

# 14

## IS YOUR DISTANCE EDUCATION GOING TO ACCOMPLISH USEFUL RESULTS?

### Ryan Watkins and Roger Kaufman

*Ryan Watkins, Ph.D. is assistant professor at the George Washington University, Washington, D.C. He has published more than 28 articles on the topics of return-on-investment analysis, instructional design, needs assessment, and strategic planning. He recently coauthored **Useful Educational Results** (Proactive Publication, 2001) with Roger Kaufman and Doug Leigh. Ryan is a past contributor to the **Sourcebooks**.*

*Roger Kaufman is a professor and director of the Office for Needs Assessment and Planning at Florida State University, where he has received a Professorial Excellence award. He is also a research professor of engineering management at the Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia. In addition, he is director of Roger Kaufman & Associates. He is the author of 35 books and 203 articles, and a past contributor to the **Sourcebooks**.*



#### Contact Information

Ryan Watkins  
Educational Technology Leadership  
George Washington University  
2134 G Street  
Washington DC 20052  
954-894-4212  
rwatkins@gwu.edu  
www.megaplanning.com



Roger Kaufman  
1123 Lasswade Drive  
Tallahassee, FL 32312  
850-386-6621  
rkaufman@cnap.fsu.edu  
www.megaplanning.com

**Overview** In response to societal demands, many organizations (including educational institutions, corporations, and government agencies) have moved toward offering employees, learners, and others the

opportunity to learn at a distance. Offering learning opportunities at a time and place convenient for the learner has become a priority for many organizations, as well as a source of possible revenue or cost savings.

In recent years, distance education has become a viable alternative or adjunct to the conventional educational and training delivery that served most organizations throughout the twentieth century. While many employers view distance education as an inexpensive and pragmatic method for delivering training, and many educational institutions perceive distance education as an alternative format for increasing enrollments and revenues by accessing new student markets, these expectations and intentions will not ensure the future success of distance education. Without a revised focus on meeting the needs<sup>1</sup> that moved us toward distance education in the first place, there is little hope that distance education will be capable of leading our learners into the upcoming decades with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, or abilities for achieving success and making a useful contribution.

Is your organization's strategic plan for distance education aligned with the characteristics that will be the hallmark of useful learning opportunities in the future? This is a question that can only be resolved by answering the "right" questions . . . questions few organizations have asked. The Strategic Audit for Distance Education poses many of the questions that are considered essential for success in the future (Kaufman and Watkins, 2000; Kaufman, Watkins, and Leigh, 2001).

## **SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION**

The Strategic Audit for Distance Education is designed to assist organizations in asking the "right" questions with regard to their intentions and plans for distance education and training. The audit is based on the fundamental characteristics that we have ascertained as likely to be embodied by successful distance education programs in the years to come. Complete the audit with the guidance of formal strategic planning documents as well as other documents that may assist you in honestly representing the direction that has been set for distance education and training over the next five to fifteen years within your organization.

<sup>1</sup>"Needs" are defined as gaps in results, not gaps or deficits in means, activities, or resources. (Kaufman, 2000)

# STRATEGIC AUDIT FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

	Dimensions of Distance Education	Response					
PLANNING	1. Is planning focused on processes or results?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ Results
	2. Is it focused on the individual, organization, or society?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ Society
	3. Is it driven by the media, content delivery, or its usefulness? <sup>2</sup>	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ Usefulness
	4. Are needs defined as gaps in desired resources or as gaps between current and required results?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ Results
	5. Are needs (gaps in results) formally or informally identified and prioritized?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ Formally
	6. Are the courses or programs linked to internal administration or external usefulness?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ External
	7. Does a formal, clear, and common goal link courses or programs with other learning opportunities, or is the link assumed?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ Formal Link
DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT	8. Is the content dictated by subject matter experts (SME) or derived by usefulness for the learner's future?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ Usefulness
	9. Is the content of courses or programs designed through a systematic process (e.g., performance system or instructional design) or by a subject matter expert (SME)?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ Systematic Design
	10. Is the instruction set or customizable by the learner?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ Customizable
	11. Are the designers, developers, and deliverers credentialed to do what they do: develop learning materials that work?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥ Credentialed

<sup>2</sup>While Dutton and Lievrouw (1982) caution that content should drive-media selection, this should not be confused with allowing the content to drive what should be offered in the first place.

Copyright McGraw-Hill 2002. To customize this handout for your audience, download it to your hard drive from the McGraw-Hill Web site at <http://www.books.mcgraw-hill.com/training/download>. The document can then be opened, edited, and printed using Microsoft Word or another popular word processing application.



## SCORING AND INTERPRETING RESULTS

Enter the response value for each question from the strategic audit in the table below, and then total the score.

Question Number	Response Value
Question 1	
Question 2	
Question 3	
Question 4	
Question 5	
Question 6	
Question 7	
Question 8	
Question 9	
Question 10	
Question 11	
Question 12	
Question 13	
Question 14	
Question 15	
Question 16	
Question 17	
Question 18	
Question 19	
Question 20	
<b>Total</b>	

### **Total from 108 to 120**

The organizational planning is aligned with the characteristics that place it in a competitive position for distance education where it can add value to all stakeholders. Strategic initiatives must now be matched with actual performance within the organization.

### **Total from 96 to 107**

The organization is likely on the right path. Further specification of the results to be achieved at the individual or team, organizational, and societal levels is probably required. Efforts should be made to ensure the implementation of programs and policies that are grounded with a results focus.

### Total from 84 to 95

Organizational leadership should review the commitment to distance education. If the programs are not focused on adding value through useful results, then future programs and projects should be reconsidered. A significant change creation initiative is likely required if distance education and training programs are going to have future success (see Kaufman and Lick, 2000; Kaufman, Watkins, and Leigh, 2001; Watkins, 2000).

## REFERENCES

- Kaufman, R., Watkins, R., and Guerra, I. (2001). "The Future of Distance Education: Defining and Sustaining Useful Results." *Educational Technology Magazine*. Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 19-26.
- Kaufman, R., Watkins, R., and Leigh, D. (2001). *Useful Educational Results: Defining, Prioritizing and Achieving*. Lancaster, PA: Proactive Publishing.
- Kaufman, R., and Lick, D. (2000). "Mega-Level Strategic Planning: Beyond Conventional Wisdom." In *Technology-Driven Planning: Principles to Practice*. J. Boettcher, M. Doyle, and R. Jensen, eds. Ann Arbor, MI: Society for College and University Planning.
- Kaufman, R., and Watkins, R. (2000). "Assuring the Future of Distance Learning." *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*. 1: 1, pp. 59-67.
- Kaufman, R. (2000). *Mega Planning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Watkins, R. (2000). "How Distance Education is Changing Workforce Development." *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*. Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 241-246.