

# Develop Your Learning Maturity

How smart L&D departments are delivering better results with fewer resources through effective use of innovative practices and learning technologies

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Prepared in collaboration with Towards Maturity

## Abstract

Steve Barden, Lead Consultant at LINE, surveys what learning maturity means to organisations. He argues that by considering the factors that are fundamental to the way an organisation defines its position on the road to more effective learning, it is possible to highlight where there are drivers for change.

Three of the most significant are:

- Learning structure
- Learning technology
- Learning culture

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# Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	5
<b>1. Learning Structure: From training to learning</b>	<b>5</b>
Ten Tips for re-engineering L&D	7
<b>2. Learning technology</b>	<b>9</b>
In the beginning...	9
The automation of learning	9
The model breaks down	9
The next generation	10
No more courses for horses	10
Management of learning	11
Open Source	12
The third generation	13
Ten learning technologies to keep an eye on! (wish-list)	14
<b>3. Learning culture</b>	<b>15</b>
You can lead a horse to water ...	15
The (alleged) loneliness of the self-directed learner	15
Key principles for building a second-generation learning culture	16
Conclusion	16
Ten Tips for creating a mature learning culture	17
<b>Your next steps</b>	<b>18</b>

Some material in this white paper has previously appeared on the HeadLINE blog

([www.line.co.uk/headline](http://www.line.co.uk/headline)).

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## Foreword

By Laura Overton, Director, Towards Maturity

For 15 years or more, the web has enabled innovation in learning. What's more, sufficient data now exists not only to prove that this type of innovation can have successful outcomes for businesses, but also to help us quantify and model that success in more detail.

The insights derived from our work at Towards Maturity point a clear path for our industry, and they also have wider implications for UK business. There is absolutely no doubt that organisations are getting results from this type of innovation. Conservative averages from the Towards Maturity 2010/11 Benchmark Study show that, compared with the classroom, technology in learning is delivering:

- 18% cost saving
- 22% reduction in study time
- 2x volume of learning

Many organisations have been using technology in learning for years but not all organisations are realising these benefits. Technology and innovation alone does not deliver results.

However, our research since 2003 shows that organisations with mature implementation practices derive much greater benefit from innovation. Our latest study shows that, compared with the bottom quartile, those organisations in the top quartile of implementation maturity are achieving:

- 2 x audience take-up
- 33% additional cost saving
- 50% more savings in study time
- 6 x decrease in time to proven competency
- 6 x improvement in productivity
- 7 x improvement in staff satisfaction

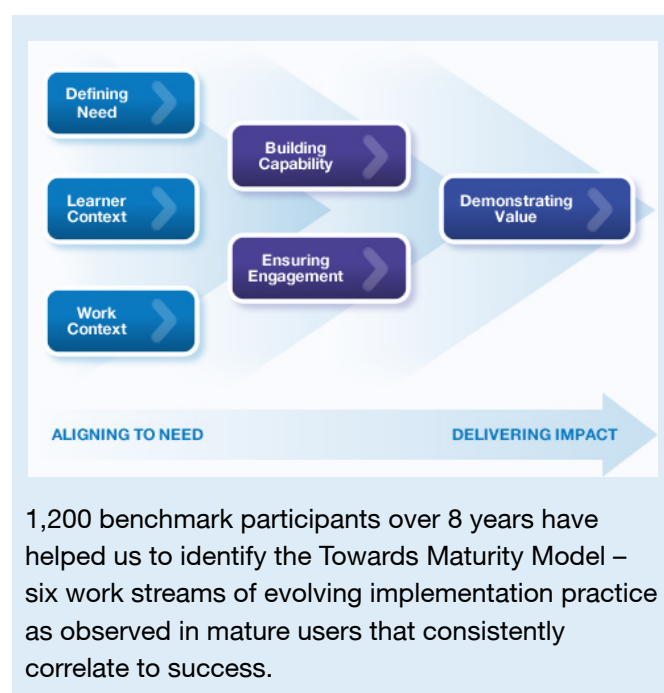
The message is clear: UK business has to develop and improve its use of these new ideas and technologies to fully realise their potential.

This message is given a greater urgency and broader significance, by virtue of the background against which it is making itself heard and understood; namely,

the wider economic context. We are living through a tough recession but business has uniquely placed the spotlight on skills as a route to growth. Though the people demands of businesses are more intense than ever before, training budgets have fallen. L&D departments are being called on to do more for less.

A mature approach to learning innovation is an absolute necessity if we are to stand a chance of meeting the challenges posed by the current economic situation, and by the deeper underlying drivers that create today's commercial realities.

Today we now have a far greater fund of knowledge than before to guide us in achieving maturity.



The Towards Maturity model creates a framework of implementation practices that can lead to maturity and it is illustrated by the practical project and programme-based work carried out by employer organisations and innovative learning providers such as LINE Communications, author of this paper and founder member of the Towards Maturity Ambassador Programme.

In this paper, Steve Barden of LINE draws on LINE's work with large organisations in designing and implementing large-scale learning programme work to illustrate how the practices uncovered by our research can be implemented.

Steve has looked at the implications of how organisations are achieving learning maturity in three key strands; structure, technology and culture.

For each of these strands, Towards Maturity has contributed a research perspective drawn from our latest benchmark report<sup>1</sup>.

The result is a practical guide grounded in independent research and day-to-day practice that has been very stimulating to work on. We hope it will provide a great deal of help and support to those taking their own steps in the journey towards greater maturity in the use of innovative learning.

### About Towards Maturity

Towards Maturity's not-for-profit benchmark practice provides independent expert advice and support in using learning innovation to accelerate business performance. Towards Maturity leverages the wealth of data provided by its benchmark, an internationally recognised longitudinal study based on the inputs of 1,200 organisations and 3,000 learners over 8 years.

[www.towardsmaturity.org](http://www.towardsmaturity.org)

Effective implementation practices are constantly evolving. To keep up to date, 2011 Towards Maturity Benchmark Research is being supported by industry ambassadors who share a passion for ensuring that independent advice is freely available to all. LINE Communications are one of the founding ambassadors and are proud to support this ongoing industry research.

[www.towardsmaturity.org/ambassadors/](http://www.towardsmaturity.org/ambassadors/)

<sup>1</sup> All research perspectives in this report come from the Towards Maturity 2010-11 Benchmark study which can be downloaded for free at [www.towardsmaturity.org/2010benchmark](http://www.towardsmaturity.org/2010benchmark).

# Introduction

By Steve Barden

Head of Consulting, LINE Communications

The last ten years have seen tumultuous change in the business of what we used to call "training" and now, as a result of these developments, more often referred to as "learning". This change in nomenclature is itself indicative of the fact that we have seen not only a transformation of the means by which we can deliver learning to learners – with technology dramatically widening the range of options available – but also a fairly seismic shift in the delivery landscape.

As the decade turns, and in order to help define some explicit benchmarks for maturity, it is therefore worth reflecting on where organisations are in their adoption of new learning approaches and new technologies. It's a big issue. To do it justice, I'm going to tackle it in this paper under three headings; learning structure, learning technology and finally the organisational attitudes that define what is learning culture.

# 1. Learning Structure: From training to learning

The paradigm that has existed for many years, and still continues in many organisations today, is one where a department – often a subset of the impersonally named ‘HR’ function – is charged with delivering training to ensure that the right skills are possessed by the ‘human resources’. Depending on the organisation, the focus on skill sets can be wide and varied or can be very narrow. No matter, the key is not so much ‘the what’ but more ‘the how’.

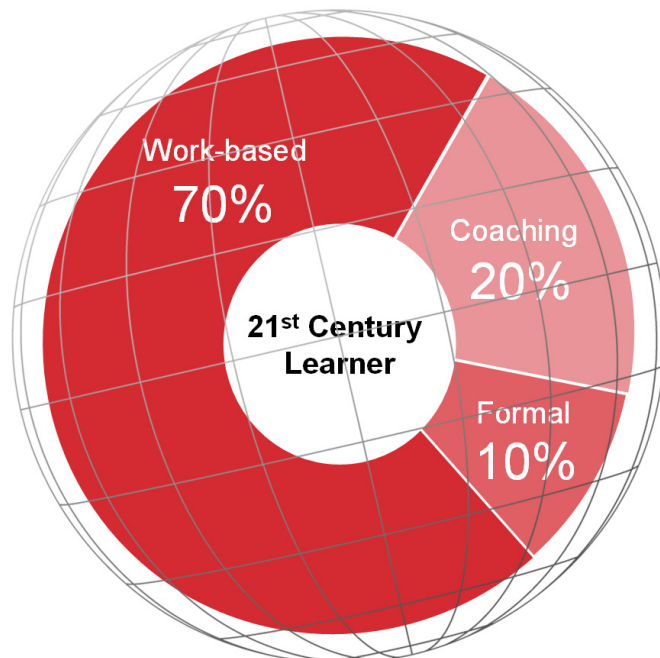
- How does the training department determine the nature of what it has to train? Does it have the right level of connection to the business it serves? Does it have proper business-led governance at its heart?
- How does it ensure the gap in current and desired performance translates into something that actually improves the performance of the people it targets? Does it apply performance consulting techniques to ensure whether and what type of intervention is needed?

- How does it demonstrate the value it adds to the business by making its people perform to the required standard more quickly? Does it use a broader spectrum of training programmes than just course-based techniques that maximise the speed to competence?

Primarily, confirming that the performance standard is met, rather than the knowledge just being possessed by the learner at the end of the training course, is paramount to ensuring L&D credibility and the business value is measurable. Time-to-competence is a good benchmark to establish in order to measure change over time.

Where many learning organisations have succeeded is in adopting an approach that encourages and encompasses informal learning methods and supports the sharing of knowledge whilst working. Not only does this mixture – which is often termed the holistic or 70/20/10 model – extend the learning process beyond the classroom but it also addresses the need to learn at the point of application. This is a holistic learning model to suit learning organisations of the 21st Century.

An organisation that thrives in today’s environment is one in which people learn quickly and flexibly to support organisational ambitions. They learn what they need, when they need it and however they can access it...  
 ...all enabled by learning innovation and technology



Based on a graphic developed for PricewaterhouseCoopers © 2010 and on the 70/20/10 learning concept by Morgan McCall, Robert W. Eichinger, and Michael M. Lombardo of the Center for Creative Leadership, Princeton University

The key consideration when looking at learning maturity is how a company (or public sector body) is organising and supporting its people in the move from being trainer-led to also being self-led in their learning.

In a traditional training set-up, the training manager's job would be, put simply, to gather and mobilise learning content centrally so that it could then be distributed and transmitted to the learners. Within more mature organisations these days, it is less and less the case that all the learning content is transmitted by L&D.

Typically, a learner might be given some objectives for what they need to know, based on an initial assessment; some learning in basic concepts, and some signposting as to where they can find the knowledge they require to complete their final assessment. From there they have to bring some level of research and application skills to bear. Further work might involve talking to someone within the organisation or drawing on the organisation's knowledge resources, not all of which are provided by L&D. It may also involve reaching out to the external environment, usually through resources on the web. The important point is that **learning content is no longer completely controlled and mediated by the L&D department.**

Along with this fundamental shift go changes in the way that learning is organised and initiated. A great deal of scope exists for applying innovative methods and tools to the centralised provision of learning – but a first step towards greater maturity might also lay in moving from a hierarchical and centralised learning provision to a more federated structure. Under this model, a particular piece of learning might be created locally, then distributed around the organisation to be facilitated and localised in each department or territory according to different local needs.

It should be said that there has always been diversity in how people organise training from organisation to organisation: in some it will be more centralised, while others have a more federated structure. Individual business units often have complete responsibility for their own training, as do horizontal functions like IT or marketing. The difference is that organisations which are mature in their learning provision approach it strategically. The way learning is structured is driven by the knowledge needs of the organisation, rather than by tactical and contingent considerations as was often the case formerly.

In the next section, I'll look at some of the technological advances being adopted by mature learning organisations and how they are being applied in novel and innovative ways. In the meantime, consider these tips for ensuring that the structure and governance of your learning department is reflecting the needs of a modern learning organisation.

## Ten Tips for re-engineering L&D

1. Accept that there is a need to change: L&D is not responsible for all learning. Embrace and facilitate work-based learning, coaching and peer sharing.
2. Ensure that you fully understand who your stakeholders are and who your customers are. You need both groups' full commitment to participating in the move towards a learner-centred focus.
3. Adopt a learner-centred and performance consulting approach with your customers to identify the core performance needs and ensure the optimal solution is identified.
4. Recognise that learner engagement and motivation to learn are crucial to success – use creativity and innovation in both communication campaigns and the learning content to attract and inspire but don't over-engineer either the design or the technical complexity – KISS is still the word (Keep It Simple, Stupid).
5. Talk and focus on business performance, business impact and demonstrate success through relevant measures and evaluation. Attendance at a course is never a relevant metric.
6. Don't persist in collecting statistics that are meaningless to the business. Getting feedback from a learner when they have just consumed a piece of learning is pointless. Develop an approach to collecting feedback on performance and business impact.
7. Encourage 'federated' generation and sharing of learning. Whether created by individuals, teams or remote parts of the organisation; its authenticity can be a key success factor.
8. Recognise and adopt a culture where 'course' is an outdated concept and replaced by building more granular learning to meet a specific competence or knowledge/skill/behavioural objective.
9. Recognise that no matter how unique your organisation, there is always someone who has already invented the wheel you need. Learn from the knowledge of others.
10. If you have addressed the first nine you should have covered the 'whole life' of learning from awareness and communication, to access, delivery, then on to application, sharing, support, refreshment, etc.

### Towards Maturity's Research Perspective:

- **From training to learning**  
Organisations in the top quartile of implementation maturity tend to be more advanced along the path of moving from training to learning. Compared to the average top quartile, organisations are almost twice as likely to be supporting the skills their business needs, their managers are more than twice as likely to give learners time to learn at home, and are two and a half times more likely to support learners in communicating and learning from each other.
- **Learning content no longer exclusively controlled by L&D**  
Mature organisations, our research shows, exhibit a far higher propensity to actively support social and experiential learning. This will typically include information sharing through online access to experts, online books, video on demand, EPS systems and communities of practice; collaborative learning, and co-creation of content.
- **Will Steve's top 10 tips work?**  
Steve's Top Ten Tips given in this section map pretty closely to a number of the activity areas within the six work streams of implementation behaviours that we have identified. However we have found that these are not common practice for example, on average:
  - Stakeholder engagement - less than 30% engage either managers or users when designing online programmes
  - Aligning to business - Only a quarter of organisations identify specific business metrics that they are looking to improve
  - Shared learning – less than 1 in 5 encourage learners to share experiences and solve problems using online social media tools

However, top quartile organisations are at least twice as likely to do these things – these tips work!

More detail about the six work streams can be found at <http://www.towardsmaturity.org/static/growing-maturity/>.

## 2. Learning technology

Now it's time to turn to the effective application of learning technologies. With examples drawn from our own work with clients, I'll be addressing the following questions in this section:

- What do we mean by a mature application of learning technologies?
- What are the important shifts in technology use that have happened between the initial, first generation of adoption within organisations and the emerging next generation?
- Where is this progress headed in the future?

I'm going to sketch out in brief the recent history of new technology developments that have been applied to learning, but I wouldn't want anyone to draw the conclusion that using the latest technology is synonymous with being a mature user of learning innovation. Technology is a factor in achieving greater maturity, not the be-all and end-all!

### In the beginning...

The first generation of e-learning adoption was all about transferring existing training activities to the computer; finding more or less direct online equivalents for physical-world processes.

So, instead of training courses delivered by trainers, we had self-paced online courses delivered to the computer desktop, in the CBT (computer-based training) mould. With the growth of the internet this became complemented by a real-time version of the physical-world training situation (i.e. synchronous), or virtual classroom.

Online courses were built with the help of authoring tools, a process akin, in those days, to desktop publishing: media assets (graphics, video, sound) would be collected and created, then embedded in a particular course along with custom-built copy.

Training administration procedures were handled by the LMS, a database-driven software program that replaced a lot of metal filing cabinets in training departments.

Meanwhile, in the adult education space, the Open

University was pioneering a form of distance learning transposed to the web – a natural enough progression for the organisation that had replaced physical-world lectures with an electronic equivalent delivered through the medium of television.

In all cases, during this initial period of learning technologies adoption, online delivery was assumed to be to a PC – whether at the employee's workstation, in a learning centre or at home – as the default delivery situation for all technology-supported learning.

### The automation of learning

This like-for-like transfer of physical-world training activities online resulted in an evolving suite of systems and software tools to cover every aspect of training development, delivery and management, it seemed. An all-encompassing vision for e-learning began to be expounded by analysts and technology vendors that promised massive efficiency savings.

Like many visions this one was destined to suffer radical modification on contact with reality.

As a model for the widespread deployment of learning, however, it has proved remarkably resilient and is still, largely speaking, the way new adopters of e-learning tend to conceptualise it. It is a simple, approachable model that has been a handrail for many organisations as they have taken their first steps in deploying learning technologies; albeit one which mature users will want to leave behind them as they move on.

### The model breaks down

In practice, this model of straight offline/online equivalents proves limiting. Engagement with learning technologies in a working situation soon shows up its shortcomings, chief among which is that it replicates an anachronistic, top-down, command-and-control training culture - out of kilter not only with the prevalent culture of the Web but also with the changing face of workplace learning.

In addition, the technology landscape has changed rapidly, in unpredictable and dynamic ways that have put even more pressure on an essentially static model. The mobile internet has evolved to a point where it is poised to take over from desktop as the most prevalent means of internet access sometime in the next two

or three years. After a sluggish start, m-learning has started to exhibit signs of rapid adoption, with the evolution of a whole new generation of tablet devices and e-readers throwing up a world of new possibilities for learning. The desktop-based early model of e-learning, once thought to be wildly over-optimistic in some quarters, now looks, if anything, not ambitious enough to encompass this burgeoning future.

The broad shift in thinking about the internet which has gone under the label Web 2.0, together with the advent of blended learning, has also revealed bigger opportunities for learning. Put baldly, it is not a matter of connecting people umbilically to machines – with the e-learning system, matrix-like, at the centre of the diagram – but about using technology flexibly and appropriately to connect people to a range of information sources and to each other in a flexible way which facilitates many different learning opportunities and pathways.

### The next generation

I would hate to suggest that achieving greater learning maturity is ever a seamless and smooth path to enlightenment. Progress towards next generation use of learning technologies is often uneven, sporadic, fitful – and even, in some instances, a bit chaotic.

Once it arrives, however, next generation learning looks and feels very different.

### No more courses for horses

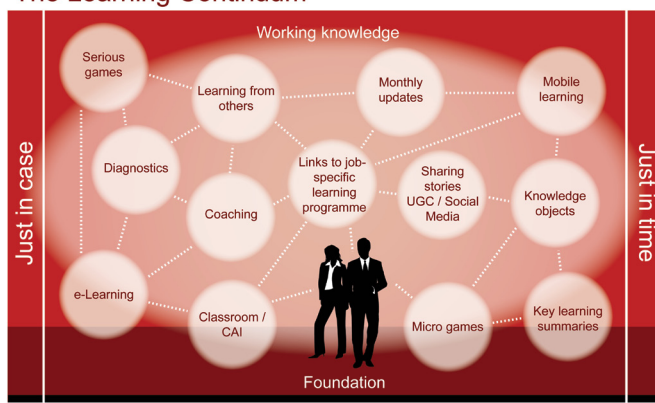
Perhaps the first feature of the traditional training landscape to come under pressure with growing maturity is the course. The notion that any training requirement should automatically and inevitably result in provision of a course breaks down – or where it persists, at least ceases to be a straight-jacket.

There are good reasons for this, and ones that were not necessarily obvious to the first generation of e-learning pioneers.

In picking apart the constituent pieces of traditional training delivery, technology forces recognition that there is a spectrum in training interventions and a blend is always going to be the most appropriate. (See diagram below). Not all elements involve instruction or, necessarily, technology. Some activities carried out under the banner of training are really more about

effective communication: you get a bunch of people in a room, give them details of a new procedure they have to follow, answer their questions and perhaps test retention afterwards. There is very little instructional depth in such an exercise – and very little rationale, in an age of networked communications media, for taking those people away from the workplace in order to carry it out.

### The Learning Continuum



Towards the other end of the spectrum are a host of activities that certainly do require a space for reflection, role-play and human mediation.

### Discovering the IKEA Concept (Client: Inter IKEA BV Systems)



Inter IKEA BV Systems developed a blended programme to train 295 retailers across 26 territories where, alongside scenario-based videos, small teams were created to research topic areas, create learning materials and then train each other, all in a facilitated environment.

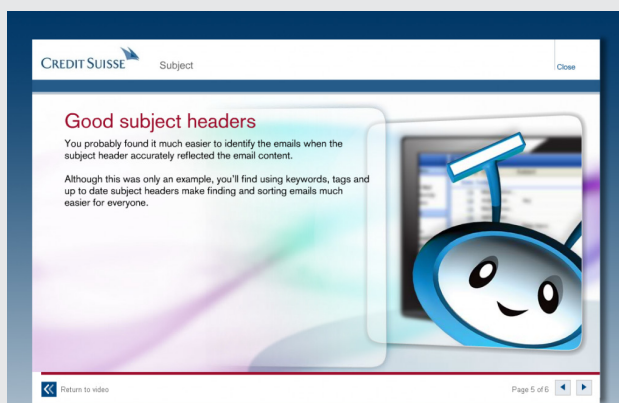
The problem is, activities at both ends of the continuum are often bound up within a single course, a fact that becomes very clear when you try to take the course online. The best answer to this conundrum, especially when designing learning programmes at scale, has proved to be designing sophisticated blends of offline and online delivery methods – selecting each resource to do the job it does best and most efficiently.

As a result, expensive people-time is not wasted, if technology is used appropriately and effectively.

A further pressure on the course comes from the realisation that having the ability to deliver learning into the working situation means that it should be delivered in smaller chunks, for use as and when needed. In this regard, the mantra ‘just-in-time, not just-in-case’ is probably familiar enough to need no explanation here!

Where discreet tasks can be handled in this way – a five-minute nugget accessed directly before an important meeting, for instance – there is less need to take people out of the workplace obviously, but also it blurs the division between learning time and work time, (not to mention less academic agonising over how best to embed learning in the learner’s memory!) The whole culture of learning delivery changes in the organisation as a result.

### Learning Nuggets (Client: Credit Suisse)

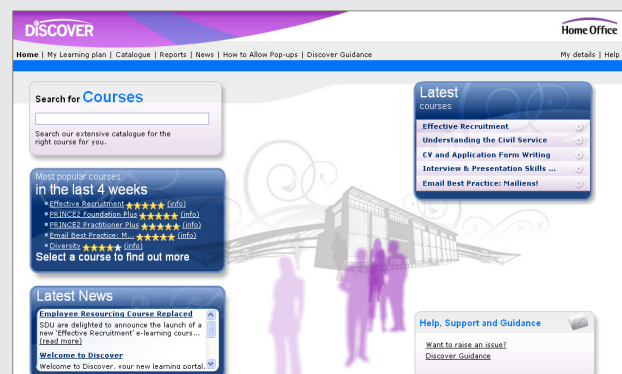


Credit Suisse delivered a new form of e-learning to all parts of their organisation through a series of media-rich, highly interactive learning nuggets on a range of topics from e-learning etiquette to more complex financial topics.

## Management of learning

Administrative functions around learning also change. From the corporate university model of first generation learning we move to a more granular, learner-focused model, with the opportunity for a greater level of personalisation. Instead of the LMS being a place to go, personalised information is increasingly pushed to the user as needed or required, with learning, in some cases, having a constant place on the user desktop.

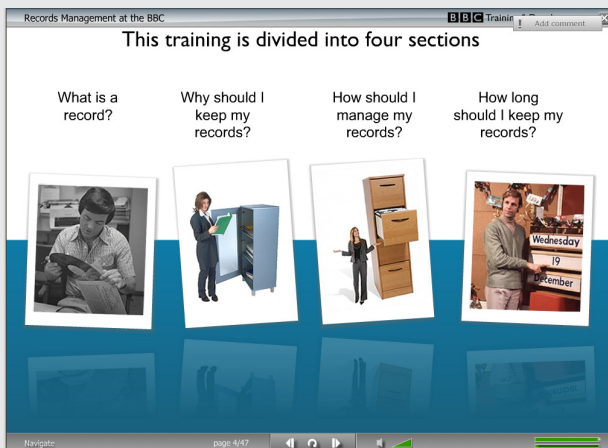
### Discovery LMS (Client: Home Office)



The Home Office rolled out a new Learning Management System (LMS) for 30,000 employees. The system was designed to enable users to reach learning quickly and easily. The platform was launched with a full communications programme and within 14 weeks, the LMS had 17,000 registered learners.

Typically, as organisations mature, they take more of their learning content production in-house, or look for ways to rationalise the production of online learning content.

## Records Management (Client: BBC)



The BBC use Mohive to quickly and easily create content and outsource certain aspects of the project to external vendors to ensure the courses and graphics look appealing and professional.

Another part of the management agenda is the introduction of rapid tools which have grown up to fulfil this need, many offering rather 'quick-and-dirty' DIY solutions. But at the premium end of the market, the Learning Content Management System (LCMS) provides a way of managing the complete content workflow, allowing re-use or rechanneling of media assets to deliver onto more than one platform. At its most sophisticated, the LCMS shades over into the field of Knowledge Management.

A good LCMS also helps with repurposing of learning content for the more diverse online delivery environment that emerges with second generation learning. Smartphones, MP3 players, touchscreen tablets and even games platforms such as the Nintendo DS become learning delivery options. Cross-platform delivery, with the technical issues it sparks, raises a new set of decisions to factor in to your learning strategy.

## Open Source

One of the major strands in Web 2.0 was the emergence of Open Source software as a major enabler of phenomena such as blogging, wikis, social media, social bookmarking, etc. Mature users become good at leveraging the free or low cost tools and resources provided by Open Source, which have made learning technologies accessible to a far wider audience

(witness the huge popularity of Moodle throughout education) and enable canny L&D departments to do far more within their existing budgets.

Mature users do more, also with existing enterprise tools. Virtual classroom technology is no longer used just to replicate the standard training session, but can also scale to encompass anything from one-to-one meetings to a whole-company webinar. Here, as earlier, we see a dissolving of the boundary between learning, knowledge and communications.

Perhaps the most significant change that comes with second generation learning, however, is the rise of the self-driven learner.

## The third generation

The description above may represent the state of the art as it is being practiced within many forward-looking teams and initiatives today, but already we are beginning to see the first juddering of a further paradigm shift for learning and communications that will define the shape of what they are doing tomorrow (Web 3.0 anyone?).

The Semantic Web, with its promise of intelligent agents – in this context, automated personal trainers who will do our information gathering for us from the databases underlying the web – may seem very much a thing of conference papers and guru hype at the moment. Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly real, with Google introducing semantic technologies to its search, and working exemplars such as Wolfram Alpha<sup>2</sup>.

Augmented reality (AR), another popular buzz phrase, is even more real, with new smartphone apps appearing every day. Although this is a technology in its infancy, as far as learning is concerned, going forward, AR has the potential to change the learning model substantially by combining stored or computer-generated data with real-time images and actions.

If the core of second generation learning was the JIT factor – a radical alteration to the time factor in delivering learning – then the third generation's distinctive shift may be all about place.

There are many examples of how technology supports learning at a specific place, for example, using a combination of mobile technologies (wireless and

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wolframalpha.com/>

GPS) and the device as the learning tool which can provide performance/knowledge support, augmented learning or assessment delivered according to the user's location. Another example is a piece of place-dependant learning delivered to a hand-held device using RFID and GPS technologies to guide an engineer sent out to repair a piece of equipment. The material guides them through the complete process, from initial identification of the equipment, the giving of step-by-step instructions according to a maintenance schedule, down to a fine level of specific detail advising exactly which piece of equipment to repair and with what to repair it.

Another example is from the Singapore Army where cadets are set trails to learn about the military heritage and culture by physically attending sites, capturing images and videos and answering place dependent questions. This learner-driven, place-dependent learning using mobile devices epitomises how technology can underpin action learning and I think is the shape of things to come.

Clearly cross-platform delivery is an important part of this future, and a couple of technologies are important to watch in this regard.



Picture courtesy of LDR Pte Ltd, Singapore

The impact of HTML5, the next generation of web code, already in the early stages of introduction, will become more pervasive across platforms, making learning more accessible.



There will be fewer issues about getting data to a mobile device, making cross-platform development easier from a development point of view and so cheaper and easier to deliver.

LCMSs are becoming more sophisticated in their ability to deliver cross-platform and to multiple channels, and can be the heart of a right-time/right-place delivery system that leverages an organisation's information and data resources efficiently to empower and support its workforce.

Third generation learning will be more about helping with tasks in real time, rather than transferring knowledge for later use, and thus will be less dependent on memory. Orientation or concept building, however, will probably still be done in the traditional way, and will be engineered to leave you with a clear view of how you get the knowledge you need to do the job.

We foresee an ever greater adoption of the 70/20/10 model mentioned earlier in this paper – addressing the need to learn at the point of application. Already much more is taking place in that space; blending learning and knowledge at work with more informal learning with others going on, and sharing of best practices.

In a sense, organisational learning comes full circle here: informal learning has always been the greater part of the learning taking place, outstripping formal training courses. Third generation use of learning technology will simply give informal learning its proper place and prominence – while also, in the process, scaling up and turbo-charging its effectiveness.

As greater maturity comes to the learning and communications community, those who might once have considered IT very much part of someone else's remit become avid watchers of the technology landscape as it evolves. But they have to learn to distinguish fact from fiction. One resource well worth keeping an eye on, if you want to keep a level eye on where third generation learning is headed, is the Gartner emerging technologies hype cycle.<sup>3</sup>

### Ten learning technologies to keep an eye on! (wish-list)

1. Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) where the learner has some control, not just training management pushing learning content
2. Mobile devices which enhance the learning, enhance the blend and drive peer-group (social) learning
3. Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) which supports place- and security-dependent learning. Near Field Communication (NFC) is also 'one to watch' in this space
4. Immersive game engines to drive goal-based scenario learning
5. Cross-platform toolsets that truly make use of the unique power of each target device and platform
6. e-portfolio tools which support the development of accreditation and continuing professional development (CPD)
7. Search engines which enable federated search across an organisation
8. Web conferencing tools that simply connect people to share knowledge both synchronously and asynchronously
9. Video tubes that use the visual medium to inspire and engage
10. Wiki/social tools that simplify the sharing of best-practice knowledge and remove the barriers from siloed information
11. And last but not least, true social engines that combine the best of the above

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=1124212>

### Towards Maturity's Research Perspective:

- **Technology and Maturity**  
It is important, in our view, to draw a distinction between technology adoption and maturity. In our studies over the last 8 years, the type of technology used does not correlate to success but the implementation approach does. Ultimately, success and engagement isn't about what technologies are being used ; it's about what you do with it, and the results you get for the business.
- **Perennial (and growing) popularity of the LMS**  
Towards Maturity statistics show that Learning Management Systems (LMS) have a wide (78%) and still growing take-up in learning, reflecting where most organisations are at present - i.e. with the emphasis being on automation of learning rather than on business transformation. Use of LMS does not become less of a focus as organisations mature, however: our study shows that top quartile organisations on the whole are more likely to introduce tools that manage programme delivery more efficiently, a category that includes learning management systems and virtual learning environments.
- **Mature organisations use a greater range of technologies**  
Whilst specific technologies do not influence results, our study shows that more mature organisations tend to use a wider range of additional tools and technologies in their portfolio than those less mature. For example 83% of mature organisations' technologies include virtual classroom in the mix vs 26% for novice organisations, 79% use online books (vs 21%). They are also more likely to use mobile apps, games and tools for online evaluation of business impact.
- **Growth of m-learning**  
Mobile delivery is among the most rapidly growing technology trends in learning. 36% of the organisations in our study now use mobile as part of the mix.

### 3. Learning culture

Organisational culture is a subject about which it is extraordinarily difficult to generalise. Nothing is more individual, more local and more specific to an organisation than its culture.

This diversity is one of the major reasons why maturity in the use of learning technologies varies so widely from organisation to organisation, from sector to sector – and why new ideas that take root fairly easily within one type of company work less easily within another.

We see this clearly when we look at one of the key principles of second-generation learning – the self-directed learner.

#### You can lead a horse to water ...

Many accept the idea of the self-directed learner as a 'given' of the 21st century landscape. However for others, the phrase is almost an oxymoron. Learners need to be led, they will say, usually by the nose. Left to their own devices, learners are no more likely to be self-directed than horses are likely to organise their own Grand National.

For many organisations which have a rigid, top-down, command-and-control culture this is undoubtedly the case. Manufacturing companies organised around a production-line model, for instance, tend to have very traditional approaches to training.

But let's take a different example: that of a global organisation in the professional services sector with a young, highly-educated workforce used to dealing in intangibles and to operating in a virtualised environment. These learners are highly motivated, use online tools like search engines with ease and are highly likely to be mainly self-directed in their learning. In this case, the classical model of classroom training will very quickly prove unable to fulfil their needs and expectations, and the organisation is likely to experience an upward pressure for more flexibility in the way learning is provided.

Then again, many large organisations have highly mixed workforces. The employees of a single large organisation may encompass lawyers, IT professionals, salespeople, manual workers, administrators and customer-facing call-centre staff. Each of these groups

is likely to have a different attitude – and hence support need – to pursuing their own learning. In addition, organisations frequently need to train people who are within their value chain but outside the organisation. We see this in the automotive sector, for instance, where a car manufacturer will have to give product training to showroom staff, within companies which may have cultures very different to its own.

Contemplating such a mixed picture, it is all too easy to make the objection that no L&D department can be expected to cope with this degree of complexity in tailoring its provision of learning: faced with pressure on budgets, a one-size-fits-all approach is almost inescapable, and a default towards the traditional 'spoon-feeding' model of training.

The reason why we feel this argument is fallacious is that it misrepresents the true nature of the relationship between learner and organisation within a mature, second-generation learning culture.

#### The (alleged) loneliness of the self-directed learner

The first thing to appreciate is that it should never be up to the learner alone to make learning work. Shaping and directing is required, if there is not to be wasted effort. Learners need the structure and support of their organisation to grow the knowledge and skills appropriate to their role. There must be a balance between the organisation's need to control and its sometimes conflicting need to provide learners with a degree of freedom.

This means having the right kind of learning culture – something that doesn't emerge spontaneously after the uttering of a suitable quantity of impressive-sounding buzzwords on the part of L&D. It has to be created.

So what is it that organisations need to do to pull together the structure and the technology that we have talked about in the previous articles in this series to create an environment and culture that is supportive of learning?

## Key principles for building a second-generation learning culture

Good signposting of knowledge is essential. It's not enough to say that everything you need to know is on Google: you must give links. As Dr Johnson's famously said, 'Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information on it'. This 'knowing where' not 'knowing what' is an important principle for next-generation learning.

Organisations must create a support infrastructure for their learners which might take the form of, for instance, a dedicated learning repository. They might have to structure themselves differently to achieve this, since disciplines such as knowledge management are often in discrete organisational 'silos' and under this model might have to be integrated with the L&D effort more closely.

The role of the trainer changes from one where the dominant activity is instruction to one where facilitation and coaching becomes more important. But as well as top-down support, learners should also benefit from peer-group support. It is increasingly recognised that learning has a whole social dimension, too easily overlooked. Again, this will not happen spontaneously, it must be intelligently fostered and enabled.

It may also be necessary to address the readiness of the learner to embrace and benefit from such a culture. Becoming a self-directed learner may involve learning how to learn.

But how ready and willing is the workforce we currently have to do this?

Technology is now commonplace in learning across business, in 2010 the CIPD's learning and talent survey showed that 85% of UK organisations use learning technologies in some way, the 2011 survey showed that the use of e-learning is one of the fastest growing media (with 54% increasing use). The result of this is that at least a proportion of the workforce that an organisation inducts from other organisations – i.e. not directly from education – may well have come through companies that have embraced self-directed learning.

Education has changed, too; with a huge government investment in getting technology into schools over the last decade and moves towards more collaborative styles of learning and working. In fact the danger

exists that workplace learning does not keep pace with these changes in Education. With a high percentage of schools and further/higher educational institutions focused on collaborative and self-directed learning, and those learners then joining organisations with a more conservative learning culture, there is potential for a sizeable mismatch between expectations and reality, resulting in delays getting new starters up to speed, underperformance in post and a larger number of recruitment failures.

Employers who wish to give their people more autonomy as learners may find they are pushing at an open door.

## Conclusion

Organisations are becoming ever more complex, demanding greater flexibility of their employees. Their people must be supported in dealing with continuous change, and an ever-increasing pace of change.

The challenge today is for business leaders to be enlightened enough to grasp the importance of transforming their training, and to take the right strategic decisions that will foster a learning culture appropriate to the scale of the challenges that its people will face in their daily working lives.

## Ten Tips for creating a mature learning culture

1. Consider all performance issues as change opportunities
2. Make sure that all performance issues don't lead to a training intervention
3. Don't expect Subject Matter Experts to develop great learning; ignore the importance of getting great learning design at your peril
4. Encourage the use of social media but don't expect all learning to be possible in 140 characters
5. Encourage everyone to be a coach
6. Break down the walls of all silos
7. If content is king, be a federalist. Remember, knowledge is not power. Knowing where to go for the knowledge is what matters.
8. Not all learners are alike. Treat them as individuals and consider each has a preferred learning style that, if considered, will best engage them
9. Help people learn how to learn. Education has been doing it for a decade but older staff may need help, particularly where online and virtual events occur
10. Finally, remember effective learning needs a full toolbox. Not all problems are nails and not all solutions are a hammer

### Towards Maturity's Research Perspective:

- **Supporting self-directed learners**  
As organisations mature in their use of Learning Technologies, they are increasingly likely to be proactive in building skills in their L&D workforce focused on creating an environment supportive of learners. Action areas that set the top quartile apart include using highly interactive methods (e.g. games-based), designing blends that include social media, connecting learners to tutors and subject experts when learning online, simulating the work environment for assessment, and introducing solutions that target learning via diagnostic tools.
- **Ensuring engagement**  
Matures users are increasingly likely to focus on managing change within the business by working with key stakeholders. Accelerators that set top quartile organisations apart include identifying and training local champions as change agents, engaging top managers as exemplary users and advocates of innovative learning, and equipping line managers with resources to support their teams in using learning.
- **Recognising the social dimension of learning**  
Almost 50% of all organisations provide access to third party social media sites (such as Facebook and Twitter) and 76% are considering how social media might be used in learning. But, generally speaking, the much-forecast explosion in the use of social media is slow to take off with only 16% using third party social media tools in learning at the moment. However, top quartile organisations are much more likely to have integrated tools and technologies to support social and experiential learning into their provision. They are also almost twice as likely to have a social media open-access policy, and this open-access policy seems to yield results: on average, those providing such access see increased take-up of e-learning, reduced training cost, an increase in learning outside of the workplace, and increased time to competency.

## Your next steps

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