ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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Everything you need to know to measure the effectiveness of e-learning courses

Content, interaction and feedback. Here's how to tell if your online course has achieved the desired objectives.

Schools, universities and companies are increasingly using e-learning courses to train their students or employees on different aspects. School subjects, safety notions and in-depth studies on a wide variety of topics are the basis of the new teaching method, which involves the use of the Net. Thus, by using devices with an Internet connection, such as smartphones, tablets and computers, students can learn new information and skills from anywhere and at any time.

These courses are structured by experienced professionals, who identify the objectives, methods of use and interactivity of the online lessons. In order to understand whether the promised results have really been achieved, it is necessary to make an objective evaluation, to find out the **effectiveness of the e-learning course**.

In recent years, the subject of evaluating learning in digital environments has become increasingly important, both from the point of view of the users, and from that of the teachers, through to that of the training course itself. At the centre of the **evaluation**, therefore, have ended up not only the students' progress and the teachers' teaching methods, but also the effectiveness of the online course itself, which is directly linked to that of the training course of those who attend the lessons.

In fact, if the course is effective, the user will achieve the desired results that had prompted him to attend the lessons. And a student who is satisfied with his or her course may have a greater incentive to take new courses and speak well of the one just completed. In this way, the organiser could not only see the continuation of the user's training pathway who has already participated in other courses, but could also present his offers to new participants who had already achieved their goals by following the same type of learning. In addition, if the e-learning course was effective, the learner will have acquired more skills and knowledge which, besides being an advantage for him/herself, could open up new career paths or improve the position already occupied. Therefore, it is important to emphasise the effectiveness of an e-learning course.

How to evaluate the effectiveness of an e-learning course

Depending on the type of training and the objectives of online courses, evaluation guidelines may differ. In general, however, rules can be identified that apply to all types of teaching. In fact, it is possible to assess their effectiveness by considering three points of view:

1. That of the **participants**, analysing the acquisition of new information and the ability to put it into practice, the usefulness of the course and the degree of satisfaction;
2. That of the **teacher**, which also focuses on the inputs, materials and tools the teacher provided to the students;
3. That of the **analyst**, who uses surveys and analysis, highlighting the users' progress in the training programme.

Regardless of the type of course to be evaluated, the monitoring of **user activities** contributes to unequivocally establishing the effectiveness of e-learning. LMS platforms, in fact, make it possible to measure certain aspects of the user experience. The data show the time spent by the learner on the platform, the completion or non-completion of lessons and answers to tests. But, in addition to this information, which contributes to the evaluation of the user experience, which reflects on the effectiveness of the course, it is good to keep in mind two other aspects: user **involvement** and user **satisfaction**. If lectures are delivered in a flat manner, like a simple delivery of notions, the degree of user involvement will be low. Conversely, a course that focuses on the user and provides interactive lessons will tend to engage students more. Furthermore, a participant who is satisfied with the course he or she has taken turns into a learner who is aware that he or she has learnt something from the lessons and may encourage others to follow.

In recent years, a model that has emerged for evaluating the effectiveness of an e-learning course is that of **Learning Analytics**,

which consists of the collection and analysis of data on the actions learners perform on the platform hosting online lessons. This data collection and analysis process combines techniques for tracking users' actions in the digital environment with data from their interactions in the platform. It is a combination of personal and system information, measurement of interactions and time spent by the user on the platform. This helps the organiser to devise customised solutions for each learner, so as to provide training that meets the user's needs and learning objectives, based on the data previously collected.

An evaluation in 5 steps

To evaluate the effectiveness of training, the **Kirkpatrick model** is often taken into account, which uses several levels to evaluate the effects of training an online course. To these, another benchmark for evaluation should be added, the one introduced by Jack Philips. In total, therefore, there are **five steps** to take to evaluate the effectiveness of an e-learning course.

1. Measure students' interest and involvement through periodic **feedback**. This can be done by means of surveys and anonymous questionnaires.
2. Evaluate the **learning of the content**, by means of tests or by using the LMS platform, which allows users' actions to be tracked. To understand the degree of user learning and engagement, we usually take into account student-platform and user-content interaction, the number of objectives completed, the time spent on the entire course and each lesson, and the time used to complete tests.
3. Identify the **impact**, if any, that the course has had **on the user's working life**. This can be done by measuring the utilisation at work of the knowledge acquired during the lessons and assessing the achievement of work objectives.
4. Assess the impact of the course on the course organiser. To do this, three aspects should be kept in mind, on which **costs** depend: people, content and technology. People-related costs are divided into those used to pay consultants (those who realise and develop the e-learning course), lecturers and other employees. Costs related to content depend on the need to create new content or to update it. Finally, as far as technology is concerned, the impact on the course provider is due to the use of LMS platforms and increasingly sophisticated and expensive technologies.
5. Measure the return on investment (ROI), which indicates the **cost-effectiveness** of the training course by balancing cost and benefit.

How to make the e-learning course effective?

What if the evaluation of effectiveness does not yield good results? Here are 10 useful tips to make an e-learning course effective:

1. Use simple and easily **accessible tools**, so that the use of the platform is immediate. It may also be useful to give the user the opportunity to review lessons, interact and access tests, and to share results online to encourage users to improve.
2. Communicate the **benefits** of the course in a way that is appealing. To do this, you can emphasise the objectives that can be achieved by following the lessons and include interactive participation modes.
3. Take care of the **emotional aspect** so that the user is emotionally involved in learning. In this way, it will be easier for him to remember the information provided during the course.
4. Share **real-life scenarios**, to allow learners to see the real-life application of what they are learning. This involves the creation of emotional and engaging experiences that immerse the user in the scene that is unfolding, prompting them to take action by putting into practice the theory learned during the e-learning course.
5. Use **storytelling**, because it can be an effective method to make a concept stick in the learner's mind. Listening to a story can awaken the user's attention through twists and turns and unusual situations, making it easier to memorise and understand the course topic.
6. Make the course **interactive**. In addition to storytelling, another useful way to make your course effective would be to include quizzes, games and exchanges with users in the lessons.
7. Use **images and videos**, so as not to make the course monotonous and to vary the learning mode. Also, the use of graphics and sounds may, in some cases, be more appropriate to convey a certain type of information, which may not be learnt effectively with words alone.
8. Make it possible for users to **personalise** the course, giving them the possibility to choose the lessons to follow and to keep track of their course, consulting their progress and sharing it with other users.
9. Focus on **collaboration** and sharing among students, creating web meetings, live events or tools to facilitate the exchange of ideas among users. Small working groups can also be organised to allow students to cooperate in the

realisation of a common project.

10. Make the course **accessible** from different devices, so that users can access it not only from their computer, but also from their tablet or smartphone. In this way, it will be easier for students to follow the lessons at any time and in any place.

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