Strategy should drive how organisations approach trainin employees

South African companies should not treat e-learning as a one-size-fits-all solution for training employees in new business systems and processes, but instead regard it as one tool of many for making their business strategies come to life.

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That's the word from Lyndsey Moorhouse, managing director of Can!Do Consulting, who says that many companies are beginning to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of e-learning as the market matures.

"A few years ago, e-learning exploded as companies bought into the concept as a means of improving training capacity while reducing costs," says Moorhouse. "E-learning seemed cutting-edge and sexy, adding to its appeal. So, companies invested a lot of many in e-learning materials with expensive production values."

Now, many companies are taking a step back and asking whether they have used e-learning with inflated expectations and for the wrong purposes. "Many organisations are finding that they do not get the end-user impact they want when the software dictates the training," Moorhouse says. "In particular, employees often battle to remember and apply theoretical learning from e-learning materials when it is time to use their knowledge in their jobs."

E-learning is not a standalone solution

The result is that many companies are starting to look at e-learning to complement and support on-the-job training and classroom learning rather than as a standalone solution, says Moorhouse. "They are starting to think about adaptable train strategies that blend these tools together into optimal mix for different segments of their workforce and for types of training she adds.

E-learning works well as a means of introducing users to theoretical concepts, ahead of more practical training. It is also suited to training people in areas such as company culture or basic policies and procedures.

But, increasingly, companies are supporting digital training materials with more tangible learning and job aids, such as summarised decision matrices, graphical business process flow diagrams, paper-based "How do I" guides, says Moorhou "A common complaint in e-learning is that people can't easily find reference notes - they can't easily thumb through online materials as they can a manual," she adds. "This makes it hard for people to get to the info they need when they're in fron their computers trying to use the system in which they were trained."

Another trend is for companies to build support and workflow tools into end-users' business applications - for example, guiding a call centre agent through a flow chart of questions to ask a client. This masks the complexity of the business system and process from the employee so that he or she can focus on softer issues, such as customer service.

"As systems become simpler and more transparent to the end-user, we can expect to see more focus on training in softer

skills than on tech training," Moorhouse says. "And here, e-learning can't compare to role-playing in a classroom environment in terms of impact."

Moorhouse says that companies should take a flexible approach to training and education, starting by focusing on the outcome they want to achieve and the employee audience they want to reach. The training requirements and strategy sho determine the tools and technology to be used, rather than the other way around.

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