Pros and cons of online training in companies
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In spite of the fact that e-learning is able to solve many problems like the wide geographical dispersal of personnel and the incompatibility of timetables, the high level of investment that companies have to make renders its deployment difficult.

The present economic, social and technological environment has radically changed the life of many organisations. In a context of rapid technological developments and dynamism in the economy, employee training is indispensable for a company to be able to compete effectively. New technology is revolutionising many traditional sectors, and this can be most obviously seen in the case of education. E-learning involves the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ITC) in the design, development, delivery and administration of training material. In the last few years many companies have embarked on e-learning projects. In the period 2000-2001 online training was the only teaching method to increase its use amongst corporations. According to a recent study on "Online Training in Spain" by Global Estrategias, 57% of companies have organised distance learning courses, 26% have used new technology for training purposes and only 15% have already implemented online training programmes, although it is hoped that in less than a year the number will have risen to 60%. IT departments are among the business areas that are going to benefit most from e-learning.

E-learning is able to solve, to a great extent, the problems noted by companies when it comes to offering training to their employees, like wide dispersal of staff, incompatibility of timetables and dates, and the need for training in a short period of time. In addition to these advantages, online training is also characterised by a variety of resources and information in order to create educational material, an increase in interaction and collaboration between instructors and participants and, above all, the individualisation and personalisation of learning.

However, they are not all advantages. The high level of investment in technology that online learning means, the time needed for preparation and implementation of the courses or the difficulty of motivating instructors and students are some of its principal obstacles.

Factors
When designing a training programme that incorporates information technology, a wide range of factors must be taken into account. In the first place, the content of the course that is to be implemented. The learning objectives are determining factors when it comes to deciding between a classroom-based or an online-based course. If what you are trying to impart is knowledge or information, online training would be a good
option. The same does not hold when what you are trying to teach is skills or aptitudes. Secondly, the role and profile of the instructor is another aspect to take into account. The company must ask itself if it has instructors who are familiar with the latest technology and whether they have a certain experience, given that if not it will have to evaluate the costs of using external instructors. Thirdly, there is the profile of the student or target audience. Online training demands from the student a series of prerequisites, like a certain experience with technology, availability of time, flexibility of participation, not to mention being independent, autonomous, thoughtful, active, and with an ability to collaborate. The fourth factor to be taken into account is the technology itself. The reliability, quality and richness of the media used (electronic mail, chat, compact discs or back-up videos), as well as the technology that makes it possible (broadband, multimedia computers) determine the suitability of the medium in each type of training. Thus, it is not enough that the company provides the material. It is essential that the employees have the adequate technology available. With all of this, the company must be aware that online training cannot completely substitute class-room based instruction, given that the one complements the other and both are necessary for an adequate training strategy. The choice of the available options will depend on numerous factors and companies must analyse the learning objectives that they want to achieve and which method would be the most appropriate to do so.

Con todo esto, la empresa debe saber que la formación online no puede sustituir completamente a la presencial, ya que las dos se complementan y necesitan mutuamente. La elección de cada una de las opciones dependerá de numerosos factores y las empresas deberán analizar los objetivos de aprendizaje que quieren conseguir y cuál es la mejor manera.

The Question

"What are the challenges facing e-learning?"

A race full of obstacles
Sandra Sieber, IESE Teacher
After the initial peak in e-learning in companies, what is being produced is a certain disenchantment due to the appearance of a series of problems. Firstly, the development of content is proving to be both difficult and costly. In spite of the acclaim given to the new learning opportunities that technology offers, thanks to a greater level of interactivity or the possibility of learning at the most appropriate rhythm for each individual, what is certain is that the development of authentically individualised programmes is still in its infancy, and that most of the existing contents are of a technical or introductory nature.

The development of more complex content requires a much greater sophistication, with the consequent exponential increase in the costs of development. Finally, it must be taken into account that for the transmission of certain knowledge, human interaction is indispensable, and thus on many occasions e-learning will have to be complemented with class-room based training.

Juan Manuel Cruz, Director of Human Resource Consulting in PwC
Towards consolidation in the sector
Online training is being consolidated through the improvement in the infrastructure of telecommunications and the availability of a notable supply of content. But not everything is being consolidated, given that there exists a series of challenges like the use of standards that assure a perfect parity of technological media and content and the consolidation of quality content that assure complete interactivity between students and tutors. Furthermore, an advance in the use of management knowledge tools, integrated with e-learning, is important, since the great potential of this is fundamentally in the capacity to share and spread knowledge in the workplace of an organisation.
The MER conception (management of employee relations) in the design and implementation of e-learning solutions, promoting personalisation and individualisation of offers to each employee is also very important. Moreover, the key factor will be research into new solutions based on the technology of mobile communications GPRS and UMTS.