Chapter 10
Critical Issues in E–Learning Project Management in the Context of Web Technologies Development

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ABSTRACT

eLearning can cover a spectrum of activities from supporting learning to blended learning (the combination of traditional and e-learning practices), and to learning that is delivered entirely online. However, no matter what technology is used, learning is always the vital element. E-learning is no longer simply associated with distance or remote learning, but, instead, forms a part of a conscious choice of the best and most appropriate ways of promoting effective learning. The global demand for higher education continues to rise, and e-learning provides an alternative way for higher educational institutions to deliver knowledge to learners at a distance rather than in the traditional way. The success of e-learning starts and ends with project management. In this chapter, critical success factors of eLearning projects—organizational factor and technological factor—are considered as critical issues from the management perspective viewed in the context of the rapid development of Web technologies.

INTRODUCTION

Joint SFEFC/SHEFC e-learning Group in the 2003 Report have stated, that "e-Learning is fundamentally about learning and not about technology. Strategic development of e-learning should be based on the needs and demands of learners and the quality of their educational experience." But the 'e' in e-learning stands for electronic, and

e-learning, defined as 'learning facilitated and supported through the use of information and communications technology', may involve the use of some, or all, of the following technologies: desktop and laptop computers, software, assistive software, interactive whiteboards, digital cameras, mobile and wireless tools, including mobile phones, electronic communication tools, including email, discussion boards, chat facilities and video

conferencing, Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), learning activity management systems etc.

Horton W. and Horton K. define e-learning as the use of Web and Internet technologies to create experiences that educate human beings (Horton & Horton, 2006). Like the Web itself, the potential for e-learning is practically unlimited, gaining momentum as more people become e-learners and begin to expect and demand engaging, Web-enabled interactive learning experiences. E-learning tries to address the growing need for just-in-time learning, to provide performance support to a widely dispersed workforce, to accommodate rapidly changing course content, and to leverage course development costs through savings in travel costs and the ability to disperse learning content to many participants within a narrow timeframe. It should be noted that learning to use new software can be time consuming. However, this should be viewed as a learning experience itself, rather than an insurmountable barrier to success.

Generally speaking, e-learning can cover a spectrum of activities from supporting learning, to blended learning (the combination of traditional and eLearning practices), and to learning that is delivered entirely online. Learning is the vital element independent of technology used. E-learning is no longer simply associated with distance or remote learning, but forms part of a conscious choice of the best and most appropriate ways of promoting effective learning.

It may be stated, that the success of e-learning starts and ends with project management. The impact of the global financial crisis on the high educational system, the aging population in Europe and in Lithuania, the emigration are the major challenges for the universities in present world. The global demand for higher education continues to rise, and e-learning provides an alternative way for higher educational institutes to deliver knowledge to learners at a distance, rather than in the traditional way. Although there are a large number of research articles on e-learning, few of them address the most important issue of suc-

cessful e-learning project management – critical issues or critical success factors. In this paper, the author will try to bring the different dimensions together by clarifying critical success factors of e-learning projects – the organisational factor and the technological factor as critical issues in Lithuania from the management perspective viewed in the context of the rapid development of Web technologies.

BACKGROUND

What makes e-learning project management different? At the heart of the question lies the hybrid nature of e-learning. It is a combination of three different domains: learning and content design, software development and corporate communications. Each of these three domains can lead to logistic challenges. The combination of all of them gives a complex set of responsibilities for the project manager. On the other hand, an e-learning project is actually two projects in one: a software project combined with an education/performance enhancement project. That means more scope, more stakeholders, more risk, longer duration, more budget pressures, and more opportunities for communication to fail.

Extensive literature on e-learning project management does not exist. There is no substantial information on e-learning project management methodologies. The studies, focusing on the need for project management function in the online learning course development process at universities are prevailing. The content analysis of enormous material of the Internet (blogs, e-learning sites etc.) gives a picture of the present state of e-learning project management, and highlights the enormous gaps and the need for further theoretical, analytical and critical work in this field.

Before specific literature on e-learning project management existed, e-learning projects were usually classified as software development (if they were categorized at all). The Project Manage-

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