24 Creating a New Learning Model to Avoid Skills Gaps and to Fulfil the Future Needs of the Knowledge Society

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Abstract

The situation in the education institutions and the challenges for human resources activities inside companies changed rapidly the last years. It is not (only) because of the integration and use of new technologies. It is due to a general need to change the paradigm of new learning models (and theories) in accordance with new demands in the knowledge society.

Strategic blended eLearning is an opportunity for institutions, universities and companies to utilise the "power" of technology for real social and educational change bringing benefits to all its users.

Online education and learning can make a huge impact on the way companies and educational institutions do business. The Web can increase their potential significantly, giving them awareness on a larger scale and increasing or even creating revenue. From a corporate point of view it is recognised that in this day and age where use of technology and business methodologies are all relatively similar organisations need something more unusual to be considered "leading edge".

Creating a corporate university or online learning environment, can educate the people who work on the frontlines of a business. If they are well informed, impart a consistent message and feel valued they become positive ambassadors for the organisation, giving them a competitive advantage, increased productivity and an enhanced knowledge capital.

Therefore it is in any case useful to be aware more clearly what the effects of strategic blended eLearning and the IT-integration can offer.

The speech/workshop will highlight some of these effects looking at promising examples and methods and discuss the need of the creation of a new learning model. Furthermore the speech/workshop will argue, how this change can influence the requirements to all actors inside the "old" and "new" learning model.

Keywords:

State of the Art of Strategic Blended Learning, Experience Based Learning, Learning-Generations

1. Background

In today's fast moving society working environments get more and more complex and request highly skilled people being motivated and willing to adapt their competencies to the requirements of the market. One of the risks within these evolving industry is that there is an increasing demand for special competencies, which may not be satisfied due to a lack of adaptive learning programs.

But why and how to prevent these skills Gaps?

1.1. Why detect Skills Gaps?

This is a delicate question, because the answer is based on assumptions, but the arguments are quite convincing. People who don't have all the information and knowledge to fulfil a task will certainly have difficulties in reaching the demanded result. This might have an important impact on the success of a company and should therefore not be neglected.

The detection of skill gaps is directly linked with the identification for training needs, which would be beneficial for the interests of the company as well as the employee. For the company the identification of skill gaps will help assure quality and competitiveness in the market. The possibility to increase personal competencies and skills will contribute to a higher motivation and therefore better working result. This shows that the identification of skill gaps may be crucial for the success and progress of a company.

1.2. How to prevent skill gaps?

Forms of skill gaps

The identification and analysis of skill gaps needs to distinguish two types of skill gaps.

Career development: Companies which don't foresee a long-term career planning in order to guarantee that the evolution of competencies follows the needs of the market.

Complex job profiles: Knowing that job descriptions get more and more complex it is evident that the ideal candidate is difficult to find, but a person which almost corresponds to the

profile will be selected and training be necessary to fill the gaps.

Skills support

In order to guarantee an effective skills support pre- and post assessments for customising the trainings depending on the needs, (pre-) knowledge and abilities of the learners are necessary.

Based on the result of a pre-assessment the instructor or training department can propose the users an individual training embedded in a training plan, which includes future training opportunities adapted to the individual needs of each employee.

In order to make the skills support even more powerful it should be directly linked to the HR department, which has an overview on how people evolve and also may influence the decisions taken by the training department. This co-operation could guarantee the support of the career- and training plan of each employee. The company would be strengthened due to an efficient manpower planning and the people highly motivated due to the perspectives offered by the various training possibilities and career opportunities.

1.3. How to detect Skill Gaps and react accordingly?

The following graphic illustrates how to determine skill gaps, who are the parties involved and how to come up with a solution.
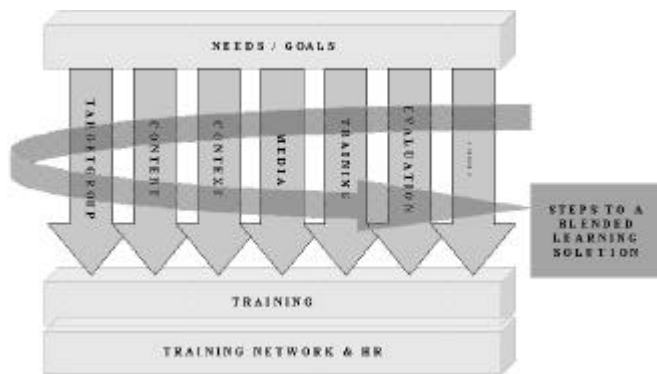

Figure 1: Steps to a Blended Learning Solution

In resume it can be said a Blended Learning solution will be the outcome of a training need analysis, which means a solution combining all aspects of training in a global learning solution.

2. What is Blended Learning?

A Blended Learning solution takes into account that individuals have changing training needs. In some regards it might be extremely useful to have a personal tutor, whereas in

others an individual repetition might be adapted. The following graphic illustrated how to combine different aspects of training.
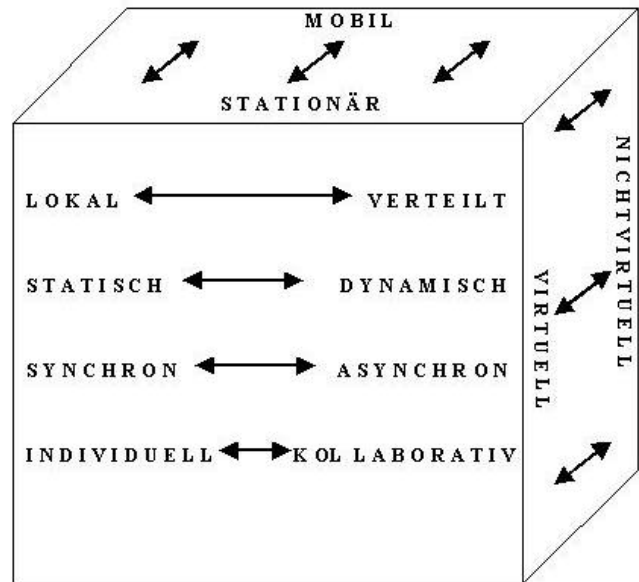

Figure 2: Blended-Learning-Model
(Technology-System-Level)

2.1. How to detect which training is adapted?

The specific learning needs depend on various factors such as:

➢ Training content

➢ degree of difficulty.

The following graphic shows how distance/eLearning can be effectively combined with tutor sessions.
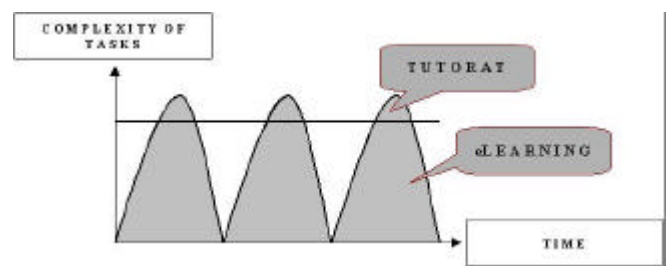

Figure 3: Tutoring and/or eLearning

As mentioned above the content type also has an impact on the training structure and methodology. In this context the following graphic illustrates that the more complex content needs tutor support, whereas a simple repetition might be done individually without trainer support.
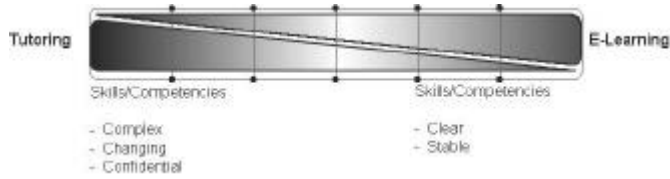
Figure 4: Combination Tutoring/eLearning

Furthermore a decision about the adapted support needs to be taken.

The following graphic illustrates partially which questions have to be considered in order to determine the suiting media support.

Figure 5: Which media might best do what?

3. What are the future trends?

Whereas in the early beginning "Skinnerian" behaviourist feedback and reinforcement schedules were predominant, today's learning environments are determined by a constructivist approach, where the learner takes an active role in order to allow him to solve problems and think in a creative way. Of course there are multiple paths for learning from incidental to intentional events, from information access to performance support, from training and instruction to education and professional development and beyond. Instructional/Educational designers are increasingly called upon to build learning systems that employ a wide range of theoretical constructs to correlate learner attributes, learning preferences, contextual variables, content resources, desired learning performances outcomes, desired time-to-learning/performance and other relevant variables. The actual trends have a considerable influence on companies and organisations offering eTraining.

Some trends in the matters of eLearning:

1. The first trend deals with issues of technology infrastructure. The ubiquitous availability, scalability and interoperability of information technologies make e-Learning a viable alternative for even small, geographically remote organizations.

2. Second, increasingly complex, competitive workplaces need information for workforce performance improvement. This leads to an increased demand for better management of an organisation's intellectual assets. Its knowledge history, shared experiences, discoveries, record of successes and failures, innovations and when or where these resources are needed most.

3. A third trend in eLearning concerns knowledge. management focuses on the accessibility and reusability of organizations intellectual assets and its core competencies. Competency based eLearning solutions employ competency models as the pattern template for compiling and assembling learning objects in meaningful relevant ways.

4. The fourth trend concerns learning architecture and learning object standards in order to ensure the interoperability of Learning management systems and settings. As these trends converge, knowledge commerce emerges. This term describes a specialised subset of the internet economy where knowledge is achieved through the judicious assembly and use of learning objects

4. In resume the learning society needs

➢ To preserve competencies and keep them as an asset subject for continuous evolution and improvement.

➢ To respect learning generations, transfer knowledge from one generation to another and integrate different point of views in order to boost a society's knowledge and competencies.

➢ To create various learning spaces allowing creative and progressive interaction, which encourage and motivate the potential of the future: "THE LEARNER"

5. Resume: Creating a new learning model

Based on the context mentioned before, the creation of a new learning model seems to be a must to guarantee that the future needs of the knowledge society can be fulfilled in the right way. The new learning model should integrate all mentioned aspects in the right way: taking the "learned lessons" from eLearning in the past and combine them with the trends in the future.

The presentation from Avallain will show how this can be realised - demonstrating best case examples and an actual project from Macmillan Publishing (UK).

Acknowledgements

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