Training versus Education: eLearning, hybrid, and face-to-face modalities - a participatory debate

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ABSTRACT

Is training education or is education training? Universities and organizations treat training and education synonymously, but it is worth exploring the differences. Universities are scrambling to standardize a preferred delivery method of education and training. With the blended modalities of eLearning, face-to-face, and hybrid learning, the educational delivery seems to be equalizing. The disruptive shift with technology in education or training is complicated by the expectations of our millennial, Gen Y, and Gen Z students. As an added pressure at the university level, even more importantly, the expectation of the administration and the accrediting bodies keep changing the 'play book' on requirements. Given the ever changing complexities of today's paradigm-shift in education and learning, we explored the complexities of navigating the delivery methods to achieve educational goals in higher education or training goals in corporate America.

Keywords: Learning Modalities, eLearning, Training, and Educational Delivery Methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

It seems a common question in education and corporate America, "Is training education or is education training?" Actually, we are discussing two different concepts; though, many organizations use these two terms interchangeably.

According to Jay Cross (1996), who is credited with coining the phrase 'e-learning', "If your sixteen year-old daughter told you that she was going to take a sex education course at high school, you might be pleased. What if she announced she was going to take part in some sex training at school?" Cross illustrates the distinctive difference between education and training with this example.

Education
"Education is about learning the theory" (Barnes, 2014) and history of your chosen field to build a foundation of knowledge; then, employers continue the education with practical real-world experiences to develop an employee's growth.

For example, as a learner we master many subjects in school and each year the materials become more difficult to challenge them. Learners through repetition or practice increase their level of accomplishment. Learning different theories and principles help learners become ready to apply what is learned to real-world experiences.

Education is defined as the "delivery of knowledge about facts, events, values, beliefs, general concepts, and principles to the learners" (Surbhi, 2015). Education helps to develop other cognitive skills learners need intellectually. Some specific criteria for education might be pursuing a foundations subject or gaining a qualification (certification).

Training

Training takes the learners to that next level—being able to apply what they gained in fundamental knowledge of their field of study to job related skill sets. Training is defined as "learning by doing" (Surbhi, 2015).

Organizations have identified skill sets employees must be able to effectively demonstrate on the job. Therefore, most employers provide "clearly-defined programs aimed at developing specific skills and knowledge" (Surbhi, 2015). The purpose of training is to achieve organizational goals. So, training complements education.

"Training provides you the skills to do something rather than only knowledge. Training can be specific to your needs, your vocation or your skills-gap. It is there for people who want to implement a new system, improve a specific ability, or further their ability in a skill" (Barnes, 2014). To apply criteria for training, the learner wants to gain a specific skill set or be able to apply their knowledge in a work place practical application.

Training vs. Education

Training has a clear direction and purpose. For instance, you would train to provide technical skills to be utilized to solve predictable problems. With training, there are clear skills, rules, checklists, and job aids to solve linear problems. On the other hand, you provide education for addressing the unknowns. Education is an exploration of adaptive options using creative guidelines to solve complex problems. (http://www.virtusleadership.com, 2016)

With training, the facilitator is responsible for managing the class environment and the learning, as well as, focusing learners on mastering routines. In training, the majority of the time is spent on skill practice and mastery. With education, the learner is responsible for the learning and self-discipline. The focus is on the unknown and preparation for the future. In education, the majority of time is spent on learning the history, theory or significant concepts rather than mastering skills, as is the focus in training. (Welch, 2014)

However, there is a justifiable reason to provide education and training depending on the circumstances. One option is not better or more important than the other. In reality, both education and training complement each other. Think about it:

Would you want doctors, lawyers, nurses, pilots, and teachers who were educated, but not trained?

2. THE STATISTICS

According to PRWeb.com (2016), in "1995 only four-percent of American Corporations moved from traditional training methods to online learning and in 2011, online strategies catapulted to seventy-seven percent. Corporate training is a $200 billion dollar industry and eLearning represents approximately, $56.2 billion and growing to $107 billion dollar market by 2015."

It seems obvious that demand for distance learning has surged on a global level with technological advances fueling the shift. The Internet and decrease in technology costs drives the growth by companies leveraging these advantages. eLearning, once only implemented by corporations with large budgets, now can be implemented on a smaller scale; online learning is a shift in availability and access making online curriculum the norm (Barnes, 2014). While, everyone recognizes the impact of online learning in today's society, the question of how to improve results is still being explored and tested in education and training strategies.

3. Flaws in Traditional Training Assumptions
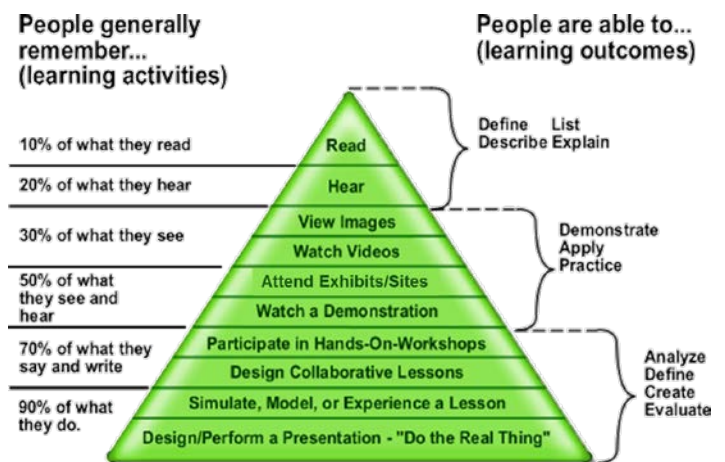
According to Edgar Dale's (1969) Cone of Experience (above), people generally remember learning activities based upon the delivery method; the more interactive the method, the higher a learner's retention rate will be. However, traditional training based upon Edgar's theory is flawed. The learning activities with weighted scale was not based on scientific research or considering the

factors of learning-based outcomes in curriculum development. While modalities are important, with results-based outcomes a learner's retention can be impacted, too.

4. PREFERRED MODALITIES

According to the Babson Survey Research Group, Pearson, and Quahog Research (2016), "over 2.8 million students are taking courses exclusively online; this study is based on 1.9 million entering college students who took ACT exams in 2015."

Why choose an online course? "The top external factors for choosing online classes are work schedule obligations, not having to go to a campus, not having to stick to a strict class schedule, and family obligations" (Bart, 2011).

Learner's considering online verses traditional education are weighing their options based upon flexibility verses work and life commitments (Bird, 2014). Some key facts for learner's to consider about pursuing an online education are their discipline level, need for structure, and a comprehensive to-do list. An online degree works for learners with appropriate expectations and motivation to follow through with the commitment. Conversely, a learner who needs one-on-one communications, and face-to-face interactions with peers and instructors, and does not do well independently, will be more successful in the classroom environment.

Another option is blended learning or the combination of face-to-face instruction methods with online technologies. In the classroom, the learners engage in interactions with other learners; while, the online portions of the course provide media rich content that can be accessed at anytime and anywhere a learner has internet access (Schlosser & Burmeister, 1999). Blended/hybrid outcomes were identified as superior or somewhat superior in 2015 by 35.6% of academic leaders (Babson Survey Research Group, 2016).

Whether learners or employees, attending a face-to-face class may not be viable. More employers are enrolling their employees in online training, as well. For example, when Jiffy Lube was having an issue bringing all of the management together for leadership training, they decided to create an eLearning training class. The net result was a "75% increase in the number of learners who completed the course" (Freifeld, 2016).

Likewise, imagine having to "train 600 employees who are geographically dispersed and operate on a 24/7/365 schedule" (Freifeld, 2016). Greyhound faced such a dilemma when the training team needed to roll out training in leadership development, business skills, soft skills, and customer service. Greyhound implemented just-in-time modules for employees to complete wherever and whenever they worked. The net result is that the company has seen a "dramatic reduction in customer service complaints." (Freifeld, 2016)"

5. LEARNER'S EXPECTATIONS

A discussion about eLearning cannot be explored without considering t`he expectations of the learners and the impact it has on performance expectations. The days of learning for the sake of learning and all learners doing what is expected of them have long gone. Today's generations of Millennial, Gen Y, and Gen Z learners have grown up with technology integrated into their daily activities; using different modes of technological communications (PC, tablets, smartphones, etc.) is expected with a high level of proficiency (Generational Difference, 2016). World culture and technological changes are the disruptive paradigm-shifts which change the world-view of these generations.

It may seem trite, but the different characteristics of the generations, such as, moral compass, educational drive, work commitment, and family views, impact educational and training achievement (Generational Difference, 2016). This drives the expectations of online learners in terms of faculty/facilitator communications prior and during a course, reminders to complete required assignments, response time for emails, and grading results for key assignments.

The online learners expect special consideration for 'any of life's ups and downs' without regard to a requirement for course deadlines. Expectations by today's learners are higher, while the learner's commitment is conditional on many other factors (i.e. excuses). Given this lack of focus on results and keeping commitments, why do organizations seem puzzled about results suffering? The answer may be finding ways to embrace these fundamental

differences in the Millennials, Gen Y, Gen Z, and Baby Boomers—given the number of Boomers in the world, addressing the issue of learner expectations fall here. Boomers may have the determination and commitment necessary to unite the generational differences. The issues are definitely being explored and discussed at the administrative and organizational levels.

6. ADMINISTRATION AND ACCREDITATION

The paradigm-shift of online learning, as mentioned earlier, is not a fad or a trend. Administrative and accreditation bodies in higher education recognize the permanent shift while continuing to improve the delivery, modalities, and expectations of the online learners. "Taking an upward turn in both 2010 and 2011, chief academic officers agreed that online education is critical to higher education long-term strategies" (Allen & Seaman, 2011). This upward shift is driven by for-profit institutions which embrace online learning as part of their strategic plans. Although higher education leadership embraces this disruptive change, the faculty still seem to question the legitimacy of online curriculum (Allen & Seaman, 2011).

Reform is ongoing for online institutions. Accrediting bodies have clear guidance for online institutions to continue to operate, for instance, expectations include:

- *"Vision and Mission:* Online learning is appropriate to the institution's mission and purposes.
- *Planning and Maintenance:* Expanding online learning offerings are integrated into the academic planning process
- *Collaboration:* Online learning is incorporated into the institution's systems of governance
- *Academic Rigor:* Curricula in online programs are as rigorous as offerings in traditional programs.
- *Evaluation:* Institutions evaluate the effectiveness of online learning programs, as part of a reflective quality process.
- *Faculty:* Faculty teaching in online programs are qualified and supported
- *Student Services:* Institutions provide effective student and academic services to support students in online courses.

- *Resources:* Institutions provide adequate resources to support and expand online learning offerings.
- *Integrity:* Institutions assure integrity of their online offerings" (Online College.org, 2012).

7. THE DEBATE AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

What is next? The debate about education versus training is bound to continue on both the higher education and organizational fronts. eLearning is no longer considered a trend or phase, but a disruptive paradigm-shift in global society with technology at the forefront. This disruption makes the future interesting to explore, so we want to develop research around the following ideas:

(1) Explore the paradigm-shift for training in corporate American and how organizations can effectively utilize their eLearning strategy to optimize training effectiveness.
(2) Explore the future of eLearning in higher education with learning styles integrated into the strategy.
(3) Explore the effects of preferred modalities on today's learner's achievement and skill set development.
(4) Explore how education and training can be combined to increase effectiveness and efficiency of organizational goals.

Despite varying opinions on the topic of education versus training, it is clear by embracing change and leveraging what we do know about online learners today, that we can impact our results. Knowing our audience is always key for effective delivery in education or training!

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