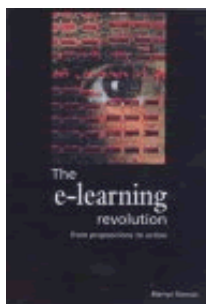


The E-Learning Revolution
The E-learning Revolution: From Propositions to Action
by Martyn Sloman, published by CIPD, 2001
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Reviewed by Ana NEVES



The impact of the electronically connected world on the learning and training of individuals and organisations is the primary subject of this book. It presents 21 propositions, which “provide a good framework to guide the actions of those involved in directing, managing or supporting the training function”. The first proposition is: “The internet changes everything, including training.” The last one is: “More honesty and less hype is required if the training profession is to grasp the new opportunity to maximum effect.” In between, the other 19 propositions are factual and provocative enough to fire the reader’s imagination and interest.

The first chapter covers the birth of the internet, in particular the changes it had on the marketplace: the transparency of information, the diminishing importance of the intermediary role (as it was), quicker access to information, reduced costs of information distribution, etc. Some definitions are given in this chapter and the author challenges readers to question established models and view them through ‘e-economy’ lenses. The chapter finishes with the concept of a blurring world, suggesting that the world is not steady or focused any more (the term ‘blur’ comes from the work of Stan David and Chris Meyer).

“What is happening in training?” is the title of the second chapter. It reflects on the current status of technology-based training, based on several surveys. Corporate universities are mentioned and the author is alert to the fact that most of the existing ones are merely disguised traditional training centres. The work of Elliot Masie is brought to light, stressing Sloman’s idea that technology-based training is not only about new delivery channels, but should also consider the user and levels of interaction.

The author also talks about the war for talent and the challenge of giving less skilled people the benefits resulting from good employment. Sloman mentions two important concepts: resource-based strategy and knowledge workers. The first concerns the definition of a strategy based on the available resources and capabilities of a company, rather than on its market position. The latter describes “someone whose work is intellectual in context” and whose task is to share ideas to bring value to the client.

The next chapter talks about instructional systems development (ISD) and about its limitations. Despite ISD’s operational value, the discipline is mainly reactive, as opposed to the proactive profile it should have. Learning organisations and knowledge management are the focus of the remainder of the section, in which the main conclusion drawn is that employees should be made responsible for their own learning.

The focus on the learner offers a bridge to the next chapter, a more practical one, offering real ideas and presenting several case studies. It starts with a choice of four of the “50 ways to blur your business”, as presented by Stan Davis and Chris Meyer:

- Try to connect everything with everything;
- Use different delivery channels;
- Deliver anytime and anywhere and take feedback;
- Customise your interface and improve it continuously.

The main lesson to be learnt from this chapter is the importance of finding common aspects between e-learning systems and approaches, while recognising the individuality of each organisation.

The sixth chapter goes over the issues of e-learning: learning needs, platforms and learner support. Some of the activities involved in learner support are referred as 'soft technology'. The trainer has the responsibility of making sure individuals learn what they need and want. This task can be accomplished by theoretically understanding the issues involved, pinpointing preferences, styles and motivations, and continuously seeking, receiving and analysing information about the learning process in the organisation.

Two frameworks can help during the analysis phase: one involves the transmission of knowledge to the learner; the other considers how the learner transforms information. This chapter also mentions the work of David Thornburg and his venues for learning (campfires, the watering-hole, the cave and the hunting expedition) and the learning profiles described by Honey and Mumford (activists, reflectors, theorists and pragmatists). Sloman also considers motivation, and the barriers that inhibit it.

Chapter seven recalls some of the ideas discussed in the first chapter regarding the new business model created by web connectivity. It also mentions the Kirkpatrick model for training evaluation and its four levels: reaction, learning, behaviour and results.

After mentioning it in chapter six, the last chapter focuses on the new role of trainers. Adding to the tasks mentioned during the previous sections, it highlights two more: encouraging greater inclusion of individuals and considering open-source. To conclude, the author offers two pieces of practical advice: afford less hype to the training profession, and establish a community site for trainers to share information issues on the introduction of e-learning.

Throughout the book there are case studies illustrating the author's ideas. Among these are examples from BBC Online, Cap Gemini Ernst &Young, CERN, the Post Office, Motorola University, British Airways and Learndirect. While focused on the situation in the UK, The E-learning Revolution also seeks help from the other side of the ocean, and overall provides a rich compilation of material and ideas. Sloman has succeeded in offering a good starting point for those practitioners who, after reading this book, want to dive into the deeper waters of each of the individual topics covered.

Note: Ana Neves is the editor of KMOL (www.kmol.online.pt), a free monthly publication dedicated to knowledge management and organisational learning. She can be contacted at: editor@kmol.online.pt

