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## Students Loan Company implements 'Just-in-time' informal learning to suit the 'Google Generation'.

Based in Glasgow, The Student Loans Company (SLC) has over 1,250 employees over 4 different locations. All of who have different training needs, learning styles and varied levels of comfort in using technology for learning.

Learning & Development (L&D) wanted to adopt a more flexible, 'just-in-time' learning solution to meet the needs of their diverse workforce, but they faced two key challenges:

1. Overcoming the mindset of managers that all training had to be classroom based.
2. Securing 'buy-in' from Management to learning, regardless of the approach.

Managers are clearly seen as key to help create a learning culture within the organisation as they set the personal development plans (PDP's) for each employee. The first hurdle was to get the managers to include training into these plans. Once that had been accomplished, the next step was to look at more efficient and effective ways of optimising the training department's budget, as well as the operational T&E budgets of the individual departments. That led to exploring the use of technology.

A number of **key business drivers** drove the search for a 'Just-in-time' learning solution:

- The IT helpdesk was getting an increasing number of calls to help support desktop applications with queries such as how to create a pivot table in Excel, how to insert an animation into a PowerPoint presentation, how to create tables in Word etc. All of these basic queries were placing a strain on the IT helpdesk, and many of these queries were very repetitive in nature.
- These calls also highlighted an organisational training issue because when an employee lacked knowledge in a certain subject area the immediate reaction was to send them on a full training course, often just to plug a basic skills gap, and that approach had obvious cost and time implications.
- When employees were not able to get through to the IT helpdesk they would simply disrupt other colleagues.

So how did **SLC address the problem**? Well 3 key factors played a part in defining the solution:

1. Employees are also consumers. They expect the workplace to evolve in parallel to what is happening in their personal lives. If individuals use the Internet at home then they expect to see the Internet being used to help in their development in the workplace. This rise of the **Google generation** has played a key part in shaping the preferred solution. Individuals expect to obtain information, knowledge and skills at the click of a button.
2. **Learning on the job** seemed to be the most effective way for employees to get the information they need, when they need it. It which would also encourage learning and build enthusiasm for learning throughout the organisation.



3. The solution was to implement a '**Just-in-time**' search capability that can be accessed anytime on the SLC learning portal with many courses, online books, reference materials and even book abstracts.

As a consequence, SLC introduced a "Just-in-Time" (JIT) learning solution to the organisation, working with Skillsoft (formerly NETg's) . They developed a learning portal through which all staff access their learning. They can access a portfolio of 250 courses covering IT, desktop and Business and Professional Development (soft skills). Regular reviews ensure that the content reflects the most relevant courses. A modern language library of Spanish, French, German and Italian, both for beginners and for experienced business users, encourages the use of the technology in learning, even if not directly relevant to an individual's job.

Individuals are able to find the relevant learning to a specific query at the exact moment of need, without leaving their place of work. This dynamic access to the relevant piece of learning means that the gap in an individual's knowledge is met quickly, and there are considerable savings in costs, which results in budget being freed-up for other learning solutions.

Individuals can choose to simply take one learning object that meets their need, a group of learning objects or a whole course. Alternatively they can simply read an article, an abstract or a book! The solution's great strength lies in its simplicity, flexibility and accessibility.

As part of the solution, the SLC senior management team also has access to Safari business Books - e-reference library containing collections of books, manuscripts, papers and instructional video. They also have access to Get Abstract Executive Summaries providing over 4000 searchable book summaries. Both of these resources help build enthusiasm for learning at a more senior level which helps to foster a learning culture throughout the organisation.

L&D set themselves some **key goals** for the project so that they could assess how well it's **progressing**. These are as follows:

- *Increase the number of employees using the learning solution by lowering the entry point to technology and making it part of everyday business use.* After the introduction of the Just-In-Time learning solution and subsequent promotion, 70% of all employees are currently signed up and using the solution on a daily basis.
- *Increase management buy-in by getting them directly involved in the solution.* Currently the senior management team are using the JIT learning solution as reference tools. Their enthusiasm for the solution has encouraged them to include e-Learning into staff development plans.
- *Reduce the number of calls to the helpdesk for desktop application support.* The helpdesk report that these calls now represent less than 5% of the incoming calls.
- *More efficient use of the overall training budget.* The solution has been a big success throughout the organisation, but particularly in the IT department where everyday queries are immediately answered through the JIT solution. The IT department's ILT training budget has been reduced by 22%, with savings of 33% company wide on T&E.



## So what do the employees think?

Here is what various members of the organisation have to say about the solution:

### User:

Internal Auditor Audit, Risk & Compliance at SLC:

*"I use the Search & Select function to get help where I have a problem that needs a quick fix. For example, once I needed help with a presentation and I was able to get the right information myself to solve the issue. The number of courses available means this is a really useful and speedy tool."*

### IT department:

Senior Test Co-coordinator ICT Development at SLC:

*"JIT training gives students the expertise of a tutor at their fingertips. There's no time delay waiting for a course or travel times to take into account. The technology is speedy, stepped and logical so it makes sense to all users. Simply access the nuggets of information, take what you need there and then and re-visit this as often as you like."*

### Senior Management:

Manager Strategy Development

*"Get Abstract helps you stay on top of management science's fast-moving popular output. It's not a substitute for reading the books, but it's a good way of identifying which ones you want to follow up."*

Ralph Seymour-Jackson C.EO

*"Our organisation has recently introduced Get Abstract to our senior management team, with great success. They are now able to access highly informative content with the minimum of effort and in a way that suits their own needs. I am personally very impressed with the extensive library and the quality of the abstracts. The quick read and the concise summary of key points is perfect for the pace of today's business environment"*

SLC envisage that their learning solution will evolve into an all encompassing learning portal that will offer learning on demand in a variety of formats: as a book, an article, an e-learning course, an ILT course, or a presentation.

The passion that the L&D department have for learning has helped to drive this project, inspiring use and adoption throughout the business. Finding new ways to make employees enthusiastic about learning is a constant inspiration.