Assignment 3:

E-learning Readiness Analysis

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Introduction

I used my assessment tool to evaluate the Teacher of Adults program at Cambrian College, which is a fully online distance program offered through the Ontario*Learn* portal. I chose this program because I recently completed it. In the sections which would be completed by a faculty member I answered the questions as if I were the faculty member who was tasked to develop this online distance education course. I gained information about the institution and their online program from the websites of Cambrian College and Ontario*Learn.*

Assessment Sections

People:

This section of the tool is designed to diagnose the readiness of the individuals who will be designing or facilitating the courses. This would be the section that would have the most variety if you were to poll an entire department or faculty. Each subsection deals with a different aspect of personal readiness. The first subsection deals with confidence in using technology and having sufficient knowledge to trouble shoot small technical problems that may occur. I (the instructor/designer) scored very high in this subsection because I use many types of technology every day. The second subsection examines what previous experience the individual has had with online technology and their views on such. Did they find it confusing? Helpful? Useful, or of little value? In the experience subsection the score was also very high because I have successfully learnt many technologies in the past, so even if I was not completely sure how to complete a task I would be able to figure it out quite quickly in my estimation. The final subsection deals with attitude. Does the person believe that online learning is a beneficial

addition to learning or distraction and too complex. Once again the score was quite high because I am interested in e-learning and the development and use of new technologies. Of all the subsections, I believe that this is the most important one because it deals with aspects of people's beliefs that would be difficult to change. For example, question one reads, "Do you believe that e-learning is beneficial to students?" if the answer to this is no, then it does not matter how much experience or confidence using technology the faculty member has, they are going to be an unwilling participant. The reason to include this section is to gauge interest of the faculty members, as they may need to be convinced of the benefits of e-learning before the program can be successful.

The implications of this section are important as they deal with the attitudes and skills of the people who will be implementing the e-learning courses. Before a successful course can be developed people must be willing to engage with the paradigm shift which is occurring and be interested in teaching and learning using new techniques and tools. Only if the faculty members are interested in developing their skills to become effective online practitioners will they then be willing to develop the associated technology skills to make online learning a success.

Technology:

This section is broken down into three subsections, stability, hardware and software. Stability deals with regular access to the tools and recourses needed to develop and facilitate an e-learning course. Software with the programs available to produce online media. Hardware looks at the tools that have been provided.

This section scored very high on the readiness tool, a total of thirty-six out of thirty-nine or ninety-two percent. This was completely expected as Cambrian College is already offering e-

learning courses through the Ontario*Learn* portal and has been doing so for a number of years. Since e-learning infrastructure and programs are already in place, it follows that the tools required are also available. However, this section lost points in two areas. Firstly, the area of more advanced software. Some courses in the program used a variety of different software, while others used only basic office programs. Although this could be the choice of the individual facilitating or developing the class, it does indicate that software such as video editing programs may not be readily available or that training to use these types programs is not available or not clearly understood The other area is technical support. There is a help desk, and the LMS systems also provide support; however, it is mainly through e-mail and there is no indication as to how long it will take to resolve your problem. In my experience, they were pleasant to deal with but my username issue did take a number of days to resolve which could have been a problem if it had happened in the middle of a semester.

This section deals with the tools needed to implement a program which contains e-learning. This is important because if the infrastructure is not of a sufficient quality teachers and students will become frustrated and the program will not be a success. At Cambrian College the basics are well taken care of and only general improvements could be made to continue to provide support for teachers and students.

Content*:*

This section is divided into two subsections: theory and practice. In this section I believe you would observe a wider variety of scores when polling different programs, as some areas would be more of a challenge to adapt to an online environment which could lead people to score a particular subject lower. I used the tool to assess the Teacher of Adults program which in this case does lend itself to online learning, both in theory and practice. The theory section had the

higher score, as it was developed to be an online course and so the information was communicated primarily through online content. However, full marks were not received as not all of the courses made use of the wealth of information available. There was limited use of Open Educational Resources, and one course required an in-person paper based exam, even though the program is fully online. The practice section had some similar issues. In part, the subject did not lend itself to one of the questions which asked about simulations. Although, practice exercises involving instructing the other members of the class (adults) in a topic were used in many classes, there were no simulations. I feel simulations may be more applicable in other types of courses such as chemistry where a simulation of an experiment could be performed. The problems in this section are related in part to the decentralization which has occurred through the Ontario*Learn* program, which is proving to be beneficial in many ways but problematic in others, which is discussed in the next section. This section received a lower score than the previous two sections, although it is still respectable at eighty-three percent.

Content is a very important section because it deals with the resources that are available for the instructors and designers to use. This section would illustrate to a researcher or a developer if the faculty members have an understanding of the wide array of resources that are available online. It may also prompt development of items which are not available online. Although, the program did well presenting the content in an online environment there are a few minor areas where some refinements are necessary.

Institution*:*

This was the section that received the lowest score on the assessment. This section is designed to assess the level of support provided to faculty in the development and facilitation of e-learning and online distance programs. It is in this section that the Ontario*Learn* program had

a definite affect. In several ways the Ontario*Learn* program helped to increase the score. Ontario*Learn* provides secure and equal funding into the development of online programs, ensures institutional support, and provides information on how to design an effective course. However, in other ways the program was a detriment to the score on this section. As it has decentralized and spread e-learning through all of Ontario's colleges there is less opportunity for a particular faculty to discuss and share ideas about the facilitation of their particular subject online. Additionally, because Ontario*Learn* provides resources on designing online courses there is no centre for faculty development within smaller colleges, and the information provided in the teacher resource section is self-directed learning (Ontario*Learn*, 2011), meaning there is no interaction between colleagues beginning an e-learning course. There is also no overarching development team, although Ontario*Learn* is working on guidelines to provide a common level of course quality developed at any college (Colleges Ontario, 2012).

This section evaluates the readiness on an institutional level, and whether or not e-learning will be supported and developed beyond the initiative of a single faculty member or department. This is important because if an online learning endeavour is not well supported it will not succeed as a program but will remain at the initiative of individual faculty members. In this way the Ontario*Learn* portal is extremely beneficial as there is provincial support, which translates into institutional support, as well as funding specifically for e-learning programs. However, I feel improvements are needed to support the faculty developing and implementing the courses.

Summary

Overall, Cambrian College scored well on the readiness tool. This was unsurprising as the Teacher of Adults program is already functioning in an online environment. The final overall

percentage was eighty-three percent. There is, however, room for improvement in all of the areas on the readiness tool. This readiness tool measured four factors which were averaged to provide the overall score for the institution. Each factor, or section, was provided with its own score, thus providing information about the strengths and weaknesses of the institution in becoming ready to implement a program of e-learning.

The sections of "People" and "Technology" scored the highest at over ninety percent. In these sections there are only minor refinements that can be used to polish an already strong program; however, anything over ninety percent shows great readiness for an e-learning program. The "Content" section was also quite strong with a score above eighty percent. This shows that an e-learning program could be implemented with good results. However, there is room for some improvements to increase the score further which would allow this section to be as strong as the first two areas of "People" and "Technology". The final section, "Institution" was the weakest of all the sections with a score between seventy and eighty percent. This is a bit surprising because of the emphasis placed upon e-learning by the college, which is a result of the heavy promotion by the province of Ontario towards e-learning and online distance programs. This provincial encouragement has been both good and bad for the development of e-learning courses. Although a score of seventy-five percent is not a bad score, this section reflects the area which requires the most work to improve its readiness score. Additionally, the improvement of this section's score would have the largest impact on the overall readiness score for the Teacher of Adults program at Cambrian College.

Generally, this program and institution scored very well on the readiness tool. Each section provided a score between average and above average using the regular association of values to percentages. The overall score of all sections resulted in a good score of readiness.

There is room for improvement, something which is present in all programs. The various areas for improvement will be outlined in the next section, with suggestions for working on refining those areas.

Recommendations

This section will focus on improvements that can be made to increase the readiness score on each section of the readiness tool, which will improve the overall score. As the scores were quite high, some of the recommendations may appear quite trivial as they are more refinements to the program rather than attempts to fix systemic problems. Additionally, this readiness score was based upon the completion of a single survey, whereas to implement a program of e-learning in an institution multiple people with an interest in the program would complete the survey and the results would be averaged to reflect all of their experiences and opinions providing a more complete picture of readiness.

Recommendations for People

This section received the highest score because it deals with the confidence, experience, and attitude of the faculty members; therefore, the recommendations for this section will be minor. The areas where points were lost had to do with experience using a variety of technologies or techniques. The way to address this would be to provide an opportunity for faculty to practice these skills. However, this section could have a wide variety of responses because it deals with opinions and skills of each individual taking part in the e-learning program. Therefore, I would also recommend that the institution provide informational resources about the benefits of e-learning and the skills needed to be confident practitioner. Information about e-learning could be provided in both written and presentation formats. Practice with the

technology could be based on independent study using videos and a personalized practice space; however, for participants who have very little knowledge and experience with technology structured professional development might be more beneficial.

Recommendations for Technology

Once again, the score on this section reflects a need for refinement versus solutions for larger problems. This section lost some points in the area of technical support. Although, technical support is provided by both the institution and the learning management system, refinements to these systems could be developed to provide an easier experience for the students. This could include items such as a faster response time to deal with student's problems. However, I do not believe that there is a significant problem in this area, it is simply requires an emphasis on continual improvement of services. The other issue in this section regarded optional software, such as video editing software. While faculty and designers may have access to these types of programs, they do not appear to be widely used. I believe the reason for this is that it is left to the individual initiative to learn to how to use these programs that not all people have the time and inclination to do. A solution for this would be to provide access to high quality tutorials explaining the use of these programs. This could be easily completed as there are many high quality tutorials that have already been created and posted online, it would only require a subscription to such material or a curation effort to bring free videos together.

Recommendations for Content

The Teacher of Adults program scored well on the content section as well. The refinements in this section mostly relate to more effective use of the resources available online. Once again, I feel that the issue is not that resources, such as Open Education Resources, were

not used for instructional design reasons but more because their availability is not well known. To solve this issue, information about the variety of resources available online needs to be effectively communicated to the faculty members. In part, this may be because Cambrian College is quite small and does not have its own teaching and learning centre the way many larger institutions do. This makes it difficult to remain current on the latest trends in education and be aware of resources that can be used. Perhaps faculty could be encouraged to subscribe to a newsfeed which keeps them abreast of the technological related developments in education and also their field of study.

Recommendations for Institution

This section received the lowest score; however, the score still indicates a good level of readiness on an institutional level. Both the lower score and the readiness are a result of the Ontario*Learn* initiative. Ontario*Learn* has been quite beneficial for e-learning; however, the decentralized method is limiting to faculty development. This effect has quite an impact on a smaller institution such as Cambrian, since many of their colleagues would actually be in different institutions which would make casual conversation about facilitating online courses difficult. There is no centre for faculty to learn the best practices in online education. My recommendation for this issue would be for Ontario*Learn* to develop a course illustrating the best practices in the field. Currently, they have a self-guided website, which is beneficial to only a few faculty members, whereas a course would provide a more usable introduction to the world of e-learning. This course could be face-to-face or online, but I feel one of the main reasons to employ a course instead of self-directed learning is the access people would have to their peers. This could help them learn about and understand best practices, as well as provide institution and peer relationships to help solve problems when they are facilitating their courses. One of the

other problems is the lack of an overarching development team. This is especially important because students are able to take courses from different colleges to complete their studies so it is necessary to have the same standards in each college. Ontario*Learn* does have a plan to introduce a series of best practice standards to all of their e-learning courses. (Colleges Ontario, 2012). Although, this was the area with the most need for improvement, it still had a respectable level of readiness.

Conclusion

This readiness tool showed that Cambrian College has successfully implemented their Teacher of Adults e-learning program. There are a few minor recommendations that could be made in three of the sections, which would work towards refining the program. The fourth section, "Institution" had a lower score, and therefore, more important recommendations. However, the score on this section still showed a good level of readiness with no major problems associated with the implementation of an e-learning program.

References

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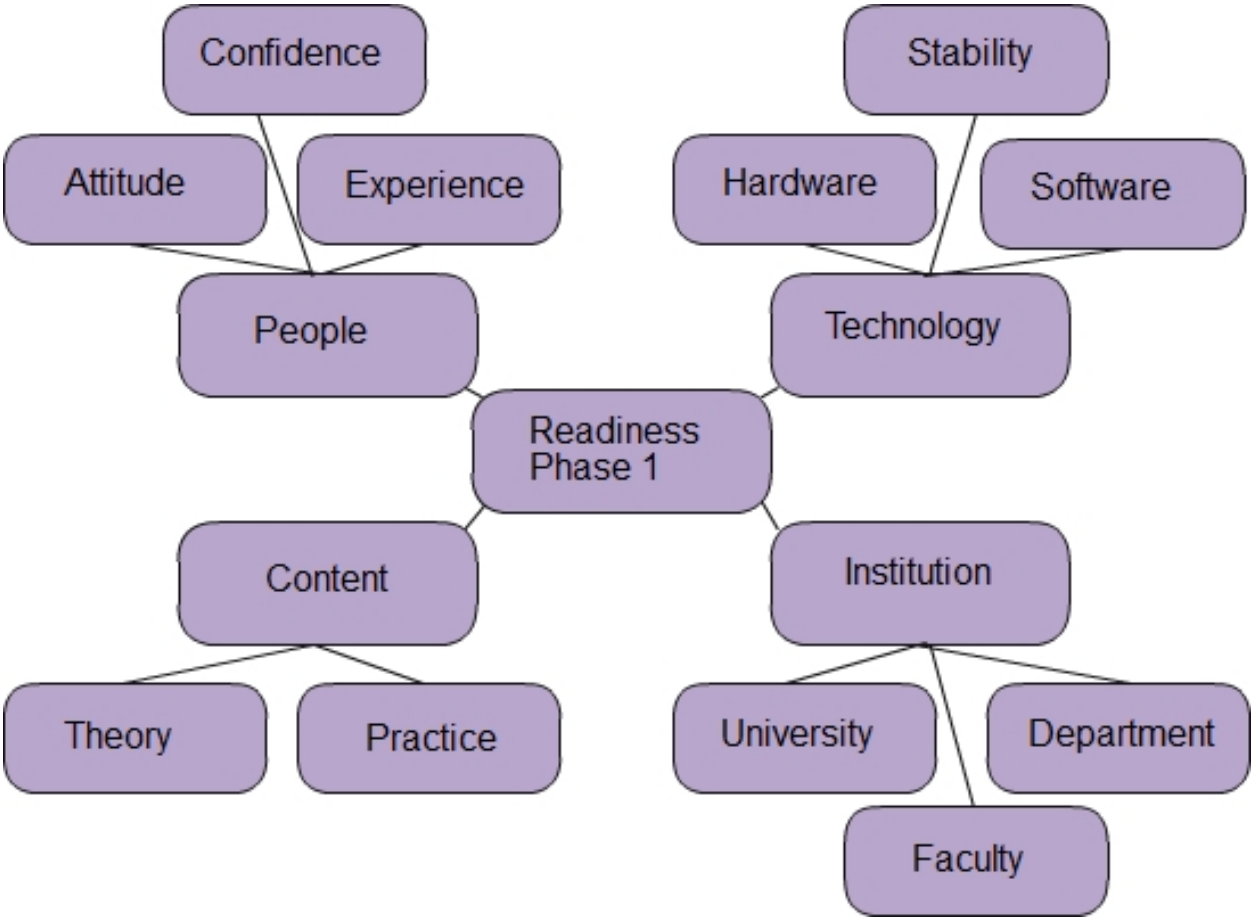
Appendix 1



Readiness (Phase 1) Questions:

Total Available Points: 180 **159 → 83%**

People (65) **63 → 97%**

Answer the following questions on a scale of 1-5. 5 for YES, 3 for MAYBE, 1 for NO. 2 and 4 can be used to indicate a half-way state.

At the end of each section is a space for any extra ideas or concerns.

Confidence

1. Do you feel confident in your abilities to use office suite software? (Word processing, presentations, spreadsheets, etc.)

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

2. Do you feel confident in your abilities to learn new software programs? (Examples: video editing, sound/image editing, LMS systems, etc.)

1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

3. How confident are you in resolving minor technical difficulties? (Example: lost your Wi-Fi connection, internet searches to find fixes)

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

4. Are you confident in using a variety of technology tools in creating learning materials?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- **4** ---------- 5

Any extra comments?

Attitude

1. Do you think e-learning is beneficial to students?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

2. Do you believe that students enjoy e-learning experiences?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

3. Are you interested in learning about new technologies?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

4. Do you think there is value in changing the method of educational delivery?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

Any extra comments?

Experience

1. Do you have experience using voice/video conferencing programs? (i.e. Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.)

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

2. Do you use email for communicating with faculty and students?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

3. Do you use social media sites? (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest)

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

4. Do you know how to use internet search engines? (Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.)

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

5. Do you know how to upload documents to a website/blog/LMS system?
   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- **4** ---------- 5

Any extra comments?

Technology (39) **36 → 92%**

Answer the following questions on a scale of 1-3. 3 for YES, 2 for MAYBE, 1 for NO.

At the end of each section is a space for any extra ideas or concerns.

Stability

1. Do you have reliable, high speed internet at work?
   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**
2. Do you have reliable internet at home?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

3. Do you have access to technical support if you require it?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

4. Is the technical support available easily? (24/7 access, easy to contact)

   1 ---------- **2** ---------- 3

Any extra comments?

Hardware

1. Do you have access to a full computer? (NOT a tablet)

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

2. Do you have to a headset and microphone?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

3. Do you have access to a computer which is relatively up to date?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

4. Do you have access to a work station that is appropriate for computer work? (Outlets, strong internet connection, large monitor, etc.)

1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

5. Do you have access to a printer?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

Any extra comments?

Software

1. Are you provided with the appropriate programs for e-learning? (Microsoft Office, Apple Office Suite, Adobe reader/writer, etc.)

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

2. Do you have the option to access optional programs for e-learning? (Video, sound, or image editing)

   1 ---------- **2** ---------- 3

3. Does the learning management system chosen work for your e-learning purposes?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

4. Do you have technical support and assistance for the learning management system?

   1 ---------- **2** ---------- 3

Any extra comments?

Content (40) **33 → 83%**

Answer the following questions on a scale of 1-5. 5 for YES, 3 for MAYBE, 1 for NO. 2 and 4 can be used to indicate a half-way state.

At the end of each section is a space for any extra ideas or concerns.

Theory

1. Does the theory lend itself to an e-learning environment?
   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**
2. Are there Open Educational Resources (OER) to make use of?
   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- **4** ---------- 5
3. Is there an e-book or series of articles that can replace a paper textbook?
   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- **4** ---------- 5
4. Can e-learning be used enhance a student's understanding of the subject?
   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

Any extra comments?

Practice

1. Are there activities that can be completed in a virtual environment?
   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**
2. Are there simulations available for students?
   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5
3. Can students be tested remotely, or through project based assessment?
   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- **4** ---------- 5
4. Can e-learning be used enhance a student's application of the subject?
   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- **5**

Any extra comments?

Institution (36) 27 → **75%**

Answer the following questions on a scale of 1-3. 3 for YES, 2 for MAYBE, 1 for NO.

At the end of each section is a space for any extra ideas or concerns.

Department

1. Are others in the department using e-learning?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

2. Is there support for e-learning within the department members?

   1 ---------- **2** ---------- 3

3. Is there support for e-learning within the department administration?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

4. Will you be granted time to develop an e-learning program?

   1 ---------- **2** ---------- 3

Any extra comments?

Faculty

1. Are others in the faculty also using e-learning?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

2. If so, are ideas being shared between faculty members?

   1 ---------- **2** ---------- 3

3. Is there support for e-learning within the faculty?

   1 ---------- **2** ---------- 3

Any extra comments?

University

1. Is training on e-learning technology being provided?

   1 ---------- **2** ---------- 3

2. Is training on e-learning best practices being provided?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3

3. Is there support for e-learning from the top administration?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

4. Is there a clear plan of financial support for e-learning?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- **3**

5. Is there an overarching e-learning development team?

   1 ---------- 2 ---------- 3

Any extra comments?