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**“E-Learning and Change Management – The Challenge”
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1. Introduction

Much has been written about e-learning being a lot to do with change management, but with little explanation of what this actually means. The hypothesis here is that e-learning is everything to do with change management, and that the two – although practised as separate disciplines – are inextricably linked. Furthermore, in the same way that e-learning can be a force for change, change management can also be a force for e-learning.

The question is, does it matter and if so, how? Well, the contention is that it matters a lot, that e-learning, by its very nature, introduces change to both the people and business dimensions of an organisation, on any scale. And good business practitioners know that you cannot change the way in which an organisation works simply by implementing the change. It must be analysed, measured, communicated and planned. It must be managed.

Getting to basics, the process of learning is concerned with attitudes, values, skills and knowledge, and has the aim of effecting a change in performance and behaviour, and so achieving the objective of adding value to an organisation. In this environment, the true potential of e-learning lies principally in the ability to provide on-tap learning – learning available anytime, anywhere – combined with the tools to measure learning outcomes, and a network to enable collaboration. Therefore, the potential for an organisation is that it can be in a state of continuous learning – continuous change. In this way, e-learning has the potential to change the dynamics of an enterprise, which is the fundamental aim of the change management practitioner.

There is a common perception that e-learning has not really delivered on its potential nor its promises. 2003 saw the publication of a raft of surveys and case studies with this as their general conclusion. Is it the case that e-learning has been tarred and feathered as an underachiever for the simple reason that the issue of change management has not been considered and addressed as a fundamental part of the process?

As a foundation for the paper, research was undertaken with four new case studies drawn from a cross section of business: a manufacturer, a government agency, a retailer and a financial services company. All are involved in implementing e-learning throughout their organisations, all at different stages, and all took a different approach, but none-the-less encountered common problems and issues.

What this paper sets out to do is to define what e-learning is within the change model, and to describe a new approach, with a strong argument that e-learning must evolve if it is going to attain a valid and valuable role in private and public sector enterprises. In fact, it needs to become something more aligned to “e-transform”.

2. Definitions, Status and Roles



In order to understand where we need to go, we need to understand where we are, and where we have come from, so that we have a clearer idea of the issues at play.

The starting point is to recognise that e-learning and change management must be seen against a broader background of often conflicting issues and dynamics, and the shifting sands of corporate structure and organisational change. Secondly, there are ever increasing demands on organisations, commercial or otherwise, to achieve a state of continuous improvement and innovation, with the aim of becoming more competitive. And they seek to fulfil a lot of this through the introduction of new technologies such as intranet portals and information / knowledge management systems. Curiously, e-learning is not regarded as a core tool in all of this.

However, the endeavour of attaining continuous innovation can only be satisfied through a perpetual mix of existing thinking with new thinking, new experiences and new ideas: in other words, an environment of collaborative learning, where the value of the network increases in proportion to its size. This concept lies at the heart of the change management model, but is not fully expressed in its e-learning counterpart. So, we're only dealing with half of the picture.

E-Learning – the issues

The status of training has always been problematic. It is perceived as a separate activity from the core business, immeasurable and unquantifiable: in other words, it's not perceived to be a core business process, but rather a "cost" or "overhead", which is frequently the first in the firing line when budgets need to be cut. The e-learning proposition played heavily on this aspect of training by promoting the financial savings to be gained through its introduction as a replacement for expensive and time consuming classroom based training sessions, in much the same way as a plug-in or sticking plaster might be applied. This, of course created a classic "Catch 22" where, on the one hand, the potential cost benefits of e-learning proved very attractive, but at the expense of perpetuating a perception of training as a singular and isolated activity on the other. As long as it remains seen as an overhead cost, as opposed to a business process, learning and training will remain in the fiscal firing line.

Added to this, there is far too much emphasis placed on e-learning as a product, a menu of items to choose from, bespoke or otherwise. Again, this attitude limits the role of e-learning, and keeps it firmly on the sidelines of the enterprise, and off the agenda of top management. Its impact on the business is measured in terms of money saved and training outcomes for each individual. Again, a limited horizon. In this model, e-learning remains nothing more than an ad hoc tool, an adjunct to corporate activity, supported by top management but not integral to their enterprise management agenda.

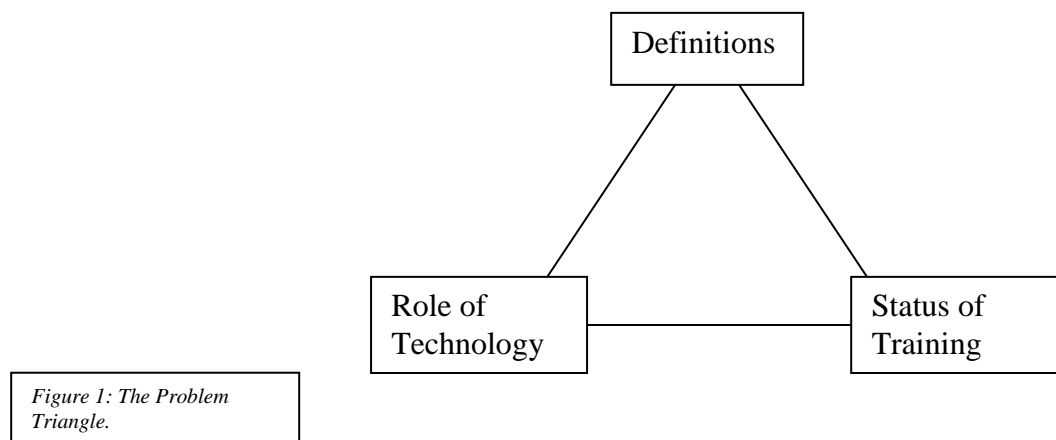
Another part of the e-learning problem lies with definitions. The vocabulary of the industry is ill-defined and persistently misunderstood or misinterpreted. Just ask four different people for their definition of e-learning, and you are more than likely to receive four different answers. This is compounded by a lack of understanding of the role of technology in all of this, and the impact that technology based training might have on an enterprise from the



inside out. Of course, this is not an entirely unexpected result where you have a relatively new industry and practice that relies on a loose and often conflicting alliance between educationalists and trainers, technologists, and designers: each has their own language, and set of priorities.

You would think that some or all of these issues would be addressed and resolved through the practice of developing and implementing a properly researched and thought through e-learning strategy. Not so. Some organisations which have taken this approach have floundered, others have found themselves throwing them away. Still others have achieved a measure of success without even having one. Why is this? More than likely these strategies are narrow and wholly focused on training needs analysis, training objectives and cost reductions. Any facet that could remotely be considered to lie within the realm of change management will be limited to some vaguely eschewed “campaign of awareness”. And, in some cases, nothing at all. Again, the issue is one of definition.

Taking these three issues together – the status of training, the role of technology and shifting definitions – you end up with something called the “problem triangle”. The elements are mutually dependent: if one is not working, none of them will.



Having said that, Laura Overton’s recently published study on “Linking Learning to Business”^{*} does reveal some positive developments, and its key findings describing the common factors in success would appear to support most of the current thinking on e-learning, namely:

- That the e-learning strategy is aligned to and fulfils a core business strategy from the outset, and continuous integration with multiple business processes ensures ongoing sustainability;
- That learner motivation is understood and developed as a high priority;

^{*} “Linking Learning to Business”, Laura Overton Associates, March 2003.



- That quick wins are delivered early on in the implementation process;
- That investment is made in various support mechanisms;
- That success criteria and measurement are varied on a project by project basis but uses an agreed set of criteria for reporting to management;
- That strong investment is made in communications with all stakeholders at project launch and on a continuous basis.

But, there is nothing here that relates to a proactive relationship with change management practice. And e-learning remains, for the vast majority, stuck somewhere between the training department and the IT department. Could it be that the lack of addressing the change agenda has kept it here?

Nowhere do we see the visionary who sees e-learning as communication, as the language and enabler of change and who draws a picture of an outcome not based on individuals, but on an organisation as a whole. This is what is meant by “e-transform”: the vision to achieve a perpetual state of transformation and therefore innovation whose currency is not money, but knowledge.

So what is change management, what is its relationship with e-learning, and does it matter? If it does, what can a new change management based approach do to further success?

Change Management

Change Management – sometimes referred to as “mess management” - is a totally separate professional discipline and body of practice, with its own models that are not too dissimilar from those that we see associated with e-learning. Its aim is to effect managed change in both the people and business dimensions of an enterprise simultaneously. Practitioners and theorists are concerned with internal and external drivers for change; an internal driver can be, for instance, a need to streamline the time it takes to move an idea from the drawing board to the production line whereas an external driver could be a new piece of legislation that introduces new mandatory responsibilities for a commercial enterprise. In reality, all drivers have their root externally, and most enterprises are in a constant state of enquiry, movement and change. It doesn't, however, follow that this process is managed in any meaningful or effective way. The point is that the more able an enterprise is to embrace change, the more successful it will be. And, if change is concerned with learning, then learning should be at the very heart of this movement.

The central theme of change management revolves around the act of moving from one state to another and its principle diagnostic tools are known as “change goals”. Transform goals describe the differences between the current state and the future desired state – the “why”. Reduce goals describe what needs to be actioned or put in place in order to reduce the transform goals to zero – the “what”. Apply goals describe how this will be done – the “how”. It's a bit like the Training Needs Analysis process.



So far, on a superficial level, the approach to both change management and e-learning would appear to be similar. But there is one major difference. Change management tends to focus on the whole organisation, and analyses the impact that change will have enterprise wide, on the basis that something is only an end or a means when it is in relation to something else. The change management practice determines these relationships in order to forecast a valid outcome of a change process. Conversely, with e-learning, it is sometimes regarded as a bonus that people use e-learning in a way that had not been anticipated – in other words, unplanned! Another interesting and fundamental difference between the two practices is that change management extols the virtues and indeed necessity of “tossing out the rule book” from the outset. If change is to be effected in an enterprise, it will not happen through adhering to pre-existing dogma. With e-learning, the practice has over time become almost hidebound by rules and guidelines allegedly drawn from best practice. The principle, therefore, with e-learning is based on the idea that if it worked in this way with one organisation, it will work similarly with another, which is not strictly speaking true. In fact, in almost all of the case studies contained in this paper there was a marked and pointed disavowal of the generic e-learning approach, but tempered with a desire to communicate with other e-learning users not so much for the purpose of swopping best practice experiences, but more for sharing issues and problems.

A widely accepted change model is ADKAR[†]. This is based on a five stage process: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement. The figure below illustrates how this model works.

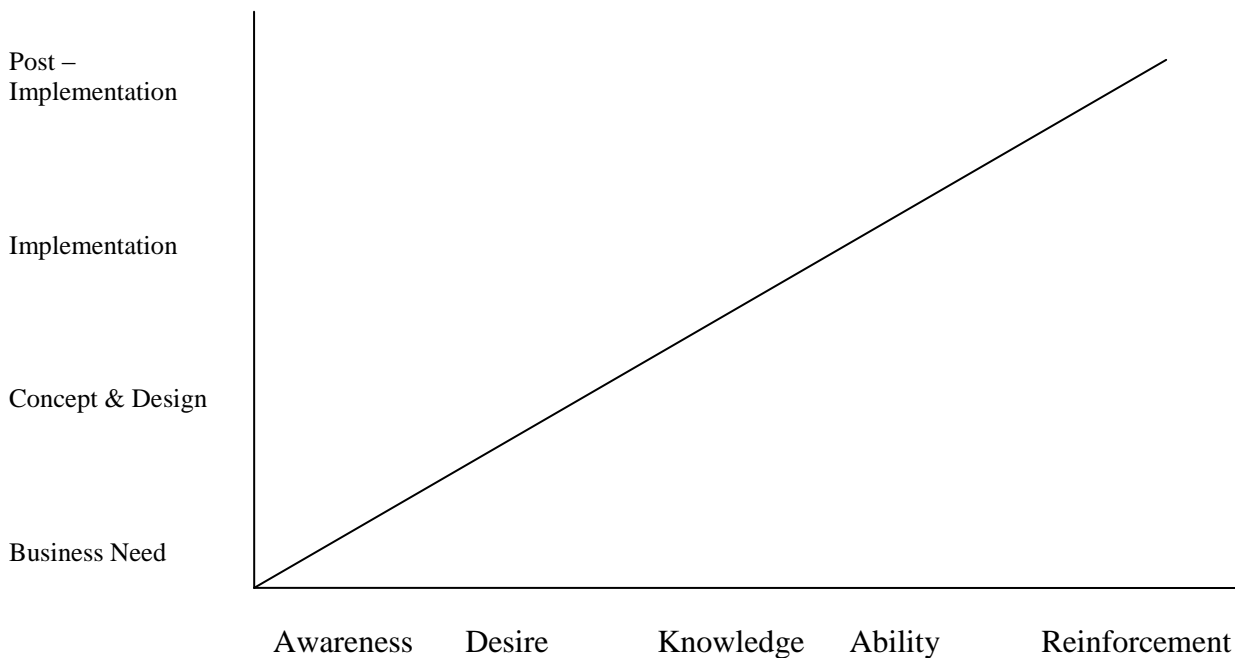


Figure 2: the ADKAR Model

[†] ©. Prosci & The Change Management Center



The Awareness stage determines the need for change and Desire focuses on generating a desire to participate and support the change. Knowledge is concerned with determining how to change, which results in the Ability to implement the requirements of the change, whether it be new skills and behaviours, or procedures and processes. The Reinforcement phase is critical in sustaining the change post-implementation, and in e-learning terms, would relate to the provision of support and personal reward, for instance. In a perpetual state of transformation, the enterprise is constantly reviewing and analysing its business needs to ensure that it is always aware of any need for change. This, of course, links back to the earlier stated concept of continuous innovation through collaborative learning.

Like e-learning, change management research shows the absolute imperative of having top level sponsorship for any project. With change management, it's easy to see why, as such a project is all about effecting a change to a larger or lesser degree in how the business works. In reality, e-learning projects seek and get no more than a top level sanction (mainly because of the budgets involved), and are not seen by senior management as tools for enterprise change. They are seen as tools for enterprise cost-cutting and pragmatism.

Change Management has four recognised strategies:

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Rational-Empirical | The change strategy is based on appealing to human self-interest through offering incentives. |
| Normative-Reeducative | This strategy has the tenet that people tend to adhere to social and cultural normalities, and therefore if these are re-defined, commitment to the new values can be achieved through communication and education. |
| Power-Coercive | Here, the approach accepts that people will do as they are told, so the change strategy is based on the exercise of authority with, where necessary, the imposition of penalties for failure to comply. |
| Environmental-Adaptive | People are adaptable. This approach is based on a gradual transference from an old environment / organisation to a new one. |

In almost every case, e-learning has been introduced to an organisation using the Power-Coercive approach, or a combination of this and the Rational-Empirical approach. And probably not for considered reasons, but more for practical and financial reasons.



Interestingly enough, a survey carried out in 2003 by an American Change Management* research and publishing company in the change management field concluded that the key factors to success were extremely similar to those highlighted by Laura Overton, but with a much stronger emphasis on methods of overcoming resistance barriers.

3. Case Studies

The case studies were chosen to reflect a cross section of business activity, and different levels of e-learning adoption. These are all based on indepth discussions with key people within each organisation. The intention was to draw out different approaches to and experiences of e-learning, and to gain an understanding of the impact that e-learning had on both the businesses and their people. Did e-learning bring about change at the enterprise level, and what can be learned from these examples?

3.1 University for Lloyds TSB

Background

Some six years ago, Lloyds used around 800 standalone PCs for e-learning throughout the organisation. There were two key catalysts that brought about a sea-change in the approach to and use of e-learning. First, Lloyds and TSB merged, which naturally raised a plethora of management issues. Second, around 3 years ago, the Lloyds TSB intranet arrived. But it took one more catalyst to realise the importance of this: a senior manager with a background in Sales, IT and Training. Although the intranet had been built with core business processes in mind, this manager saw it as a communications channel for learning.

Today the e-learning system consists of three channels:

- Standalone PCs, which clocked around 150,000 sessions in the last year
- Intranet, which logs 750,000 hits on average each month
- Internet, which logs between 15-16,000 hits per month.
- It is expected that a new online testing system will deliver 1.6 million tests during 2004.

Altogether the University for Lloyds TSB provides training services to around 70,000 employees and has two residential centres plus a further 35 training centres around the UK. 50% of learning hours are “face to face”.

Experience and impact

Up until now, the use of e-learning has been driven predominantly by “needs must”, starting with the merger of the two institutions and the need, for example, to create and implement one single computerised counter system. With so many people to train in such a short space of time, alternatives to traditional methods had to be considered and e-learning provided the solution. However, before this could be tackled, there was one very practical issue that needed to be resolved. Until 4 years ago, all TSB staff had never used a Windows system

* Change Management Learning Center, “2003 Best Practices in Change Management Report” ©. Prosci



before. Rather than instigate a Windows training program, instead Lloyds TSB created cybercafés inside all main buildings, which allowed people to “play” and get familiar with Windows in an informal setting which is an ideal approach to adult learning, inspiring a sense of comfort, confidence and security. So, in this instance, a normative re-educative approach was taken, and it worked.

Between then and now, the e-learning strategy has been very much project based, and guided by a cross-discipline Strategy and Faculty Board comprising board level directors. It was their role to ensure that the learning agenda was continuously reviewed against the company’s agenda and business needs. This board also had an agenda of change and leadership development. This structure will shortly change and, for the first time, Lloyds TSB will have a Human Resources Director sitting on the main board, whose remit includes e-learning.

A major change is the introduction of an enterprise wide Performance and Learning Management System (PLMS), giving the ability to link performance to competencies for the first time. The impact that this system is likely to have on the business and its processes, the way that learning is experienced, and the way that people work is massive, and planned for. Effort has been invested in ensuring that some cornerstone functions of the PLMS are already in place, such as the concept of managed career and personal development. The objective is that the PLMS will be operating “as part of the business as usual” within two years. It is clear that in their planning, Lloyds TSB have drawn on the experience and vision of a multi-disciplinary team who, although not perhaps using the precise terminology of change management, have demonstrated the application of change goals to better understand why changes are needed, what needs to change and how, and, most importantly, what the impact will be on the enterprise as a whole.

It is interesting to note that Lloyds TSB do not rate their success in terms of statistics on course completion, for instance. Quite rightly, success is considered to have been achieved if the learning objectives are achieved – that is, an assessment passed. Taking a pragmatic point of view, completion of a learning course is irrelevant, so long as the learning outcome is achieved. On anecdotal evidence it has been noted that where a group of people from the same working environment attend a course, typically one will complete all of the learning content. That person becomes the unelected “expert” in the topic!

The evidence from Lloyds TSB shows that the organisation is following a change agenda rather than an e-learning specific one. The emphasis is on measuring a change in knowledge as opposed to course completion, which empowers the individual to customise their own use of the learning offering.

3.2 Rolls-Royce plc

Background

Rolls-Royce, unlike many enterprises, has a long standing training culture, stemming back to the 1960s when the company regularly recruited and trained around 1,000 apprentices at any one time.



The company's first toe into the e-learning bucket, like Lloyds TSB, was driven by a "needs must" approach when in 1991 a new manufacturing system was introduced which required the rapid training of a very large group of people. Traditional classroom methods were considered to be impractical and prohibitively costly, whereas e-learning, delivered via Learning Resource Centres, seemed to offer the best solution. A couple of interesting and early lessons in change management were learned.

First, the e-learning program rapidly became obsolete because as people started to use the manufacturing software system, having gone through the training, they started to adapt and alter the way that they used it. Although it was widely used during implementation, the subsequent cost of revising the program's contents proved prohibitive, and it was not a long-term solution for refresher training or new starters post-implementation. Second, it became obvious that there was an issue concerning IT skills levels, which had not been anticipated. So, in this case, the introduction of e-learning brought about a change in the way that people did things, and therefore how the business operated, but this could not be readily reflected back into the training content itself and so the training could not be sustained. However, this program did provide the foundation for the establishment of Learning Resource Centres across the company's main UK sites.

Today, Rolls-Royce has six training centres in the UK, Germany and the USA, plus a further nine predominantly e-learning based Learning Resource Centres. In 2003, employees took a total of around 77,000 days of training. The Corporate Learning and Career Development group comprises a team of 80 people, including in-house content developers, reporting to the Director of Learning & Career Development. The scope of this group is across the global organisation of 35,000 employees in major locations in the UK, USA, Canada, Germany and Scandinavia. One of the remits of this group is Organisation Change and Development.

Experience and Impact

The company's early forays into e-learning proved invaluable as it allowed a considered approach to be taken during the early hype of e-learning in the late 1990s. The lesson had been learnt that there were no easy cost savings to be made in the company from e-learning, and it allowed a more planned and strategic approach to be taken. This time, it can be argued that change management acted as a force for e-learning (within a blended learning environment). During the mid 1990s, Rolls-Royce transitioned from a predominantly British based company operating in the Aerospace industry, into one with a broadened business portfolio and with 40% of its employees now based outside of the UK. Consequently, although the company began to shrink in size, its staff were no longer conveniently located for access to training centres and classrooms. For example, 10 years ago, half of the company's staff was located close to the main training centre in Derby: now, less than one third is.

The introduction of e-learning at the enterprise level was therefore an enabler of this change. Moreover, in a mirror of the organisation's transition from a predominantly "function-based" to a customer facing business, the company's approach to learning was restructured into a structure similar to that of a corporate university, taking a lifelong learning approach. Now, employees have access to professional development frameworks, encompassing generic as well as profession specific learning.



Significantly, Rolls-Royce recognises the value of extending the Return on Investment model to measure the benefits of learning against business performance *because* this gives a measure to change. Moreover, in order to fully express and address change issues, it is vital that the e-learning strategy is embedded within the company's overall learning strategy which, in turn, is closely aligned to the company's business strategy as a whole.

As a fundamental step forward in this process, the Learning and Career Development Group have effectively begun the process of change management by determining the desired future state versus the present one, and therefore the identification of the change goals. Some of these issues are focused on:

- Ensuring stakeholders within the main Rolls-Royce businesses are involved in guiding the direction and policies around e-learning.
- Addressing the IT skills levels by forming links with local colleges who can provide the necessary upskilling courses.
- The need to create consistency and manage and amount of "freelance" e-learning products being created and/or used by different elements of the company, by applying corporate policies and standards.
- Developing a solution for the time scheduling problem, where there is a perception that it is more difficult to spend an hour at the desk doing a piece of e-learning than it is to take a day out at a training centre. The plan is to introduce "learning zones" at places of work so that people don't have to sit and learn at their own desktops.
- Providing better access to hardware facilities for factory floor employees (frustratingly, the IT department keeps on raising its head as a major hindrance to the roll out of e-learning). An inspired solution involved the piloting of factory floor kiosks.
- Evaluation of the benefits of moving towards a single HR system for the company and a single Learning Management System, from the current position of having different tactical solutions put into place by different parts of the business. [The tactical solutions being necessary to achieve progress in an affordable and technically acceptable way].
- The control, management and validation of learning content.

Rolls-Royce saw e-learning as an enabler for enterprise wide change. Now, e-learning has become a force for change in its own right, with points of delivery embedded throughout the organisation, from desktops to classrooms and factory floors.

3.3 Somerfield Group

Background

The Somerfield Group first "dabbled" in e-learning some 8-10 years ago, introducing it to facilitate instore IT training, and this immediately raised very similar issues to those experienced by Rolls Royce. This first step into e-learning evidenced that when used for IT training it would become obsolete very quickly, typically within 12 months of implementation. Again, similarly to Rolls Royce, they found that although it was useful for initial or implementation training, it was useless for refresher or ongoing training. Once a person had completed the course and started to use the software tools themselves, the training content would become irrelevant. Not a particularly good start but what it did show was that unless



the outcome of the training in the wider sense was addressed at the outset as a planned method for change, the investment in the training was ephemeral and not future-proofed.

Somerfield again took up the e-learning toolset starting around 3 years ago. This time, two drivers were responsible for this fresh look, both a result of enterprise wide change. In the first, a cost-cutting exercise had effectively reduced the traditional training capacity to almost zero. Trainers by their nature are “unseen”: they’re normally training in a classroom. The results of their training were seen as unproductive and difficult to measure, particularly in financial terms. Training was seen by senior management as a corporate activity not a core business process. Much of the responsibility for training was subsequently devolved to the Store Manager (SM) or Deputy Store Manager (DSM). The result was a vacuum. There was no way of ensuring the effectiveness of the SMs or DSMs in this role, and the quality of training relied heavily on how good the existing resources were. In the majority of cases, these consisted of books.

The implementation of an enterprise wide broadband intranet brought with it a possible solution. Although this was designed solely to support management systems such as stock taking and finance tools, others saw its wider possibilities. And, like the Lloyds TSB case, it took a senior manager with a background in both IT and training to act as the catalyst for change.

Experience and Impact

In the initial stages, the intranet was used to provide access to electronically held training manuals, the main advantage of which was an assurance that the most up to date versions were in circulation. However, barriers were discovered: some people simply did not like reading from screen, so all this really did was shift the responsibility for printing elsewhere!

With considerable foresight, when the Group purchased a new HR and Payroll management system, it chose a solution that also came with the capability to expand, providing integrated training records and performance tracking.

This new management system was just one aspect of an enterprise wide change. Acquisition of new businesses into the Group had created an environment of multiple-cultures, and there was a need to rationalise operations across the business as a whole. With so much change now coming into play, mostly managed by an HR implementation team, one of the most profound effects was a realisation that people needed to be trained: they needed to have proper appraisals, career paths and learning objectives. There was a real sense of desire to make training part of the corporate culture and to help people feel more valued.

The Group had no master plan for e-learning, no vision for a future state. What happened came about through an organic process of collaboration between key individuals, all with different backgrounds and experiences. As with any enterprise, a business case is required to gain access to funding for new projects. Here, the business case has involved the development of a pilot e-learning program. The training group considered a number of change projects as possible topics for a pilot. It’s interesting to note that, although Induction is an obvious topic to use for a pilot project, particularly in Somerfield’s case where the average staff turnover is around 35%, it was considered by the team to be too risky. Induction is something that all



staff do, which would make it a highly visible pilot, and would run the risk of encountering barriers such as low IT skills levels or discomfort with the idea of learning via a PC.

Instead, the team chose “Cash Management in Stores”. The use of e-learning in this instance not only supports the corporate change agenda but proactively fulfils its aims. Historically, only one or two people in any one store are trained to perform cash management. From a corporate perspective, this needed to change. Each store should have at least three people with this skill. Also, it would no longer be a dedicated job, so those who traditionally performed cash management could be freed to perform other roles within the store. The outcome of the training would be easy to measure, for obvious reasons!

So, Somerfield’s pilot e-learning course is being used as a mechanism to bring about an active change in the way that stores operate, and at the same time, will prove that e-learning can fulfil the role of an embedded business process, and not just a corporate activity.

3.4 Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)

Background

IDeA was established some 4 years ago with the main objective of supporting internal improvement within the 400 local councils of England and Wales. Their aim is to empower these councils with the tools and internal capability to effect their own methods and strategies for attaining a state of continuous improvement, and, within this, e-learning is part of the solution.

The Agency provides the councils with practical tools, starter packs, seminars, support and advice. It also provides a portal called the Learning Pool, through which tools and content can be accessed. In essence, it’s acting in a catalyst role, facilitating the debate on issues such as the role of e-learning. Since its launch in February 2003, over 60 local councils in England and Wales have signed up to the IDeA Learning Pool.

Experience and Impact

Of all of the four case studies included in this paper, the IDeA case is probably the most accessible in terms of demonstrating the relationship between e-learning and change management. And, perhaps the most important impact that e-learning is having is on the way that councils communicate both internally and externally.

The IDeA approach is to help councils to develop their e-learning resources and skills organically, rather than starting out with a specific e-learning strategy, and so encourage a more “bottom up” development. It is therefore a normative – reeducative approach, which is important in developing new processes and methods that are sustainable over time. The IDeA approach is strategically important: as a result of placing emphasis on developing internal e-learning development capabilities, what we are seeing is an increase in cross-departmental collaboration, and so, in a very real sense, the act of developing an e-learning module becomes, for those involved, a collaborative learning experience and a platform for communication. Change.



It is true that in many cases, councils are perceived to have a view that e-learning is all about tools and content, and that it is not yet seen as a business process, but rather as an extension to training. In fact, the experience is that the sales messages and arguments put forward by e-learning vendors are actually not helping in achieving this perceptive transformation. There is a strong motivation to sell e-learning as a product or range of products rather as a single embedded business process. It is not unusual to find a council with up to 50 different e-learning products gathering dust on a shelf, unused and irrelevant. Also, the complexity and sophistication of some of these products is viewed as a very real barrier.

As a catalyst and facilitator, one of the roles of IDeA is to “harvest” examples of good practice – success stories - and make them visible to all of its subscribers. One of these concerns a council in the northwest of England that developed its own e-learning module on Comprehensive Performance Assessment, a new process where all councils are given an overall performance grade. The module was recognised as a highly successful “communications” device, and has subsequently been made available to other councils. This is a sign of the direction in which e-learning is gravitating: out of the training realm and into the broader cross departmental communications and knowledge realm.

This is important because it evidences the concept that all departments will view e-learning content and objectives differently. For instance, a trainer might devote few resources to the development of an Induction module, seeing it as an internal training device only. Someone higher up in the organisation, or perhaps someone in marketing, might take the view that an Induction module should be given a high priority because of its potential use outside the organisation in, for instance, attracting new recruits, or promoting the council in general. So, what e-learning is doing within council organisations is prompting debate, acting as the glue for collaboration, and engendering a broader approach.

Another example of how e-learning can effect a change in the way that councils work is through visibility which leads to organisational learning. For example, best practice operated by one department and captured into an e-learning program becomes easily available to other departments. Again, it’s acting as a communications channel for knowledge, and encouraging sharing and collaboration.

E-learning is in its infancy in this environment, but clear lessons are being learned through experimentation and sharing. This organic phase can be called a piloting stage, similar to that of the Somerfield Group. And like the Somerfield Group, when this pilot stage reaches the point of being able to deliver and evidence tangible benefits, it needs to move forward to a higher more strategic level of responsibility. There are already plenty of case studies that demonstrate the financial rewards gained through the use of e-learning: those derived from a transformation in the way that people and departments communicate are still anecdotal but are on the increase.

The biggest issue that IDeA and its customers have is that of support. Ironically, in order to make e-learning work and to step out of the “it’s there so use it” attitude, significant investment may be required in people to act in a support role. In other words, it may be necessary to undermine the original business case for introducing e-learning in the first place – that people costs can be saved.



4. The Future

The starting point of this paper was the hypothesis that e-learning has not reached its full potential because practitioners, commissioners and users have failed to address it within the change management environment. The approach has been too narrow, too product centric, too training centric. Little heed has been paid to how the implementation will bring about change in both the business and its people, and, as stated earlier, unplanned outcomes have often been perceived to be a bonus.

E-learning needs to evolve. E-learning vendors need to get a wider agenda. E-learning commissioners need to think beyond the training objectives.

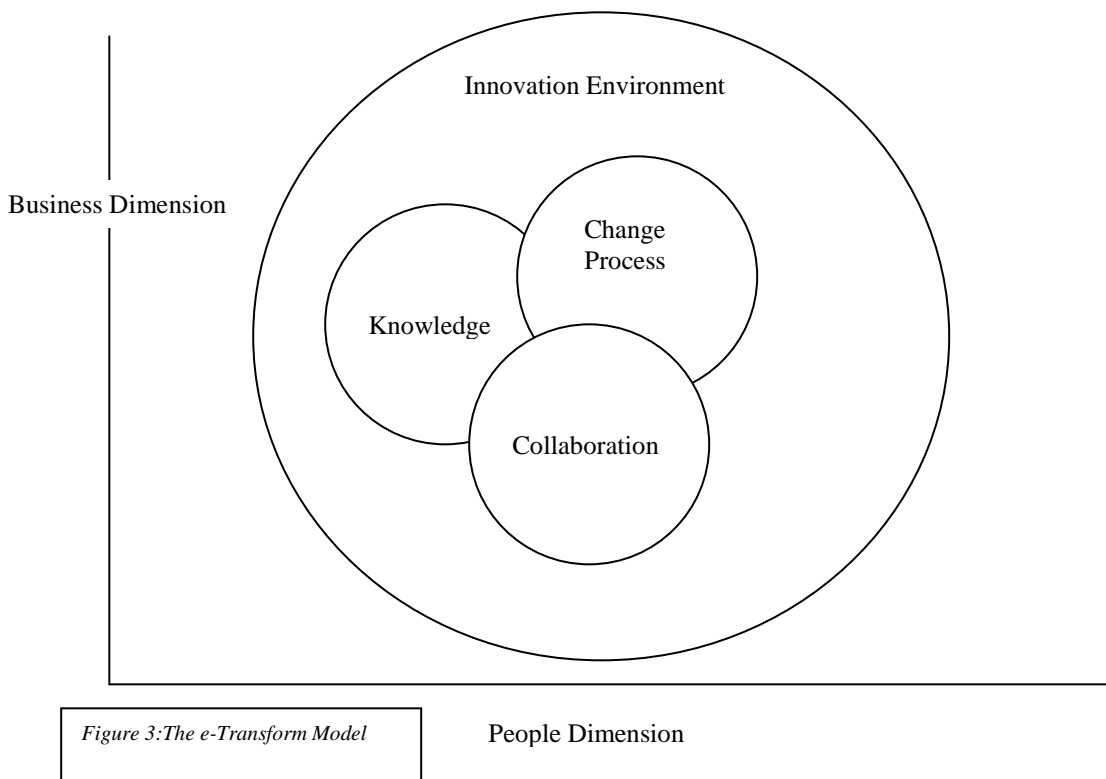
For the last few years, as the e-learning offering has moved from desirable to necessary, the debate has been consumed almost to the point of asphyxia by issues such as definitions of learning objects, interoperability standards and pedagogical values. Much emphasis has been placed on the need to “compel” learners with exciting content to meet their expectations for high levels of quality and engagement. Frankly, learners’ expectations are that their skills and competencies are developed, that they are trained not entertained. At least two of the organisations interviewed for this paper expressed the strong view that content needs to be fit for purpose: it does not need to be “play station”.

So, what might a new model look like? First the agenda – which breeds the requirement – needs to be expanded.

- **Analysis:** of the current state versus the future state, based on consideration of the drivers for change;
- **Diagnosis:** of the transform goals, the differences between the current and future states;
- **Strategic:** what needs to be done or put in place to achieve the transform goals, in other words, what are the reduce goals;
- **Tactical:** how will this be achieved, what are the apply goals;
- **Awareness:** consideration of sponsors, learner profiles, approaches, communications and collaborative planning;
- **Desire:** implementing quick wins, rewards strategies, achievements, “What’s in it for me”, cascade sponsors;
- **Tools and Resources:** creating a platform for knowledge communication, sharing of experience, development of ability, putting into place the people, networks and evaluators that will support the enterprise.
- **Reinforcement:** mechanisms for sustaining the change and evolving it on a continuous basis.

The e-transform model can be visualised in this way:





The aim is to achieve perpetual change through collaboration and sharing of knowledge in a way that supports and enables the process of change both in the people and business dimensions of an organisation = continuous innovation = knowledge innovation enterprise.

5. Summary

The background against which e-learning has made its appearance is one of technology convergence. This is forcing enterprises to look at *how* they work, and *why*, and make fundamental changes in the way that they operate from the bottom up. If e-learning is to fulfil a valuable and vital role in this future, it must integrate with and share this change agenda.

The debate must move on from cost and time benefits to harness the real promise of the e-learning proposition. As the case studies have shown, the introduction of e-learning at any level within an organisation will either effect a change in the way that it operates or it will be simply sidelined as an unwanted or short lived solution.

E-learning hasn't failed. After several years of critical battering, it's still here. Which means it's wanted and needed. However, the stakes can be raised considerably and its importance within an enterprise leveraged through digging ourselves out of the mud of the issues of the past, and looking to the issues of the future.

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“ADKAR” ©. Prosci & The Change Management Learning Center
“2003 Best Practices in Change Management Report” ©. Prosci & Change Management Learning Center

7. About the Author

Lesley Mackenzie-Robb is Vantaggio’s principle e-learning consultant practitioner, and has more than 15 years’ experience in analysing, designing and implementing blended learning solutions for enterprises in both the private and public sectors, including Peugeot, the Ministry of Defence, the Environment Agency and British Energy.

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