

The impact of e-learning champions on embedding e-learning

- in organisations, industry or communities

Final report

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Executive summary

Introduction

E-learning champions as agents of change can be found in the vocational education and training (VET) system - which includes TAFEs, private RTOs, schools and adult learning settings. This report identifies the program design and performance reporting framework required for a champion strategy to impact effectively and achieve the goal of embedding e-learning in VET teaching and learning.

This report is based on a study funded and supported by the national training system's e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework¹), that was conducted in the second half of 2008. The methodology included:

1. A review of literature on agents of change in VET and the use of champions in e-learning development initiatives (see McCulloch et al, 2008).
2. Consultations with 15 experienced e-learning champions who each had at least three years experience, selected from 120 nominees nationally (see Jolly et al, 2008).
3. Case studies of three of the champions interviewed, which provide examples of successful e-learning champions in action from three different contexts: industry (health and community services); community (Indigenous); and a VET organisation (a state TAFE) (see Shaw et al, 2008.).

Key findings

Characteristics of an e-learning champion

The literature identifies effective agents of change as requiring considerable theoretical and practical knowledge and well-developed analytical, interpersonal and diplomatic skills.

The e-learning champions interviewed have the following characteristics:

- skilled in e-learning
- willing to share their expertise with passion and enthusiasm
- client focused and able to communicate effectively with all kinds of people
- able to provide tailored e-learning messages, solutions and advice
- enterprising and willing to solve problems: small/large; technical/non-technical
- open to scrutiny and willing to adapt as new information comes to hand
- persistent and model in their actions and communicates a commitment to promoting e-learning and the use of technology to provide educationally sound and reliable teaching and learning solutions. One of the case study champions provides a detailed account of how to achieve this. A model has been developed to illustrate this and is included in the report. (See Chapter 2.)

The activities champions undertake

E-learning champions empower, motivate and mentor teachers and trainers in e-learning and network with other teachers/trainers to encourage knowledge transfer and technology exploration as part of their everyday operations. (See McCulloch et al, 2008.) The champions

¹ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au>

interviewed confirmed these literature findings and highlighted the relative success of different strategies.

Good practices by e-learning champions to facilitate the uptake of technology in VET teaching and learning include:

- developing a strong understanding of teacher, trainer and learner needs through active listening and relationship building
- offering e-learning solutions that are contextualised to the user's needs and build on their current skills and knowledge
- monitoring the preparedness of teachers and trainers to include e-learning in their practices and make opportunities available at the appropriate times
- transferring e-learning know-how in small chunks
- supporting each person on their e-learning journey, building confidence initially through one-on-one interactions
- improving activities based on feedback and their own research.

Both the literature reviewed and the 15 e-learning champions interviewed suggest that organisational support is required to embed e-learning in teaching and learning practices. One person cannot by themselves shift e-learning from the margins to the mainstream. To embed e-learning requires organisation/industry/community-wide change and processes in place that aid the work of a change agent to sustain the innovation.

The e-learning champions manage upwards, regularly communicate successes and build strong allies within the organisation in management and the IT department to navigate through blockages. They need to think and act strategically to ensure e-learning becomes prominent across all levels of the organisation.

To build and maintain momentum, e-learning champions must:

- make strategic decisions and focus the available resources on achieving a critical mass of adopters - it is the early majority of adopters who will embed e-learning practices
- encourage early adopters to achieve further innovations
- establish mechanisms for sharing e-learning resources and know-how such as online social networking, peer-to-peer mentoring, use of blogs and wiki spaces, show-case events, and general staff induction and training programs.

The impact of e-learning champions

This study concurs with the literature findings that e-learning champions aspire to:

- change attitudes towards e-learning
- build e-learning capacity among as many teachers, trainers and learners, where possible
- influence their organisation to adopt processes that will sustain e-learning and build the organisation's reputation in e-learning.

The Framework's 2008 E-learning Benchmarking Survey² reveals that, nationally, 36% of VET activity now involves e-learning and half (58%) of the teachers/trainers in participating VET providers now use e-learning in some part of their training delivery. Comments by staff from the case study organisations, including managers, emphasised the depth of impact on

² <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/e-learningindicators>

teachers/trainers' and learners' attitudes and capabilities that could be linked to the e-learning champions.

E-learning champions reveal they have mixed success at the organisational level. Few of the champions consulted have the advantage of organisational-level mission statements, e-learning goals or targets. All the champions believe that e-learning would be less likely to continue, except in isolated pockets, if they were to discontinue their work tomorrow.

The need for 'management buy-in' is a consistent message from the e-learning champions, both in this study and earlier studies. Both the literature and the national consultations for this study suggest that one person or group of people (the champions) cannot embed e-learning. To embed e-learning requires organisation/industry/community-wide processes to be put in place that will aid the champions and the teachers/trainers they work with. The nature of the management support required includes policy support, budget support and a responsive IT department.

In the case studies, 'management buy-in' to introduce e-learning at a strategic level has occurred using different approaches. One example uses an inclusive whole-of-organisation collaborative exercise approach, another a business case to management approach, and the third an external freelance consultant working with organisations and targeting community or social groups.

It may be concluded from this study that e-learning champions do invaluable work in building e-learning capacity among VET teachers/trainers and their learners. A supportive whole-of-organisation approach is required to sustain the work of e-learning champions and the changes they have influenced. E-learning champions need the skills to engage executive and senior managers and achieve systemic organisational change if e-learning is to be embedded in teaching and learning practices.

Key focus areas include:

- e-learning as part of the strategic plan for achieving quality teaching and learning
- a budget line for robust e-learning technology
- recurrent funding allocations for staff e-learning training/exploration
- mechanisms for the diffusion of e-learning knowledge, experiences and resources.

Measuring the impact of e-learning champions

E-learning champions achieve many flow-on effects from their activities that are difficult to measure.

The measurement focus to date has been on e-learning capacity and usage among teachers/trainers and learners and on aspects of their attitudes to e-learning. Less emphasis has been paid to collecting evidence that e-learning has been sustained and is embedded in an organisation.

The qualitative information collected in this study indicates that e-learning champions have had a significant impact at the teacher/trainer/learner level and mixed success at the organisational level.

Whatever measures are used, it is difficult to assign the outcomes to an e-learning champion alone; there are other variables that have influence. The champion's role is facilitative not absolute. It is difficult to measure the full impact of a successful champion because they achieve cascading or flow-on effects from their activities over time, not all of which are explicit or measurable. Obtaining a complete picture of their impact is difficult.

Figure 2: An e-learning champions' program design and performance framework



Introduction

This report is about championing change in the Australian vocational education and training (VET) sector. Specifically it is about the effective use of champions as a change strategy for embedding the use of technology (e-learning) in VET teaching and learning practices.

E-learning champions are:

“People who have demonstrated leadership and as a consequence have significantly influenced or developed the e-learning capacity of their business unit, organisation or have had an influence beyond their immediate organisation.”

(Study brief definition refined by study team)

Embedding is:

“The final stage of an innovation process that starts with an initial decision to engage (adoption), moves to spreading the word (diffusion), consolidates in utilisation (implementation), and culminates in embedding.”

(Jasinski, 2006, p. 1)

Study rationale

This report is based on a study undertaken for the Benchmarking and Research business activity³ of the national training system’s e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework). The Framework was launched as a strategy in 2000 and is currently focused on maximising and building on the national investment to date in essential e-learning infrastructure and on embedding e-learning in registered training organisations (RTOs), business and industry.⁴

The Framework’s project initiatives have featured, or referenced, the use of ‘champions’ as a change strategy:

- Between 1999 and 2005 an alumni of e-learning champions was created through Flexible Learning Leaders⁵ to influence change both within and outside their organisations.
- Between 2005 to 2007 e-learning experts in VET organisations were partnered with industries and businesses interested in taking up e-learning.
- The Community Engagement Project⁶ and the Indigenous E-learning Project⁷ (2005-2007) used members of local communities as champions. The champions were supported by an external team of specialists (Bowman 2007 and Ithaca Group 2005 respectively).

³ The Framework’ Benchmarking and Research business activity conducts benchmarking activities to determine the use, impact and uptake of e-learning within different learner groups, states and territories, RTOs, business and industry; and research to inform the development of policy and new direction: <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/research>

⁴ 2008–2011 Australian Flexible Learning Framework Strategy. http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/webdav/site/flxsite/shared/Secretariat/2008_2011_Framework_Strategy.pdf

⁵ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/leaders>

⁶ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/communitypartnerships>

⁷ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/indigenous>

- The 2007 survey of small businesses identified ‘lack of a champion’ as a barrier to the uptake of e-learning among small businesses (Mack Consulting Group, 2007), implying that a champions model should be employed.
- From 2008 the Framework’s Industry Integration of E-learning business activity⁸ is using industry-based champions (refer the *2008-2011 Framework Strategy*).

The literature review (McCulloch, et al 2008) supporting this report shows that schools and the adult and community education sector have used e-learning champions. This has been particularly evident in Victoria.

Study aims and questions

The overall aims of the study were to:

“- inform the Australian VET sector on the effectiveness of the use of e-learning champions as a strategy to effectively embed e-learning practice

- advise on whether a champion’s model should be supported and if so under what circumstances and what it means for VET program design and performance reporting.”

(Study brief p. 4)

Research questions

The study was commissioned to answer the following specific questions:

- To what extent have champions been used as a strategy within e-learning initiatives?
- What are the characteristics of an e-learning champion?
- How do e-learning champions maximise their impact?
- What support do e-learning champions need to maximise their impact?
- How can the impact of the e-learning champions be measured and evaluated?
- How successful is the use of champions in the uptake and integration of e-learning in business units or organisations?
- To what extent have e-learning champions had an influence beyond their own organisation?
- How is the work of champions sustained so that the e-learning practice/s are embedded in business units and organisations, or more broadly?

(Study brief p. 4)

Methodology

A three-part methodology was stipulated in the study brief. A literature review informed questions for in-depth interviews with 15 e-learning champions. Case studies were prepared based on three of the interviews.

In this instance the literature review filtered the wide body of research and commentary on champions or agents of change and focused on Australian VET-specific literature. Other education sector literature was referenced as a secondary source.

⁸ The Framework’s Industry Integration of E-learning business activity funds industry sectors to develop multiple year plans for the inclusion of e-learning in overall industry-led workforce development. Industry sectors are led by industry or professional associations or lead employers working with other employers so they cover an industry sector. In each case, there are partnerships with registered training organisations (RTOs).

“To identify the interviewees, the study team contacted VET networks, organisations and individuals via email, inviting them to nominate persons who ‘have demonstrated leadership and... significantly influenced or developed the e-learning capacity of their business unit, organisation or have had an influence beyond their immediate organisation.’”

(Study brief definition refined by study team.)

Email recipients were encouraged to forward the request to any of their networks or connections. More than 120 nominations were received. The project team then undertook a filtering process to select a sample of 15 e-learning champions for interview. The filtering criteria used were:

- the champions had to have at least three years experience as an e-learning change agent; three years being the minimum time it takes to embed e-learning according to the research work of Jasinski (2006)
- the final list of individuals had to represent a wide geographical and organisational spread and include some working outside of the Framework to ensure that a variety of perspectives were considered.

Thirty-five nominees were selected using these criteria and then additional background research was undertaken prior to selecting the final list of 15 people, with several reserves. The study team did substitute reserves to ensure project timelines were achieved.

The 15 e-learning champions interviewed are listed in Attachment A. The set of questions used as a guide is provided in Attachment B. Each interview took at least one to one-and-a-half hours using a flexible interviewing process to yield rich responses.

It is worthwhile noting that many of the nominees were humble in their acceptance of being identified as an e-learning champion. Sentiments such as *‘I don’t really do anything special’* or *‘I don’t really see myself as being different’* were expressed. However, this is not how they were viewed by their peers and managers.

A selection of views on our case study e-learning champions is given below.

Greg Logan: what some of his colleagues said to Shaw (2008)

“Greg does, from time to time ‘rattle our cages’ by suggesting different approaches and encouraging us to think about online facilities that we have not yet used. This helps to lift us out of our self-created ‘comfort’ zones – which in turn leads to periods of increased learning.”

“I have moved from being somewhat of a sceptic to a convert. It does help that Greg takes a realistic approach regarding the scope and limitations of the online environment.”

Georgina Nou: what a current manager said to McCulloch (2008)

“There is a passion and energy about Georgina – it will just win people over who are the most negative about technology. It’s almost like she is consuming you with her passion – and you are just led. Her ability to influence is huge.”

Graeme Kirkwood: what teachers said about Kirkwood to Jolly (2008)

“I believe that many teachers have been inspired to make changes to their teaching practice as a direct result of the work that Graeme has undertaken.”

Three case studies were selected from the 15 interviews to provide examples of successful e-learning champions with significant impact on e-learning in their respective contexts over an extended time: an industry (health and community services); a community (Indigenous); and a VET organisation (a state-wide TAFE) (see Shaw et al, 2008).

The three case studies are:

- **Greg Logan**, a proactive e-learning champion in the Victorian dual diagnosis mental health services industry. Greg’s successes are related to making the link between

e-learning and achieving the goals of that industry, to sell the benefits to management and engage clinicians from far and wide.

- **Georgina Nou**, an e-learning champion in Indigenous communities in central Australia working freelance with and through a range of organisations and directly using community helper mentoring processes.
- **Graeme Kirkwood**, who is championing e-learning in a state-wide VET organisation by using long-term consultative processes to engage the 'heads, hearts and hands of staff' throughout TAFE Tasmania to build an overarching engaging e-learning plan that includes educationally sound use of technology in the delivery blend.

The case studies have common structural elements including the champion's:

- e-learning journey
- impact
- insights
- strategies.

The case studies are contained in a document separate to this report (Shaw et al, 2008) as are the national consultations (Jolly et al, 2008) and the literature review (McCulloch et al, 2008). A synthesis of the findings from the two field work phases of the study is presented in this report combined with key evidence assembled from the literature.

Organisation of this report

Data was collected on four topics through the literature review, national consultations and case studies, presented respectively in the following four sections of this report:

1. The **characteristics** of an e-learning champion of change.
2. The **activities** champions undertake to facilitate uptake of technology in VET teaching and learning.
3. The **support** champions seek from an organisation, industry or community to embed e-learning.
4. The **impact** e-learning champions have had, and how it has been or might be measured.

The final chapter of the report contains the answers to the study questions and advice for potential e-learning champions, their managers and policy makers to achieve the embedding of e-learning into VET teaching and learning practices.

Chapter 1: The characteristics of an e-learning champion

The study definition of an e-learning champion fits within the broader definition of a change agent provided by Buchanan and Badham (2000, p. 4) as 'someone involved in initiating or implementing change, whether or not they have an official job title recognising that responsibility.'

The 'someone' in relation to e-learning varies. The roles, titles and operational levels of champions of e-learning consulted in this study are diverse; there is no consistency regarding their operational levels, titles and job roles. Some champions are working inside an organisation, others act as consultants to various organisations, while others run their own e-learning business. However, there are similarities in the traits they identify as required in order for them to be effective in their champion role, and these echo in practical terms those established for change agents from the literature.

What the VET change agent literature says

The VET sector has been through a period of constant change and reform for at least the past 15 years. E-learning is one of many innovations occurring in Australian VET. Change agents have been employed as a methodology to assist VET providers to respond to and implement the many reforms.

Reframing the Future, a national VET sector professional development program, has undertaken research regarding internal VET change agents and provided professional development in this area. Change agency is one of eight methodologies that *Reframing the Future* has supported over several years. Reframing the Future suggests that the change agent's role is:

"complex and not to be underestimated. Change agents need the agility to adopt a range of roles which could include being opportunists, diplomats and net-workers. Change agents need an advanced range of skills and knowledge, as well as a high level of judgment, courage and sensitivity, to effectively assist the change process. Change agents also need to be reflective and insightful while coping with resistance, apathy, exuberance or turmoil."

(Mitchell and Young 2004b)

The skills that a change agent needs as identified by Mitchell and Young (undated) are:

- data gathering skills to be able to collect reliable information on challenges
- evaluation and integrating skills to correctly weigh information and integrate this information into a coherent picture of issues
- diagnostic and prognostic skills to translate the information into intervention strategies and action
- interpersonal skills to communicate, work with teams, develop and manage cooperative and productive relationships with all stakeholders
- diplomatic skills to confront, negotiate, keep quiet, speak up when professional judgement suggests this is the right step
- 'functioning backstage' skills to recruit and maintain support and identify and block resistance.

Mitchell (2004) concluded from a study of the work of 11 VET change agents, that managing change is a creative activity that extends beyond the application of theories and formulae of change that are simplifications of the real world and that there is debate about whether

change can be driven better by one person or a cast of characters. Most agree that someone has to take responsibility.

The latter point is highly relevant when it comes to considering the embedding stage of e-learning, as discussed in Chapter 3, when policy makers and managers must take some responsibility to support champions seeking to spread the e-learning message and its use among VET teachers/trainers, learners, industry and communities.

What the literature says about champions of e-learning

The core task of the e-learning champion is to develop others' expertise in and use of e-learning in their everyday teaching and learning.

To do this, Sherry and Gibson (2002) suggest champions would need to have progressed themselves through five distinct evolutionary stages of professional growth in using educational technology. These stages are:

1. Teacher as learner – information gathering and learning new skills and knowledge for utilising technology.
2. Teacher as adopter – experimenting, trying out and sharing experiences with peers.
3. Teacher as co-learner/explorer – developing a relationship between the technology and the curriculum rather than the technology tasks.
4. Teacher as decision maker – reaffirming/rejecting the technology as they develop a greater awareness of outcomes and begin to assess the impact of the innovation on student learning and performance.
5. Teacher as leader – expanding their role to become active researchers who share experiences and suggest improvements.

This time-phased professional growth of an e-learning champion has been summed up for the Queensland schools system (*E-learning for smart classrooms*, p. 11) as involving an evolution in thinking from:

- traditional logic: teaching and learning about ICT, to
- transitional logic: teaching and learning with ICT, and on to
- transformational logic: ICT embedded in teaching and learning.

According to a newsletter for the Queensland School System, effective e-learning teachers:

- demonstrate an ongoing commitment to professional knowledge, professional practice, professional relationships and professional values
- have an understanding of the transformative role of ICT for 21st Century curriculum design/interpretation, pedagogy and student learning
- make conscious decisions about student learning based on an understanding of digital learners
- are lifelong learners who are willing to take risks, fail and explore areas outside their expertise
- employ a variety of methodologies, current learning theories and practices
- constantly collaborate with colleagues and practising professionals in order to consolidate understanding and to share and reflect on their learning, wonderings and discoveries (*Smart Classroom Bytes* edition 3).

The time-phased professional growth of an e-learning champion and the personal attributes, as suggested in the literature, are borne out in the testimonials and e-learning journeys of the

champions in each of the three case studies undertaken for this study. It should be noted, however, that not all of the e-learning champions consulted are qualified teachers/trainers.

What our sample of e-learning champions said

To have credibility is the short-hand response of many of the 15 e-learning champions when asked what characteristics they believe to be important for personnel cast in the role of championing e-learning. Credibility and confidence are also identified to be of paramount importance among the e-learning champions within the Framework's Flexible Learning Leaders (I&J Management 2003, p. 45).

When pressed for details about the attributes of an e-learning champion, those interviewed made regular reference to seven characteristics:

- have high competence in e-learning
- be prepared to share
- exhibit passion, enthusiasm and tenacity
- be focused on the end user
- have vision and be able to communicate the message in many forms depending on the audience
- be enterprising and able to problem solve
- model commitment and the above behaviours that they would like others to practise.

Understandably, an e-learning champion must have knowledge and skills in a range of technologies and software packages, and keep abreast of emerging technologies. Moreover, workable solutions must be delivered that are relevant and appropriate for the particular users and the knowledge and skills they currently possess. To do this the champion must be able to address all facets of an e-learning problem or know where to find information. Some interviewees expressed the requirement for having expertise with e-learning to allow the rhetoric to be backed up by the provision of solutions that prove successful. Champions must deliver on their promises.

To varying degrees, all of the e-learning champions have described a preparedness to share their knowledge and their resources. Those who said they share everything saw competition as being tied up with how the knowledge and resources are used, not in having the knowledge and resources per se.

Greg Logan stated that *'his job is to give everything away'*. A current colleague confirmed:

"Greg has demonstrated a wealth of knowledge about the online training environment. Not only that, but he has been very willing to share this with us. Without both of these elements, I don't see how we could have made anywhere near the progress that we have so far." (Shaw, 2008)

The champions' motivation for sharing is underpinned by a collective belief that e-learning provides excellent opportunities for organisational and personal growth and they are making a legitimate contribution towards equipping organisations and learners for the future.

The e-learning champions exhibit high levels of passion and enthusiasm for e-learning that extend far beyond the immediate requirements of their jobs in many instances. To have passion and enthusiasm is considered of foremost importance in influencing others to engage with e-learning and for keeping the champions themselves on track when their wins are small or when they feel they are taking 'two steps forward and one step back'. Indeed, they indicate that rather than becoming jaded by set backs or 'blockers', these incidents often make them stronger and more determined. Tenacity is an identifiable characteristic of the champions interviewed.

McCulloch, 2008:

Georgina Nou discovered online session rooms were being used effectively for education of First Nation people in Canada. She took this initiative to central Australia. Georgina had early conversations with technical people working out bush and they weren't very encouraging. She was told "I'd never do better than a phone and email!"

"Well they were wrong...and needless to say I challenged them...because of the work that had been done in Canada, we were facing the very same social, educational, geographic and telecommunication circumstances."

The e-learning champions consistently highlight the importance of having the ability to communicate with a wide range of people, focus on the needs of the end user (teacher/trainer, learner, manager or another stakeholder) and to 'talk their language'.

A key to success is not to 'bamboozle' teachers/trainers with 'techno talk' or use the opportunity for grandstanding or to discount what the teacher/trainer is already doing. It is to acknowledge fears or concerns, talk through issues or challenges while trying to move the teachers/trainers towards adopting a level of e-learning. When working with a teacher/trainer or other staff members new to e-learning it is considered essential for the champion to be able to converse in the language appropriate to the user to build empathy with them. Communications with senior management to secure resources or influence organisational directions require an articulate detailed argument that uses the language of the business and connects to successfully achieving the business strategy/strategic plan.

The ability to be an independent, autonomous worker and problem solver is viewed by interviewees as of high importance. A great deal of initiative is often required by champions when trying to satisfy the needs of teachers/trainers and learners in an environment where organisational policies are not regularly reviewed from an e-learning perspective. Alternative approaches may have to be thought through.

The champions also recognise that even when a decision has been made, there are times when the decision has to change. The rapid changes in technology and the constant release of new software may mean a better solution is possible compared to the original course of action. The goal may still remain but the approach may have to be modified to overcome identified barriers or new opportunities gained from experience and time.

Demonstrating commitment to change is another characteristic that the champions exhibit to influence others to embrace e-learning.

National consultations: Jolly, 2008

One of the interviewee champions had worked hard to foster e-learning and had developed a team willing to pilot the possible application of new web 2.0 technologies often in the staff member's own time at home on their own equipment backed up by national and international research. As the group developed proficiency, they began to explore how such technology could be integrated into improving their work practices and subsequently enhance the level of service they provided to staff, students and management.

Summary - champions must have credibility

It has been established that a suitable person to take on the role of an e-learning champion will have considerable theoretical and practical knowledge and skills in e-learning and the capacity to utilise a diverse range of 'soft' skills at a managerial/leadership level. The literature identifies these skills in general terms as diagnostic and prognostic skills, interpersonal skills and diplomatic skills.

The champions have discussed these skills in more specific terms. They specify the need to be:

- end-user focused to ensure the e-learning message and solution is relevant
- generous and willing to share their expertise with passion and enthusiasm
- persistent and problem solve.

By exhibiting these characteristics a champion builds credibility and e-learning is more likely to be adopted.

Chapter 2: Building engagement with and use of e-learning

What the literature says

Insights into the activities of e-learning champions were gained from the early work of Flexible Learning Leaders in 2000-2001. For the Framework, I&J Management Services (2003) identified the following critical points of influence of e-learning champions:

- exposing teachers/trainers to a wide range of resources and experts
- offering inspiration and motivation
- mentoring
- transferring knowledge and establishing communities of practice to foster collaboration
- building strategic partnerships.

Creating e-Learning Leaders (CeLL⁹) describes the activities of e-learning champions in schools as:

- empowering people – inspiring teachers/trainers with confidence
- providing infrastructure – influencing the acquisition of essential technology
- ensuring practices meet curriculum guidelines
- ensuring new practices engage learners
- motivating, supporting and guiding teachers/trainers
- risk-taking – enabling explorations and allowing growth
- researching – as part of everyday operations
- networking – connecting teachers/trainers with others for e-learning sharing purposes.

What our sample of e-learning champions said

The e-learning champions were completing all the above activities. While being aware of the wider business imperatives, the interviewees placed greater emphasis on the needs of teachers/trainers and learners, heavily supporting the teacher/trainer during the commencement of their e-learning journey and building connections between teachers/trainers to enable sharing of e-learning knowledge and resources.

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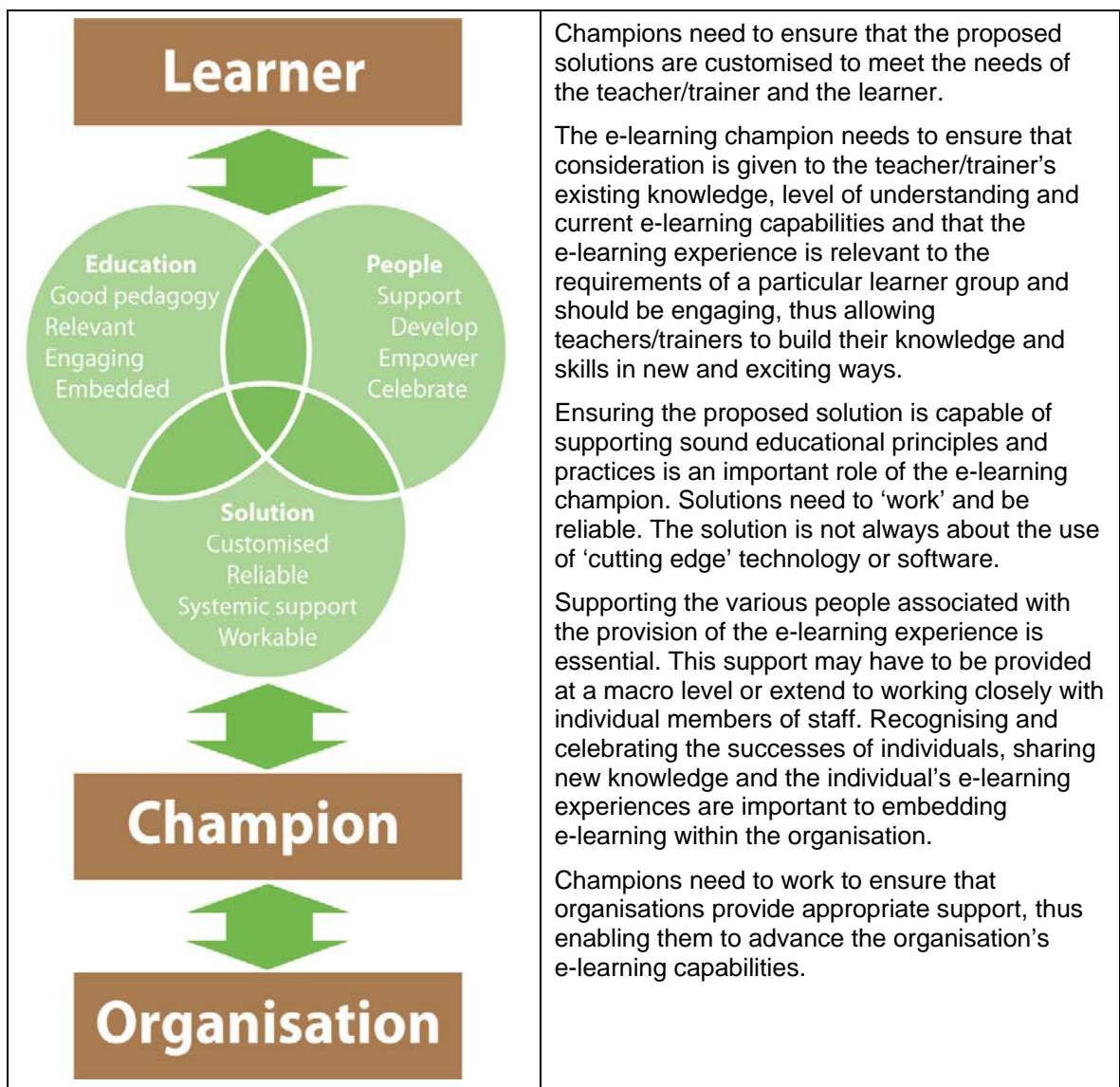
http://www.education.vic.gov.au/knowledgebank/infocus/dec2005_cellschools_files/dec2005_cellschools_tenlessons.asp

Ensuring that new practices engaged learners has challenged the e-learning champions to explore innovative approaches including online social networking (Greg Logan using Ning) capitalising on community practices (Georgina Nou, peer-to-peer learning and mentoring with Anangu people in South Australia), the use of blogs and wiki spaces, showcase events, and general staff induction and training programs.

Be end-user focused and provide what is wanted

To build engagement with e-learning the e-learning products need to be educationally sound, appropriate to the teacher/trainer making the request and engaging and positive for the learner. Graeme Kirkwood suggests that e-learning must be about connecting to the learner, it must engage and the experience must be positive. For teachers/trainers, e-learning must be about providing something that is achievable, allowing them to undertake small steps to build on their current practices and be educationally sound. The dynamic is shown in Figure 1 (Jolly, 2008).

Figure 1: Ensuring educationally sound teacher/trainer and learner connected e-learning



The champions said that casting oneself in the role of the e-learner was important. Remembering what it is like to be in the early stages of developing expertise in using educational technology enabled rapport to be built with the teachers/trainers they were seeking to influence.

To provide what people want, one interviewee said that it is useful to follow a series of steps:

1. Listen to what people want.
2. Show them examples.
3. Let them explore.
4. Let them share with their peers.
5. Look at some small projects.

Another champion summed it up as “*really getting to know the needs of staff and learners by listening intently and building a relationship with them.*”

Active listening, ‘being there’ for the person and attending the individual’s work space were some of the common techniques used by the interviewees to ascertain needs. Research was another key activity.

Shaw, 2008:

*What becomes apparent in the **Greg Logan** case study is his ‘can do’ approach to the implementation of e-learning. To encourage innovation, Greg Logan adopts a ‘you want it, you got it’ attitude. By brainstorming solutions, sharing experiences, looking at what others are doing, joining online communities and ‘talking to our kids’, he is able to achieve this.*

Work with teachers/trainers as they become ready and willing

The 15 champions suggested that it was important to work with people as they became ready or willing. There was a preference for a ‘softly, softly’, ‘keep it simple’ approach and not trying to impose a ‘solution’ on teachers/trainers. Facilitating the engagement process with e-learning is a matter of identifying the correct people at the right time and then heavily supporting them. It requires balancing how much time and effort the teacher/trainer is prepared to spend on a particular task or function and the likely return on that time. If the upskilling or learning process for the teacher/trainer is too protracted it is unlikely that they will remain enthusiastic over a long period of time. One champion described it as ‘chunking’, or making small incremental steps, in preference to having a teacher/trainer bring about wholesale changes to their current teaching practices. Once confident using one e-learning tool, a new practice can be introduced.

Heavily support staff and trouble shoot

The e-learning champions recognise that effective teachers/trainers are required. E-learning must be applied using sound educational practices. If anything, some champions suggest that teachers/trainers need to become more skilled to be an e-learning teacher/trainer. The e-learning champion is required to share good teaching practices with other members of the organisation, to act as a coach, supporting and encouraging individuals.

There is a need to heavily support people on their e-learning journey. It is common practice among all e-learning champions to provide training on an as-needs basis and to sit down with respective staff members when assistance is required.

A lot of the work undertaken by the e-learning champions is specifically targeting teachers/trainers in both the development of e-learning resources and uploading of the newly developed content into a learning management system, and in the preliminary stages, assisting teachers/trainers to build knowledge of resources and online facilitation skills.

The champions highlighted that a lot of their time was spent solving problems. These problems may be of a localised nature only affecting a few individuals at a particular site, or of an organisational nature (see Chapter 3).

The localised problems typically are diverse and include:

- dealing with simple IT issues
- gaining access to software or to the system
- achieving good online resource design
- building resources that reflect sound pedagogical principles for the appropriate learner cohort
- dealing with the mechanics of teaching online, such as when to engage a co-moderator
- building learner engagement
- developing strategies to cut through the 'red tape'.

Other approaches to support people include an online community, introducing a help desk, or building a network of supporters. Irrespective of the approach, the e-learning champions are primarily seeking to empower the individual, to expand the individual's e-learning capability and build their skills and knowledge, and to make things easier by trouble shooting.

Be open to scrutiny

Champions actively seek feedback from teachers/trainers, learners and other stakeholders including their managers and industry. A consistent message from the interviews is the need for champions to respond to feedback and be willing to change their approach or to alter the technology being used if a better solution can be found.

Be strategic to build momentum

All champions recognise the importance of having a critical number of people involved in e-learning to gain momentum. There was no discussion as to what this number should be. The champions spoke in terms of needing to balance the enthusiasm of the early adopters versus broadening engagement.

Jolly, 2008:

***Graeme Kirkwood** suggests that the early adopters are not the group for bringing about an ongoing entrenched change of practice. This group is important for identifying what is emerging, yet by their very nature they are always looking for the 'next offering'. Kirkwood has found that it is the early majority who actually brings about long-term change. It is this latter group who will think through the uses of the product, how it may be used educationally, and the type of support that will be required and whether at the end of the day it is a viable long-term solution.*

Some champions identified that it is important to restrict their e-learning 'offerings' as it is very easy to become engrossed with the latest 'gizmos/gadgets/new releases' without being able to truly support the user or provide documented uses of the technology. Much time and energy can be spent trying to come up to speed with minimal outcomes. At times the champions make a conscious decision to focus their finite resources on a particular e-learning approach, such as developing good quality digital stories across a number of departments rather than trying to be everything to everybody. This is often a difficult decision to make as it can alienate some of the stronger supporters.

Build a team, ongoing training and coaching of teaching/training staff and learners

All champions see the importance of developing ongoing training for staff. Having a good team around the e-learning champion is seen as important, if not vital, to building e-learning momentum. The need for building a team with complementary skills was highlighted, given the pace of change. As interest in and the uptake of e-learning grows, it becomes increasingly difficult for the e-learning champion to be able to provide all the solutions. A strong local team with all members having a clear understanding of the goals, directions or e-learning imperatives also aids the dissemination of the core message across the organisation.

There is variability among the e-learning champions regarding the extension of training from an 'as-needs' basis, one-on-one, to systematic staff development procedures. Prescribed minimum standards for staff undertaking e-learning training are rare in the organisations of the champions interviewed.

Where there are e-learning teams in place, they vary significantly in their reporting structure. Some teams are part of the human resource area, some are part of a larger training and development department, others are part of a corporate division, and several are small autonomous units.

One common element of all of the teams is their size - they are fairly small. Small independent teams are often able to work directly with the teacher/trainer (in some cases with the learner) to effectively and efficiently achieve changes in e-learning practices. They are, however, often stifled as they may not have the same level of management support and resources associated with a larger department.

Larger teams have the advantage of being able to build a wider skills base with greater expertise being available to assist teachers/trainers. On the other hand, they may be forced to compromise, or decisions may be slow, as the larger team may have competing agendas.

Some innovative approaches to building momentum

Shaw, 2008:

Greg Logan is successfully implementing e-learning into dual diagnosis training throughout Victoria, with the objective of training 6,000 mental health and AOD (alcohol and other drug) clinicians in dual diagnosis by 2010. Among the new ideas and practices Greg has brought to and introduced to achieve this is online social networking. Greg has developed a dual diagnosis social network site for clinicians using Ning. Within one week of setting this up, Greg had many users. Within three weeks, he had 300 people online and by week six, 500 people were using the site from all over the world. The online 'word of mouth' has encouraged people to join the site and it sells itself through people networking and learning from each other.

McCulloch, 2008:

Georgina Nou is using a mentoring, peer-to-peer learning approach and having great success in demonstrating e-learning tools and strategies to Anangu people in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara APY lands of SA who are then confident to pass this new skill on to others. She assists one person and that person shows and supports another person.

"... the whole mentor notion is really being carried on by Anangu champions in the community; they are the ones who can best inform and show their folk about these new possibilities..."

This is how the impact is spread in the Lands: "the more you give the more you get back, :Ngapartji Ngapartji. I give you something, you give me something" says Georgina.

Jolly, 2008:

Graeme Kirkwood has had 30 Flexible Learning Champions resourced from March 2004, by first building management support through a consultation process outlined in this report.

Summary - building engagement requires a strong user focus

What champions do to facilitate uptake of technology in VET teaching and learning is to focus on the end users, the teachers/trainers and the learners and to ensure that the e-learning solutions that are offered engage them. This is how champions enthuse and empower teachers/trainers and learners, develop a strong understanding of users' needs through active listening and relationship building and offer e-learning solutions that will do what the users want and build on their current skills and knowledge, often in teams or communities of practice.

Champions expose teachers/trainers to e-learning opportunities as they become ready and willing and transfer e-learning know-how in small chunks with strong support, initially at least to build confidence. They remain open to changing their approach based on feedback and other research they undertake.

To build momentum, champions establish teams or communities of practice or networks of people for sharing and peer-to-peer learning. Examples include online social networking, peer-to-peer mentoring, use of blogs and wiki spaces, showcase events, and general staff induction and training programs.

Champions also seek management support for systematic staff development in e-learning but prescribed minimum standards and frequencies for staff undertaking e-learning training are rare in the organisations of the champions interviewed.

Chapter 3: What it takes to embed e-learning

- What support do e-learning champions need to maximise their impact?
- How is the work of champions sustained so that the e-learning practices are embedded in business units and organisations or more broadly?

What the literature says

About embedding innovations in VET generally

Two change management approaches are commonly required to support the implementation of innovation in the VET system generally: developmental transitions involving the re-moulding of the core cultural values of an organisation; and task transitions, involving the redesign of jobs and/or business systems (see Mitchell and Young 2001, and Mitchell 2003).

Callan (2004) expands on these activities by describing eight characteristics of innovative VET enterprises:

- creating learning cultures
- having leaders who are risk-tolerant
- making innovation a core capability
- identifying their innovators and rewarding people for bringing forward innovative ideas
- using partnerships to bring in new knowledge which drives further innovation
- developing teams and cross-functional teams
- creating communities of practice which meet regularly to discuss common interests
- providing places to be innovative.

Callan observed that many VET organisations have begun the journey with some exceptional individuals and teams leading the way, but no VET organisation met all eight characteristics.

More recent research (Clayton et al, 2008) suggests that there remain multiple cultures within VET organisations and that multiple cultures are a weakness where they become cultures that are resistant to change and prevent the ready exploitation of opportunities. Organisational cultures and structures are recommended that encourage learning at work and these are similar to the characteristics required by innovative organisations.

Learning organisations have:

- support from management
- ready access to necessary information
- ready access to other people in the organisation
- a culture where risk-taking is supported
- flat devolved decision-making and opportunities for individuals and teams to work flexibly
- work arrangements that give practitioners the time, space and support to innovate.

(Smith et al, 2008)

About embedding e-learning

More specifically regarding embedding e-learning, a report on e-learning within the building and construction and allied trades suggests that to go beyond the pilot or early adoption stage requires organisational support:

'Despite best intentions and enormous energy, one person cannot by themselves shift e-learning from the margins to the mainstream across a trade or college. This is because despite the e-learning tools being much cheaper, they still cost money, and student access to digital technologies is the key to success. Therefore, budgets do need to be committed to technology support.

Where e-learning has flourished across trades and courses, it is generally where there is at least middle management (budget) support and a flexible learning centre that can assist in the mentoring and skills development. If the top level management has incorporated e-learning in their strategic plan, there are even more productive consequences.'

(Thompson and Lamshead 2006 p. 32)

The need for better system-wide support was also a dominant message among VET e-learning champions interviewed by Jasinski (2006). The various supports required to embed learning included active administrative leadership (senior level and line managers), teacher/trainer support and technical support (p. 75).

Teacher/trainer support includes allowing time for teachers/trainers to experiment with e-learning, offering mentoring, practical hands-on experience and access to networking opportunities for sharing and collaborating. Teachers/trainers need to be able to learn about e-learning from peers and mentors and through collegial networks rather than through formal training programs if e-learning is to be sustained or embedded.

- Technical support enablers include competent, service-oriented IT staff, access to up-to-date hardware and software, and reliable robust systems.

What our champions did and said about embedding e-learning

The champions generally agree that they need to foster advocates for the e-learning cause in their spheres of influence through strategic and active promotion of the successes achieved by those who have adopted e-learning in their teaching/training and learning practices.

An opinion that consistently came through from our champion interviewees is the need to have a strong advocate in management, particularly their immediate manager and preferably

another advocate at the senior management level, summed up by expressions such as ‘the imperative for management buy-in’, a strong management advocate who will consistently take up ‘the cause’ and ‘someone to deal with the politics’.

Most of the champions spoke about the need to maintain a conspicuous profile whilst supporting staff currently undertaking e-learning and seeking to convert others. As staff change, new organisational priorities emerge that may result in e-learning not remaining at the forefront for all personnel. Being entrepreneurial, always on the lookout for any opportunity to promote e-learning is a key requirement of a champion. One interviewee describes it as being ‘the fleas on the elephant - always there’. The champion has to ensure that e-learning remains on the agenda.

Employ proactive and innovative promotional methods

The need for and the importance of being highly visible across all levels of the organisation was mentioned regularly throughout the interviews. The champions spoke about the importance of promoting the great work of the general staff. Promotion needed to capture the successes from across all sections of the organisation and not solely the work of the champion.

Showcasing successes is a powerful method for gaining support and champions use digital stories, blogs, video newsletters, general newsletters, constantly taking photos and sharing, intranet sites, lunch and learn sessions, staff meetings, management meetings, themed professional development days and staff conferences. Rewarding staff through the use of certificates is another approach used with some success and to have staff work with their peers to share their knowledge.

Meetings, particularly with the senior management group to highlight initiatives, can also be valuable. A useful technique is to always have at hand a prepared one-minute pitch or to have examples of successes and statistical information. Being able to push out the success stories rather than simply being reactive is viewed as important. The champions admit that it is often easy to put aside such promotional activities because they require considerable time and energy but they recognise their value in accelerating and embedding e-learning.

Interestingly, our champions suggest they are often better known externally. Comments similar to ‘I am more known outside of my organisation for my work than I am within’ were made by a number of respondents. Their promotional efforts externally appear to be more successful than their internal efforts.

In the literature review (McCulloch, et al 2008) it was noted that e-learning champions have developed new ways of enhancing their impact that compounds the determination of what any one champion alone has achieved. E-learning champions have sought to influence a wide variety of people beyond their charter through various e-tools such as the Knowledge Tree¹⁰, one of the key resources developed through Flexible Learning Leaders with the following objectives:

- to provide a platform for sharing new ideas in flexible learning and leadership
- to keep learning leaders and practitioners up-to-date
- to promote the practice of flexible learning and leadership
- to facilitate flexible learning leader networking on a national and international basis, eg refer to <http://kt.flexiblelearning.net.au>, wikis (<http://innovate2integrate.wetpaint.com/page>), and the E-learning Innovations blog (<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/innovationsblog>)

¹⁰ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/knowledgetree>

Through these means the influence and impact of e-learning champions is wider and deeper, with a viral-like effect that quickly reaches even the most isolated of communities (McCulloch et al, 2008).

Develop and nurture internal advocates

A strong advocate in management, particularly at the supervisory and/or senior management level to 'take up the cause' or 'deal with the politics' is seen as a critical success feature.

The management advocate does not have to be an e-learning expert but rather someone the e-learning champion can turn to for assistance to drive e-learning projects, navigate organisational politics, and provide strategic advice. 'The need to have political intelligence' was a term used by some of the champions as well as assistance with sourcing funds and allocating human resources for innovative activities.

Trying to find funds to provide time release for staff to undertake training or to assist departments to release staff for the development of resources or the trialling of new e-learning practices is a common problem or challenge faced by the champions.

The e-learning champions also express difficulties maintaining their own ongoing professional development due to resources and time constraints. They feel obligated to and do spend many hours 'exploring' new software or technology in their own time and at their own expense.

Having good relations with the IT manager is also seen as desirable. IT practices often imposed limitations or restrictions on what can be done and act as a barrier to the introduction of new e-learning tools. Actively engaging with the IT department facilitates getting them 'on board' and abreast of emerging trends as well as staff and student expectations. Some champions have sought to include the IT manager or a representative on major projects. In one instance the e-learning leader played an active role in the recruitment of a new IT manager. This had partially come about as a result of their lobbying for an IT manager who better understood the needs of an educational organisation.

Introduce e-learning anyway

Some of the champions have the advantage of organisational level e-learning goals/targets. The existence of such targets provide the champion with a useful instrument for encouraging or motivating staff in the uptake of e-learning practices.

The value of having clear e-learning strategic directions gives the champion increased credibility within the organisation. The study of Graeme Kirkwood is a case in point. Tasmania now has the highest rate of use of e-learning of all Australian states and territories (Benchmarking survey report, Mack Consulting 2008, p. 8).

Building a whole-of-organisation foundation for e-learning

*After a visit to Sunderland College in the UK **Graeme Kirkwood** was inspired to develop the 'Engaging Learning Strategy' to position TAFE Tasmania to offer client-focused teaching and learning with e-learning as a significant emphasis, not for its own sake but as a crucial tool to promote learner engagement, and more active participation in learning.*

The Strategy took most of 2003 to develop. It was an inclusive, collaborative exercise.

There were two major reference groups: a Business Consortium that was chaired by the CEO and comprised managers and a Learning Coalition group made up of a vertical slice of the organisation. Focus groups and forums were held across the state.

'...this was an essential step in understanding the internal context for change, and ensuring the eventual plan had a solid grounding in the everyday reality of those responsible for delivery' (Kirkwood, 2004).

An online discussion forum was established to enhance the communication process and 'to avoid the danger of focus groups being seen as a one-off exercise'.

Two discussion papers were prepared and distributed to enable people to see what themes were emerging, and provide feedback, and demonstrate that 'things' were happening.

Upon endorsement of the plan, Graeme marketed it by conducting 36 presentations involving all campuses himself to ensure that a consistent message was delivered and that there was minimal opportunity for people less committed to 'dilute or filter' the message.

Another example is the leadership taken by Greg Logan to build the business case for e-learning in the health sector (Shaw, 2008).

Implementing e-learning of his own accord

Greg Logan has introduced e-learning into an organisation (Turning Point Drug and Alcohol Centre) and then a whole-state mental health services network on his own initiative. Greg had a vision of what could be achieved utilising technologies, made an attractive case for e-learning to staff management, and then provided leadership for implementation.

Greg identified market demand, analysed the cost effectiveness and benefits of implementing ICT, considered the tangible/intangible benefits, identified resource implications and the personnel required, and found and assisted with professional development as providing hands-on mentoring.

According to a dual diagnosis clinician, 'Greg moved, quickly and positively, to engage with the key stakeholders in the dual diagnosis community and was instrumental in drawing them together, highlighting their commonalities, engendering a sense of community and engaging them in working collaboratively towards their common goal.'

Crucial from Greg's viewpoint is that his managers have given him a degree of autonomy to implement e-learning successfully. In his eyes, 'bad managers micro manage – good managers give you the autonomy to do it' (Shaw, 2008). For other champions, sourcing external funds provides the opportunity to do something they might not have otherwise been able to do and to gain organisational support. Interestingly, others have found that the reporting associated with external funds can be onerous, detracts from the core aims and limits the actual outcomes. These champions consciously avoid some external funding opportunities.

Another approach is to work freelance as an e-learning champion with whichever organisations show interest, as does Georgina Nou.

"Sometimes operating as a sole maverick in a vacuum makes it hard to reflect. You need to have unqualified support and encouragement from others," says Georgina. "You need to actively source funding. You need to talk to management and find new frontiers to make e-learning part of policy. Be excited about what you are doing and keep the 'edge' happening," says Georgina.

(McCulloch, 2008)

Champions have introduced e-learning by stealth using strategies such as:

- influencing internal bodies (see consultation report for an example relating to an organisation's academic board)
- induction programs to provide new staff with an overview of the organisation's e-learning expectations and online learning environment
- online staff training as part of a broader organisational strategy to build engagement with e-learning.

Has a sustainable state been reached with regard to e-learning?

The 15 e-learning champions do not think that they have reached a sustainable state regarding e-learning in their spheres of influence. When asked what they thought would happen if they walked away tomorrow, the champions said that e-learning was not likely to be maintained or further developed except in some isolated pockets.

Summary – embedding requires systemic buy-in

Both the literature and the 15 champions suggest that organisational support is required to embed e-learning in teaching/training and learning practices.

Both the literature and the national consultations (for this report) suggest that one person cannot by themselves shift e-learning from the margins to the mainstream. To embed e-learning requires organisation/industry/community-wide change and processes in place that aid the work of a change agent to sustain the innovation.

The champions indicate that they are required to manage upwards, regularly communicate successes, and build some strong allies within the organisation in management and the IT department to assist them to navigate through various issues that arise as they seek to introduce the required changes within the organisation. They needed to think and act strategically to ensure e-learning becomes prominent across all levels of the organisation.

Not one of the 15 champions believes that e-learning would be widely sustained as yet without their influence in their respective spheres. Greater administrative leadership, teacher/trainer support and technical support are required, and particularly:

- management buy-in through the specific inclusion of e-learning in the strategic goals of the organisation, to ensure that e-learning remains on the agenda and to reduce the promotional time that the champions otherwise have to spend
- more time and/or funds for teachers/trainers to explore e-learning opportunities
- more supportive IT systems.

Three models are provided by the case studies for introducing e-learning at a strategic level: an inclusive whole of organisation collaborative exercise approach; a business case to management approach; and a working freelance with willing organisations that target a community or social group approach.

Chapter 4: Evidence of impact of e-learning champions

- How can the impact of the e-learning champions be measured and evaluated?

What the literature says

Areas of influence

In the report *Signs of Change* (I & J Management, 2003) measurements of impact by Flexible Learning Leaders from 2000 to 2003 were recorded under six headings. The term 'flexible learning' was used then to describe what we now refer to as 'e-learning':

- solid influence across the board
- increased implementation of different models of flexible learning
- increased numbers of teachers/trainers participating and learner enrolments in courses offering flexible learning with 57% of survey respondents believing that flexible learning leaders had had a moderate impact and 12% believing that the impact was high
- increased use of online communications but this was not seen as an increased take-up of flexible learning
- increased underpinning capability of their organisations which over 75% of survey respondents indicated to be the area of most impact by flexible learning leaders
- increased satisfaction with e-teaching and learning outcomes but only 48% of survey respondents believed they had had a moderate impact on teacher/trainer satisfaction with flexible learning.

In the report *Faster, Straighter, Smoother* (I&J Management, 2003), the impact of the Framework funded e-learning champions at that time was identified as including four components of an organisation:

- **Practices** – including strategic and business planning, professional development, learning programs and resources, funding and commercial activity, and organisational structures (p. 16).
- **Decisions** – the leaders or champions indicated that with their enhanced knowledge base they were better placed to be opportunistic in that they can now see and seize opportunities for alignment of organisational initiatives to advance e-learning (p. 21).
- **Capacity** – champions have had impact on knowledge transfer and communities of practice, the import of a wider range of resources and experts on flexible or e-learning, who are more knowledgeable, experienced and confident in their capacity to contribute to improved e-learning practices (p. 23).
- **Profile** – 90% of leaders and managers indicated that things that had happened as a result of the e-learning champions had reflected positively on the organisation raising its profile among the VET sector as a flexible learning organisation (p. 24).

What is currently routinely measured?

Data on e-learning uptake is collected in the Framework's annual E-learning Benchmarking Survey tracking progress made with regard to e-learning among registered VET training providers of all types using data on 12 indicators that measure:

- uptake of e-learning in teaching and learning by teachers/trainers and outcomes in terms of changes in practices and learner outcomes
- uptake by individual learners and their views on levels of confidence with using ICT, the flexibility e-learning provided and whether they believe the e-learning experience will improve employment opportunities
- uptake of e-business services and client satisfaction with such services.

In 2008, VET training providers were also asked for the first time if they had an e-learning strategy.

The 2008 E-learning Benchmarking Survey shows 91% of VET students and 88% of VET teachers and trainers use at least some form of e-learning. These high figures relate to the use of technology per se in VET,

“to download learning materials and resources, for remote and/or classroom use of multimedia interactive learning resources, electronic submission of work, online assessment, and/or the use of web 2.0, mobile and voice technologies.”

In many cases the above figures relate to the use of e-business tools rather than to the use of technology in teaching and learning activities. The 2008 E-learning Benchmarking Survey reveals that about one third (36%) of all Australian VET activity now formally involves e-learning, up from around 3-4% in 2003-2004, and that half (58%) of the participating VET training providers are now using e-learning in some part of their training delivery. Early adoption has also been achieved of web 2.0 or social networking technologies (24%).

The 2008 E-learning Benchmarking Survey also reveals that less than 30% of enterprises, community based education organisations and schools that are registered VET training providers have e-learning incorporated into their overall business strategy, while the figure for public TAFE institutes is 56%. Another 9% of VET training providers report having a stand-alone e-learning strategy (I & J Management Services, 2008).

These figures from the Framework's 2008 E-learning Benchmarking Survey indicate that there is some way to go to achieve the embedding of e-learning in VET teaching and learning processes. The successes to date are remarkable nonetheless, but how much they can be attributed to the work of e-learning champions is a moot point.

Determining impact – confounding variables

Flexible learning champions, their managers and colleagues suggest that the impact of e-learning champions is facilitative, not absolute. They aid the uptake and embedding of e-learning to be faster, straighter and smoother than it otherwise would have been. This includes:

- **Faster** – the change would have happened anyway but the organisation is better able and more confident to proceed with what it wants to do.
- **Straighter** – decisions and programs are more focused on what the organisation needs, drawing on the leader's [that is, the champion's] experience and knowledge from research and visiting other organisations.
- **Smoother** – the leader's greater awareness of practical issues that might positively or negatively influence the success of an initiative has smoothed the implementation process.

(I&J Management 2003, p. 35).

What our champions said and measured

Measuring the impact of e-learning champions provoked a diversity of comments and views from the 15 e-learning champions who concurred that performance should be measured in terms of whether the e-learning champion did what they planned to do within the timeframe and within budget and received positive feedback and comments relating to changes they have been driving.

The champions universally agree that a positive impact on embedding e-learning is enabled if the solution is:

- reliable
- sustainable
- flexible to meet the needs of teachers/trainers and learners.

A wide range of more detailed indicators of impact are also provided by the champions that relate to teachers/trainers, learners and/or their organisation as a whole. Some of the indicators are quantitative; others qualitative.

The case studies reveal the complexity of measuring the impact of a champion. Their teacher/trainer, learner and organisational level impacts are cumulative: they expand over time. There is a 'ripple' effect. Obtaining a complete picture of their impact is often very difficult; for example, measuring the impact of Georgina Nou, a freelance e-learning champion whose approach is to mentor others to mentor others (McCullough, et al 2008).

The overall range of responses of the champions is provided in Table 1 overleaf.

The measures may include:

- changes in the total numbers of learners involved in e-learning (accessible via the learner management system)
- changes in numbers of learners involved in e-learning in particular cohorts (age/industry/geographic area)
- changes in the number of individual teachers/trainers engaged in e-learning
- outcomes of qualitative feedback from teachers/trainers regarding the performance of the e-learning champion (undertaken by some of the champions)
- outcomes of qualitative feedback from the learners by the teachers/trainers and the e-learning champions
- changes in the volume and types of e-learning tools and technologies being developed and used
- changes in the frequency of assistance requested by early adopters
- numbers of new teachers/trainers assisted to introduce e-learning teaching and learning practices
- organisational outcomes against the annual Framework's E-learning Benchmarking Survey
- achievement of organisational strategic goals and/or performance targets (where they exist)
- volume of data accessed via the e-learning platform
- trends in numbers of staff undertaking professional development in e-learning practices and processes.

Table 1: Measures of impact of an e-learning champion¹¹

<p><i>User-focused measures</i></p> <p><i>a) Attitudinal indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to observe changes in attitudes towards technology: ‘have them walk away with less fear’ • to see an improvement in perceptions regarding e-learning • to engage with groups who had always been negative • to witness an improvement in the ‘tone’ in terms of attitude towards e-learning. <p><i>b) Teachers/trainers’ usage of e-learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to have new initiatives undertaken by staff • when something that started as a project has been able to make the transference into practice • when a product has been rolled out by teachers/trainers that the learner had been able to use effectively without the requirement for extensive e-learning team one-on-one support • if the teacher/trainer is able to make a connection and build engagement in learning among learners through the use of technology • when there is an increase in demand for their (e-learning champions’) services • when a culture of knowledge and resource sharing is developing • when staff are working together to achieve the management plan of every class having access to technology • when a change of practice has occurred. <p><i>c) Learners using e-learning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to get their first learner is a measure • to continue to increase the number of employers and learners who use the e-learning product • the number of learners/users having enrolled in programs involving e-learning • the number completing units where e-learning practices are included • the number continuing with a program including e-learning and the time taken to complete units or activities • the number of times a user logged in, the time taken to complete tasks; the level of engagement could be used as a measure of success • to have learners complete their course and to be issued with a certificate • comments on e-learning made by learners directly to the teacher/trainer. <p><i>Organisational level success</i></p> <p><i>a) Success is when nominated targets of the organisation are met such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a specific number of online enrolments, new products, having a percentage of teachers/trainers engage with e-learning, or having a required number of staff undertake training • when the organisation achieves or exceeds national benchmarks for e-learning usage. <p><i>b) Success is achieving the recognition of others such as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having staff achievements recognised and the organisation known for its e-learning • when others approach the organisation to expand their e-learning • having staff want to join the organisation (that has e-learning as core of the business).
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¹¹ Provided by the 15 e-learning champions interviewed

In the three case studies conducted for this study, testimonials of staff and managers about e-learning champions were collected and found to be a powerful avenue for understanding their personal performance and indicative impacts.

The case studies also reveal the complexity of measuring the impact of a champion. Their teacher/trainer, learner and organisational level impacts are cumulative; they expand over time. There is a 'ripple' effect. Obtaining a complete picture of the e-learning champions' impact is very difficult.

Summary – champions achieve many flow-on effects that are difficult to fully measure

The desired impacts of a champion have been outlined by the literature and the champions themselves and can be summarised to include:

- changing attitudes towards e-learning
- building capacity among as many teachers/trainers as possible to use e-learning in ways that engage more and more learners and improve their educational outcomes
- influencing the organisation(s) they work for to adopt processes that will sustain e-learning and build the organisation's reputation in e-learning.

The measurement focus to date has been to determine e-learning capacity and usage among teachers/trainers and learners and their attitudinal changes to e-learning. Less emphasis has been paid to collecting evidence that e-learning has been sustained and is embedded in an organisation.

E-learning champions apparently have had a significant impact at the teacher/trainer/learner level but mixed success at the organisational level.

Whatever measures are used, it is difficult to assign the outcomes to an e-learning champion alone; there are other variables that have influence. The champion's role is facilitative not absolute. It is also difficult to measure the full impact of a successful champion because they achieve cascading or flow-on effects from their activities over time, not all of which may be explicit or measurable. Obtaining a complete picture of their impact is difficult.

A summary of the findings pertaining to the use of champions model for the future is provided in the next and final chapter based on the findings of the study overall.

Chapter 5: Use of a champion strategy in the future

Summary of findings

Principal findings of the study

- Champions have been used widely as a strategy to develop e-learning.
- There are identifiable similarities in the traits of people in an e-learning champion role that are required for them to have credibility as change agents.
- There is commonality in the strategies that champions employ to be successful in facilitating the uptake of e-learning for teaching/training and learning purposes among teachers/trainers and learners.
- Champions of e-learning are expected to and appear to be having significant impact on teacher/trainer capability and application of e-learning in VET delivery to learners, but they alone cannot embed e-learning in their organisation, industry or community.
- To sustain e-learning, managers and policy makers must assist and build organisational cultures and work processes, including e-learning performance measures that support innovation and the work of champions and their e-learning adopters. This has not yet widely occurred despite e-learning champions promoting this message for some time.
- E-learning champions are often better recognised for their work outside their organisation than within it.
- Using champions of e-learning to influence the uptake of e-learning should continue but with greater consideration to the development of whole-of-organisation systems and practices that will both support and build the capabilities of the e-learning champion and the various personnel associated with embedding e-learning solutions into teaching/training and learning practices.

Implications for future VET program design and performance

A champions' program design and performance framework based on the findings of this study is summarised in Figure 2 overleaf.

Figure 2: A champions' program design and performance framework



This study and Figure 2 suggest selection criteria for an e-learning champion should include the following:

- high competence in e-learning, in both theory and practice
- preparedness to share
- passion, enthusiasm and tenacity
- client focused to provide workable solutions
- communicate effectively with many different kinds of people
- enterprising and can problem solve
- role models a commitment to e-learning.

The work tasks of a champion to build engagement with e-learning among VET teachers/trainers and learners include:

- providing client tailored educationally sound solutions
- motivating teachers/trainers to explore
- working with teachers/trainers as they become ready and willing
- supporting teachers/trainers heavily, one-on-one
- effectively troubleshooting to empower teachers/trainers
- reviewing and adapting as required.

To build e-learning momentum the tasks for a champion are to:

- promote and showcase what they are doing and the successes organisation-wide including in terms of usage data on:
 - % of staff using e-learning as part of their delivery
 - % of total delivery that now involves e-learning
- nurture advocates who are influential in setting policy
- provide advice on processes that need to be in place to sustain e-learning to managers and policy makers.

The organisation should demonstrate an ongoing commitment to e-learning with managers and policy makers sharing the responsibility. The performance indicators recommended for them include the following.

1. Evidence of mainstream adoption of e-learning at the strategic level:

- E-learning is part of the strategic plan for achieving quality teaching/training and learning.
- There is a budget line for technology support for e-learning and it lives on beyond special funding.
- E-learning is supported by the IT branch/section.
- Use of e-learning is part of teachers/trainers performance plans.

2. Evidence of mainstream adoption of e-learning at the operational level:

- Processes/repositories are in place for continual sharing of e-learning knowledge and resources.
- Teams and/or networks are in place to encourage connections between novices and experts in e-learning.

- Teachers/trainers have time to experiment and try out new e-learning tools/products, and time for review (including with learners).
- Champions bring about change to e-learning practices within organisations. Moreover, embedding e-learning requires more than the appointment of a champion. A range of other factors are required as depicted in Figure 2.

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Attachment A

The 15 e-learning champions interviewed

Interviewees	Organisation
Fran Dodd	GippsTAFE, Victoria
Cinthia Del Grosso	Transport & Logistics Industry Skills Council
Rodney Spinks	St Luke's Health
Debora Gallo	ING Australia
Moir Holmes	Canberra Institute of Technology
Denise Morgan	Wide Bay Institute of TAFE
Tim Harris	Blue Dog Training
Greg Logan	Dual Diagnosis Education, St Vincent's Hospital
Graeme Kirkwood	TAFE Tasmania
Michael Chalk	ACE, Preston and Reservoir
Ben Metherell	The Muir Electrical Company
Rita Bennick	College for Learning and Development Organisation
Georgina Nou	APY Lands, TAFESA Regional
Arabella Hay	North Coast TAFE
Ruth Wallace	Charles Darwin University

Attachment B

The set of questions used as a guide for the interviews

Research Questions for E-learning Champions National Consultations Phase of the Study
<p>Introduction</p> <p>GippsTAFE in collaboration with Kaye Bowman and Carole McCulloch is undertaking a study of the impact of e-learning champions on the embedding of e-learning in their organisation, industry or community for the Australian Flexible Learning Framework.</p> <p>The aims of the study overall are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• inform the Australian vocational education and training (VET) sector on the effectiveness of the use of e-learning champions as a strategy to effectively embed e-learning practices• advise on whether a champions model should be supported and if so under what circumstances and what it means for VET program design and performance reporting. <p>Thank you for agreeing to be one of 15 e-learning 'champions' involved in the national consultations phase of the study. The questions we wish to discuss with you via Elluminate or phone interview are listed below. Your individual answers will be kept confidential unless we have your prior approval.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Brad Shaw and Malcolm Jolly</p>
<p>Interview Question 1</p> <p>1a) What does your organisation expect of you in terms of implementing e-learning into your section/department or more broadly across your organisation?</p> <p>1b) How long have you been in this role?</p>
<p>Interview Question 2</p> <p>Name some of the new ideas or practices you have brought to e-learning in your organisation.</p>
<p>Interview Question 3</p> <p>How have these ideas or practices, or any other e-learning ideas or practices that you integrate into your teaching, been accepted by your peers as well as your organisation?</p>
<p>Interview Question 4</p> <p>From your personal viewpoint, what characteristics would experienced e-learning personnel require in order to promote and implement innovative e-learning practices within your organisation or further into the VET sector?</p>

Interview Question 5

Describe your views on the characteristics of experienced e-learning personnel relating to the following:

- Being able to influence others into taking up e-learning technologies within their own organisation and into the general VET sector.
- Able to lead a team to assist in the uptake of e-learning technologies within their own organisation and into the general VET sector.
- Someone who undertakes professional development so that they can further embed e-learning into their and others' teaching practices.

Interview Question 6

How do you measure success in implementing e-learning from:

- a) an organisational point of view?
- b) a learner's point of view?

Interview Question 7

Please outline how many teachers/trainers have taken up e-learning as a result of your efforts. Perhaps you can provide an indicative percentage?

Interview Question 8

Please indicate how much e-learning teachers/trainers in your organisation have taken up. Perhaps you can also provide an indicative amount of their total delivery that includes e-learning?

Interview Question 9

Please outline the capacity of your VET colleagues with regards to e-learning. Eg:

1. All have some capacity.
2. Some have some capacity.
3. All have no capacity.
4. Some have no capacity.

Interview Question 10

What strategies do you employ to gain support and build momentum from others in your quest to move e-learning forward in your organisation?

Interview Question 11

Mention some of the ways in which you share your e-learning skills, knowledge and resources with other VET personnel and organisations.

Interview Question 12

Discuss ways that external VET personnel and organisations consult with you with regards to your e-learning practices and implementation.

Interview Question 13

How do you maximise the impact of e-learning in your organisation?

Interview Question 14

Please comment on the following remarks:

To maximise the impact of e-learning in your organisation, you would need to:

- have forward thinking
- be committed and have drive and resilience
- be enthusiastic and positive
- role model and lead by example
- have unqualified support and encouragement from others
- actively source funding.

Rank each of the above on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the least important.

Interview Question 15

In terms of maximising your impact in the implementation of an e-learning mindset into your organisation and the wider VET sector, what support would you need?

Interview Question 16

In relation to the above, how do you go about seeking and gaining support to maximise the impact of e-learning into your organisation?

Interview Question 17

Other than yourself, what types of people do you see as being responsible for the building and sustainability of e-learning practices that have/are being implemented into your organisation?

Interview Question 18

What ways can you ensure your work in e-learning is sustained so that it is truly embedded in your organisation?

Interview Question 19

In terms of establishing guidelines for incorporating a strategy of implementing key drivers of e-learning into organisations and the wider VET sector, describe your views on the following:

- Creating learning cultures
- Ensuring innovation is a core capability
- Identifying innovators and rewarding them
- Using partnerships to encourage new knowledge
- Appointing leaders who are tolerant to risk strategies
- The development of teams that are both common and cross-functional
- Creating communities of practice
- Providing places or spaces to be innovative
- Other

Rank each of the above on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the least important.

Final Summation Question

Interview Question 20

Please sum up your views on:

- a) the 'champion' model as a means of facilitating the uptake and embedding of e-learning in VET organisations
- b) critical success factors for the champion model to be effective.

Interview Question 21

Are there any other points you would like to raise?

For more information

Benchmarking and Research business activity

Annie Fergusson

Phone: (08) 8348 4071

Email: fergusson.annie@saugov.sa.gov.au

Website: flexiblelearning.net.au/research

For more information on the Australian Flexible Learning Framework

Phone: (07) 3307 4700

Fax: (07) 3259 4371

Email: enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au

Website: flexiblelearning.net.au

GPO Box 1326, Brisbane QLD 4001