E-learning and the corporate setting: A closer look at how e-learning impacts the work environment.

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ABSTRACT
Employing e-learning as a corporate training tool has now become an indispensable model that is being used by an increasing number of companies to ensure that they have an appropriately skilled workforce. Change is a constant in the work environment, this necessitates the need to train and retrain employees on new product, technologies and services specific to their industry. E-learning utilizes ICT network technology using either the intranet or the Internet as a vehicle to instruct and inform relevant users. This method makes it possible to extend training to a diversified geographically scattered workforce in an economical way. Corporate e-learning facilitates on demand training, ensuring that the information and knowledge base is readily available and accessible to all relevant team members within the corporate environment. There are a number of benefits as well as challenges to the progress of corporate e-learning and this paper sets to review the impact of e-learning in the corporate setting.

INTRODUCTION
Dynamics associated with workplace learning.
In today’s dynamic business environment, the innovation, information and training triad is viewed as a vital factor to bolster a corporate entities competitive advantage. A company sets up training activities for its personnel so that the workers improve their skills, upgrade their qualifications and in-turn get equipped to facilitate retraining. Improving the activities around training and retraining of staff within organizations is critical to enhance the knowledge and skills of the employees. This makes it a strategic tool used to ensure excellent results within an organization. There are a number of factors that led to the increase in the demand of in-company training such as globalization of the economy, the advent of new technologies at an increasing pace, revamping of production systems and restructuring of organizations to name a few. For an organization to thrive and maintain the gains of from corporate learning success the employees must be trained frequently, not only to add to their knowledge but also to introduce them to new competencies and techniques and these must be frequently updated. For a business to be competitive, it is important to ensure that an organization develops versatile staff members who have the ability to cut across job descriptions as well as organizational levels. Lastly, after establishing skills and training competencies, a culture must be set to continually retrain as well as transfer the application of the skills across all areas of the business’ activity.
In the more developed countries, the economic structures are transitioning towards higher added value as well as higher technology and as a result there is an increasing demand for skilled labour in the production unit. The increase in demand creates a skills gap where the pool of skilled labour cannot sufficiently service the demand and providing relevant training is the only way to circumvent this dilemma. In such a setup, corporate e-learning is a perfect tool because technological innovation as it applies to education favors new models for the production, access and distribution of digital learning resources. Adopting technology advances for use in corporate training can be expected to improve the efficiency by achieving desired objectives at a wider range, utilizing fewer resources compared to traditional classroom training. The use of tech tools can boost efficiency of training and raise the levels of outcome sustainability. There a number of set backs that come with adopting the advances; where a company already has established training programs and practices, it will take substantial investment and organizational stamina against resistance to effect change. Research however, supports the notion that
regardless of the challenges and difficulties corporate will face in this shift; corporate e-learning will continue to rise. The basis of the rise can be linked to an increase of in reliable Internet connections, cloud computing, HTML5 browser and smart mobile devices.

**E-learning**

E-learning refers to the practice of accessing learning and educational material outside the setting of a traditional classroom. The learning process takes place by use of technological devices and is usually in the form of electronic media utilizing ICT platforms like the Internet and intranet to facilitate content deliver.

**Corporate E-learning**

The word corporate is used to denote a large company, group or corporation typically spread out over many locations, employing a large staff complement. Corporate e-learning can then be stated as the practice of employing e-learning models to replace or augment traditional workplace learning and training practices.

Research has outlined the need to model advanced and novel e-learning support platforms for corporate entities. This should result in an increase in overall competitiveness and help corporates stay afloat in this new world economy era. (Acampora., et.al. 2011). When, e-learning is utilized by corporate entities, the expectation is to achieve an augmentation of the skills and knowledge of their personnel. E-learning is a manpower development tool that can be viewed as an instructional approach or ‘learning platform’, used by an organization with the intent to convey training to their labour pool, using computer and web based technology (Salas et. al. 2002). Expected benefits from its appropriate application can include:

- Cost effectiveness,
- Efficient content delivery,
- Ability to provide training on demand,
- Not time and space bound,
- Freely available as long as there is a device and/or connection among other benefits.

Overall, the purpose of learning in the vocation setting is to drive business returns and inspire positive changes in workplace conduct and task execution (Park & Wentling, 2007). Corporate e-learning is valuable because it is potentially flexible and can foster a suitable environment for independent study. It can help outline standards and foster common practice in the work that an organization is carrying out, in addition, corporate e-learning creates a platform that can allow collaboration across local sites and even facilitate a network that isn’t limited by geographical boundaries for professional interaction.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this section, the trends of workplace learning, the augmentation of e-Learning in the corporate set up are summarized as well as highlight some of the pros and cons that can possibly be attributed to e-Learning. Various models are explored from different bodies of literature. (Charband & Jafari Navimipour, 2016) Refer to the Internet and worldwide web services as a hub, which facilitates the exchange of data and information. Gagnon, et al. 2015, state that our present day society is a result of the shift from an industrial era to the knowledge era. This represents opportunities to create new knowledge. According to Tirziu & Vrabie, 2015, e-learning is increasingly becoming a standard in many courses to the point of fully replacing the classroom set up with online courses. (Fadayin et. al. 2015) states that: In the work place, the training of staff to improve their status is a very important function and is key in third-millennium organizations.

**Developing a Learning Culture**

Distance learning and electronic learning has been a valuable alternative to classroom teaching for decades (Huang, Lin & Huang, 2012b). In the Canadian Council on Learning's recent report was stated that e-learning is “the development of knowledge and skills through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), particularly to support interactions for e-learning with content, with learning activities and tools, and with other people” (Tirziu & Vrabie, 2015). Staff development and improving job status done through training is concerned as important parts of HRM in the third-millennium organizations (Fadaiyan, Reshadtjoo, Zahir & Golestanes, 2015) and their management is an important challenge in any system and organization (Ashouraie, Jafari Navimipour, Ramage & Wong,
2015; Jafari Navimipour, Masoud Rahmani, Habibizad Navin & Hosseinzadeh, 2014). The development of a learning culture in an organization involves the continuous education of its members (Gagnon, et al. 2015). As learning professionals, the importance of learning on employee's commitment and turnover is known. Studies carried out by various researchers have highlighted the positive effect of training on various work-related outcomes for improving organizational performance and on the commitment level of employees (Dhar, 2015). Achieving employee commitment is essential (Lam, O'Donnell & Robertson, 2015) and the knowledge of the factors that influence employee's commitment in their electronic learning systems possibly provides teachers important information to design, develop, and finally distribute more effective distance learning courses. E-learning systems support the needs of the new workforce and drive employee's commitment in a number of ways.

**Learners Satisfaction:** Numerous studies have found that the implementation of e-learning in its various forms can be expensive to an organization due to the relatively low adoption rate among users and this expenditure must be balanced with improved satisfaction (Cheok & Wong, 2015). According to previous studies on learner's satisfaction and the employee's commitment, technical characteristics of the learning system, educational content, and self-efficacy had a positive effect on learner's satisfaction (Hassanzadeh, Kanaani & Elahi, 2012; Ko & Ko, 2012; Rubin, Fernandes & Averinou, 2013; Roh, 2015). User satisfaction is defined as the sum of positive and negative responses to a set of factors (Najmul Islam, 2014). In addition, satisfaction is determined by users' subjective experience. An e-learning system can ensure effectiveness and efficiency but if users do not feel comfortable and emotionally positive in using it, the potential of the system wouldn't be fully taken advantage of (Grinberg & Hristova, 2012). Educational technology is the effective use of technological tools in learning. As a concept, it concerns an array of tools, such as media, machines and networking hardware's, as well as considering theoretical perspectives for their effective application (Richey, Silber & Ely, 2008). Education content is the quality of system output and measures semantic success (Hassanzadeh, Kanaani et al. 2012). Increased satisfaction leads to increased usage, reduced user complaints, and thus improved individual performance (Violante & Vezzetti, 2015) and employee's commitment.

**24x7 Access to Training Materials:** E-learning is gaining an educational foothold all over the world. The availability of electronic and web-enabling technologies has a tremendous influence on the success of e-learning (Gunasekaran, McNeil & Shaul, 2002). “Anytime anywhere” access is always appropriate and valued. Clearly, the collapse of time-space barriers is a boon to multinational corporations who struggle to deliver consistent training to a workforce scattered across countries and time zones (Seow, Hughes & Servage, 2005). Educators can add and revise materials as business needs or trends change and employees may contribute to content themselves. It all adds up to continuous learning and an empowered workforce.

**Personalized Learning:** The necessity of life-long learning in the era of knowledge explosion together with the ever-increasing bandwidth of Internet and continuously falling costs for memory brings about the rapid proliferation of massive open online courses (Lee, et al. 2014). People are looking for flexible learning to accommodate their needs for improvements. One option is through Internet based learning or online learning. The Internet has provided people with unlimited access to information. Online learning enables lifelong learning to become more accessible (Dahalan, et al. 2012). Personalization is crucial to foster effective, active, efficient, and satisfactory learning, especially in informal learning scenarios that are being demanded in lifelong learning settings, with more control on the learner side and more sensitivity towards context (Henning, et al. 2014). Organizations can more easily tie learning goals to competencies, objectives, and priorities. Workforces have the flexibility to learn at their own pace and investigate other areas of interest easily.

**Efficiency:** Efficient use of the e-learning system is related to the productivity, as work accomplished per unit time. For e-learning, a measure of efficiency would be the time or number of clicks trainee’s need to access a lesson or obtain some information, or the time needed to acquire some competence (Grinberg & Hristova, 2012). Employees are the backbone of an organization. Hence, the retention of the employees is important in keeping the organization on track (Hong, Hao, Kumar, Ramendran & Kadiresan, 2012). A highly engaged employee will consistently deliver beyond expectations. Thus, employee commitment is critical to any organization that seeks to retain valued employees (Singh &
Affective commitment and retention within nonprofit human service organizations are important factors of success in public policy implementation for those citizens in greatest need (Toscano, 2015). Employees take note of awareness and prefer employers who take active measures to reduce their footprint. Decreased materials usage leads to decrease the costs and increase employees’ retention.

**Empirical Studies**

Empirical studies have found sufficient evidence suggesting that training within the company increases productivity as well as the workers wages considerably. In the United Kingdom, Ballot, et. al. 2001 calculated the impact of training on the profitability of both workers and companies and then examined the co-relation between training and productivity to come up with the conclusion that there is no relationship between the number of trainees and profitability of the firms surveyed, but found that there is a strong positive relationship between training areas and a company’s profitability of companies. (Holzer, et.al 1993) and (Ichniowski, et.al. 1997) found significant relationship between hours of training and productivity. (Groot 1999) concludes the presence of a substantial relationship between training, wages and business productivity.

Key results from the consolidated empirical studies are as follows:

1. The relationship between training and business results is most significant in the areas of manufacturing and other leading sectors of high technology,
2. To date, strict rates of returns similar to those calculated for fixed assets and other financial data which refers to business results, is seldom calculated
3. A positive effect of continuing training variables on sales and similar qualitative measures of business production is considered acceptable.

E-learning can be considered an emerging technology, which makes impact on the workforce, reshaping the relationship between employees and organizations. (Bell, & Yeung,2006), highlight a set of significant challenges to both the organizations and the employees. These challenges are viewed as human resource challenges driven by interaction between the following factors: The property of emerging technologies, peoples dynamic character profiles (employees and customers needs) and what they are seeking and the fluid nature of organizations and how they are approaching their human capital. Interactions that drive human resource challenges represent the relationship between emerging technologies, people and organizations. Organizations in this regard play a central role because they should be aware of the impacts due to the changes in people (employees and customers) as well as emerging technologies. The organizations provide training for office-workers to ensure that they get familiar with emerging technologies and resultantly improve efficiency. People and emerging technologies are linked through organizations. E-learning can facilitate these interactions as it provides rapid communication between colleagues, improving the quality of the work. The process of improving the quality of the staff in order to set better quality work is called continuing professional development (CPD).

**Continuing professional development**

The Engineering Council (US) defines continuous professional development (CPD) as “The systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skill, and the development of personal qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties throughout the practitioner’s working life” (Friedman & Phillips, 2004). CPD, is essential for the organizations and includes executive education as well as staff training.

Lorriman’s Windows (1997) explains the three key elements in CPD. First, there must be a mission by each individual for his or her self-improvement and every employee should understand his or her key competencies, all learning should maximize the speed to develop these competencies. Secondly, organizations should redefine the managers’ role so that coaching and developing of staff can become a highly important activity. Lastly, an organization should provide a learning environment and maximize learning processes. These three elements can be achieved by adopting training. E-learning, is a key solution used by many organizations for training in this regard.

According to Sloman (2001), the Internet has revolutionized the way things work. Training is one of the many aspects that have been tweaked as a result. The methods used by trainers to conduct training and the way employees now learn have become different because the internet and other technology platforms
allow the dissemination of information, knowledge sharing and self-learning with speed, this diminishes
the trainers’ role. However, Sloman speculates that “training is possibly entering a new age, with
growing respect for the importance of the function further adds that many organizations realize that
‘people are a source of competitive advantage’, hence investment in the use of corporate e-learning
becomes more important.
Lowe (1995) states that all the employees should be able and motivated to acquire new skills, this will
enable them to contribute to technology management within the big organizations, where each manager
takes charge of at least one project and has several employees working together. Effective team
management is vital in influencing the project’s success.
(Freeman & Capper, 1999) explain that online education at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS)
enables students to increase their motivation and interests in learning. More students trust online
education and feel it is useful because they enjoy learning as a result of the increased motivation.

**Bates- Factors supporting the adoption of E-learning technology in learning**

Based of previous the examples, increased motivation and interest in learning is a key factor encouraging
the uptake of technology in learning. Bates (1997) highlights four main factors to explain this:

- Improving access to education and training.
- Improving the quality of learning.
- Reduction of the costs of quality education.
- Improve the overall cost-effectiveness of education.

Bates suggests that the fourth factor is different from the third as he argues that “for the same dollar,
expenditure learning effectiveness can be increased, or more students can be taught to the same standard,
for the same level of investment.” (Bates, 1995) considers a wide range of factors to summarize the core
influences of effective implementations of e-learning models.

**Alexander’s four-level model of E-learning**

Alexander’s four-level model of e-learning (Alexander & Cosgrove, 1995) is another representative
model. Here, the first level is about online presentation and publishing where lecturer can put relevant
course materials on his subject on the university’s intranet. Then the second level covers online quizzes
or assessment, providing an alternative type of assessment. The third level accommodates online forums,
allowing students to provide feedback and presenting the opportunity to have online discussions. The
third level can train students how to express their thoughts and how to present them.
The fourth level accounts for interactive learning, particularly online role-play simulation. This level
combines all the benefits of the first three levels, and than greatly strengthens knowledge creation and
knowledge sharing by face-to-face presentations, face-to-face discussions, online debates and online
discussions. This four-level model of e-learning contains aspects of interactive learning and makes use
of software, Internet and videoconferencing to assist learning, in the presence of lecturers and tutors.

From the above literature review, a number of perspectives on the positive impacts of e-learning in the
corporate setting as well as a few challenges that threaten to hinder the full adoption of e-learning
platforms for corporate training are extracted. From the basis of the gains and the threats to potential
progress, the paper proposes a few methods on corporate e-learning evaluation for increased impact.

**IMPACTS OF E-LEARNING IN CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT**

Corporate e-learning initially comes across as a hefty investment but it carries a significant return on
investment. A majority of companies, regardless of size are beginning to see and appreciate the
advantages of moving their training to technology based platforms.

Generic statistics report savings on training of up to 50% when e-learning takes over from instructor
based training. Despite such a margin in potential savings, there is a cost barrier to setting up corporate
e-learning systems. The question remains whether the benefits are dramatic enough to warrant the
required investment. It is therefore imperative to take a closer look at the positive implication of e-
learning in the corporate setting.

**POSITIVE IMPACT**

**Overall training cost reduction.**

E-learning does not require user to use printed material, onsite training facilitators and travel associated
costs as all the material and information required by the employee is available on the training platform.
An initial investment and on-going input for maintenance are required but these are minimal compared to the costs associated with the one-on-one traditional manpower development methods. This can be viewed as cost reduction whilst maintaining the quality of training input and can increase corporate profitability.

**Rapid content deployment**
E-learning methods can be delivered with speed and convenience and employees are able to access the new information or requisite skill sets almost immediately. From the moment that content is uploaded onto an e-learning platform, it is available almost immediately. Faster deployment of information can result in the immediate net increase of employee and corporate productivity.

**Employees can access information as and when they need it most**
Corporate e-learning platforms can be set up in a way that allows employees to access vital information and reference material on demand. If an employee for example feels the need to refresh their memory on a specific standard procedure, the can simply log onto a learning management system (LMS) and retrieve the module outlining the required information. The result benefit from a corporate perspective is improved customer satisfaction and more fluid business practices.

**Better retention of knowledge**
An engaging and interactive learning setting results in better learning outcome because employees will show improves retention of the knowledge and skills. Corporate e-learning enables employees to digest the information better. Improved data retention will correspond in an increase of the quality of work produced by the organization.

**Offers flexibility by allowing employees to learn at their preferred pace**
Asynchronous e-learning platforms allow employees the benefit to take on a course at their desired pace. The employees are not rushed through a content presentation in a rigid corporate classroom. This enables the learner to assimilate the new knowledge before moving on to new milestones within the training course. This benefits a corporate entity in that an employee will likely have better understanding of their training material.

**On-site instructors no longer a necessity**
The most notable benefit of employing e-learning methods for corporate training is that it does not require an instructor to be on-site. The implication of this among other things are that: corporates no longer finance the instructors travel and accommodation as well as allocate valuable working hours to fit in workplace class sessions. These savings amount to a dramatic increase in corporate productivity and profitability.

**Updating training material is quick and efficient**
Corporate e-learning makes the process of updating training material and or company policies relatively straightforward. It eradicates the need to rewrite, print voluminous pages of manuals and reference guides and then distribute them. The information can simply be uploaded on the LMS and then communication be sent to all employees so that they make the mandatory log in and learn the new material. This keeps employees abreast with real-time changes in policies and procedures, giving the corporate entity competitive advantage.

**Immediate access to essential resources**
An e-learning platform can help an employee to access resources quickly through the LMS. The platform can include links to relevant articles, pages, videos and webinars. These resources could serve the function of fine-tuning personnel skills.

**Increases an employee’s productivity**
Corporate e-learning can equip a staff member such that in comparison they become better trained, more knowledgeable about products and services, and acquire the knowledge adequate to support fellow workers. Such an employee is an asset, it can be predicted that they will be more efficient and will undoubtedly help to improve an organizations image and increase bottom line.

**Decrease employee turnover ratio**
Corporate e-learning gives employees 24x7 access to self paced training materials to further their personal and professional goals. This is a motivating factor and will lead to an improvement on job specific performance as well as workplace satisfaction. When an employee is happy and satisfied, they
will more likely maintain their loyalty to an organization. Corporate entities will likely have better brand ambassadors as a result.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS
As much as the points highlighted above indicate significant potential gains as a consequence of adopting corporate e-learning, there are a few drawbacks to consider in addition to the large start up cost.

1. Corporate e-learning requires more effort from the instructor. This is necessary for the extensive once off content preparation as well as addressing all the students concerns as when they come.
2. Corporate e-learning requires employees to exert more effort since online course takes up to 20-40% more time and effort when compared to traditional learning. Self paced learning requires users to be self motivated and disciplined to excel.
3. Conversion from traditional teaching methods to e-learning normally take longer than anticipated. It has been observed that changing the set up is harder than e-learning designers expected to achieve a set up that delivers quality and maintains the same efficiencies as traditional learning.
4. The lack of face to face interaction in e-learning makes it an impersonal approach to learning. When there is a lack of a meaningful connection, it is hard to maintain learner engagement and focus.
5. Fear of technology can act as a barrier in the dissemination of e-learning material. Users may run into obstacles like technical malfunctions while interacting with the devices as well as other tech-related challenges which otherwise would not be encountered in a traditional classroom.

STEPS TO EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE E-LEARNING
From the evidence gathered, organizations stand to benefit a lot by adopting e-learning as a training tool. It is prudent for companies regardless of their size and budget to invest in an e-learning training platform. However, when the costs associated with setting up a corporate e-learning system is considered, it is necessary to put rigorous checks and balances in place to ensure a definite return on investment. The checks should assess and evaluate the impact to ensure that training does not fall short of expectations. Outlined below are proposed steps that can help in ensuring corporate e-learning success.

Set Primary goals and evaluation parameters
Before evaluating a system, primary objectives must be established. If the main objective of the training was on developing a better method of attending to queries then the evaluation must be based on customer satisfaction after their queries have been handled. If this parameter is not defined, evaluation is not possible.

Gauge employee understanding and satisfaction using surveys and feedback
Employee feedback is a critical tool to help one assess areas in need of adjustment and fine-tuning. The surveys can be anonymous or open and also include a section to help determine whether or not employees are satisfied. The employees feedback is critical because they have experienced the training first hand.

Test the employees’ level of skill acquisition.
Giving employees a test after training can give insights on how much an individual has learnt for a training course. Information retention is a sure measure of how much one has actually learnt. Testing will give insights on what needs to be improved as well as appreciate what is working well.

Assess skills’ use on the job
It is one thing for an employee to learn a skill and another for them to actually use it. This test will also help evaluate if the training has improved the employees’ performance.

Compare and contrast successes and failures
This comparison helps one assess which employees are able to transfer their skills to corporate applications as well as assess the overall training strategy. It provides insights on possible window of training improvement.

Continually re-evaluate
Evaluation of a training strategy should not be viewed as a once off event rather an on-going corporate culture. The thrust of training should be to seek out points of weakness and continually improve to maximize on the gains as a result of the training.
For corporate e-learning, to register a higher uptake and score significant gains, both management and employees must be made aware of the benefits of this approach in training. Awareness is a key driver for an active commitment towards as well as participation in e-learning initiatives. The adoption of e-learning in corporate training offers organizations the possibility to offer consistent quality training and alters training events from ‘once off’ sessions to an ongoing process where employees can continually return to the online resources and refresh their knowledge. The quality of the training remains consistent regardless of the employees’ location, which helps ensure uniform training even where a corporate has a number of different divisions that are in geographically diverse locations. Its is a key tool in employee motivation and provides an impetus, allowing staff to move on their initiative from a low skill level to a higher skill level dependent on their desire and aptitude to learn. This tool provides opportunities for improved collaboration, teamwork and communication within an organization and as a result of the flexible deliver methods, and it does not hamper productivity because training can set up in such a way as not to be disruptive to a firms working schedule.

In light of all the potential benefits offered, the need to ensure a solid evaluation framework is outlined considering the fact that adopting corporate e-learning entails a heavy financial investment. The adoption of an evaluation framework is necessary to ensure that there is consistent feedback from users, and the platform is continually updated and improved to remain relevant as the business evolves with time. Frequent evaluation of the learning platform and outcomes can help keep the model relevant and cost effective as well as maximize benefits derived from it and overall ensure that the training strategy remains acceptable.

**Opportunities in corporate e-learning**

Corporate e-learning provides an opportunity for firms that occupy the same business niche to cooperate and collaborate in the development of their training material. The synergies will result in a reduction of costs associated with the development of material and increase the quality of the learning resources. These linkages will help set standards on universally accepted practice and ensure that the skillset of workers in a similar industry is both comparable and transferable across different sector in the same line of business.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Despite the increasing uptake of corporate e-learning, traditional models of corporate learning are still important and should not be abolished. E-learning as a training method has a lot of advantages but maximum benefit can be derived when the two methods are blended. The incorporation of mobile technologies such as smart phones and palm computers will increase the impact of corporate e-learning. These devices are now increasingly available and they can be accessed remotely and are able to exchange data with on-site devices used for corporate training. This presents as a huge integration opportunity for the expansion of corporate e-learning.

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