EMEA e-learning Benchmark Survey
The Users’ Perspective
Over the past five years SkillSoft has conducted several major research studies into e-learning. We’ve commissioned these studies so that we can understand more clearly the needs and objectives of our customers – and adapt our products and services so that we deliver against their requirements.

In the past year SkillSoft invested more than $40 million on research and development to ensure that we remain at the forefront of our market. But, as time goes on, and ROI is undisputed, our customers are increasingly looking for evidence that their employees are getting quantifiable results from their e-learning – results that are relevant to both the business and to the individuals themselves. The fact is that e-learning cannot remain successful unless the organisations using our learning content, and the people working within those organisations, are experiencing tangible benefits from it.

Hence our latest piece of research – to identify the perceptions of e-learning amongst over 200 employees, within organisations across EMEA, who are actually using e-learning as an integral part of their development.

In many respects, this user research is more important than any which has preceded it. Proving that people are enjoying e-learning and are applying what they have learned within their job has never been attempted on this scale before. Qualitative studies amongst so many individuals are rare at this level, particularly when they encompass so many job functions and so many diverse organisations across EMEA.

Understanding the reasons why e-learning works and why employees like it, gives SkillSoft real and valuable information, which then influences the direction of our research and development. For us this is critical because it means we can ensure our courses continue to deliver learning opportunities that are effective, efficient and enjoyable.
At this point, I would like to thank each of the 16 organisations that agreed to participate in this study and made their employees available to us during our research phase. Without their invaluable help and support, this in-depth research would not have been possible. And I would also like to extend my thanks to each and every employee who was interviewed, for sharing their experiences and views with us. Please be assured that all your responses have been taken on board.

I hope you enjoy reviewing the findings. You’ll see that there is unequivocal evidence that e-learning delivers knowledge and skills to those that use it. There’s also evidence that course completion isn’t a true indication of what’s been learnt - as the immediacy of the medium allows employees to dip in and out of courses, just learning what they need. You’ll see that the learning is put into practice and that it delivers a range of specific benefits to the enterprises in which employees work. And you’ll also see, most importantly of all, that the overwhelming majority of employees like learning in this way.

If you have any questions relating to the results or would like additional copies of this report please contact our Head of Research, Kay Baldwin-Evans, on 020 8283 1811 or email her at kay_baldwinevans@skillsoft.com

Kind regards

Kevin Young
Managing Director, SkillSoft EMEA

INTRODUCTION

Within the majority of organisations, e-learning is now a well accepted means of increasing skills and knowledge across the enterprise. Early adopters no longer think of themselves and their organisations as pioneers of a new and unproven method of training. For the most part they have seamlessly integrated e-learning into their training strategy along with all the other methods of delivering training available to them. Even those organisations that waited until e-learning was proven, are now enjoying cost efficiency, accessibility, flexibility and the many other benefits that e-learning brings.

However, whilst much has been made of the benefits to the organisation of e-learning, there has been little, if any, qualitative investigation into the attitudes and views of the users themselves. What do they think about it? Do they like it? Do they learn from it? And most importantly of all, are they able to put into practice what they learn – and does it make a difference to the way they do their job? To answer these questions, SkillSoft embarked on an ambitious project to interview a broad spectrum of over 200 employees, across a range of organisations, in over 14 countries across EMEA.

It’s easy to follow, you can do it ‘as and when’, it is interactive and you can ‘skip’ sections you don’t need. It is really good.

IS SECURITY SPECIALIST, PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS

I think e-learning is excellent. I’m pleased that my employer has the facility, and think more employers should do the same. Frankly, I’m surprised that the Learning Centre isn’t inundated with staff.

CUSTOMER SERVICE ADMINISTRATOR, INTELLIGENT FINANCE
OVERVIEW

This research proves unequivocally that e-learning is proving to be an effective, relevant and enjoyable way for employees to learn. An overwhelming 93.5% of those interviewed stated explicitly that they enjoyed e-learning, thus verifying its appeal across all disciplines, job levels and age groups – regardless of computer literacy.

Employees are developing skills and knowledge across a broad range of areas and increasing their level of competency in both IT and softer business skills. They are putting these skills into practice, improving their performance, enhancing their abilities and delivering real and tangible improvements to the businesses they work for. 87% of those interviewed stated explicitly that they had set out to learn at the start, regardless of whether they had completed the course or not. Astonishingly, 92.5% said that they had – highlighting the fact that course completion isn’t necessarily an accurate indication of whether knowledge has been gained or skills acquired.

Most of the employees who participated in the survey came to e-learning with some degree of trepidation. Yet, as the results show, almost all came away from the experience with a positive attitude towards learning in this way. One participant aptly described this experience when he said: “The main barrier is taking the first step to do an initial course. Once that hurdle is overcome then people can’t help but be hooked on e-learning.” This was backed up by the number of respondents (98%) who said they would recommend e-learning to a colleague. Having experienced e-learning, employees regard it as flexible and efficient, describing it as an interesting and engaging way to learn, citing the fact that it allows them to progress through a course at their own pace as particularly appealing.

However, it became obvious during this research that there are a number of barriers that employees need to overcome to make full use of the learning in the way they want to. Inevitably, time pressures posed problems for many employees. For others, it was a lack of management support – both at line manager and senior management level – that prevented them from taking full advantage of what was available. Some participants said that awareness of e-learning in their organisation wasn’t as good as it might be – and that it could be used and be promoted more aggressively. Lack of self-motivation was also mentioned as a barrier and it appeared that there were some small pockets of technical difficulties in some organisations that constrained e-learning usage.

Our survey revealed that there is little formal, dedicated time allocated to employees to analyse their learning. Consequently, one of the questions organisations should take the time to consider, is how much more might be learnt, and how much faster and more effectively the learning might be, if dedicated learning time was made available to employees. This research suggests that establishing a specific time for e-learning would almost certainly raise the level of competency amongst employees, and have a significantly positive impact across the enterprise as a whole.

But despite this, in the majority of cases, those who were interviewed were finding the time and motivation to learn within the constraints of their normal working day. In most of the employees interviewed (98%) learning at their desks, there is a genuine desire and willingness to learn through the e-learning programmes available.
Employees genuinely like e-learning and find it effective

- Courses are enjoyable - 83.5% state that they have enjoyed the courses they have taken
- The learning is effective - 87% can give tangible examples of how they have applied their learning
- Application of the learning goes beyond just the individual - 52% pass on what they learn to someone else
- The whole e-learning experience is engaging - 98% say they would recommend e-learning to a colleague

Why do employees like e-learning?

- The ability of employees to take e-learning at their own pace is key - 93% value e-learning because of this
- Ease of use is also important - 87.5% think it’s easy to use
- The flexibility of e-learning is highly rated - 85% cite flexibility as one of the key reasons why they like it
- Its efficiency in terms of time is cited by 77.5% who appreciate being able to learn whenever they have time

Why are they learning and where are they learning?

- The majority (34%) are learning to improve their competency and efficiency in their current roles
- Or they want to broaden their skills and knowledge (16%)
- Most of the learning is done by employees at their desk - almost 70% learn at their workstation
- Two thirds of those who learn at their desk do so during the working day
- One third of those who learn at their desks do so before they start work or after 5:00pm
- There is very little formal dedicated time for e-learning in most organisations

The Methodology

15 organisations using e-learning as a critical component of their training delivery agreed to contribute to this study: AT&T, FedEx, Hilton Group, Intelligent Finance, Lloyds TSB, Nestle, Norwich Union Life, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Prudential, Royal Mail, Siemens Communications, Schlumberger, Telewest, Waters Kraus and Fermor. The research participants (204 users) were randomly selected by their organisations. The only criterion was that each participant should have had some experience of at least one e-learning course (which need not necessarily be a SkillSoft course). Clearly, if we were to seek opinions about the relevance and effectiveness of e-learning, we needed to interview people who had first-hand knowledge of this method of learning.

If you want to inject a habit of learning, this is a good way of disciplining your learning process. You always know where you stand with it and it forces you to learn.

GENERAL MANAGER, HILTON

I've learnt how to automate test scripts, set up and reset data and write SQL queries.

SYSTEMS TESTER, LLOYDS TSB
The participants could be in any discipline (for the full range of disciplines covered see figure 1), at any level of job grade, in any country in the EMEA region (14 countries were represented). They could be male or female and have any level of PC literacy (see figure 2).

The field work took place between July 2003 and January 2004 and was conducted by experienced researchers. Each participant was either interviewed in-depth, face-to-face for a period of 20–30 minutes (68%) or, where distances prohibited a face-to-face meeting, via the telephone (32%). The interview was based around a structured questionnaire that consisted of both spontaneous and prompted questions, including a number of open-ended questions which allowed the participants to express their opinions in their own words. Every participant had undertaken at least some e-learning in the previous 9 months.

The skills & knowledge acquired

Of the sample surveyed, the largest majority (57%) had taken upwards of 3 courses with some participants having taken over 10 courses (7.5%) and an even greater percentage (8.5%) having taken over 20 courses. Whilst it may be argued that this sample was therefore, heavily biased towards those who enjoyed e-learning, the reality of the situation is that most of the participants in the study had come to e-learning with some degree of trepidation regarding its ease of use, its flexibility and its effectiveness. The fact that the majority had gone on to take considerably more courses than they had anticipated at the outset is a testament to the value they felt they derived from learning in this way.

Not surprisingly, due to the diverse nature of the participants and their roles and responsibilities, the range of expertise and knowledge being acquired covers the full spectrum of IT and business skills.

All major IT skill areas are represented in the sample. Employees are using e-learning to develop skills across the wide range of general operating systems and network fundamentals, including; Microsoft,
Cisco, Unix, SQL and Lotus. Additionally, some employees are developing more sophisticated skills in web development and programming languages in areas like Java, C++, C#, Frontpage, and Dreamweaver.

In relation to business skills, the picture that emerges is similar to the IT area. The users who participated in this study are using e-learning to help them with their professional and personal development across a wide range of competencies including the following areas:

- Customer Service
- Change Management
- Dealing with conflict
- Presentation Skills
- Project Management
- Strategic Planning
- Accounting & Finance
- Management
- Leadership
- Communication Skills
- Motivation
- Teamwork
- Emotional Intelligence
- Project Management
- Leadership
- Marketing
- Sales
- Finance
- Operations
- Coaching
- Teamwork
- Finance
- Emotional Intelligence
- Management
- Leadership
- Marketing
- Sales
- Finance
- Operations

Considering the sheer range of skills – both IT and business – for which the users in this study are using e-learning, the findings suggest that there are few, if any, areas of personal and professional development where e-learning isn’t being utilised. It would appear therefore, that as a method of effective delivery, e-learning has become universally accepted amongst the majority of employees in the organisations represented in this study.

Key to understanding the dynamics of e-learning, is having an insight into what drives an employee to undertake the training in the first instance. In this survey, a spontaneous answer to the question of motivation was recorded, to capture in the participants’ own words why they are doing the learning. As might be expected, the reasons offered were wide ranging and differed from organisation to organisation. However, when analysed, there were a number of key groupings that became evident (see figure 3).

The largest single reason given was to specifically enable the particular employee to be more competent and efficient in their day-to-day role: 34% of participants spoke in terms of needing skills to do their job better e.g. “I wanted to raise my level of expertise in using the software”; or to complete certain projects e.g. “I needed to create a departmental website so I did the course beforehand to help me”.

For 20% of the sample the training was compulsory; either because it was a regulatory requirement or because it had been mandated by the organisation as part of an individual’s personal development plan.

The knowledge is out there and it can be accessed easily – so use it!

**THE MOTIVATION TO LEARN**

Give e-learning a go. It’s really useful.

**NETWORK SERVICE QUALITY MANAGER, AT&T**

It’s a different method of learning. It is convenient. Providing you have the time, you can just ‘click-click’ and you are there.

**CORPORATE TRAINING MANAGER, NESTLE’**

I like the fact that you get the opportunity to try out what you have learnt.

**PROGRAMMER, LLOYDS TSB**

It’s the Open University. You can pick it up when it’s convenient and do it at your own pace.

**PRE-SALES ANALYST, XEROX GLOBAL SOLUTIONS**
Learning new skills and broadening knowledge was given as a reason for learning by 16% (and not necessarily for use in the workplace, although this is implied) and the majority of these mentioned technology skills specifically. 10% of respondents are learning for personal development reasons; and 5% and 4% respectively mentioned career development and accreditation. 4% said they learn simply because they enjoy it! For the remainder, the reasons were; refreshing existing skills; referencing what had already been learnt; evaluating courses for others to use; and to set an example to staff.

The interesting point to note regarding the motivation to learn is that this research suggests that even if we exclude the 20% for whom learning is compulsory, the majority of employees want to improve the way in which they do their jobs and develop their personal skill sets. This can only be good news for those organisations investing in training.

WHERE AND WHEN THE LEARNING HAPPENS

It’s one-on-one learning. You call the shots. It’s easy to understand and you do it in your own time. It’s totally student friendly.

MANAGER, PRUDENTIAL

It’s flexible and easy to get the information you need. It gets you involved where you’ve got problems to solve. The exercises make sure you give the right answers. I like the way the actual learning is taken in different ways and the different types of questions that are asked to keep you interested.

DEVELOPMENT TECHNICIAN, NORWICH UNION LIFE

... from what I’ve done, I’ve enjoyed it. And I have definitely learnt from it.

BROADBAND ENGINEER, TELEWEST

In those cases where the learning is being done at home, almost all participants cite the fact that they don’t have time at work, coupled with the lack of distractions in the home environment.

“I do my learning at home because I can’t take time out of the working day to do it.”

Business Account Manager, Telewest

“I learn at home – it’s the only chance I get.”

Network Design Consultant, Lloyds TSB

“At home I’m not disturbed by my daily work.”

IT Risk Manager, Schlumberger

e-learning is, by design, available anywhere and at anytime – as long as the learner has access to a computer and the Internet. However, in this study, although 17% said they did their learning in a special learning area, the majority of those surveyed (68%) did their learning at their desk – despite having access to a computer at home in most cases. Only 14% said they did their learning mainly at home. The remaining 1% accessed courses in a variety of locations (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Where the learning is taking place

At home – 14%

Various locations – 1%
But for the majority, the learning is being done at work - most of it at the employee's own desk. Interestingly though, of those who learn at their desks, not all are doing the learning during the working day as might be expected. Of those who said they were learning at their desks, almost one third (31%) were learning either before their working day started or after their working day had finished.

“I do my training before 9:00am; it’s nice and quiet in the office then!”

IT Security Consultant, Lloyds TSB

“There are continual interruptions at your desk during the day and it’s easier to do the courses at the end of the day when most people have gone home.”

Performance Advisor, Norwich Union Life

For these employees, who have no access to a dedicated learning area, it is difficult or impossible for them to learn during their normal working day. They all cite constant distractions and interruptions as the cause.

However, the remaining 69% of employees who learn at their desk, are a testament to the flexibility and convenience of e-learning. This group (who were the vast majority in almost all the organisations surveyed) all manage to fit their learning in around their daily responsibilities. Not surprisingly, these employees learn in small chunks - usually of between 10 and 30 minutes. They talk in terms of “I do it whenever I have a spare minute” or “I do it last thing on a Friday when I’ve generally finished everything I had planned for the week” and “I fit it in around my work - usually in the afternoon because the mornings are busy dealing with e-mails and calls.”

What these findings point to is that employees are learning with little or no formal dedicated learning time. We found small pockets amongst the sample where individuals were given specific amounts of time by their managers to do some learning, but this seemed to be an informal arrangement rather than any definite policy to encourage specific learning time. The survey found that only one organisation set specific times aside for their employees to learn via e-learning. In this case, employees learnt in a training room in small groups at set time each week for 2 hours. The benefits of this approach are that the employees can share experiences and learn from each other whilst they are doing their e-learning, and at the same time they are diligently progressing through a given set of courses they are required to take. The employees look forward to their learning and their attendance rate at their schedule training is almost 100%.

The most important issue to consider when looking at where and when the learning is done is to imagine how much more might be learnt and how much quicker the learning might be accomplished if some dedicated learning time was made available to staff. This time need not be a set time every week as in the example just given (although this does seem to work well and the employees enjoy learning in this way), it could simply involve establishing a given amount of time that can be dedicated to e-learning during the working week. This would almost certainly have a significant impact on the capabilities and competencies of employees, which would in turn have a positive impact on the knowledge and skills base of the organisation concerned.

It’s a good tool for all layers of the team - not just managers. You can do it at home, at your own pace. There is a big variety of courses that are career related and useful for personal development.

SECRETARY, HILTON

e-learning is a good method of learning. It gives you the opportunity to learn as much as you want to, wherever you want, whenever you want. It’s very flexible.

SYSTEMS ENGINEER, AT&T
The results of the survey found that the majority of those interviewed are learning in small chunks. Of the total sample, 34% spend 30 minutes or less in one session; and 23% say they spend an hour or less – a combined total of 57% of the sample. Only 17% say they spend more than 2 hours at a time taking courses. For the remainder of the sample, the amount of time they spend on their learning varies. Clearly, therefore, most of the courses being taken aren’t being completed all at once. In fact, of those surveyed, only 23% of the participants say they manage to complete a course in one learning session. The remainder (67% – see figure 5) give a number reasons why they are unable or unwilling to complete a course in one attempt.

Having established the amount of time spent on learning at any one point, the survey sought to ascertain whether the employees were learning what they needed to learn – given the apparent sporadic nature of their learning patterns.

Each participant was asked whether they learnt what they needed to, or what they set out to learn at the start regardless of whether they had completed the course or not. The results are unequivocal: 92.5% of the total said that they had. What this finding indicates is that employees are finding the learning to be effective, irrespective of whether or not they had completed the course. Typically, for many of those interviewed, employees are dipping in and out of courses, skipping the sections they don’t need and only learning what they need to learn at that particular time. This is particularly true where IT skills are concerned; for example, where employees frequently need to improve their skills immediately in just one specific area.

For many of the employees interviewed, course completion is not something they consider to be significant because as soon as they learn the skills they need, they often come out of the course to put the learning into practice at once, demonstrating the benefit of just-in-time learning.
Having established the range of skills that the participants were engaged in learning – and where and how employees learnt – the research went on to determine how effective the learning had actually been. Each participant was asked whether they had used any of the skills they had learnt from their e-learning courses.

An overwhelming majority (87%) said “YES” they had used or put into practice skills and knowledge they had gained from e-learning. To test the veracity of this, each participant was then asked to give an example of how and where this learning had been applied. In each and every case, an example was given. On closer analysis it appears that there are 5 major areas where the impact of the learning is being realised:

- **Tangible business benefits** – the respondents cited examples of increased sales, happier customers and an improvement in their negotiation skills
- **Improved processes** – such as better project management, improved reporting, and more efficient contract management
- **Improved communications** – both internally across departments as well as with customers and suppliers
- **Personal skills development** – in key areas like management, leadership, coaching and mentoring, assertiveness, time management, and presentation skills to name just a few
- **IT and computer literacy** – the skills base of employees, at both beginner and advanced level, has been significantly improved.

The verbatim comments aptly illustrate the individual experiences:

- "I'm closing deals quicker!"
  Conference and Events Manager, Hilton
- "I applied the project management knowledge gained; it has helped me balance the 13 projects I’m working on at the moment."
  Customer Account Clerk, FedEx
- "I've been able to create a project framework and an intranet for our team."
  Lead Intranet Developer, Norwich Union Life
- "I learnt how to make customers understand that I appreciate their problems. Recently, I had a very angry customer but I was able to calm him down and rectified his problem. So we were able to keep the customer who has now done additional business with us."
  Service Quality Consultant, Intelligent Finance
- "I’ve implemented some new systems and spreadsheets, including a spreadsheet for monitoring payment of overtime. This saves a huge amount of time compared to the way we used to do it before."
  Service Centre Unit Manager, Royal Mail

I like the combination that you can do it in your own time and that it is difficult and stimulating enough to give you concepts that you can apply in your current job.
It's a good way to learn things quickly, without waiting for courses.

IMPLEMENTATION MANAGER, LLOYDS TSB

From this evidence, it is clear that the skills being developed through e-learning are making a real and positive difference - for both the individual as well as the enterprise. However, the findings also show that the learning and development isn't just restricted to those who take the courses. Having identified that the learning was being used, the survey sought to explore whether any of the learning was passed on to any other employee. Encouragingly, over half the sample (52%) said that they had passed on knowledge and were able to give examples of what they had passed on to whom.

Typically the knowledge passed on covers practical hints and tips; concepts and theories; and advice on specific subject areas. And generally, the learning is being passed on in one of 3 ways:

- by managers and supervisors to their teams and subordinates - "I gave a presentation to my staff - and coached them on - assertiveness and confidence building." Team Coach, Prudential.
- by employees to their peer groups - "I had a colleague who was struggling with her workload. I passed on what I had learnt from a Time Management course. She's now doing what I told her and says it's relieved a lot of stress." Customer Accounts Manager, Intelligent Finance.
- and even by employees to their managers - "I passed on some of the behaviours identified in my leadership course to my manager." Service Centre Unit Manager, Royal Mail.

Each participant in this research was asked whether they had enjoyed the e-learning course or courses they had done. Given the widely held belief that if an employee enjoys their learning, they are more likely to remember it and use what they have learnt, this finding was critical. A large majority (93.5%) said that "YES", they had enjoyed the courses they had done - demonstrating the range of appeal that e-learning has.

The reasons why e-learning was enjoyed by the majority varied enormously, reflecting the diversity of the people who were interviewed and the countries they were working in (see figure 6).

**Figure 6: What do learners like about it?**

- It's interactive - 7%
- It's so flexible - 11%
- I like the structure and design - 13%
- Easy to use - 21%
- I can take it at my own pace - 14%
- Other - 10%
- Easy to review and refresh - 4%
- It's accessible - 5%
- It's enjoyable - 7%
- It's an investment - 5%
- It's on flexibility - 11%

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- It’s accessible - 5%
- It’s enjoyable - 7%
- It’s an investment - 5%
- It’s on flexibility - 11%
I would absolutely recommend it and I have done. I’ve seen it as such a benefit to me so I felt it would be useful to others – consequently I’ve been spreading the word.

ACCOUNT DEVELOPMENT EXECUTIVE, TELEWEST.

Each participant was shown a series of statements about e-learning as a method of learning and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each one.

Arguably, the most interesting point about the barriers mentioned is that – with the exception of self-motivation – the others can be relatively easily rectified by the HR and management teams. Given the right framework of reward and recognition, it is relatively easy to motivate users – and yet this need remains unidentified by many. In contrast, one of the exceptions amongst the organisations we surveyed has established a clear correlation between training and salary levels – firmly embedding e-learning into their competency model. Not surprisingly therefore, this organisation’s e-learning programme enjoys a consistently high level of usage.

DOES E-LEARNING MAKE THE GRADE?

This research clearly demonstrates the determination of employees to learn – regardless of the various obstacles in their way. But are the obstacles the same across all organisations, or do they differ by company or by geographical location? Each participant was asked to give a spontaneous answer to what they thought the barriers to e-learning were – for both themselves and their organisation. Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer.

Predictably, the lack of time was the greatest barrier cited by most, with 50% of participants giving this reason. However, 41% of the sample expressed the view that e-learning suffers from an image problem. There was a consensus of opinion amongst this group that there was a fear of technology and a lack of understanding about e-learning that was hindering a wider use of it. One participant said “A lack of understanding of how it works can put people off before they have started.” Another went further saying: “The main barrier is taking the first step to do an initial course. Once that hurdle is overcome then people can’t help but be hooked on e-learning.” 41% of the sample cited lack of self-motivation as a barrier; and lack of management support as mentioned by one third of respondents. Lack of awareness about e-learning and ignorance about what was actually available was given as a reason by 24% of the sample.

Against each and every hurdle, the vast majority of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements – reinforcing and substantiating the benefits of e-learning (see figure 7).

- 93% of those interviewed agreed that e-learning was easy to take at your own pace
- 73% thought that it was an interesting way to learn
- 77.5% acknowledged the efficiency of e-learning for time-pressed professionals
- 75% agreed that it allowed for just-in-time learning, allowing them to learn on the job – as and when they needed to
- 85% held the view that e-learning offered a significant degree of flexibility
- 87.5% agreed that it was easy to use
- 69.5% said that e-learning was easy to refer back to.

Figure 7: The benefits of e-learning

Each participant was drawn a series of statements about e-learning as a method of learning and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each one.

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- 85% held the view that e-learning offered a significant degree of flexibility
- 87.5% agreed that it was easy to use
- 69.5% said that e-learning was easy to refer back to.

ARE THE BARRIERS EASILY OVERCOME?

The courses are good and you can do the training just-in-time: you’re more in control than ILT.

APPLICATIONS DESIGNER, LLOYDS TSB

This research clearly demonstrates the determination of employees to learn – regardless of the various obstacles in their way. But are the obstacles the same across all organisations, or do they differ by company or by geographical location? Each participant was asked to give a spontaneous answer to what they thought the barriers to e-learning were – for both themselves and their organisation. Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer.

Predictably, the lack of time was the greatest barrier cited by most, with 50% of participants giving this reason. However, 41% of the sample expressed the view that e-learning suffers from an image problem. There was a consensus of opinion amongst this group that there was a fear of technology and a lack of understanding about e-learning that was hindering a wider use of it. One participant said “A lack of understanding of how it works can put people off before they have started.” Another went further saying: “The main barrier is taking the first step to do an initial course. Once that hurdle is overcome then people can’t help but be hooked on e-learning.” 41% of the sample cited lack of self-motivation as a barrier; and lack of management support as mentioned by one third of respondents. Lack of awareness about e-learning and ignorance about what was actually available was given as a reason by 24% of the sample.

Arguably, the most interesting point about the barriers mentioned is that – with the exception of self-motivation – the others can be relatively easily rectified by the HR and management teams. Given the right framework of reward and recognition, it is relatively easy to motivate users – and yet this need remains unidentified by many.

In contrast, one of the exceptions amongst the organisations we surveyed has established a clear correlation between training and salary levels – firmly embedding e-learning into their competency model. Not surprisingly therefore, this organisation’s e-learning programme enjoys a consistently high level of usage.

Figure 7: The benefits of e-learning

Each participant was drawn a series of statements about e-learning as a method of learning and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each one.

- 93% of those interviewed agreed that e-learning was easy to take at your own pace
- 73% thought that it was an interesting way to learn
- 77.5% acknowledged the efficiency of e-learning for time-pressed professionals
- 75% agreed that it allowed for just-in-time learning, allowing them to learn on the job – as and when they needed to
- 85% held the view that e-learning offered a significant degree of flexibility
- 87.5% agreed that it was easy to use
- 69.5% said that e-learning was easy to refer back to.

DOES E-LEARNING MAKE THE GRADE?

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A recent report in the Harvard Business Review (December 2003) by Frederick F. Reichheld suggests that the most important indicator of satisfaction and loyalty amongst a given customer base is whether an individual would recommend a product or service to someone else. Reichheld argues that asking someone to put their reputation on the line is the best possible endorsement a product or service can hope to get because, by nature, no-one will recommend something they aren't completely convinced about for fear of damaging their reputation, undermining their position or causing personal embarrassment. Assuming that this premise holds true and that it is an excellent way to measure the depth of satisfaction in any situation, the survey asked each participant whether they would recommend e-learning to a colleague. 98% said that they would. This suggests that e-learning has proved itself unequivocally amongst those who use it. The survey shows the reasons why the users would recommend it are, as expected, in line with the reasons why the users themselves like it: it's easy to use; it's flexible; the content is good, it's interactive and it's an efficient and effective way to learn. The verbatim comments illustrate the point:

Why would you recommend e-learning to a colleague?

“It's a very easy way to learn; it's better than a book; and more cost-effective than a trainer.”
Project Manager, Schlumberger

“It's a good way to learn things quickly without waiting for a course.”
Business Analyst, Deloitte

“It's easy to learn at your own pace. The ability to dip in and out and the just-in-time aspect is very useful.”
Business Services Consultant, Norwich Union Life

“I recommend e-learning to my team all the time. You can do it if you've got a spare 10 minutes, and you can do a bit in between handling calls.”
Customer Interaction Centre Manager, Siemens Communications

The emphasis of this research was on understanding the users’ perspective of e-learning – with the objective of gaining useful insights into the reality of how it is being utilised by major organisations across Europe. Some of the findings surprised us. For example, we knew from anecdotal evidence that employees liked e-learning – we just didn’t know how much. To have over 93% of respondents say that they enjoy e-learning and almost 100% say that they would recommend e-learning to a colleague or friend should silence, once and for all, those who harbour doubts about whether e-learning has a genuine, universal appeal. Similarly, the evidence that large numbers of employees are undeniably learning in this way proves that not only is e-learning here to stay, but that as a method of training, it is delivering a significant return on investment - in its effectiveness as well as in monetary terms. At the time of our interviews and whilst writing this report the economic climate continues to be tough. Cut backs in staff numbers mean that even less time and resources are available to remove employees from the workplace for classroom training. Training budgets are tighter too – with those responsible for training often facing budget reductions and typically finding that they are expected to train more employees with less funds. If it wasn’t for the availability and effectiveness of e-learning, the task of training a diverse and geographically dispersed employee base would be almost impossible.

Without effective ongoing training, the ability of any organisation to compete successfully is under threat. Its competency and efficiency is reduced and the development of its intellectual capital is restricted. In an ideal world, a mix of classroom and online learning is acknowledged as the preferable route for employee development. But, these are not ideal times, and the undisputable fact is that e-learning can equip far greater numbers of employees with the skills and knowledge they need than the classroom alone. It should come as no surprise therefore, that e-learning continues to grow across the enterprise. But the important fact for organisations to bear in mind is what this research proves; that e-learning really is delivering. And it is delivering because it offers good ROI; employees like it; and – most important of all – it works.
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The organisations represented in this study are as follows:

AT&T
Deloitte
FedEx
Hilton Group
Intelligent Finance
Lloyds TSB
Norwich Union Life
PricewaterhouseCoopers
Prudential
Royal Mail
Siemens Communications
Schlumberger
Telecom
Risken
Xerox