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Can E-learning improve employability skills?

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Many people wonder if e-learning really is an effective way of learning. Some people think it will forever change the way we learn. Some people think it can never replace regular classroom training. One of the main questions is: Can e-learning really improve our skills?

Important skills in our professional life include:

- Learning
- self management
- planning and organizing
- problem solving
- communication, teamwork
- initiative and enterprise
- use of technology

These skills are required in most jobs, including project management and regular management.

“Cleary, Flynn and Thomasson (2006) recommend that for effective employability skills development, the design of an overall active teaching and learning and assessment strategy adheres to the following **4 adult learning principles**:

1. Responsible learning – learners take responsibility for their learning.
2. Experiential learning – learners learn from experience.
3. Cooperative learning – learners learn with and through others.
4. Reflective learning – learners reflect on and learn from their experience.

A 2009 study of the Australian government organization “Global Learning Services” shows that employability skills can be improved by the use of various e-learning methods. Those consulted for this study agreed that e-learning can foster these four types of learning and the development of all of the employability skills.

e-learning

The use of e-learning per se assists learners to undertake self-paced learning and so to take **responsibility for their learning**: when, where and how they want to do it. Some particular learning technologies in use to facilitate ‘responsible learning’ include webbased research, podcasts, other online educational resources, m-learning, e-quizzes/tests and online course content, and learning objects from Flexible Learning Toolboxes.

‘**Experiential learning**’ can provide a strong basis for the demonstration and development of most of the employability skills. The individual learns from experiences in real and simulated contexts. E-learning is being used as a significant tool in this regard in the form of simulated material from Toolboxes, CD-ROMs that contain workplace and community simulations, and the use of virtual worlds such as ‘Second Life’.

The family of employability skills which ‘**cooperative learning**’ supports include teamwork, communication and problem solving. E-learning tools in use to support cooperative learning include virtual classrooms, web conferencing, interactive whiteboards, chat rooms, wikis and other online communication and collaboration tools.

‘**Reflective learning**’ is a key facet of employability skills development. E-learning tools in use for reflection on an individual’s experience and learning with regard to the employability skills include e-portfolios, blogs, wikis, audio/video self-recording, digital stories and other online self-assessment tools. Learners are using these e-tools to

document their employability skills and provide self-assessment notes for validation for use as evidence of competency.

E-learning in the delivery blend also enables teachers to cater for a wide range of learning styles: auditory learning (eg own and others' recordings); visual learning (eg videos); and kinetic learning (eg through workplace simulations).

Kolb

ISES uses the learning model of Kolb in which 4 stages of learning are being passed. We all have a certain preference by which we tend to stay in one stage, but Kolb has recommended that all 4 stages should be passed for effective learning.

1. **Concrete experience:** Looking at things as they are, without any change, in raw detail.
2. **Reflective observation:** Taking what they have concluded and watching to see if it works.
3. **Abstract conceptualization:** Looking at things as concepts and ideas, after a degree of processing that turns the raw detail into an internal model.
4. **Active experimentation:** Taking what they have concluded and trying it out to prove that it works.



Screenshot of Prince2 Foundation demo on <http://www.ises.nl/online-demos-prince-and-til>

Our conclusion is that for effective skills development e-learning can be very useful because it can include abstract concepts and ideas, which can be developed into models. It can include simulations in which one can experience certain situations over which one can reflect and think. The last step should always be putting theory and online experience into practice



in real projects and find a way to reflect on them. Write down your experiences and discuss team with colleagues. Write down your professional memoirs! It really helps also in passing exams and certification.

Demo

View the demo of one of our e-learning project management courses, which prepare you for an Prince2 or ITIL v3 exam. <http://www.ises.nl/online-demos-prince-and-til>

*From: The Impact of E-learning on Employability Skills Development, Final Report, 2 March 2009
Kaye Bowman and Peter Kearns, Global Learning Services, Brisbane.
http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/files/E-learning_Employability_Report.pdf*