

Chapter 5

Challenges of LMS Implementation in a Multi-Cultural Context

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ABSTRACT

Utilization of a learning management system (LMS) to deploy web-based learning content creates opportunities to cross cultural borders and distribute education on a global scale. However, cultural norms, language development, and the cultural diffusion of technology create barriers to the global growth of an LMS. In order to overcome these barriers successfully, instructional designers must use various strategies to work with international teams effectively, and create a virtual learning environment that meets educational goals that are mindful of the diversity present in cultural context. In this chapter, we explore the design, communication, and technology that challenge the development of LMS-based instruction in varied cultures. In the conclusion, we suggest best business practices for navigating these challenges in cross-cultural implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout literature and historical experience, terms denoting the ability to create virtual learning vary by industry and region. Such terms include e-learning, online learning, web-based education, virtual learning environment, and distance edu-

cation; all of which can be used interchangeably depending on the context. Allison Rossett (2001) defines the concept of e-learning as a connection between the learner and educational content facilitated by hardware, software, or both. Some, but certainly not all, carry deeper connotations of utilizing a global network, mainly the Internet. According to Wang et al (2004), content delivered over the Internet, intranet, or connected network enhances learning through the ability to integrate

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audio/video and other integrated elements through a collaboration of hardware, software, and personnel. Hardware and software aside, learning in a web-based environment requires an intermediary application to facilitate the organization and transference of information, often described as a Learning Management System. Ellis (2009) defines an LMS by categorizing its main functions into administration, documentation, evaluation, tracking, and reporting of educational material over the Internet.

As the saturation of Internet users has increased, the utilization of LMS-based education has grown substantially both in the U.S. and abroad (Nagel, 2010). The research firm Ambient Insight published a worldwide market forecast and analysis report for 2010-2015, which stated that North America is the largest consumer of e-learning products, a market driven primarily by higher education (Adkins, 2011). As the Global economy and world population evolve, Asia is forecasted to surpass North America by 2014. Further, as online learning opportunities become more widespread, many countries are leaning toward more web-based educational models (Nagel, 2010) in both higher education and organizational training.

A Global progression into the utilization of LMS-based instruction has its challenges. Despite rapid advancement in technology and a worldwide growth in Internet usage, the perception of usefulness and ease, and the acceptance of technology is not universal among all cultures. However, the economic advantages have led both and commercial organizations around the world to seek the benefits of online learning (Vance, 2012). Despite the ability of learning management systems to deliver online learning experiences to both industries, a varied cultural context can create challenges for the successful deployment of an LMS. At its foundation, e-learning requires design, communication, and technology, three things that differ greatly from culture to culture. Further, one must navigate these differences to

create a virtual learning environment that meets educational goals in a cultural context. In this chapter, we explore the design, communication, and technology challenges to the development of LMS-based instruction in varied cultures. We address each construct by examining the literature, personal experiences, and building a theoretical framework of best business practices.

BACKGROUND

A brief review of the literature on distance learning and cultural aspects of the use of Learning Management Systems reveals a number of fundamental concerns that need to be addressed by any learning organization prior to, during, and throughout an LMS implementation. Like any other type of learning design, the use of an LMS should be built on the premise that experience is a source of knowledge accumulation and learning (Levitt & March, 1988). In organizations, the need to establish a stable structure to political, economic, and social interactions is not necessarily predisposed to enable efficiency (North, 1990). According to Ally (2004), prior to delivering any training program, the organization needs to develop a cohesive and comprehensive instructional strategy. This practice can be a very strong determinant in the success of online programs designed within a global context (Ally, 2004). Osika (2006) asserts that the trainers and facilitators play a critical role and are the true core of any distance education program. In addition to the focus on the trainers and facilitators of the learning opportunity, both the learning design and the learner must be assessed to assure that the process has worked together to promote the desired learning (Escoffery et. al., 2005). While designing an effective and efficient LMS implementation, it will be critical to be cognizant that changes in the world, including the need for developing industry in countries that are less technological. Other factors include a demand

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