of teachers.

e-learning still lacks clear-cut standards.

Who cooperate to work out common strategies; train each other in the use of new technologies; and look for ways to divide the workload.

Afterwards, we are focusing regarding critical factors in success. First, I would like to pass on to you the suggestion which Litton PRC, an IT consulting and systems integration subsidiary of Litton Industries Inc., has a global e-learning program.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE E-LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION

The most obvious challenges for any global e-learning implementation center on language and localization issues. Many companies offer courses only in English or in English and one other language usually Spanish. Companies that want to offer courses in several languages usually turn to translators. But Mike Markovits, manager of the center for learning and organizational excellence for the Stamford, General Electric Co. subsidiary, says "The translation company may not be up to speed on GE language, so we have GE employees in each local language review the translation to make sure it's GE-correct".

When we look to the worldwide e-learning implementations, we understand they are adapting strategic approach, which integrate corporate mission, vision and values to their e-learning programs. Generally, before they start, they have to fix what their expectations and main target with their corporate vision? [6]

Watson Wyatt Worldwide senior consultant Bruce said this approach allows companies to implement effective comprehensive e-learning initiatives in their organizations.

He says "Today we are seeing more synchronous, two-way online learning environments, where employees have immediate interaction with each other and experts in the field".

He also added, " Managing this new learning environment is the challenge for these companies" [7]

Then; how can HR manage the process, encouraging employees to complete their e learning without hovering over every computer screen?

SOME ADVICE FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Mr. Jim Moshinskie, PhD, lead author of study and Professor of Human Performance at Baylor University (Texas) presented their findings at the 2001 International Society for Performance Improvement conference and expo in San Francisco.

Here, it will be mentioned some highlights from his presentation;

Before you start, they are suggesting these factors;

Know the learners and their goals. Employees must see and understand how the e-learning course directly relates to their needs in the workplace, said Moshinskie. They need exercises and examples that are directly applicable to their daily struggles in the workplace.

Know the work environment. Managers, trainers, and peers must participate in designing the course and support the learners during their online training. Managers should be active coaches who create on the job opportunities for practice and feedback. It is also important to make it acceptable to participate in training during work hours. [8]

In the meanwhile, Concerning Instructional Design and Delivery Process I would like examine much more detailed as follows;

Instructors should use organizers to create an appropriate context for instruction. [4] They should select effective images, using appropriate objects with relevant attributes that will convey the same idea to the user as they did to the designer.

The more familiar teachers are with the instructional design and delivery process, the more effective their presentations will be. On a practical note, they need training in instructional message design, strategies for delivering instruction on-camera, methods of diversifying types of presentation, selecting various mixes of student-teacher activities and interactions, choosing situations and examples which are relevant to their students, and assessing the level of learning by distant students.

Strategies such as using fewer overheads and more moving video, interspersing "talking heads" with videos of sites, using hands-on experiments, incorporating text and graphic art, and other guidelines for effective video production are also valuable.

Foreign language instruction presents special instructional challenges, not only because of lack of immediate 2-way interaction that characterizes many distance education programs, but also because of the loss of visual detail in videoconferences by providing students with oral practice and feedback through telephone conversations with the instructor, and by instructional strategies that encourage frequent student-teacher and teacher-student dialogue.

Effective distance learning requires extensive preparation, as well as adapting traditional teaching strategies to a new learning environment, which often lacks visual cues. Students must quickly become aware of and comfortable with new patterns of communication, learn to manage their time, and take responsibility for their own learning.

Site facilitators can act as the on-site "eyes" and "ears" of a teacher, stimulating interaction when distant students are hesitant to ask questions or participate in discussions. [4]

Match values and motives. Values influence people's choices about where to invest their energies, Moshinskie pointed out. Planning activities that support different value orientations will increase learner's enjoyment and improve the completion rate.

Use push/pull strategies. Push strategies include requiring and monitoring course completion. Many online learning systems allow real time tracking and reporting. Get managers to support early finishers and coax laggards.

In order to be most effective communication;

Tell learners what they will be able to do afterward

Let them know their new skills will be immediately applicable and that they are fully capable of successful completion

Explain that senior management endorses the training and will confer an award or recognition for course completion

Let learners know the course will be interesting or relevant to them.

Before the finishing this factor, I would like to underline of importance of "teamwork" for a successful implementation.

Progressive teachers, who are early adapters of technology, can support other teachers by planning as a group.

Facilitators can try out learning modules, building in interactivity as it suits the learning styles of their particular students.

Technology providers, too, are available to answer questions from new users. Studio teachers are available between session to reply to fax messages or telephone calls. The process of adapting new learning resources to the classroom, such as instructional television and videoconferencing, is not immediately transparent.

Instructors need to download and upload resources and lesson plans, consult with other teacher, and try out new learning modules.

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Include reward. Money, time off, better working conditions, new tools and equipment.

Create a portal. Include available courses and their monetary and non-monetary awards that are customized to learners.

After the ideas Mr. Moshinski, let us see the ideas of Watson Wyatt consultants; companies with successful e-learning programs tend to do the following:

Commit (at the executive level) to funding and supporting e-learning and aligning it with the corporate vision.

Create a solid and compelling business case for e-learning and aligning it with a corporate vision

Develop a phased plan for implementation that ensures successful results reasonably early in the program.

Establish an implementation team of insiders and consultants who are focused and committed to the program.

Plan for adjustment period to help employees thrive.

Create a vehicle for employee feedback and ensure the flexibility to go make changes based on that feedback. [9]

Here, it has been mentioned from the requirements to establish a good working e-learning system. As first step, he says requires corporate vision and continued support that can be easily communicated.

Other factor is developing a phased implementation plan to ensure the success. And also suitable implementation team. Fifth step involves careful plan for employee adjustment period to help everyone.

The final step is to understand that employee feedback is good.

Briefly, He says "This is done by creating a well-understood communications channel for employees to convey what is and isn't working, and be prepared to make changes that will keep them learn better".

No doubt, success in operational issues as well, it is also important in total success. Otherwise only technical success can be insufficient.

In terms of operational issues, these involve planning, management, and economies, all of which are crucial for a successful distance education program. We must consider the roles of teacher-facilitator-student triad, training of teachers and staff, implementation and adoption of new technology, and policy issues such as facilities, cost, and scheduling. [4]

Distance learning will affect learning relationship from the common, centralized school model to more flexible model. This leads to host new issues for administrators;

Balancing budget with potentially low cost electronic learning options

Redefining what it means to have a teacher present in the classroom

New forms of assessment and evaluation

Accepted set of teacher certification standards and accreditation standards

The need for cooperation among business, government and education sectors

Implementation of distance education is resource-intensive. Sufficient money and time must be allocated to deliver whatever courseware was promised.

If money is limited, then there are two options; either downsize the project period or extend the time frame. People also needs resources and time to build and effective team, to start and maintain development project, to develop a plan for evaluation and obtain a commitment. Programs may be too long, too short, or resulting in a loss of real-time interactivity.

Those factors such as scheduling and cost/benefit are one of the important effective factors in a successful implementation. Administrators should be so careful these kinds of administrative limitations.

CONCLUSION

As the result of this advice, I sincerely support both approaches and also believe that there should be an integration between them and that they should be implemented according to the structure of the organization. Mr. Monshinskie presented his approach in terms of tasks, whereas Mr. Watson expressed his ideas with project management approach in mind, which was more generic. The former approach needs more discussion even though it seems more specific. Furthermore; I have to mention that we assume that Internet services will always be available and be fast and maintain its quality consistently. Without a consistent Internet connection, it will not be possible to establish a successful e-learning organization. Otherwise, some additional strategies should be developed to maintain its availability. E-learning organizations will require to manage the internet services as the core of their business more closely and provide improvements continuously.

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