Chapter VI

E-Learning:
Trends and
Future Development

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Abstract

During the last several years, high expectations have surrounded e-learning initiatives in companies, universities, and schools. Presently, however, this optimism has often given way to disillusionment. In this paper, we will postulate three central theses to help counteract both this process of disillusionment and the problems that were encountered during the initial euphoric phase of e-learning. The theses provide a framework for realizing the potential of e-learning in a beneficial and meaningful way. Firstly, this new technology should be applied to learning only when its use reflects a new culture of learning. Secondly, e-learning has to be integrated into the existing training culture of an organization. Thirdly, the implementation of e-learning should focus on the learner rather than on technology. To substantiate these theses, we will provide examples that illustrate sustainable implementations of e-learning.
Introduction

During the last decade, there have been significant developments in computer technology. With the increased use of modern computer and communication technologies, a new buzzword was also born: e-learning. The term e-learning is used as a label for learning that takes place using new electronic media. This kind of learning, which relies heavily on information and communication technologies, is a hot topic in the field of corporate learning. According to eLearningNews (2005), many implementations of e-learning can be found in companies that are dedicated to providing further on the job training for the company’s employees. However, educational institutions, such as schools or universities, were also highly optimistic about the potential of this new kind of learning. There was the hope of being able to deliver courses of higher quality to more students at less expense. In short, e-learning was associated with very high expectations. It was considered to be a flexible, efficient, and relatively cheap style of learning. Consequently, just two years ago, many journals had headlines such as “Learners can access learning material anytime and anywhere, whether at home or on the road.” Currently, there are questions about the degree to which these expectations can be satisfied.

This chapter aims to answer these questions. To this end, we will firstly define the concept of e-learning. Based on the latest research studies, we will analyze the degree to which e-learning can satisfy the expectations that have come about in recent years. We will then postulate three theses that provide a framework for the beneficial and meaningful realization of the potentials of e-learning. We will substantiate these theses using three particular examples of e-learning within university and business settings.

E-Learning

The term of “e-learning” seems to be derived from word creations like “e-mail” and means learning with support of electronic media—in particular with the support of computers and the Internet. There are many scenarios for realizing e-learning, which include computer-based trainings (CBT), Web-based trainings (WBT), and different styles of online learning, for example, virtual lectures, virtual seminars, or virtual tutorials. Computer-based trainings (CBTs) describe programs for individual learning with computers (Learnframe, 2005), which have been used since the early 1980s. This kind of e-learning is widely used for training on the job. The term Web-based trainings (WBTs) is used for learning in network environments like the Internet or a company’s intranet. WBTs rely on informa-
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