ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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E-learning: orientation and choice of distance learning

Technological development has improved access to and use of distance learning services, enabling the creation of tools that facilitate learning.

Distance learning has found renewed interest in light of the pandemic situation of the past two years, as the health emergency we have found ourselves facing has brought out a need: the need for mandatory distance learning.

In fact, the methodology of e-learning has distant origins, early 1990s, with Elliot Masie coining the de?nition "the way network technology designs, distributes, selects, administers and expands training," already hinting at its purpose: to change the way we think about and design training content. To organize, to design training content differently, in a way that improves its enjoyment and consequently also improves the learning process.

But when we discuss e-learning, do we really know what we are talking about? Personally, I am part of the "old school" generation, the generation of textbooks, underlining and notes taken de visu.

But although the newest generation would de?nitely de?ne me as a boomer, I have found myself present and reasoning with the birth and spread of digital, as early as the 1980s. The introduction of computers into life, professional activities and education represents a huge breakthrough in the educational landscape, introducing and soon reinforcing the concept of the better enjoyment of content and the better and progressive interactivity of those who, that content, enjoy it.

Online education and training (DAD and FAD) also becomes a new concept of sociality, precisely because of the increased user interaction, not to be demonized.

At some point I asked myself: **what are the parameters that would make me choose distance learning?**

Why choose distance learning

- The absence of time and attendance constraints
- Lower or no costs
- Tailored training and better assessment of learning
- Content that is always up-to-date and never outdated

The parameters I based on are absolutely simple and suitable for everyone.

Classical training, as we know, cannot do without the **constraint of attendance** and **fruition in a given time frame**.

Health needs, in the last period, and everyone's work requirements have twisted this parameter. We can enjoy, at any time of the day and at any time, the educational content we need through platforms, tools, webinars and social media. And very often for free.

Here we come to the second point. Not necessarily paying exorbitant costs is synonymous with, and a guarantee of, excellence.

E-learning allows, first and foremost, the **elimination of so-called living costs**: all-digital material, fewer expenses related to teaching, zero travel costs to get to frontal training locations. All with a good Internet connection.

Costs are certainly not the only determining factor in choosing distance learning.

The best training content delivered is the basis of an informed choice.

Continuous monitoring of the level of learning, through assessment or self-assessment, and enhancement of the social and collaborative dimension of learning are absolutely crucial in training, achieving progressive and steady improvement over time.

Precise and comprehensive training content always allows integration with updated and never outdated materials.

Thus it will be possible to intervene quickly and speci?cally when a part of the course requires updating, without affecting the entire training project, positively affecting cost reduction.

An important feature, perhaps among the most important, is the possibility of fruition of training content not necessarily from a pc but also and especially from mobile.

Thanks to **fruition from smartphones**, training takes place conveniently at any time, situation and environment. This is directly related to the emergence and development of **microlearning**, training pills that fit perfectly into a teaching strategy aimed at balancing fruition without affecting the quality of the content.

When choosing e-learning training, we must necessarily include the social media aspect. Starting precisely from the de?nition of social media, means of communication that make it possible to create, share and exchange user-generated content through the use of web-based platforms, we can easily create discussion forums, working groups, blogs allows users to interact, collaborate and exchange content making the environment creative, always up-to-date, harmonious in sharing the knowledge acquired and making themselves a true active part of the course.

E-learning platforms

The development of technologies is a foundational part of distance education and training. Our habits have changed, are constantly changing, and have adapted to technological development, and, of course, technology concerning e-learning software has also undergone considerable upheaval.

A **Learning Management System**, LMS for short, is what allows you to manage the learning process. It is the virtual space in which training content is transmitted, enjoyed and tracked.

Among the many possible options, the focus has fallen on the **Moodle Platform**, an open source platform that is completely free and modi?able by users. Many Italian universities use this platform because it provides, through a series of extensive and articulated tools, considerable support for teaching activities. Teachers and students, through passwords, can access individual course areas.
Moodle also offers the possibility of taking advantage of instant and real-time messaging systems, such as during the performance of an assignment, calls through Skype, interactive whiteboards. In addition, it is very easy to download notes, lectures, and slides from the platform and share them among students.

In my ?nal analysis, I tried online teaching at the Federico II University of Naples.

I was able to easily veri?fy, with simple registration and the use of a password, a quality of university-level content accessible to all, moreover a digital space where learning is continuous, free and innovative.

As well as the Federico II in Naples, other Italian universities have adopted this methodology.

The learning material is divided into macroblocks and the content of the courses, depending on the organization chosen by the teacher, can directly contain an entire academic year or individual sessions.

The subdivision of courses is by categories of study, and the teaching material is implemented by the lecturer in three different ways: Activities, Resources and Blocks.

- **Activities** are tools that enable students to learn through interaction with each other or with the lecturer.
- **Resources** are the elements that teachers can insert to implement the courses, such as a video or a link to a site, so that the student can watch or read independently.
- **Blocks** can easily be represented by widgets, inserted in the margins of the course and providing additional information. Examples are links to speci?c blogs or survey results.

Student assessment is done through the **achievement of objectives**, levels of learning achieved through the correct execution of tasks or through the completion of an activity.

Conclusions

The study of these platforms, combined with personal experience, allows me to say that these forms of learning absolutely have high and evolving potential. This is the real strength of e-learning. The continuous development, which goes hand in hand with the most advanced technology.
A technology that is constantly evolving and that allows training and teaching to always be increased to the best through increasingly fast, interactive and ef?cient systems.
However, we must record that Italy, while still having a good number of public institutions such as universities that already had e-learning in their training offerings, remains rather behind in the use of these forms of learning and training as they are still considered too experimental to be used with regularity and af?rm in-presence teaching and training.

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