

Christophe SADOK: The challenge of blended learning

1. *Widening the range of training options*

Digital market and massifying access to knowledge

Over the last decade, the digital market has broken into the vocational training field. It was meant to above all provide both massive free and accessible information and educational resources. It broke significantly with all previous types of distant learning initiatives.

These initiatives did not aim in any way at massifying training access. Even if they targeted pedagogical or experimental goals, or used a lot of digital tools such as pedagogical platforms.

Undoubtedly we are facing a brand new phenomenon. **The** most crucial one by far i.e.:

- ✓ the use of high-speed internet,
- ✓ the democratization of smartphones,
- ✓ the development of social networking
- ✓ opened new horizons ; **they** widened the range of training options in unprecedented proportions **too**.

This suggests that new information transmission means are emerging. **This suggests that** fully unprecedented sociability means are emerging **too**.

Let's focus on the very specific MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) emerging right in the middle of the 2010s in American universities.

Basically access to university knowledge mainly was intended to become democratized and massified that way. To some larger extent courses material for academic knowledge is conveyed and made available thanks to MOOCs.

The meaning of *Value* gradually shifted to diploma (xMOOC) rather than to knowledge – easier to access then and produced by the learners community alone (cMOOC), seeing that there was open access to information and knowledge.

Massifying access to knowledge versus Pedagogy

Let's underline that on-line training tools were not created for clear pedagogical purposes, contrary to the previous paradigm.

In fact, they were to be used on account of the democratized access to information and were at first considered as progress.

Besides the e-learning initiative « e-learning : thinking about the tomorrow's education », implemented on May 24th, 2000 by the European Commission can be understood retrospectively in that respect. It resulted from the conclusions of the European Council, which took place here, in Lisbon. The e-learning development was seen as « *the use of new multi-media technologies and the Internet to improve the learning quality by easing the access to resources and services along with exchanges and distant collaborative learning* ».

If accessing pedagogical resources and services may be rightfully understood as progress in itself, training quality does not necessarily result from it. **This can not be taken for granted.**

That is actually where the challenge we have now to take up lies.

Meaning: creating a massive quality training system on-line or partially one-line. **In other words,** a training system ensuring an increase in human capital. **Shortly speaking** a significant improvement/increase in the employability of the working population and the companies competitiveness.

Along with it, one-line trainings tend to coincide with the opening and expanding of a highly promising market. In this context, the customer benefit is more based upon the access process (where I want, when I want, how I want) rather than upon the measurable and quantifiable increase in human capital in companies and the economic industry.

Yet, no pedagogical thinking able to meet the current challenges at stake is being carried out regarding this economic development that is this expanding of the on-line vocational training.

It seems that digital tools along with their corresponding services prevail over pedagogical goals and efficiency ; the latter is **obviously** lagging behind.

Habits are keeping on changing continuously via the existing and providing of digital tools. It is not a new phenomenon at all. The Internet was not intended to revolutionize the individual transport market ; it however made Uber possible.

2. At the dawn of the Uberisation of vocational training : from blended learning to e-learning?

Let's go back to the initial stages and concepts which accounted for distant training attempts. In France, the name **FOAD = Open Distant Training**, is to be defined as pedagogical ways and means, which use digital tools. Truly speaking, this name gathers a large range of training or teaching systems. What they have in common is to be able to override location (distant), time (synchronous and asynchronous) and action constraints. **Every learner can access the contents meeting his/her needs. This possibly anytime, anywhere.**

To put it clearly, the wish to free oneself from usual teaching/learning constraints (unity of time and place) while promoting contents suited to individual needs at the same time is pretty obvious.

These practices applied to vocational training for adults are defined the following way by the Ministry of Labor as "*an "open training and/or distant training " being « a flexible training system organized according to individual or collective needs (individuals, companies, territories). It includes individualized learning units and access to local or distant resources and skills. The trainer does need to supervises the course in a continuous way ».* DGEFP Circular document n° 2001-22 dated July 20th, 2001 regarding open and/or distant trainings.

In that context, the trainer plays an accompanying role. No continuous supervising is required : the self-training takes an ever-increasing place compared to face-to-face trainings systems.

Besides, the so-called FOAD **Open Distant Training** does not refer solely to distant training systems. Translating into English would rather appear as a *blended learning system*, mixing face-to-face and distant training.

100% distant training systems may be described as a specific case of FOAD **Open Distant Training**, which can be labelled as part of e-learning.

Truly speaking, we do think it definitely is a **fracture model**

3. Inventing a new model

Questioning the efficiency of e-learning and MOOC in vocational training

Viewing pure e-learning as a mere continuation of pedagogical ways and means experienced via the first stages of FOAD **Open Distant Training**, would be risky and irrelevant. It is not only *the same*, but it also includes the « distance » criteria as a core feature.

We do think that the paradigm is currently changing.

The prevailing but hardly assessable position of this type of training so to speak “*community of inquiry*”¹ to quote a famous phrase is striking. It refers not only to all the interacting within the learners’ community but also to trainers themselves in order to solve out issues raised by the learning process and the gaining of vocational skills. It creates some kind of presence in the distant training system.

By far it is the most significant and ironic feature at the same time. The emerging of a tremendous virtual on-line community. It recalls a long experienced memory « we learn better and faster within a group ».

To say the least, at this stage of the e-learning development and the sharing about experience from companies, which tested out pure e-learning, we are unable to draw definitive conclusions regarding the method efficiency. **Sofar** many vocational skills are not likely to be gained easily via digital training.

For instance, vocational knowledge or based upon realistic work situations can hardly be dealt with via e-learning means or MOOC ; even if their use open a new field for experimenting. **Indeed** efficiency is bound to be quite unfruitful if the e-learning material consists in an on-line filmed course or the mere providing of pedagogical documents.

Another example is provided by the Afpa. The Afpa released its first MOOC, dedicated to vocational cooking (basic know-how). 53000 cybernauts went to the site.

But we need to explore this path further in order to assess under which conditions and to which extent, professional skills can be gained efficiently that way.

Last but not least, **here is a third example** about distant learning. **It is aimed at** a young audience.

The American Department of Education, conducted a survey about experience feedback as to numerous on-line trainings².

¹ Garrison, Randy & Terry Anderson, *E-Learning in the 21st Century: A Framework for Research and Practice*, 2003.

² US Département of Education: *Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning : A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies*, 2010. “In contrast to previous meta-analyses, this review distinguishes between two purposes for online learning:- Learning conducted totally online as a substitute or alternative to face-to-face learning

It reports that:

- ✓ Pupils or students attending on-line courses do not necessarily complete their courses less successfully than those attending face-to-face trainings ;
- ✓ However the most successful ones are those attending *blending learning* courses.

Our recommendations

To conclude with, we still have to explore numerous paths and horizons, take up many challenges and seize new opportunities.

Thanks to the emerging of digital tools in vocational training, we have no other way but to question the economic model of vocational training. We also have to invent in a renewed way an efficient pedagogy, a rock-solid one. It is never to be subject to or replaced by tools progress or else limited to a mere on-line teaching, unlikely to be helpful in a work situation.

Between the face-to-face and the pure e-learning, we most probably have to find a middle-way by inventing a balanced multi-modal pedagogy focusing on the efficient gaining of professional skills.

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-Online learning components that are combined or blended (sometimes called “hybrid”)with face-to-face instruction to provide learning enhancement”