

Why Organisations choose e-learning

E-learning refers to a wide set of applications and processes such as web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration Arth (2011). As a result of advancing technology e-learning has become one of the fastest moving trends which aims to provide a platform that facilitates the integration of learning content, tools and services to create and deliver training content quickly effectively and economically (Zhang, Zhou, Briggs, & Nunamaker, 2006). As organisations look to more efficient ways of updating employees' knowledge and skill the role of e-learning as a method of training delivery has become increasingly more important Wargnier (2010) while Rosenberg (2006) recognises e-learning as an important structure that supports both formal and informal workplace learning.

Gunasekaran, McNeil, & Shaul (2002) discuss the reasons for implementing e-learning within corporate organisations and suggest they centre around its cost effectiveness, consistency, flexibility and convenience to users, Macpherson, Homan, & Wilkinson (2005) agree but propose the reasons for implementation in organisations can be discussed under two main themes which are cost reduction and flexibility. Organisations experience cost savings through a reduction in training time, Kineo (2012) describes this as learning compression. Mallon (2009) reports Toshiba American Business solutions (TABS) transformed a seven-hour, instructor-led session on Six Sigma⁸ for management into three, 45-minute, self-paced online training modules while Dublin (2011) reports similar findings in Seagate Technology where as a result of changing the format of their programme "Maximising Business Results" to include live virtual sessions, virtual team studies and off line self-study, the course time was reduced from 160 hours to 48 hours of modularised sessions. For companies with geographically dispersed employees there can be huge costs saved in travel expenses and time away from the workplace. Hopp (2012) relates the experiences of Xerox who cut travel expenses in Europe by as much as 10% and by \$150,000 from a single event for a Canadian business unit through the use of online learning while Weinstein (2011) indicates similar results for Emerson Network Power Liebert Services where the implementation of a virtual instructor led training programme saved over \$100,000 in travel costs and time away from the workplace. Another area where companies can experience cost reduction is in the ability of e-learning to deliver training to large numbers of employees. Arth (2011) suggests large scale training interventions require major resources such as rooms and instructors and there is usually a requirement for a phased rollout over time to accommodate the inclusion of all learners. He argues these costs are significantly reduced as e-learning allows organisations to present content quickly and easily to large numbers of employees. Other areas where cost savings may be experienced are the reduction in the number of trainers required Macpherson et al. (2005) and Mallon (2009) and a reduction in the organisations carbon footprint through presenting learning content online or providing alternatives to paper based forms of communication Kineo (2012).

Turning to the theme of flexibility Macpherson et al. (2005) suggest the discussion on flexibility tends to focus on two aspects; flexibility in delivery and flexibility in the pace and dissemination of learning. Jones & McCann (2005) posit the traditional definition of the workplace as being a single location with normal daily hours is being replaced by global organisations and communication networks that change the notion of standard work hours and incorporate multiple geographical locations. They contend technology provides the answer to providing the flexible learning environment that employees now require, Rosenberg (2006) supports this argument contending e-learning “conquers” (p. 4) time and location and facilitates immediate content updates and interconnectivity. There are numerous aspects to work based learning, Wargnier (2010) proposes e-learning is flexible enough to deliver across all areas of work based learning such as induction, new product information and career development training and updating work knowledge and skills. From an employee perspective employees often have different needs for information and want to learn at a time and pace that suits their own ability and lifestyle, e-learning provides organizations with a medium that can be adapted to different trainees without modifying the actual training content Long & Smith (2004). It is acknowledged that while corporations may implement e-learning to reduce costs this is not always the outcome. Rosenberg (2006) recalls the end of the 90s when enthusiasm for e-learning coincided with the internet bubble bursting and suggests many managers looked at their e-learning investment and wondered what value had been achieved. Watson-Healy’s interview with Pack (2002) highlights many corporations “jumped on the bandwagon” (p. 23) and invested in systems that didn’t integrate with the existing infrastructure, she also refers to long implementation cycles that impacted on the level of investment made. London & Hall (2011) highlight the challenge of corporations investing with a vendor who subsequently stops developing their product and suggest investment in web 2.0 technologies for learning may not run smoothly and unanticipated costs may occur. Pack (2002) acknowledges the technology is expensive and confusing and concedes instructional design for digital media is challenging but proposes where corporations are willing to rise to the challenge there are benefits that extend beyond cost effective training such as strengthening relationships with clients, reaching new markets and even building a new profit centre.