Chapter 27
Key Capabilities, Components, and Evolutionary Trends in Corporate E-Learning Systems

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ABSTRACT

The chapter examines the development of online learning systems in corporations, corporate utilization of reusable learning modules, and the various forms of assessment and knowledge certification used to ensure and improve the quality of the learning outcomes. Corporations continue to embrace e-learning, at a dramatic rate. This is partly driven by a desire for cost reduction and partly to ensure that all staff to have the required skills and competencies for their jobs. Organizations are increasingly linking the e-learning/e-training systems with other modules of their human resource management systems and this chapter includes a case example to illustrate such linkages. Universities have demonstrated progress in e-learning but remain in a position to learn much from e-learning developments in the corporate world. In sum, the chapter provides an overview of corporate experiences with e-learning/e-training and how these might be transferred to the academic world; it also sounds a note of warning for the universities should they fail to observe the ongoing development of corporate e-learning systems.

INTRODUCTION

Multiple sectors such as universities, corporations, organizations, and governments throughout the world are rapidly expanding their utilization of online tools to take advantage of faster, affordable Internet access and state-of-art technology. Universities are offering more online classes to supplement, enhance, or replace their traditional face-to-face classes and this increases student accessibility to university courses, more flexibility for instructional delivery, and a wider range of options for student-faculty interactivity (Yeh & Hsu, 2008). Corporations are reaping similar benefits from e-learning/e-training systems and have also benefitted from being to keep their employees' skills up to date. Consulting groups expect continued increases in corporate online learning (or e-learning) expenditures. For example, in 2002, Cortona projected that corporations would spend $50 billion on e-learning/e-training systems by 2010, rising from $5 billion in 2001 (Source: eMarketer) and in 2007 Global Industry Analysis Inc. (GIA) expected e-learning/e-training expenditures to exceed $52.6 billion by 2010 (Source: Global Industry Analysis Inc.). Although caution must be exercised in using these figures due to some variation in markets covered and in type of expenditure included, it is clear that corporate attention to e-learning/e-training will continue.

This chapter looks at recent developments in e-learning/e-training in the corporate environment and examines them from an academic perspective. The authors believe that the education environment (and in particular the management education environment) is going to get much more crowded and competitive. Corporate educational offerings can be viewed as a substitute for more formal training, including university-based training, and corporations have arguably moved more quickly than the universities in fully embracing online education. The authors believe there are both lessons and warnings for the academic learning community.

The chapter begins by reviewing the development of the online learning platforms and how these integrate with other human resource management systems. The chapter continues by examining the factors driving and constraining the development of corporate e-learning/e-training systems and uses a case example for illustration. The chapter then turns to what has become a fundamental element of corporate e-learning/e-training – the reusable learning objects. Assessment (a crucial factor in all learning systems) is examined next and this is followed by a brief discussion of implementation issues. The chapter concludes by discussing some implications for more traditional educational environments.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORM

Technology and the changing workplace provide opportunities to approach employees' learning and skill base development in new ways. E-learning/e-training technologies allow employees to take online course on an "as needed" basis at times that best suit them. E-learning/e-training can also be timed to suit workplace skill enhancement requirements. The ubiquitous nature of the Internet, multimedia and communications technologies allow learning and training to be delivered in new formats at a lower cost.

E-learning/e-training systems are increasingly important components of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) (also called HR modules, HRIT systems, HRMS) which support human resource management processes in organizations such as HR planning, recruiting and selection, training and development, performance management, and compensation and benefits (Bentley, 2007). E-learning/e-training solutions can be acquired by organizations as stand-alone HRIS applications, as components of integrated performance management solutions, or as components of integrated human capital management (HCM)

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