

Chapter 23

Promoting Online Education for New Working Environments in Companies

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ABSTRACT

International social and economic change processes like globalization, market competition, technological innovation, and crises such as the current world economic recession deeply affect the situation of companies and require adaptation on many different levels. The most important change is the shift towards a social and economic paradigm where choice and acquisition, management, and transfer of the right kind of knowledge makes or breaks a product, or even a company. In this context, learning has to be looked at in a different, more comprehensive and integrated way than has been the case so far. It is no longer sufficient to see it as a separate field of activity centred on new learning technologies, methods, and strategies. Rather, it has to be understood as intrinsic to the working environment overall. Hence, new designs for the working environments are required, and new forms of cooperation and learning in and between companies are also needed. These new approaches have to be focused on economic effectiveness and oriented towards innovation, sustainability and human-oriented business practices. In comparison to conventional training online learning, e-learning methods, with their flexibility of time and place, have many advantages for companies.

In this chapter, results of European studies and projects coordinated also by authors i.e. ARIEL (Analysing and Reporting on the Implementation of Electronic Learning in Europe) and SIMPEL are presented showing that IT-based online learning activities in companies often face a series of problems. Secondly, some issues related to the design of new working environments are presented, particularly

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the aspect of learning in new working environments. This is followed by a presentation of the concept of Communities of Practice (CoPs) as an interesting approach to cooperative learning by using online methods, particularly based on Web 2.0. The concept of Cluster is also presented. In the final section, some conclusions are presented.

INTRODUCTION

International social and economic change processes like globalization, market competition, technological innovation and crises such as the current world economic recession, deeply affect the situation of companies and require adaptation on many different levels. The most important change is the shift towards a social and economic paradigm where choice and acquisition, management and transfer of the right kind of knowledge makes or breaks a company or even a product (Hamburg, 2009).

In this context learning has to be looked at in a different, more comprehensive and integrated way than has been the case so far. It is no longer sufficient to see it as a separate field of activity centred on new learning technologies, methods and strategies. Rather it has to be understood as intrinsic to the working environment overall and as a component of a life long learning (LLL) strategy. Hence, new designs for the working environments are required and new forms of cooperation and learning in and between companies are also needed. These new approaches have to be focused on economic effectiveness and oriented towards innovation, sustainability and human-oriented business practices.

In comparison to conventional training on line learning particularly E-learning methods with their flexibility of time and place have objectively many advantages for companies also in this context. For E-learning we use the definition given by the EU Commission:

In this chapter we discuss results of European studies and projects coordinated also by authors

i.e. ARIEL (Analysing and Reporting on the Implementation of Electronic Learning in Europe) which was an international joint project funded by the European Commission in the framework of its eLearning Initiative. The project investigated online learning particularly E-Learning supply for SMEs with regard to didactic approaches, benefits and fields of application. The results show that online learning activities in companies i.e. the intensive use of E-learning often face a series of problems particularly in small and medium sized companies (SMEs). SMEs have needs facing a variety of challenges in their daily operations. They are socially and economically important, since they represent 99% of all enterprises in the EU, provide around 65 million jobs and contribute to entrepreneurship and innovation.

Recent studies in different European SMEs show that about 10% of these companies quoted lack of skills as a barrier to grow highlighting the link from training to sustainability. This barrier is not a simple one. For an SME to manage and sustain the business whilst engaging in training can be very difficult. Most SMEs do not have a formal learning culture; their priority is to survive, look for the exact information they need, the benefits of the training to the business have to be very clear and measurable. Their resources to build a LLL strategy are very limited. One important aspect we discuss in this chapter is that many companies particularly SMEs are not ready from organisational, technical and human resource point of view to implement and use online learning particularly E-learning. We give some suggestions in this context. Secondly, some issues related to the design of new working environments

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