

# How MOOCs Will Revolutionize Corporate Learning and Development (Aug 13)

By Jeanne Meister, August 13, 2013

Before Intel giant McAfee revamped its new-hire orientation, it was over 80 hours long and consisted of roughly 40 hours of pre-work, 5 days of on-site training, and a “robust” syllabus of post-work, meant to be completed at home. But as McAfee’s Senior Director of learning Lori Aberle says, “Once they leave the instructor-led class, that’s it, they’re done. Let’s face it, you will never get them back again!”

In addition, the on site training was paced either too fast for some or too slow for others – as classroom lessons by necessity are. The associates teaching them were sometimes torn away at the last minute to close big sales – their primary job, after all. Plus, the system didn’t prioritize associates who were inclined toward teaching in the first place.

To fix its problem, McAfee turned to a concept sweeping the education scene: Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs. By using a tenet of MOOCs called “flipping the classroom,” which means that the majority of learning happens not with a professor lecturing the students but by giving students access to course materials and having them probe, discuss, and debate issues with fellow learners as well as the professor. With that change, McAfee turned its training around in a way that both saved both time *and* produced more lucrative sales: its sales associates now attribute an average of \$500,000 per year in sales to the skills they learned through the new training model.

MOOCs, which first formally entered the learning sphere in 2008, gained prominence in 2012 when Stanford University offered the first in what became a series of its own. The concept’s name plainly conveys its definition: the MOOC is “**massive**” because it is designed to enroll tens of thousands of learners; it’s “**open**,” because, in theory, anyone with an Internet connection can enroll in the free course; it’s “**online**” because much if not all of the interaction takes place online in threaded web discussion groups with cohorts of learners, or on wikis, or via online videos of professors giving lectures and finally, MOOC’s are “**courses**” because they have concrete start and end dates, student assessments, online tests and quizzes, and proctored exams. Upon completion, some may offer a “verified certificate” of completion or college credit. The leading MOOC providers include Coursera, Udacity and edX.

But as MOOCs storm the academic world, the public discussion of their impact is ignoring what could become their most valuable application. Far from being limited to higher education reform, the new learning style’s most important legacy could be its impact on the world of corporate training – which is a \$150 billion industry.

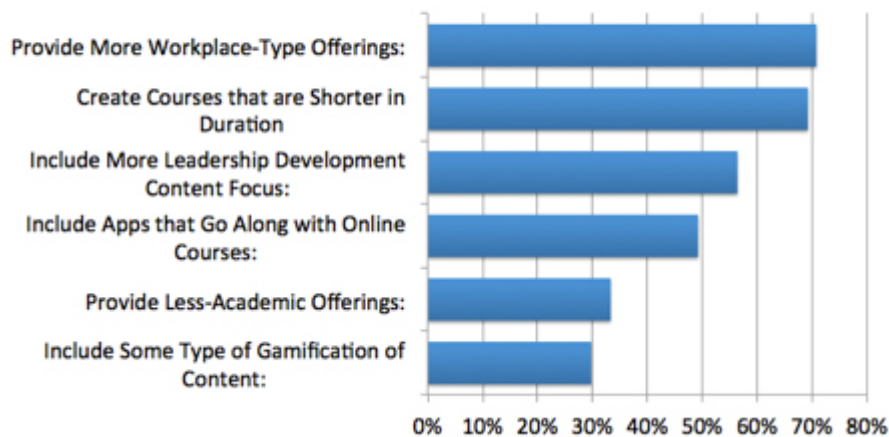
The following three MOOC elements are particularly well-suited to corporate learning & development:

- **Semi-synchronicity:** Most MOOCs allow students to go through the course as a ‘semi-synchronous’ cohort of learners. That means each week the group receives the same assignment of video lectures, readings, quizzes and/or threaded discussions, but each member completes that course work on his or her own time. The design of semi-synchronous cohorts provides learners the opportunity to motivate each other as they go through the program.
- **Course design:** “Flipping the classroom,” or swapping classwork with homework, was first made popular by Khan Academy, and is one of the defining features of MOOCs. This way, the most of the learning happens not through a professor lecturing but by giving students access to course materials and having them study and explore them at home. Then in class, they put their new knowledge to work with role-plays, use cases, and exercises.

- Credentials:** Many MOOCs offer college credit or certificates of completion, which help to legitimize and formalize the learning. At leading MOOC provider Coursera, 14 percent of courses offer verified certificates, for which registration costs between \$30 and \$100 depending on the course's length and content. Seventy-five different Coursera courses offer verified certificates, through what the company calls its 'Signature Track,' and five of those offer college credit eligibility – they include Pre-Calculus and Algebra from UC Irvine, Calculus from UPenn, and from Duke one class on genetics and evolution and another on bioelectricity. In the workplace, certificates function as an incentive for employees to complete optional training or skill development courses, because they'll have something to show for all their work.

In a recent Future Workplace survey, completed by 195 corporate learning and HR professionals, 70 percent of respondents said they saw opportunities to integrate MOOCs into their own company's learning programs. Even further, this sample of respondents made six recommendations for how MOOC providers could adapt to needs of corporations:

## To Gain Greater Traction In Corporate Learning MOOCs Should Be Adapted To



Incorporating MOOC concepts inside the organization will ultimately challenge the human resources and corporate learning departments to rethink and re-imagine their value proposition.

If you are a Chief Human Resource Officer or a Chief Learning Officer, here are five questions to consider as you think about how MOOC's can provide you the impetus to re-think and re-imagine your employer brand and corporate learning department.

- How can MOOCs build the employer brand by offering consumer education?** Rather than limiting the innovation to the learning department, bring your Chief Marketing Officer in on the project and create branding opportunities similar to partnership between Khan Academy and Bank of America to create a series of self-paced courses for Bank of America customers on how to develop better money habits. One can imagine how this partnership could start a trend of company-sponsored consumer education using the MOOC model of free self-paced courses.
- What's more important in learning: content or context?** MOOCs' universal nature is central to their existence. Bringing them into the company's learning department inevitably means considering the context of training as well as the content. Chief Learning Officers should consider incorporating an opportunity to add a global dialogue to formal learning programs by partnering with internal corporate social networks like Yammer and Jive Software or even external consumer sites such as Meetup.com.

3. **How can data analytics help you improve your learning programs?** MOOCs offer real-time analytics that reveal each learner's progress and what formats work best for your learners. As big data sweeps the HR & Corporate Learning functions, more Chief Learning Officers need to be prepared to use data analytics to enhance the overall learning experience.
4. **Can your company re-imagine the role of the learner?** With MOOCs, the learner takes on a role more expansive than ever before, acting as teacher, learner, and peer reviewer. Companies adopting MOOCs have to trust the learner to do this, by incorporating more opportunities for peer reviews and peer-to-peer dialogues into the course.
5. **Could verified certificates mean huge reductions to your executive education budget?** Millennials, who are projected to be 50% of the global workforce by 2020, are demanding more opportunities for learning & development credentials. MOOCs offer that – at a price point of under \$100 for each certificate. Based on Yahoo! and Coursera's partnership to train and credential Yahoo!'s software engineers for a fee, this could become the "new normal" for employees pursuing continuing education. That in turn would lead to budget re-allocations regarding how companies spend their continuing executive education budgets.

However they do it, companies will have to adapt MOOC elements or risk falling behind. Because as historian Norman Davies once said, "The one certainty for anyone in the path of an avalanche is this; standing still is not an option."

©2013 Forbes.com LLC