



TURN A LEARNING MUDDLE INTO A LEARNING PORTAL

Peter Gray and Daniel Mills present Part Two of their three-part series. This month they quantify the muddle resulting from running too many systems.

In November's *ILT&S* magazine we looked at the many ways that organisations and HR professionals can end up in a muddle: starting when the business strategy doesn't align with the business process, tasks, or even the people development agenda.

Alongside that, we took a look at how technology can support the online transparency and delivery of the company goal – and whether it sufficiently *pulled* the individual to wanting to find out more or self-develop, rather than the learner feeling *pushed* to access this information.

This month we continue the theme by looking at the muddle your people can face when they have too many systems to access. And, at how the integration of your new and existing systems, seen by many as “expensive and complicated,” can in fact be straightforward, cost effective and lead to the ultimate L&D solution.

When you think about your organisation's systems, don't!

Think instead about your people, and *then* think about your systems. How many systems are they expected to engage with

in one way or another, just to satisfy the notion that your organisation is deploying technology solutions to this or that business area? Organisations are generally advocates of technology. From the basic to the most complex, we are more and more expected to engage with the screen, either at our desks, in our briefcases/handbags and, more so now, from our pockets. The screen often facilitates a huge amount of the business processes we are involved with.

Some within the organisation will have access to more or less systems than others. It can often be argued that both hierarchy and business functions materially affect the number of systems that your people may have access to.

But, for sure, any organisation already using Learning Technology Systems, thinking of adding more to existing systems or looking to begin the Learning Technology journey by deploying their first technology solution, will face the common question. How do we make this/these systems a better experience for our people/learners?

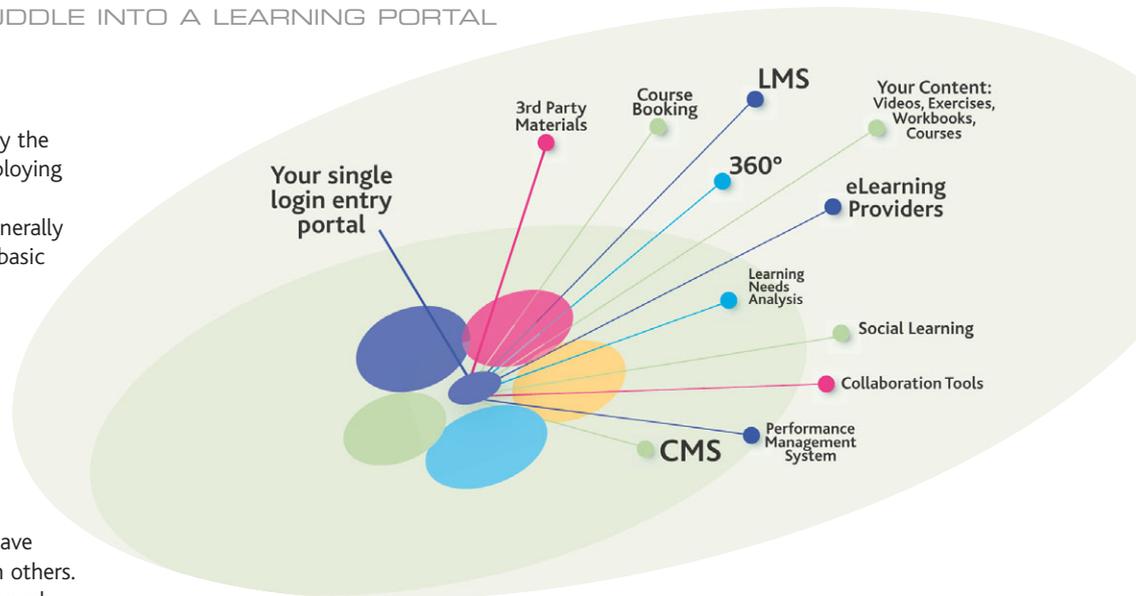
To answer this we should ask ourselves the question: What is the job we want to do? Most of us in the Learning Technology industry would agree on one answer: "We want to ensure that as many of our users as possible are engaged in Learning and Development initiatives. Engaging our people will lead to greater use and consequent improved take-up of our learning initiatives. Our organisation will grow and operate more efficiently because our people are learning effectively."

In other words (and in technology terms) the job we want to do is to make these systems a better experience for our learners; to create an environment for the systems to operate where our people enjoy spending their time.

If that sounds appealing, how might we get there? As always, it does no harm to consider a few questions.

Start by understanding what people have to say about their current experience with your technology. In addition to asking the obvious questions, ask yourself: do we have any data, which can point to the ROI we're achieving from our original investment in this technology?

Move to thinking about whether users are (or will be) properly inducted in using your learning technology. This is an important point when trying to achieve an engaging environment and experience. Do you have a plan for this? Consider Apple's approach in this area. When they sell you a piece of technology in their store, no matter how



experienced you are, they will offer you the opportunity of being 'inducted' into your new purchase. Someone (a 'genius') will actually sit with you and point out the key features and benefits of what you've just bought so that you leave with a foundation of knowledge.

Now compare that to the reality some people have in organisations when they arrive on Day One. How often are they just given a new piece of equipment and an email with a list of usernames and passwords? Far too few get any kind of 'hand holding' experience which can help them understand the organisation's systems for the first time? What would be the value for their user experience of spending more time in this area to get the basics right first time, rather than reacting to the number of questions that are inevitable afterwards?

Furthermore, if you already have systems in place, it's important to think more about your content. Is anyone checking the relationship between readership and usage levels and the currency of content? The world of 'technology provided content' moves much faster than we think – in general, people prefer to engage with content which is bite-sized and based on current thinking and delivered in ways people learn.

Finally, spend some time on the most important questions surrounding KPIs. Are they made up of both the financial picture and the metrics surrounding your people? Of course we need to appreciate the sensitivity of data but let's not forget, even top line information on where an individual, site or team is at any given point of time, is more motivating and engaging than no information at all. Could another definition of KPI therefore be 'Keeping People Informed?'

The other side of this coin is to contrast what support or action is offered to those who are under-performing and how this

can provide a positive message about your organisation's culture? This touches on the technological capability, as opposed to ease of use and engagement.

We wouldn't be writing this article, as Learning Portal specialists, if we weren't prepared to put our money where our mouths are and define the two key elements of a learning portal. Reducing 'required user logins' to just one and linking systems together to create an all-encompassing and engaging environment is at the heart of creating high levels of user engagement and a truly worthwhile online user experience.

The learning portal is the natural extension to helping organisations come to terms with their individual systems to create a single place where users can readily access all that they require and all that you need them to access.

While TWM have a Portal *lite* solution (with an entry level price tag that caters for those organisations just entering the Learning Technology business), many organisations already have legacy systems which can, and most certainly should, form the bedrock of a greatly enhanced single login Learning Portal environment.

It's not just a question of technical know-how linking systems together. It's about ensuring that the learning blend is properly understood and implemented within the Learning Technology so that every aspect of the blended mix is represented.

The integrated system therefore results in consolidated outputs, making it possible to get consistency on a local, national and international level, with a scalable model that encompasses all company systems. You'll create a one-stop shop window – an area that invites the user to enter and explore. Technology removes the frustration of multiple logins and creates a greatly enhanced user experience – accessible from work, home or mobile.

But the journey doesn't stop there...

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needs to be constantly fed to continue momentum. And this principle is exactly the same for the learning environment you create.

From the moment it is launched within the business and users start to engage with the content, so too begins the task of regularly updating the platform with new and relevant content. Otherwise the initial enthusiasm will begin to fade.

So, the real challenge is to keep the learner engaged and help them see the personal return of investment for themselves (and covertly the link to improved organisational performance) by leaving them with the hook for them to return.

Missed Part One? Read it here: Unravel the ultimate L&D solution.

<http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/69c718a3#/69c718a3/68>

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