PROJECT 2
FORMATIVE EVALUATION
myLearn

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this evaluation is to develop a plan to suggest improvements for the myLearn system. The myLearn system is a self-directed course curriculum that is currently being offered to University of Missouri employees. The proposed evaluation includes a formative component to assess the design of the user interface as well as a summative component to assess the relevance of the financial courses included in the myLearn system. This evaluation is to be provided to Jill Wood and Kaitina Volle, Directors of Professional Development for the University of Missouri System.

Online e-learning programs are continuing to gain popularity amongst corporations and institutions. As the access afforded by distance education increases the number of people served, we must develop processes that ensure quality in their programs (Schott, Chernish, Dooley, & Lindner, 2003).

For the formative evaluation, we administered a usability study of myLearn to expose any design weaknesses that might interfere with regular usage of myLearn. The usability study of myLearn will consist of hands-on observations, interviews, and a questionnaire. Secondly, the questionnaire will assess the ease of accessibility to myLearn.

Data collection for the formative evaluation involved an examination of questionnaires submitted by University employees via e-mail. The questionnaires were distributed to a list of 50 University employees. In total 33 or 66% of employees solicited responded. Focus groups administered by the evaluators to two groups of 4 used the printed versions of questionnaires which were collected after each session. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and a summary transcript was created from the recordings.

The resulting data collected from the questionnaires, focus groups and interviews revealed the need for three areas of improvement. The participants had some criticisms of the user interface. The participants also noted it was difficult find myLearn. The expert reviewer feedback the need for minor changes to be made to the financial section.

Topline recommendations are as follows:

- Enhance the user interface of myLearn's home page

- Increase promotion of myLearn

- Periodically update topics in the financial section

Client Assumptions

       The clients involved in the evaluation of the myLearn system are Jill Wood and Kaitina Volle, Directors of Professional Development for the University of Missouri System. The target audience for myLearn is the University staff and faculty and is used as a supplemental training resource that provides opportunities for personal and professional growth and development.

       At the conclusion of this evaluation client expectations are to understand recommendations to improve plans to increase the user base of the myLearn system. In addition, the client is seeking recommendations on how to improve the user interface and promotion to potential users.

Introduction

       myLearn is a program sponsored by the University of Missouri (UM) Office of Human Resources. This office and the directors of the Staff Development Unit are the clients for this report. At the end of the semester they will be looking to make possible changes to the user interface and topic selection. myLearn offers an ongoing commitment to the continuing development of faculty and staff. Within the myLearn program are training resources in many areas, from highly technical topics to software application instruction, as well as business skills development and legal compliance awareness.

       myLearn is not intended to replace instructor-led training courses. Rather, it is intended to supplement training methods and leverage the UM System Staff's existing resources by providing greater opportunity for development of professional and personal skills. The objectives of the myLearn program are:

- Improve the quality of employee performance to improve communication, processes, and project management skills.

- Improve departmental efficiency by offering best practices used in the University System.

- Improve productivity with an objective for employees to better understand the university's goals.

Background

Since myLearn is a proprietary learning program for the employees of the University of Missouri System, the program is funded by the University's general operating budget. This is an extended service for individuals seeking to improve a variety of skills or concepts used in Higher education or for personal growth. myLearn provides an outlet for self-directed, self-paced learning opportunities. myLearn services do not have to be aligned with the employees individualized department mission, they are of no cost to the individual or their departments.

In the single year that the myLearn program has been implemented, surveys have been conducted to informally gauge the current level of usage by University employees. Most of this data has not been systematically quantified nor reported. Consequently, the directors of the myLearn program want to collect and analyze more concrete data to assess whether the program as initially designed, was adding value to the target population. For these reasons the directors are seeking a program evaluation that will provide information to determine the current strengths of the program and areas for improvement.

As increased competition enter the marketplace many organizations are striving to offer development programs for their employees to maintain a competitive edge. There is an ever increasing demand for innovation, creativity, customer friendliness and quality improvement. Organizations have shifted from a reactive to a proactive philosophy. Business success has become increasingly dependent on continuous improvement of the core skills of the individuals in the organization in order to keep one step ahead of the competition.

Purpose

This evaluation will include both formative and summative components. The user interface and direct marketing strategy of myLearn will be the focus of the formative evaluation. The specific purpose for the formative evaluation is a follows:

- Determine areas of improvement for the content and user interface

- Identify ways that potential learners can become aware of myLearn

- Collect usability information regarding navigation, consistency, and aesthetics

Audience

In order to execute an effective evaluation, stakeholders were identified and formal agreements reached on the goals and expectations of the evaluation. In this case, the primary stakeholders were identified as the program Directors for Professional Development in Human Resources. Secondary stakeholders include the Vice President of Human Resources and any staff members of the University that decide to pursue professional skill development. Primary stakeholders were notified of the project in a brief interview and their vision of the program goals and evaluation needs were determined as follows:

1. To understand if the skill development offerings compare favorably with other professional development programs

2. What is needed to improve user experience

3. What can be done to improve awareness of myLearn offerings among University of Missouri employees

Decisions

As evaluation results are gathered, recommendations will be made to the client. The client is initially interested in gauging the usefulness of the overall user interface of myLearn.

Upon evaluation of user reviews, interviews, and surveys in the formative evaluation, the client may opt to modify the user interface of myLearn. Additionally, the client may need to address satisfaction levels with the advertising strategy of the learning system amongst the University of Missouri employees. After gathering and synthesizing data from employee questionnaires and focus group feedback, a new plan will be determined to promote the learning system to prospective users.

Questions

1. Are the users satisfied with the learning system interface? (Formative)

2. Are the users satisfied with the learning system content? (Formative and Summative)

3. Is the depth and breadth of the content useful and appropriate? (Formative and Summative)

4. Are potential users aware that there is a learning system for professional skills development? (Formative)

5. Is it easy to locate myLearn? (Formative)

Methods

Several methods were used to evaluate myLearn. Each method was specifically chosen to collect information that will directly relate to the questions asked in the Questions section of this evaluation plan (please refer to the Evaluation Matrix at the end of this section).

User review

Participants in this phase of the evaluation responded to a checklist of items related to the content and instructional design. These items provided an opportunity to assess the content and usability of myLearn. The evaluation focused on the finance module of the myLearn curriculum (accounting, investing, data analysis, etc.) in terms of content relevance and ease of navigation.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the content expert, participants of the focus groups, and the clients. The session for the formative evaluations was recorded for subsequent analysis.

Questionnaire

The potential learners of myLearn completed a formative questionnaire focusing mainly on their likes and dislikes and problem areas. The questionnaires was constructed using a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree / 7 = strongly agree) and was administered online via website service.

Focus Group

Focus group participants were asked to complete a series of tasks on myLearn and then be given time to explore the site as they chose. Following this phase of the focus group a moderator lead an open-ended discussion probing for additional feedback from the participants regarding the user interface and content of myLearn. The participants were prompted to discuss any issues regarding awareness and access of myLearn in the University of Missouri System's website.

Review from expert in content

This individual is currently employed as a financial investor and investment researcher of the University of Missouri. His role was to evaluate the depth of the content contained in the financial module in myLearn.

Formative Evaluation

NO.	Question/Method	expert (content)	user review	focus groups	interviews	questionnaire
1	Are users satisfied with the learning systems interface?		X			X
2	Are the users satisfied with the learning systems content?		X	X	X	
5	Is the depth and breadth of the content useful and appropriate?	X			X	
6	Are potential users aware that there is a learning system for professional skills development?					X
7	Is it easy to locate myLearn?					X

Sample

The sample included approximately 50 participants composed of our client, an expert in finance, eight to twelve focus group participants, and 36 other University employees who have had previous exposure to myLearn. This number of participants will provide a representative sample of the myLearn user base. Furthermore, including a representative ($n > 30$) sample of participants will add validity to our findings.

The participants in this evaluation will be:

● Jill Wood and Kaitina Volle, Directors of Professional Development for the University of Missouri System

● University employees

● Tom Jordan - financial expert

These interviews will gauge the effectiveness of direct marketing to University employees. A number of employees were asked questions on the existence of myLearn. They

were also be asked if they knew how to find it. The participants provided good data points on marketing strategies to promote myLearn. Those points are elaborated in more detail in the recommendations section.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data was collected by the writers of this evaluation by means of personally administering focus groups and user reviews of myLearn. Questionnaires for the formative evaluation were distributed by e-mail and received back by user submission. Interviews were conducted by the evaluation writers and recorded for data analysis. A summary transcript was created from the interviews. Expert review were conducted with David Champlin with the expert in his office. The expert was directed to walk through the financial content area of myLearn.

Formative Instruments:

User review

Participants in this phase of the evaluation responded to a checklist of items related to the content and instructional design of myLearn. These items provided an opportunity for potential learners to assess the content that University employees while interacting within the financial focused areas (accounting, investing, data analysis, etc.). Questions probed for the site's visual appeal, user-friendliness, and ease of navigation.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the content expert and three employees from the treasurer's office of the University of Missouri. The entire session was audio recorded for subsequent analysis. Questions addressed whether the content was adequate for the topic area.

Questionnaire

The potential learners of myLearn completed a formative questionnaire focusing mainly on their likes and dislikes, and areas of concern. Items were constructed so as to allow them to either agree or disagree with a statement by responding on a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree / 7 = strongly agree)

Focus group

The focus group was instructed to complete a list of tasks on the myLearn website and then given time to explore the site as they chose. Following this, the group participated in a discussion with the moderator concentrating on areas of concern uncovered in the user interface and the ability to find the learning system in the University of Missouri System's website.

Review from expert in content

This individual was currently employed as a financial investor and investment researcher of the University of Missouri. His role was to gauge the concept validity of the financial material in myLearn.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the user review and focus groups were from written notes by the participants. A summary of recurrent recommendations for the myLearn system were identified. Those recommendations were then summarized for the client.

Questionnaires were submitted from 35 University employees. The employees were identified through their e-mail URL. The questionnaires were developed using a Likert scale to gauge participants likes and dislikes toward myLearn's user interface and marketing.

The participants of the user study and focus groups felt that the user interface was too complicated to understand. They felt that the home page was text heavy and difficult to navigate.

Also there was a debate amongst the focus group participants about the layout style of the learning system. Several participants felt, however, using all text was acceptable. They felt since this was a learning system for professionals more text was appropriate for use on this site. Another group of participants felt UI needed a more contemporary style. More use of graphics and icons were suggested from this group. Both of groups did have a common concern with the amount of information that was presented on the myLearn's homepage.

Limitations

There were a few constraints; we had no control over participant level of experience, perspectives and possible preconceived notions regarding online self training. Prospective learners were are not being pre-screened to determine their proficiency level with technology. It should be noted that we were dependent upon the the University technology resources and outages which could impede the ability to collect data. The content and format of myLearn shall remain constant pending recommendations to the client.

The quantitative instruments used in this evaluation were not tested for reliability and validity. Consequently, the results are intended to be used directionally to make improvements to the user interface and marketing of myLearn.

Results

Results from the data analysis illustrates the need for changes to be implemented in the user interface, promotion of myLearn to prospective users, and minor content revisions.

Of greatest concern among focus group participants was that the UI for myLearn was very confusing for first-time users. The majority of focus group participants seemed to dislike the fact the homepage and secondary pages contained far too much text and felt it was too much to absorb.

None of the participants were aware of myLearn. Inspite of the lack of awareness, the majority of participants found it to be an interesting service for employees to improve professional skills. A series of recommendations were provided from the participants and is featured in the next section.

The expert reviewer found very few concerns with the content of the financial section of myLearn. He felt it had relevant content for employees of the University. Furthermore, he too was unaware of the existence of myLearn and found it interesting that a learning system for University employees existed.

Recommendations

The following recommendations address the issue of confusing format:

1. Change layout to be more professional and modern.

2. Change the color scheme to be more engaging and energetic.

3. Place folder style tabs across the top of the page with hover dropdown menus

4. Include roll down options to avoid lagging webpage load time.

5. Add a short description when the user hovers over a selection to explain the selection before opening.

6. Simplify detail page, make the descriptions more brief.

7. Provide option to open on page or in new window.

Recommendations to promote the service are as follows:

1. Ask visitors to bookmark the site: Provide a large text or graphic to allow users to bookmark myLearn to their respective browser.

2. Promote the site in online campus forums and discussion lists: Include a myLearn link in MU info (a weekly email newsletter) to promote the service.

3. Promote myLearn using traditional media: Develop posters, flyers, and business card size handouts to guide employees to myLearn. Distribute them in campus office buildings. Consider other traditional media to drive people to myLearn, such as direct mail, postcards, etc. TV monitors on campus can be used to promote myLearn, especially in the University Hospital.

4. Issue news releases: Create a news release that is sent out to internal offices on campus.

5. Promote myLearn's professional skills content: Send out emails campaigns about the financial, creative, and communication skills that can be accessed on myLearn

<u>Recommendations from the expert reviewer are as follows:</u>

1. Periodically update topics in the financial section

References

Boam, Rosemary, and Paul Sparrow. *Designing and Achieving Competency: A Competency-based Approach to Developing People and Organizations*. London: McGraw-Hill, 1992. Print.

Schott, M., Chernish, W., Dooley, K. E., & Lindner, J. R. (2003). Innovations in distance learning program development and delivery. Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, VI (II). Retrieved February, 12 2013 from

http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/summer62/schott62.html

Appendix A

Formative Data Collection Tools

1. User Feedback Survey

		Strongly Dissagree	Dissagree	Somewhat dissagree	Neurtal	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	Site features were easy to use.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.	I think that I would need to be more technically literate to use the site.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.	I would imagine that most people would learn to use the site very quickly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.	I found the information that I needed easily.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.	I felt very confident using the system.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Please answer the following questions to further help us make the myLearn experience more enjoyable and productive.								

6. How would you improve the computer based training?

7. What is the least valuable about the myLearn™ program?

8. What is most valuable about the myLearn™ program?

Appendix B

2. Self Assessment

1. Comment on the how easy it is to find materials on myLearn™.

2. Comment on any work you accomplished in addition to while using myLearn™.

3. What training/developmental activities did you plan to use during this session? Were these plans completed? On time? Be prepared to discuss how accomplishment in these areas has impacted your performance.

4. What do you consider to be your work-related strengths and weaknesses?

5. Describe areas for improvement in terms of your current job responsibilities.

6. What growth opportunities are you looking for?