ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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eLearning and Automation: how to optimize time

How to optimize the development and learning time of an eLearning course?

In a training course, the **first objective is effectiveness**. The user who decides to take a course wants to learn the concepts covered and confidently acquire the skills and abilities illustrated. Taking an introductory excel course is about understanding what this software is for and what can be done with it. In a training course, practical skills are just as important as theoretical ones, if not more so: when we talk about training, we mean a course that follows or accompanies the normal course of study and is meant to apply, update or contextualize the notions learned during normal schooling. For more adult users, training has the intent of updating or retraining, where for younger users it has the intent of introducing them to the specific field of work in which they will enter. The two needs have an important element in common: they must be effective and they must be effective within a reasonable time frame.

The **second objective of a training course is precisely efficiency**. It is not enough that those who attend the course come out of it trained: they must be able to do so at the times and in the ways that best suit their work and personal needs. Many training courses have different schedules and modes of administration than school or university classes. A master's degree, a language course or some certification, are often delivered in the late afternoon, sometimes on Saturdays, precisely so as not to get in the way of professional commitments. Professional categories-architects, journalists, etc. - are required to attend a number of annual refresher courses, many of them remotely. The Internet and the ecosystem of applications and institutions that deliver content to them make it possible to optimize time.

Weighed in light of the resources required, a training course, however effective, may not find the deserved uptake among potential attendees. Let's take an extreme case. Obtaining a doctorate requires years of sustained and intense effort: at the end of this post-graduate course, the doctoral student can obtain the title of professor and eventually begin an academic career. The opportunity cost of this choice is to target work in the natural outlet areas of his or her education. To make the choice, the student will evaluate both the end result, in terms of career possibilities, remuneration and personal satisfaction, for each of the scenarios. That done, he will think about the efforts needed to direct himself toward the appropriate choice. If there is not too much difference between the two choices, the cost may make the difference and deter him from choosing a doctorate.

With due proportion, the same **opportunity-cost calculation comes into play for any educational choice**. Not only that. The same calculation involves both prospective attendees, in the first instance; and course organizers, as a direct consequence. If a course does not find adequate uptake among potential attendees, those responsible for its production and delivery will have to consider the reasons and possible remedies. What levers can be used to make training offerings more adequate? One is the optimization of time, both developmental and learning time.

Reduce development time

Optimizing the development time of an eLearning course has at least two positive aspects. On the one hand, it allows **a course to be packaged in time for a new requirement**. The quarantine period and subsequent phases of remote work and distance learning have underscored the importance of time-to-market: the need must be met when it is there. Delaying in this task may result in the end of the need. On the other hand, optimizing time means reducing person-hours worked, containing costs, and keeping the cost of subscription, admission, or ancillary certifications under control. In times of double-digit inflation, this is vital for anyone competing in the market.

What tools to reduce time

Automation is the word. The main strength of an eLearning course is not so much its ubiquity, nor the ability to enjoy the content at any convenient time. This a regular online video does very well. An eLearning is able to offer much more, because the underlying IT configuration is more articulated. Both an LMS and an LXP can manage libraries of content in a way that organizes it along one or more learning paths.

With automation, it is possible to reduce the workload on people. Especially, automating repetitive and chronovore tasks can bring the best benefits.

Course Writer, Subject-Matter Expert, and Instructional Designer are the professionals for whom automation should serve.

At the design stage, all extensions and additional features that will speed up the task of the **Course Writer**, the author of the content: for example, all notes and handouts should be produced in an editable, sharable format as early as the design stage. Transferring from a multitude of different notebooks and folders may be too laborious. Similar discourse for audio and video content: even those with minimal editing can be better utilized if along their length they are indexed by keywords and timestamps, so that the most interesting excerpts can be easily found and extracted, possibly to be included in a review file or as the correct answer to test questions.

For more in-depth courses, allowing proper collaboration between the Course Writer and the **Subject-Matter Expert**, the person with in-depth knowledge on all aspects of the subject matter, may be essential. Integrations with online collaboration programs and file sharing can make all the difference: the two figures can thus collaborate on the same document, even asynchronously.

Finally, process automation should allow the **Instructional Designer**, the course designer, to coordinate everything as a project manager, also taking care of the reporting to be delivered to the human resources offices. This would open up the possibility of creating courses to anyone interested. A more structured offering would make it possible to create a real marketplace for eLearning training, spread the costs of production over a broader base, initiate a healthy path of content competition, and establish the most up-to-date standards.

Reduce learning time

Having reduced production time and enrollment costs, improvement can still be achieved by targeting users. Their time also deserves to be optimized since, ultimately, they are the ones who have to choose whether or not that specific course is worth choosing. True, a good part of the choice depends on the subject matter itself, the student's interest and commitment, and the possible applications of what is learned. And acting on these aspects is primarily the responsibility of the student, the Course Writer, and the eventual decision makers in the workplace-from the managers who manage the employees' work to the human resource managers who evaluate their course.

There is, fortunately, a whole other dimension that those producing a course can enhance. It too through the principle of automation of repetitive or low value-added tasks. On the students' side, the impact is perhaps even more promising: it's not just saving time that counts, but also keeping them interested in the course and the topics covered.

Let's take a few examples: taking notes during class is essential, there is no escaping that. But, spending all your time writing on a sheet of paper while a lecturer speaks on the screen risks turning into pure dictation in which attention is focused on sentences and inattentive to the overall scheme. Automating some of this through notes and outlines in pdf allows the attendee to focus on the path, rather than the stage: once the lecturer has reassured about sending the pdf with the outlines, students will spontaneously be more focused on understanding the essence of the lecture, rather than remembering individual sentences.

Other possible automations are those on the normal "bureaucratic" course of the class: enrolling in a test, sending a result, notifying a response on a forum, etc. If, then, an eLearning course provides different paths depending on the student's level of initial preparation or on the progress of intermediate tests, automatically directing each attendee to all and only the classes he or she will face will allow them each to follow a certain and personalized path: to the teacher, a summary interface will have to be provided that allows him or her to follow the progress of each user.

The automation of pathways would also allow for better interaction among students, especially when each was instructed or offered to choose a specific area in which to contribute to teamwork.

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