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Rapid eLearning : its impact on instructional design in the corporate world

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Abstract
Rapid eLearning is a present and growing phenomenon in the world of corporate training that is challenging traditional instructional design ideas. The concept of Rapid eLearning represents a class of easy-to-use eLearning development tools, methods designed to shorten course development timelines, and techniques intended to enhance learner understanding and retention. Companies are adopting Rapid eLearning as a way to reduce costs and shorten the time it takes to disseminate new information and concepts to employees in geographically diverse locations. New software tools and instructional design methods are being developed to address the goals of Rapid eLearning.

To gain a broad perspective of the issues, articles and other materials published in both educational journals and business sources, as well as presentations made at educational and corporate training conferences were reviewed. This literature review supports the finding that Rapid eLearning is a growing influence within the field of Instructional Design, impacting all aspects of corporate training, and that while much is being written about this relatively new phenomenon, sound research is still lacking to validate its effectiveness.

RAPID ELEARNING:
ITS IMPACT ON INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN
IN THE CORPORATE WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Rapid eLearning is a present and growing phenomenon in the world of corporate training that is challenging traditional instructional design ideas. The concept of Rapid eLearning represents a class of easy-to-use eLearning development tools, methods designed to shorten course development timelines, and techniques intended to enhance learner understanding and retention. Companies are adopting Rapid eLearning as a way to reduce costs and shorten the time it takes to disseminate new information and concepts to employees in geographically diverse locations. New software tools and instructional design methods are being developed to address the goals of Rapid eLearning. To gain a broad perspective of the issues, articles and other materials published in both educational journals and business sources, as well as presentations made at educational and corporate training conferences were reviewed. This literature review supports the finding that Rapid eLearning is a growing influence within the field of Instructional Design, impacting all aspects of corporate training, and that while much is being written about this relatively new phenomenon, sound research is still lacking to validate its effectiveness.

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INTRODUCTION

There once was a time when a person could learn a single trade and work at that trade for a lifetime with little need for change or improvement. That is no longer the case. In today's market place, most people will not only work multiple jobs, but many will also change careers more than once during their lifetimes - necessitating a significant change in knowledge and skill sets. Even workers who stay with the same job for years at a time find that it is necessary to continually upgrade their abilities in order to stay current with the demands of the market place. As technology changes, so do the expectations the employers place upon skilled workers. As a result of this changing environment, the use of Rapid eLearning (ReL) tools and techniques has become a growing trend in the corporate world today (Schoenfeld & Berge, 2005, p. 29).

In order to stay competitive, most businesses have found it necessary to make ongoing training available to their employees. As the pace of change accelerates, so does the need to develop faster and more effective learning solutions. Training departments no longer have the luxury of taking several months to develop new courses. In response to this need, a greater number of businesses are turning to Rapid eLearning. According to Bersin and Associates, as reported by Unneberg (2007), "Rapid eLearning…is expected to reach 50 percent of all eLearning produced by 2008" (p. 4).

New training technologies and methods are being introduced every day. These new technologies make it possible for anyone with basic computer skills to produce the kind of graphic-rich materials that used to require highly-trained graphic designers and programmers. Much is currently being written about the different tools and methods being introduced. Many different ideas exist about the role of the instructional designer (Archibald, 2005).

Some writers think that they are no longer necessary while others believe they are more critical than ever (Tozman, 2007, p. 1). To remain relevant, instructional designers need to evaluate how they can be most effective and productive at developing training that will meet the needs of today's corporate worker.

This literature review will explore the different ideas about eLearning in the corporate world as well as the different tools and methods being used. The review will explore the current expectations placed on instructional designers and how Rapid eLearning impacts the different stakeholders in the corporate training world. A search of educational journals, according to Macpherson, Elliott, Harris, & Homan (2004), reveals "how little the literature examines implications and directions of e-learning in the corporate environment" (p. 4). This lack of attention by academia is significant as it "means that a reasoned debate is lacking, particularly in the areas of quality of content, problems with the technology, learner support and evaluation" (p. 6). This paper will review articles and other materials published in both educational journals and business sources, as well as presentations made at educational and corporate training conferences in an effort to bring together both sides of this important discussion.

Research Questions

In doing research for this paper, the following questions were addressed. What is Rapid eLearning? What are the tools and methods used for Rapid eLearning? What is the impact of Rapid eLearning on corporate managers, instructional designers, and learners? How is instructional design impacting and being impacted by Rapid eLearning? What is the future of eLearning in the corporate world?

METHODOLOGY

Sources

A number of resources were used for this literature review. Online databases were searched using the University of Northern Iowa Rod Library website. These databases included: Education Full Text (Wilson), ERIC (EBSCO), ERIC (U.S. Dept. of Education), ABI/INFORM Global (ProQuest), Business and Company Resource Center with Investext Plus (Thomson Gale), Business Index ASAP (Thomson Gale), and Business Source Elite (EBSCO). Several searches were also done using Google Scholar. The websites of several professional organizations were accessed as well. These organizations included The E-Learning Guild, AECT (Association for Educational Communications and Technology), and ASTD (American Society for Training & Development). Descriptors that were used in these searches included: instructional design, e-learning, rapid e-learning, corporate training, business training, and rapid development. Searches were also conducted that related to specific eLearning tools including PowerPoint®, Articulate®, Captivate®, Lectora®, Raptivity®, Flashform®, and Second Life®. Resources were also used from the author's work place and personal library.

Criteria

In analyzing sources for this paper, the following criteria was used. Sources were first rated according to relevance to the chosen topic. Priority was given to materials with a recent publication date and information that was found in multiple sources. Peer-reviewed articles and materials presented at professional conferences were given preference. While not all references were taken from academic sources and peer-reviewed journals, only authors who are recognized as authorities in their field were chosen. Authors were considered

authoritative if they met one or more of the following standards: published multiple times in peer-reviewed journals, an instructor in the field of education or technology working at a recognized university or college, a featured speaker or presenter at an internationally recognized corporate training conference, or a professional in the field of instructional design who has been recognized as an authority by a professional training related organization.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

eLearning in the Corporate World

The business world has moved from a national to a global focus. Information technologies have made it possible to collaborate and compete across geographic and political boundaries. "Workplaces are being transformed by rapid changes in technology and increasing global competition" (Margaryan & Collis, 2004, p. 1).

> In this context businesses have to adapt to new requirements and customer concerns more quickly as well as new work relations and organizational forms have to be developed. The basis for new competitive strategies is the ability of enterprises to identify key skills particularly for their business and to encourage their development for all employees. (Hamburg & Lindecke, 2005, p. 79)

As a result of these increasing pressures both internally and externally, "Companies are opting for eLearning over more traditional learning" (Britt, 2004, p. 36). Hsiao, Kuo, and Chu (2006) report that eLearning "is gaining in importance as educational institutions and enterprises continue to allocate significant amounts of resources to IT (information technology)-enabled learning environments" (p. 150).

eLearning solutions have become very attractive to business "due to the increasing mobility of the workforce, the need to save on training costs, greater acceptance of Web-based training, and better interoperability of systems" (Britt, 2004, p. 36). "The cost advantages center on reduced training time, the costs saved in travel and time away from the job and the ability of e-Learning to serve large numbers at one time, or over time, with relatively little additional cost" (Macpherson, et al., 2004, p. 5). Cost will continue to be a key consideration in future training decisions.

eLearning has been responsible "for helping many companies increase the reach of training at a reduced cost" (Gustafson, 2006, p. 7). Insight, a global IT services provider is a good example; "after taking over a major competitor, dramatic revision of the e-training infrastructure has become a cornerstone in the company's consolidation drive" (Unneberg, 2007, p. 4). The continuous advancement of technology "has created many new opportunities and changed the landscape on how workers are trained" (Schoenfeld & Berge, 2005, p. 29). Learners can access training when it is convenient for them and go back to it as often as is necessary to master a topic. "The delivery of business skills by using e-Learning has many advantages" when compared "with conventional training delivery techniques" (Hamburg & Lindecke, 2005, p. 80).

As new technologies are developed, the need for training can reach well beyond the employees of the company. "eLearning developments are often designed not only for company use, but also for use of business partners" (Britt, 2004, p. 38).

> This [eLearning] offers great advantages to a geographically dispersed workforce, those working non-standard hours and those employees who work from a home base. It also enables learning to be offered easily to those beyond the formal boundaries of the organization at relatively low cost; this would include customers, suppliers and contractors. (Macpherson, et al., 2004, p. 6)

In this situation, the training department can function as part of the customer service department. This enables companies to provide a useful service to customers as well as keep their employees current on the latest product knowledge and technologies by repurposing many of the same learning materials.

The literature states that companies that can provide effective eLearning have a significant advantage. "The competitive strength of companies and even countries is now tied not to physical resources but to the knowledge and skills of people" (Forman, 2004, p. 16). The internet has made it possible to provide training opportunities when and where they are needed in a much more cost effective way. Tozman (2007) has suggested that "online learning's success is due in part to accessibility" (p. 6).

Whatever the cause, "web-based training/instruction is currently growing exponentially in all areas of adult education" (Williams, 2002, p. 132). "Nearly 80% of all companies and nearly 90% of organizations with 10,000 or more employees are either currently creating eLearning objects internally or are planning to do so" (Britt, 2004, p. 37). Macpherson, et al. (2004) reported that "the scope of e-learning is continuing to grow in all of the companies, with a concomitant reduction in the amount of training delivered by more traditional means." (p. 14). While most leaders in the field of training believe face-to-face training will never be completely replaced, current indicators suggest that eLearning "will continue to grow as an educational medium and it has the potential to supplement or replace a wide range of instructor-led training programs" (Williams, 2002, p. 133). While business pressures continue to drive the adoption of eLearning, they are also bringing changes in the way eLearning is done.

Why Rapid eLearning?

Rapid eLearning builds on the strengths of traditional eLearning by working to further reduce cost and development time while increasing accessibility. As the world moves further into the 21st century, "many new challenges for enterprises and employees arise as well as for society as a whole. Markets globalize, new information and communication

technologies speed up trade flows, and customer requirements become more complex and individualized" (Hamburg & Lendecke, 2005, p. 79). The need to stay competitive in the global market place has impacted all aspects of how companies do business, including how they train their employees. "Many training departments are struggling to adapt to today's demanding business environment, while at the same time integrate new technology-based delivery methods into their organizations" (Schoenfeld & Berge, 2005, p. 29). According to Bersin (as cited in Fritz, 2006, p. 1), "In the past, in order to build an online course, you pretty much had to know HTML, you had to know Flash, be a good graphics editor, and be an instructional designer." Using traditional tools and methods, a course could "take anywhere from three to 12 or more weeks and cost $5,000 to $30,000 or more to develop" (Boehle, 2005, p. 1). Archibald (2005) puts the cost even higher at "between US$10,000 and $50,000 per hour of e-learning" (p. 1). The introduction of Rapid eLearning tools has changed that dramatically.

> In a study of Fortune 500 companies conducted by Larstan Business Reports, 85 percent said they planned to expand the role of e-learning. More important, over 80 percent of respondents said that rapid e-learning strategies would make a significant contribution to the training initiatives in their companies. (Archibald, 2005, p. 1)

According to Hart (2007), there are "three factors that are driving the growth of Rapid eLearning in the corporate setting: cost, speed, and ease of use" (p. 1). In today's highly competitive international economy, companies are forced to control expenses in all aspects of their business. In business, time equals money. Like all departments within a corporation, training departments are being pushed to deliver "more (content) in a shorter time. Speed has shifted the dynamic" (Laff, 2007, p. 45). "With rapid e-learning, organizations can reduce the

time spent on course development and can place new capabilities to develop and deliver content into the hands of those who hold the knowledge within a company" (Gustafson, 2006, p. 7). More intuitive software, a greater use of subject matter experts, and less time spent building the technical side of courses, all add up to shorter development times at much lower costs. "The corporate sector and now, finally, small and medium-sized enterprises are realizing that they can actually spend more time getting content right, than getting content working" (Ward, 2007, p. 1).

Rapid eLearning has allowed organizations to expand both the scope and number of training options that they offer. "Besides the demand for quick training on everyday business applications" organizations are turning to "rapid learning to address sales training…and compliance training" (Laff, 2007, 45). In a recent online learning conference, Finn (2008) discussed how the use of Rapid eLearning "saves organizations money while allowing a workforce and extended partner and customer base to obtain high quality, just-in-time learning and information." She also pointed out how it gives corporations the "ability to reach geographically dispersed employees, customers, prospects, and partners" while "dramatically reducing training-related travel costs" and "improving the work-life balance for workers and learners" (p. 1). Many "organizations are banking on rapid learning methods as a way to accelerate implementation of new business services " (Laff, 2007, p. 45). The perceived strengths of Rapid eLearning continue to attract the attention of business leaders and training managers as they seek to improve the competitive position of their companies.

Defining Rapid eLearning

Rapid eLearning (ReL) tools and practices build on the acceptance of traditional eLearning within the corporate world. "It's pretty universally accepted that e-learning can

produce a consistency of learning and development approach which large organizations want and have found elusive using other methods" (Hoyle, 2007, p. 1). Definitions for eLearning range from the broader definition used by Learning Circuits (2007) to the more narrow definition given by Piskurich (2006).

> eLearning (electronic learning): Term covering a wide set of applications and processes, such as Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration. It includes the delivery of content via internet, intranet/extranet (LAN/WAN), audio- and videotape, satellite broadcast, interactive TV, CD-ROM, and more. (Learning Circuits, 2007, p. 1)

Piskurich (2006) gives an even simpler definition when he says that eLearning is "delivering training using the Internet or a company's intranet" (p. 305). For this literature review, the definition of eLearning will be viewed as a computer-based training process that encompasses a variety of delivery formats and can involve synchronous events, asynchronous courses, or a blending of the two.

Rapid eLearning is a form of eLearning. Rapid eLearning seeks to do what traditional eLearning does, only better, faster, and cheaper. According to Archibald (2005), "The definition of rapid e-learning differs among experts, but generally it's considered to be e-learning that can be developed quickly and inexpensively" (p. 1). Like many terms in use today, the definition of Rapid eLearning seems to be continually evolving. The meaning of the term is often found in the context in which it is used. Generally speaking, Rapid eLearning is used in reference to the tools, methods of design, and methods of delivery being used to deliver training in the shortest time period, at the lowest cost, and to the widest audience currently possible. A definition given at a recent eLearning Guild Online

Symposium states that "Rapid eLearning includes processes which allow building instructional content in days or weeks, rather than the long period of time it normally takes to build instruction according to more traditional instructional design methods" (Shank, 2006, p. 1). Shank went on to explain that "Rapid eLearning is an alternative to the lengthy and expensive design and development process commonly used for building online instructional materials" (p.1).

When mentioning Rapid eLearning, most speakers and authors are referencing the tools currently being used for rapid development. According to Hart (2007), "Rapid eLearning…generally refers to the use of a new breed of authoring tools to create formal instructional online training resources" (p. 1). Other authors use the term to mean the methods used to speed up instructional development or processes designed to help learners master information more quickly. Rapid eLearning can mean many different things, depending on the training need.

Recognizing the diversity of opinion concerning what constitutes Rapid eLeaning, Brandon (2005) asks the following question:

> Does the term refer to A) fast, and perhaps cheap, development of e-Learning applications, or B) methods that increase the speed at which people learn, or C) technologies that speed up the connection between SMEs and learners, or D) services that enable organizations to add e-Learning offerings to their online? (p. 1)

He goes on to say, "Using the term 'rapid e-Learning ' too loosely simply adds to confusion and tends to reduce the term (and the notion of e-Learning itself) to the level of noise" (p. 2). Based on this potential confusion, The eLearning Guild has suggested that a qualifier always be used to help clarify what is meant, suggestions include: "rapid e-Learning development,"

"rapid e-Learning delivery," "rapid e-Learning deployment," "rapid e-Learning outsourcing," or "rapid e-Learning uptake" (p. 2). The wide use of the term Rapid eLearning reflects that fact that there are many different stakeholders who see a benefit to increasing the speed at which eLearning is developed and accessed.

> e-Learning professionals may understand 'rapid' to mean that there has been some advancement that will facilitate their work or serve their clients more efficiently. Decision makers may see 'rapid' as an extension of whatever promise they understand to be inherent in the brand 'e-Learning.' Learners may rejoice in the vision of 'caffeinated courses' that can be completed in practically no time at all. (Brandon, 2005, p.1)

Whatever the form of Rapid eLearning, it has opened the door for much wider participation in the development of eLearning materials. T. Kuhlmann, author of the Rapid eLearning Blog and Vice President of Community for the Articulate Corporation (personal communication December 07, 2007) says that "Rapid eLearning has democratized the eLearning process. A few years ago, you would have to get web programmers to build the web page for your course." The advent of Rapid eLearning tools and methods has made it possible for anyone to be involved in developing and delivering eLearning materials.

Rapid eLearning Tools

There are many different Rapid eLearning tools available on the market and more are being released each year. "These tools facilitate the task of turning separate multimedia blocks such as audio, video, text, and animation components, into an interactive piece of instruction, and at the same time they liberate designers from their dependency on computer programmers" (Cancelo, 2006, p. 6). Rapid eLearning "tools provide a low cost way to get

the same things you would find in a high cost course" (Kuhlmann, personal communication, December 07, 2007).

According to "The eLearning Guild Research 360 Report Authoring and Development Tools, Rapid e-Learning Tools" (Wexler, Schlenker, Bruce, Clothier, Miller, & Nguyen, 2008 p. 1) rapid eLearning tools are defined as:

> ...tools that allow anyone – whether a subject matter expert or an e-Learning guru steeped in instructional design – to create e-Learning content quickly. While, in the past, ReL tools strictly targeted the SME who needed to convert PowerPoint into Flash, today's ReL tools are capable of doing much more. (p. 13)

These tools range from programs for developing basic content, to Flash development and conversions programs, to presentation programs. They also include webhosting software and programs that attempt to do it all. Rapid eLearning tools " leverage common business tools and automate applications to accelerate and simplify the development process. This also means that editing and updating content can be done quickly and painlessly" (Archibald, 2005, p. 1). The primary focus of Rapid eLearning tools is to speed up and simplify the course development process. These "tools give the instructional designer more time to think through their design, because they don't have to spend so much time building web pages" (Kuhlmann, personal communication, December 07, 2007). This allows the developer to build more quality into the design without spending more time.

Time is a key factor in the development of eLearning. "Traditional courseware development timelines are measured in terms of months whereas ReL timelines are measured in terms of days and weeks." (Archibald, 2005, p. 1). When they were first introduced, Rapid eLearning tools were limited to basic PowerPoint to Flash conversion tools, but now

Kuhlman (2007) says they "can do most of the things that are done in [traditional] eLearning, with much less time and effort" (personal communication, December 07, 2007). As a result Rapid eLearning tools are replacing many programs that require a high level of technical proficiency to operate.

While some programs try to do it all, most Rapid eLearning tools are "designed to address one mode or method of developing e-Learning, such as screen recorders for teaching how to use a software tool, PowerPoint-to-Flash conversion for informational or conceptual content, or question tools for quizzing or testing" (Wexler, et al., 2008, p. 160). Most eLearning developers have multiple tools in their arsenal. "The eLearning Guild's 360 Report on Rapid eLearning Tools" (Pulichino, 2006, p.1) states that "76% of Guild members use more than one Rapid e-Learning Development tool, and 38.9% use four or more" (p. 7). Having a range of options to choose from allows developers to create more interesting and interactive courses.

PowerPoint

One of the most widely used tools for content development is Microsoft PowerPoint. There are many in the fields of education and business who believe that PowerPoint has become an obsolete tool. "PowerPoint users typically only use a very small subset of the capabilities of the tool" (Wexler, et al., 2008, p. 154). This means that most presentations are very dry and lifeless. Yet, according to Fritz (2006), "in the Rapid eLearning market, PowerPoint is king. Countless solutions employ PowerPoint as their central content authoring tool, and even those that don't at least offer the ability to import and incorporate PowerPoint slides" (p. 1). In discussing the various Rapid eLearning tools, Kuhlmann (personal communication, December 07, 2007) says, "don't discount PowerPoint. There are a lot of

bad PowerPoint's out there, but the reality is it's a common tool. Why not leverage the fact that everybody knows how to use it?" PowerPoint, when used correctly, "can help create rich, compelling, and instructionally sound e-Learning content" (Wexler, et al., 2008,, p. 152). Most authors reviewed seemed to agree with this assessment.

It's simple to use, therefore, most people who have to make presentations in front of a group use PowerPoint. This widespread familiarity with and use of PowerPoint makes it an excellent Rapid eLearning tool for two reasons. Because presenters already know the program, "subject matter experts can build content in the PowerPoint and the instructional designer can repurpose it without having to start from scratch" (Kuhlmann, personal communication, December 07, 2007). Secondly, much of the content needed for the development of eLearning can be found in existing PowerPoint presentations. Using this existing material can save the instructional designer time and frustration.

Another reason that PowerPoint is so popular with eLearning developers is that "many Rapid eLearning tools use PowerPoint for developing the learning content, before converting it to Flash or other formats" (Wexler, et al., 2008, p. 143). While PowerPoint is used by many as the main content development tool, it is not the only program that is regularly used to author courseware. Adobe Captivate, a Flash tool, actually outranked PowerPoint in a survey of instructional designers as the most used development tool according to The eLearning Guild Research 360 Report, Authoring and Development Tools (Wexler, et al., 2008, p. 35). Other tools regularly used for content development include: Microsoft Word, Adobe Acrobat Connect, Articulate Presenter, Lectora, and Articulate Engage (p. 35).

Flash Tools

Most Rapid eLearning tools, including Captivate, enable the development of learning content and objects in Flash. "By publishing out to Flash, the courseware is presented to the learner in a user-friendly medium that is available on 98 percent of all browsers" (Archibald, 2005, p. 2). These Flash-based tools allow the developer to create animations, simulations, and SCORM (Sharable Content Object Reference Model) compliant tests all without the need to know HTML, Flash, or a programming language. "SCORM provides for answers to quizzes and other feedback from the learner to be manipulated by LMSs and reported back to the lecturer in easy-to-read summary and graphic form" (Carrington & Green, 2007 p. 2). The Flash movies can be loaded directly into PowerPoint. The enhanced PowerPoint presentations are then converted to interactive Flash movies which can be hosted on a server, on the internet, on a Learning Management System (LMS), or distributed on CDs. The use of Flash products gives instructional designers "a powerful means for shifting of content broadcasting out of the face-to-face teaching session, and a quick and efficient way of creating, delivering and managing material" (Carrington & Green, 2007 , p.2).

Captivate has become one of the most widely used course development tools because it "provides a simple way of creating Flash content with interactions, quizzing, video, animated text, zoom features, etc" (Wexler, et al., 2008, p. 158). It captures all or a predefined region of the screen while automatically generating "annotated explanations…without user intervention" (Ganesan, 2008, p. 72). Captivate offers several other features "that are particularly useful for the development of software training modules. One is the ability to introduce interactive learning" (p. 74). "Being able to simulate the

functionality of a software package and the ability to incorporate quizzes" (p. 74) allows the learner to practice what they are learning while taking the course.

Several Flash tools support PowerPoint conversion. Two of the most popular, Articulate Presenter and Adobe Presenter (formerly Breeze), "are easy to use and easy to learn how to use; they are affordable to purchase; and they make it easy to update content" (Boehle, 2005, p. 1). These tools permit the developer to start with a PowerPoint presentation and attach Flash movies, audio (which can be synchronized with PowerPoint animations), games, web objects, and quizzes. The PowerPoint presentation, with all of its attachments can then be published. This will "create an xlm based infrastructure with a menu and user navigation" (Kuhlmann, personal communication, December 07, 2007) which is SCORM compliant and can be uploaded to a server, a website or an LMS.

In a recent survey of instructional designers, Articulate eLearning tools were considered to be the easiest to use of all the different tools available (Wexler, et al., 2008, p. 159). The Articulate Rapid eLearning Studio includes Presenter, Quizmaker, and Engage. As already noted, Presenter is a PowerPoint to Flash conversion program. Engage is a tool for developing Flash-based interactive learning objects. Quizmaker can be used to develop various evaluations and surveys which can be published to Flash. (www.articulate.com).

All-In-One Tools

Several Rapid eLearning programs are designed to be all-in-one solutions. These tools tend to be more expensive costing up to $2,000 or more for a single user license (www.btsoftware.com).

Traditional development methods involve using subject matter experts (SMEs) to pass on information to the instructional designer who, in turn, designs the solution. A

> developer then builds the interactive solution based on this design, and the quality assurance team tests the solution against the design and test plan. (Archibald, 2005, p. 1)

The all-in-one Rapid eLearning tools are designed to place all of the various functions of designing and developing an eLearning course in the hands of a single developer. According to Wexler, et al. (2008) three of the most popular all-in-one tools are Lectora, Raptivity, and Flashform.

Lectora, "one of the more powerful content creation tools" (Godwin-Jones, 2003, p. 18), is the most widely used of the all-in-one tools (Wexler, et al., 2008, p. 35) It "is an easy-to-use multimedia-authoring tool that has a very low learning curve and features simple drag and drop features that enable the non-programmer to easily build interactive multimedia content" (Pina & Harris, 2006, p.1). By using this software, instructors can "create and deliver interactive multimedia (text, animation, video, and audio) lectures without any knowledge of programming" (Pace & Kelley, 2006, p. 1). Lectora is also SCORM complaint which allows the learner's progress to be tracked. "Performance on quizzes is automatically linked into the LMS gradebook"(Godwin-Jones, 2003, p. 18). It also provides interactivity using "advanced interface options such as show and hide functionality, mouseovers, or object visibility, can all be added without any need for programming knowledge" (p. 18). Because this software is easy to use, yet has a sophisticated toolset, Lectora has become a popular tool of instructional designers in both corporate and educational settings.

Another popular all-in-one tool is Raptivity. Like Lectora, Raptivity combines many of the functions of Rapid eLearning tools into a single package. One of the primary strengths of Rapitivity is that it comes with a "library of pre-built interactions" (www.btsoftware.com,

p. 1) which help the instructional designer to take technical content and transform it into "a highly interactive and effective course" (www.mastergadgets.com, p. 1).

Flashform is developed and marketed by a company called Rapid Intake. "It consists of customizable forms and templates that are interpreted and displayed by a Flash player" (Watts, 2007, p.3). According to Watts, "Flashform is easy to use and facilitates rapid content development" (p.3). Not everyone agrees with this assessment. On his blog, Hegenbart (2007) states that "Flashform is a very simple tool that suffers from poor interface design and usability issues" (p. 1). Despite what the critics say, Wexler et al. (2008) confirms that Flashform is one of the most popular all-in-one Rapid eLearning tools on the market (p. 14)

Most discussions of Rapid eLearning focus on the tools. "There is also a proliferation of tools that allow training professional to create training--or a reasonable facsimile--at a moment's notice" (Dolezalek, 2006, p. 27). These tools have become widely available and simple enough that anybody can use them. This ease of use carries with it the danger of misuse. "It's important to keep in mind that the tools and technology used in e-learning need to be appropriate to the instructional objectives of the courseware" (Archibald, 2005, p. 2). Rapid eLearning would not exist without Rapid eLearning tools, but by themselves, these programs are just tools. As Hart (2007) emphasizes, "users will still need instructional design skills if what they are to produce is to be instructionally sound" (p. 6). This observation doesn't change the fact that the ongoing development of new and better Rapid eLearning tools is altering the whole concept of training within the corporate world.

The Impact of Rapid eLearning

The proponents of Rapid eLearning tools and processes are continually searching for ways to implement eLearning strategies more effectively. As a result, Rapid eLearning brings many advantages to the corporate training environment. The advantages can be seen from several different perspectives. One of the reasons it is difficult to define Rapid eLearning is that there are many different ideas on what it is, depending on the role and experiences of the person discussing it.

Business Perspective

The business perspective has been partially addressed in an earlier section of this review. Business leaders have adopted Rapid eLearning because they "see 'rapid' as an extension of whatever promise they understand to be inherent in the brand 'eLearning'" (Brandon, 2005, p.1). To remain competitive, businesses have to continually train their employees in the use of new methods and technologies while keeping costs at a minimum. eLearning appears to address both issues. "eLearning allows the designer to recreate opportunities that don't cost anything from a material perspective. The learner can practice the skill in a virtual environment" (Kuhlmann, personal communication, December 07, 2007). This lower cost option makes eLearning very attractive to business leaders.

The business perspective requires looking at eLearning in a very practical way. Technology is constantly changing and employees need to be brought up to speed very quickly. Corporate trainers are expected to produce results. "Learning for workplace performance and competence calls for outcomes that demonstrate direct relevance to the business needs, and involve solving complex workplace problems" (Margaryan & Collins,

2004, p. 1). Technologies are being developed and implemented at such a rapid pace that it is critical for corporate workers to get ongoing training produced as quickly and efficiently as possible. Rapid eLearning can provide an "organization with a competitive advantage by having knowledgeable, trained professionals and improved productivity of staff" (Finn, 2008, p. 1). As long as it can be demonstrated that eLearning methods are producing results while reducing costs, the business community will continue to gravitate in that direction.

Learners

Few people have the time or motivation to enroll in traditional education, yet, continuous learning is a necessity for employees who want to keep their skills and knowledge competitive. One of the responsibilities of the instructional designer is to develop instructional materials with the learner in mind. "Today's learner has a different mind and a different disposition, and is a completely different learner than in the past" (Tozman, 2007, p. 1). Pressures on and off the job make it difficult for people to devote the amount of time and energy that traditional instructional settings require. Rapid eLearning offers much to address the "new demographic differences of adult learners" and the challenges these learners create for "traditional education and training programs" (Williams, 2002, p. 132) by providing faster and simpler options.

From the perspective of the learner, Rapid eLearning represents the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills in the shortest, easiest way possible. "Learners may rejoice in the vision of 'caffeinated courses' that can be completed in practically no time at all" (Brandon, 2005, p. 1). The work place is constantly changing and demanding more of workers. Easy access to eLearning through company intranets and through the internet has created the belief that training can and should be available to everyone. "The warp speed development of new

technologies will continually raise the expectations of end users" (Laff, 2007, p. 47). As a result, the demand for a greater availability of eLearning courses will continue to grow.

eLearning allows learners to take courses at the time and place that is most convenient to them. They can move through the course as quickly or slowly as they need to. "Flexibility in the pace of learning is represented largely as an advantage to the learner in that they can learn at a time and pace to suit their own capability and life circumstances, and enable their continued marketability through lifelong learning" (Macpherson, et al., p. 6). Rapid eLearning offers flexibility in more than just the pace of learning; it allows the learner to decide what they will learn. "Adult learners customize instruction to meet their needs, based on their prior experiences, their current responsibilities, and their expectations of future responsibilities" (Dobrovolny, 2006, p. 166). This learner involvement is an important part of the overall process. "It is the activity of the learners that most directly determines learning" (Wilson, 2006, p. 78). According to Kuhlmann (personal communication, December 07, 2007), "learners filter out a lot of the detail, because it's not critical to getting the job done" (p. 1). Rapid eLearning allows students to take control of their own training.

Instructional Designers

Rapid eLearning can mean many things to the instructional designer, but for most it is all about a set of tools. According to Brandon (2005), "e-Learning professionals may understand 'rapid' to mean that there has been some advancement that will facilitate their work or serve their clients more efficiently" (p. 1). Rapid eLearning tools have allowed instructional designers to have more control and more ownership of the course development process.

> Traditional development methods involve using subject matter experts (SMEs) to pass on information to the instructional designer who, in turn, designs the solution. A developer then builds the interactive solution based on this design, and the quality assurance team tests the solution against the design and test plan. (Archibald, 2005, p. 1)

Using the newest tools and processes, the time spent doing development can be reduced dramatically allowing the instructional designer to focus more on design and content. "The skill that an instructional designer possesses, that writers, teachers, programmers, technical writers, and so on don't, is the ability to systematically break down content so that it is applicable to learners and their learning styles" (Tozman, 2007, p. 5). Yet, as Kuhlmann (personal communication, December 07, 2007) suggests, instructional designers may need to learn how to step back from the detail level of the design process to gain a broader perspective.

Many eLearning professionals are finding that there is a need to re-examine the whole process of instructional design in the context of Rapid eLearning. Tozman (2007) points out that "as the world changes around them, instructional designers continue to approach their jobs in the same ways that they have for decades" (p. 1). Traditional methods take a lot of time and often come into conflict with current expectations about eLearning. "Sometimes these pressures work against each other, for example, cranking out a product versus applying the latest instructional theory" (Wilson, 2006, p. 78). Instructional designers are expected to quickly produce high quality training materials with limited resources.

> When you've got courses to write, evaluations to create, subject matter experts (SMEs) to shepherd and learners to please, you don't have time to sit around and

> think about theories or perform months-long analyses of every aspect of how, when and where to train. (Dolezalek, 2006, p. 25).

This ongoing struggle between the need for speed and efficiency, and the demand for learning materials that are well designed and effective has challenged instructional designers to find new solutions. "Today's training professionals are pursuing rapid prototyping solutions, designing solutions that are aligned with business outcomes, designing using cyclical approaches, and addressing the technology demands required by today's distance training programs" (Schoenfeld & Berge, 2005, p. 30). This changing environment has encouraged experimentation that has resulted in both successes and failures.

Tozman (2007) cautions that there is a danger the instructional designer will "get caught up in the hype, and jump on the opportunity to use new tools without questioning the results we are looking for" (p. 2). He goes on to say that the role of the instructional designer "must evolve into a technology agnostic one, in which we can classify and semantically define content based on scientific principles that relate content to the audience in a meaningful way" (Tozman, 2007, p. 5). To remain relevant, instructional designers must take the lead in developing and implement new Rapid eLearning solutions that do not sacrifice the quality and effectiveness that others have come to expect of them.

Instructional Design Considerations in Rapid eLearning

eLearning has become the method of choice for much of the training that takes place in the majority of medium and large organizations. "The rise of online learning environments has driven home the need to carefully consider all aspects of the learning experience" (Wilson, 2006, p. 77). Williams (2002) points out that "the current literature on Web-based training/instruction focuses primarily on the technical elements of design and not the adult

learning principles that are necessary for effective design and adult learning" (p. 133). There is much discussion going on, but there appears to be very little research being done.

Because of both time and financial pressures, many business leaders and instructional designers alike are tempted to embrace Rapid eLearning as the solution for every situation without fully considering it's weaknesses as well as its strengths. eLearning professionals are coming to understand that while Rapid eLearning has much to offer, it is not the ideal choice for every situation. Laff (2007) points out that "faster does not always mean better. As the delivery methods of training are accelerating, the old questions about maintaining the integrity of the learning environment persist" (p. 45). Not all subjects lend themselves well to being taught using eLearning courses. According to Shank (2006):

> Rapid instructional design is more efficient for producing instruction quickly but effectiveness may be compromised (a little or a lot). As a result, rapid instructional design is best used for informational and lower-level instructional objectives and when there simply is no time for using a traditional instructional design process. It should not be the only online learning strategy you use. (p. 1)

Münzer (2003) says this type of course is good for imparting "facts and concepts" (p. 98). Rapid eLearning, which "is particularly well suited for training material that has critical development timelines, goes out of date quickly, changes frequently, or may not be substantive enough to have previously been considered for an e-learning training solution" (Archibald, 2005, p. 1). Rapid eLearning is an excellent option, but is not the best solution for every training need.

Understanding the limitations of Rapid eLearning is important if the instructional designer is going to use it to the best advantage. Boehle (2005) points out that "[rapid

development tools] are not effective for learning situations in which the goal is for trainees to acquire high-level, complex competencies or skills (think leadership, business acumen or teamwork training)" (p. 1). These subjects require more interaction with an instructor and supervised practice than an elearning setting can provide. Good audience and needs analysis is needed prior to starting the design process if effective choices are to be made about what and how to deliver the content.

Many eLearning professionals have begun to question whether it is appropriate to use traditional instructional design processes, not just because of time constraints, but also because they do not allow for the new realities of the eLearning environment.

> While companies explore and adopt the many distance-training solutions that are available, they are finding that the existing instructional design models are not adequate for today's environment. Critics believe that the old models are too slow and linear, lack usability testing early in the process and continuous review throughout, limit creativity, lack a learner focus, and don't align results to business goals. (Schoenfeld & Berge, 2005, p. 30)

Cheong, Wettasinghe, and Murphy (2006) agree, suggesting that "the traditional paradigms of learning and teaching will not be able to meet the demands of our workforce today" (p. 197). This questioning of traditional methods and theories is a result of changes in technology and in the corporate culture.

Computers, cell phones, and a host of other devices have allowed modern workers to be far more mobile, but also have placed them under pressure to adapt to changes quickly. "Many of the basic building blocks of today's learning solutions were developed more than 50 years ago, when the world was barely entering the information age" (Forman, 2004, p.

16). The technological revolution of the last half century have brought about changes that need to be considered.

> Traditional instructional systems design (ISD) models, such as the popular ADDIE model, are used for designing all types of instruction. These models evolved during WWII when the military and large corporations were faced with training large numbers of people in a short amount of time and needed a solution that would provide consistency and measurable results. (Schoenfeld & Berge, 2005, p. 30).

Punyabukkana, Sowanwanichakul, and Suchato (2006) argue that "the current eLearning development model based on the ADDIE…has many problems in managing the development process" (p. 1). Yet, these concepts have become so engrained in the educational establishment, that "instructional designers of online courses, at times, find it difficult to avoid old 'paradigms' which may no longer be effective" (Cheong, et al., p. 197). These engrained habits can become a significant hindrance to effective eLearning course design. Schoenfeld and Berge (2005) believe that "using traditional methods creates online learning that is focused on content and documentation rather than on learners and learning and their prior knowledge and experience" (p. 31). The concern is that courses become dull and do not meet the instructional objectives.

Not all experts agree that the old models are obsolete. When a "recent article in Training Magazine questioned the contemporary relevance and efficacy of Instructional Systems Design [ISD]…The article resulted in a firestorm of controversy." (Zemke & Rossett, 2002, p. 1) There are many practitioners in the field of Instructional Design who still believe there is a place for systematic design. According to Lee, Chamers, and Ely (2005), "the same sound instructional design principles that apply to traditional academic or

corporate instruction still apply" (p. 32). They go on to promote "a thorough front-end analysis, effective design of learning content and guidance, appropriate user interface design, and a careful development and evaluation process" (p. 27). Waight and Stewart (2005) agree saying "the application of 'front-end analysis' is critical and creates a benefit far outweighing the additional costs and time involved" (p. 37).

Even though there has been considerable debate over what is the most effective approach, most professionals have not abandoned the idea of using a systematic design process.

> While many training professionals feel that the traditional ISD models are no longer adequate to meet the changes in technology and demanding business environment that exists today, they still believe and respect the importance of a system and process to produce training solutions. (Schoenfeld & Berge, 2005, p. 36)

This suggests that new ISD models are needed. Cheong, et al., (2006) says "that any good instructional designers should be well versed in at least the immediate theories of learning and human development that underlie the instructional design theories that they are adopting for their design work" (p. 198). Understanding the way people learn is a critical precursor to any instructional design process. Tozman (2007) believes that the training instructional designers receive allows them to "merge a good understanding of psychology, learning theory, communication theory, and business acumen in order to be effective and valuable in their jobs" (p. 5). Instructional designers are, therefore, well positioned to continue as leaders in the field of corporate training.

Many new learning theories and design models are being developed and written about in training magazines and journals. Schoenfeld and Berge (2005) list several: "Emerging

Instructional Design Models: Rapid-Prototyping; ADDIE-M; Successive Approximation; IDM-DT; Multimedia Instructional Design" (p. 31-36). Most of the emerging models "are not radical departures from the traditional models" (p. 36). The underlying psychology that was the foundation for those models is still essentially the same. "The big change is, of course, the emergence of technology-based instruction as a viable conduit for knowledge sharing" (Tozman, 2007, p. 2). The changes in technology have, thus far, dominated the discussion surrounding eLearning in the corporate environment. Hsiao, et al. (2006) argues that "so far there has been little effort to explore the mutual influence of technology and the instructional method on the learning outcome" (p. 150). This fact has challenged modern learning theorists to come up with ideas that take into account the impact of technology on the learning process. Cheong, et al., (2006) suggests that "the adoption of Internet technologies in education and training" has made it possible for changes to take place that are allowing for the fields of training and education to be more learner-centered (p. 198).

Traditional learning theories continue to play a significant role in Instructional Design. "Of the current theories that support instructional design for Web-based training/instruction, behaviorism has historically had the greatest impact" (Williams, 2002, p. 134). Williams lists several of the "basic assumptions and characteristics of behaviorism" (p. 134) that are "embedded in many of the current instructional design practices" (p. 134). These characteristics include: working toward "observable and measurable outcomes"; the "pre-assessment of students"; an "emphasis on mastering early steps before progressing to more complex levels of performance"; the "use of reinforcement to impact performance"; and the "use of practice and application to ensure a strong stimulus-response association" (p.

135). The influence of Behaviorism can be seen in virtually all aspects of the instructional design process.

Williams (2002) continues by explaining that even though Behaviorism has had a major impact on current theories, "The trend in teaching and learning in Web-based environments tends to be constructivist, which is based, in cognitive psychology. With this model, students are viewed as active participants and processors of information" (p. 135). This is especially significant for adult students who expect to be directly involved in their own learning process. An online course "is especially suited to the hands-on learning supported by a constructivist framework. In constructivism, the mind creates a knowledge base that is very personal and individualistic" (Lee, et al, 2005, p. 29). Learners need to be able to connect what they are learning to their own life experiences. Wilson suggests that "it is the activity of the learners that most directly determines learning" (2006, p. 78). From this perspective, the instructional designer's role is to become "the bridge between the learners needs and the organization's needs" (Kuhlmann, personal communication, December 07, 2007). While the instructional designer may be working to help the company solve a problem, he or she must also focus on the needs of the learner when designing the course.

> One of the biggest challenges a designer faces when designing WBT [web-based training] courses is to keep distant learners engaged. Designers can stimulate learning by giving learners control over the learning process. This can be accomplished by allowing the learner to choose his or her own navigational paths for the information presented. (Lee, et al., 2005, p. 30)

Learners who are able to make their own choices and to "see the relevance of what they are learning with their jobs will be more likely to become engaged with e-Learning" (Waight &

Stewart, 2005, p. 337). The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) has established a set of learner focused "standards to guide the design, development and evaluation of web-based and multimedia courses" (p. 337) The very first standard includes an emphasis on developing an interface that is easy for the learner to use (p. 340). Lee, et al. states that "the user interface design should be 'transparent' to the learner, as a complicated interface forces the learner to think about the logistics of the interface and may distract their attention from learning". They go on to say "navigational cues should be easily discernable to the learner, should be clearly marked and should be consistent from screen to screen, and module to module" (2005, p. 31). Consistency makes it easier to navigate without having to constantly figure out what to do next. eLearning also "needs to be flexible so that in-house employees connecting through the corporate T-1 line, traveling salesmen using wireless modems, and employees connecting from home with a slow dial-up modem all can access the program." (Britt, 2004, p. 38). Instructional designers face a challenge to design an interface that is simple and consistent, and to make the training easily accessible to learners using a broad range of technologies.

Making the course flexible and easy to navigate is an important part of design, but keeping the course relevant to the needs of the learner is even more important. "While learning theories are critical, valuing of the adult learner in e-Learning especially in corporate settings demands more" (Waight & Stewart, 2005, p. 337). To motivate adult learners, the training needs to be "tightly connected to their work requirements. As such, rapid access to updated and relevant information and instruction is very critical to their work no matter when and where they need it" (Cheong, et al., 2006, p. 198). A well-designed course takes into consideration all aspects of the learning experience from the perspective of the learner. "An

elearning program design needs to allow a user to skim or skip content he's already familiar with and go deeper into materials when necessary" (Britt, 2004, p. 38). Courses that are available to the learners 24/7 can help meet the needs of the workers while also advancing the goals of the company.

While Rapid eLearning is gaining favor with learners, instructional designers, and corporate leaders; there are some in the field of training and education who continue to raise serious concerns about this concept. According to Bill Communications (as cited in Williams, 2002, p. 132) "The good news about online learning is that everyone is interested in it. The bad news is that most of what's out there is not worth anything." One of the criticisms leveled at Rapid eLearning is that it has become too easy to put together bad or ineffective courses. Laff (2007) states that "At its best, rapid learning can solve the problem of training a pool of employees on a procedural issue in a consistent, cost-efficient format. At its worst, rapid learning is just repackaged training manuals presented in an online format" (p. 45). Without good analysis and design, ReL can become just another boring PowerPoint converted to Flash.

The reduced development time and lower cost, makes it tempting for training departments to accept lower quality. As a result, "more and more companies are willing to sacrifice a little functionality for reduced cost, rapid development, and ease of updating content." (Wexler, et al., 2008, p. 153). The strength of Rapid eLearning tools is the ease of use. The weakness of Rapid eLearning is that many people use the tools who do not have the skills to properly design effective eLearning courses.

Another criticism of Rapid eLearning is that too much of the discussion surrounding it has focused on the development tools without enough consideration being given to the

design methods. "Although teaching and learning via the Web is growing at a steady pace, the current literature…focuses primarily on the technical elements of design and not the adult learning principles that are necessary for effective design and adult learning" (Williams, 2002, p. 133). Even as some are criticizing the lack of systematic design being applied to Rapid eLearning courses, others are suggesting that the whole concept of systematic design should be scraped. As Zemke and Rossett point out, when an author writing in Training Magazine questioned whether Instructional Design Systems were still relevant, the article created such a controversy that the editors were forced to address it in the next issue (p. 1).

Most training experts recognize that Rapid eLearning falls short of the ideal from an instructional design perspective; yet, the corporate world has continued to embrace it as the best method currently available to meet most employee development needs in a world where technology is changing daily. "Inherent to the whole Rapid eLearning movement is the attitude that it may not be perfect, but it's good enough (and costs less, happens faster, and enables many more individuals to participate as teachers and learners)" (Fritz, 2006, p. 1). This willingness to accept less than the best has allowed Rapid eLearning to become the phenomenon that it currently is, but has also prevented it from reaching its full potential.

Future Trends in Rapid eLearning

The use of Rapid eLearning tools and techniques has grown consistently since the late 1990's and most experts project that it will continue to grow in the coming years. As business finds it necessary to respond to changes more quickly, the demand for rapid training solutions will also grow. "Learning anywhere, anytime and having the flexibility of occurring just-in-time at a lesser cost than face-to-face training has been and continues to be attractive to companies" (Waight & Stewart, 2005, p. 337). After doing a study on the "pedagogy and

practice in the corporate sector," Macpherson, et al. (2004) commented that "what was particularly significant was that the trend for the future of those involved in eLearning was to move towards implementing or expanding both an eLearning and web-based learning capability" (p. 11). Companies will continue to expand the use of Rapid eLearning as technological changes continue to drive the need for faster training.

> The most compelling change is the new focus on satisfying business needs and performance-driven objectives. This change focuses on using models that can meet the aggressive time schedules demanded today, by allowing many activities to occur simultaneously and by connecting business needs with the training solutions". (Schoenfeld & Berge, 2005, p. 36)

Rapid eLearning represents the ongoing efforts of training professionals to meet the continually growing needs of business for training solutions. In the future, these efforts will continue to produce tools and methods designed to increase eLearning development speed and efficiency.

A greater variety of tools are being introduced to the market all of the time. These Rapid eLearning tools will continue to add more sophisticated tool sets, including the ability to build logic into courses that will respond to choices made by the learner (Wexler, et al., 2008). ReL tools will allow the development of "multi-channel design and delivery" (Finn, 2008, p. 1) courses which will continue to give the learner even greater choices. Mobile learning (using devices such as cell phones, mobile readers and portable gaming devices) will become common place.

The application of Rapid eLearning tools and methods will also find broader use in areas such as face-to-face classes and synchronous online learning. According to Finn (2008)

companies are discovering that rapidly developed "synchronous learning saves organizations money while allowing a workforce and extended partner and customer base to obtain high quality, just-in-time learning and information" (p. 1). Rapid eLearning is also invading virtual worlds. "By 2012, more than 70% or organizations will use intra-verses (private virtual worlds) to support internal collaboration and social interaction" (Finn, 2008, p. 1). Established virtual learning environments can provide an excellent platform for the rapid development and deployment of time-sensitive information (Donaldson & Acheson, 2006, p. 87). Finally, Rapid eLearning will help to capture critical tribal knowledge within organizations and make it available to everyone who needs it. "The key learning challenge today is enabling knowledge workers to readily share and store their knowledge so they can all easily know what each other knows when they need to know it" (Cocheu, 2006, p. 1). With tools that are simple to use, experts will be able to create training materials enabling greater collaboration between individuals, within organizations, and beyond. This knowledge sharing will be a critical component of keeping businesses competitive in the global marketplace.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rapid eLearning is a present and growing phenomenon in the world of corporate training. It "is becoming a more pervasive and disciplined practice as it struggles with and solves problems common to all e-Learning design and delivery efforts (Pulichino, 2006, p. 1). The business world is growing more competitive and more dependent on technology. As a result, effective training is becoming even more important to both large and small businesses. Computer-based learning solutions, eLearning, is playing a significant role in meeting that challenge.

Rapid eLearning, both the tools and the methods, falls considerably short of many of the standards promoted within the instructional design community. It encourages a developer to shortcut both the analysis and design phases of the development process. Most Rapid eLearning courses lack the depth and quality that one would expect from a professionally developed course. Nevertheless, Rapid eLearning is a growing reality in the corporate world. Several major conferences are held each year that are focused on Rapid eLearning. A number of software companies such as Articulate, have focused their entire business model on Rapid eLearning. Even larger software corporations like Adobe have focused significant resources on developing and promoting Rapid eLearning tools. Each year these tools comprise an increased share of the training development software being purchased and used by corporate training departments.

As Shank (2006) points out, Rapid eLearning is not the best solution for every training problem. The need for more in depth courses, both eLearning and instructor led will continue to exist. Learning complex physical or cognitive skills will always need more time, more guidance, and more practice than a rapidly produced eLearning course. Even so, Rapid

eLearning has a significant role to play in fulfilling the training needs of today's corporate world. The need for rapidly developed training materials that are accessible to a geographically-diverse population is going to continue to grow. "As online experiences become more commonplace and more real in people's lives, we need to work to make sure they are contributing to our quality of life, and not detracting from it" (Wilson, 2006, p. 83). Those in the field of instructional design need to address this issue by finding ways to adopt and improve the tools and methods that comprise Rapid eLearning.

One of the biggest problems related to Rapid eLearning today is the lack of significant research on the subject. Macpherson et al. (2004) commented that there is a "dearth of academic literature available on this subject" (p. 6). Educators could do the corporate world and themselves a great service by paying more attention to Rapid eLearning. New research to identify which tools and which methods are effective and which are not needs to be encouraged. Standards need to be developed that address both the realities of the modern corporate environment and the needs of the adult learner. Instructional designers need to be trained to have the skills and knowledge necessary to accommodate the demands of the business world, while still ensuring that the courses they develop are well designed and effective.

Rapid eLearning will never be a field of practice completely separate to itself; rather it will continue to reflect the efforts of trainers, instructional designers, and software developers to improve upon the tools and methods used for eLearning. These changes will continue to have a major impact on the field of Instructional Design, driving the need for ongoing re-evaluation of the role of the instructional designer in both the corporate and academic worlds.

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