

## “Out of the catalogue, and into the work place”

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“How do we increase actual take-up of learning from our learning portal or LMS?” This is a common question being asked by organisations that have already implemented some form of learning management system (LMS) or learning portal providing on-line access to learning.

The trouble is, much as we want people to think learning is important, they don't generally behave like it, particularly over an elapsed time. The initial interest generated on launch of the LMS, or on the back of big projects or mandatory courses, does not often get translated into high levels of recurrent usage by the broader learner population. Sure some people are very quick to work out how they develop their CV faster, and are more active in playing the system on an ongoing basis. But they are a minority. Most people, come once and mostly don't come back until they are given their next “must do” learning opportunity. Disappointing but true.

Yes, you need to market the LMS. If you don't, people won't go there – that's an easy way to fail. But what I've described is not really a problem of marketing. Compliance and other forms of mandatory training will force usage, but you also need to build everyday usage of discretionary learning areas – learning they choose to do, rather than are told to do.

No, I think the problem is structural. We want to bring them to learning, not the learning to them. It's the wrong way around, and the danger is, the LMS may reinforce the wrong model. We can get so distracted by our ability to provide a single point of access to all forms of learning, that we forget that our learners don't actually use it to do their jobs. People spend their working time focusing on the systems and processes associated with their day job. If they are sales people, they use the sales processes and systems. If they are finance people, they use the finance processes and systems. They don't casually go wandering around the HR intranet or learning portal.

Getting them out of those systems and into a separate one is a challenge, or really a series of challenges. If they identify a learning need during their day job, getting them to go and log into a completely different system (that they've probably forgotten their password for because they haven't used it for three months) isn't going to be easy. If they actually go to the LMS, navigating through an on-line course catalogue with hundreds of entries isn't simple. If they find what they are looking for, finding out that they could book on a course in three months time to resolve a problem next week, is not very helpful. Or if they find a bunch of vaguely relevant e-learning courses, none of which specifically address what they want to know, that is also not helpful. Multiply all those “if they” issues together and you end up with a pretty low likelihood of a successful result. And if they fail or give up once, they don't come back.

So what do we need to do to make it easier?

Firstly, we need to integrate access to learning into their everyday business processes and systems, not require them to somewhere else to access learning. We can use the LMS to manage the processes around learning without always needing them to access the LMS as something discrete and specific. Give them direct links to learning interventions from the point of the need. And don't take them to the catalogue, link them straight into the specific learning entry. If they want to also check out what else might be relevant, let them go to the catalogue after that. Direct links to a learning opportunity from business applications actively market it continuously, and provide a much simpler way to get to it.

This kind of direct linkage will require alignment of learning opportunities to business activities at a more detailed level. This may turn out to be difficult in practice, as many courses in the catalogue don't really align very well. If they do, great, build links to them. If they don't, why are you offering them? If they are too general, make them more modular, more deliverable at the point of the need.

A by-product of the above approach will be a growing pressure for more e-delivered solutions that can be accessed anyplace, anytime, rather than in three months when the course runs next. But this is not about e-delivery, it is about *really* integrating learning into work and the workplace. The LMS is an enabler, the catalogue isn't. By-pass it, and link directly to the point of the need.

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