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ONLINE TRAINING IN AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

On-line training is becoming an interesting phenomenon in Australia and has attracted a lot of interest across many industries and businesses (Chan and Ngai, 2007). The research reported here looks at the use of online training in corporations in Australia. It focuses on two aspects of online training, the factors that 'warrant' its success as well as on benefits of being involved in online training.

This exploratory study into the issues prevalent to organisations in Australia was accomplished through a survey of top 500 Australian companies.

The findings from this research shows that a lot of success factors of online training identified in the literature have been identified in the Australian environment as well. These include: financial support, cross-functional team, alignment of the software and organisational standards (Driscoll, 1998); top management support, skilled work force (Talib et al, 2010); just in time training (Chan and Ngai, 2007); and usability and transferability (Wang et al, 2004).

Additionally, the findings also confirm the findings from the literature about major benefits of online training. These include: cost effectiveness (Wang et al, 2004); efficiency, competitive advantage, receiving training any time, any place, ability to provide custom tailored solutions (Chan and Ngai, 2007), 24 hours accessibility, flexibility, relearning skills; and improving knowledge and practice of preventive oral health (Talib et al, 2010).

KEYWORDS

Online training, Australia

1. INTRODUCTION

The online training has been "defined" by few authors as activities that uses Internet, intranet, www, for learning purposes (Hall, 1997); a way of communication that uses information technology in order to provide instructions 24/7 and is geographically independent (Chamers and Lee, 2004); (Davis, 2001). Some authors see the advent of the Internet as a vehicle for delivering this important service (Greenberg, 1998).

Online training allows collaborative learning environment, delivering the training in a more cost-effective and efficient way, as well as without the need to attend the classes (Levin et al, 1999), and (Davis, 2001).

Some of the reasons for the companies to get engaged in this activity include its flexibility, adaptability, low cost, and just-in-time training (Chamers and Lee, 2004); (Simmons, 2002).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Online training is becoming more and more popular in recent years and because of its ability to provide a variety of benefits has been adopted in many organisations worldwide. In the last few years it has made a profound (Chamers and Lee, 2004). According to Sloman (2001), it is attractive to a large number companies and businesses all over the world.

In addition, according to Talib et al (2010) the use of online training has witnessed the increase in knowledge, efficiency, etc. in many industries. According to the same author, it also supports the practice of preventive oral care, in the health industry. Furthermore, the online training can be of great use in telerehabilitation by providing an alternative to the classical clinic-based approach (Burdea et al, 2000).

To be successful in any field and to be able to achieve benefits the businesses need to identify those few factors that can “make it or break it”. The identification of these success factors is one of the most important tasks for the businesses that want to be involved in online training.

One of the best definitions of success factors is provided by Laudon and Laudon (1988; 1998), and has been cited by Hossain (1999): “success factors are small numbers of easily identifiable operational goals shaped by the industry, the firm, the manager, and the environment that assure the success of an organization”.

In the context of online training, and for that matter in any other context, the achievement of benefits is only possible through the identification of success factors. Some of the major success factor identified by the literature are: top management support, positive attitude towards online training adoption, innovativeness, knowledge about IT, user-friendliness, and championing the online training in an organisation financial support; cross functional team; conformance to the corporate standards; matching the technology and the training topic; right complexity of the content; familiarity with the tools; ability to provide continuous improvement, skilled work force, ability to provide flexible services (Aguinis et al, 2009); (Driscoll, 1998); (Chan and Ngai, 2007); (Chamers and Lee, 2004); (Simmons, 2002); (McGinnis and Ackelsberg, 1983); (Quinn, 1985); (Westmoreland et al, 2010) and (Thong and Yap, 1995).

Among the main reasons for many companies, regardless of their size, to participate in any business endeavor is to be successful and to achieve benefits from it. Online training is not any different in that respect. It has provided organisations with opportunities to achieve benefits by reducing operation costs, improving customer service, and gaining business efficiencies (Chan and Ngai, 2007); (Markham et al, 2009); (Gasparetti et al 2009); (Carpenter et al, 2010); and (Kleinpell et al, 2011).

Additionally, online training can help organisation in providing custom tailored training, achieving time savings, reusing of programs/trainings as many times as they need it, allowing 24/7 delivery, and information sharing (Chan and Ngai, 2007). Online training is about building better relationships between its participants and allowing its consumers to search for products and check for customer service information online, helping in decision making process (Raupach et al, 2009); (Lockhart and Smith, 2009); (Thistlethaaite, et al, 2007); and (Wang et al, 2011).

Achieving benefits in this field, is however, quite difficult, and to make sure they are successful, organizations must really endeavor in identifying factors (CSF) that can bring those benefits around.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research represented in this paper is a part of a larger research into online training accomplished through a survey of top 500 organisations in Australia. It was guided by the following research questions:

a) What are the Critical Successful Factors of online training in top 500 Australian organisations?
b) Is there any difference among identified critical success factors in Recreation and other services, and finance/banking industry?

The survey questionnaire was piloted and subsequently sent to the top 500 organisations in Australia. The participants were asked to list all the critical success factors of online training to their organisations, and rank the importance of each of the factors. The ranking included using 0 to 5 Likert scale, 0 being the success factor not identified, 1 being list important and 5 being most important factor identified.

The responses collected were analysed using the non-parametric statistical test/analyses because of the non-parametric nature of the data from the Likert scale. The data collected for the research reported in this paper included the Rank Analysis, and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

The Rank Analysis was conducted to find out what are the most important critical success factors in participating organisations.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted to find out if there were significant differences among the participating organisations from finance/banking, and recreation and other services industry.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Out of 500 questionnaires sent out we received 52 useable responses, making the response rate just above 10%. The Communications industry returned the highest number of responses – 11 in total. Insurance, Finance/Banking, and Wholesale/Retail industries returned 10 responses each. It was followed by the Recreation and other services, returning 9, Education/Training industry 1, and Community services 1 response.

In order to find out the importance of each CSF in the whole population and in the Finance/Banking, and the Recreation and other services, we conducted rank analysis. Table 1 shows the ranks of CSF for the whole population and for the two industries.

Table 1. The rank order of CSF identified in the whole population, finance/banking and Recreation and other services industry

Rank	**Whole population**	**Finance/banking industry**	**Recreation**
1	Content	Content	Innovativeness
2	Skilled work force	IT knowledge	Corporate strategy
3	Top management support	Cross-functional team	Content
4	Innovativeness	Flexibility	Top management support
5	Flexibility	User friendliness	Skilled work force
6	Cross-functional team	Corporate strategy	Familiar tools
7	User friendliness	Financial support	User friendliness
8	Financial support	Topic and technology matching	Financial support
9	Familiar tools	Skilled work force	Topic and technology matching
10	Topic and technology matching	Top management support	7 days 24 hours availability
11	7 days 24 hours availability	Online training adoption readiness	Cross-functional team
12	Corporate strategy	Familiar tools	Online training adoption readiness
13	IT knowledge	Innovativeness	IT knowledge
14	Online training champion	7 days 24 hours availability	Online training champion
15	Online training adoption readiness	Online training champion	Flexibility

Table 1 show that 9 critical success factors of online training are represented in the top 5 CSF in the whole population, finance/banking, and recreation and other services industry. It indicates that these factors are evenly spread throughout all 3 populations. It also indicates that the recreation and other services industry has higher degree of “agreement” with the whole population about the importance of these top critical success factors than the finance and banking industry, as it has identified 4 out of 5 factors as very important from their organisations’ point of view. The 9 identified factors represented in top 5 across the whole population and the two industries include: Content, skilled workforce, top management support, innovativeness, flexibility, user-friendliness, IT knowledge, Cross-functional team, and Corporate strategy.

In order to find differences, if any, among identified CSF in finance/banking and recreation and other services industry we conducted Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($P>.05$) shows that there was no significant difference in the identified success factors between the two industries. It indicates that both industries have perceived the importance of the identified success factors similarly.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This research has confirmed that the critical success factors of online training that have been found in the literature have also been found in the top 500 Australian companies. The two industries, focus of this research, have ranked the identified critical success factors similarly.

The research also indicates that top ranked success factors are evenly spread throughout the whole population, as well as in finance/banking and recreation and other services industry. The most important success factors identified in the whole population as well as in the two industries include: Content, skilled workforce, top management support, innovativeness, flexibility, user-friendliness, IT knowledge, Cross-functional team, and Corporate strategy.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

A major limitation of this research, and for that matter all the survey oriented researches, is we couldn't clarify some of the issues that needed some clarification, and clear the doubts raised by some of the answers. A chance to clarify these and some other issues will, hopefully, be presented to us when we conduct few case studies in the future research on this topic.

In the near future we will attempt to conduct few case studies to try to get a better understanding of the issues we have our doubts after this survey. Hopefully we would be able, and that is our aim, to get 5 in depth case studies.

After completing the in depth case studies, we would endeavor to expend our research to large corporations in some of the European Union countries, to get the sense of the state of online training in the Europe, and to make comparisons with the Australia's large corporations.

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