

THE LAST WORD



Does E-Learning Equal E-Training?

Concentrate more on the quality rather than the quantity of training.

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Ask trainers to tell you what they think e-learning is, and many will say it's about putting training on the Web. That's fine for a start,

but if we believe that's *all* e-learning is, why don't we just call it "e-training?" Probably because we know, deep inside, it's about much more.

We seem to be trapped in an "e-learning equals e-training" way of thinking. Do we see e-learning with tainted eyes, influenced by years spent in the classroom and prior experiences with computer-based training? We are so comfortable with "the course" that we have transferred most of its artifacts—lessons, objectives, lectures, tests...even attendance—online. This only adds to the confusion between training and learning. Certainly online training has a critical role to play in a learning strategy, but assuming that e-learning is limited exclusively to the same planned training solutions that are delivered in the classroom world is extraordinarily limiting, and even misleading. Here's why.

Learning and training are different. Learning is an *internal* process where we take in information and expertise, and then translate it into knowledge, skills, and capabilities. It's something we all do, like breathing. Training, on the other hand, is one of many ways to facilitate learning; an *external* experience we go through using a structured approach called *instruction*. Learners don't do training; it's done to them.

So we don't just learn from training. If we did, we'd be in class all the time.

We learn by talking with other people and watching them perform. We also learn from documents and online information, from the news media and from simple trial and error. Training, including online training, will always play an important role in learning, but if trainers stop here, they'll miss opportunities to move beyond individual learning towards impacting entire organizations. If they stop here, they abdicate their responsibility for learning when employees are not in class, online or otherwise. And that's most of the time, by far.

Overcoming this paradigm requires leveraging other approaches to learning. Limiting "blended learning" to a combination of classroom and online training is far too simplistic. We now have many new techniques that not only facilitate learning, but may also reduce the amount of training that's needed. New technologies support involvement in communities of practice, enhanced access to valid and authentic content through knowledge management, informal peer collaboration, and the guidance of SMEs, coaches, and mentors. Better understanding of how people interact with systems and tools enables us to build and support them so they are inherently easier to use. This eliminates the training we might have put in place to compensate for the original poor design. In almost every situation we can think of, blending online and classroom training with approaches like these will almost always result in higher levels of sustainable learning and performance.

So what will it take to break out of the "e-learning equals e-training" mindset? Begin with a belief that learning happens everywhere, all the

time. If we buy into that, we free ourselves from the need to do everything in the real or virtual classroom. Second, accept the fact that research—seeking knowledge—is a very legitimate means of acquiring learning. If we do, we start to look at other types of rich information repositories or libraries, online or offline, as critical resources that keep people up-to-speed during the 97 percent of their work time when they are not in class. Third, recognize that learning from each other—peers and experts—is a great idea. It's where new ideas and best practices are hatched. Finally, break out of our corporate universities and training departments and get more deeply involved in the real business of the organization. Ask the question, "How can we improve performance?" rather than, "How can we use training?"

Although technology-based training has been around for more than 30 years, for the first 25, we had little to show for it. The Web has changed the rules, finally making learning technology practical, accessible, and more visible. With new scrutiny over the benefits of e-learning, we now have to show that it is worth the investment. Putting lots of courses online is a start, but it's not enough. We must start thinking differently about what we do. E-training is part of e-learning, but e-learning is much, much more. *e*

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