



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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### **Growth of Distance Learning**

The use of the Internet and computer-based learning technologies is on the rise, despite real challenges in today's often-frenzied workplace. Training often takes a back seat to day-to-day duties. An engineer who needs to learn a new software package or handle a new machine may face a boatload of work and a crisis on the shop floor.

For a growing number of companies, the answer is distance learning. In the past, distance learning meant correspondence school taught through the mail. Today, distance learning is the Internet, Intranet, CD-ROMs, DVDs, and videos.

Online learning has its advantages and disadvantages, both human and technological.

#### **Online Learning Advantages**

- Time and place flexibility.
- Reduced travel and reimbursement costs.
- Computer equipment and operating systems compatibility.
- Easy and affordable updating of content as compared to print guides, videos, and CD-ROMs.

#### **Online Learning Disadvantages**

- Limited bandwidth and slow modems.
- Reliance on learning initiative of student and social isolation.
- Potential for information overload.
- Getting employees and supervisors to recognize online learning as a viable learning tool.

When one goes to any HR or training trade show around the world, it is easy to see the explosion in technology-based learning companies and solutions. Clearly, many millions of dollars are being pledged to incubate and grow distance learning, which continues to emerge.

Why this explosion? Why this talk in boardrooms around the world about learning as if it had just arrived from outer space? The case for technology is often heard:

- Reduced cost (including time away from the job, less travel and accommodation cost, and increased reusability of materials).
- Use of a process that is more flexible, allowing for learning that is 'just-in-time' before a particular piece of skill or knowledge needs to be applied on the job and 'just enough' for that application.
- The process is learner centered, which leads to employees taking more responsibility for their own development.



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- The training message is consistent across variables of time and distance.
- Learning and results can more easily be tracked and measured.
- Finally, the Holy Grail: the claim that training can more easily be evaluated in terms of money or, as some expresses it, Return On Investment.