
E-LEARNING

Khaled Batiha, Safwan Al Salaimeh

Abstract: *E-learning means learning via electronic means and is therefore an all-embracing term covering learning via an electronic device. The "expectations" and "realities" for each of the delivery mechanisms within the electronic arena vary greatly for not just the learners themselves, but also the site providers. Because of this, each of these learning systems has vastly different design principles, which is not always understood by those unfamiliar with technology. What is appropriate for a CD-ROM off-line system is generally inappropriate for an on-line internet system. So when designing an e-learning system it is important to understand how the information is to be accessed by the learner. This paper will identify and suggest some ways to avoid e-learning's pitfalls and reap its rewards.*

Keywords: *e-learning's, organization, computer literacy, evaluation, learning module.*

ACM Classification Keywords: *C. Computer systems organization, C.2 Computer communication networks, K.3.2 Learning*

Introduction

When the projected surge in technology-driven training hits your organization, you could face difficult questions (Broadbent 2002):

- Is your organization-public, private, or not-for-profit-ready to benefit from new e-learning approaches?
- Are you personally ready to be a pioneer who develops, uses, or manages e-learning?
- What can you-as an instructor, instructional designer, manager, or learner-does to reap the advantages of e-learning innovations?
- Are you ready to help open the new frontier?
- When your organization is faced with a decision about whether to use e-learning, how will it decide?
- What drives decisions like these? Perhaps an influential decision maker read the latest article or advertisement in a management or training publication and convinced top brass that all learning materials should be converted to e-learning immediately, if not sooner.

E- learning – Challenges

As e-learning evolves, challenges ranging from lack of equipment or computer literacy to deep-seated organizational resistance are being faced and resolved. However, there will always be new challenges. To meet them, learners, instructors, developers, and managers need the following characteristics (Broadbent 2002):

- A realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of e-learning
- Complete dedication to transform e-learning function successfully
- Creativity, flexibility and the diligence required to adapt e-learning to the specific needs of individuals and organizations
- The conviction to say no when they think e-learning is not the right solution to a business performance issue

The Ability for Self-paced Learning and Revision

Another design principle of asynchronous, online learning is to provide the capability to complete the module in a number of sessions. Some e-learning courses assume that if the motivation is there to purchase, then the motivation is there to complete the module in one session. This is not a good way to approach the design, as determining the time that a user has available at any given moment and the speed at which they will read and take to progress through the module is impossible to determine. And there is the problem of heavy usage that

certain Internet service providers may experience at critical times, which will impact on the learner and increase their level of frustration. In these situations the capability to log off and revisit at a later time is important (Morrison 2003).

Users should be allowed to undertake an unlimited number of sessions and the server should return them to the last point of exit when they log in again. A further step that can be taken is to encourage learners to take the opportunity to revise the content, self-assessments, and feedback profiles by securely storing their information for 12 months after they complete the modules (Morrison 2003).

Self-evaluations: Can Learners Evaluate Their Knowledge?

This is a somewhat controversial topic on the internet. Firstly, when delivering any kind of feedback instrument on personal preferences, work requirements, or other individual factors, there is an ethical obligation to ensure that the learner/user understands the content/theory behind what is being delivered and the appropriate interpretation that can be made from this. The ethical guidelines in which personal feedback is given should not be forgotten just because the medium has changed from face-to-face to electronic (Morrison 2003). In asynchronous learning, evaluations are one way of ensuring that a certain degree of understanding has been achieved and trainer contact should be made available for learners who require additional help with content.

Secondly, self-evaluations are important when the module is used as pre-work for a more comprehensive course involving face-to-face interaction with other learners and a facilitator. In this situation, there must be a checkpoint by which facilitators can determine if the e-module has been completed, and whether the learner has understood the content (Morrison 2003). While people can have the best intentions in the world to complete pre-course work, it is certainly not unusual for some to attend a conference or workshop without having fully completed the pre-work, even though they often indicate they have. For this reason it is important for the module to have evaluation sections at appropriate points so that learners can check their progress

Workplace Examples

Applications of feedback instruments and HR training tools can often be difficult for some to visualize. This is important to overcome as the follow-on or actual usage of the feedback is where the learner is likely to get the most value (Morrison 2003).

Expecting e-learning to cover all aspects of a training workshop is a fatal mistake. While some products that are specifically skills based can replace the classroom, HRD is not so cut and dry. In many cases, the discussion and applications that follow the feedback and self-appraisals hold an equal portion of value to the self-understanding that is achieved by asynchronous learning (Morrison 2003).

Conclusion

Learning design has always been difficult. Combining it with the limitations of the electronic medium has been a real challenge. The asynchronous nature of the interaction between "teacher" and "pupil" means that the learning module must be designed to cater for a wide range of learning styles. Users shouldn't be left with "self-marinating hype" but should be given an option for ongoing learning and improvement, the ability to review and revisit the module, and to have as many workplace applications as possible to provide examples of how to put this into action in real life.

Bibliography

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Authors' Information

Khaled Batiha – e-mail: batihakhalid@yahoo.com ,

Safwan Al Salaimh – e-mail: safwan_71@yahoo.com

Irbid National University, Faculty of information technology, Irbid, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan