

# "Why e-Learning Projects fail?" // Final Version

Contribution for NCeL 12th Seminar  
e-Learning Practices:  
Factors for Successful Performance  
Al Jouf University, Sakaka Al Jouf, April 2-3, 2014

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This abstract summarizes some of my personal key points of the panel discussion about the topic "Why e-Learning projects fail?" This abstract has the status of a working paper and does not cover the complex topic to a full extent.

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## 1 Why e-Learning projects fail? An Introduction.

The question "Why e-Learning projects fail?" is not easy to answer. Each project is different from another. In addition, we should move the focus away from individual projects towards e-Learning Strategies and broad Training & Development programs in general. Often a single project fails, because the surrounding conditions are not sufficient. Furthermore, the question "Why e-Learning projects fail?" is highly related to the question "What is successful e-Learning?" Without answering the latter question, the first one does not make sense. The simple answer is, e-Learning projects can fail on various levels and for various reasons.

## 2 Pitfalls of e-Learning projects

In order to structure the answer and the reasons, why e-Learning projects can fail, we differentiate between five perspectives or Stakeholder roles (Image 1). For each Stakeholder role two out of many reasons are mentioned together with suggested mitigations and solutions.

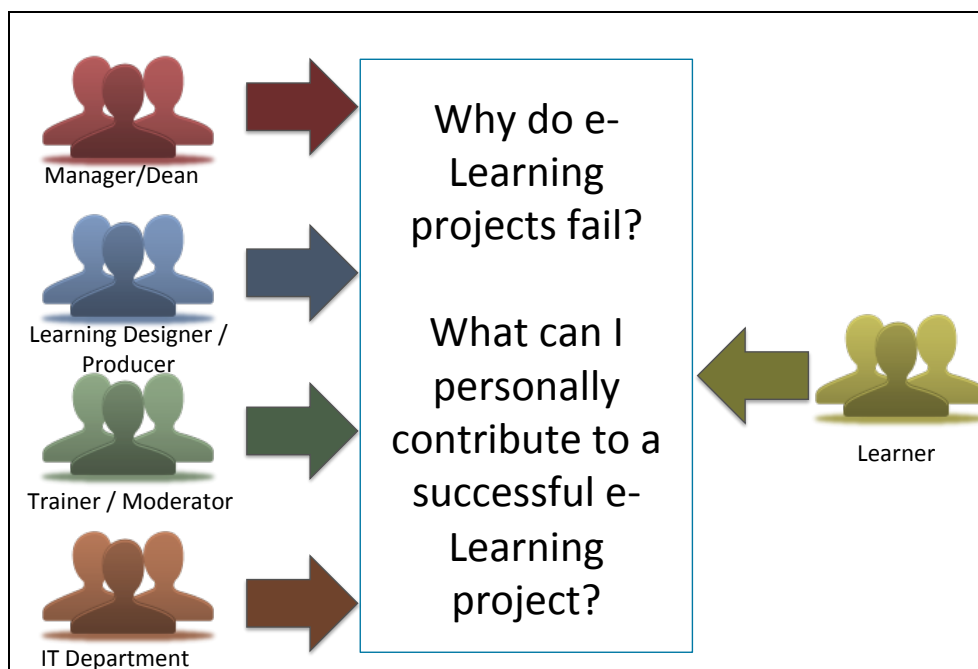


Image 1 What do you consider as a "failed e-Learning project"? The answer depends on the perspective of a stakeholder group

### 2.1 The Learner perspective

From a Learner perspective an e-Learning program failed, when he/she could not successfully complete the e-Learning program. Two main reasons for this could be:

Reason for a failed e-Learning project	Mitigation / Solution
The learning environment (Learning Management System or Learning platform) has a badly designed user interface, which is not accepted by the learners. The learners are not	User Centric Design: Implement a Learning Environment, which is targeted on the learners' needs and offers a well designed, easy-to-use interface.

Reason for a failed e-Learning project	Mitigation / Solution
motivated to take a course or they can hardly find anything due to the fact that the learning catalogue is too complex.	→ In general, the focus should be on learning processes (the "L") and not on managing data (the "M", as lot of <u>L</u> earning <u>M</u> anagement <u>S</u> ystems still do).
The knowledge or competency level of an e-Learning program is too high or too low for the target group. Learners are either over-charged or under-challenged and drop out the e-Learning program.	→ Conduct a proper target group analysis and a clear definition of learning goals before you design an e-Learning program.

## 2.2 Manager / Dean perspective

From the perspective of the Dean of a University or the Manager of a Company e-Learning programs can fail, when they are not properly defined, funded or supported.

Reason for a failed e-Learning project	Mitigation / Solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lack of a commonly shared and broadly known e-Learning definition (a definition of e-Learning, a taxonomy how to use and to write the different e-Learning terms, a glossary which defines the different e-Learning offers etc.)</li> <li>• No proper e-Learning Vision</li> <li>• No clear, measurable goals</li> <li>• No structured project management process with a project plan, action item list and milestones. Therefore nobody really knows where they are in the implementation process and what are currently the biggest obstacles.</li> </ul>	<p>Define e-Learning properly based on discussions with the different stakeholders and make sure that everybody knows the definition. Also define clearly what you mean with the term "successful learning". Make sure that you personally know, why and when you consider an e-Learning initiative as successful.</p> <p>→ Based on the e-Learning definition, create an e-Learning vision and derive clear, measurable goals. Once this is achieved, launch pilot projects and measure the results.</p>
There is no sponsorship for the e-Learning program from the deanship of a University or the top management of a Company.	→ If e-Learning is really a strategic project and a strategic success factor, then the deanship or the top management has to prove this by taking over clear sponsorship and releasing the necessary resources and the necessary support.

## 2.3 Learning Designer / Producer perspective

From the perspective of a Learning Designer and Producer, an e-Learning project can fail due to lack of competencies, knowledge and concrete experiences:

Reason for a failed e-Learning project	Mitigation / Solution
<p>The Learning Designers have no or not enough DESIGN experience how to develop a state-of-art Blended Learning Course.</p> 	<p>Good Education Designers are like Soccer-Players:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the Stand-leg they are grounded in learning theory and proven methodologies and didactics.</li> <li>• With the Play-leg they score a goal. They can apply all the current techniques and are trained to bring in modern approaches such as social media, social learning, collaborative learning etc.</li> </ul> <p>→ With this combination, they will be successful. If the competencies are just based on the "Stand-Leg", they are not prepared for current trends and new learning concepts; if the competencies are just based on the "Play-leg" their learning design is not sufficiently based on proven learning theories and research-based methodologies.</p>
<p>The Learning Designers have no or not enough experiences with e-Learning Tools and Systems (Authoring Tools, Webconferencing Platforms, Social Computing Platforms, Testing Tools, Learning Management Systems).</p>	<p>It takes a lot of time to become an efficient and effective professional in using modern authoring systems, master virtual classroom sessions as a moderator or to produce learning tests which are funded in test psychology. The best starting point is to use these tools and systems on a daily basis.</p> <p>→ A good 'litmus test' to answer the question "Is this a good e-Learning program or course?" is the follow-up question: "Would I as the Learning Designer of this e-Learning program subscribe to it myself and complete it successfully and with satisfaction and motivation?" If the answer is "No" then a re-design is required.</p>

#### 2.4 Trainer / Moderator perspective

Form the perspective of a Trainer or Moderator an e-Learning project can fail, because they are reluctant to take over a new role or to adapt to other training methods.

Reason for a failed e-Learning project	Mitigation / Solution
<p>The Trainer or Moderator has no or not enough experiences how to conduct, execute and support an e-Learning course.</p>	<p>Trainers and Moderators have to go through a Face-to-face Training first, how to conduct and support Blended Learning Course. They have to be</p>

	<p>supported by e-Learning experts to gather concrete and personal hands-on experiences. Only if they are convinced and familiar with Blended-Learning-Course-Methodologies, they are ready to conduct and support these kinds of courses.</p> <p>→ As long as they are anxious and not really convinced they will hinder the e-Learning courses to become a success.</p>
<p>Trainer and Moderators are not prepared to be available for 7x24h, which is expected by the learners currently and even more in the future.</p>	<p>A clear communication towards the learners in the beginning of a Blended Learning course is needed to set the right level of expectations in regard of support and personal learning activities. The learner must know, when and where they can approach for support and they must be aware of their personal duty to make the e-Learning program a success. If they do not bring in anything, they can not expect that they will be successful at the end.</p> <p>→ Learning remains an exhausting process, which requires the effort from each individual learner.</p>

## 2.5 IT Department perspective

Finally, an e-Learning project can fail, because the IT-Department has not enough resources or not a proper order to support an e-Learning project. Due to that fact, the e-Learning project is not part of the yearly IT project plan.

Reason for a failed e-Learning project	Mitigation / Solution
<p>E-Learning is not an official project, therefore the IT-Department has no proper Cost Center and cannot allocate costs and working hours properly. Therefore nobody is really responsible and requests from the e-Learning department will be always conducted in between the official IT-Tasks.</p>	<p>→ The IT department needs a clear order from the deanship or the top management to treat e-Learning projects with the same priority as other critical IT-Operating-Tasks.</p>
<p>E-Learning projects fail due to technical issues with insufficient bandwidth, login problems, unsupported Browser-Versions, Plugin- and Firewall-issues etc.</p>	<p>When designing an e-Learning project, the specification of the technical requirements and conditions must be part of Specification document. Unsupported technology has to be excluded from the beginning in order to avoid frustration after the roll-out and deployment of the e-Learning program.</p> <p>→ Again, it is important to set the right level of expectation and to know exactly on which devices the learners</p>

Reason for a failed e-Learning project	Mitigation / Solution
	will execute the e-Learning programs.

## 2.6 Summary

These are only a few reasons, why e-Learning projects can fail. If those reasons can be excluded or avoided, approximately 80% (my personal estimation) of the risks of a failed e-Learning project are covered. The main focus should remain of the learners. If a considerable amount of learners consider a Blended-Learning-Project or a pure e-Learning Program as a failure, they are probably right and their complains have to be analyzed carefully and solved.

## 3 About the author

Dr. Daniel Stoller-Schai is an Education Design Expert with special expertise in Organizational Learning, eLearning, Knowledge Management, Social Media and Learning Architectures. He holds a master in Pedagogy and Computer Science from the University of Zürich as well as a PhD in Information Systems from the University of St. Gallen. Dr. Daniel Stoller-Schai worked as Director and Manager of Education Design for various companies in different industries. In addition, he is also the co-organizer of the Swiss eLearning Conference SeLC. In his current position he works for LerNetz AG in Bern as Head of «LerNetz for Enterprises Solutions» and Member of the board.