



Chapter IV

Implementing Corporate Distance Training Using Change Management, Strategic Planning and Project Management

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As businesses expand to become more globally competitive, their needs grow to train geographically dispersed employees in a cost-effective manner. What must businesses do to implement distance education? An important role of the training and performance specialists in business is to help management solve complex problems within an organization. Still, distance education is usually not accomplished by a single group within an organization, nor through a single process. To change the way training is done, performance managers must use what is known about change management, strategic planning and project management in order to successfully implement technology-enhanced learning globally. One of the methods being used increasingly in the workplace is distance training.

Early in the company's implementation of distance training, it is useful to think about two approaches: a change approach and a project approach. As the level of the organization's maturity with distance training grows, (i.e., as distance training becomes institutionalized),

the amount of change by definition decreases, and reliance shifts from change management to strategic planning. Similarly, as distance training permeates the organization, the shift is away from “individual events” and toward distance training as simply “how the organization does business.”

Offered here is a perspective for implementing distance education which integrates strategic planning, change management and project management as critical to successful overall implementation. Rather than prescribe specific models, this approach identifies the essence of what each discipline contributes to the process of implementing distance education.

WHAT IS CORPORATE DISTANCE TRAINING

Distance training and distance education are used synonymously throughout this article unless otherwise noted. Essentially, we mean that the training or teaching function is implemented remotely using some type of technology and two-way communication system. This is especially in contrast to in-person training. Our focus is on how to introduce and sustain technologically-mediated learning in the workplace. Included are applications such as internet/intranet, computer-mediated communication, video-conference, satellite broadcast, audiographics and e-mail. Corporate distance training is defined differently by different authors, but here it means bringing together resources and learners to address the business problems in which training is at least part of the solution. This needs to be done in a cost-effective, timely manner. An emphasis is on the business challenge of training geographically disperse employees and managing resource and productivity across the system.

In addition, we view corporate distance training as an “innovation” (Schreiber and Berge, 1998). We propose an approach where training at a distance represents a significant departure from how the business currently conducts training activities—a change which will meet some level of resistance. This results not only in applying new technology but also “creating a different kind of structure for learning and teaching” (Kearsley, 1998, p.49). The decision to implement distance education must be made during strategic planning, where it is determined whether distance education programs fit into the mission of the institution and how best to integrate it into the mainstream (Berge and Schrum, 1998).

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