Getting Started with eLearning: Eight Questions to Consider
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The face of corporate learning has changed. It is no longer possible to develop your human capital with a single approach. Today’s corporate environment calls for out-of-the-box thinking, incorporating the advantages of many types of learning to benefit your company’s single biggest investment: your people.

This paper will help you navigate the growing number of learning solutions and offer you eight essential questions you need to consider as you develop your learning program.
WORKPLACE LEARNING HAS CHANGED

All organizations are looking for ways to maximize the effectiveness of eLearning and align to strategic business initiatives. Initiatives such as increased sales, customer service, industry certifications, quality programs, compliance, communications and leadership.

Many training departments in the United States consist of a single person. While doing more with less can be a real challenge, a well-run L&D department with fewer people can still make a significant contribution to an organization. To assist you in ensuring your efforts are effective consider the following:

- **Keep a business perspective** – Maintain your credibility by conducting programs that focus on delivering increased performance. Adding value is essential and training alone doesn't increase performance.

- **Marketing provides visibility** – Let sponsors, management and your target audience know what you have planned and how it will assist them to accomplish their goals.

- **Partner with the best** – You need a supplier(s) who will act in partnership to increase your organization's performance. Your joint focus should be on the transfer of learning to performance, not just delivery of content.

- **Measure what matters** – Agree on what matters and track the outcomes accordingly.

By framing your questions in the context of your workplace and business needs, you can determine quickly if a supplier has the best solution for your organization, and whether they have the right qualification to enter into a learning partnership with you. The following eight questions will start you on your way toward improved learning and performance within your organization.
QUESTION #1 – WHAT IS ELEARNING?

For this paper, “eLearning” is used to define a wide array of learning interventions provided by technology, which can include online courses, books, videos, websites, chats, portals, quizzes, job aids, articles, recordings, presentations, learning management systems and similar online resources. Content can be either ready-to-use or custom developed. Here is a review of some of eLearning’s unique features you will find helpful. eLearning content is:

• **Rich** – an enormous collection of rich and varied web-accessible learning resources that support a multitude of job roles, various learning styles and wide-range of organizational imperatives.

• **Ready** – available anytime, anyplace or anywhere a learner and web-linked device happen to be, making all forms of electronically-developed instructional and informational content readily accessible closer to the point of need.

• **Everywhere** – delivered either synchronously (same time) or asynchronously (different time). For example, an individual can access a course, book, simulation, case study, assessment, video, and/or attend a virtual meeting.

• **Scalable** – the size of your audience can range from a single individual to a thousand globally diverse learners. You remove physical constraints of the traditional classroom and your program delivery moves from bricks to clicks.

• **Flexible** – works just as well in a formal or an informal setting. Studies have shown that workplace learning happens in an informal environment. Unlike classroom-based training, eLearning can support the just-enough, just-in-time, self-guided learning that workers employ while doing their regular work.

QUESTION #2 – WHAT BENEFITS DOES ELEARNING PROVIDE FOR MY ORGANIZATION?

It offers a wide-range of benefits to any organization. Chief among these are saving time and money in delivery of learning and an increased transfer of learning into performance through the reduction of “scrap learning“.
Think of these two major benefits as essentially two bags of money given back to your organization:

- **Delivery of learning** – eLearning does away with the need for travel, allowing content to be easily shared across any organization, large or small. Whether you buy or build, eLearning content usually costs much less than traditional classroom training. When eLearning is blended into structured programs with traditional methods, used as self-directed learning, and included in workflow, higher retention by the individual occurs. This characteristic proves to be a very effective attribute in the transfer of learning into the workplace.

- **Transfer of learning to performance** – The purpose of using eLearning is to shape the knowledge, skills and attitudes of employees to make an organization more productive. eLearning has an extremely low scrap rate compared to training delivered via traditional methods (classroom).

- **The quantitative (hard) savings** – from the reduction in expenses, either actual or forecasted, usually offset the initial costs involved in bringing eLearning into an organization. The qualitative (soft) results provide an increased focus on work processes, customers and overall productivity.

**Question #3 – How does eLearning Reduce Scrap Learning?**

Learning programs create value only when the new knowledge and skills they impart are transferred out of the learning environment and put to use in the work of the individual and organization. If learning is never used in a way that improves how things are done, then it is scrap learning.

- **Scrap learning rates are high** – The cost of not transferring learning into the workplace in terms of time, money, resources, lost opportunities and customers is incredibly high. Scrap learning rates can be as high as 50%-80% of all learning delivered.

- **Most learning is informal** – The U.S. Department of Labor estimates 70% or more of work related learning occurs outside formal training. The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) similarly believes at least 70% of learning occurs through informal learning processes driven by workers seeking to find the information they need to do their jobs.
• **Finding content takes time** – Informal learning implies a search for the right piece of information or the clearest set of instructions. Research shows that knowledge workers spend 15% to 30% of their time gathering information and these searches are less than successful 50% of the time. That is why it is essential to provide for people’s ongoing needs to gather information efficiently and to learn through formal, informal and social means.

Unlike traditional classroom methods, eLearning can be directly embedded into the workflow and is immediately applicable. This distinction allows the seamless integration of formal, informal and social learning to the daily work efforts. Along with instructional and informational design, eLearning can be easily located and available when and where it is needed.

Skillsoft’s recent Impact Analysis found that 80% of Skillsoft learners were able to apply what they learned within six weeks of the training. Learners felt that eLearning was able to impact the critical areas of business performance, help them close their skill gaps and build confidence that is essential to performance. eLearning provides just-in-time access and personalized learning that maps to the learner’s schedule rather than the instructor’s availability.

**Question #4 – How do I select the ‘right’ eLearning content?**

Contrary to more traditional approaches, eLearning can be embedded and/or delivered closer to the actual workplace, whereas traditional training (classroom) is, by its very nature, separated in time and distance. Aside from the vast array of learning styles that make up your audience, learners most often seek information in an informal, casual manner. To address the needs of a wide range of formal, informal and social learning needs, employees need a rich array of learning resources that encompass a full set of business needs.

When selecting the right eLearning content remember:

• **Instructional content** – Formal eLearning content (courses) supports both formal and informal learning efforts. The course content must be instructionally sound, current and well-designed. Take the time to evaluate how well the course supports the transfer of new skills directly into the workplace. The best instructional content is based on adult learning principles that emphasize problem solving, critical thinking, learner initiative, self-management and experiential learning. The course should use user-focused performance objectives and learning activities appropriate for those objectives and exercises, along with assessments to measure the learner’s achievement of those objectives.
• **Informational content** – Most common forms of informational content include books, webpages, reports, manuals, videos and other audio-visuals tools. Since most workplace learning occurs informally, having quick, searchable access to a wide range of informational content wherever the learner is located is essential to provide just-in-time performance support.

• **Certification** – Every organization has professionals, such as IT technicians, engineers, HR specialists, accountants, security and project managers, who are certified in various disciplines and need to stay updated. These knowledge workers need fast access to information on a routine basis and seek the same rapid response to policy, procedural or leadership questions. Critical content need to be accessible quickly and precisely when and where it is required. Since learners apply new skills in an informal setting much more often than in a formal environment.

• **Modalities** – Different people learn in different ways and eLearning programs need to allow for this. A learning program needs to include access to a variety of different formats in order to give all users a choice of modalities.

• **Learn to blend and reinforce content** – Blending includes a combination of formal, informal and social (collaborative) approaches that improve the effectiveness and efficiency of learning. The blend must also include practical reinforcement activities. By reinforcing learning, you increase the individual retention, which in turn, leads to increased transfer of skills into the workplace. Without multiple (at least six) reinforcements within a 30 day period, retention can fall as low as 10% and your overall investment will be greatly diminished.

**QUESTION #5 – SHOULD I BUY OR BUILD ELEARNING CONTENT?**

Obtaining high-quality elearning content is critical to your success. Content can be obtained in three basic ways. You can buy or lease content from a supplier, have custom developers create it for you, or build it using your internal resources and their subject matter expertise. As a rule of thumb, half of all learning within any organization is generic, meaning that the same general content and learning objectives apply across the industry, while the remaining half is unique to the personality of that organization and needs to be custom-developed either internally or externally.

Every organization needs leadership, management and supervisory, communication, legal compliance, IT, desktop, project management skills and so forth. This list of common topics can be very long, so consider using ready-to-use content rather than building customized content wherever possible. Creating brand new eLearning assets can be very expensive and time-consuming. Instead, select existing content that meets at least 85-90% of your needs. If you feel the ready-to-use course still needs some
customization, expect the supplier to be able to guide you to a tool that allows you to make these changes or simply find a way to fill the gap with your own content.

**QUESTION #6 – WHAT IS BLENDED LEARNING?**

A major foundation of effective learning development is the ready availability of high-quality learning content covering a wide range of enterprise needs. The ideal blended learning model is one that integrates functions that empower learners to participate in several formal, informal and social learning activities.

High-quality blended learning establishes a balance between the instructional advantages for the learner and the learning objective. It allows learners to pick and choose how they want to learn and also affords them flexibility and convenience about when to take it.

A true blended solution includes online courses, online access to reference materials (books, white papers, job aids, etc.), instructor-led training, mentoring by seasoned experts and other information resources. These resources should be readily available, utilizing a search function to quickly allow access to the learning asset at the moment of need.

**QUESTION #7 – WHICH TOPICS SHOULD I ADDRESS FIRST?**

Well-designed eLearning content does a good job of addressing the formal and informal needs of a wide range of business, technical, desktop, compliance and safety topics. Begin by setting your learning goals based on your organization's strategic goals so you can ensure that what you begin with will benefit your company. You should make a conscious effort to find content that applies to all levels and all functions to ensure that your learning investment is directly correlated to desired business outcomes.

The real question is what workplace skills are important to you and your organization right now and what will be your needs a year from now? Start with your immediate needs first and then think about what you will need following those needs so you can keep the momentum of learning and increased performance in motion.

As a general rule of thumb, we find that organizations that include instructional and informal learning content for key stakeholders assist in building support for their eLearning efforts. It is critical to choose a partner who has the resources to meet your company's varied learning needs and corporate goals. The following topics will begin closing skill gaps right away in most organizations:
• **Management or leadership skills** – Blending new eLearning assets into your existing program helps to build support for eLearning for the rest of the organization, increasing the skills and attitudes of your leaders.

• **General business skills** – Have courses, books, simulations, videos and other eLearning content readily available for your professional people and knowledge workers.

• **Desktop skills** – Every job role has a need to close skill gaps dealing with desktop technology. Often people waste time by asking someone else who may know, or they are given incorrect advice.

• **Professional certifications** – There are several people who need specialized support to achieve or maintain their professional standing. Subject areas can include technical such as IT systems engineers, project managers, and HR professionals.

• **Legal compliance** – Your organization must communicate legal and behavioral expectations to your employees and keep them updated as laws and regulations change. Topics include sexual harassment, safety, hazardous situations and many more compliance subjects that reduce your risk.

**QUESTION #8 – HOW DO I ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF MY ELEARNING PROGRAM?**

Success for you and your organization should be defined as how well your organization uses eLearning to improve performance and strengthen your business. Getting your people to use and include eLearning into their work life takes time and effort. You will need someone to partner with who has the content, services and experience to ensure your success.

There are many aspects of the learning program that need to be managed and implemented to increase the success rate of your initiative. Finding the right partner is critical in a successful transition to eLearning.

• **Promotion and marketing** – Relying on “if you build it, they will come” doesn't work. It is not enough to just provide eLearning content and make these assets available to your workforce. You need to promote the use of eLearning to your audience on a regular basis.
• **Learner adoption** - Usage of eLearning content is a basic metric to determine how well your promotional efforts are working. Generally, learning starts out slow and begins to climb as you increase promotion and reinforce new methods such as blending. At first you push the learning out and as learners become more comfortable and management support builds, the “push” from you will change into “pull” from the learners.

• **Learning evaluation** - Basic metrics include usage (uptake), assessment scores (Kirkpatrick Level 2) and behavior changes within the workplace (Kirkpatrick Level 3). Later on, you will conduct targeted ROI (return on investment) studies and develop management dashboards to give regular updates to your management team.

Your eLearning partner should offer assistance in all of these areas and help with administrative tasks. It is critical to have the support of your supplier in the implementation of your learning program. They should be able to start you off on the right foot and boost learner usage right away.
### Summary of E-Learning Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the Organization</th>
<th>Hard Quantitative</th>
<th>Soft Quantitative</th>
<th>Fuzzy Difficult to Measure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Increase sales</td>
<td>1. Increase transfer to productivity</td>
<td>1. Increase global capability</td>
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<td>2. Increase customer service</td>
<td>2. Increase agility &amp; flexibility</td>
<td>2. Increase employee loyalty</td>
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<td>3. Increase quality</td>
<td>3. Increase content deployment</td>
<td>3. Increase scalable content</td>
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<td>4. Increase output</td>
<td>4. Increase availability</td>
<td>4. Increase deployment</td>
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<td>5. Reduce travel time &amp; costs</td>
<td>5. Shorten development cycles</td>
<td>5. Increase market share</td>
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<td>7. Reduce lawsuits</td>
<td>7. Recruit better employees</td>
<td>7. Consistent, accurate content</td>
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<td>8. Reduce time away from work</td>
<td>8. Retain high-potential employees</td>
<td>8. Support innovation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10. Observation of OJT transfer</td>
<td>10. Maximize current systems</td>
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<td>11. Nurture learning efforts for high potential employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>For the Learner</td>
<td>1. Reduce travel time &amp; costs</td>
<td>1. Increase career opportunity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Reduce learning time</td>
<td>2. Self-directed learning</td>
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<td>3. Increase learner retention</td>
<td>3. Increase personal freedom</td>
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<td>4. Increase engagement</td>
<td>4. Wide selection of assets</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Increase career opportunity</td>
<td>5. Personalized learning</td>
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### For the Trainer

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<tr>
<th>HARD QUANTITATIVE</th>
<th>SOFT QUANTITATIVE</th>
<th>FUZZY DIFFICULT TO MEASURE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reduce travel time &amp; costs</td>
<td>1. Reduce overall costs</td>
<td>1. Track learning by usage</td>
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<td>2. Reduce training backlog</td>
<td>2. Platform independence</td>
<td>2. Align to business objectives</td>
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<td>3. Track training progress</td>
<td>3. Leverage existing technology</td>
<td>3. Revitalize classroom training</td>
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<td>5. Create blended programs</td>
<td>5. Greater storage capacity</td>
<td>5. Enhance L&amp;D’s image</td>
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<td>6. Evaluate learning gains</td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Obtain proof of certification</td>
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- 7. Ease of making updates
- 8. Increase ways to teach
- 9. Reach neglected employees
- 10. Expand business orientation
SUMMARY

Getting started with eLearning can have many benefits to your organization, from a cost, time and learning perspective. As an employer you now have the ability to design and implement learning that is scalable, accessible and diverse in a way not possible with instructor-led training. This in turn allows you influence and tailor informal learning to meet the needs of your biggest assets—your people and your customers.

For more information or to learn more, call 866-757-3177 or visit www.skillsoft.com
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We currently serve over 6,700 customers and more than 45,000,000 learners worldwide and provide continuing, hands-on support to assist them in maximizing their ongoing success.

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