

Checklist for Organizational Considerations in eLearning Development and Implementation

1. Make e-learning a Business-Driven Activity

It is the business-side of the organization that will have the strategic need for training (e-learning). Initiatives need to be tied to solving business problems and need to be championed by business managers. Training managers and information technology (IT) managers are service providers in an organization offer a specialized skill related to training and development of human resources. It is not the job of the training manager or IT manager to set the direction or define what should be accomplished. Instead they are to guide and support the business manager.

2. Match Online Solution to Business Need

The starting point for any online training initiative is to determine first, whether training is needed, and second, what kind of solution is appropriate. Not all organizational problems can be solved by training. Additionally, there are different types of training for different types of needs. For example, new hire orientation is mainly information that needs to be conveyed, whereas rolling out a new customer service software platform will require a much more comprehensive program that offers learners opportunities to practice and problem solve.

3. Demand Adequate Budget and Time

Variables that can affect budget include:

Degree of Interactivity - Things like branching scenarios and customized feedback cost more than simple linear 'inform' programs.

Production Values - HD video footage, professional videographers, and narrators increase production quality but they also cost more.

Complexity of Content - Complex topics will require extra effort by the instructional designer to chunk, sequence, and develop exercises.

Stability of Content - Each time reviews and edits are made to the content or production materials, it takes time and effort to rework scripts, images, re-shoot video, etc. and so increases costs.

Adequate Time - Time and budget are often inversely proportional. If something needs to be developed quickly, you may need more people, may have night and weekend hours, and may have to pay rush fees to hit deadlines.

4. Form a Cross-Functional Team

More often than not, design, development, and implementation of an online course involves the talents of more people than just the instructional designer and subject matter expert. Other roles often brought in to help guide the process can include:

- management to ensure top-down support of project and budgets and a project manager who oversees the entire process of designing the training,

- IT staff to provide technical guidance,
- legal counsel who might review documents to ensure there is no copyright or trademark infringement or that proprietary information is not leaked,
- videographers and graphic designers to provide visuals, scriptwriters to craft the content message for multimedia, and software editors to create custom applications,
- instructors who often work with the final product in live learning situations or moderate online classes

5. Drive Simplicity and Standards

To minimize support headaches down the road, consider identifying organizational standards for designing and developing online training. These can include: picking a learning management system, selecting a limited number of development software programs, and/or standardizing on a specific hardware platform that will be supported. Standardizing the technology helps when it comes time for program revisions and benefits learners by limiting their need to work with multiple navigation systems, icons, and passwords. Standardizing processes can help the design team members more easily collaborate on projects. Standardization yields simplicity.

6. Avoid a "Big Bang" All at Once Implementation

When implementing a program, it's best to roll out one curriculum and one audience at a time. Working on smaller releases allows the training organization to make corrections without massive negative attention. It also aids in obtaining feedback quickly and learning from mistakes. Chunk content into individual lessons or modules and create prototypes as soon as possible so that you can get learner feedback, recognize issues, and make necessary changes before you launch the full program.

7. Measure Improvements

When rolling out an online e-learning or training initiative, being able to show that the program **works** at the beginning of the roll-out is a big incentive for executives to continue to support it. Decide on metrics to measure, and track the results. Metrics could include things like:

- number of calls to help desk
- improved productivity
- test scores/grades
- progress to higher-level courses
- participant satisfaction
- employee/student retention/satisfaction

8. Recognize e-learning as a Form of Software Development

Implementing e-learning has a great deal in common with developing and implementing software. What the software (or e-learning) program can do is one thing, but understanding how it impacts existing systems, processes, platforms, and infrastructure is also necessary before a program can 'go live'. Also, like software, you have to carefully plan the 'release' of an e-learning course and think about future maintenance and upgrade issues.

9. Think Ahead and Anticipate Needs

Thinking six, twelve, eighteen months ahead is essential when dealing with the Web. Things change quickly, so it's important to anticipate what an organization may want to do. Will the organization want to charge for e-learning? Will the data from the e-learning courses be used for certification, lead generation, or prospecting? Does the company plan to purchase a learning management system? Can the e-learning course adapt for global delivery (translation or localization of the course)? Is training accessible to all learners, including those with sight or hearing impairments? Is the architecture scalable? Asking these types of questions often and early can save time and money down the road.

10. Create an Instructional Technology-Smart Organization

E-learning is a complex and often expensive solution requiring managers to learn a great deal in order to make wise decisions. One of the best ways to ensure the successful implementation of e-learning is to educate top management about the technology and the overall impact e-learning can/will have on an organization. Without management buy-in, e-learning initiatives struggle to succeed.