



Tips to Make e-Learning a Success

Today is a critical time for training. Changing technologies, compressed time lines, limited resources, and scrutinized budgets all make it crucial that your e-Learning initiatives are successful. Within these pages you will find tips and ideas to help you maximize your e-Learning investment and ensure success.

1. Integrate e-Learning into an overall organizational Learning Strategy

Dramatic results from e-learning initiatives are achieved outside the typical annual budget cycle. Obtain senior management support from all areas of the organization for a sustained, multi-year time frame. To get this support, e-Learning initiatives need to be positioned—and supported at the highest organizational level—as an integral part of an organization’s overall business strategy.

An e-Learning strategy, like any performance improvement strategy, needs to be aligned with business goals. Avoid the hype and focus on what e-Learning can actually do for your organization.

2. Start with a solid business case

An e-Learning initiative requires significant investment. Many projects fail because they are conducted on limited budgets that are unable to support the investments in technology and courseware development required to create a successful e-Learning program. Given this, a return on investment (ROI) analysis is needed to justify the required funding. As with more traditional training initiatives the biggest challenges are identifying, tracking and analyzing the performance indicators that will provide the data to demonstrate a solid business case. Only 14 to 20 % of organizations have implemented data collection and analysis at these levels. These organizations stand a much better chance of success with e-Learning.



Proceeding in a systematic manner will ensure that you focus on the business and performance goals rather than the means of achieving these goals. E-Learning is making a big splash in the training world, yet, many of the earliest e-Learning adopters were disappointed by cost overruns, time delays and ineffective training. For best results, ensure you and your clients understand and agree on what will be a reasonable result or measurement of success for e-Learning within the organization.

Once you have built the case it is useful to:

- **Plan big, implement small. Remember:**
 - It's easier to build on success than failure.
 - Some of the best results are evolutionary not revolutionary.

3. Avoid the technology traffic jam

The technology infrastructure is a critical component of successful e-Learning initiatives because you need an adequate platform to deliver your program. However, a common problem experienced by organizations implementing e-Learning is spending most of their investment chasing the technology. Instead, it is recommended that you:

- **Set a deadline for selecting the technology;**
- **Prioritize your functional needs;**
- **Develop a system specification that meets those needs; and**
- **Establish an objective evaluation criterion.**

Follow this up with some research. Review and assess three or four technology vendors' options, then pick the best available at that moment and commit to make it work.

- **It's better to go with what is available than to wait for the latest and greatest.**
- **Use proven technology that you are comfortable with.**
- **Upgrade/update after you have something on-line.**

4. Big changes for technology, little change for learners

Putting an *e* in front of learning doesn't change basic adult learning principles, learners still need well designed courseware. Re-purposing existing classroom training to e-Learning works only when adjustments are made to the training design. The design changes must account for two major shifts:

- **Moving from the real classroom to the virtual classroom; and**
- **Changing from face-to-face to remote interactions.**



a) A Training Transfer Strategy becomes the working environment for e-Learning

Improved performance in the workplace is fundamental for a good return-on-investment (ROI) and a positive contribution to the business goals of the organization. On the surface e-learning appears to better facilitate training transfer because the learning occurs closer to the work environment. In fact, rigorous transfer activities must be planned for e-Learning as with all traditional classroom or on-the-job training interventions.

- **Establish an e-Learning Transfer Partnership consisting of managers (including executives, supervisors, team leaders, etc.), trainers (including all HRD related professionals) and learners who have a strong interest in a particular e-Learning initiative.**
- **The only requirement for a successful e-Transfer Partnership is for all partners to be committed to making the e-Learning investment pay off.**
- **The overriding goal of the Partnership is to recognize existing barriers to transfer and, take steps to reduce/remove the barriers.**
- **Managers hold the most significant keys to resolving the problem of training transfer, as they are the arbitrators of workplace performance.**
- **Trainers hold primary responsibility for transfer problems when training is impractical, irrelevant, poorly designed or delivered.**
- **Trainees hold the primary role for accepting the new knowledge and skills.**

b) Manage the new Learning Environment

The traditional classroom is removed from the everyday work environment and the learners are not subject to the same interference inherent in the workplace—people dropping in, the phone, e-mail, instant messages, and deadlines. If e-Learning is to be delivered to the learners' desktop then the initiative must include a plan to manage the learning process and control the interference. Ideally have a learning station separate from the workplace, if not:

- **Put up a sign: *Person Learning, Do Not Disturb***
- **Block phone calls, instant messages and e-mail in at least one to two-hour chunks.**

c) Use good instructional design

It is widely recognized that a poor instructor may cause a well-designed training program to fail. On the other hand, a good instructor can make a poorly designed program successful. Good instructors succeed by getting the learners actively involved in the training. They are actually designing interactive training in real time as they teach. One

of the realities of e-Learning is that it is more difficult to dynamically adjust on the fly, therefore:

- **You need to engineer more high quality learning interactions into the design of the program up front.**
- **The less you spend on design and development the more you will need to spend on support and facilitation.**

5. Integrate e-Learning, knowledge management and performance support

Finally, you need to have a precise vision of what you want e-Learning to encompass. For many organizations it is simply training delivered over the Internet or intranet. That vision allows the organization to think in terms of re-purposing existing training to be delivered on-line, however, that may be a limited vision. One of the potential benefits of e-Learning is that it can lead us back to traditional performance-based training. For FKA this means a return to our roots when we designed primarily self-directed, performance-based training.

Performance-based training includes:

- A performance statement.
- The standard(s) to measure the performance against.
- The conditions under which the performance occurred.
- All the required tools and references.
- The support requirements.

In other words, all aspects of the performance are addressed. Procedure manuals, job aids and on-the-job training were always considered as the first alternatives and more formalized training was designed to complement these components.

One of the emerging aspects of e-Learning is the idea that the success of e-Learning will be tied to the ability to integrate e-Learning with other key corporate initiatives in Knowledge Management and Performance Support Systems. So as the saying goes, "*What's old is new again*". Knowledge Management encompasses, among other things, documenting and publishing the performance requirements. Performance Support includes electronic job aids, online documentation and access to expert coaches.

a) *More than the same old course*

E-Learning should be thought of as training that is delivered in small chunks, in a just-in-time environment. The new vision of e-Learning blends these chunks with on-line references, support materials, templates, job aids, and access to on-line experts, mentors and coaches.

E-Learning instructional design may also include:

- FAQs
- Tips of the day
- Course/Class Newsletter/web-magazine
- Discussion Boards -communities of practice
- Help systems
- Instant messaging to experts

E-Learning is not just scheduled classes, it's an ongoing event designed to support performance improvement within the organization.

b) *New training metrics*

So, how do you measure the success of your e-Learning initiatives? For that matter, how does your training organization measure the results of its traditional training programs?

Traditional training metrics:

- Number of courses
- Student days
- Number of students per course - one course fits all
- Average students per class
- Cost per student day - reduce cost is better
- Level 1 evaluation

If you are using any of the above metrics to measure your e-Learning success you probably need to find some new metrics. E-Learning has the potential to show poorly when measured against the traditional metrics even when it is achieving positive performance improvements.

New e-Learning metrics:

- Number of different learners accessing learning
- Number of learning events (courses) per learner - just what they need
- Amount/Volume of learning activities - more is better
- Improved job performance
- Improved business results

In conclusion:

- **View e-Learning as an opportunity to strengthen your training and performance initiatives.**
- **Leverage essential skills and techniques used in traditional learning.**
- **Take advantage of what e-Learning technology has to offer.**

How can FKA help?

We have been contributing to the success of leading organizations around the world for more than 36 years. We can help you develop a strategic e-Learning plan, or prepare you and your team to create and deliver your own e-Learning programs. We can also design, develop and implement a custom e-Learning initiative that meets your business needs and organizational goals.

