

Whenever considering any training session, there are many variable that come into play. For instance, the components of the learning system - the learners, the content, the method and materials, and the environment, including the technology all have to be considered (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2009). In this scenario, pre-planning strategies the trainer needs to consider before putting his training materials on a server include: 1) His course may need to be restructured in ways that engages the learner. 2) He should find ways to illustrate key concepts, or topics, using tables, figures, and other visual representations. 3) Activities should be planned that encourages interactivity and allows for group work. Group work aids in increasing communication among the learners and create a sense of community. 4) Incorporate the use of threaded discussion which has been proven to promote interaction among the learners. 5) Finally, plan how multimedia technology will enhance the learning materials and have a back-up for when technological tools do not function well (Simonson et al, 2009).

The most important aspect of training that could be enhanced by a distance learning format is the content of information. The course needs to reflect essential content and not a lot of extraneous, nice to know information. The instructor also needs to determine the sequence or order of information so that the logic is apparent for the learner. The pace of instruction for the learner is another training aspect that could be enhanced. The pace should accommodate the busy life of the learner.

The most important role of the online instructor is to model effective teaching, keeping discussion on track, and contribute special knowledge and insight. Berge (1995) divided the role of the online instructor into four major areas. The first area is “pedagogical.” In this area, the facilitator uses questions and probes for student responses that focus discussions on critical concepts, principles and skills. The second area is “social” The facilitator creates a friendly, social environment in which learning is promoted. The third area, “managerial,” involves setting the agenda, objectives of the discussion, procedural rules and decision-making norms. The last area, “technical,” mean the facilitator must make the participants comfortable with the system and the software that is being used.

There are many way to encourage communication online. The use of technological tools is one way to encourage communication. Email can be sent to members of a course via the Email tool. This feature facilitates selective communication with various combinations of students and staff users based on their role. Discussion Board allows online communication with other members of a course. Groups within the course can have their own private discussion forum. Blog is a tool used for reflective writing within a subject. It can be made available for all users, for individuals, or for groups of selected users within a subject. Wiki is a tool used for collaborative work within a subject. It is an editable web site consisting of one or multiple web pages. Each contributor is able to edit and publish content, upload files and link to other resources.

Some tips and strategies the facilitator can used to help encourage communication are:

1. Be clear about expectations. Require the learner to participate.
2. Learners often need structure. Start major topic threads to help get the discussion going.

3. Be present in the discussion. Let the learners know you are visible. Lead by example.
4. Create a forum or discussion thread for casual conversation and questions.
5. Do not dominate the discussion. The goal is dialogue not monologue
6. Form small learning groups or teams. This has shown to be effective in encouraging participation. Group learning provides the learner with peer support and a sense of responsibility to the group to keep up with activities.

Berge, Z. L. (1995). *Facilitating Computer Conferencing: Recommendations from the Field*. *Educational Technology*, 35(1) 22-30.

Simonson, M., Smaldino, S., Albright, M., & Zvacek, S. (2009). *Teaching and learning at a distance: Foundations of distance education* (4th ed.) Boston, MA: Pearson