



E-learning flexibility Providing business solutions

E-learning in business continues rapid growth

The application of e-learning solutions to meet business and industry workforce development needs continues to grow rapidly with e-learning fast becoming a central component of workplace learning.

A survey of 140 organisations across the construction and mining, health, primary industries, manufacturing and electronics, transport and logistics industries found that 40% of respondents plan to increase the proportion of their training budgets spent on e-learning in the next 12 months.

The survey found that 72% of responding businesses used e-learning as part of their structured training, with 71% recommending e-learning to other organisations.

Key business drivers identified for the implementation of e-learning were to increase staff knowledge, provide online access to training materials, reduce costs and time associated with training in the long-term and ensure quality and consistency of training.

It is these and many other benefits of e-learning that are being promoted and realised in Australian business and industry through the national training system's e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework.

Collaboratively funded by the Australian Government and all States and Territories, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework aims to promote the uptake of e-learning and to support industry and business with the application of e-learning practices.

As one of 14 Australian Flexible Learning Framework projects, the Industry Engagement Project aims to increase industry use of e-learning in workplaces by demonstrating the flexibility of e-learning to respond to and deliver on industry's needs. The project is industry led, with individual businesses and industry associations developing e-learning demonstrations that are customised to meet their business goals.

Following the success of the 2005 Industry Engagement Project, which supported nine businesses with the development of e-learning and mobile learning, in 2006 14 businesses have been funded and supported to develop e-learning solutions in the workplace.

All the industry e-learning demonstrations can be found on the **E-learning for Industry** website: flexiblelearning.net.au/industry. This industry-focused website is also packed with resources, video clips, audio reports, other case studies, practical guides for introducing e-learning and discussion forums aimed at helping businesses develop and implement an e-learning strategy.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation case study outlines the business drivers, industry applications and specific solutions which have been implemented by this business with \$49,620 of national funding. The ideas and solutions contained in this industry e-learning demonstration meet the direct needs of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and they can also be adopted and customised by other businesses and industries.



Knowledge-capturing key to informal learning

What are the drivers for e-learning?

- **knowledge management of an ageing workforce**
- **recognise informal learning**
- **enable timely acquisition of specialist skills within a diverse workforce**
- **facilitate knowledge transfer and the development of mentor relationships.**

The management of skills recognition and knowledge sharing within the workplace are serious challenges for many large, geographically dispersed organisations. This is a particular problem for industries involved with rapidly evolving technology and with multi-skilled staff.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) is addressing these challenges with the development of the Knowledge Pool – a revolutionary online system used to define and record the skills within the organisation and to capture and share the experience and knowledge of the workforce.

‘The Knowledge Pool offers an innovative solution to current trends in the implementation of workforce training in that it recognises all forms of learning, including informal learning – responsible for 70%-80% of all learning’, said Project Manager, Craig Delahoy.

The skills capture and audit component of the system will create a dynamically evolving picture of the skill-set of the ABC by allowing individuals to record their skills and add new skills to the system.

The second component of the Knowledge Pool will be used to record the knowledge and experience of those recognised as experts in particular skill areas.

‘Knowledge may be recorded in the form of narratives, case studies, diaries, articles or other means, which together form a valuable, growing, self-correcting and self-regulating real-world learning resource’, Craig said.

‘The knowledge capture and sharing tool will develop into an online library, allowing anyone in the organisation to access this pool of knowledge and learn from these experts.’

A third phase is proposed which will allow individual employees to match their existing skills against national competencies. This will allow employees to self-assess their potential for recognition of prior learning (RPL) and recognition of current competencies (RCC), easing access to nationally recognised qualifications and units of competency.

Once implemented, ABC staff will be able to browse and search for skills, job roles, individual’s stories, knowledge or specific people. For example, if a radio or television program needs to find someone in the organisation who can speak Hungarian, they can search for this skill on the Knowledge Pool. If an employee wants some information on how to gain the skills and experience for a particular job they may want to pursue, they can look up the knowledge that has been gathered for that job and can instantly locate and connect with potential mentors and coaches.

Craig believes that other large organisations will also draw great benefits from the ABC Knowledge Pool project. ‘The methodology and engine can be migrated to other organisations, which can customise and use the tools to build their own skills sets and knowledge bank’, he said.

By sharing a common engine, multiple organisations within an industry have the potential to develop common industry skill sets, common industry learning resources, and a common industry RPL/RCC tool.