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What **Isn't** E-Learning?

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Corporate Motivation for E-Learning

The Pentium speed of technological development has brought about the short shelf life of information in the market place. To compete in such a fast-changing world, corporations need employees who know how to seek out new but relevant information, think critically and show initiatives to meet up with challenges. Lifelong learning is no longer a buzzword for corporations, but rather, a basic necessity for survival in the market place. On-going corporate development then, becomes one of the most important strategies to sustain growth in corporations. However, the rate at which knowledge becomes irrelevant and the far-flung globalized workforce scattered around the world impose a huge financial drag on corporations engaged in corporate development.

Over the last few years, e-learning in corporate training and development has been perceived to be what the relic of the True Cross was in the Age of Faith: emblems of salvation. It is believed that this Internet-supported learning innovation allows workers to learn anywhere and anytime, promotes active and independent learning, and supports communication between experts and novices. The anywhere-anytime nature of e-learning generates substantial cost savings to corporations. The monetary costs of e-learning are much lower than traditional classroom training due to the absence of transportation, accommodation and other miscellaneous costs. More importantly, the opportunity costs of e-learning are much lower: employees learn on-site, on-the-job, rather than away from the job in some other training sites. Therefore, the primary motivations for e-learning in corporate development are cost-effectiveness and a well-trained workforce that gives the corporation a superior competitive advantage.

Not About Technology

Before you become entranced with the gorgeous hardware and mesmerizing interactive multimedia displays of e-learning, do be reminded that e-learning is NOT all about hardware, software, boxes and wires. For decades, educators, administrators and researchers have been lured into the fantasy that radio, television and videotapes are going to take over the human instructor. In 1922, Thomas Edison predicted that motion picture was likely to supplant the use of textbooks. As we now know, such optimistic predictions were shattered by subsequent media comparison studies that failed to prove that any one medium is superior to another. It depended on the context of how the media were used.

Therefore, e-learning does not exist in isolation; it is interwoven with the rest of the media and human participants in the corporate environment. The success of e-learning in a corporation depends on the way e-learning is situated within that environment. If nothing significant changes in that environment save the introduction of e-learning, few, if any, import effects can be expected. E-learning then, must be about the processes, NOT just the products.

Not About Information

Even if e-learning is considered as a process, it is easy and inaccurate to confine one's perception of e-learning to giving employees greater access to more up-to-the-millisecond information, faster and more conveniently. E-learning is NOT about disseminating information. Employees in the 21st century are already bombarded with too much information. With so much information available, corporations need people who can synthesize meaning from large bodies of diverse knowledge. Craig (1996, 2) warns, "information is not knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom, and wisdom is not foresight. Each grows out of each other, and we need them all." E-learning then, must be about making possible successful knowledge management to leverage upon the intellectual capital of the entire corporation.

Not About the Web

Much too often, e-learning courses have been attempting to replace traditional learning and teaching media without much thought to their underlying pedagogical principles. For example, from textbooks to e-books, or from overhead transparencies to PowerPoint slides. The learning medium may have changed, but the methods employed in using these new innovations remain constant. Human beings have a tendency to maintain order and control in their lives that many will unconsciously alter innovations to fit into the existing ways of doing things. Therefore, e-learning is NOT just about web-based learning. Without considering the strengths and weaknesses of each medium, e-learning courses may adversely affect the learning experiences of the course participants. E-learning then, must be about harnessing the strengths and addressing the weaknesses of web-based learning to create a conducive learning environment.

Not About Interaction with Computers

Many e-learning courses have also over-emphasized the interactions between the computer and the learner. These interactivities are often seen as control over pace, choice of activities and sequences, and may not necessarily bring about learning. The learning of an individual is the outcome of the interactions with his/her community. This community consists of his/her colleagues, employers, clients, partners and other industrial stakeholders. The interactions with the community enable newcomers to become old-timers. However, the newcomers also bring with them their own set of experiences and expertise that contribute to the community's repertoire of knowledge.

Such interactions promote the creation of lifelong learners who collaborate with colleagues and other stakeholders within the e-learning context and across the globe to build and share knowledge. These interactions may be synchronous or asynchronous where employees and their learning communities can assemble virtually, across time and space, to engage in and extend the powerful dialogue of learning. E-learning then, must be about providing the interactions among the employees and their communities to develop the competitive advantage of the corporation.

Conclusion

In this article, I have dismissed four myths about e-learning:

1. E-learning is all about technology;
2. E-learning is all about information;
3. E-learning is all about web-based learning; and
4. E-learning is all about the interactions between the computer and learner.

By doing so, I have, indirectly, established what e-learning must be about, and hence, how corporations can evaluate e-learning courses by asking these questions:

- Does the course emphasize on both processes and products?
- Does the course focus on knowledge management rather than information provision?
- Does the course harness the strengths and address the weaknesses of web-based learning?
- Does the course provide interactions among the learners and their communities?

E-learning is a double-edged sword; it can be used either to enhance the corporations' competitive advantages or to amplify their disadvantages. E-learning can foster a learning community of 'knowledge workers,' or it can cause abstraction and individualism among employees. Therefore, embedded within the opportunities of e-learning, is the responsibility to design a corporate environment with the goal of developing a learning community of 'knowledge workers.'

Reference

Craig, W. (1996). New technologies mean new goals. *Learners Together*, 4, 1, pp.1-3.