

Three strategies to meet learning needs of today's online learners

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Introduction Although electronic learning has become one of the very valuable instructional tools across the globe, many institutions are still unsure if e-learning could be an effective platform to deliver quality training to their candidates. Undoubtedly, the effectiveness of e-learning mainly lies with the appropriateness of the learning strategies intended for the needs of today's online learner and for the goals of the organization concerned. This also involves the quality of the design, operational feasibility of the system, and finally the range of learners' autonomy in the whole learning procedure. This paper will discuss three main strategies that can improve the overall outcome of e-learning program and learners' attitude to online learning.

Strategies First of all, the instructional objectives and curriculum activities of the program must par with the online learning environment, because unlike traditional teacher-centered classrooms, online learning environment is much broader with extensive sources and easy access to information. Hence, for an online teacher, it is unlikely to gain student's dependency, and instead the teacher has to admit student's autonomy to a great extent in order for maintaining good teacher-learner relationship. The more challenging and fundamental tasks of the learning program involve designing curriculum, goals, objectives, and activities of the learning program. This new learning environment requires lot of changes with regard to attitude and approaches of both teachers and students. For example, teachers must find themselves as facilitators of knowledge who can guide students to solutions. The learning environment should be more collaborative and interactive with

sufficient changes executed in pedagogy as well. Contract learning is identified as an effective instructional strategy which allows learner and teacher to share the responsibility for learning. “ A learning contract is a formal agreement written by a learner which details what will be learned, how the learning will be accomplished, the period of time involved, and the specific evaluation criteria to be used in judging the completion of the learning” (Instructional Strategies for Online Courses). Hence, contract learning would avoid further dilemma and instead tends to enhance teacher-learner relationship and thereby learner participation. Secondly, ‘ activity based e-learning’ is suggested by many scholars as a potential strategy that can meet the learning needs of today’s learners. Undoubtedly, an interactive content which facilitates active learning and training applications determines the effectiveness of this strategy. Pahl (2007) points out how in a third-level web based computing course various activities like controlled animations and graphical modeling can be integrated in a practical way. The author calls this system as ‘ Interactive Database Learning Environment’ (IDLE) which is an excellent example of effective online learning method (p. 134). Thirdly, online learning strategy should be sustainable and contributory in every aspect. To illustrate, without a well defined operational objective, e-learning program cannot meet the needs of all learners. An e-Learning strategy must define learning solutions in addition to addressing change management, communication planning, and performance support solutions. An effective strategy cannot undermine the significance of measurement and evaluation processes as well. This means, how the success and failure of the learning program is assessed is an important aspect of a learning strategy. As Moore

(2007) states, the system must “ assess the whole technology-enabled instructional process, and the outcomes are highly dependent on the technology architecture, content, instructional design, teaching strategies associated with software, attitude of all those who participate, and the work environment” (Moore, 2007, p. 23). According to the scholar, an e-learning strategy should have the qualities of a good business plan, and must ensure the active involvement of the potential members across the organization (p. 24). For example, without the active involvement of valuable board members, a learning program will not achieve its proposed goals and objectives, no matter how excellent the concept is. Hence, a sustainable and contributory plan will have answer to all challenges related to design, execution, change management, feedback assessment etc. Conclusion

Online learning has gained worldwide popularity for the recent decades. In order to pace with the changing technological scenario and learner needs, e-learning providers must take up extensive strategic changes in their learning programs. Creating a feasible e-learning environment that can guarantee learner autonomy requires first priority. Activity based learning is the second important strategy, for it can improve learners’ active involvement and interaction throughout the program; and developing an effective ‘ interactive content’ is the real challenge in this regard. Finally, the program needs a well defined operational objective and assessment method. References

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