

Brief Synopsis

To re-design an existing CGI learning program called Finance Fundamentals. CGI is an IT systems integration company and its learning department deliver “off the shelf” and bespoke e-learning to its 74,000 staff in different languages along with tailored made blended learning programs.

Context

The original learning program comprised of a 5 day classroom-based course for CGI senior executives which took place at CGI’s Canadian head office, students being flown in from around the world giving them a chance to meet and socialise. The program was run by the Leadership Institute, a separate department that deals solely with executive learning. They were receiving very poor feedback from students on the quality of the learning program and asked the company’s main learning department if they could revamp it.

The original program was made up of 18 PowerPoints delivered over the 5 days with collaborative group exercises taking up a limited amount of classroom time.

The new design encompasses:

- A Finance Fundamentals Learning Zone, which is a portal allowing for learning delivery using the flipped classroom model
- Original content converted into a myriad of learning types: e-learning, video, paper-based
- An area for student dialogue
- Virtual classroom sessions for group discussion and collaborative exercises
- A one-day meeting event within the student’s local geography.

A downside of the new design is that executives undertaking the program will now not travel to CGI’s head offices in Canada although with was at huge expense to the company. However, it could be argued that the one-day event in their local geography allows for successful networking with colleagues with whom they can foster closer working relationships.

Given the change in design, the learning program can now be run more often than previously, although a new timescale has not yet been devised.

Technology

Rather than use a Learning Management System (LMS) as the main portal, CGI decided to use a SharePoint site which would allow the Leadership Institute to add extra content easily themselves on an ongoing basis. CGI’s current LMS has a technical limitation in that it does not allow for student dialogue integrated within a learning program, something that can be achieved using SharePoint.

All learning content will be hosted on the LMS and linked to the SharePoint portal, thereby allowing CGI to carry out standard LMS administrative reporting.

There is a disadvantage to this process in that learning is now being delivered from two portals (the LMS and SharePoint) something that may confuse students. This is something that CGI will need to closely monitor.

Pedagogic Approach

The decision to move to a flipped classroom model was made for a number of reasons. The aims of improving student satisfaction, increasing collaboration whilst reducing company cost, is something the CGI design team is confident of achieving with the new design.

The new learning program applies Salmon's (2003, p.10-36) five-stage framework by moving student learning online whilst allowing them to network effectively with colleagues. Tutors originally consigned to the classroom can now act as e-moderators providing ongoing structured help when it is most needed along with more collaborative group sessions online. With access and motivation (Stage 1), our new design will have improved access but whilst welcoming does not have the initial motivating qualities of the original given that students were travelling across the world to CGI headquarters at no expense, the increased motivation will come during the program. Increased online socialisation and information exchange (Stages 2/3) will occur via learner dialogue and collaborating in focused virtual classroom sessions allowing students improved social presence and identity as well as better achieve their own goals as well as help others achieve theirs. Knowledge construction (Stage 4) will be enabled via the focused collaborative virtual classroom sessions applying knowledge into real workplace situations. For Development (Stage 5) the design team were to pass control to the Leadership Institute for future student development, possibly by bringing more learning resources into the new portal, but given the poor design of the original program this could be a risk.

New learning content planned for the program by the design team incorporates Laurillard's Conversational Theory as outlined by Beetham (2014, p.41) in that it uses 4 of the 5 Laurillard types; narrative, communicative, interactive, adaptive. The team hasn't developed any learning that fits the remaining Laurillard type, productive, which could be utilised in the one-day event that has not as yet been designed.

The increased collaboration within the new learning program is a vital part of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development as discussed by Luckin (2010, p.36) along with scaffolding (Luckin, p.27) where students gain help from more able others. As the student progresses, they themselves may become a more able other and as such require less support and be able to provide support to other students, something the program hopes to foster.

Strayer (2012, p.172) notes that research shows the coherence of face to face and online being an important factor in success. Given this, it may be prudent for the design team to request some design input into areas of the learning program that the Leadership Institute are due to develop, namely the virtual classroom and final one-day events to make sure all parts of the program are coherently structured. It is also interesting to note that in Luckin (2010, p.106-107) discussion on Laurillard, she lists four necessary learning process characteristics the teacher/tutor must present; discursive, adaptive, interactive and reflective. At this time the design team had not considered the transformation the tutors need to facilitate the face to face elements of the new flipped classroom learning program effectively, this is something the design team should consider and advise the Leadership Institute accordingly.

Summary

In summary, the new Finance Fundamentals design can be a successful flipped classroom model incorporating learning theories to motivate students. This will allow them greater situational presence whilst providing CGI a more cost effective learning program. Whilst looking at learning theories it was noted that there are improvements the CGI design team can make.

Word count - 996

References

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