

## Do 'real men' do e-learning?

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Well they don't have to be 'men' really, technically speaking either sex would do. "Do 'real men' do e-learning?" is an interesting sound-bite question that paraphrases a whole range of questions around the cultural acceptance of e-learning in many companies. Is e-learning done by people who have no choice, or is it done by people who have choice and who choose to do it?

In many companies that have deployed e-learning in some scale, there is a whole strata of learners that have to engage with e-learning because basically they have no choice. Either they are mandated to do it, or it is the only training mechanism available, or both, and we're going to track them to make sure they have! A big driver for this scenario is regulatory compliance, and there's already plenty of examples of how on-line learning for compliance can be quite effective, particularly in scale. Delivery via e-learning content and assessment, in conjunction with automated tracking from a learning management system can provide quite a compelling solution, especially when you have to do it for hundreds or thousands of people.

But what about the people that do have a choice? The learners for which learning is discretionary, and where they believe they have options on how it is delivered. Do they engage with e-learning? Do they accept it as a viable method of learning, or do they see it as just a way of doing it on the cheap? Even if they intellectually buy into the idea of using e-learning, do they engage with it in reality?

These are all really good questions, or predictably there are no clear answers as different organisations have different experiences. But this is a real issue, and we need to build different strategies to address it. Here are some thoughts on how this might be done.

Firstly, we need some reasonable targets and metrics in the first place. I am often alarmed to hear the expectation levels that are applied to e-learning and that aren't applied to classroom training and other forms of learning. Seemingly e-learning cannot be successful unless 100% of people do it. This is rubbish. We don't get a 100% of people to come to classroom training, or to complete other forms of distance learning, it's way below that. We don't even get a 100% of people to attend 1:1 coaching sessions. Even compulsory, must-do, CEO-says-so-or-you-lose-your-job attendance rarely achieves more than 90%. In reality there are always a proportion of people who are not interested regardless of what you do, many more may posture at non-cooperation, but ultimately will engage with the right combinations of stick and carrots. If your focus is compliance however, let the LMS report their non-completion, and let them deal with the consequences.

But how do you the learners to access the content in the first place, particularly in an environment where culturally e-learning is perceived as second class or for more junior people. This is a tough problem to deal with, and needs a range of complementary approaches. Actively marketing to them is a good start but usually insufficient. The tipping point tends to be a combination of peer pressure, and making it easier to do it than not.

Peer pressure can be critical, and is often more important than executive sponsorship. Working with key influencers and getting them on-side, can accelerate acceptance in the broader community. Picking the right initial projects will also help to drive adoption, as will removing alternatives where they are not justified by the learning needs. Pilots need to be good business pilots that demonstrate success and relevance, so that business managers and more switched on staff start to understand the benefits that e-learning could bring.

Directly linking access to e-learning to points of business relevance is also a good strategy. 'Real men' don't habitually visit the learning portal to see what kinds of new courses are available. But they do use the sales management system and might follow a link to some e-learning covering a new product they've not looked at before. Integrate

links to learning within the context that might initiate the need. Let the business context show the need, and let e-learning be the way of fulfilling it at the point of the need.

Either way, there is no magic wand. Gaining acceptance is a long process. Sometimes a specific project will tip the balance for you, but other than that it's perseverance and some good tactics.

# E L E C T R O N I C A R T I C L E