

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN HUMAN RESOURCE TRAINING BASED ON E-LEARNING

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**ABSTRACT:** *With the rapid development of the Internet, online methodologies and learning technologies, the Web has become a global, interactive, dynamic, economic, democratic environment, as well as a learning and teaching environment. The Internet offers the opportunity to develop on-demand learning as well as training and student-centred training.*

*Providers of education for pre-university education and higher education and for vocational training have created e-learning materials to meet the educational demand. Online learning is becoming more and more accepted in the training required by companies. Companies and institutions invest heavily in the development and implementation of online programs. Academic institutions, corporations and government agencies all over the world are increasing the usage of the Internet and digital technologies to provide training and vocational training. At all levels of these institutions, individuals are encouraged to participate in online learning activities. Many instructors and trainers are asked by their institutions to convert traditional face-to-face courses into e-learning courses. People involved in designing e-learning programmes or in conventional face-to-face courses in online courses face many challenges, such as: what e-learning is and how it is different from face-to-face learning courses; what works and what is not working in e-learning; how to measure learning success; which are the ethical challenges posed by new educational technologies.*

*In a world increasingly confronted with the risks of its development, these challenges call for the need of an ethical evaluation of research, development and implementation of e-learning technology.*

**KEYWORDS:** *e-learning; ethics in e-learning; human resources; training*

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With the rapid development of the Internet, online methodologies and learning technologies, the Web has become a global, interactive, dynamic, economic, democratic environment, as well as a learning and teaching environment. The Internet offers the opportunity to develop on-demand learning as well as training and student-centred training.

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Education around the world is becoming e-education, and we are beginning to see fundamental changes taking place in the organization of education. Learning is often defined as a change in behavior, which is demonstrated by people implementing knowledge, skills, or practices derived from education (Poonia et al., 2012). “*Learning is the lifelong process of transforming information and experience into knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes.*” (Cobb, 2019)

In the current information society, the way in which knowledge is accessed and transmitted undergoes profound mutations. Information and technology have always represented important components of the teaching and learning environment. The way of transferring knowledge has become more dynamic, being supported by tools of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) (Blaga, 2018). Computer devices are more and more powerful and have increasingly different forms and the internet connects both the used devices and learners to each other in any classroom, in any school and around the world.

The unprecedented development of information technology and communication has provided a revolutionary way of learning. Learning with technology has become essential in present. Technology devices and networks have changed the way of learning and training. One of the technology approaches in learning is e-learning and has become very popular in the recent years.

Nowadays e-learning is a very common term not only in academics but among people of all discipline. E-learning has been expanding with the exponential growth due to the interactivity and ubiquity of the Internet, where learning is possible without space and time barriers (Poonia et al., 2012).

“*E-Learning is the use of technology to enable people to learn anytime and anywhere. E-Learning can include training, the delivery of just-in-time information and guidance from experts.*” (Naidu, 2006; Stockley, 2003)

The benefits of e-learning technology in organizations must be adapted to each specific case. The e-learning programs and courses allow more flexibility for both employers and employees. Learners can reduce the time spent on such training, they may be trained when it is needed in the company and when there are adequate study materials (Horton, 2000). E-learning technology allows learners to study in an independent manner and when time allows them (Blaga, 2012).

E-learning environments require policies balancing different expectations of participants and considering how the users perceive ethics during online learning. As in the case of face-to-face classes, learners must show respect and tolerance among each other, and conduct civil relations and interaction based on pre-determined rules (Toprak et al., 2010).

## 1. APPLICATION FRAMEWORK FOR E-LEARNING

Adopting e-learning in the universities and organizations is a forward step towards manifesting a new vision of technology serving lifelong learning and a knowledge based society (Hosseini, 2006) through development of a new and effective pedagogies (Posiah et al., 2008).

By incorporating the online characteristics in organization's conventional training mode, e-learning has created a potentially powerful learning environment that enriches

and complements the effectiveness of traditional teaching and learning. Learning activities and resources are no longer limited to resources physically available in libraries, to classrooms and lecturers who are physically present on classrooms. E-learning technology has gradually transformed the teaching-learning approach in organizations, and this has increased its capability to offer online and distance education programs (Holden and Westfall, 2009) to learners, not only nationally but also internationally (Posiah et al., 2008).

E-learning represents a paradigm shift, not only for learners, but also for instructors, trainers, administrators, technical staff and for the organization (Henderson, 2003). Learners, instructors and staff are adapt to the structure of a traditional education system in which the instructor and the classroom where the face-to-face meeting takes place represent the learning environment. On the other hand, e-learning is an innovative way to provide training in an environment in which learners, instructors and auxiliary staff do not interact directly. The way of learning in such an environment is different from the traditional training in the classroom. The traditional training in the classroom takes place in a closed system (within the limits of a certain classroom, school or within a textbook, etc.), while e-learning takes place in an open system (the learning limits are extend to an open and flexible space, where students decide where and when they want to learn) (Hadjerrouit, 2008). Learners in an open, flexible and distributed learning environment require special attention and feedback on the outcomes of their learning processes. They should be provided with the best support systems, so that they do not feel isolated and do not contribute to increasing school dropout (Khan, 2005).

Many factors help to create an e-learning environment and many of them are interrelated and interdependent. A systematic understanding of these factors can help designers create effective learning environments. These factors can be grouped into *eight dimensions*: institutional, management, technological, pedagogical, ethical, interface design, support resources and evaluation. Each dimension has several *sub-dimensions* (Khan, 2005), which in turn are composed of specific aspects of the e-learning environment (Table 1).

Table 1. Dimensions and sub-dimensions of the e-learning application framework

<i>Dimensions of e-learning</i>	<i>Description of dimensions</i>	<i>Sub-dimensions of e-learning</i>
Institutional	The institutional dimension takes into account administrative, academic, services for learners related to e-learning	Administrative services Academic services Student services
Management	E-learning management refers to updating the learning environment and information management.	People, processes and products (3P) The management team Management of e-learning content development Management of the e-learning environment
Technological	The technological dimension of e-learning analyzes the	Infrastructure design Hardware

	technological infrastructure problems of the e-learning environment. This includes planning infrastructure, hardware and software.	Software
Pedagogical	The pedagogical dimension of e-learning refers to teaching and learning. This dimension addresses issues regarding the analysis of learning content, the analysis of learners, the analysis of objectives, the analysis of learning environments, the design approach, the organization and learning strategies.	Content analysis Student analysis Analysis of the goals pursued Design strategy Training strategies Organization Mixed strategies
Ethical	The ethical considerations of e-learning refer to social and political influence, cultural diversity, discrimination, geographical diversity, diversity of learners, technological gap and legal issues.	Cultural and social diversity Trends and political issues Geographic diversity Diversity of students Rules of behavior Legal issues
Interface design	The interface design refers to how e-learning programs are presented. This dimension involves designing pages and websites, learning content, browsing, accessibility and ease of use.	Design of pages and websites Design of learning content Navigation Accessibility Easy to use
Resources	This dimension of e-learning examines the online support and resources needed to promote effective learning.	Online support Resources
Assessment	The e-learning assessment includes both the assessment of the students and the evaluation of the learning environment.	Assessment of the learning content development process Evaluation of the e-learning environment Evaluation of e-learning at institutional and program level Assessment of trainees

Source: Khan, 2005: 15

Designing open, flexible and distributed e-learning systems for diverse learners globally is a challenge. As more and more corporations offer e-learning for learners around the world, more and more knowledge will be accumulated, from different geographical areas, on the advantages and disadvantages of e-learning. The various needs of the learners must be identified by critical analysis on the eight dimensions of the e-learning application framework. The efficient analysis of the aspects related to the eight

dimensions of the e-learning application framework will have a beneficial influence on the learning environment. In the case of a specific context, in which all the aspects regarding the eight dimensions of the e-learning application framework cannot be addressed, it is recommended to approach as many of them as possible (Khan, 2005).

Modern technologies in general and e-learning technologies in particular have transformed not only the how and what learners learn, but also the learning process from teacher/trainer focused to student/learner. The new technologies are interactive and lead to the creation of learning environments, which allow the students to become active learners and to self-guide their learning (Rosenberg, 2007).

Providers of education for pre-university education and higher education and for vocational training have created e-learning materials to meet the educational demand. Online learning is becoming more and more accepted in the training required by companies (van Dam, 2004). Companies and institutions invest heavily in the development and implementation of online programs (Blaga and Gabor, 2016). Academic institutions, corporations and government agencies all over the world are increasing the usage of the Internet and digital technologies to provide training and vocational training. At all levels of these institutions, individuals are encouraged to participate in online learning activities. Many instructors and trainers are asked by their institutions to convert traditional face-to-face courses into e-learning courses (Henderson, 2003). People involved in designing e-learning programmes or in conventional face-to-face courses in online courses face many challenges, such as: what e-learning is and how it is different from face-to-face learning courses; what works and what is not working in e-learning; how to measure learning success; which are the ethical challenges posed by new educational technologies.

In a world increasingly confronted with the risks of its development, these challenges call for the need of an ethical evaluation of research, development and implementation of e-learning technology (Ximena Moldovan, 2017.).

## **2. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

Ethics is defined as *a moral philosophy or code of morals practiced by a person or group of people*. Ethics is based on well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues (Velasquez et al., 2010). Ethics are a common set of rules or behavior that applies to a particular profession. They should be clear, specific and widely communicated. What is ethical in one profession may not apply in another or it may be entirely inappropriate, so there is no a code of ethics which can be applicable for all professions.

In education, ethics is essential for the proper functioning of the system, which is why ethics has been given increasing importance in recent years. Institutions are designing courses that help students understand these ethics. Teaching is based on moral and ethical principles (Haughey, 2007) and ethics in education are applicable on both the instructors as well as the students. It sets the standards of what's acceptable and what's not hence protecting the interests of both the educators and the learners. Ethical questions arise, when different interests of individuals conflict and thus there is need for a higher level of principles that are fair to the rights of all concerned (Schultz, 2005). Ethical

principles mean cooperative and rational norms that have higher priority when compared with self-interests of the participants (Toprak et al., 2010). This is why ethics in a learning environment denotes sensitivity to multicultural understanding, tolerance and civility (Schultz, 2005).

The introduction of ethical codes in education and the obligation to respect them highlight the importance and the need for their understanding and application in this field.

According to Muhammad et al. (2016), in their paper entitled “A Study to Investigate State of Ethical Development in E-Learning”, many studies show that ethical understanding and its application are declining in graduates which is creating harmful situations for the society. The reasons listed in the paper by the authors for the gradual decline of the ethical development of the graduates are as follows: attention to child at the early age in the family, disintegrating family systems, no attention to ethical development in early education, the philosophy that knowledge should be independent of religion and local social context, disappearance of explicit contents on ethics from the study material, and the quick fix approach and economic push to teach market-oriented courses (Muhammad et al., 2016).

Toprak et al. (2007) analyzing the Instructional Ethics in their paper entitled “What do learners and instructors of online learning environments think about ethics in e-learning? A case study from Anadolu University”, they have listed the following principles as code of instructional ethics for educational administrators (Hartman and Stefkovich, 2005):

- Making the well-being of students, the fundamental value for all decision making
- Honesty and integrity for fulfilling professional responsibilities
- Protecting civil and human rights of all individuals
- Obeying the local, state and national laws
- Implementing the administrative rules and regulations of the affiliated institution
- Pursuing appropriate measures to correct regulations that aren't in conformity with sound educational goals
- Avoiding use of position for personal gains
- Accepting the academic degrees of the accredited institutions only
- Maintaining standards and making research for continuing professional development
- Honoring all contracts until fulfillment or release (Evin, 2007, 111-112).

## **ETHICS IN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT**

Ethics in the field of training requires granting educational opportunities to anyone on an equal basis, disregarding nationality, gender, ideological differences or mental/physical disabilities. Through this perspective, online learning environments have an important potential to reach large audiences (Carliner, 2004). Ethics in e-Learning,

considering the number and diversity of students in these environments necessitate policies balancing different expectations and studying how the users perceive proper conduct (Toprak et al., 2010). Higher education institutions have the responsibility to train staff and monitor them, this aspect being important both for the successful operation of the system and for meeting user expectations.

Computers and internet are powerful instruments that allow learners to reach information around the world and it is trainer's responsibility to teach them how to use it responsibly and develop a culture of ethics. Schools, universities and organizations have been so absorbed in their efforts to bring the new technology into their classrooms that the issue of values and ethics as far as the general guide in e-learning usage has been neglected (Posiah et al., 2008).

In the field of Information System ethics are moral standards that play a major role and help to guide behavior, actions, and choices. Ethics refers to a code of safe and responsible behavior for the Internet community (Poonia et al., 2012).

Ethics in online environment involves understanding the risks of harmful and illegal behavior and learning how to protect ourselves, and other Internet users, from such behavior. It also involves teaching young people, who may not realize the potential for harm to themselves and others when they are online (Poonia et al., 2012). Ethical considerations in e-learning are derived from both communication ethics and instructional ethics.

Many researches evidenced that e-learning has provided more opportunities to behave unethically than in traditional learning.

During online learning, temptations to commit unethical behaviour tend to be greater than in traditional classrooms. Many researchers have suggested various approaches to minimize academic dishonesty, namely, deception and plagiarism (Posiah et al., 2008).

In his book "Managing E-Learning Strategies: Design, Delivery, Implementation and Evaluation" Khan (2005) emphasized the following ethical considerations in e-learning:

- Social and political influence
- Cultural diversity
- Bias
- Geographical diversity
- Learner diversity
- Digital divide
- Etiquette
- Legal issues,

Khan (2005) also states that an e-learning environment should take into account the diversity of learners, respectively the different learning styles, including the special needs of some learners, such as people with disabilities. If the learners have their own styles for learning and different learning needs according to their background and experience, the instructor, course designer and discussion moderator must be sensitive to all these aspects. Instructors should be innovative about involving diverse learners in e-Learning environments and they can motivate learners to create a good learning experience (Khan, 2005). Therefore, in the case of online courses, several strategies and instructional activities should be used that take into account the different learning styles.

Since e-learning provide educational opportunities (Kearsley, 1996) for high number of people and in many cases to people deprived of education, is right to consider from this point of view that this type of learning is an ethical one. However, the new technology presents vulnerabilities that users need to be aware of. Institutions need to publish clear definition of academic fraud in online learning and set policy providing codes for students and instructors to follow. Also, it would be very important for organizations to give ethical principles for the online/blended programs (Brown, 2008; Watson, 2010).

Khan (2005) also stated that institutions should have e-learning policies, guides on legal issues, such as: preventive measures for confidentiality, plagiarism, copyright. The institution must inform the students about whether they will share their personal information. Students should be informed and encouraged to support their own ideas with the views of others, to provide references (Khan, 2005) and not to steal one's work and to present it as their own. Instructors and students must obtain the necessary permits when they need to.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the paper is to highlight the importance of considering ethical issues in the case of human resource training through an important educational technology used in the educational and business environment - e-learning.

The pace of technological change in society and in schools has been exponential and will continue to be so. Teachers are using information and communications technology to support their role in providing information and advice to learners, monitoring their progress and assessing their accomplishments (Eady and Lockyer, 2013). When learners use technology to conduct research projects, analyze data, solve problems, design products and assess their own work, they work with others to create and communicate new knowledge and understandings.

Under these conditions, ethical issues have become more and more important due to the use of technology. The training process must be conducted taking into account the observance of the ethical principles to the process so that the specific Codes of Ethics are not violated.

Learning does not end with graduation from school, university or training courses. It will continues throughout the entire life. When graduates are employed, their career and work become more effective with the improvement of values and ethics, as well as with motivation and positive thinking (Posiah et al., 2008). All of these, if well blown, determine the quality of life at work.

In order for science and technology to be truly useful, they must be based on a well-developed and consolidated general education.

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