

Improving the Take up of e-Learning in Local Authorities

Engaging time starved staff and line managers

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*This practical guide was created with the input of
25 Local Authorities
at a series of Learning Pool Showcase Events in autumn 08*



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Introduction

The current Local Government agenda is to devolve more decision making powers to a local level, giving Councillors increased responsibilities now and into the future.

Facilitating elected Member development is a key challenge facing the 410 councils across England and Wales. There is a recognised need to provide new ways of helping elected Members develop capacity and understanding of their role, particularly as local government continues to modernise and improve.

But this situation isn't just affecting elected members. All local authorities face the same challenges of needing to meet the training and development needs of all their staff in a timely, cost effective way. This makes the case for embracing e-learning a compelling one.

Yet e-learning is not new to local authorities and in fact many have been using some form of e-learning for a number of years, so there is a lot of experience to draw on.

Regardless of how appealing e-learning may be if managers, learners and all the other key stakeholders are not fully engaged then it's doomed to failure. This was the subject explored during a series of Showcase events run at the end of 2008 by Learning Pool, the public sector e-learning exchange, and Towards Maturity.

This report provides an insight on engagement with learning as well as sharing some of the findings and challenges gathered during the Showcase events.

The challenges of engaging your Local Authority with e-learning

Many local authorities have considerable experience with e-learning, although there must be some concern about the lack of 'real' progress and getting e-learning, and more accurately learning technologies, imbedded into the fabric of the council.

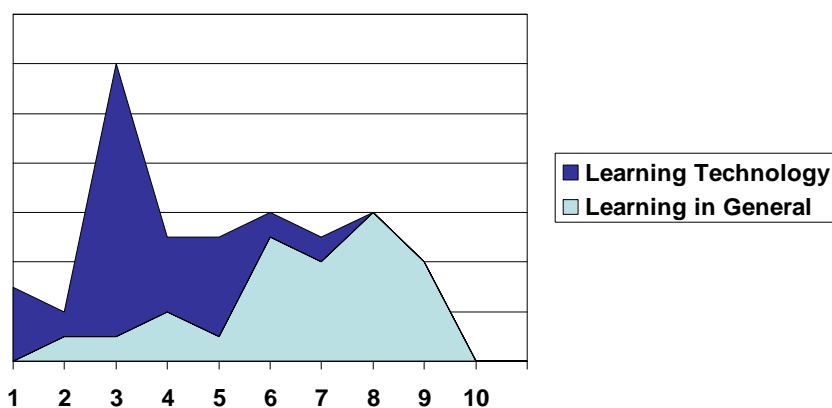
Some lack of progress can be traced back to the early days of e-learning when many staff were exposed to poor quality content, didn't understand how to use e-learning and fell victims to having some poor initial experiences that have tainted their view of e-learning.

This situation has to change otherwise the benefits of harnessing learning technologies will not be realised and we'll be stuck with using traditional methods of learning.

So how engaged are local authorities with learning and learning technologies?

The first step in the Learning Pool showcase was to determine, on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 low, 10 high), how well the participants felt that their council was engaged in learning in general and learning technology in particular. The results are as follows:

Levels of Engagement



We shouldn't be too surprised to note that the level of engagement in learning in general is ranked consistently higher than the level of engagement with learning technologies. Some may view this with disappointment however it does confirm what many of us recognise and that there is still work to be done to shift opinion and perspectives.

The participants were then invited to discuss what they felt the key challenges are in learning technology engagement. Here is what they said:

Key challenge	Considerations on how to overcome
Cost	<p>If cost is a major consideration for organisations then this should present a strong case <i>for</i> using learning technologies which can be much more cost-effective than traditional methods of learning.</p> <p>Restrictions on travel and expenses further support the case and yet there seems to be some form of contradiction when we consider current levels of engagement. Are we selling the benefits of effective use of technology in learning enough?</p>
Culture/Bureaucracy/Policy	<p>Many authorities are very traditional in management style and culture, although there are signs of this changing in some authorities.</p> <p>Key stakeholders have to be engaged in order for learning technologies to succeed. In order to overcome the inherent resistance to their use effort must be put into reaching all the stakeholders, understanding their concerns and adopting strategies to overcome.</p> <p>It's also too easy to hide behind internal policy and culture as a reason not to try and embrace learning technologies.</p>

	<p>There are examples of it working extremely well in some authorities so L&D managers should ask how those experiences can be leveraged to influence in their authorities.</p>
Staff resistance to change	<p>Change management is a key element of any successful project to adopt learning technologies and is mandatory to help overcome staff resistance.</p> <p>It was also clear from the workshop that what should be a clear advantage of using e-learning can actually work against it, and that is its flexibility and accessibility.</p> <p>The very fact that it's readily available actually results in staff and line managers not allocating the time to use and as a consequence e-learning is perceived as a cheap poor relation.</p> <p>Ironic when you think that if booked on a classroom event staff would need a very good reason not to attend.</p> <p>What is needed is an internal discipline to allocate time, even in very short chunks, for staff to undertake e-learning.</p>
Boring e-learning	<p>This often comes down to poor initial experiences that many staff have had with e-learning, but things have changed.</p> <p>As in any market over time those who offer a quality product survive and the rest don't and this is what has happened to a large extent with providers of e-learning.</p> <p>Effort has to be put in to overcome this resistor and historical prejudice and demonstrate to staff that e-learning and the use of learning technologies doesn't have to be boring.</p>
Technology changes	<p>New and emerging technologies in every walk of life are now a 'norm' but the challenge for learning & development staff is to evaluate any new learning technology and answer the questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can this add-value to our learning programmes? • What are the potential problems when implementing and how do we overcome? • Who else is using this technology and how can we learn from their experiences?
ICT Infrastructure	<p>It's a common myth that all users in an organisation have access to high-spec PC's which are able to support rich-media.</p> <p>The reality is that often the learning solution has to be suitable for the lowest common denominator and existing infrastructure may limit the choices but doesn't have to be a permanent barrier.</p>
Management buy-in	<p>Understanding what is important to each group of stakeholders, including managers, is paramount and this is expanded upon later when exploring</p>

	'Who influences our success?'
Nervousness and fear	<p>The trick is to recognise this possibility and to help learners overcome their fear.</p> <p>From a practical perspective this means being available at the outset to hand-hold and guide them through their initial experiences.</p> <p>Provide simple user guides and job aids to make it easy to understand and checkpoint with learners on a regular basis to ensure that they are gaining confidence in using e-learning.</p>
Internal discipline	See earlier note on 'Staff resistance to change'.
Value for money and perception that it's 'frivolous'	<p>This is a key hurdle to overcome. We can't create a situation where investment in learning technology is seen as an indulgence.</p> <p>Effort must be put into determining what the use of such a learning technology would do to add value, save money and increase motivation.</p> <p>This really comes down to understanding key business needs, learners and the environment within which learning takes place.</p>
Informal learning	Recognition that much of what is learnt is through informal learning and that collaborative technology can help harness this for everyone's benefit.

Examples of success

It isn't all 'doom and gloom' and in fact many local authorities have made tremendous strides with e-learning. Consider the following as prime examples (links to full stories in the [appendix](#)):

- **Rotherham MBC** was totally new to e-learning but they've implemented an e-induction programme that has been widely embraced by their staff. They have also just re-purposed an existing e-learning course and rolled out to over 1,000 staff on Adult Safeguarding.
- In the 2007 e-learning Awards, **Kirklees Metropolitan Council** walked away with the award for the best example of supporting learners online, and that was won against some stiff competition.
- The **London Borough of Brent** received a special mention in the e-learning award 2006 for the way that they delivered business impact from their e-learning, despite limited budgets.
- Shortlisted for the '*most innovative application of technology to learning*' in the 2007 e-learning Age awards, **Modern Councillor** from Learning Pool is an innovative new service which provides high quality, flexible learning and development materials to elected Members
- As a result of financial constraints and capacity issues **Blaenau Gwent** considered how traditional training delivery needed to change to cope with these new challenges. They created a blended programme of learning for training staff in Recruitment and Selection procedures and made significant ROI savings as a result.

- **LB Bexley** is using its Dynamic Learning Environment (DLE¹) to help facilitate its Equality agenda by using the online chat to allow more people to attend its Black Workers Group and Disability staff groups.
- As one of the earliest adopters **Cardiff CC** use their DLE it to support their 30 Institute of Leadership and Management students.
- A strong internal brand together with a structured and well planned roll out has ensured a successful launch for **Wycombe DC's** DLE.

We can also learn from other examples in sectors similar to that of local authorities:

- **London Gifted and Talented** were e-learning award winners for project team of the year in the public sector. They developed effective learning networks to support some of the busiest and difficult to reach learners in the workplace - teachers!
- **Care UK** deliver care to people who need it in their own homes. They deliver home-based e-learning to their employees who need it. This is an outstanding example of Return on Investment.

There are other examples on Towards Maturity website of successful use of learning technologies across health and the rest of public sector plus the secrets from the Widespread Adoption e-learning award winners (from Nov 08).

What makes the difference between successful and unsuccessful implementations?

Towards Maturity's research over the past 6 years has shown that organisations who are mature in the use of technology perceive more business impact, improved staff impact and increased take-up of learning technologies. But what contributes to their success?

We have found that success is less to do with technologies and infrastructure and more to do with the fact that mature organisations are more likely to have proactive strategies for involving critical stakeholders who will help align learning with business needs and influence behaviour change.

Later we outline a 6 strand model below that looks at the activity of mature organisations but the secrets of in implementation success are about people and not about technology.

Mature organisations will have a clear idea of their influential stakeholders and how to engage them.

Which stakeholders influence success in Local Authorities?

The table below highlights the range of potential stakeholders who might influence the success of e-learning in an organisation.

¹ The DLE is a Learning Pool LMS with Web 2.0 functionality built in

All the various stakeholders have some impact on learning technology effectiveness and therefore should be engaged. They are motivated by different things and therefore we must be able to understand their language and develop a different communication strategy and proposition for each group.

The various stakeholders are shown below:

Stakeholder	Role in building success
Senior Management	Building vision Creating Priority Defining success criteria
Business sponsors	Own specific initiatives Incorporate learning as part of solution Influence management Define success
Line Managers	Influencing and Motivating Individuals Allocating time Supporting learners
Learners	Participate in learning! Apply learning Improve performance on the job
Local Champions	Motivate, engage and support Ensure local relevance and buy in
Learning and Development staff	Design and Deliver Agents of change
Support functions such as HR, Finance and IT	Enable new learning solutions Allocate budget

In our work at Towards Maturity, we have found that those relatively new to learning technologies are more likely to say that their most influential stakeholders are within support functions such as HR & Training, whereas more mature organisations consider that the learners and line managers are the most influential stakeholders in need of engagement.

Participants at the workshops were asked to comment on their greatest supporters and their greatest challengers of their initiatives and the table below reflects their feedback:

Greatest Supporters of e-learning in Local Authorities	Greatest Challengers of e-learning in Local Authorities
Successful learners happy to share their experiences	Learners who have had a poor previous experience (usually from compulsory programmes)
Learning & Development team looking for new opportunities	Learning and development staff who see this as a threat
IT involved up front in decision making	IT who look to protect their systems
Councillors who have been through programmes themselves	Councillors
Some Line Managers using the programmes proactively to support their own goals	Line managers not allocating time
Senior Managers & Directors ² who have had experience themselves	Senior Managers who fail to see the relevance

² Towards maturity research in 07 and 09 highlights that when directors are learners, take up and organisational impact is significantly increased
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What does this tell us? Well clearly adoption and use of learning technologies in local authorities ranges dramatically which is why we see the same groups being referenced in both lists!

The strategy has to be to examine what those local authorities who are using learning technologies effectively are actually doing. What can we learn from them? How are they overcoming resistance? How are they turning the challenges into supporters?

How do we engage the various stakeholders?

Engaging appropriate stakeholders is about asking the right questions and using the right language at the right implementation stage.

At Towards Maturity we have developed a 6 strand model where all the elements contribute to delivering impact and value. This was discussed and explored during the Learning Pool showcases so that the participants could directly relate it to their local authority and situation. The model with a brief outline of each strand is shown below.



Strand	Why are these important?	What types of activities are included?
Defining Need	Mature organisations are more likely to align learning to business strategy, ensure that programmes are relevant to both business and individual requirements.	Regardless of sector and size of implementation mature organisations formulate a range of strategies to help define need.
Learner context	Mature organisations are likely to have a greater focus on understanding the context of the learner, their motivations and environment.	Understanding the learner context requires a fresh look on learner motivation, opportunities for informal learning, work life balance and opportunities to use new technologies for learning.
Work context	What are the work environment factors that might influence success? What needs to be changed? How to go about it?	Does the organisation have appropriate infrastructure? How can you involve managers more successfully? What type of job aids could be part of the mix?
Building capability	Mature organisations target the changing needs of their learning and development professionals to ensure that they are equipped with the right skills, resources and reputation to effect change.	Capability of L&D professionals will include areas such as blended learning, learner support, content, know what free tools are available, how to build collaboration and deliver assessment.
Ensuring engagement	Mature organisations have proactive strategies for involving critical stakeholders who influence behaviour change.	This strand has a focus on learner engagement and building activities linked to marketing and managing change.
Demonstrating value	Mature organisations will be proactive in identifying the value their learning technologies are adding to their organisation.	The Towards Maturity website has examples of organisations showing improved productivity and organisational benefits.

There is an opportunity for stakeholder engagement within each of these strands. The actions below may help you to consider how these strands can uniquely help you to engage your most influential stakeholders.

Action: To what extent have you planned your engagement with stakeholders?

1. Identify those stakeholders important to your success
2. Identify those stakeholders who may challenge your success
3. Review the 6 strands of activity to identify how to involve your most influential stakeholders in new ways.

Thinking like a Marketer!

To engage the various stakeholders Learning & Development would do well to borrow techniques from marketing and consider each stakeholder as a customer with their own motivations, language and influencers.

You should consider:

- Who is our customer? (stakeholder analysis - see previous section)
- What are they buying? (what problems are keeping them awake at night?)
- How are they influenced?
- Are we using language and activities that will engage them and cause them to act?

Through a series of exploratory exercises at the showcases, the participants examined a number of ideas to engage the various stakeholders in their authority.

Specifically they were asked to come up with ideas that could be used to engage learners and line managers and their suggestions are summarised below:

Learners	Line Managers
Offer Prizes & incentives (loyalty points)	Define clear benefits to them in terms of time and cost savings - 'More is Less'
Be imaginative – use Wii technology, create useful job aids as part of course	Publish facts & figures on adoption
Make content fun & dynamic, and use Flash-animated links	Use adoption league tables widely – regularly provide them as part of management meetings
Advertise – get learners to help create own advertising	Seek earlier engagement – what are they looking for, what do they need in their teams to help them?
Make it mandatory through PDP's	Gather testimonies of learners and other managers & use them
Introduce early in their career as part of an e-induction	Use data from DLE's (dynamic learning environments) to highlight gains
Ensure that they will benefit as a direct result of taking part eg new access to IT kit or password for new system once they have completed programme	Create a managers toolkit – make life easier for them to implement, coach support and manage
Involve them in competitions to come up with new proposals for content	Peer testimonies from other authorities
Involve learners in content design	Review stats on business performance and promote correlations with e-learning takeup

We also looked at other marketing techniques that can be adapted and adopted:

advertising	sales promotions	public relations	Sales Force	direct marketing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • packaging, logos, branding • posters • literature • powerpoint • intranet banners • tray liners, sandwich bags 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • competitions • giveaways • road shows • canteen/foyer demos • manager league tables • podcasts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • success stories • in house magazines • external press coverage • internal recognition • awards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local champions • toolkits • managers • learning centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • email • SMS • skinkers • payroll inserts • viral campaigns

Action - Starting points for thinking like a marketer

- Speak to your own internal communications teams or local marketing teams – they will often be happy to help with ideas.
- Borrow techniques and approaches that have worked with other authorities
- Share and adapt marketing materials and collateral
- Think about external recognition (studies have shown that external recognition can improve internal credibility of learning solutions)
- Enter awards – and promote your successes at being shortlisted or winning
- Get involved with the Next Generation Learning @ Work campaign and share your story as part of a national campaign to promote successful use of learning technologies in the workplace (See www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/work)

Checklist for your next team meeting

Action 1	<p>Stakeholder analysis – who are your most significant stakeholders?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporters • Challengers
Action 2	<p>Review of your current implementation activity against the 6 strand model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining need • Understanding & responding to Learner Context • Understanding & responding to Work Context • Building Capability in L&D team • Engaging stakeholders • Demonstrating value <p>What are your areas of greatest strength and weakness? What actions need to be taken to redress the balance in your implementation? Who needs to be involved?</p>
Action 3	<p>Communications Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you know how successful your current communication is with learners and line managers? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If no - How can you find out? ○ If yes – where are you strong? Where are you weak? • How can you improve your marketing message and communications?

Appendix 1 Resources and References

To find inspiration in other's success, click on the hyperlinks below:

Stories from other Local Authorities:

- From www.towardsmaturity.org
 - Rotherham MBC
 - Kirklees Metropolitan Council
 - The London Borough of Brent
 - Modern councillor programme

- From www.learningpool.com:
 - LB Bexley:
 - Blaenau Gwent:
 - Wycombe DC:
 - Cardiff CC:
 - Bournemouth:

Similar sector stories:

There are other examples in sectors similar to that of local authorities.

- [London Gifted and Talented](#) -.
- [Care UK](#)
- Winners of Widespread adoption awards – [NCALT](#) and [Toyota](#).

Research Papers

Insights from over 700 organisations over the past 6 years available for free at www.towardsmaturity.org:

		
<p>Driving Business Benefits (2009) <i>Chapter 1 – Building the Business Case</i> <i>Chapter 5 – Barriers to success</i> <i>Chapter 6 – Improving the Impact</i></p>	<p>Towards Maturity Research (2007) – see chapter 5 for engaging the business</p>	<p>Linking Learning to Business research (2005) <i>Chapter 3 - Understanding learners..</i> <i>Chapter 4 - Manager influence and engagement.</i> <i>Chapter 7 - Winning hearts and minds..</i></p>

About Learning Pool

Learning Pool is the leading e-learning provider for the public sector.

Our products and services are used by public sector organisations, mainly councils, to build capacity and train their staff, elected representatives and school governors in various subjects from health and safety, through to ethics, presentation and media skills.

We believe that efficient public sector transformation isn't just about having all the right answers. In fact, in a sector that changes as much as ours, being able to collaborate with others and find the answers together is far more important. Our services help senior public sector managers deliver the transformational government agenda, create efficiency savings and develop a modern and professional workforce.

Originally set up by the IDeA our unique service allows you to create, share and access e-learning content. We help you to get the benefits of e-learning without making a significant strategic or financial investment. Over 90% of English councils and over 50% of Welsh councils use a Learning Pool service as part of their training blend, helping them to deploy cost effective and efficient training for council officers and Members.

Visit www.learningpool.com, email elearning@learningpool.com, call 0207 101 9383.

About Towards Maturity

Towards Maturity CIC is a not for profit organisation that provides research and resources to help organisations improve the impact of learning technologies in the workplace.

Available on site are resources to help you on your e-learning journey

- The Towards Maturity Model for e-learning success.
- Case studies
- Interviews
- White papers
- Industry research

www.towardsmaturity.org