

## Executive summary

This report aims to portray the current position in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region of the use of e-learning through a social context lens that is relevant for both business and government sectors.

The *E-learning Toolkit* follows on from Patti Anklam's *Social-Network Toolkit*. Consequently it focuses on the human-dimensions and the transportable nature of e-learning/e-training, forming an important part of the social networking that transpires in all parts of our daily lives.

The Introduction in Part One describes the current position in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region of the use of e-learning/training through a 'social context lens', which is relevant in both the business and government sectors. This opening section introduces concepts of 'organisational and social capital' offering practical strategies for creating effective e-learning experiences for older learners/industry trainees. The 'Asia e-Learning Network' (AEN) is emerging to enhance this region's effectiveness. We see a fine example of how to facilitate best practice through third generational e-learning designs, to emphasise that a blended approach may indeed be the best practice after all.

Chapter 1 explains why e-learning matters through a social networking lens [4]. This enables us to understand the broader concepts of organisation capital within e-learning networks. Change is all around us; there is even a special variety of digital linguistics that plays an important role in any discussion on e-learning. This means that our comprehension of what people experience may be slightly different in different corners of the globe. Consequently, our notion of social networking that is used within the business community *per se* is changing the way we understand 'trusted communication' between two or more business people in an online e-learning/training environment.

The social context of e-learning goes hand-in-glove with e-communities. In most cases these communities develop online through a digital osmosis, changing the ways we deal with our tacit (conceptual) knowledge sharing. Since the beginning of time, we have experienced our learning through our collaborative ventures, like watching our parents interact with those around us. Collaborative online environments develop our digital tacit knowledge into more concrete and explicit knowledge that people pass on as digital artefacts through the internet.

Chapter 2 shifts from the broader focus taken in the first chapter, where the central themes link the social context of learning and organisational performance – to examine the interactive effect of e-learning social networking structures in a range of business or corporate sector settings on performance outcomes. Instead it looks more closely at e-learning to highlight the human-dimensions of human-computer interaction (HCI). The relationship is constantly changing between human-beings and their reliance on technology for educational/training purposes. One of the more powerful influences noted here is the merging of the relationship within the fields of distance education and social networking. This is partly due to the emerging virtual community practices. This means they now overlap the previously disparate learning/training agencies, shedding new light on the differences between co-operative and collaborative education and training. Co-operative environments are prescriptive where there is a set pathway of tasks to reach the intended outcome; in a collaborative environment, there is flexibility for sharing new ways to achieve the final result.

Chapter 3 takes a step away from the e-learning environment *per se* to explain that not all people will visualise their online learning materials in the same manner. Unlike the popular myth, which says that visualisers learn best from pictures and verbalisers learn best from text, researchers know that away from a computer, our mode of thinking about the

information we receive, will vary according to the task at hand. People will choose to think of the information they are receiving in terms of verbal (text-driven) or mental images (visualising concepts). Researchers in general have been aware of learners' cognitive (learning style) differences – and the implications for instructional design. Yet it is still unclear how individuals respond to screen-based information. Research is yet to provide a comprehensive evaluation that considers the full Riding dimensions of cognitive style (people's representation of information during thinking and their mode of processing information) to determine the interactive effects of adding colour, movement and sound to our comprehension in online learning/training environments.

Chapter 4 provides common-sense tips for developing your own e-learning development strategy. These ten design and delivery tips are offered as strategic *E-learning Toolkit* rules; they draw upon the human-dimensions of the human-computer interactions (HCI) to guide the building of your e-learning solutions. These rules offer some practical tips to overcome the common view that training programmes for new corporate employees are readily available.

Chapter 5 takes a brief look at the future for e-learning and learning more generally, considering the impact of mobile and home working.

Part Two presents eight e-learning case studies written by academic researchers in a mix of corporate/industry sector training and education sector online learning programmes. While these case studies are located in the Asia-Pacific region, the professional training practice as it applies to the Australian view is threaded throughout this *E-learning Toolkit*. Although inclusivity is viewed as highly desirable, the common threads between the case studies reveal a strong tendency towards cost savings as a prime motivator for devising e-learning programmes.

The contributions from Singapore and the Philippines bear this out. In particular, the collaborative approach is valued most by the Singaporeans – while in the Philippines they extend this collaborative relationship into customising the e-learning programmes by involving the local communities. In the case study from New Zealand, the authors add access and quality training to facilitate their systems analysis training, while in the case study from Taiwan the author notes that the values of improved performance and quality training are the key drivers that enhance the acceptability of e-learning among teachers there. While the treatment of e-learning is quite different in Japan and Malaysia, these case studies share a common thread to emphasise the value of group dynamics. Their key drivers include informal learning, knowledge management and skill capture. The final case study, from the USA, concentrates on inter-agency collaboration for implementing a blended e-learning programme. This e-learning programme is based upon sound instructional design principles, to meet the performance expectations of each agency.