

## Final Reflection

“Organisations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning. But without it no organisational learning occurs”

Peter Senge

## **Introduction**

Since my appointment to a role in learning and development in an Irish Insurance company almost ten years ago now, it is interesting to look back and reflect on the changes that have occurred in the area of training within the organisation. Possibly one of the most significant changes has been the introduction of e-learning as a means to deliver training. Since its launch I have become more involved with e-learning, which has resulted in my spending less time delivering traditional classroom style training. It has also resulted in the decision to undertake the MSc so that I could learn more about the possibilities of what can be achieved through e-learning. Sometimes it is difficult to define my exact role or relationship with e-learning, originally I was heavily involved in the initial implementation project, while currently I'm working on a project to implement our virtual classroom and on a project which will see a significant upgrade and change to our learning management system (LMS). However as I approach the end of the MSc I find that at times in addition to my project work I may also step into the role of Instructional Designer, provide advice on the moderation of our new discussion fora or advice on how our new virtual classroom will be used to deliver training. This ability to advise or temporarily step into another role has certainly come about as a result of my participation on the MSc.

## **Looking Back**

For me the learning theory module is the foundation of the course and continues to affect my thoughts on how training is and can be delivered.

Eric Mazur's lecture, "*Confessions of a converted lecturer*" continues to resonate with me as it provided so many answers as to why my classroom training was not as effective as it could have been. My initial thought that social constructivism should be the approach for all training has been replaced with the knowledge that there is a need to consider the topic at hand and decide whether a behaviourist, cognitivist or constructivist approach should be taken. In addition an important realisation for me has been that there is a need to avoid a technology centred approach. As I encounter more technology and new ways of delivering training I have found it is very easy to get caught up in the latest craze particularly as I have a tendency to want to try new technology. The dominance of technology-oriented approaches has led to badly designed e-learning which is poorly regarded by management and left unused by employees, thus making it ineffective and a misuse of valuable resources (McKay and Izard 2012) I have come to realise that as Macpherson, Homan, & Wilkinson,( 2005) argue the full potential of e-learning will not be realised unless there is a substantial investment not only in technical capability but also in pedagogical design.

I mentioned earlier that from time to time I have needed to take on the role of instructional designer. Having worked with a number of very skilled and experienced instructional designers in the last number of years, I would not consider myself as knowledgeable as they are, but since completing the Instructional design module my confidence has increased in my ability to question and critique their approach. In addition my understanding has increased regarding why they are taking a specific approach. Storyboards are always used now to illustrate design and layout of the course content and provide a focus for discussion with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). The ability to explain and justify the approach taken during these discussions has enabled me to illustrate the importance of appropriate instructional design to SMEs who may be concerned that the format of the course is not what they had envisaged.

At times when I have needed to work on our asynchronous e-learning modules I have been cognisant of Clarke and Mayer's principles of multimedia (2008), indeed now that we are working on the introduction of a virtual classroom I have returned to Clarke's work this time with Kwinn (2007) when considering how content should be designed for synchronous online modules.

When completing the supporting virtual community's module and the trends in e-learning module I reflected as to how the learning from these modules could be applied within my organisation as at the time the modules were completed the topics that we covered were not in use. It is interesting to note that a year later the organisation has moved to the stage that Rosenberg (2006) describes as "we need to get better at e-learning" (p.2). In making this move Rosenberg (2006) contends there is an appetite in organisations for experimentation with different methods of online learning. This experimentation is illustrated most recently with the move to a more blended approach to training delivery and the introduction of monthly online modules to support and embed the learning achieved in face to face workshops. With this move I have returned to Gilly Salmon's 5 stage approach to online learning (2011) for guidance. To help our learners, we have created several short videos to welcome students, illustrate where they can find course materials and to provide guidelines on netiquette and posting to forums. Structured online activities have been set up and all learners must post to a forum. The activities encourage learners to reflect on what they have learnt and how they are applying their new skills. Although we are still in the early stages of this approach to blended delivery the initial indications are that learners are engaging with the content.

Another indication of the level of experimentation which is taking place is that consideration is now being given to how games can be used to promote learning. For me this is a very exciting departure as during the trends module I was very much an advocate of games for learning. The

area in which it is anticipated that games will be used is in a project which will see the replacement of a current IT system with a newer system. This project will have huge impact on how employees work within the organisation and so in addition to training on how to use the new system there is also a change management element. Educause (2011) contends games can be used to motivate and influence behaviour and it is hoped that this will be one of the outcomes of using games on this project. It is also anticipated that the use of games in this project will encourage the five freedoms discussed by Klopfer, Osterweil and Salen in their report on moving learning games forward (2009), freedom to fail, experiment, fashion identities, effort and interpretation. While this is a new departure for the organisation I am also hopeful that it will open the door to the use of games in other training interventions, particularly in the area of induction. I am aware that that the majority of our new starters are "digital natives" Prensky (2001). However at a recent seminar I attended it was stated that assumptions should not be made about those who are or are not game players as most "digital immigrants" have engaged in some form of online gaming through their children Quinn (2013). With this in mind I would hope that games will bring an interactive dimension to training for all our learners.

## **Conclusion**

It would not be possible to reflect back on what has been learnt throughout the MSc without recognising the level of knowledge and expertise that my fellow students contributed at every stage. I am aware that participation in group work can be difficult, however for me while at times it may have been stressful, overall it was a very positive experience that led to the design of resources and e-tivities which could never have been achieved if I had worked alone. Their creativity and enthusiasm to try out new ways of using technology has challenged my creativity and enthusiasm, while their knowledge of open source tools and applications

has widened my knowledge and allowed me to tap into their experiences of using them.

I started this reflection with a quote from Peter Senge as it illustrates the challenges facing learning and development departments in work based learning. More and more I have become aware that the traditional role of learning and development departments is changing from trainers to system designers and architects, London & Hall (2011). London & Hall outline the changes

“They are the experts in learning theory and innovatively incorporate the theory into the use of the technology. They create structures that encourage intentional learning, and then let the workers create the content within their own context. They facilitate, moderate, and probe.”

My experience on the MSc has provided me with some of the tools needed to facilitate this experience and the knowledge that I need to continue to my learning journey.

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