



STRATEGIC USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN TRAINING-A PARADIGM SHIFT

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Abstract

The IT revolution has brought about sweeping and multifaceted changes and has enabled the digital representation of all the important forms of expression; words, music, numeric data, maps, photographs and eventually voice and video and global exchange of all digital information. With the steady advancement in telecommunications they would soon be able to disseminate their own digital content in so many ways to so many people worldwide or in other words Information At Your Fingertips (IAYF) has become possible. And online training and learning is no exception the IT tools have made training automated and digitized. The internet-based worker-training programs today are enormous from online degree programs to in-house guided training for different specialization. Every week brings technological breakthroughs that make this easier and richer. The more lifetime learning opportunity the companies provide, the more they are widening the skill base of their own workforce.

Keywords: *Strategic use of technology, Online training, Training a paradigm shift, Technological Training, Advancements in training, prospects of oOnline training, Practices in Online training, Web based training, Shift in methods in training.*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Online training should be viewed as strategic and integrated of the broader training and development strategy. Technology should be considered as part of strategic framework. Many companies are now starting to develop learning portals or looking at implementing enterprise learning management systems. These systems support all types of learning and integrate online learning delivery as well as class room delivery and other forms. Online learning is moiré than content on a website. One need to have a strategy that includes instructional support and collaboration, look for educational values and content otherwise one may be able to tick boxes about level of activity but not about improved knowledge or performance. Various surveys conducted show that internet based training is highly recommended by HR managers world wide. Uptake of online training has progressed further and HR managers are cutting down heavily on traditional classroom training. HP, evaluated how customer service was affected by its focus on E-learning and blended instructions rather than classroom training. HP found that sales representatives were able to answer questions more quickly and accurately enhancing customer-service provider relations¹. In addition Unilever estimated the increase in product sales as a result of its online training for sales employees; the company found that sales increased by millions dollars after E-learning.²

Online training specifically refers to “*training being delivered electronically via a computer system (including other peripheral devices) through the use of network technology i.e. an intranet, internet, extranet or other multimedia platforms allowing for interactive communication. The instructions delivered can be synchronous or asynchronous.*” Online training can be managed as a “profit centre”. The employee training operation must pay for itself in revenue and hopefully over time generate a profitable return on investment. When companies manage online training as a profit centre, electronic delivery may reduce the cost. When companies view training as a profit centre, they first embark on online training to reduce delivery costs. Synchronous/live training tools greatly reduce the expense of class room and travel for both the company and trainee. As a result, a well developed live online course may in fact be more profitable than a traditional instructor-led program. Once companies get started with such training they can realize that online course can often create new training revenue streams. Each course must be considered as a “revenue generating product”.

Managers and training departments need to determine when and if online training is a viable strategy. Organizations today realize that they cannot use traditional training methods if they want to stay competitive. Because product cycles, competitive intelligence, industry information and corporate strategies are moving and changing much faster than they need to; companies understand that the only way to get knowledge to their employees is through online learning that relies on the internet. Electronic delivery does not only mean reducing cost but increasing effectiveness, in terms of improving the way the organization does business. Apart from this online training is also preferred because of its cost-effectiveness, one of the biggest differences between online training and traditional modes of training is that the delivery cost of the former is very

¹ O' Leonard, K. 2004. *HP case study: flexible solutions for multi-cultural learners.* Oakland, CA: Bersin & Associates.

² Hoekstra, J. 2001. *Three in one. Online learning*, 5: 28-32.



low, companies are increasingly outsourcing their training activities in an effort to take advantage of this new training approach while also reducing cost.

1.2 Issues to be Addressed in Online Training

Issues that need to be addressed in online training are:

- How motivational is the climate of online instruction, in terms of motivation will trainees perceive online learning as electronic page turning or as a fun and engaging learning opportunity.
- Trainees' engagement may be the most vital issue to address when adapting online training.
- Whether management can actually document savings due to online training initiatives, are course completion rates higher or lower than in conventional class room training environment.
- Variables that assess online training's impact on organizational effectiveness which includes production levels, employee turnover, quality measures, and absenteeism.

In times to come employees will witness extensive use of online training in organizations, some of the chief drivers of this will be:

- Emergence of wireless technologies
- Electronic book tools
- Standards (development of courseware and content standard from ASTD)
- Knowledge management (linking knowledge with e-learning initiatives and goals)
- Multiple language support
- Mentoring (use of online mentoring as a vehicle to enhance course quality, feedback, relevancy and interactivity)
- Artificial Intelligence and assistance (more responsive and interactive online environments)

The question confronting online training is not about replacing human-taught courses with online self-directed content or are computers replacing human contact, instead the issue is how to blend the two or when to implement a human touch within the online course. Just how can organizations integrate collaborative opportunities and live mentoring with rich internet resources. The shift should be towards a "blended" or "integrated" approach to online training.

Any organization planning to implement online training should access five critical online training success factors as detailed by Teri Anderson³:

- Assessing or evaluating corporate culture and readiness for online learning
- Specific content and programs
- Internal capabilities or infrastructure
- Cost options of the initiative
- Targeted clients or employees.

Hence there are five C's of online learning; *culture, content, capability, cost and clients*-this would help acknowledge and address a wide range of online training and learning issues confronting organizations.

It is difficult to conclude whether online training is equally, more or less effective than traditional class room based training as both the methods have their inherent advantages and disadvantages and should be used depending on training need. Despite many questions and concerns online training has impacted corporate training in a variety of ways. It has altered training goals and expectations and can positively influence organizational outcomes. Impact of the internet and the ways in which it can be used to support learning and training has revolutionized the landscape of training in organizations giving access to so many people to learn at the same time, ensuring flexibility, convenience and self-paced learning at the work setting reducing travel costs to outside training facilities, also allowing organizations to deliver training consistently to all trainees and keeping the content updated. Lastly, online training's viability, effectiveness, and potential to return tangible benefits to organizations depends largely on how it is designed, delivered and evaluated.

³Anderson, T. (2002, January). *Is e-learning right for your organization? Learning circuits, American Society for Training and Development.* Retrieved January 24, 2002, from <http://www.learningcircuits.org/2002/jan2002/anderson.html>.



1.3 Best Practices From Leading Organizations

Best practices from leading organizations [IBM Global Training provider] suggest the following in terms of training;

1. Fully train the team
2. Provide ongoing training/access to reference resources
3. Train consistently
4. Train efficiently
5. Train globally
6. Train conveniently/technology based training
7. Train thoroughly

Traditional methods of training often results in scrap Learning (learning that is successfully delivered, but not applied on the job and goes unused to improve performance). It is estimated that more than half of the investment in learning delivery isn't being transferred into the workplace⁴.

What according to Futurethink- leading innovation research and training firm must change if learning & development has to be successful;

1. Stop boring/too long/ dull and uninteresting courses
2. Start focusing on timely topics
3. Embrace flexible, blended learning
4. Collaborative and experiential approaches
5. Training in short time frames for focused learning using micro-modules.

Training is based on relevance not hours, it is not important to complete a class what is important is that did you get the learning you needed. Training and development is a critical component to organizational effectiveness. It's not enough to just deliver content via technology and expect it to translate to increased performance and productivity⁵. The most valuable asset a company has is its people, and that investment must be properly supported with efficient training measures.

1.4 Leading Online Training Practices

1.4.1 Skillsoft

E-learning market is now more than 13 years old (the word "e-learning" was coined in 1998). Courses built ten years ago are utterly boring today. We now expect online training to use video, run in mobile devices, and be totally integrated with social tools and online collaboration. To Skillsoft's credit, the company has evolved as well, now offering more than 12 different modalities in its content.

1. Companies like Fed Ex, Hewlett Packard, Delta Airlines etc., have tied up with Skillsoft
2. In April, 2014, Skillsoft was acquired by Charterhouse Capital Partners LLP, In September, 2014, Skillsoft acquired SumTotal Systems, LLC, it provides flexible, next-generation human resources (HR) solutions to 3,500 customers and 49 million users worldwide, including many of the Fortune 500.
3. Skillsoft has grown from its early days as a provider of IT and business skills to E-learning, and now offers learning solutions that include digitized books, videos, simulations, learning management system, content development tools, and a range of services.
4. E-Learning portal, to provide its employees a choice of 800 short courses on a wide variety of topics.
5. Training Industry spotlights best practices within the training industry, its Global Top 20 list of IT Training companies include-Skillsoft, IBM, GP Strategies, Global Knowledge, HP, Netcom Learning using E-Learning.

1.4.2 Motorola University

1. MU is the education and training arm of Motorola Inc., the US telecommunication giant. 1981- MTEC [Motorola Training and Education Center] was founded. It was intended to serve the in-house training needs of the corporation. Motorola's intention to build a companywide quality culture to promote high internal standards, develop employee skills, translating into overall increased profitability.
2. MU claims to serve 100 companies in 24 countries, ranging from Brazil to Mexico to China and Singapore. Conventional universities to partner with MU. Provides 100000 days per day of training to customers, suppliers and employees.
3. Motorola employees get 35% of their training through web based learning, 65% through instructor-led class room training and mixed solution that combined the best of both modes.

⁴ Eggleston, M. (November 22, 2013), *Integrating online training into your training portfolio*. Training Industry.com.

⁵ Ibid

4. Education was viewed as an investment rather than a cost. Therefore, Motorola decide to elevate MTEC to the status of a university in 1989. Motorola University created a new internal institute named College of Learning Technologies (CLT) to develop educational delivery systems through satellite, Internet and virtual classrooms. This department was responsible for providing innovative learning via virtual classrooms, online experiences, use of CD-ROMS and through multimedia such as video and satellite conferences. The university placed a large selection of courses and training materials on its intranet, available around the world at any time to its employees.

1.4.3 Personalitree Academy Ltd.

1. The Godrej Group has taken a stake in PERSONALITREE Academy Ltd., a fast growing, e-varsity providing online soft skills training, it offers highly interactive training modules in soft skills in areas like- communication, lateral thinking, public speaking and creativity applied to business sphere.
2. India times learning, in collaboration with personalitree, an online varsity for people skills, is launching a host of personality development courses aimed at enhancing communication and other related skills from some of the best experts in the country.

1.5 Prospects of Online Training

1. Online training can be delivered with interactivity the programs can be instructor led and designed to mimic a classroom online. Class sizes can be small (10-20 students at the most), instructors ask questions and interact with learners through chat media, phone and the program is highly instructional. "Broadcast" can also be used here programs are delivered as web seminars or "webinars", typically here the learners are much larger (100's or more) and the instructor delivers with much less interactivity, yet they can be very cost effective and profitable. Besides a real feel of the class can be maintained.
2. Online training can make possible "knowledge Management"; that is using technology to leverage the intellectual capital of the entire company, which in turn, leads to increased productivity and superior competitive advantage.
3. According to Industry experts online training costs on an average about half as much as traditional class room training⁶. This doesn't even include the more intangible benefits, such as the opportunity cost of not having to send large number of trainees away from their jobs at a physical training site for several days. Nor does it include the increased competitive advantages that companies derive from having a well trained workforce that's up to date on all the latest trends, collaborating with one another and sharing information throughout the company. As corporations are increasingly embracing online training, they find that investment in the new technology will provide ROI, greater productivity, increase in knowledge, skills acquired than investment made in traditional methods of training.
4. Technological barriers are diminishing. The main hurdles of technology such as lack of interactivity, content availability, technology standards and bandwidth, are currently being addressed. Especially the continued adoption of broadband should facilitate higher use rates of media rich online training products.
5. Technological advances in the near future to solve the problem of bandwidth. Emerging technologies will provide greater bandwidth- "fatter pipes" to send the data as well as greater compression of data; that is, more data will be able to be squeezed into smaller packets, which take up less bandwidth. Meanwhile hybrid CD's (also called internet CD's) are an alternative in which the program with audio and video are delivered on a CDROM with updates delivered automatically over the web.
6. Instructors, trainers, mentors and coaches may increase as firms increasingly adopt blended approach to online training⁷. A mentor or guide can help personalize the online learning experience and make it more learner-centered⁸ to increase course completion rates. More organizations might lean towards instructor-learner online interaction if better instructional tools existed.
7. Digitization of books and other online content will undoubtedly lead to significant growth both in terms of learner-oriented and instructor-oriented tools. E-books might have links to ancillary course materials as well as the ability to search and highlight text. With E-books, trainees could further customize the online texts by removing and rearranging information, adding new materials, and, posting announcements.
8. In today's competitive era "there is a need to train more people on more topics, to do it faster, to do it on a worldwide basis and to do it cheaper" says Brandon Hall, editor and publisher of the Multimedia and internet

⁶ Alexander Laurel, *Online training*, Mumbai, : Jaico Publishing House, 1st edition, p.128.

⁷ Vam Dam, N.2002, (January). *E-learning by design: can a better designed course help you learn more? E-learning*, 3(1), 38-39, retrieved January 23, 2002, from: <http://www.elearningmag.com/elearning/article>.

⁸ Adler, C., Rae, S. (2002, January). *Personalized learning environments. The future of e-learning is learner-centric. E-learning*, 3(1), 22-24. Retrieved January 24, 2002, from <http://www.elearningmag.com/elerningarticle/article>.



training cookbook⁹. Answer lies in internet and multimedia software which have created a tremendous potential for multiple-site delivery by bringing training to people's work site.

9. With technological modernization personal or human touch with instructor or trainer is also possible in online training as in physical classroom. Online training can be "live" or "synchronous" hence giving scope to trainees to get into conversation sessions with trainers. The location of the trainer is not a constraint a trainer in US can train a workforce in any part of the globe with synchronous training methods. Hence there is virtual presence of trainer and technological interface makes it possible. Trainees can take tests, participate in learning activities in a number of different ways. Live instructors lead these online courses in real time with plenty of interaction between trainer and trainees in multiple locations at same time, much as they would in a physical classroom.

1.6 CONCLUSION

When developing and delivering instruction, the use of technology is secondary to well designed learning goals and objectives. Much discussion dwells on the way online training can enable individuals and organizations to acquire new skills. However it can also be used as a powerful tool in overall development. It is important to recognize that different types of learning outcomes require different types of learning. Learner engagement may be the most vital issue to address when adopting online training. Bill Wiggenhorn, former President of Motorola University, claimed that a crucial part of the success of online learning at Motorola was the support and mentoring provided to learners. "If you just throw a program at them, with no support, only 10% complete it. But if you give them technical support, online assistance, coaching or mentoring, and an environment where they can concentrate then that makes all the difference." Organizations must figure out what works first, and apply the right technology second. The key is to figure out the framework around what makes the experience right and then decide the technology and delivery solution (online or classroom) better courses are a must.

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⁹ <http://www.brandonhall.com>