

EDUCATION OF CONSULTANTS TO WORK AS TUTORS IN DISTANCE LEARNING COURSES AT UNIALGAR

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Abstract

In this report you will see the description of an internal work done with UniAlgar consultants who structure and teach training courses and after taking a training programme started working as tutors in planned distant learning projects. This education programme was divided in two moments: distance and presential which were developed through theories and practices aiming to make them realize the importance of the role of the tutor and how they should behave with their students – associates of the Algar companies (which is how the employees of the Algar Group are called). Thus, UniAlgar aims to suit its trainings to the reality of the students and to the Algar business, taking into account, among others, time and cost to execute an educational programme. Finally, it considers this initiative relevant and necessary to the performance of these consultants as tutors in distance education programmes assuring a more specialized and efficient learning process, that will be able to generate better results for students and potentialize quality in interaction and construction of distance learning.

Key words: education programme, DL, tutoring.

1- Introduction

The choice of DL¹ as a way to train and develop people has been very important and appropriate to the reality of the organization and of the collaborates working for it, as it becomes necessary to the development in a faster and large scale way.

Through DL many educational programmes can be realized, besides facilitating the access to knowledge and allowing students and tutors to enjoy the advantages this teaching modality promotes.

DL may happen throughout several resources as CBT², which means packs with books, DVDs, among other pedagogical resources necessary to a complete course, as well as to an online training – also known as e-learning – which can be produced in the video lesson format, flash animation with pictures and others. As a way of interaction and knowledge construction in this teaching modality, some tools to involve students and tutors attention are used, such as forums, chats, support communities, web conference, videoconference, blogs and others.

Nevertheless, to assure efficiency and excellence in the quality of the course, choosing this teaching modality requires a structural planning which includes all information about the distance actions to be taken. With that said UniAlgar³ defined DL as one of its educational strategies to some of its training courses, aiming to educate and enable consultants to also work as tutors in the distance modality.

2- The choice of the distance modality to the course **Education of consultants to work as tutors in distance courses in *UniAlgar*.**

Since there are so many resources to be used in the learning process, a UniAlgar invested in the education of presential training consultants so that

¹ Distance Learning

² Computer Basic Trainer

³ Corporate University of the Algar Group - <http://www.unialgar.com.br/apresentacao.aspx>

they would be able to perform DL courses in the blended learning format, which means part presential and part distance. Thereunto it was necessary an appropriate training for tutors, since conducting class and studying in a distance learning environment e different from the way we teach in a presential classroom.

2.1 – The importance of the education of training professionals to work as tutors in distance courses.

The preparation of the consultants happened as they were chosen to teach any distance course, partially or totally. The most important was for them to be aware of their role and that they had enough knowledge to interact with the students. Therefore, during their preparation they were involved in theoretical and practical tutoring activities which indicated the knowledge acquired and brought up both points of view, the student's and the tutor's.

2.2 – The Course Planning

The course to prepare consultants to work as tutors was planned to be taught to professional from different areas. The objective was for the course to be developed in classes of at least 10 students, so in some moments they would work in groups and even tutor each other.

The course was divided as follows:

- **Phase 1:** Performing and Conclusion of Distant Learning activities – DL through UniAlgar's LMS.
- **Phase 2:** Participating in the presential course at UniAlgar, with duration of 8 hours, all done in 1 day, as follows:

Education of Consultants to work as Tutors - DL					
Class	Theme	Content	Strategies	Material/ Equipment	Duration
Opening	LMS and presentation of the forum	- Presentation of the LMS; - Presentation of the course members;	- Reading of the Course Manual – Part 1; - Self introduction in the forum and debate about the activity. - Visit to LMS.	- Individual computer; - Internet; - LMS - Forum	1 week
Distant learning and its benefits nowadays	Education and DL	- Education; - History of Distance Learning; - DL benefits;	- Reading of the Course Manual; - Participating in forum debate.	- Individual computer; - Internet; - LMS - Forum	1 week
The role of the tutor	Tutoring	- Tutoring and Affection; - Tutoring and Interaction.	- Reading of the Course Manual; - Watching a video about the theme; - Participating in forum debate.	- Individual computer; - Internet; - LMS - Forum - videos	1 week
Assessment in DL	Assessment	Assessment in DL	- Reading of the Course Manual;; - Watching a video about the theme; - Reading of the text about the theme; - Participating in forum debate.	- Individual computer; - Internet; - LMS - Forum - videos - Text	1 week

Chart 1. Class Plan

Content/ Date	Study development
WEEK 1 – The LMS tutor teacher introduces him/herself in the course forum.	<p>Task 1 – Update LMS profile and insert photo.</p> <p>Task 2 – Read course forum opening topic and introduce him/herself to the group.</p> <p>Task 3 – Read course manual – 1st Part.</p>
WEEK 2 – Distance Learning and its benefits nowadays.	<p>Task 1 – Reading of parts 2, 3 and 4 of course manual.</p> <p>Task 2 – Doing the online course – History of the Algar Group.</p> <p>Task 3 – Participate in the Forum: Distance Learning and its benefits nowadays.</p>
WEEK 3 – The Role of the Tutor – Affectivity and interaction in DL.	<p>Task 1 – Reading of parts 5 and 6 of course manual.</p> <p>Task 2 – Watch videos: Parts 1 and 2 – Tutoring and the</p>

	<p>processes of teaching and learning.</p> <p>Task 3 – Participate in the forum – Tutor in DL.</p>
WEEK 4 – Assessment in DL.	<p>Task 1 – Reading of parts 7 and 8 of course manual.</p> <p>Task 2 – Watch video about assessment in DL.</p> <p>Task 3 – Reading the text about assessment in DL.</p> <p>Task 4 – Participate in the forum about assessment in DL.</p>
WEEK 5 – Closing.	<p>Task 1 – Participate in the closing forum and feedbacks.</p> <p>Task 2 – Reading of bibliography.</p>
WEEK 5 – Presential Workshop.	Presential training.

Chart 2. Student's schedule

Presential Workshop	
Morning	Afternoon
08h30 – Opening	14h00 – NTICs in trainings.
09h00 - Theme I: The challenges of Education Technologies.	14h40 – Group activity
10h00 – Breakfast	15h30 – Individual activity
10h15 – The role of the Tutor in DL	16h20 – Debate about both activities
10h40 – Debate about experiences from the online Course.	17h00 – Assessment of reaction
12h00 - Lunch	

Chart 3. Schedule of presential Workshop

2.3– Course Development

The course was developed according to the following fluxogram.



Image 1. Fluxogram of Course Development

As it can be seen, many didactic-pedagogical strategies were used during the consultants training process.

1. Previous reading of orientations in the electronic guide.
2. Previous reading of chapters of electronic book.
3. Participation in forum and chat debates
4. Activities solving
5. Tutorial practice.
6. Participation in presential workshop

From the fluxogram presented it is possible to identify which distance and presential training actions were developed. The actions taken in the distance phase and the ones taken in the presential phase are listed below.

Distance actions

Before consultants came to the training they received an invitation with an **electronic study guide (1)**, in which the whole content of the course, the planning of the presential and distance educational actions, the assessment format and an access tutorial for Algar's LMS was presented.

They also received the **course book and activities guide (2)** which were divided in modules (as shown in the charts) and included every week during the distance action as each topic was discussed and approached through the course tutor.

Thus, in this moment a weekly work was done in which a specific topic was discussed every week. They took part in **forums and chats (3)**, did the **reading and requested activities (4)** when the tutor assessed and made appropriate interventions. In a specific moment, the participants **acted as tutors (5)** to understand this role in a practical way, and also reflected about how students act and think, since they have also lived that reality.

Presential actions (6)

After the distance phase, the presential phase started which was when the topic Technologies for Education was discussed with the participants. The goal was to reinforce the knowledge acquired during the distance phase and to make them realize how important resources and technological tools are in both distance and presential learning processes. But mostly the aim was to enable learning on how to use these tools day by day. In practice, consultants should learn how to make the learning process more constructive, dynamic, interactive and interesting for the students.

During presential workshop the interactive board was used with the purpose of demonstrating its benefits to consultants and specially to tease their interest and desire of making their lessons more interactive and interesting with the use of this tool.

Laptop computers, which by then had only been used by participants to take personal notes were also used as educational tools. That way consultants did

researches in groups, posted comments in the online forums, watched videos and also read complementary material about the topic of discussion. That was another strategy adopted to show how presential classes can go much farther than the simple use of data show and PowerPoint presentations.

3- Results

The results of this work was evaluated initially by a reaction assessment in which participants could test the modality chosen as well as didactic methodology used in both distance and presential phases. Having as result:

Training strong points – the participants reported that the dedication of the instructor, the technical knowledge, the interaction, the openness, the clearness in the DL proposal, dedication to the theme, the previous solving of activities before Workshop e the ability to reflect about them and the clarification of the role of the tutor and the functioning of DL made a difference in the course and provided better conditions of reaching the teaching-learning expected.

Besides that, 89% said the workshop allowed the participants to share experiences which complemented their development process.

Training points to be improved – The participants claimed that the course hours could be reduced and the work in the LMS could be extended in the part concerning the training of the tutor environment.

Thus the final result of the training assessment was good and met 90% of participants' expectations in a satisfactory way.

The method used to assess the consultants was their participation in interaction tools as well as in the delivery of the nominated activities. There was not a content evaluation since the realization of each planned phase and the following up of the instructor plus giving feedbacks is believed to assure the analysis of the consultants learning. It consisted therefore, of a multiple choice questionnaire about the training and open space for discussion.

Throughout course instructor analysis, it was possible to realize how afraid consultants were at first to work with the DL modality. This lack of

confidence was minimized though, after experience in which they proved to be more at ease and confident to conduct a distance learning group. This has become more common in DL educational practices in UniAlgar trainings, both partially or totally distance courses.

After this course, these consultants tried to explore the possibility of dividing educational actions into presential and distance more often. Educational actions which before that moment were essentially presential – something that has changed the learning process into something more interactive for the student and has facilitated the access to knowledge in a more practical and flexible way.

4- Final Considerations

The training of consultants to work as tutors shows above all, how training courses have been adapted to the NTICs (New Technologies of Information and Communication) and to the professionals' needs, taking into account the time, the cost to realize each training and specially the reality of the Algar companies and students' – who are spread all over Brazil.

Besides that, it's important to point that as consultants are being prepared to work as tutors in distance learning projects, work in this modality becomes more specialized and efficient, bringing better results to students and an increase in interaction quality and knowledge construction.

For all that, this work is considered so important and necessary to enable these consultants to work as tutors in distance learning projects which will be developed throughout the training courses they teach.

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