Chapter 6.25
Implementing and Sustaining E–Learning in the Workplace

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ABSTRACT

New information and communication technology, specifically computer networked systems, create both a demand and an opportunity for businesses to approach training and knowledge management from new perspectives. These new training perspectives are driven by the need for businesses to provide the right training quickly and efficiently and to support knowledge systems that are current, accessible, and interactive. This article will discuss strategic planning in terms of the organizational elements and the e-learning program requirements that are necessary to build a framework in order to institutionalize and sustain e-learning as a core business process. The elements of the organizational framework include leadership, change management strategies, the technology infrastructure, and the organizational structure. The e-learning program requirements include instructional systems, roles and competencies of key staff people, and budgeting. The building blocks in a framework to sustain e-learning and knowledge building start with a foundation laid out by the strategic plan. The next two building blocks of the framework are the organizational support processes and the e-learning and knowledge management system.

INTRODUCTION

Strategic Planning and Creating a Mission and a Vision

Implementing and sustaining e-learning in the workplace is based on strategic planning. The plan serves as a dynamic blueprint to guide the organization's practices based on its strengths, its values, and its mission (Schermerhorn & Chappell, 2000). This acts as a foundation that supports a learning culture by integrating learning and knowledge management with the organization's business processes and business goals.

Kilfoil (2003) defines strategic planning as a macro-level tool that involves change and focuses on the future by building a bridge between the organization's current position and its vision of the future based on evaluation of its environment. Strategic planning is:

- A disciplined, fact-based, decision-making process.
- Based on an analysis of internal and external contexts and data.
- Related to choices on how to commit resources.
- Compatible with the vision and mission.
- Optimizes strengths and opportunities and minimizes weaknesses and threats (Kilfoil, 2003).

Strategic planning primarily involves two important components: the organizational mission and the vision for the future. Developing these two components requires the organization to analyze its current circumstances and to determine what strategy it needs to move forward and to thrive. According to Rosenberg (2001) vision statements are created through an organization-wide consensus-building activity and then refined by senior management. The vision identifies how the organization will conduct business in the future. Rosenberg (2001) describes the mission statement as a "succinct, specific and powerful articulation of the steps the organization will take to reach its vision" (p. 297).

The vision statement of an organization that intends to position itself as an e-learning organization of the future needs to determine how it will provide support and direction for the initiative. Gap analysis and SWOT analysis are tools that can assist in identifying what an organization needs to do in order to implement and sustain e-learning as a business process (Rosenberg, 2001; Schreiber, 1998). The gap analysis identifies disparities in current e-learning status with those outlined in the vision statement. The SWOT analysis looks at the internal environment and identifies **S**trengths and **W**eaknesses while looking at the external environment to identify **O**pportunities and **T**hreats (Rosenberg, 2001; Schermerhorn & Chappell, 2000).

Rosenberg (2001) explains that an organization can build a foundation for e-learning strategy that reinvents the training model. This model can encompass knowledge management, a learning architecture, the organization's technology infrastructure, a learning culture, and a sound business case (Rosenberg, 2001). These ingredients are key to sustaining e-learning over the long term because they institutionalize learning, support it with technology, and link learning to business goals. The blend of organizational learning programs linked to improved business goals as a strategic plan is the foundation in a framework to implement and sustain e-learning (see Figure 1).

Organizational Issues

The second building block in a framework to move through the stages of technological maturity and to sustain distance training and knowledge management includes a commitment to strategically blend strong leadership, change management, a networked electronic technology infrastructure, and organizational structure with the goals put forth in the mission and vision.

Training and knowledge management must be viewed as a core business process. According to Conner and Clawson (2003), in order to remain competitive, organizations need to adapt quickly to changing environmental factors. As a result, training and knowledge are critical to growth and survival. From an organizational perspective, this means developing a plan that includes training and knowledge management as integral system components that produce outcomes that are needed to reach business goals. Institutionalizing learning by gaining stakeholder buy-in is critical here. Ensuring access to learning systems, highlighting the personal benefits of e-learning, and illustrating

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