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## Editor's Note

### Enhancing government productivity using rapid e-learning: closing the gap.

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Distance learning has come a long way since Sir Isaac Pitman initiated the first correspondence course in the early 1840s. Today the Internet dramatically expands the opportunities for customized training at all levels of business and government. Corporate expenditures for e-learning in the private sector are estimated to be on the order of \$20 billion for 2007 with a projected annual growth rate of 10 percent. U.S. government spending on e-learning lags behind that of the private sector as measured by the percentage of payroll assigned to training.

Why does this gap exist when the government has been tasked with improving efficiency and effectiveness even in light of tighter budgets?

Training in general and e-learning in particular offer the opportunity to enhance both employee and customer satisfaction throughout the government workforce. Furthermore, an e-learning environment offers a vehicle to provide training consistency across the myriad of government agencies, which is especially important in the arena of emergency management. Somewhat surprisingly, in light of the "training gap," government supports training at all levels. For example, the Federal government's Office of Personnel Management e-learning initiative is designed to support the development of the Federal workforce and to facilitate the widespread distribution of training content and systems. One approach for helping governments close the "gap" is adopting a standard e-learning paradigm design.



To be productive, web-centric learning systems must be cost-effective, but the cost for developing e-learning material and content can be expensive. Cost estimates range as high as \$50,000 per hour of content delivery. Typically, the project delivery times are measured in months. Obviously, this cost level and time lag could preclude many agencies from fully exploiting the fundamental advantages of e-learning. This is where rapid e-learning solutions can make a difference.

One definition of rapid e-learning is the development and deployment of web-centric training content quickly and inexpensively. The use of a rapid e-learning approach is particularly attractive for training projects with critical timelines and frequent updates. By using proven developmental tools and adapting existing training formats, content development times can be reduced from months to weeks.

Specific examples where rapid e-learning deployment is essential include immigration management, airline passenger screening procedures, and natural disaster emergency response protocols. Even the more commonplace but vitally important task of training government managers to analyze new financial reports and auditing procedures lends itself to the rapid e-learning process. Providing digital-based training will help accelerate the movement to a digital government, which, in turn, will hasten the transformation to a digital economy.

At a time when public confidence in our government institutions is at a new all-time low the Internet provides a vehicle for producing tangible results. The effective expansion of rapid e-learning throughout all levels of government will require an integrated effort and the ongoing measurement of performance. In this regard, one simple step is to inventory current rapid e-learning projects and make these resources available throughout the government infrastructure. In this same vein, government must work on existing IT compatibility issues that breed inefficiencies and duplications.

Congress must be pressured to more fully embrace the digital age and to support rapid e-learning initiatives. Closing the gap will also require strategic alliances with the private sector and its customer-centric perspective.

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