

116

Proven
eLearning Design and
Development Tips

by Sharath Chandra



116

Proven eLearning Design and Development Tips



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1

Table of Contents

Preface	3
28 tips to design the perfect eLearning course	4
26 tips to get the best translation of your online course	18
21 tips to leverage your LMS	26
30 tips to harness the full potential of mobile learning	38
11 tips to make the most of rapid eLearning	51

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2

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Preface

It is common knowledge that eLearning is used extensively in the corporate training world. But, what does it take to create the perfect eLearning course? How can you deliver wonderful experiences to your online learners? What are the aspects you need to focus on to develop a highly effective course that leaves your people spellbound? Well, here is an eBook that contains 116 tips to help you harness the power of eLearning to deliver top-notch training.

These tips are a product of 15 years of experience in providing online training solutions and go a long way in unleashing the power of the online training format. The tips are organized in 5 sections. The first section provides invaluable insights into instructional design, critical to the making of a good online course. We then proceed to see how rapid eLearning can be utilized in an effective and efficient manner. The third section contains tips to produce first-rate translations of online courses, quickly, in a cost-effective manner. We then move on to see how the mobile device can be used to deliver excellent training to your workforce. Finally, we come across tips that help you the most of your Learning Management System (LMS).

We hope that this endeavor helps you develop incredible eLearning courses and utilize the online medium to create learner delight.



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3



28 tips to design the perfect eLearning course

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4

Before you start designing the course

1. Know your audience

Audience analysis needs to be conducted in the first stage of project planning. In order to communicate the purpose of your course, you need to know who your audiences are. Depending on your learners' profile and experience, you need to shape the online course in such a way that it accommodates the needs of the learners. Here are a few questions to help you know the target audience better.



- Who is the course for?
- What do they want or expect to get out of the course?

- How will they use the information and skills they learn in their job? What do they know about the topic?
- Are they white collar or blue collar employees?
- What is their comfort level with computers?
- Is the training under consideration compulsory or voluntary?
- What are the pre-requisites for training?
- In what settings will they use this training?
- Are they native speakers of English or is English their second language?
- Are they likely to get inspired by game-based learning or would they prefer a more formal approach?

2. Frame effective learning objectives

Learning objectives (also called course objectives) specify what learners are expected to do at the end of the training program. They set the direction of the course to the learners. The desired learning outcomes can be achieved only if the learning objectives are framed appropriately. In order to enhance the learning process and increase the scope for progress, an instructional designer should be clear with the objective of the program. Learning objectives should be framed in such a way that they

- Specify what the learner will be able to do by taking the course
- Are brief and easy to understand
- Are attainable and realistic
- Communicate the purpose of the course clearly



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5



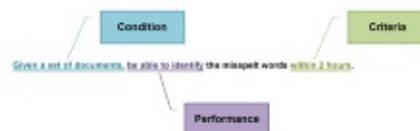
According to Robert Mager, an ideal learning objective should contain three components, viz.

Performance – What should the participants be able to do?

Conditions – Under what conditions do you want the participants to be able to do it?

Criterion – How well must it be done?

An example



Steps to write good learning objectives

Step 1: Create a stem: The stem or how you start a learning objective is important. Here you can address the learner and tell when they will achieve the objectives (after completing the unit, lesson, etc.)

A few examples

- After completing the lesson, you will be able to ...
- On completion of this unit, you will be able to ...
- By the end of this course, you will be able to ...

Step 2: Add a verb to the stem: An action verb is critical for the learning objective. Adding verb to the learning objective specifies clearly observable and measurable action. You can always refer to the [Bloom's Taxonomy](#) for choosing the appropriate verbs.

0

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A few examples

- After completing the lesson, you will be able to **list ...**
- On completion of this unit, you will be able to **explain ...**
- By the end of this course, you will be able to **identify ...**

Step 3: Determine the process, or outcome: You should define the process, procedure, or outcome the learner will achieve after completing the course.

A few examples

- After completing the lesson, you will be able to list the steps to shutdown the computer.
- On completion of this unit, you will be able to explain the communication process.
- By the end of this course, you will be able to identify the key steps in project management.

After framing the learning objectives

3. Develop assessments first before "sourcing" the content

Many a time, instructional designers (ids) focus on creating the content once they have clear learning objectives and put the development of the assessments on the backburner. This forces them to fit the assessments within the ambit of the content. A major advantage of reversing this general trend and creating assessments first is that it helps you know what you need

to test. You need not spend a lot of time on writing content in between the formulation of learning objectives and testing them because it is easier to come up with questions that are directly linked to learning outcomes.

Another advantage of developing assessments first is that you get clarity about the topics that the learning content needs to cover. Once you have developed assessments that "match" the learning outcomes, it becomes easy to identify the topics that are necessary to complete these assessments successfully. This goes a long way in segregating the 'must know' and 'nice to know' aspects of the learning content.

4. Ensure that the content is relevant to the learners

Your learners spend time to take your course because they expect it help them resolve their problems and enhance their productivity. They expect the content to be relevant to their job and want to apply the learning at the workplace. You can make sure that your content is relevant by mapping it to the learning objectives using this simple matrix.

Learning Objective	Item of the content that meets the objective
--------------------	--



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5. Prepare a detailed outline of the content

Prepare a detailed outline of the content to provide an overview of the course, a brief description of the target audience and a list of modules and lessons. A detailed outline helps:

- Include whole content as representation for instruction
- Detail the objectives, modules, lessons and topics
- Classify terminal learning objectives and associated enabling learning objectives to establish the instructional objectives
- Create a basis of instructional design

A Sample DCO

Course Objective:

After completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Explain the types of minerals transfer situations related to welding.
- List the used gases in welding and how they can be used.

Scr. no.	Screen title	Slide No.	Content strategy	Notes/Questions/Connections
1.	Welcome	0	Animations	
2.	Navigations		Text + Animations	
3.	Learning Objectives		Text + Images	

6. Map the assessments to the learning objectives and the content

Clearly defined objectives help you know what to expect from the course and stay on track. They enable you to check the comprehensiveness of your course. For instance, let us suppose that you are building a course on industrial safety and have identified 3 learning objectives for the course. You can check whether the content of the course and the assignments meet these objectives using this simple matrix.

Learning Objectives	Item of the content that meets the objective	Assessment questions that are in tandem with the objective
---------------------	--	--

A few tips to design effective assessments

7. Make assessments interactive

Try to embed different interactivities for assessment questions so that learners could approach these assessments with the same zeal and interest as they take the online course.

8

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8. Create module wise assessments

Assess the learner after the completion of each module. This helps recognize and address problems immediately. These assessments generally need not have points or scores as they merely prepare the learner for the final assessment at the end of the course.



9. See that gamified assessments help assess the learner

Remember that the purpose of a gamified assessment is to evaluate the learner and fun element is secondary. For instance, when you develop a gamified assessment based on the folktale Aladdin and the Magic Lamp, make sure that the assessment helps you measure the learner's comprehension of the subject-matter and does not merely entertain him.



10. Provide proper feedback

E-learning courses commonly make use of feedback. Here are some **dos** and **don'ts** for good feedback.



How NOT to give the feedback?

▶ Do NOT overload

Never include more than one idea in the feedback or connect it to the other learning objective.

▶ No one-line feedback

Never give one liners in the feedback. This will not help the learner understand why he is right or wrong.

▶ Avoid negatives

Make sure you avoid negative feedback. This may de-motivate the learner. You always need to provide constructive and positive feedback for the learner to feel motivated.

▶ How to give effective feedback?

Properly offered feedback will make the learner feel motivated and makes the course more interactive.

Have a look at the tips below on how to give effective feedback.

▶ Give it immediately

Always give the feedback for an assessment question immediately after the learner chooses the answer. This will help the learner understand what is correct then and there so that he need not wait till the end of the course.

▶ Give explanation

In order to make the learner understand better, it is necessary to give the correct explanation for the questions they answer.

► Maintain consistency

It is necessary to maintain consistency in giving feedback. The feedback should be given in the same manner for all questions.

Here is an infographic which lists 5 proven tips to give feedback on assessments.



A few tips for a good narration



11. Add pronunciation notes for:

► Acronyms

We may use several acronyms in our script. So, we must make sure to give a clear pronunciation note for each acronym. For example, the term ISO must be pronounced as I-S-O (individual letters) or I-So.

► Units

Include the pronunciation notes for the units of a number as it can be useful to the narrator. For example:

"100 kg."- Should be read as "Hundred Kilograms"
"2 cm."- Should be read as "Two Centimeters"

► Unfamiliar terms

E-learning courses often deal with different subjects - medicine, industrial safety, compliance, etc. Not all narrators are familiar with the terminology used in them. To avoid mistakes in pronouncing unfamiliar terms, we need to provide pronunciation notes for them.

► Numbers

In order to avoid mistakes when pronouncing numbers give a note to the elearning course narrator on how to read them. For example:

"263"- Should be read as "Two Sixty Three" or "Two Hundred and Sixty Three"
"2015"- Should be read as "Two Thousand Fifteen" or "Twenty Fifteen"

Provide a separate column for the pronunciation notes in the audio script, so that it will be easy for the narrator to understand.

► Global abbreviations

Provide a global abbreviations list on the top of the script. This helps avoid confusion when the narrator encounters the abbreviations in the script. For example, include things like:

"i.e."- Should be read as "such as" or "that is"
"e.g."- Should be read as "for example"
"etc."- Should be read as "etcetera"

12. Emphasize the "needed words"

If you want some words to be emphasized, then make sure you underline, bold, capitalize or italicize the words. This helps grab the narrator's attention and makes the narration easy.

13. Include slide numbers

Include the slide numbers in the script, and this helps both the narrator and the people who are embedding the audio in the eLearning course.

14. Give a pause wherever required

The animations in the course should be shown along with the audio. So, a little pause in the audio may be needed to maintain synchronization. So, by adding the word pause in the script, you can let the narrator know that he needs to give a pause there. This makes our task easier.

Once you have the assessments and the content in order

15. Make an interesting start

Starting your course with learning objectives will make it uninteresting and monotonous. There are many ways to make your course interesting right from the beginning. For instance, you can start your course with statistics about the subject being taught. This approach will help in two ways.

- Your course starts with a "big bang" and engrosses your learner.

- Your learners get a gist of the subject being taught in the course.

Let's take a look at how statistics were used at the beginning of a course on Ergonomics.



16. Add videos to break monotony

Add videos to your eLearning course. Two minute snippets on complicated processes or procedures facilitate a great level of interaction. Videos generate a sense of personalization and help the learner connect with your course instantly. This makes him continue with the course enthusiastically and finish it. Here are a couple of things that you need to remember about using videos in your online courses.

- Videos need to be short to let the learner focus effectively
- Learners can be asked to perform an activity based on a video.



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17. Follow a style guide

A style guide is a document that sets the standards and ensures uniformity in style throughout the course. Following a style guide helps maintain consistency, avoid mistakes and provide a better look and feel to the course. A style guide tells you how content should be written and abbreviations need to be used, when and where to capitalize and italicize etc. It provides guidelines that help you use fonts properly, set a color scheme for your course and give information on a host of other aspects. You can use style guides brought out by Associated Press (AP) or other reputed organizations.

Serial No.	Issues	What Styles Guide Says:
1.	Article title and section heads	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Do not number sections heads
2.	Navigations	Ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups: Capitalization these as noted (unless author objects): African, American, Afro-American, and Alaska Native. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Lowercase these terms as noted: aboriginal (where not Australian or Canadian); black; highlander, but Highlander (where referring to Scottish)
3.	Learning Objectives	Spell out number in the following instance: <ul style="list-style-type: none">One through tenNumber at the beginning of a sentence

Visuals and designs

18. Add interactivities

By using the interactivities, you can ensure that your learners "connect" themselves with your eLearning course. This is required to retain their attention throughout the course and keep them "glued" to their screens. Proper use of interactivities goes a long way in overcoming the problems caused by the absence of instructor in eLearning. You can add interactivities like roll over, drag & drop, slide shows etc. For more on using interactivities to present the learning content, refer to this [ebook](#).

19. Use attractive GUI

In eLearning, the Graphical User Interface (GUI) is considered to be an important part. It displays the buttons that guide the learners and help navigate through the course smoothly. An attractive GUI that is easy to understand and navigate enables the learners to explore and learn what they want.



14

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Let's look at an example of a GUI that has the theme of water and sea for orientation of new employees for a company operating off-shore rigs. The GUI was designed using an image of the sea in the background. The 'Next', 'Previous', 'Play' and 'Audio' buttons are designed in the shape of water droplets, so that they are pleasant to the learners' eye.

20. Add info-graphics

Info-graphics are ideal tools to make huge content look attractive and visually appealing. We can present any form of content attractively, using an info-graphic with different colors, charts, notes etc. They are now being increasingly used to enable quick learning and help recall the knowledge gained. They give an 'at-a-glance' view of the entire content and reinforce learning. Here is a [good blog](#) that lists the 3 steps involved in the making of a good info-graph.



21. Maintain a striking design

We all love to see good colors and designs on our screens. The same applies to eLearning courses. Good, striking visuals make a far reaching impact on the

learner. Designing doesn't mean just adding an image to the text; it can be anything from a proper screen layout to an info-graphic that breaks your topic into understandable points. A striking design:

- Provides consistency throughout the course
- Helps understand visual elements better

Let's take a look at how striking designs were used to explain Pharmacokinetics, using Adobe Captivate.



Using Images

22. Maintain a balance between text and images

In eLearning, we use images to educate and not to decorate the screen. Images should enhance learning, and therefore, only relevant images need to be included in the content. This will help the learner to understand the information quickly. It's important to strike a balance between text and images because using too much of text or too many images does not help retain knowledge. On the other hand, if the image does not support the content, the

learner may get distracted, and he may not be visually engaged.

23. Placement of images:

Images should be placed in such a way that they grab the attention of the learner. A very important point is that an image should never be placed at the bottom right corner because it goes unnoticed. Another important point is that always place the content and image in correlation so, that it is easy for comparison and analysis.

24. Educate, but do not decorate:

A relevant image will help the learner understand and absorb information quickly. The selected image should be as per the content which will add some color or interest. On the other hand, irrelevant images can distract the learner.

25. Right choice of characters:

Characters play a very important role in an eLearning course; they also create a good human touch. For example, while developing an eLearning course about health care, use a character that plays the role of a doctor and use it throughout the course to provide a good understanding of the duties and responsibilities of a doctor.

For example, here is the screenshot showing how a character guides the learner throughout the eLearning program.



Allow the learner to think (use problem-based learning)

26. Tell stories that have conflicts

Stories are great tools to impart knowledge, and you can explain a complicated process or procedure with the help of a story. For instance, if you create a story on a sales process, you can add the element of conflict between the sales representative and his manager. You can use this conflict to explain the sales process.

Making use of conflict will help you in two ways:

- Creating conflicts in stories will 'increase' suspense and keep your learner hooked for a long time.
- The entire process is explained and learnt effortlessly.



27. Include scenarios:

In an e-learning course, a scenario can be created where the learner is given a situation and a problem is posed to him. Then, the information that is required is presented as a process of solving the problem.

Adding a scenario that a learner may face at work can help the learner grasp the topic quickly and recall information easily. For more on the creation of a good scenario, refer to this [blog](#).



28. Include case-studies:

Case-studies are a form of problem-based learning. Case-studies are based on real-time situations which contain information about the problem. These make the learner concentrate more on a situation.

For example, in online medical cases, the learner is presented with a patient complaint. The learner can enquire about the patient's background information. He can also get feedback on the diagnosis method. A resemblance to the real world situations keeps the learner motivated, and he feels that he is truly preparing to confront his future challenges.

How can you ensure maximum value from the case-studies in an e-Learning course?

- Case-studies come handy when imparting training on a specific skill or explaining a concept. Case-studies usually have lots of details. Collect and explore the relevant facts. In a good case-study, there are more facts than what you actually need, for your analysis.



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29. Outsource your eLearning course translation

It is a good idea to outsource the task of translating your eLearning course. This results in multiple benefits as you can:

- Allocate your resources to your core business
- Avoid the costs associated with in-house teams
- Avail the benefit of experience and a set-process
- Prevent delays
- Scale up your international training programs



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A few tips to choose the right eLearning course translation vendor

30. Choose a firm with considerable experience

You need to choose a veteran in the business of translation. An experienced translator can understand your needs well and this can go a long way in producing a translation of very high quality. Furthermore, experienced translation firms have set processes in place that can considerably cut the time of rendering your online courses.

31. Select a vendor who earns his bread and butter through eLearning translations

It is important to choose an organization that specializes in the translation of online courses. This is because a firm with expertise in rendering eLearning courses into multiple languages has access to a pool of translators who have experience in translating online courses. They can comprehend the source content better and add value to the translated content and the project as a whole.

32. Outsource your translation project to an organization that uses the services of native speakers

You need to make sure that your translation agency uses the services of native speakers. This is very essential to render your course in the target language with high quality. A good online course translation is devoid of overtly literal translation of words that can reduce the effectiveness of the course. Languages are amazing animals with several subtleties that only a native speaker can tame.

33. Check whether the translator has access to the right language tools

You have to double check whether the vendor is well-versed in the use of tools such as dictionaries that are specific to various domains. This allows efficient usage of linguistic nuances that are very helpful in producing high quality translations. Many translators also use Computer Aided Translation (CAT) software that ensures uniformity in the terms used. They also help make translations quicker and subsequent rendering of online courses in the target language simpler due to in-built memory. This can cut costs, if you use the same vendor multiple times.

34. Ask prospective vendors for sample translations

You need to check if the translation agency is able to provide samples of work done by them previously. This is the most common and the best way to see if the organization is qualified to meet your needs. When you deal with a new translator, it's always safe to give a small pilot project first rather than entrust your entire course in a single go.

35. Ask for references

It is very important to make sure that the prospective translator provides a list of credible references. You need to select a translator that has worked for reputed clientele. After all, you want to assign your course to an organization that is well-known. Don't you?

Tips to improve the quality of translations



36. Focus on the quality of source content

Often, companies do not pay attention to the quality of the content that needs to be translated. It is important to remember that the efficacy of the translations of your eLearning course depends on the quality of the content in the source language. The translator merely renders the content written in the source language into the target language. Therefore, you need to ensure that the content of your course in the source language is well written.

20

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37. Define a proper process for translation

It is very important that you have a well-set process for translating your online courses. Make sure to define the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders and involve them in the process. You need to monitor the translations very closely to ensure quality output.

38. Check the availability of already translated courses

You need to check if you can get the information on already translated projects. This will come handy, while translating the courses. Past information will be very useful to ensure proper usage of grammar and construction of sentences. It also provides a clear idea of the style you need to use. Courses, which were translated earlier, can also provide information about abbreviations or jargon. You can also know more about your translator if you can go through the past work.

39. Provide the necessary reference material

It is essential to provide the translator with the necessary reference material containing explanation of terms, abbreviations and other inputs, needed to render the course effectively into the target language. It is also advisable to provide a checklist that can be used to ensure that all quality parameters are met.

40. Give the translator enough time

A major blunder committed by many organizations is that they wait till the "last moment" to get the English version of courses localized. This results in the translation of elearning courses with a "meet-the-deadline" attitude and quality takes a beating. You need to remember that translators need adequate time to deliver good output. If you squeeze the schedules, they cannot analyze the content efficiently. This could lead to poor translation as they fail to understand the nitty-gritty of the content effectively.

Translators also need time to analyze the jargon used in the course to find out their equivalents in the target language. So, make sure that you plan much in advance and provide adequate time to the translators.

41. Provide the English version of the course to the translator

It is very important that you provide the fully developed English version of your course to the translator. This helps him comprehend your requirements better because it contains all graphical elements and scenarios that give a clear idea of the course. So, provide the English version of the course in the MS-Word or powerpoint format.

42. Coordinate and communicate effectively with the translator

Effective elearning translation is much more than rendering of words into the target language. The context and purpose of a online course often play an important role in its translation. The company, which developed the course, knows what it wants to achieve through its translation better than anyone else. Therefore, it needs to convey the objectives of the translation and clarify



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21

the doubts of the translator effectively. It is better to assign a knowledgeable person as the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to ensure effective coordination and communication.

43. Use computer-aided translation (CAT) software

CAT software enhances the effectiveness of the translation by ensuring uniformity of the terms used. It also helps use the jargon correctly because it can be used as a source of reference.

Tips to reduce the cost of translations



44. Use ss language

Make sure that you avoid slangs, idioms and culture-specific words which make the translation complex. Use simple words that can be easily translated. This goes a long way in reducing the cost of the translation.

45. Use already translated courses to develop an effective instructional strategy

Provide reference course files that have already been translated or created in the relevant languages. This helps in getting a quick understanding of what type of images, colors and tone are preferred by the target learner base. The course can be designed in a sound manner in less time and at low cost.

46. Lay emphasis on visual content

When an elearning course of 30 minutes needs to be translated, the audio can be reduced to approximately 15 minutes without losing the original meaning. The focus can be on graphics, images and text so that narration costs are reduced. You need to place text beside images. Placing text in a graphic or on the top of an image leads to delays and additional expenditure.

47. Choose the languages into which you want to translate the courses carefully

Choose the languages into which you want to translate the courses carefully. We notice that sometimes companies get their courses translated into languages which are not popular and do not have many takers. In such cases, the money spent on translating courses into these languages is wasted. You

22

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can reduce your elearning translation costs by identifying the languages into which the courses must be translated and those that are not essential. One of our clients found out that traditional Chinese course had no takers and they could have done with just the simplified Chinese course.

48. Cut down on audio and video

It's a good idea to develop interactive elearning content, but this can complicate the translation process. For example, if there are 3 audio or video clips in the course and you want to translate them into three different languages, you have to produce nine different dubbings. It's better to use only those clips that support the content. You can use more content on screen and interactivities to enhance the effectiveness of learning.

49. Utilize the database of translation software

Leverage the power of Computer Aided Translation (CAT) tools, which ensure uniformity in the terms used. They enable faster translations and make subsequent translations easier, due to built-in memory tools. They help reduce costs in the long run, if you use a single vendor.

Tips to make elearning translations easier



50. Harness the power of rapid authoring tools

There were 2 major problems in the translation of online courses.

- Semitic languages such as Hebrew and Arabic are written from right to left. It was very difficult to develop elearning courses in these languages.
- Another issue that often created problems was embedding the double-byte character sets (DBCS) used in languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean.

These problems were effectively resolved with the advent of rapid authoring tools. Authoring software such as Articulate Storyline, Adobe Captivate and



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23

Lectora Inspire support these languages very effectively. Furthermore, you can publish the course to MS-Word or XML formats and this makes translations easier.

51. Use the text-layout format(TLF) for Flash-based courses

TLF supports most languages written in complex scripts. It allows content to flow through several text containers. It enables you to create courses in languages that have the right-to-left (RTL) orientation such as Arabic and Hebrew. It supports layout properties, giving full control on the text dimensions. It also supports bi-directional text in which right-to-left text can hold the elements of left-to-right languages. You can use this when you need to embed English words or Arabic numerals into right-to-left languages such as Arabic or Hebrew. It also provides excellent support to Asian languages.

Tips to make culture-neutral courses



52. Mind your language

It is advisable to use international English to develop the content of your online course. You would do well to avoid idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms and sports references. Sports are highly culture specific – soccer is very popular in Europe and Latin America and when it comes to India, you will find more about cricket here. So it is better that we steer clear of these kind of references. You also need to be careful while using humor. Humor is very culture-centric. What is very funny in one country may be very offensive in another. So the focus should be more on "visualization" rather than "verbalization."

53. Use visuals of humanoid

It is better to use neutral humanoid images such as the one below, in your eLearning courses.

Avoid human photographs because they tend to communicate a lot of cultural aspects – the way people are dressed, whether their head is covered and so on. But if you have to use photographs, then we suggest you use photos of people belonging to different ethnic backgrounds, genders and ages. It goes without saying that using cultural or religious symbols and images needs to be avoided so that you don't run into problems, when you translate the course. So, you need to be very careful in the choice of visuals.

54. Use the right voice

You need to choose the right narrator because in some cultures as in the Middle-East and South Asia, people expect the voice of the narrator to be very authoritative and firm. But when you ask western learners, they would

24

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definitely tell you that they expect a friendly tone that is informal. The narrator needs to sound professional. For more on the use of narration in elearning courses, please refer to the article [How Can We Use Audio Narration Effectively in E-learning?](#)



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25



21 tips to leverage your LMS

26

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55. Explore Open Source LMS such as Moodle for your training needs



Planning training

Before planning to go ahead with customization, you should discuss with your training department to identify their specific requirements and do a thorough analysis of the current training workflows. This will be helpful in preparing Request for Proposals (RFPs) and selecting the best vendor for LMS setup and customization. Here are some basic customizing requirements that need to be attended to even at the planning stage.

56. Creating a custom theme

LMS themes can be customized to match the look and feel of your company website. You can furnish information regarding the standards of your website to the LMS customization service provider. These service providers can customize the LMS exactly like your website. This will help end-users feel at ease when they see the LMS resemble the website.



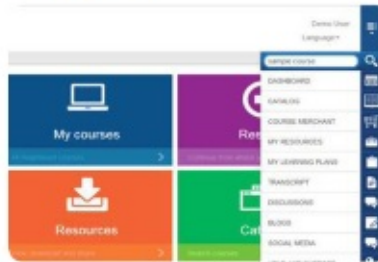
Additionally, facilitating easy navigation, which is similar to existing ERP software, would be another way of putting end-users at ease when using the LMS. For this, navigation options in the LMS need to be customized to make them look similar to the options in the ERP software. Therefore, this forms a very important part of LMS customization.



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27

Customize the default theme to match the look and feel of your company website and/or ERP software.



57. Understanding the user profile

It is important to have a good understanding of who the users of LMS would be – who will be administrators, who will be managers, who will be the learners (Do you want to categorize employees based on their department, designation, etc.?). An in-depth understanding of the target users will ensure that the fields are designed appropriately as per the requirements of the organization.



28

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58. Creating user roles

Every LMS has default roles for its users. However, organizations may require creating new roles or modifying default roles to make it relevant to their business situation. For example, Moodle has roles such as Student, Teacher, etc., but in the corporate sector these roles are not applicable. You can create any number of roles and give access rights accordingly.



Remember to change the default roles to reflect your organization's designation or function

59. User profile fields

LMS provides certain default user profile fields. They may be relevant and adequate for your organization or you might want to modify certain fields to better relate to your organization's situation. You can remove, edit or even add new profile fields. Designing custom profile fields as per your organizational and training requirement helps you filter training reports based on the fields.



Change the user profile fields to reflect the structure and needs of your organization

60. Catering to a global audience



If your organization is spread across the world, you can set up languages in the LMS, based on the country where your target learners reside. This will help learners switch to any language anytime. The entire LMS interface content will get translated, which will help the learner understand the LMS navigation and instructions easily.

61. Simplify user navigation



It is important to reduce the number of clicks required to access training content. Ideally, users should be able to access courses with minimal number of clicks and therefore, some customization is needed for the LMS dashboard. For example, you can add shortcuts/quick links for accessing a particular page. You can also display the assigned courses and the quick view buttons in the dashboard itself. The dashboard should provide access to any course on the LMS with relative ease.

Simple navigation should reduce the number of clicks needed to reach the desired course or resource.

62. Enable and disable features

Most of the default features may not be necessary for your training needs. It is a best practice to disable those features that are not used and retain only the essential features. Otherwise, the user interface will become complex making course navigation difficult. Enabling or disabling features does not require the services of a programmer and can easily be done by LMS administrators.

63. Additional plug-ins

Activity modules					
Assignment	Standard	2011112900	Enabled	Settings	Uninstall
CellCode	Fileview	2011112900	Enabled	Settings	Uninstall
Chat	Standard	2011112900	Enabled	Settings	Uninstall
Choice	Standard	2011112900	Enabled	Settings	Uninstall
Database	Standard	2011112900	Enabled	Settings	Requires Plugins
Democrator	Fileview	2011112900	Enabled	Settings	Uninstall
Quiz	Standard	2011112900	Enabled	Settings	Uninstall
File	Standard	2011112900	Enabled	Settings	Uninstall
SCORM package	Standard	2011112900	Enabled	Settings	Uninstall
Survey	Standard	2011112900	Enabled	Settings	Uninstall

If you are using an open source LMS, you can also avail additional plug-ins contributed by various developers. You can search for a plug-in relevant to your needs and ask your service provider to install it for you. Alternatively,

you can just explain the functions of the feature, and your service provider will locate and install the respective plug-in.

Disable the default features that are not used.

64. Reconfigure the default settings



Instead of accepting default settings, you can make changes to the default options based on your training structure and make it easier for your end users to access information relevant to them. The structure can be standardized at the time of creating a course or when setting up the LMS as a one-time activity. You don't have to change these settings again. It will not only save you time when uploading future courses, but also ensures uniformity in the standards followed across the organization.



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You don't have to accept the default features as they are; you can reconfigure them according to your specifications.

65. Providing job-aids and other information



In an LMS, you can upload not only SCORM/AICC-compliant courses but also other courses, videos, PDFs, MS-Word documents, PowerPoint presentations, recorded web conference videos (Webex/ GoTo Meeting) and almost any kind of digital content. However, this feature is usually neglected because the focus is mostly on SCORM/AICC-compliant content.

66. Help pages and user manuals



The default help page and user manuals may not be useful or adequate for your users. Therefore, you need to create your own help page and user manuals. This should have information based on the features and screenshots in the LMS. This will help users understand instructions quickly.

Use your LMS not just for SCORM/AICC-compliant courses but also for other useful digital resources and job-aids.

67. Have a dedicated team

It is important to have a dedicated team which can work at the back end to respond to queries related to login, registration, course allocation and so on. This dedicated team also needs to monitor, administer and manage the courses on the LMS on an ongoing basis. They need to generate reports and

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study them to improve the existing methodology or structure.



Lack of good and timely service is the reason why many people are dissatisfied with their LMS. We have noticed that when clients have a dedicated team that is responsible exclusively for LMS management, the results are far better.

Managing evaluation

All training methods require considerable amount of investment on the part of the organization for analyzing current training needs and available budget, planning, implementing, reviewing and so on. Just as you need a well laid out plan, you need an equally sound implementation and evaluation of your learning programs.

68. Generating custom reports

LMSs have a provision for generating several reports. Every LMS has some inbuilt standard reports. By just reviewing these reports on a periodical basis, we can get valuable data useful to develop elearning strategies, our aim being effective ROI on courses.

Course Description	Start	End	No. of Users	No. of Items
Product Training Report	10/10/2010	10/10/2010	10	10
Product Training Report	10/10/2010	10/10/2010	10	10
Product Training Report	10/10/2010	10/10/2010	10	10
Product Training Report	10/10/2010	10/10/2010	10	10

Apart from the standardized reports one can also generate customized reports to suit the training needs of an organization. So you can ask your service provider to create specific report generators that address the requirements of your organization.



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69. Evaluating training

Data obtained from the Learning Management System is important because it is useful in determining the effectiveness of an elearning course.



Most of the organizations use Learning Management Systems only to serve courses to their users. There is no great focus on analyzing the reports to evaluate learning. You need to ensure that you use the tracking capabilities on your LMS to evaluate and improve the efficiency of your training programs.

70. Make evaluation at the end of every course mandatory

Make evaluation mandatory, after the completion of the course. You can create customized templates for evaluation with tailor-made questions in the evaluation form to get the learner's feedback. A standard questionnaire of 10 multiple choice questions will not take more than 2 minutes for the user to complete. But, this survey will really give valuable insights into the course's effectiveness, accessibility issues and pain points if any.

Course Type	Course ID	Language	Region	No. of Users	No. of Items	No. of Items
Product Training Report	10/10/2010	English	North	10	10	10
Product Training Report	10/10/2010	English	North	10	10	10
Product Training Report	10/10/2010	English	North	10	10	10
Product Training Report	10/10/2010	English	North	10	10	10
Product Training Report	10/10/2010	English	North	10	10	10

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71. Make the LMS platform user-friendly

A Learning Management System or a learning portal is essential to host the courses online for easy access by the employees. It also plays a vital role in tracking and monitoring user progress and completion. Therefore, a user-friendly Learning Management System is the key to encourage users to make use of the resources in an LMS and help complete designated courses. So, how do you make your LMS have a user-friendly interface? Here are some ideas.

72. Easy navigation and interface

Just imagine you visited a library or bookstore where books have not been categorized on the basis of the author or genre. How comfortable would you be browsing and looking for the book you want at such a place? Similarly, when an employee logs into an LMS and tries to locate a course, he needs to be comfortable looking for information easily – be they courses, job aids or resources.

Make it easy for employees to move around the interface with good layout and design. Help them find the relevant course easily with minimum effort and time, and they will take the next step to explore it further, which will lead to course registration and finally completion. You need to have smart cataloging of courses, based on target audience and content.

73. Effective dashboard to announce classroom and online programs

Dashboard is a control panel for a driver in the car. It gives all the necessary information to help the driver with the journey – fuel gauge, speedometer, odometer, light controls and so on. Similarly, a learning dashboard on the LMS is the first page that users see on logging. It needs to be as effective as the dashboard of a car, with all the necessary equipment for a user to get on with his learning journey –the courses to be completed, credits that can be received, courses yet to be completed, new courses assigned, resources, discussions and feedback to queries posted.



In short, the dashboard in an LMS should give a good picture to learners about their learning journey, the beginning, and what would be completed at a point of time, and what are the tools available to reach the destination of their learning journey. Similarly, it needs to be equally intuitive and easy, for managers and instructors who use the LMS, for generating reports and monitoring learner progress.

74. Regular updates and communication

What is so endearing about social media that people these days never seem to have enough of them? It is the power of dynamic and constant flow of information that attracts people to them. LMSs in organizations can replicate the look and feel of social media sites to include dynamic content. You could regularize updates about new courses uploaded on to the LMS. Trailers about course launches that highlight key takeaways from the course would be useful to educate users on the benefits of completing the course.

75. Peer review and learning

It would be boring for participants to take the course in isolation. Instead, they may want to know what their peers, who have already completed the course, think about it. They would also like to virtually mingle with colleagues and check out what they feel about a particular course. Or, they would like to add some point that needs to be made about a course. This sort of virtual interaction would certainly be more exciting. Discussing the course or sharing experiences that are relevant to the subject-matter discussed in the course, practical insights from peers etc., could only provide additional value that would certainly lure employees to be part of this engaging experience. After all, if they know that they get a chance to learn from others, so that they don't make the same mistakes or, waste significant amount of time troubleshooting a problem, for which someone else has already found a solution – wouldn't they be more receptive to the idea? After all, who doesn't want to make his job easier!

Each time users log on to the LMS, they should find something new and interesting. This gives them reason to visit the LMS often and check out the latest offerings and courses. This goes a long way in increasing the number of user-registrations for courses.



76. Responsive support team

Nothing is more frustrating than having technical glitches and hindrances when you are out to put in an honest effort to gain knowledge. If users are stuck and are not able to login to the LMS, they might put the task off for another day and chances are they might never again come back – unless it becomes a mandatory exercise. It is surprising, but most of the issues pertaining to LMS management are simple and can be easily solved, but are not resolved immediately much to the frustration of users. In fact, lack of a responsive support team is one of the major factors for lower completion rates of online courses. You need to have a set of team members who address issues such as password problems, login problems, network or loading issues etc. within minimal response time.



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37

A person in a dark suit and light blue shirt is shown from the chest up, holding a tablet in their left hand and a smartphone in their right hand. The background is a dark blue gradient. Overlaid on the image is a glowing blue globe of the Earth, surrounded by a network of white lines connecting various white icons of people. Some icons are single figures, while others are pairs of figures. The overall theme is global connectivity and mobile learning.

30 tips to harness the full potential of mobile learning

38

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The logo for CommLab, featuring the text 'CommLab' in a stylized font with 'for effective learning' underneath. The letters 'C', 'L', and 'A' are larger and more prominent.

77. Identify the need

You should first identify the individuals who should receive training and understand how the task is being accomplished. Then, determine whether offering just-in-time learning helps them perform their jobs more effectively or not. If yes, then you should check whether your employees are ready for mLearning or not. As you know, all your employees don't need mobile learning. For example, it may not be relevant to the tele-marketing representatives who spend most of their time in front of their desk. And staff members such as field personnel, sales people, channel partners and service staff who move from place to place to discharge their job responsibilities and do not get time to spend in front of their desks are the ideal audiences for mLearning courses.



Once you are done with the audience analysis and get convinced that mLearning can help your employees, the next step is to decide on the devices.

78. Decide on the devices

Organizations have two options - provide similar devices to employees or encourage them to bring in whatever mobile device they have. The latter policy is called Bring Your Own Device (BYOD). Whichever option is chosen, security becomes a problem. So, you should plan for the management of hardware and software that are to be used and make sure that effective security measures and policies are put in place.

But, which option do you think will suit your organization? According to Chad Udell and Gary Woodill, a better understanding of the pros and cons will help you make an informed choice.

Option 1- Supplying company-owned devices

With this option, you will not have security and compatibility issues. But, there are some constraints. You need to invest in the devices, and your learners may not be comfortable in using the company provided device. They will not show interest in carrying two different mobiles (one for personal and one for business). So, the solution can be providing low cost devices and creating awareness among the employees about security issues.

Option 2- BYOD policy

If a company does follow the BYOD policy, they don't have to pay for the devices. Also, learners learn better using their own devices. However, course compatibility issues and security problems like unintended data leakage can cause trouble. The solution is to have a Mobile Device Management (MDM) strategy. The devices can be smartly provisioned to make it easy for the user and separate business and pleasure. In the event a device is lost or stolen or if an employee leaves the company, the mobile device can be locked or blocked, to protect organizational information.



It also allows IT staff to administer mobile devices in a manner similar to desktop computers to maximize the standardization, minimize the down time and enforce usage policy.

Content analysis



Proper analysis of the learning content is vital to the making of a good mobile learning course, because it goes a long way in delivering the content effectively and enhances the efficacy of the course.

79. Identify the content type :

Content can be classified into facts, processes, procedures, principles and concepts. You should have set learning strategies to deal with these content types. Facts, processes and procedures are more suitable for mobile delivery.

80. Assess the levels of learning :



Assess if the learning is to be applied at the knowledge level, comprehension level, application level, analysis level, synthesis level or evaluation level.

81. Divide content :



Deliver only one message or 'serve' a single learning objective on each screen. Make sure that the content is self-contained.

82. Ensure content is delivered in small chunks :



Break the content into small and easy-to-understand chunks, so that it is possible to create cohesive, self-contained learning units.



83. Consider the learning environment :

In order to make the best use of audio, it is important to analyze the end-users (learners) and the environment in which they are going to access the courses.

84. Replace long text with audio :



Audio and videos are integral parts of mobile learning. If learners access courses in reasonably noiseless surroundings, then you can replace large quantities of text with audio in mLearning modules.

85. Presenting the content :

Podcasts	Downloadable Content (DOC)	Videos	Games Apps	Formative Assessments
Podcasts need to be used to deliver a key message from the CEO/senior manager as a part of onboarding, sales training or other training programs.	Downloadable content works well for compliance, safety training or workplace harassment prevention courses.	Videos can be used for product and process training. They can also be used to demonstrate the working of a process, or a machine.	Games Apps can be useful to engage or familiarize the user about product features, glossary of terms, etc.	Formative Assessments could be used as a part of blended learning - to reinforce test classroom training or as a continuation of an eLearning course.

When it comes to mobile instructional design, podcasts, scenarios, case studies and most importantly videos and popular games and apps can be the best approaches



86. Use simple GUI:



Keep the GUI easy with a few navigational elements. Assume that the user will be operating the device with a single finger and travelling most of the time.

87. Use self-explanatory and simple icons:



Use icons which are easy to recognize. Simple line graphics or images would work very well for mobile learning. It's advisable to have a good compression ratio and use a commonly used format such as JPEG.

88. Reduce scrolling with short text:



Usually, mobile users do not like to go through lengthy content and scroll. So, it's important to chunk the content and keep it crisp.

89. Avoid background images:



Background images or patterns clutter the small screen. They distract the learner's attention from the main learning content.

90. Use standard fonts and colors:



Always use fonts and colors that are clear. Use large and simple fonts. Fancy fonts may not appear well on the small screens of mobile devices. It is better to use just one or two colors that are clearly visible on mobile screens.

91. Let audio play the second fiddle

Ensure that audio does not play the primary role in communicating the message to the learner, but merely complements the on-screen content.



Sometimes, mLearning courses are accessed in noisy places such as shop floors. In such cases, audio may not be of much use.

92. Replace large quantities of text with audio:



If learners access courses in reasonably noiseless surroundings, then you can replace large quantities of text with audio in mLearning modules.

93. Limit the sound effects



It is advisable to limit the sounds produced on clicking a tab, opening a link, giving feedback, etc. as they do not add value. You can use sound effects, when learners try to skip a screen or a question.

94. Avoid background music



It is better to avoid background music because it distracts your learners. Moreover, if the processing speed of the device is low, the course may become "slow". This could result in learner frustration.

95. Limit the file size



We suggest you limit the audio file size to 128 kbps, if you are using audio from the existing eLearning courses. It is better to save an audio file in the MP3 format.

96. Re-design audio from Flash objects



Flash objects need to be converted into videos to make them mobile compatible. This is necessary because Flash is not compatible with most mobile devices.

Multimedia Strategy

97. Keep the animations short:



Users interact with mobile devices effectively only for a short span of time. Therefore, animations and videos should not be longer than 4 minutes. Use file formats that load faster and are compatible with most devices.

98. Avoid complex animations:



Avoid animations that are not clearly visible on the screens of mobile devices. Animations should be simple and used to convey a single message. Resolution and frame rate of the animation should be reduced, so that they load easily on all mobile devices. 320x240 is the recommended resolution that will work on most smartphones.

99. Animations should be consistent

Throughout the mLearning module. Avoid experimenting with too many variations in a single module.

100. Redesign the Flash content:



If you have existing Flash content and like to use it, you need to re-design it as Flash is not compatible with most mobile devices.

101. Videos should have smaller dimensions:



The format that is ideal for videos is MP4. Frame rate can be 15, and the average bit-rate can be 256. It is advisable to check the device of your users and the most optimum configuration.

102. Avoid constant streaming:

It is preferable to pack the learning content into a mobile solution such as a native app that "sits" on a user's mobile device, instead of using constant streaming.

Assessments strategy

103. Use tests/quizzes:



For regular tests/quizzes, questions should be short and simple. These questions can be used during the course to check the knowledge periodically. They can also be used at the end of the course to measure the level of success. They should provide immediate feedback.

104. Use games



Games are ideal tools to reinforce learning and engage your learners. While designing mobile games, keep in mind the touch interactions of mobile platforms to ensure effectiveness.

105. Use puzzles



Instead of formal assessments or quizzes, learners could be asked to solve various kinds of puzzles such as crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, etc. On successful completion of the puzzle/activity, the learner can be allowed to proceed further. Puzzles assist the learners to refresh their knowledge.



11 tips to make the most of rapid eLearning



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51

Selection of the right rapid authoring tool

106. Comprehend your training requirements:

Before planning for the development of an eLearning course, it is very important to know the training requirements well. For instance, if you want to update your sales team about the new version of a product, you can use Articulate Storyline. If you want to train your team on a new software app, you have to choose a tool that is ideal for developing eLearning courses containing software simulations i.e. Adobe Captivate or Articulate Storyline. If you want to launch enterprise-wide compliance training on topics such as fire safety, then you can go in for Flash or Lectora Inspire.

107. Consider the budget and timelines:

While defining the learning approach of your eLearning, you should consider your budget and timelines. We can use in-built templates or customize them. All these effect the budget and timelines.

108. Support your instructional strategies

As we have discussed earlier, the selection of the authoring tool should be made on the basis of your training requirement. Here, you need to check what level of interactivities you are going to use in training. Sometimes, you may need to include quizzes, videos, puzzles, animations, audio, colors and graphical elements in your eLearning course to engage learners. The authoring tool you select must be capable of presenting such elements in an effective way.

For example: In software training or other application training programs, which require incorporation of simulations, an authoring tool like Adobe Captivate is extensively used because it includes the required features to create effective simulations. In the same way, a tool such as Storyline, with simple intuitive graphical user interface, enables to create a huge combination of characters, poses and expressions for the use in eLearning courses. So, the selection of tool mainly depends on the exact training requirement.

109. Understand the nature of content:

Based on the content complexity, we should choose a tool which makes it easy to fit the content into the in-built templates. We need to select a tool that has more inbuilt templates, so that we can save a lot of time.

110. Find out what the compliance requirements are:

It is very important to know the requirements for LMS compatibility, i.e. SCORM/ AICC / Tin can API. We should also consider HTML5 output for iPads and mobile devices.

Once you select the rapid authoring tool(s)

111. Create a checklist:

Prepare a checklist with all standards and requirements. This will help you control the quality of development and avoid rework. The checklist also ensures consistency.

52

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112. Use default features:

It is a best practice to use default features of the tools. This is because customization takes more time for development and creates functionality problems.

113. Standardize the templates:

We need to standardize the GUI, interactivities and assessments for the course that we are developing. Otherwise, each time the instructional designer brings out a new interaction or a new assessment, the production will be jammed. So we need to standardize the format and have only one set of templates.

114. Build a central media library:

The experience of many projects worked can be used for future projects; you could have developed various interactivities, videos, images, etc. It is wise to reuse this content. You can have a media library or a development kit, which can be used as a base for future projects. This will act as a one-stop shop for developers looking for interactivities, videos and images.

115. Develop the storyboard in the tool itself:

It is better if you create the storyboard using the tool itself. This helps save precious time. You need not plan the course development separately. As these tools do not require much programming skills, you can create courses easily.

And, a bonus tip

116. Make the most of the PowerPoint presentations

Now-a-days, converting a PowerPoint presentation into an online course is very simple and cost-effective, thanks to rapid authoring tools. To convert a PowerPoint presentation of 30 slides into an eLearning course using Articulate Storyline, it takes around 24 hours for one eLearning developer; this estimate includes the use of audio in the eLearning course.



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53

Conclusion

We have seen how to create top-notch eLearning courses and produce excellent translations of online training materials. We have also learnt what it takes to make the best use of the LMS and how to harness the learning potential of the mobile device. We understood how to make the best use of rapid eLearning to produce first-rate online courses.

By helping you make proper use of eLearning, these tips go a long way in imparting excellent training to your workforce and enhancing their productivity. Indeed, they help unleash the power of the online training format!



54

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55



50

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