

Building E-learning Strategy and Developing E-learning Action Plan In Higher Education

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Abstract

Building a e-learning strategy and developing e-learning action plan, requires two fundamental things, first: enough knowledge about what you want to accomplish, and second: a willingness to articulate your plan in a way that is meaningful to all your stakeholders. Before any work can begin, identify the key stakeholders who should participate in strategy development.

This paper intends to inform how to building your e-learning strategy in higher education. There are some strategies must be considered such as who should participate?; analyze current situation; set your vision; state your mission; gap analysis; conduct force-field and SWOT analysis; strategy recommendations; and build an action plan. Beside that in this paper will describe some steps for developing an e-learning action plan in higher education.

Key words : Building E-learning strategy, developing E-learning action plan.

01. Introduction

The Internet has begun to radically change the teaching learning process of students in higher education, especially to improve their knowledge, their skills or further their general education. E-learning refers to the use of Internet technologies to deliver a broad array of solutions that enhance knowledge and performance. It is based on three fundamental criteria: (1) E-learning is networked, which makes it capable of instant updating, storage/retrieval, distribution and sharing of instruction or information. (2) It is delivered to the end-user via a computer using standard internet technology. (3) It focuses on the broadest view of learning – learning solutions that go beyond the traditional paradigms of training. E-Learning is not limited to the delivery of instruction.

E-learning spans distance, but distance learning's broad definition also includes correspondence courses, or other approaches. So we can say that e-learning is a form of distance learning, but distance learning is not necessarily e-learning. Furthermore, there's no particular reason that the goal of e-learning should be to simply emulate what could be done in the classroom. By combining the new technology of the internet with new thinking of how people learn, durable e-learning strategies-strategies that actually work are beginning to merge. There are some major benefits of e-learning i.e.(1) e-learning lowers costs; (2) content is more timely and dependable; (3) messages are consistent or customized, depending on need; (4) builds community; (5) scalability; (6) universality; etc.;

Why we have an E-learning strategy? Because, with e-learning, we are not just introducing new technology for learning but we are also introducing a new way to “think” about learning. Learning does not necessarily require training or instruction. People can learn in many ways through access to well-designed information, by using new performance-

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enhancing tools, through experience, and from each other. Many efforts at using technology for learning have not been sustainable because few saw past the capabilities of new and promising technologies to understand the bigger picture. Many efforts often underestimated the complexities of the interactions between e-learning and the organization, and how truly difficult it is to change people's attitudes about what learning events are & what they can be.

E-learning would be complex enough if all we wanted to do was to build and deliver high-quality training on the web. So we need to build an e-learning strategy as foundation for e-learning itself, and developing e-learning action plan in higher education. To Build an e-learning strategy, we need to know some important component i.e. who should participate? How to analyze your current situation? How to set your vision and state your mission? How to determine gap analyze? How to developing e-learning action plan? This paper will give brief description about all questions above.

02. Building E-learning Strategy In Higher Education

Before any work can begin, identify the key stakeholders who should participate in strategy development. Sometimes the work requires input from a broad cross section of the training organization (training managers, developers, instructors, administrators), its client (students, organization, sponsors), and other stakeholders, especially senior managers and the IT organization (in some cases customers and outside suppliers may also play a role). These larger groups are best used to generate ideas and suggestions, as well as identify key issues, problems, or needs.

The first step is to fully analyze the current situation as it pertains to the ability to launch and sustain e-learning. Take a look at the current state of your overall learning and development efforts and the state of your e-learning initiatives. Determine how well you are aligned with goals and direction of your business. This is derived from a broad assessment of your overall costs, effectiveness, flexibility, etc., plus the value perceptions of all your stakeholders. Here are ten key questions to ask.

- How is your business direction changing and what are the causes of this change?
- How is learning and development viewed in your business, in terms of:
 - Perception of what learning is
 - Learning as an integral component of work
 - Flexibility and responsiveness to changing business requirements
- What is current state of e-learning in your business, in terms of:
 - Usage throughout organization
 - Value perception by key stakeholders
 - Sophistication of both the technology and approach
 - Perceived or actual level of success or failure with previous projects, including reactions from users/learners
- What is the current state of the technology (inter/intranet) infrastructure in your business?
- What is the current level of funding for e-learning? Is it adequate or inadequate?
- How are learning efforts evaluated in the business?
- What is the current state of your internal e-learning talent?
- How coordinated are your e-learning efforts? Is there redundancy or process gaps?
- How is e-learning currently accessed in your business?
- Are e-learning initiatives, expertise, and funding evenly distributed across your organization or concentrated in a few places?

Now, create a detail description of where you want your learning and development efforts (including e-learning) to be. This is derived from the goals and mission of your business and an assessment of its future needs, plus input from all stakeholders.

- What is the mission & what are the goals of your business? Where is your business going?
- What should be the role for learning and development in your business?
- What are your competitors doing in the areas of learning & development, and e-learning?
- What are the best practices in learning and development, and e-learning, that are appropriate for your business situation?
- What should be your e-learning value proposition?
- What is the business rationale for e-learning?
- What is your vision for how you want to be viewed and valued in the future (five years)?
- What is the mission for learning and development in your business? How does e-learning play into that mission?
- What principles are most important to you in guiding how you will implement your mission and realize your vision?
- How will your mission, vision, and guiding principles manifest themselves in:
 - Your position in the business
 - How learning and e-learning are defined
 - Your organizational structure
 - The support you receive from the top
 - The stability of funding
 - Your ability to recruit or develop the alright talent
 - How you and the business define learning and e-learning

We need to set our vision. A vision statement describes a future state as if it were the present. Vision statements are usually developing through some port of consensus-building activity, followed by refinements by senior managers. They reflect a future, ideal state. Also we need to state our mission. Once you have agreed-upon vision, develop a mission statement that encapsulates your purpose. Mission statements are usually developed by senior managers and then tested/refined with stakeholders (who should be solicited for their initial ideas first). They reflect the direction the organization must go on order to realize its vision. With a vision and mission in hand, you are ready to build your e-learning strategy. But bear in mind that as you build your strategy, your vision, and mission may change, based on the data you uncover and the various forces (people, technology, business, financial, etc.) that are working n support of and against your effort.

Before we building an e-learning, we need to determine our Gap Analysis. Create detailed specification of the key disparities between the current and desired situation, a long with associated descriptions of root causes (not symptoms). Conduct Force-Field and SWOT Analyses. There are two good analytical techniques that can be used for looking more closely at strategy issues and decisions. The first is a force-field analysis that can be conducted for each gap statements. Verify your gap analysis with stakeholders. A SWOT analysis looks at the entire organization to determine its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threat, either at the moment or at some future point in time.

- *Strength* signify what you're good at, reflecting a high level of competence and support. To identify how the strengths of the company support the training or learning effort.

- *Weaknesses* also look inward, at areas that are under performing or nonexistent that pose a risk to organization.
- *Opportunity* highlight the key areas where progress could be made if the strengths are accentuated and the weaknesses diminished.
- *Threats* highlight the consequences if the opportunity are not realized or if the organization's weaknesses overwhelm its strengths. Threats also detail what might happen if nothing is done.

Essentially, the goal of SWOT analysis is to surface issues relating to each of these four areas and devise strategies to accentuate and build on strength and opportunities, while, at the same time, reducing weaknesses and neutralizing, threats.

Sample SWOT analysis for a training organization

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-tech company with lots of tech savvy • Long tradition of training gives us lots of experience • Established intranet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long tradition of training may lock us in old paradigms. • Everybody doing their own thing. • Business not doing well at this time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to leverage our technical expertise. • By showcasing e-learning as more efficient and cost effective, may get support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to move quickly will lose windows of opportunity facing downsizing of critical talent and budget cuts. • Business units will buy from outside sources.

03. Developing E-learning Action Plan In Higher Education

Implementation your e-learning strategy recommendations through a comprehensive action plan. This is where the specific tactics are described in enough detail so everyone knows what needs to be done. Following are eight basic steps for developing your e-learning action plan.

- *Begin with strategic finding (from your research) followed by specific recommendations.* Priorities recommendations. Start with the most important issues, which may be the most difficult. Eliminate challenges that you can't overcome immediately, but note which of these are true inhibiting factors.
- *Specify tactics to operationally your recommendations.* Get into some detail about how you will make the strategy real, answering the typical question: who, what, when, where, why, and how
- *Identify critical success factors.* Determine what constitutes success. Seek out the input of all stakeholders—including senior leaders, front-line managers, the IT organization, learners, customers(if appropriate), and the training staff itself.
- *Set and stick to timelines and milestones.* Get agreement from everyone about deliverables and accountabilities.
- *Provide adequate funding for implementation.* Be sure there's enough money to implement the strategy.

- *Write it down.* Some people are satisfied when everyone comes out of a strategy discussion in agreement.
- *Define and implement a change management plan.* Don't wait to begin helping the organization adopt the changes your e-learning strategy will bring about.
- *Define and implement a communication plan.* Commensurate with your change management initiative, develop and implement communications design to both inform everyone about the new e-learning strategy and help people overcome their own doubts and resistance to this new approach.

04. Conclusion

- Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure are required to ease the communication among the stakeholders. IT infrastructure helps many universities to work out a process relating to the administering the students data so that it can accelerate the decision concerning those data.
- Strategy Recommendations: Based on all the work you've done to this point, you can now make specific strategic recommendation to close the gaps, implementation the mission, and achieve the vision.
 - Identify one champion who will take up the cause at the senior level
 - Develop one e-learning solution, perhaps sponsored by that champion (that addresses a business problem), as showcase product
 - Build an e-learning business plan focused on the issues senior managers believe are important (even if some of them are not your issues)
- Computers can be an assistant to serve the stakeholders and they can also help the process of the learning itself, including all things relating to the management of the e-learning process. Besides, computers can be used as a tool for searching for scattered free knowledge in the world
- Developing an e-learning strategy essential in setting a direction for the organization and sticking to it. But to accomplish this, it's important to be on guard for issues and behaviors that will surface. Some people who see e-learning as threatening will challenge the strategy as unworkable or not in the best interests of the client. Issues of turf and responsibility for e-learning.

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