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In Conversation with TIS

Budgets are often the biggest obstacles to adopting e-learning.

How does your organization define/detect the key training needs/requirements at various levels? Are the needs captured at a central 'training department' level or do they emerge from specific functional teams?

At UPS, we identify multi-level training requirements, with different approaches for each level—Corporate, Business Unit, Functional, and Individual. Corporate level business imperatives include Compliance, Leadership Development etc., derived from measures set against the Balanced Score Card. At the Business Unit/ Functional/ Departmental/ Individual Levels, training needs are identified through in-house operational methodologies including observation, performance evaluation, or measurement. Here, the drivers are the performance goals of the concerned business unit/function/department. We feel that there cannot be a standard assessment tool to capture the unique individual training needs across diverse functions. As a result, our training needs analyses are not standalone activities, but linked to specific objective areas like competency mapping, performance improvement, leadership development, compliance, new employee or a new role orientation. Objectives and associated training programs are reviewed 2-3 times a year.

What are the trends in the 'training-development/deployment-infrastructure' area? Do you use rapid development tools for e-learning/training programs? Which tools have you found useful?

Yes, we do use rapid development tools to create e-learning programs. But they are privileged information as they are proprietary or are licensed to other custom vendors.

Do you deploy training programs to your constituents on alternative technology platforms like PDAs, mobile phones, or tablets?

UPS did consider the possibility of delivering training on other technology platforms/devices, as a large part of the workforce is on the move and doesn't really have office or computer time. But as of now, we haven't deployed training through devices like PDAs and mobile phones.

Does an LMS matter in this day and age? What are some of the must-have features that most LMS lack?

We're building a highly specific, feature-rich, custom LMS because an LMS bought from the market is often a glorified tracking tool. An LMS should be a part of the integrated HR and Training System that goes beyond tracking. It should completely integrate to the organizations' Talent Management System, with strong links between its operational features and competency measurement and performance management.

How do you decide on the right delivery mechanism (e-learning, blended, class-room) for your learning/training needs? How do you allocate budgets across these various delivery options? Furthermore, what do you see as the biggest challenges in adopting e-learning for an organization?



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First, we identify a specific training requirement at a particular level. The Central Core Training Development team then undertakes a 'needs analyses,' which involves two critical steps that are discussed with training stakeholders, namely, (a) High Level Design and (b) Recommendation of the Training Media. Elements like effectiveness and expense are negotiated vis-à-vis the high level design and training media selection before finalizing the training solution.

Obviously the kind of training—whether it is online, classroom, or blended—determines the solution. Software simulations are traditionally driven by an e-learning-oriented, blended approach; information-driven training for compliance works best with e-learning; mechanical training on engineering equipment works best in a hands-on laboratory class environment, even though e-learning can always play a reinforcing role.

Budgets are determined on a case-by-case basis. Here, I must admit that budgets are often the biggest obstacles to adopting e-learning. For instance, in a particular project, a simulation may work wonders but it might simply be too costly.

What performance metrics would you use to evaluate the success of the e-learning programs? Specifically, how do you measure the ROI delivered by e-learning programs?

We at UPS consciously stay away from the 'training metrics' trap that starts with budgets and moves on to ROI. E-learning programs are specifically evaluated through usability testing at their prototype/alpha/beta stages, and again after 3-6 months. Often, well-designed assessments built into the program indicate that it has gone down well with the learners. Increasingly, we're measuring the success of training programs by tracking changes in end-user's performance at every level. So, while corporate-level training programs, linked to the Balanced Score Card are measured against the changes in the BSC readings, a training course for drivers would be evaluated by the long-term impact on driving behavior.

Tata Interactive Systems' e-learning program for Business Managers linked its learning objectives to six measures on the Balanced Score Card. We'll look at the changes in these measures after administering the Business Manager Training Program for evaluation.

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What are the biggest challenges you face in achieving your business objectives, and how do they tie in to the training objectives? How is e-learning emerging as an effective tool to address these challenges?

The Balanced Score Card captures the organizational level objectives and training objectives, which are directly linked to each other. Compliance and leadership are two core training areas.

We feel that a mix of blended learning process maximizes training effectiveness: critical business training needs like 'Leadership Development' do need human interaction to be truly effective. On the other hand, e-learning is an effective knowledge builder, a supplementary, a finisher and a refresher. Certain 'business-critical' areas like Enterprise Software or technology-related training are best catered for by e-learning, using software emulations and technology models.

Is there a unique and/or challenging training need that classroom training addressed, and which would have been better addressed by e-learning?

Technology training/software training is a focus area for e-learning, with more and more leadership- and business processes-related training moving away from the traditional classroom setting to simulations. Simulations can involve all kinds of learners—the visual



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Can you think of three types of training areas in your organization where SimBLs™ (Simulation-based Learning Objects) and/or StoBLs™ (Story-based Learning Objects) could be used effectively?

Simulations are engaging and effective tools for leadership training, decision-making skills, and business skills. Business Skills Simulations are a preferred choice as they create a virtual-risk-free world for managers to tackle real problems to sharpen their decision-making skills. Vendors, however, must come up with a low per-user cost. If building a simulation for 500 managers costs USD150000, the per user development cost alone is more than USD 300, whereas the ideal figure should be between USD 25 to USD 50 per user. The future calls for 'Simulation Engines' similar to rapid development tools, pulling costs down to an extent where they are viable for everyone, even when the number of end-users is small.

How do you ensure that the services—e-learning programs, for example—you create and provide are effectively used within the organization? How do you 'market' your services and products to your stakeholders and internal customers within the organization?

We develop training programs only when we identify a very strong business need, often linked to performance outcomes. Naturally, therefore, their effective utilization is very high. In certain cases, the training is mandated due to government laws or company policy, which ensures the full utilization of the solution.

We deal with the marketing aspect of the training courses at the beginning, with a strong one-on-one mapping between the members of the core training development team and the key functions of the training programs. As a result, the business needs are very clear to everyone, and the courses developed thereafter are usually much in demand by the people they are designed for.

Tata Interactive Systems (TIS) has been a strategic service provider in various simulation-based training initiatives at UPS. The solutions are key to the UPS training strategy of packaging its domain knowledge and expertise in one seamless, simulated experience.

