

An evolution of virtual training: implications for talent development in the post-pandemic period

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Introduction

With technology evolving at a rapid pace, companies are required to incorporate information technology (IT) into their strategy to remain relevant across the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced companies to rethink the way employees receive training. While employees work remotely, learning and development remain a pinnacle focus area for companies. Companies must ensure that their staff remain relevant through training by upgrading staff skills and developing employees to adapt to the changes occasioned by the pandemic. Golden (2021) indicates that nearly 85% of learning and development functions at PepsiCo had moved to virtual training platforms as of July 2020 to continue to train employees. According to the survey, 61% of employees who participated in the virtual training session over three months during the pandemic indicated that the training was effective.

It is important to consider the organizational goals and information technology or devices available in the organization. The organization should determine what is required to deliver interactive content before selecting a platform. A study on the trends of virtual training applications during the pandemic highlighted Google Classroom, Edmodo, WhatsApp, Schoology, Zoom, MS Teams and many more (Pratama *et al.*, 2020). Accordingly, online meeting applications provide and bring tangible benefits because video conference is proven to be more efficient, practical, and safe for virtual training (Golden, 2021; Pratama *et al.*, 2020). The move towards implementing virtual training requires a well-prepared program designed to enable virtual interactions and effective use of virtual platform (Atiku, 2018). This study focuses on a company within the auditing field where people are deadline-driven and work in a tremendously pressured environment. This study examines the effectiveness of virtual training within a public sector institution in South Africa.

Methods

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design following a quantitative approach for data collection and analysis procedure. Quantitative data was collected using a self-developed questionnaire to assess the impact of information technology, virtual training platform, and online library on the effectiveness of virtual training programs during the pandemic. The scale contains 17 items designed on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The first scale contains 4 items measuring the use of information technology. The second scale contains 5 items measuring

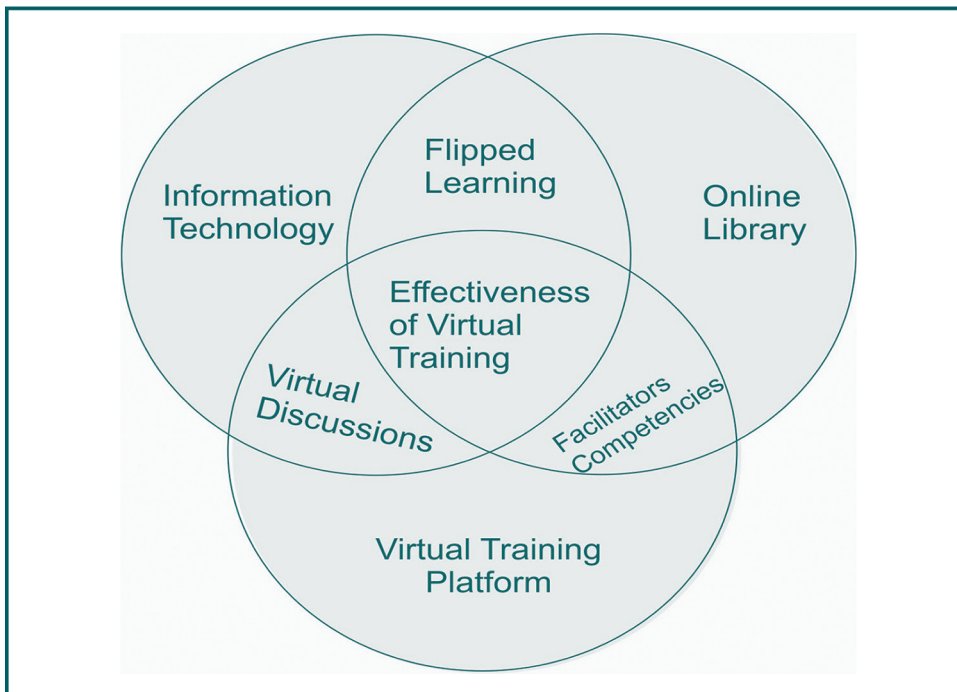
the effectiveness of virtual training platforms adopted in times of crisis. The third scale contains 3 items measuring the use of an online library for virtual training in times of crisis. The effectiveness of virtual training programs in times of crisis was measured using a 5-items scale. The structured questionnaire was designed and administered to 119 respondents in the participating public institution. Respondents were selected using a stratified random sampling technique. The respondents were employees receiving virtual training and the facilitators providing the training in times of crisis. The data was analyzed using a variance-based structural equation modeling via SmartPLS, version 3.3.3 for path analysis (Ringle *et al.*, 2015).

Results and discussion

The results of preliminary data analysis showed that the scales measuring the key constructs (online library, information technology, virtual training program, and effectiveness of virtual training programs) investigated in this study were reliable and valid, judging from the observed composite reliability coefficients and average variance extracted. In order of importance, the adoption of user-friendly virtual training platforms, IT support and online library resources contributed to the effectiveness of virtual training programs during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa. Specifically, the use of virtual training platforms such as Zoom and MS Teams, as well as IT support provided to the trainees contribute to the effectiveness of virtual training programs in South Africa during the pandemic. The framework illustrating the effectiveness of virtual training programs in times of crisis is presented in Figure 1.

The framework in Figure 1, which emerged from the analyzed statistical analysis revealed that the availability of online library resources enhances the effectiveness of virtual training programs, judging from the significance level of the path from online library to the effectiveness of virtual training ($r = 0.027$, $p < 0.01$, $n = 119$). In a similar vein, the results of the statistical analysis further suggests that information technology such as Google Classroom, Edmodo, WhatsApp, Schoology, Zoom, MS Teams contribute significantly to

Figure 1 Effectiveness of virtual training



the effectiveness of virtual training programs ($r = 0.345$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 119$). The use of information technology and online library enhance flipped learning, which invariably contribute to the effectiveness of virtual training program in times of crisis. The R^2 value ($R^2 = 0.556$) explains the joint influence of information technology, online library, and virtual training platform on the effectiveness of virtual training programs. The R^2 value suggests that the predictive variables examined in this study explained 55.6% of the variance in the virtual training program in times of crisis.

Implications for practice

The implication of our findings for organizational development specialists in public institutions is that the adopted virtual training platform made the largest contributions to the effectiveness of virtual training programs, judging from the results of the analyzed data. This means that the virtual training platform adopted for the virtual training and competencies of the facilitators in online delivery made the largest contributions to the effectiveness of virtual training programs during the pandemic. Therefore, adopted virtual training platforms must be user-friendly to enhance the effectiveness of virtual training programs in the post-pandemic period. The implementation of advanced information and communication technology systems for effective virtual training and development programs is essential for organizational development in the post-pandemic period. The reason is that information technology also made a considerable large amount of contributions to virtual training programs during the pandemic in South Africa. The provision of e-learning devices and mobile learning applications for specific training will go a long way in enhancing the effectiveness of virtual training in the post-pandemic period.

The online library could be updated for an enhancement of a virtual training program through a flipped classroom to increase learner engagement in virtual classrooms. The use of electronic sources of material for flipped learning is essential for the effectiveness of virtual training programs in the post-pandemic period. An up-to-date online library for flipped learning extends teaching and learning beyond the virtual training platform, where additional knowledge could be acquired for workplace application.

This study examined the effectiveness of virtual training programs in a South African public institution. Based on the results, this study concludes that virtual platform plays a prominent role in the effectiveness of virtual training programs during the pandemic. Therefore, the virtual training platform adopted for virtual training programs and competencies of the facilitators in modes of online training made significant contributions to the effectiveness of virtual training programs. The limitation of this study has to do with the use of a public institution, which does not allow generalization concerning the effectiveness of virtual training programs across public institutions in South Africa. Therefore, future research may consider researching representative public sector institutions in South Africa to provide robust statistical analysis and generalize the key findings.

Keywords:

Information technology,
South Africa,
Talent development,
Training effectiveness,
Virtual training platform

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