

*A handbook*  
FOR E-LEARNING  
SCEPTICS





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# Foreword

## **E-learning: too much or not enough?**

People say all sorts of negative things about e-learning: they say it's inefficient, too complex, and so on. This probably reflects the fact that it challenges conservative attitudes (which are, it has to be said, losing strength as time goes on). E-learning has so many advantages that people are gradually coming to realise that we simply can't do without it. These advantages are far from theoretical, at a time when companies are eager to enhance the efficiency and long-term cost-effectiveness of the training they provide.

So is this handbook on the obstacles to e-learning and the solutions that can be found a pointless exercise?

Well...in a way it is, because we do seem to have reached a point of no return. We see so many projects, so many success stories, and so many companies taking on board new training initiatives that are both more effective and less costly than ever before. For all their merits, however, e-learning and blended learning have still not achieved the status they deserve, and we shouldn't be surprised that they still represent a small proportion of corporate training budgets.

This handbook looks at e-learning at its tipping point - when it can still be seen as a glass that's half full or half empty. It's intended to be light-hearted, and includes a number of humorous illustrations\*.

It's also designed to help people promoting e-learning, as well as training decision-makers who are convinced of the enormous potential of e-learning for their organisations, to tackle the obstacles that still stand in their way.

We hope you enjoy reading it!

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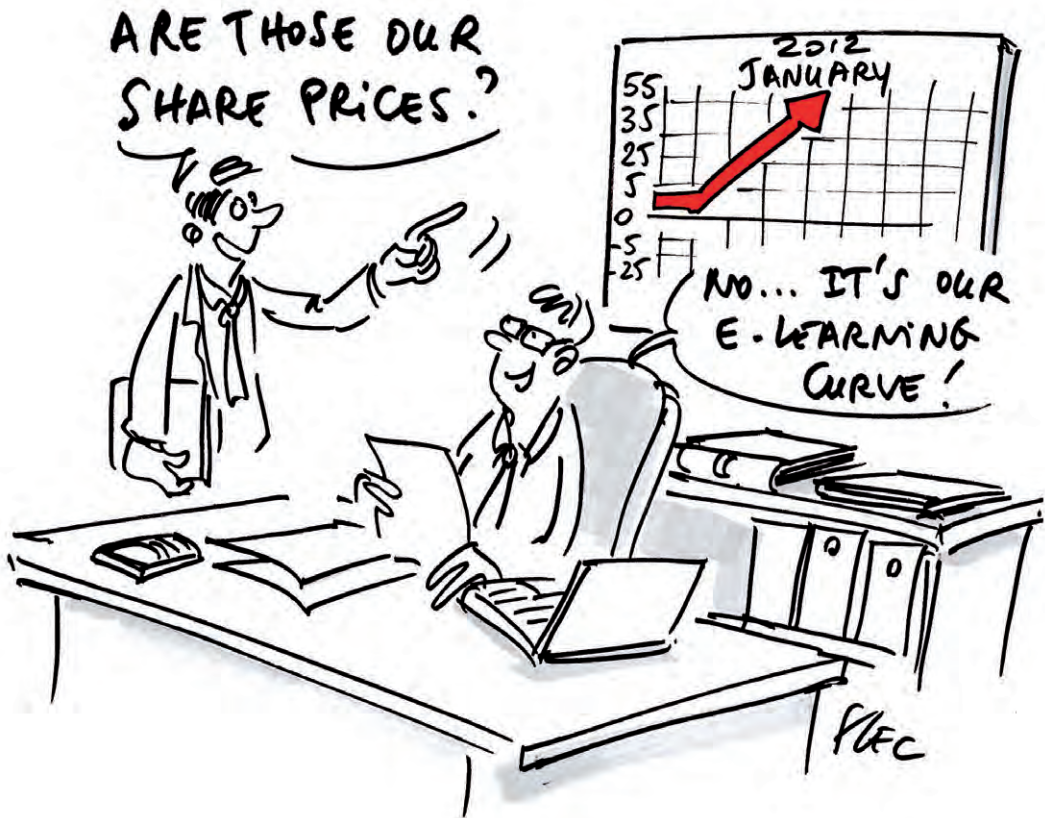
\*Illustrations by FLEC

# 1

## *Not effective?*

“E-learning is not effective”. With this statement, distance-learning nay-sayers seem to have hit on a killer argument that puts an end to the discussion. But notice how, in the effectiveness stakes, more seems to be expected of e-learning than face-to-face training!

It’s true that there were quite a few disappointments for e-learning pioneers in the early days, with results that fell short of the expectations of the training departments that agreed to make the investment. This perhaps explains why the old “not effective” argument dies hard.



### *What is effective training?*

Let's first try to establish what we mean by "effectiveness" when it specifically applies to training. What's often called into question is the ability of e-learning to transfer and consolidate knowledge in the long term. And it's dismissed out of hand when it comes to teaching people new approaches.

And yet the success of this type of training when it comes to personal development and communication proves the exact opposite. At a time when companies are focusing on well-being in the workplace, e-learning is the ideal solution for helping people to develop new approaches confidently and without worrying about being judged by other learners.

Who really seeks to assess the effectiveness of knowledge transfer after a classroom session? Thanks to extensive questionnaires, e-learning allows you to measure what's been learned, whereas classroom training contents itself with vague satisfaction levels. Whether carried out pre- or post- training, these on-line assessments are a great opportunity to measure how knowledge is retained over time.

### *But that's not all...*

Training methods alone aren't enough to ensure effectiveness: it's the company's whole training system that really matters: a system that can be turbo-charged by using new learning technologies that allow you to alternate training and practical work and formal and informal learning (cf: the 70:20:10 model\*). A system that closely matches training approaches with training goals, and which favours "just-in-time" over "just-in-case". A system that supports both collective performance and individual development needs. In a system like this, the learner is placed squarely at the heart of the learning process.

The effectiveness of on-line training can also be looked at from the point of view of optimisation, bringing significant rewards in terms of cost-effectiveness, performance, and speed of deployment.

These unique benefits explain why e-learning is so successful in companies that need to align staff skills with their business strategies. No business sector can escape the need to enhance staff development in order to remain competitive. There are countless examples of this: training an international sales force just before a new product launch; rolling out a new health and safety procedure in a factory; ensuring that pharmaceuticals reps comply with standards... the list is endless.



So in the end, people are right to expect more from e-learning than from face-to-face training! It's not surprising that e-learning plays a key role in skills development strategies... a role that reflects its effectiveness!

### *The e-learning market*

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The global e-learning market (products and services) was worth 32.1 billion dollars in 2010 and is expected to reach 49.9 billion by 2015 (average annual growth of 9,2%). The USA and Western Europe are among the most mature markets.

*Source: Ambient Insight*

**49.9** billion  
dollars

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\*The 70:20:10 model, accredited by Lombardo and Eichinger (1996), indicates that 70% of skills development and knowledge acquisition comes from work experience, 20% from interactions with others (especially one's line manager), and 10% from formal training, either in classroom, workshop or e-learning format.



## *Not for me?*

Here's an argument that seems very sensible at first glance. "E-learning is for young people, it's too complicated, I don't have time for it..." But if you dig a little deeper, you'll find that these arguments are put forward by people who are putting off their training until later, irrespective of its format!

This should be compared with the popularity of e-learning among staff members who have less frequent opportunities to train. Ironically enough, they are often the first to point out how useful and relevant e-learning is.



## Not for me?

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### *E-learning is not a question of age!*

Contrary to popular opinion, e-learning is not just for generation Y. You don't have to have been some kind of geek born with a computer mouse in your hand to use it. A well-designed e-learning module can be used by anyone. This is because it focuses on what's essential: the knowledge or skill that needs to be acquired. Video, voiceovers and interactive features grab the learner's attention, make him or her want to learn, and spark the positive emotions that facilitate knowledge transfer.

The learner should be able to forget about the technical stuff - how to use the module, how to browse between screens, how to answer a quiz to check knowledge

acquisition, etc. - and focus on the learning process.

Let's go even further: with the advent of smartphones and touchscreen tablets, e-learning can even do away with keyboards and mice! You just have to brush your fingers across a screen to move between the different sections of your training module, and there's no need to do things in a set order.

### *It's not a question of time, either!*

Saying that people don't have the time for e-learning doesn't hold water, either. What, you mean staff members can spare two or three days to go on a traditional training course, but they're too busy to spend barely an hour completing an on-line training module?

On the contrary, distance training is all about using your time efficiently; this can hardly be said about face-to-face training, with all the travel, traffic jams and nights spent in hotels it involves.

The potential of mobile e-learning is also consistent with the increasingly popular trend for ATAWAD (Any Time, Any Where, Any Device) training, which leaves you free to choose when and where to learn.

### *The LMS market*

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The growth of the global LMS (Learning Management System) market in 2012 is estimated at 14.7%.

Source: Bersin & Associates

# 14.7%

### *It's just a question of organisation... and motivation*

It's easy to understand why this new way of managing training time makes people feel a bit uneasy. With classroom training, things are very clear: the team member leaves his or her desk, and doesn't go back until the course is over. Sure, it takes time, but we've got used to it! With on-line training, things are less clear-cut. "When I'm doing e-learning on my computer, am I at work, or am I training? How am I going to explain to my boss that I'm not available to deal with something urgent when he can see me sitting here browsing!"

The solution, as always, lies in organisation and awareness-building. Even more than face-to-face training, distance learning requires an organisational framework that works over time. Planning ahead means making personal commitments: "this is the time I've set aside for training". It means making your colleagues aware of your schedule. And of course, it means talking to your boss about your training!

The challenge for the line manager isn't so much about whether training is on-line or not; it's more about how to make training relevant to the context of the individual team member so that it's in synch with his or her essential motivations and so that it enhances his or her performance.

### *E-learning: a chance to modernize roles*

So e-learning is for you after all! It's even a real opportunity to modernize the way you commit to your training. You know that knowledge and skills are your key assets, and you embrace your responsibilities as a learner. Any help your boss can provide will be very welcome. After all, isn't it your line manager's role to support the development of his team members? Paradoxically enough, in distance learning the trainer plays a central role, running a course that extends far beyond the classroom. Interaction between trainer and learners is an on-going process.

# 3

## *Not quality-driven?*

Let's be fair: we've often heard this criticism! It's a relic from a time when too much trust placed in new technology pushed content quality aside – content had too few media enrichments, and was dauntingly long-winded even for the most motivated learners. There were software quality issues too, because the new technology was still in its infancy. Key questions of design, duration, interactivity, relevance to the learner and impact were not yet on the agenda.

We can now admit that quality was not always a guest at the e-learning table in the early days! It's safe to admit this now, because the situation has completely changed.



## *Not quality-driven?*

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### *Things have really changed*

Modules taking more than an hour to complete are now a thing of the past; today, some modules last fifteen or ten minutes – sometimes just five! The underlying trend is for micro-learning, content that cuts to the chase (focusing on the three or four key messages the learner has to memorize), and courses that fit comfortably into people's work schedules.

We've also said good-bye to ugly, boring content justified by the argument that "training is a serious business, it doesn't need to be attractive!" Who says you can't combine the two?

Credit must go to off-the-shelf modules that set the tone in terms of e-learning quality with their storyboards, sequences, training methods, simulations, rich media, and genuinely useful pre- and post-assessment features. They continue to inspire designers producing bespoke content and, more especially, people involved in developing training media.

It has to be said: whether for generic or specific content, today's quality levels are able to satisfy the most demanding organisations and staff members. And when they don't, the designers only have themselves to blame: the necessary tools and know-how have now been around for a long time! Content providers have

got the message, loud and clear: training departments want high-quality training courses, and learners and PR departments involved in branded corporate training initiatives want those courses to be attractively designed!

### *A paradigm shift*

But although spectacular advances have been made in the design of e-learning modules, an even bigger transformation has taken place in the broader field of instructional engineering.

The traditional approach that saw face-to-face training as the "main course" and e-learning as just the "appetizer" and "dessert" is fast losing currency. Sophisticated and innovative learning methods are emerging, creating a new balance between face-to-face and distance learning, synchronous and asynchronous learning, and formal and informal learning. HR and training departments also see it as a fantastic opportunity to combine training, information and collaboration, focusing on synching with corporate social networks: a great way of getting learning communities to work together!

Because they allow a high level of customisation, adapting to the profile and pace of each individual learner; because they include collaborative and



### *The tablet market*

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The tablet market is expected to double in size between 2011 and 2012, increasing from 60 million to almost 119 million units sold worldwide.

Source: Gartner

**119** million  
units

Staff and managers are our front-line judges. Let's ask the people who've tried out this "quality + customisation" approach if they'd go back to what they had before!

fun components; and because they keep step with the changing expectations of learners and more directly serve the needs of collective skills development strategies, new technologies make it possible to define new types of learning processes.

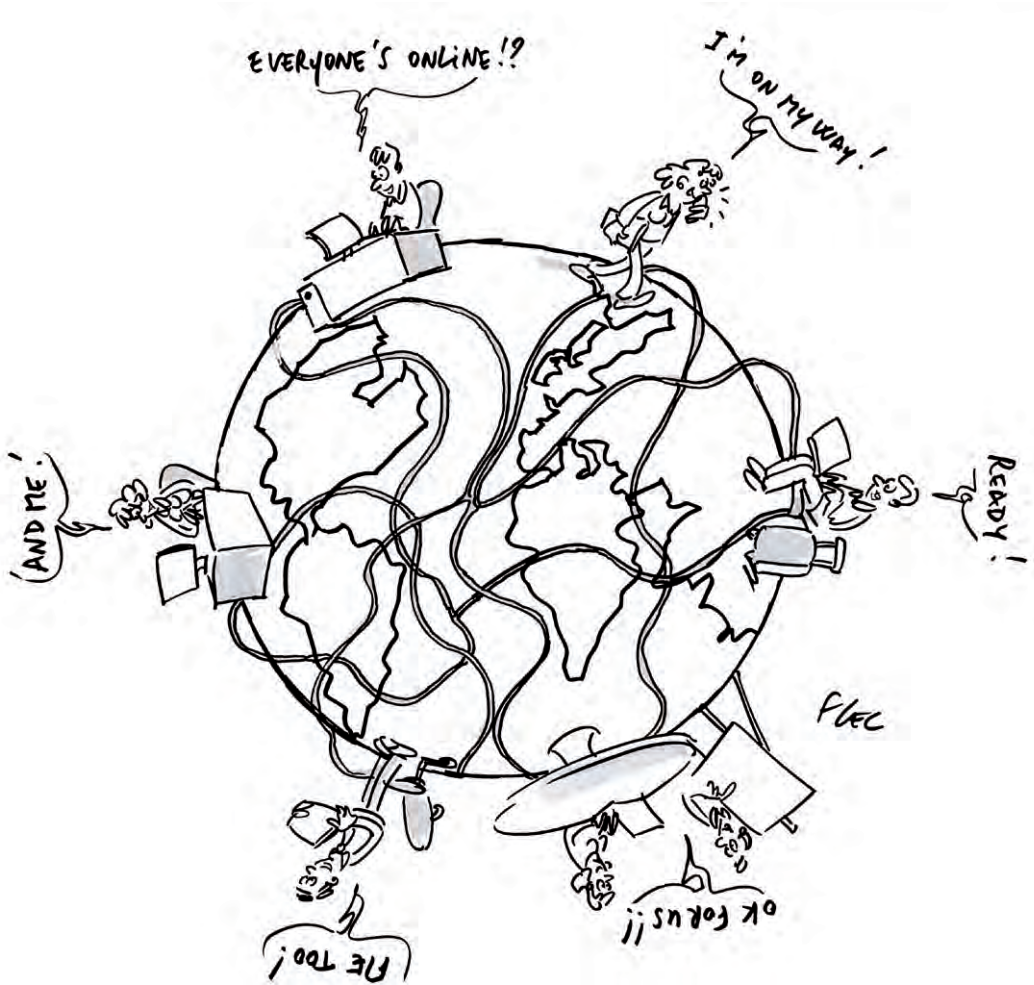
This means that the most up-to-date training portals can offer environments where learning is both "generated" by learners themselves and supported not only by the training department but also by trainers, line managers, and fellow learners.

It's true that such systems may seem complicated to implement, both from an educational and technological point of view. But revolutions take time!

# 4

## *Too isolating?*

OK, it's true that this is an objection we often hear...but it's rarely uttered by learners themselves. Most of the time, with all due respect, it's usually training providers who put forward the "learner loneliness" argument when it comes to e-learning.



## Too isolating?

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### *Distance learning and face-to-face learning: allies or rivals?*

E-learning versus face-to-face learning... People say it's an unequal struggle where the fighters aren't playing by the same rules. On the one hand we have distance-learning programmes "crushing" face-to-face training thanks to their ability to train quickly, efficiently and cheaply. Try training thousands of staff members scattered all over the world in one classroom, in a dozen different languages and in less than a week! On the other hand we have the idea that only face-to-face learning deserves to be called "training", because it means that the learner can avoid the terrible ordeal of learning alone: because Man is first and

foremost a "social animal", he learns from others by being among them...

The right path to follow is actually somewhere between the two. Let's explain this with the help of an example.

### *The loneliness of the manager*

Let's put ourselves in the shoes of a manager who wants to prepare for a round of performance reviews. Here's what happens in traditional training mode: he signs on for an in-house or external training course for performance reviews due to start in October. The course includes role plays and case studies: it suits him fine, he's in a group of learners, the trainer seems to know what he's talking about, everybody has a good laugh... It's perfect. But then when October comes around, he goes back to his notes; by now the energy of the course has evaporated, and he suddenly feels terribly alone: and it's NOW that he needs to talk to someone and ask for support!

Let's look at another solution: a tutored e-learning path. Our manager starts (let's say in mid-September) with a self-assessment that gives him a sense of where he stands and offers him a selection of e-learning modules that closely match his needs. In addition, the training path is supported by e-mail or

### *The serious games market*

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The world market for Serious Games represents 1.5 billion euros. Its annual rate of growth is expected to be 47% in 2010-2015.

Source: IDATE (*Institution De l'Audiotvisuel et des Télécommunications en Europe*)

**1.5 billion euros**

chat-room interactions with his tutor as and when required. When he's done his first performance review, he looks back over it with his tutor, focusing on at what worked and what can be improved on... Lonely? Who's lonely? He gets all the support and guidance he needs, at precisely the right time.

### *So where are the other learners?*

Yes, you say, but this is a tutor-learner relationship. The other learners have disappeared! In larger companies, it's rare for just one manager to be involved in a scenario like this. There'll be a community of managers concerned with performance reviews, in an environment where people communicate less than you might expect: managers don't often talk to each other about the touchy subject of performance reviews. But this is far less true in virtual communities. It's not as paradoxical as it may seem: the task of keeping track of contributors and managing how they make their contributions is made much easier if those contributions are made via a collaborative learning portal. It's also much easier to respond to them, and to initiate group interactions. People engaged in these kinds of interactions don't have to wait for a coffee break to carry on with them, and they're not limited to the two or three people who

meet at the coffee machine. Instead, anyone can follow and contribute to these conversations at any time. They make it possible for people to ask their peers for advice, and to find answers to questions. And most importantly, they're conversations that don't stop at the end of a training course. They are multi-faceted interactions that can continue over long periods.

### *Towards a blended approach*

Nobody has to feel lonely any more... at least in blended learning formats that leverage learning communities and on-going trainer/tutor mediation. The trainer knows the expectations of the learners before training begins, and can ensure that useful interactions take place, for example, every time the learner begins to apply what he or she has learned ... in other words, every time the learner is likely to feel most lonely! Fear of being alone often conceals a deeper fear: that of not being up to standard on the course... With tutored learning it's a very different story: individual support and collective interactions are central to the approach.

Last but not least, blended learning is also perfectly compatible with group face-to-face sessions. Just one more reason to put the "fear of isolation" argument in the dusty old closet where it belongs.

# 5

## *Too expensive?*

“E-learning? Why not? But are we sure we can afford it?” The cost of e-learning was an understandable concern given the figures bandied about when the first raft of projects was launched. Ten years later, now that it has reached maturity, the distance learning market has become far more professional. Experience gained by both providers and corporate clients now makes it possible to factor in all the various project parameters when dealing with the question of cost.



## Too expensive?

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### *E-learning in the early days*

You thought you'd got a robust budget worked out and suddenly you found your IT department, your HR department and so on being asked for more money - a pretty nasty surprise! Even when properly budgeted, the platform cost could suddenly become elastic: you never knew if the project had been properly costed in terms of number of users, services, configurations, updates and so on...And in addition to this, you had the cost of developing bespoke content. This cost would increase incrementally when instead of an isolated e-learning module, you were looking at building a significant asset able to replace some or all of the courses in your company's training plan. So when you looked at the budget, you'd say "It's impossible to go further than just an initial trial! If we want to apply it company-wide, it'll cost millions!"

And what about justifying the time spent on these projects in-house? Show me a training manager who didn't feel his heart sink when he looked at the hours finally spent by his team on e-learning...

These kinds of real-life experiences are, to some extent at least, a thing of the past.

### *So...have things really changed?*

Not completely: at least not for companies that are still struggling to define and implement their e-learning strategies!

For the others, who show a more mature approach, e-learning has stopped being too expensive. Which is just as well, because cost-effectiveness is cited as the number one reason for investing in e-learning!

So how do these companies do it? In the first instance, they are very concerned with how much they're spending on bespoke content (which accounts for almost half of their e-learning budget) as they reorganise their project portfolio. A lot of this content is now produced internally; this is the principal benefit of the powerful and user-friendly rapid learning tools that are now available, in that they allow course designers, trainers, and in-house content consultants to develop e-learning modules on their own. These types of software packages are genuinely popular: training departments, whether centralised or non-centralised, are acquiring them on a massive scale. Design studios have also increased their productivity, which means that it is now less expensive to use their services. Next up, off-the-shelf e-learning catalogues now cater for a wide range



### *e-learning in Europe barometer*

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45% of companies surveyed consider that the priority objective when adopting e-learning solutions is to improve cost-effectiveness.

*Source: e-learning in Europe barometer prepared in December 2011 by CrossKnowledge, Féfaur and IPSOS*

# 45%

### *Training professionals in the hot seat*

The cost factor had already been used as an argument against traditional training, and trainers would respond with a watertight argument: “You think training is expensive? Try ignorance!” Now that blended learning makes it possible to measure return on investment or, less bravely, return on expectation, it hardly seems appropriate to carry on challenging its worth. It’s up to in-house and out-of-house training professionals to use existing models to prove whether e-learning is too expensive or not!

of needs in a variety of fields: why pay an arm and a leg for “bespoke” content when you can get quality “generic” content for less? Serious Games are no exception: there are even off-the-shelf versions of these!

As for LMS platforms, the rapid development of SaaS (Software-as-a-Service), where you subscribe to a service instead of buying a software licence, means that companies can enjoy the benefits of an all-in price with no hidden extras that is proportional (or almost proportional) to the number of actual users.



# *Too complex?*

We've left the best part - in other words, the most difficult part - until last. The complexity argument is a tough nut to crack! The feeling of complexity caused by the introduction of new learning technologies is understandable given the huge range of options available. Combinations of content, technologies, services... it's sometimes hard to know where to begin.



## Too complex?

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### *A practical approach to complexity*

So how should we approach the issue of complexity? First of all, the company should avoid putting itself in “big bang” mode. Change should be approached rationally, sensibly, and gradually. The company should decide on the new components to build into its training system... and make them its own. Remodelling training programmes involves adding new components: a list of choices that can involve more than ten different types of media! These components should be chosen to fit training goals as well as corporate ambitions, resources, and context. All this has to be done within economic constraints: the new blended learning system will have to pay its way. Once the first programmes have been launched, it will be easier to extend the new system to all training, leveraging previous experience and gradually increasing complexity in order to obtain even more effective results.

It's true that implementing these new approaches requires particular skills: you have to understand what each media component contributes to the overall economy of a training project; and you have to know how to organise these components in a coherent way, how to disseminate custom training paths via a platform, and how to support the new system using the relevant PR tools.

### *What about technology?*

Paradoxically, things have got much simpler on the technology side. It's true we have to cope with a lot of different formats (video, modules, quizzes, discussions, etc.) and devices (PC, tablets, smartphones, etc.) But nowadays, corporate infrastructures are powerful enough to deploy all the content types required by the modern learning mix. With the advent of fibre optics, networks have faster transmission speeds than ever, which means improved performance all round.

The issue of integration between LMS platforms, Talent Management solutions and local networks is no longer a cause for concern either. Solutions offered on the market are more and more open-ended, and providers offer simplified integration procedures.

SaaS and Cloud Computing are also the subject of much discussion; far from being sources of complexity, these models actually give you more freedom of choice. They're also reversible, and this limits risk for companies, unlike the experience of implementing large ERP systems.

### *Managing complexity or supporting change?*

Managing this complexity is first and foremost about supporting change, in other words taking full account of the human factor - which is, of course, essential. It involves defining the right arguments - and they do exist - that can be used to convince the various stakeholders of the value of the new training initiative. Expressions of resistance or reluctance must not be met with denial; instead they must be listened to because they can help you make improvements to the system, and dealt with properly in order to smooth the way to change.

As far as learners are concerned, priority must be given to support and communication in order to anchor e-learning in the long term perspective: information campaigns, marketing initiatives

designed to get people on board and promote loyalty, user communities, videos featuring managers, teasers, multimedia launches, login kits, goodies, automated e-mails, and so on.

As for the HR/Training people, it's a case of making sure they champion the new initiatives. The idea is to leverage their experience gained on early projects and encourage them to promote them among their peers. New systems that allow training managers to interlink training initiatives, business goals and status reports provide them with an opportunity to work more closely with people in the field, to offer more effective advice and support, and to develop the idea of "business partnerships" within the company.

Top managers are potentially the easiest people to convince, as e-learning provides an unbeatable way of making an organisation more responsive and more efficient. Because they are eager to make their company more responsive so that it can adapt to tomorrow's challenges, to align staff with corporate strategy, and to manage in real time to cope with more and more complex business environments, senior managers can hardly question the value of e-learning when it allows them to rapidly train large numbers of learners scattered across the world and speaking a variety of different languages.

### *The rapid learning market*

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A report published by Bersin & Associates lists the need to respond to business requirements, cost optimisation, and the ability to train more people as the three main reasons for adopting rapid learning solutions cited by US companies.

*Source: Bersin & Associates*

## About Féfaur

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# FēFaUR

Founded in 2006 by Michel Diaz and Aude Dellacherie, Féfaur is the biggest independent eLearning research and consultancy firm in the French market, and one of the European leaders.

Féfaur advises and supports companies and training organisations as they define and implement their eLearning strategies.

Féfaur publishes authoritative economic and technical studies on eLearning supply and demand in the French market.

[www.fefaur.com](http://www.fefaur.com)



With more than 3 million users, CrossKnowledge is the leading European provider of distance learning solutions. CrossKnowledge enables organisations to evolve successfully by helping their staff members to develop. The company offers integrated solutions that use exclusive learning formats, some of the most sought-after content in the world, and a range of accompanying services specially designed to meet corporate needs. These solutions ensure a unique learning experience for the individual and a real return on investment for the organisation.

CrossKnowledge learning content and formats are developed in collaboration with an international 'Faculty' comprising the best authors, professors and management professionals from the most renowned business schools in the world. CrossKnowledge has created the CrossKnowledge Academy in order to formalize and share its expertise in instructional design and deployment with its clients via certification programmes.

CrossKnowledge provides solutions adapted to companies of all sizes and is present in 25 countries through its network of global offices and partners. The group's clients include AkzoNobel, AXA, BBVA, Belgacom, BNP Paribas, Carrefour, CocaCola Entreprise, Fedex, Geodis, Jaguar Land Rover, Lafarge, Schneider Electric, Sodexo and Thales.

[www.crossknowledge.com](http://www.crossknowledge.com)

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