

Exploring the sustainability and economic viability of lifelong e-learning programs

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Abstract

Lifelong e-learning models have been proposed in order to make education and training more accessible, appealing and have great payoffs for the training organizations, the individuals and the corporate/business world. The anytime, anywhere delivery of e-learning/e-training is appealing. For individuals who are busy with careers, raising a family, or are place bound, e-learning brings education to home or workplace on your time is beneficial and motivational.

E-learning seems to be beneficial. On the one hand there are reports like which state that three-fourths of academic leaders at public colleges and universities believe that e-learning quality equals or surpasses face-to-face instruction. It is also mentioned that universities provide distance learning to almost two million users, with a rate of increase of about 25 percent per year.

On the other hand, the corporate learning market grew slightly from 2006 to 2007, increasing from \$55.8B to \$58.5. Spending on products and services grew from \$15.8B in 2006 to \$16.38B in 2007. The average spending per learner is \$1,202, a figure that is roughly equivalent to last year (2006)" [<http://services.tekrati.com/research/9987/>]

Although so many investments have been made in lifelong e-learning programs by educational and corporate organizations, no data have been given about the economic evaluation and viability of these programs. Such data need to be financial as well as intellectual, quantitative as well as qualitative. Measuring value and return on investment (ROI) for training and e-learning spendings has always been important. Return on investment (ROI) has been used both to justify a planned investment and to evaluate the extent to which the desired return was achieved. ROI is a measure of the monetary benefits obtained by an organisation over a specified time period in return for a given investment in a training programme. Looking at it another way, ROI is the extent to which the "benefits" (outputs) of training exceed the costs (inputs).

However, "benefits" are far more difficult to quantify than costs. They are often less tangible but you must still attempt to define the benefit in monetary terms. It is well documented that nobody is quite sure what the appropriate metrics are for measuring ROI for e-learning.

The main scope of this colloquium is to present various policies and methods for the economic evaluation and viability of lifelong e-learning programs. This colloquium also aims at investigating the factors that affect the adoption of methods and techniques for the calculation of viability and return on investment by training organizations. Emphasis will be given on the investigation of parameters that affect the sustainability and ROI of lifelong e-learning programs such as the quality of the programs per se.

The structure of the colloquium will be as follows: Four (4) key presentations will be made by speakers who will make references to international case studies:

1. A comprehensive view of ROI from a U.S. perspective.
M. Dumestre, Regis University, USA
2. Quality assurance models for e-training programs
T. Kargidis, P.Kefalas, D. Stamatis, Alexander Technological Educational Institute of Thessaloniki, Greece
3. Developing sustainable e-learning courses – the Norwegian experience
T. Hjeltnes, TISIP Foundation, Norway
4. Measuring the viability of lifelong e-learning programs of the Greek Ministry of Education
S. Retalis, K. Siasiakos, G. Korres, University of Piraeus, Greece

Then plenary discussion will happen where participants will have the opportunity to exchange opinions and experiences. The main topics of discussion will be:

- Are the approaches and metrics proposed meaningful for educational and training organizations?
- What are the "intangible factors" that contribute to programs' success and the growth of those who participate?
- Do we need more metrics or new methods for calculating ROI in lifelong e-learning?

Acknowledgements

This colloquium is being organized within the activities of the N1 working group “Sustainability of and return on investments in lifelong e-learning programs in Greece” sponsored by the e-business forum and GRNET Ltd. The e-business forum (www.ebusinessforum.gr) is a permanent consultation mechanism between the State, the business sector and the academic community, aiming at establishing useful measures for promoting electronic business in Greece.