

How much standardization does e-learning need?

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Abstract

Online learning takes advantage of the Internet and enables the delivery of just in time training online. The main benefit gained from online learning is a higher degree of retention by the learner and an increased efficiency in supplying the learning material. The potential of e-learning to reduce overall training costs is, however, still somewhat debatable, and the “breathtaking” technological revolution in the delivery of education does not seem to have significantly enhanced the learner’s overall knowledge. The success of e-learning also depends upon how e-learning is defined.

One of the main goals of e-learning is to promote enhanced business performance through learning. Today’s e-learning is not yet really delivering on its promises and the transition to m-learning is still of a rather theoretical nature. One of the main issues in e-learning involves standards. Standards enable interoperability between platforms from different suppliers and ensure compliance throughout the industry. Standards in e-learning aim to enable the re-use of technology-based learning content across multiple environments and products. There are, undoubtedly, many advantages to standardized e-learning, but there are as yet only specifications for standards and no actual standards. Given this situation, a more critical look at the issue is justified.

Against the background of a radically altered situation in the field of IT professional training, education providers are faced with growing pressure to incorporate e-learning components in their plans for professional training. Until very recently a course trainer was available practically all the time, yet the changed economic conditions mean that self-study phases are increasingly having to be included in training courses. This naturally places added demands on the ability of the learner to study independently. In this model, the trainer has to individually consult the course participants in all decisions about the planning and design of the training plan. In addition, he must be able to quickly recognise strengths and weaknesses, providing help with the latter. His role, as such, is that of a ‘learning process facilitator’. Whereas purely factual knowledge, assessed by means of multiple choice exercises, can be very effectively standardized and implemented into an e-learning programme, dealing with knowledge of methods and process models proves to be clearly more complex.

This article deals with standards in e-learning and summarizes our recent experience of the development and use of learning environments and management systems in keeping with e-learning specification guidelines. We will also report on the use of different e-learning programmes in Germany in order to acquire the qualifications necessary for examinations and assessment.