

## CHALLENGES OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT THROUGH E-LEARNING: A STUDY OF SELECTED POWER SECTOR COMPANIES

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### ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that training being a crucial part for efficient operative functioning of employees, corporate e-learning programs often end up with disappointment. This paper deals with prospective challenges pertaining to training and development through e-learning. It also identifies the factors that hinder growth of e-learning program in organizations. The findings are supported by an online survey on Power Sector International Corporations working in India.

**Keywords:** E-learning, training & development, corporate learning, e-learning challenges.

### INTRODUCTION

Till the end of previous century, training was not imparted on a computer, but usually given either in classroom situation or on the job by a qualified trainer. Due to technological advancement, organizations initiated computer based training and the field of e-learning has begun to take a shape. In early 1990s, many organizations used videotapes to impart training to their employees.

The initiative of delivering training on video was not found to be a perfect solution, hence a new form of training evolved, that is Computer based Training (CBT). CBT proved to be more effective but it was not able to measure employee performance on a central database and was not found to be easy to upgrade. As a result, e-learning emerged (Clark, 2002).

The term "e-learning" came into existence in the year 1999; the word was initially used in a CBT systems seminar. Other terms were also utilized to express an exact description such as "online learning" and "virtual learning". In 2000s, enterprises started adoption of e-learning to train their manpower. New entrants and experienced workers were given opportunity to advance their industry related to know how and to improve their skill level. It allowed individuals at home to access programs that enabled them to earn online degrees and to enrich themselves through extended knowledge.

E-learning is relevant for all types of training requirements e.g. refresher training; orientation for new entrants; information about new service requirement or product and to share emerging knowledge, technology or skill requirement (Harun, 2002). In order to respond quickly to persistently changing learning needs, e-learning emerged as the best and most viable option for corporations. Technology related breakthroughs and emerging skill needs

necessitated exploitation and management of new developments and escalated demand for e-learning solutions. There exists a variety of e-learning products and services available to meet majority of the organizational training needs.

## **RATIONALE FOR E-LEARNING**

Teaching and training in traditional senses are ways of delivering knowledge, just like a proverbial one-way street. E-learning ensures the possibility of better interaction and direct engagement offers effective ways for information sharing resulted into empowered employees with increased morale.

The rationale behind adoption of e-learning is justified because of the following reasons:

- There is no need to engage all employees for training at one time. They can choose their own convenient time, pace and place of learning which suits them.
- It is self-paced and if required, content can be recorded and provided as and when needed by people.
- No time limitations. It can be delivered in parts or all at once wholly as per the learner's requirements instead of the trainer's comfort.
- A variety of courses can be conducted and managed through suitable Learning Management Systems (LMS) by a small number of experienced training administrators. LMS can also maintain records of participation in number of courses, test scores, time taken for learning, etc. for each learner which may provide intelligent data to enhance employee's skills further.
- Measurement of learning is possible in terms of performance for each participant. This can be measured with the help of various ways like score tracking, progress tracking and time tracking. In established training methods this was not possible.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This part deals with different perspectives under various studies undertaken so far on e-learning potential to impart training & development. Review of literature also aimed to note employee attitudes regarding e-learning. One study reveals that while 84 per cent of the companies consider e-learning as an efficient and cost-effective tool for organizational learning, only 27 per cent use it as an effective Training & Development (T&D) tool.

Naresh B, Dr. Bhanu Sree Reddy (2015), in their paper titled "Challenges and Opportunities of e-learning in Developed and Developing Countries - A Review" compares e-learning environment and its relative use in developing and developed countries. This paper identifies the problems faced by emerging economies. Developing countries face challenges like lack of infrastructure, non-availability of trained instructors, and lack of financial support by the management, government policies and passive attitude of prospective trainees. However, e-learning offers more opportunities since it has some inherent advantages. The things that are to be learned from developed countries are support from the government, proper adaptation of technology, awareness of benefits of e-learning along with users' readiness to learn its use. If the developing countries learn and adapt developed countries success path pertaining to e-learning implementation, there is a huge potential for the use of e-learning in these countries. They have a huge working population and wide gap exist between trainee and faculty ratio. In developed countries, government provides infrastructural and financial support to enable e-learning with clear action plans for future. They have uninterrupted electricity supply and internet access. Though developed countries are strong in infrastructure, the challenges faced are related to learner engagement, motivation, and high trainee drop out ratio. Therefore, opportunity exists for developing countries to implement successful e-learning models, which in turn may provide them trained personnel on sustained basis. They may increase productivity

to maximum level with minimum negative effect by using ICT through which knowledge can be shared from any corner of the world. If proper steps are taken, challenges and differences between the developed and developing countries can be minimized to a large extent by implementing e-learning for working manpower. In India premium institutions like IIT's and IIIT's taking initiatives to make e-learning popular. They created NPTEL portal and started offering online courses within and outside the country.

Anand Rimmi, Saxena Sharad, and Saxena Shilpi (2012) in their research paper entitled "E-learning and its impact on rural areas" mention about the awareness and impact of e-learning in selected rural areas in India. The result indicates that e-learning is found to be highly emerging knowledge tool today. In developed as well as in developing countries e-learning can bring lot of benefits in rural areas and to agrarian sector. E-learning has much wider scope in the areas which are undeveloped and are not so educated. E-learning provides knowledgeable contents through CD, DVD, multimedia and other tools. The main limitation of this method is the availability of proper bandwidth, readiness of e-learners and a set of skills to deliver the content to learners. Overall, almost 48 per cent providers reported that e-learning is beneficial for rural service providers to impart advance knowledge, to prepare people for promotions, better job opportunities, and to learn new developing technologies available in the market.

#### **E-learning in Power Sector Companies**

This study is largely empirical in approach in which quantitative research method was used to solve the research questions. This study is aimed to determine challenges pertaining to training and development through e-learning. It also identifies the factors that hinder the growth of e-programs in organizations. This study was an attempt to overcome the concerns and initiatives across three power sector organizations (KEC, Torrent Power and Siemens). The main objective of this study is to explore and overcome the current work environment and difficulties in implementation of e-learning in Power sector. Some specific objectives are given as under:

- To understand the role of learning process in skill enhancement of employees in power sector.
- To analyze potential of e-learning in implementation of new knowledge and skills in organizations to enhance general business skills, task specific skills and customer service training.
- To identify how e-learning enables organizations to reduce cost of employee training and simultaneously adopt processes to improve overall competitiveness of enterprises.
- To explore current work environment and to overcome difficulties in implementation of e-learning in selected companies.

Taking into account the challenges faced by employees in e-learning program and to determine effectiveness of e-learning program in selected organizations, the respondents were asked to share their experiences they had with e-learning practices being followed in their organizations and give suggestions to make it a success. The variables which have been identified in this study include e-learning, employee satisfaction, employee commitment, impact on job performance and organizational competitiveness. A random sample of 280 employees working in selected power sector international corporations was taken. Stratified Sampling Method was used to represent the population and strata were identified on the basis of different managerial levels and functional areas. The study is based on primary and secondary data taken from a purposively designed questionnaire and published reports from the covered organizations.

#### **E-LEARNING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

E-learning, despite predictions, cannot replace traditional training and education. Many senior

executives hesitate to adopt e-learning as a mode of training to their employees. Some of the reasons that pose resistance in using it are its novelty, lack of knowledge, insufficient budget, lack of IT infrastructure, and employee perception to adapt it. (Ettinger et al., 2006). E-learning too requires time to attend training sessions and completion of given assignments as in traditional learning tool. For implementing a successful e-learning program, companies need to understand its limitations and develop a well thought plan to ensure its success.

E-learning is considered by organizations as new training & development possibility and a prospect to economize use of time and financial resources. Nevertheless, poor content quality, unpleasant learning experience with inadequate learning conversion into performance outcome was observed. Following are the other issues:

- Lack of learners' motivation is one of the most common e-learning challenges that e-learning professionals must overcome. Learners often have the belief that conventional training programs are more effective because they are imparted in a familiar environment.
- Many employees resist in taking an e-learning as they perceive their inability to go with required pace or that it will require a great deal of their time. Furthermore, trying to keep track of learners' progress may be the most difficult challenge to address.
- There exists a belief that e-learning environment offers no support. However, it is a general misconception that e-learning modules are imparted in isolated situations and offer no support to learners. Similar misconception felt is that virtual environment is not appropriate to keep sustained learner interest.

Challenges being experienced related to T&D through e-learning:

In an online survey done on an international power and energy corporation, respondents were asked to rank the challenges being experienced by the employer in providing e-learning T&D facility to people in your organization. The outcome of the e-learning survey is shown here below in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Challenges Experienced in Extending E-learning Facility

| Option                                 | N    | Median | Average Rank | Z Value |
|--|------|--------|--------------|---------|
| High up-front costs                    | 280  | 2.00   | 849.50       | -4.18   |
| Employee resistance to e-learning      | 280  | 2.00   | 756.70       | -7.15   |
| Lack of management support             | 280  | 2.00   | 933.60       | -1.50   |
| Lack of technical support              | 280  | 2.00   | 972.80       | -0.25   |
| Trainers knowledge and skills to teach | 280  | 3.00   | 1067.60      | 2.78    |
| Inappropriate learning culture         | 280  | 3.00   | 1152.20      | 5.48    |
| Irrelevance to real-time tasks         | 280  | 3.00   | 1131.10      | 4.81    |
| Overall Rank                           | 1960 |        | 980.50       |         |

$H = 120.62$   $DF = 6$   $P = 0.000$  (adjusted for ties)

In the above table Median and Average Rank is compared using the Kruskal-Wallis H Test to determine whether there was any significant difference among the average ranks of challenges being experienced pertaining to T&D through e-learning at workplace?

- A statistical significant difference was found among average ranks of challenges being experienced pertaining to T&D through e-learning at workplace. It was found that Employee Resistance to e-learning got the highest importance whereas Inappropriate Learning Culture was given the least importance.

## **FINDINGS**

Some common challenges and obstacles faced by organization in implementation of an e-learning solution are as follows:

- **Initial content creation requires significant investments**  
Initial investment requirement for e-learning solution is larger due to content and program development costs. Budgets and cash flows are needed to be negotiated.
- **Technology related issues**  
Technology related issues like whether the existing hardware and software setup can help to achieve the training goals or additional technological expenditures will be required and whether all software and hardware setups are compatible.
- **Improper content**  
Improper content of e-learning may pose a challenge as opined by some experts, though they are limited in number.
- **Organizational culture**  
Organization's Culture can be an issue where learner's demographics and psychographics may influence them against using computers for e-learning programs.
- **People resistance**  
Employees in beginning resist change. It may be difficult to convince management to make the required investment and to the employees to enroll themselves for e-learning program.
- **Less social and cultural interaction**  
Infrequent social and cultural interaction is proving an inhibition. The exclusion of peer-to-peer learning, inappropriate use of communication mechanisms such as body language, gestures etc. However, these disadvantages are reducing with development in communications technologies.

## **CONCLUSION**

On the basis of above analysis, it could be concluded that e-learning provides flexible learning options for employees and allow them to up-skill. E-learning at workplace, and outside it may reduce cost of training to workforce. This is possible due to reduced need for travel and saving of employees' time as they are not expected to leave workplace to report at training locations. E-learning is particularly useful for a geographically dispersed workforce as it can deliver them a consistent training experience at different locations. It provides consistency in training, increased convenience and control over learning by learners, improved monitoring capabilities for employers, and reduced costs due to decreased travel costs and employee absenteeism. However, it has some drawbacks but if managed systematically it may offer better results. Employee motivation, readiness and ability to use emerging technologies are important for e-learning participation. Majority of employees believe that their employers continued to invest in e-learning and that it is an effective tool for training and development. However, sizeable numbers of employees are facing difficulties in using e-learning.

Some potential challenges of E-learning are - upper management unenthusiastic attitude for E-learning; lack of appropriate infrastructure and bandwidth; inability of managers to categorize training needs for different classes of employees. Lack of formalized training program also causes E-learning difficulties in making good use of this too. Therefore, organizations should adapt and suggest e-learning in lieu of formalized - structured training only after development of well thought modules for different needs and extend all support to make it useful.

Employee attitude is also play an extremely important role in imbibing learning and utilizing it in performance. In spite of availability of the best of knowledge and skill, the will to deliver the better services may be kept reserved by individuals if they are not imbued with appropriate attitudes. Therefore, within the e-learning modules there should be enough content to pass it acquired knowledge for better performance on the job. Without top management and training & development wing support and motivation it would be difficult to implement corporate E-learning strategy effectively. Therefore, management must consider above mentioned points carefully so that optimum benefits of e-learning may be realized.

The research findings have implications for the human resource management in general and training and development department in particular. The importance of e-learning is not being exaggerated as 84 percent of our respondents are now using e-learning at work. Therefore, employers and human resource managers should think strategically before investing in training delivery methods that may prove effective for their people. When considering which training method to invest in, managers must focus on convenience, cost, accessibility, new developments and deployment speed. On all above parameters e-learning proved to be beneficial.

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