



In this, the final article in their three-part series, Peter Gray and Daniel Mills explain why *unravelling* the muddle paves the way to the ultimate Return On Excellence.



TURN A LEARNING MUDDLE INTO A LEARNING PORTAL

Organisations are faced with a plethora of technology-based solutions, some of which they already have; and some they perhaps think they would like to have. But does it just end up in an organisational and people development muddle?

In December's *Inside Learning Technologies & Skills* we looked at how people within an organisation may be left in a 'muddle' when presented with too many business systems to access. We explored the rationale for an integrated portal to remove this confusion and in turn helped people understand the "what's in it for me" by referencing the "job to be done".

By accessing knowledge and information in a manner more suited to 'pull' than 'push,' individuals can take responsibility for owning their own development.

In our final article we continue this theme by placing the individual in the heart of our integrated learning environment. Doing so provides the business case for technology investment by way of showing the ROI and ROE within people development. Google thinks ROE refers to 'Return on Equity'. We define it as Return on Excellence: often demonstrated by an improvement in the job tasks performed regularly or the improvement in people orientated development conversations.

Can technology demonstrate a ROI/ROE in the area of people development? Historically, demonstrating ROI and ROE has been challenging. Everyone seems to have worked on the principle that we deploy technology solutions, so they must work. Of course, this is errant nonsense but we are today much more able to ask the questions which, when answered, will build the ROI and ROE picture.

From the outset the question is: How can an organisation build an online development strategy?

By this we mean a development strategy which will take the individual from first



application, to pre-joiner to the final day of service.

Well, start with an analysis of what you have done already, how successful has this been in providing you with a succession/talent pool that matches the current demand for filling vacant roles?

How does the recruitment processes of your organisation equip the wider business with the people who have the right attitudes and enthusiasm for learning? Does your recruitment process start the journey of learning in an online environment? For example, broadening an applicant's knowledge of the company and role or perhaps introducing situational judgement testing?

Add further to your analysis by considering what are the touch points managers within your organisation have in order to progress their careers beyond that of the business systems they access. This might be 360 assessments or virtual webinars.

Ask yourself – how does your technology support an online development strategy – are you delivering onto company mobiles, or is development still fundamentally restricted to e-mail? Do your people have the ability to access the internal learning platform outside of the workplace?

The critical point now is who owns the strategy? Do you think the organisation should own the strategy or should the individual? A career "that knows no boundaries culture" is now ingrained into the digital generation, does a lack of an online development offer lead to more 'people' leaving organisations rather than managers – a marked shift from earlier technology times when managers led the

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way in being disillusioned by development offerings.

At TWAM we believe that individuals should readily be able to understand where they are now, in terms of their job competence and measure that against where they want to be? So, we look at how technology can support both the job skill and the leadership behaviour development. We ask what visual representation exists within an organisation to help employees know what their future looks like and what the benefits might be to them (aside from monetary value) of them moving or progressing – will they get more job satisfaction, or enhanced reputation, less stress perhaps! Massively important, then, is to establish whether the language of career development is spoken just by line managers or is it ingrained into the organisation's culture?

We would say this wouldn't we? But learning portal environments, approached correctly, engage the learner using rich and interactive content matched to their learning style and will record specific development activity.

Far beyond traditional e-Learning capability, internal tools and resources can be leveraged to make content engaging (audio, visual, social collaborative) and appealing to the learning preference of most workplace employees. It will differ from industry to industry but a well managed learning environment will underpin and encourage the move from reflector theorist to activist

pragmatist (if so required in the working environment).

The learning portal will solve the learning record dilemma. Paper based training attendance sheets and the multiple digital records in varying places are replaced by records in the TinCan-enabled digital Learning Record Store. This much more easily enables reviews that are fit for purpose, more likely to be part of CPD as opposed to something which gets opened only in the annual performance appraisal cycle.

In an ideal world, organisations should strive to create a link between an improvement in operational tasks and personal development activity. So, we should therefore be prepared to go against the traditional methods of measuring productivity and efficiency by going beyond the analysis of looking at sales/profit numbers on the P&L.

We should look at the differences in people's management and leadership behaviour and the improved competence in the job role (confidence, speed, accuracy). Are our people speaking the language of what they have learnt from the training they have attended and is this generating interest and excitement in those who are have not yet attended?

The question of whether the use of technology will demonstrate a ROI financially, links back to the ROE (through operational excellence). We can look at the

impact highly trained and qualified staff have on the retention statistics of an organisation – and we can see how this demonstrates the reduction in agency/recruitment costs and similarly the immediate productivity gains of internal recruitment versus external. But consider too the reduction in the liability within an employment tribunal of having competent managers who are able to handle complex HR issues – what impact would this have on the bottom line operating profit or reputation of the organisation? How might this message promote the attraction of new talent into your organisation and, in turn, help reduce the marketing spend in areas of advertisement or product awareness?

So, in conclusion, this leads us right back to where we started our journey. If we regard the technology as an enabler to help organisations and individuals to **GROW**, how can we succinctly identify the benefits in investing in it and specifically in a learning portal?

Simply put, it begins with helping everyone to understand the future state (in effect the Goal) and provides the alignment of the communication of the strategy with the business process or tasks and how the people

development agenda supports this. Secondly, it can help us to understand the need (the Reality) by providing us online and transparent information around where the gaps are in either knowledge or competence that is restricting us from achieving the future state. Thirdly, the possibility (or opportunities) of what is available to support the reduction of the needs gap, through either engaging learning content or experiential learning consistent with that of 70:20:10.

Finally, it can provide a workplace where actions and next steps can be recorded and monitored (the what “will I do?”) and the important role the line manager has in managing and leading people through the journey of change required.

Unravelling the muddle in an organisation isn't easy. It isn't easy and it takes time. Alongside this, it also takes commitment to wanting to change against the backdrop of “if we always do what we've always done, then we will always get what we have always got”. Sometimes though this is not enough to help us survive in the challenging workplace environments we are in.

Wherever you are starting from and whatever direction you take, we hope this series of

articles has helped you start to untangling your muddle or provide you with some thoughts about where you can start. If not and we can be of assistance, we at TWM would be happy to provide you with further information and consultation to get you started.

How to turn a learning muddle into a learning portal

Part One:

Unravel the ultimate L&D solution

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

Part Two:

Quantify the muddle

<http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/29c25a23#/29c25a23/110>

Part Three:

Return on Excellence. This article!

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