Training and Development through E-Learning: A Case Study

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Abstract

For an organisation human resource is an altogether important asset. Skills and knowledge of people are the driving force of growth and social development. Training and Development ensure that employees may develop competencies and maximise their potential. The major factor hindering employees training are time and budget. The emerging trends in technologies require development of new skills and knowledge so as to meet the emerging challenges. Therefore, companies are nowadays focusing on advanced and effective training methods to train and develop their people. E-learning is becoming a dominant tool that is widely used in organisations worldwide for the purpose of employee training. This case study identifies the use of E-learning for training and development processes within the organisations being studied.

Keywords- E-learning, E-learning components, Corporate E-Learning, E-learning strategy, Evaluating E-learning.

Introduction

In recent years, E-learning has become an increasingly popular tool for imparting training within organisations. E-learning is a structured electronic form of learning. It can be categorised into two forms: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous e-learning occurs in real time with participants actively communicating with each other conducting through online chat and videoconferencing. Coursework and

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communications via e-mail, blogs and forums are some examples of asynchronous e-learning. The combination of synchronous and asynchronous e-learning allows employees to benefit from the different delivery formats regardless of their schedules or preferred learning methods.

E-learning is evolving at a very fast speed and transforming the way organisations are delivering learning and advanced knowledge to their employees. It has provided flexible access to content and instruction at any time, from any place. E-learning in the organisation has evolved rapidly over the past 10 years. In particular, E-Learning has assisted the emergence of new learning and development practices.

Many large organisations are moving to E-learning to increase access to training and decrease their costs. The benefits of e-learning are very much obvious. Training needs exceed traditional training resources. Cost savings, less time away from work, just-in-time training, and individualised lessons are just a few of the advantages of e-learning (Berge, 2000).

With E-learning, now organisations can increase the productivity of employees and optimise their working hours as it allows anytime, anywhere accessibility to training courses. It also facilitates organisations to quickly provide training to employees when there are new product launches. Thus this enables employees to assist the customers in a more effective manner and to generate more sales for organisations. Following are the pros and cons of e-learning:

**Pros:**

- E-learning is accessible ‘24/h 7’d in a week and all over the year.
- It helps us to intelligently track the areas that need special attention.
- It is a 360 degree learning process in the sense that, training can constitute of multiple resources of different types facilitates flexibility and self-paced learning.
• It allows the company to offer personalised training that is up to date and in line with the requirements of the company with the help of videos, audios, texts, websites, applications, etc.
• An E-learning solution efficiently uses resources to train multiple people at a given time.

Cons:

• The costs to develop content and establish an E-learning infrastructure can be very significant.
• The content must match the medium. Complex issues that require hands on learning process may not fit the model.
• Remote areas with limited bandwidth may not be able to realise the benefits of E-learning.
• E-learning limits personal interaction and social cues.

The study conducted by Geetha K. Joshi, Venkata Subrahmanyam & Sandhya Anvekar (2014) concluded that E-learning controls costs, enhances quality of work, suits to geographically scattered employees, provide more consistent course delivery and render more individual instruction and attention to the employees by modernising the workforce.

Factors Influencing e-Learning
• Economic Factors: Convenient time duration, flexible training time and lesser cost.
• Environmental: Motivation, guidance and support.
• Individual: Gender, age, occupation, attitude and computer proficiency.
• Organisational: Participation of employees, synchronisation across departments.
• Technological: Computer availability and internet accessibility.
E-Learning Practices in Covered Undertakings

E-learning can empower employees and allow them to take ample amount of training to gain mastery over concepts. It also allows training at one's own pace and comfort, without worrying about attending any training session at a particular time and place. E-learning is being used by organisations as a means of communicating, training, and enhancing employee value. To uncover the role of E-learning to impart training, the real life experience of companies / businesses is given here under:

TRU Group of Companies

TRU Group is known for its customer-oriented approach with focus on impeccable standards of operational excellence in consulting, design, project management, implementation and quality, to create tailor-made solutions to meet its clients' expectations. With an extensive network spread in India and Dubai TRU Group is the premier service provider to all IT solutions with expertise in different domains like:

- Business applications & information service
- Consulting and implementation
- Wide area network
- Development & Internet Technology

The company has partnered with cutting edge product Companies: RAMCO, 3i InfoTech, Sage, SAP, PC Soft, QUADRA, and MAIA one Key so as to provide for the evolving needs of its clients and solve the ever changing challenges faced by the IT industry.

TRU Information & Systems Ltd.: It is an Internet communication and networking product and services company having partners e.g. Sify Communications, Reliance Communications, Hughes Communications, Cisco, IBM, Microsoft, and Citrix. The company provides services to enable customers to use all products related to wireless equipment implementation and support.
TRU Care Consultants Ltd is a professional IT consulting firm, providing customers with flexible, rapidly deployed ERP, BI, SCM, CRM solutions. The differentiating factor is its in-depth technical, project management and problem-solving skills that enable the company to provide high-value solutions and rapid return on investment. It provides enterprise solutions to end customers which include:

- Business study
- GAP analysis
- Selection of a suitable business app
- Implementation
- End user training
- Post implementation support and AMC
- Development / customisation of business specific processes.

TRU Technologies LLC is a global presence of TRU Group based in Dubai UAE. It has partnered with 3i-Infotech Ltd. Middle East for business solutions like Orion ERP. TRU Tech is a recognised player in offering solutions for mission-critical, high transaction processing environments to all Verticals in the industry.

TRU Business Solutions Pvt. Ltd. (BSPL) is in the business of aligning solutions to client goals. It is catering in the areas given below:

- Goal definition & strategy mapping
- Business strategy design
- Designing monitoring matrix
- Visual analytics & dashboard building
- Business consulting
- Industry specific business solutions
Horizontal solutions – ERP, CRM, BI, DMS, HR, SFA, POS, Payroll, AR/AP etc.

This study describes how training and development has been an integral part of TRU Group culture. It explains in detail the initiatives taken by the TRU Group for employee training and development and examines how these initiatives have benefited in improving employees’ productivity, performance and quality of work.

TRU group’s presales team provides all the necessary support to the sales team. It is primarily engaged in identifying the technical and business requirements of the customers, prior to designing a solution, consulting with technical teams about capabilities, and supporting business sales teams, account managers and partners in proposal activities.

Pre-sales support activities undertaken by TRU: The pre-sales team conducts in-depth research to understand the potential areas and identify the list of prospects that may need the organisation’s products or services. The business requirements of clients are validated and mapped with the organisation’s offerings. A presentation of offerings in accordance with the business requirements gathered during the qualification stage is prepared and demonstrated.

The Pre-sales Technical Specialist program is specially designed for company’s pre-sales team to help them close leads. To facilitate this, Class Room Sessions to train the Pre-Sales team is held on all Saturdays.

Modules Covered: The E-learning systems are integrated with e-content and e-management, where learning styles and preferences are combined with varying media and delivery systems to create an effective virtual experience. This includes:

- Understanding the client - pattern in vertical / horizontal (Programming / Platform) / Technology Architecture / Solution
- Pattern match of the client’s Domain / behavioural expectations
• Project briefing: Introduction to Platforms / Architectures / Technologies.

The Sales team focuses primarily on closing deals. The Sales team designs the solutions, makes corporate presentations for corporate clients and takes orders.

The Project Team primarily studies the project in detail and verifies it. Client verification is carried out and meetings with end users are conducted to discuss the mapping criteria, mapping requirement and Score card. Business mapping requirement (BMR) document is prepared accordingly.

Infrastructure and Implementation team sets up various data centers as per the client’s need. Virtual Private Networks (VPN), Disaster Recovery Site (DRS) are set up at Primary and Secondary Sites. Business Intelligence (BI) is used for MIS reporting whereas; business dashboards are designed using HTML and Excel. Global products like RAMCO (for ERP and Magna), EPICOR, 3I Info Tech ORION, software solutions with built-in CRM, SCM, finance, and HR capabilities—are provided to organisations to smoothly integrate disparate teams, functions, processes and systems.

Training and development of implementation team plays a very significant role because the products / services are often heavily customisable and the requirements from client(s) are very unique. Training is done to prepare collaterals, case studies, and presentations. The Pre-sales team must know the functionality of the product and the business processes of the industry. For example, EPICOR deals in discrete manufacturing and RAMCOR deals in both Discrete and Process manufacturing. EPICOR products are mostly used by manufacturing companies. The TRU group employees login at partner portals (EPICOR and RAMCOR) and access different learning modules.
Five years back, the TRU group followed class room training which led to many hurdles such as physical presentation, dispersed geographical locations. Cost to company was high while training was imparted to those employees only who were involved in the US and France based projects. Training was dependent on a number of participants and absenteeism of instructor or participants were inhibiting factors. However E-learning provided flexibility and the schedule of training was distributed amongst the participants much before the commencement of the training.

**Learning process:** The E-Learning process in above stated organisations comprise of the following steps:

- Nomination of employee, as per the type of training (Specific or general), employees are nominated for various modules
- Requirement gathering and schedule making
- Selection of domain experts
- Design of training modules
- Scheduling and sharing of training calendar
- Informing employees two weeks ahead on the type of training to be attended.

- **Type of Training Modules:**
  - General product training for new releases;
  - Product upgrade updates;
  - Module Specific- for production, taxation, aimed for functional consultants.

Challenges faced with this model of training are:

- Time zone (country specific) - trainer is in one zone and participants are in different time zones.
- Live training and language problem- Chinese instructors giving product training.
People sometimes miss training schedules (due to non-availability, customer visits, vacations), other priorities supersede the training requirements.

Less active participation as compared to class room training.

**Issues:** To make E-Learning effective attention may be given on the following issues:

- Understand the training and development initiatives.
- Trainees’ engagement must be considered as vital issue to be addressed.
- Understand the issues which constitute a learning organisation.
- Understand the limitations of training and development initiatives in driving change.

TRU group recognised that E-learning is essential as the management realised that product cycles, competitive intelligence, industry information and corporate strategies are evolving at a much faster speed and the only way to enhance their employee knowledge is through online learning. Electronic delivery does not only mean reducing cost but increasing effectiveness, in terms of improving the way the organisation does business. Apart from this, online training is also preferred because of its cost-effectiveness. One of the biggest differences between online training and traditional modes of training is that the delivery cost of the former is very low. TRU Group has outsourced its training activities in an effort to take advantage of E-learning training and also to reduce the cost. E-Learning has helped the group tremendously. Cost of training has gone down, flexibility in attending training is given, queries are answered fast and each training program have been documented. Through E-learning certification processes becomes faster; and employee’s motivation have been enhanced.
Blend of Classroom Training and E-learning

To reap the benefits through human development the group is using both modes of training in a judicious fashion. For example sales skill set training is lacking in current scenario, where real life case studies and experiences to be shared. For this trainer impact will be high. Online training is not about replacing human-taught courses with online self-directed content or computers are replacing human contact, instead the issue is how to blend the two or when to implement a human touch within the online course. Question is how can organisations integrate collaborative opportunities and live mentoring with rich internet resource. The shift should be towards a “blended” or “integrated” approach to online training.

Earlier the group was utilising only classroom training however at later stages RAMCOR started their own E-Learning training modules. Recently, RAMCOR initiated three days training module and the last two days are devoted to class room interactions. Under the module trainer presentations are easily available, shared and accessible as per convenience of the learner.

Learning experience with EPICOR- Global Prospective

Problem Faced- Excessive Training leads to Iteration. Client utilises the employee first and post taking the certification, the employee switches company. They attend training but do not go for certification whereas; some clients need certified people to handle their projects.

Any organisation planning to implement online training should access five critical online training success factors as detailed by Teri Anderson:

- Assessing or evaluating corporate culture and readiness for online learning
- Specific content and programs
- Internal capabilities or infrastructure
- Cost options of the initiative
TRU Group had planned to implement a new ERP system for customers at Pune. The project was ambitious with tight timeframes and the implementation team training had to be in line with the demands of the undertaking.

Challenges faced by the implementation team were:

- A huge number of staff was to be trained in various functions core to the business functioning (12+ staff on one site) in different modules.
- A fundamental mindset change by local staff was required who were deployed on site and had worked on a different ERP product.
- No dedicated Training resources were available. Staff doing the change of system had to take time away from the project to train staff on-site and remotely. The majority of go-live team was based in Pune.
- TRU needed a system which allowed their staff to take on a self-training approach which didn't allow key staff who was busy with the change and needed time to complete the core business requirements.

Solution

- Epicor's custom-produced digital multimedia and eLearning courseware offered the power of real-world simulation and interactivity, plus built-in tracking of training results.
- Epicor's E-learning solution allowed TRU group staff to give time to go through training in a staggered pattern removing the requirement for additional staffing hours. The E-learning solution and quick reference cards allowed staff a chance to "refresh" their knowledge on 'go-live' and reduced the number of 'How do I' type requests.
- The cloud-based platform provided by Epicor offered end-to-end training solutions to TRU group- employees, partners and customers. A customisable library of effective, multimedia lessons was developed.
- The database provided a simple way to schedule and record training.
Results

- The online training solution was highly effective. The self-learning module developed enabled staff to learn the new system on their own time and pace. The eLearning solution allowed staff to refresh their knowledge when needed during ‘go-live’. Employees continued to complete their core business requirements while learning the new system without requiring additional staffing hours.
- Continued function using old system during migration to the new system minimised impact. TRU was able to accelerate the implementation of the major ERP change in a large manufacturing business in six months.
- With the use of E-learning solutions, the company was able to seamlessly integrate their people, processes, applications, and data. This enabled the organisation to automate and streamline its operations and support business growth.
- TRU group was able to easily manage learning solutions that produced real performance enhancement and, in turn, gave boost to company business.

TRU Group of Companies implemented different E-learning programs (learn-at-your-own-pace) of employee development and delivery of effective, cost-efficient online training for different groups, based on their requirements.

The self-paced E-learning training empowered workforce and increased productivity with tailor-made solution for employees. E-learning programs improved the efficiency and increased motivational level of a large number of staff across different locations. The company was able to easily monitor individual employee learning and progress.

Conclusion

E-learning in corporate training has become increasingly popular worldwide and plays a crucial part in the training and development
process of many big organisations. Skilled and knowledgeable employees are the real assets of a company. E-learning provides the impetus for improving consistent quality of training which in turn is instrumental in increasing the knowledge and skill levels of employees. More and more companies around the globe prefer E – learning as their chosen training format.

Many organisations are already deriving huge benefits from E-learning. E-learning’s evolution is leading training and development and HR professionals to re-evaluate its potential as an efficient, flexible and cost-effective method to deliver quality learning and development opportunities to employees. E-learning has revolutionised training through various mediums such as video conferencing, interaction, creative story lines and exercises developed by recognised subject matter experts (Avalon Consulting, 2008).

Recent findings from various case studies indicate that E-learning dimension provides greater speed and flexibility for the learner. This also indicates that the training can be tailored to be least disruptive to a firm’s work schedules and there is less time “off-the-job”. This will eventually lead to a decline of classroom-based events and corresponding increase of technology-based training. A blended approach, incorporating E-learning with traditional formats of training has already been identified as the correct way to proceed. It is believed that in the next few years there will be a steady, but notable, increase in use of E-learning for enhancing and expanding traditional training methods in the organisation programmes.

References


