

Chapter 21

Innovation in the Learning Management System (LMS): Design Elements for Retail Industry Training

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study identifies design principles and delivery methods best suited for the retail industry with a focus on training front-line workers. This research identifies key design elements to aid retail organizations in choosing an effective online learning solution for their workforce. To provide clear and relevant design recommendations specific to the retail workforce, the scope of the research focused on learner characteristics, e-learning in the workplace, adult learning theory, as well as current design and delivery features available on the market. Through a meta-synthesis of qualitative research, findings indicate a need for soft skill development related to customer interactions. A list of design principles targeting soft skill development of the front-line retail worker is recommended based on both industry and academic research.

INTRODUCTION

Factors like technology advancements, increasing global competition, and other changes in the business environment are reasons corporations are evaluating the way in which they develop and train their people (Wong & Lee, 2017). Changes in the way people are interacting with, and accessing learning content, can be attributed to the advances in digital technology (Wang, 2018). Using handheld devices, it is not uncommon to see learners reading course material on a bus ride home or listening to lectures through the Bluetooth connection in their vehicle (Park, 2011). Learning management systems (LMS), training applications, video streaming sites, and other digital learning platforms have made it easier and more accessible for education to happen anywhere, at any time (Leung & Chan, 2013). As a result, individuals

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seeking information are exposed to accessible learning opportunities more so than in previous decades (Leung & Chan, 2013). The potential for accessible learning offerings creates an opportunity for retail organizations looking to improve the learning and development for their evolving workforce.

This research set out to address the retail industry workforce specifically and focuses on front-line workers. When examining the varying demographics within the workforce in North America, five distinct generations were identified throughout the literature. These include the Tradition Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (which is often interchangeably referred to as the millennial generation), and finally Generation Z, who are the youngest and newest members of the workforce (Kupperschmidt, 2000). When discussing “young workers” throughout this research, it references workers who fall into the Generation Y (Gen Y) and Generation Z (Gen Z) categories. There are various age ranges associated with both generations; however, research indicates that anybody born after 1980 will fall under either the Gen Y or Gen Z category (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Ng, 2010; Tolbize, 2008). Thus, various age groups carrying unique characteristics, present challenges and opportunities to the workforce.

Retailers are faced with challenges associated with personnel changes and an inconsistent workforce. The service industry, which encompasses areas like retail, food services, and the hospitality sector often hire young front-line workers for various reasons that include low wages, and minimal or no experience required (Williams & Connell, 2010). As a result, front-line service positions often experience high turnover and less career commitment than other fields (Arndt, Arnold, & Landry, 2006; Fisher, Gallieno, & Netessine, 2017). For these reasons, it is critical for employers to ensure the training and development they provide for these specific roles align with the needs of their workers to promote high learning outcomes (Clayton, 2018). Consequently, if needs are ignored, there lies a risk of lower motivation and a lack of retention (Clayton, 2018; Tolbize, 2008).

Workplace training is important for the retail industry, especially when customer experience and quality service is a key differentiator for companies and their brand identity (Fisher et al., 2017; Hennig-Thurau, 2004). Effective design and delivery of staff training can contribute to the overall success of service-oriented businesses when the interpretations of skills are recognized and implemented by the front-line workers (Clayton, 2018; Rosenthal, 2004). Therefore, retailers can influence workforce retention and employee effectiveness through their training design and delivery strategy. To aid in front-line job training, a plethora of learning management systems and corporate education platforms are available on the market for various types of industries; examples include systems like SumTotal, Cornerstone OnDemand, and Oracle (Watson & Watson, 2007). The challenge is, although there is an abundance of LMS options available for corporations to consider, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to workplace training (Bersin, 2017). Design elements must be customized to learners and the specific roles in which they are looking to apply their knowledge (eLearning Industry, 2019).

The purpose of this research is to examine and identify specific design elements for an online learning solution that can effectively train and develop a front-line retail worker. The recommendations are intended for retail leaders looking to create a request for proposal (RFP) to upgrade or replace their current online learning solution.

Research Questions

To accomplish this, the principal investigator explores the following research question: In what ways might a digital learning platform be designed for front-line workers in the retail service industry? The following sub-questions include:

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