Chapter XIII

Bridging the Academic Divide:
A Collaborative Production Model for Learning Objects in Workforce Development

Tom Cavanagh, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University-Worldwide Campus, USA

Abstract

There is a commonly held perception in industry that the academic community is out of touch and irrelevant. Surely, there must be a way to bridge this perception gap and leverage academe’s disciplinary and instructional expertise to benefit the commercial workforce. This chapter presents a collaborative development model that accomplishes this goal, specifically relating to the production of self-paced, Web-based learning objects, catalogued within workforce development curricula. The model provides a roadmap that maximizes the expertise of college faculty, industry managers, and multimedia production specialists to meet the needs of government sponsors, commercial corporations, nonprofit postsecondary institutions, and individual learners.

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Introduction

There is a commonly held perception among many in industry that the academic community is out of touch and not particularly relevant; although there are many cases where academics work well with industry partners. As a result, industry many times chooses to collaborate with non-academic partners for their training needs. The vast majority of commercial workforce training and development activity is performed by for-profit vendors and contractors, comprising the bulk of an economic sector worth more than $50 billion annually in the United States alone (Galvin, 2002). When considered in comparison to their larger academic missions, postsecondary institutions conduct very little of what is traditionally considered workforce development. Yet, paradoxically, it is the academic community that provides industry with its most important resource: employees. Surely, there must be a way to bridge this perception gap and leverage the academic community’s disciplinary and instructional expertise to benefit the commercial workforce.

This chapter presents a development model that accomplishes this goal, specifically as it relates to the production of self-paced, Web-based learning objects, catalogued within targeted workforce development curricula. This collaborative development model provides a roadmap that maximizes the expertise of college faculty, industry managers, and multimedia production specialists to meet the needs of varying stakeholders which include: government sponsors, commercial corporations, nonprofit postsecondary institutions, and individual learners. By applying this collaborative development model, almost 100 learning objects were successfully developed during a two year period, representing more than eighty hours of student contact time across three distinct curricula.

Context

While recognizing that there is ongoing debate in the academic and commercial discourse regarding the precise definition of a learning object, the learning objects produced as a result of the collaborative development model described in this chapter conformed to many generally-accepted definitions of learning objects. From a macro perspective, they are consistent with the often-cited definition provided by the IEEE Learning Technology Standards Committee: “any entity, digital or non-digital, which can be used, re-used or referenced during technology supported learning” (IEEE, 2005). To narrow the definition a bit, the learning objects were further consistent with Wiley’s contention that learning objects should be “small (relative to the size of an entire course) instructional components that can be reused a number of times in different learning contexts,” and “be digital entities deliverable over the Inter-
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David Lee John and Deborah Kaercher (2019). Optimizing Medical Education With Instructional Technology (pp. 148-155).

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