

## “Creating e-learning in the business”

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The one thing you can always guarantee with learning, is that every organisation has something that's unique to them. Whether it's the company's mission and values, its' business processes, or its' products, there is always stuff to know or do that can only come from you. You can't buy training off the shelf for this because no-one else has it. You have to build it yourselves.

Of course, companies have done this all the time, since before they had computers. But with the arrival of PC's and Office suites, led to the explosion of business-generated PowerPoint courses and presentations that clutter up hard disks across the country. This is where all those training courses with all that unique business knowledge lie.

One of the things I do when working with companies to help them develop more coherent learning strategies is analyse the overall shape of learning-related activity that goes on in their business. It's usually pretty easy to get at part of it, but that often turns out to be all the non-unique stuff. I have this segmented donut-shaped diagram I draw, where I go around filling in the outside segments as learning & development tells me about the management programmes, connecting with customers, executive leadership and soft skills courses. We then add in IT training, financial training, sales training, and everyone starts to feel quite comfortable as all of the outside segments are populated.

And now to the scary part. In maybe 70% or more cases of doing this process, I then have to turn around and ask them exactly what it is that their company does for a living. Because in all the excitement to tell me about all of these training programmes, no-one has bothered telling me about the core technical training of what the company does, be it researchers creating pharmaceutical products, or for claims processing and underwriting. The closest I might get is maybe some induction training.

And the reason this is scary? Well to my mind at least, this unstated set of training in the centre of my donut /s the core of the company. It is the most valuable learning because it is about what makes them what they are. The trouble is that mostly this is outside the scope of the “learning & development strategy”. It is done in the business, by the business, and doesn't figure much on the L&D radar.

What differentiates the other 30% where core training is on the radar? Generally either a strong requirement for regulatory compliance or a distributed training delivery organisation, embedded into the business units. With regulation, many of the core processes, particularly in financial services or pharmaceutical companies have a regulated training process that has to be centrally tracked and reported. That puts it onto the L&D radar, although its still likely to be only the regulated components. And if learning delivery isn't a centralised function or outsourced, but is embedded into each of the business units with its own small delivery team, the scope of that delivery is typically everything; business specific products, systems and processes, as well as the more generic management and customer care programmes. Again, making it visible.

Now what if I relate this discussion back to e-learning. Well, e-learning courses come in one of two main flavours; they are either generic courses bought from a third party e-learning content supplier, or they are custom courses developed specifically for you by an e-learning content development company. You are probably doing a bit of both of these.

The problem is though that from our analysis earlier, there is lots of very valuable stuff in the “specific” camp. But are seriously going to pay fifty or a hundred thousand pounds to pay for someone else to develop custom e-learning content for you? You might do this for a small number of discrete programmes where they justify the external spend, but what about the hundreds of others that are not generic, and are not big enough to justify the sledgehammer of an external development company. Must these be forever ignored?

# E L C I R T I C L E

In my view the answer is no. I strongly believe you need a multi-faceted approach to looking at where e-learning is used. After all, often the subject matter is quite technical and might lend itself to e-delivery. No, firstly you have get it on the radar, and then you need multiple strategies for getting at it. Yes some can be fulfilled through generic third parties. Yes some will be best developed by external agencies to increase its impact, or because of the scale of the development.

But the rest in middle also needs to be tackled too. This means enabling the business to self-generate it. And it means developing a strategy, tools, and embedded best practice to make this viable. This is a huge hidden problem and a hidden opportunity, make sure it is on your radar too.