Chapter IX

E-Learning Portal: Enhancing User Experience

Abstract

This chapter looks at the e-learning portal from the perspective of the user. Perceptions and attitudes of employees from a large Asian organisation towards their corporate e-learning portal were compared to those towards the traditional classroom environment. The results indicate overall preference for electronic over traditional learning environment. However, deeper analysis revealed that e-learning was clearly preferred only for acquiring explicit knowledge, but not tacit knowledge.
Introduction

Technological advances, globalization, changing demographics, and privatisation are the main driving forces behind the current transformation of education and training. Market research firms estimate that electronic learning or e-learning is the fastest growing sector of the global education market with an annual growth rate of 10-15% (Hezel Associates, 2005).

The proponents of e-learning argue that such technology-mediated learning (also known as virtual, online, or distance learning) may improve students’ achievement, their attitudes toward learning, and their evaluation of the learning experience. They also suggest that e-learning may help to increase student interaction and to make learning more student-centered. In addition, many researchers suggest that e-learning can potentially eliminate geographic barriers while providing increased convenience, flexibility, currency of material, retention of students, individualized learning, and feedback over traditional classrooms (Piccoli, Ahmad, & Ives, 2001). In contrast, some researchers warn that e-learning may lead to the student feelings of isolation, frustration, anxiety, and confusion. Furthermore, inappropriate e-learning practice may result in reduced interest in the subject matter and questionable learner achievement (Schank, 2001).

The literature indicates that current research interests in e-learning fall into three areas: (1) measuring e-learning outcomes, (2) measuring preferences for learning methods, and (3) proposing and evaluating hybrid models. With respect to outcomes, the research has produced mixed evidence regarding the benefits of e-learning (Cho, 2002; Rosenberg, 2001; Urdan & Weggen, 2000; Yoo, 2002). With respect to methods, researchers are seeking to better understand learner preferences for one delivery system over another (Rivera, McAlister, & Rice, 2002). Finally, there is a growing interest in hybrid courses that meet in the traditional classroom for part of the course and meet online for another part (Reasons, 2004; Young, 2002).

The main purpose of this chapter is to address the issue of user preferences for their learning environment in the context of a large Asian organization, and from the knowledge management (KM) perspective. In particular, the paper examines employee-trainees’ perceptions and attitudes towards their corporate e-learning portal compared to the traditional classroom environment. The current study is a part of the ongoing research project on corporate e-learning by Handzic and Hoor (2005). The investigation was carried out in Korean Air, a global-sized airline that is ranked 12th for passenger transportation and 1st for cargo transportation in 2003. Korean Air flies to 87 cities in 31 countries and has offices worldwide. The company introduced its first e-learning course in 2001 and is gradually increasing the number of e-learning courses, in order to replace most of its on-site trainings with e-learning eventually. The focus of the current investigation was on the KALCC’s (Korean Air Lines cybercampus) Microsoft Word e-learning portal.
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