

IMPACT OF BLENDED LEARNING IN CORPORATES

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Abstract:

The quality of Human Resource is an asset to any organization and as a result Training has become an issue that has to be faced by every organization. The amount, and quality of training carried out varies enormously from organization to organization due to factors such as the degree of external change, for instance, new markets or new processes, the adaptability of existing workforce and importantly the extent to which the organization supports the idea of internal career development. Most organizations meet their needs for training in an ad hoc and random way while others set about identifying their training needs, then design training activities in a rational manner and finally assess the results of training. If employees are to experience flexibility and effectiveness on the job, they need to acquire and develop knowledge and skills, and if they are to believe that they are valued by the organization they work for, then they need to see visible signs of management's commitment to their training and career needs. Training and development are the processes of investing in people so that they are equipped to perform. These processes are part of an overall human resource management approach that hopefully will result in people being motivated to perform. This paper focused on the importance of training as well as innovative techniques in the learning in order to gain output in both ways.

KEYWORDS:

organization ,techniques ,management's commitment , training.

INTRODUCTION

According to Cole (2002:329), factors influencing the quantity and quality of training and development activities include; the degree of change in the external environment, the degree of internal change, the availability of suitable skills within the existing work-force and the extent to which management training as a motivating factor in work.

Armstrong (1996), Human Resource Management has emerged as a major function in most organizations and is the focus for a wide-ranging debate concerning the nature of the contemporary employment relationships. Managing human resources is one of the key elements in the coordination and management of work organizations.

Several new technologies are used to ensure the creation and delivery of services and goods in modern economies. Whatever means are used, the role of individuals and groups as employees and the ability of management to effectively deploy such a resource is vital to the interest of both the employee and organization. The Blended learning is one of the new techniques which enables the employees to produce better output. Corporate researchers and practitioners note that technology enhanced learning alone is not enough, arguing that people need experiential learning for the mastery and retention of knowledge and skills achieved through the blending of technology and face-to-face interaction (Singh, 2003; Collis, 2002).

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On-line learning

Online learning is a subset of distance education that uses audio, video, and computer delivery modes to facilitate the learning transaction. Online learning has also been defined as anytime, anywhere electronic or computer-supported learning via the Internet.

According to Moore and Kearsley (1996), learner-learner interaction is a relatively new development in online learning. Because of the software available, there are more opportunities for learners to interact with each other. McDonald and Gibson (1998) describe computer conferencing and the use of online threaded discussion as a powerful social constructivist learning tool because of its capability to support interaction and collaboration among diverse and dispersed students. According to social construction theorists, learning is necessarily a dialogical process in which communities of practitioners socially negotiate the meaning of phenomena (Schrire, 2002). online learners who have a stronger sense of community through increased interaction, perceive greater cognitive learning, feel less isolated, and have greater satisfaction with their academic programs. In other words, the sense of community may be an integral part of students' perceptions of learning.

Learning Outcomes

Training is defined as “the systematic acquisition of skills, rules, concepts, or attitudes that result in improved performance in another environment” (Goldstein & Ford, 2002, p. 1). It is a specialized form of education that focuses on developing or improving performance. Education, on the other hand, focuses on whether learners have gained knowledge and skill, but does not evaluate actual performance or application in a different environment (Rekus, 1999). That is, simply understanding and knowing a specific subject does not warrant an effective training system. An effective training system must ensure that learners are able to perform the expected outcomes in such way that they have demonstrably learned during the training.

BLENDED LEARNING

Garrison and Vaughan (2008) define blended learning as “the organic integration of thoughtfully selected and complementary face-to-face and online approaches and technologies” (p. 148). According to this definition and using George Siemens' concept of innovation, which is “Innovation is about being new...doing existing things in a new way, or doing something new in response to changes. Innovation is part evolution and part adaptation (and occasionally, part revolution),” clearly blended learning is an innovation; it involves teaching and learning in a new way, while still adhering to the tenets of higher education. Moreover, it is a very significant innovation as it requires thoughtfully integrating face-to-face and online learning, fundamentally rethinking course design to optimize student engagement, and restructuring and replacing traditional class contact hours.

Blended learning has a growing presence in workforce learning and performance. Kim and colleagues' 2005 survey of 200 training professionals in the United States predicted an increase in the use of BL in their organizations. In another survey of almost 300 training professionals in the US and UK, ASTD and Balance Learning reported that more than two thirds of respondents ranked blended learning as “the most effective and cost-efficient form of training,” and indicated that “blended learning will make up about 30% of all corporate training budgets by 2006,” (Sparrow, 2004).

Coaching, e-coaching, e-mentoring

Coaches can be used to demonstrate, model, remind, critique, guide, nudge and nag, in person or using technology. The key is finding knowledgeable, credible coaches who are willing to do what needs to be done on an as needed basis.

Today most coaches rely on some form of electronic means to communicate, if only to arrange appointments. But e-coaches go further, typically using the internet strategically (Rossett & Marino, 2005). Relations and skills can flourish online too, using Instant Messaging with voice and video, for example, to coach a sales pitch, discuss approaches to a product launch, or rework a job description.

THREE BLENDED MODELS

Anchor Blend

IMPACT OF BLENDED LEARNING IN CORPORATES

An Anchor Blend starts with a defining and substantive classroom event, followed by independent experiences that include interaction with online resources, structured workplace learning activities, online learning and reference, diagnostics, and assessments.

Bookend Blend

The Bookend Blend is characterized by a three-part experience: something introductory, an essential, substantive and meaty learning experience, online or F2F, and then something that concludes and extends the learning into practice at work.

Field Blend

The Field Blend is most distinct from training-as-usual. It is employee centric, with each individual surrounded by many kinds of assets and continuous choices about when and where and whether to reach for them. Although a classroom experience is often part of the Field mix, it is but one method of many, with the focus on independent and persistent choices and continuous learning and reference at work. The Field Blend requires employees to commit to continuing growth and effort, relying on defined expectations, engaged managers, and assessments that point to resources.

BLENDED LEARNING APPROACH

Blended Learning proposes a mixture of learning activities consisting of self-steered learning activities, cooperative and collaborative learning activities, learning activities supported by online tutors, social learning activities, and traditional classroom teaching activities. Blended learning (BL) integrates seemingly opposite approaches, such as formal and informal learning, face-to-face and online experiences, directed paths and reliance on self direction, and digital references and collegial connections, in order to achieve individual and organizational goals.

BL is devoted to learning and performance. From the organization's perspective, blended learning is about improving performance and achieving business objectives. From the employee's perspective, blending is about getting work done, when and where a need emerges, more typically at a time and place of the employee's choosing.

BL addresses that nagging concern about transfer of training. BL is the next step in a continuing commitment to systems, results, and performance. If you are concerned about lessons that stop at the classroom door and events limited to time and place, BL has much for you.

BL relies on compelling assets and experiences. As we move from instructors to blends, from classroom to field, participation and results are the hands of employees. Employees can elect to skip entire programs or elements that feel superficial, complicated, or irrelevant, in favor of

their “real work.” Thus, BL programs and assets must present themselves as worthwhile and manageable.

BL capitalizes on the resident smarts in the organization. BL presses people and organizations to find, store, stir, and share what they know. A database might help sales people re-use parts of proposals.

BL promotes connections and conversations. BL encourages the organization to extend lessons and conversations far beyond the classroom and into the workplace through coaching, e-coaching, and online communities. A sales person who has learned about a new product can chat with more experienced colleagues attempting to bring that product to Asia. An executive can reach out for expert views from a trusted e-coach. A researcher can reflect with others on the investment team about how a natural disaster should influence their choices.

BL guides direct and tracks. BL must do two things: first, it must propel action, showing employees how to benefit from the blend, how far they have come, where else they need to go, and what else is possible; and second, it must simultaneously encourage smart choices and involvement. Diagnostics, assessments and feedback, menus, and sample paths can be used to tailor experiences, assets and activities.

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Employees

Blended learning shifts responsibility for learning from the instructor to the employee. For many, this is not an easy transition. They like what they know – classroom experiences led by instructors – and are often uncomfortable and not particularly adept at learning more independently and online. “An important

IMPACT OF BLENDED LEARNING IN CORPORATES

finding in the education literature is that many students given control over their own learning choose to terminate the experience before mastering the training task,” (Brown, 2001).

Supervisors/Managers

Blended learning, because it often occurs in the workplace, depends on an active supervisor or manager. When BL is in place, managers and supervisors must coach, guide, track, motivate, and encourage. They can influence F2F or online, formally and informally, synchronously and asynchronously. To support the development of new real estate agents at Century 21, managers are given a coaching guide to answer questions, contextualize the content, and provide on-the-job learning opportunities as new agents participate in online and F2F training.

Instructors

In a BL system, teaching is important, but not sufficient; instructors do more than teach. Through online systems, they might monitor and nudge employees' progress, moderate a discussion board, coach managers, online communities, offer feedback on a group or individual task, analyze workplace readiness.

Experts

One of the nifty things about blends is that content experts can be involved in small yet targeted ways, in person or via technology. They may be used to enhance a specific lesson, or called upon as a “go to” person in the field with questions, guidance, and resources.

Executives

The executive's role is to provide an organizational environment that is collaborative and cross-functional. Learning professionals and business leaders foster a learning culture that extends beyond classrooms and into the workplace.

MEASUREMENT OF BLENDED LEARNING

Enrollment and Completion. What are the enrollment rates? Did employees complete a particular module, course, or series of courses? Did they take assessments and self-assessments? Enrollment and completion are relevant where compliance and certification are concerned, but are less relevant in BL, because the learning and relationships are often ongoing and even informal. No matter the case, rely on assessments that ask participants to measure up against work-relevant performance standards.

Participation. Because blending shifts control and decisions to employees, their choices reveal much about the health and success of the program and assets. Which assets are chosen? Which ignored? How are various assets and activities being accessed and used? What do typical learning paths look like? How much do employees rely on the knowledge base to find answers?

Reaction. Are they pleased about the time spent on the blend? Which assets do they favor? Which do they ignore? While few will expect the blend to be a rollicking good time, employees must see good reasons to take an online class, chat with a coach, look at a database, self-assess, or check in with an online community. Are employees satisfied with the program and assets? What about coaches, experts, or supervisors? Do they enjoy their roles? Will employees continue to come back for more? Would they recommend it to their colleagues?.

Learning. Did employees earn a passing score for an entire course or sections of it? Can they demonstrate attainment of skills, retention, proficiency, and mastery through some type of authentic assessment? Does the learning and assessment combine to earn participants some form of recognition or certification?.

Performance. Are they handling work challenges differently? Better? Do outcomes reflect new skills and knowledge? Are they using what is taught in the blend? Do customers perceive a difference?

Business Impact. Why did the sponsors commit to the program? What indicators of success will they accept? Establish these answers and then seek relevant data throughout the effort.

Value. Was it worth it for the organization? Was it worth it for the employee? Do the benefits realized from the program justify the costs in terms of money and time spent on development, implementation, and maintenance? Would the sponsor do it all over again?.

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