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Enterprise Rapid E-Learning
Project managing rapid e-learning in large organisations

Whitepaper

Overview

The role of e-learning in our largest enterprises goes deeper and wider than ever before. And as the e-learning culture continues to permeate across the entire enterprise, roles and responsibilities are changing. No longer confined to in the inner sanctum of the company training department, today's most advanced course development programmes are supported by easy to use systems, advanced workflow and enterprise wide knowledge sharing capabilities that don't just encourage but actually depend on participation and input from any or every corner of the enterprise.

Offering unprecedented opportunities for knowledge sharing, the new inclusive culture has the potential to improve course quality, reduce course development time and boost profitability dramatically.

But with dramatic change comes dramatic challenges: If the role of today's forward thinking training managers is to effectively identify, harness and share expertise traditionally locked within the enterprise then the new inclusive culture must balance openness with control. Expertise required for successful course development doesn't just need to be located, it needs to be motivated; the people that hold it need to understand and respect their role in the new inclusive development process, know what's expected of them when they do participate and believe that participation will be simple and have confidence in the value they bring to the new rapid e-learning process.

This whitepaper presents a suggested model for course development from planning to publishing and provides tips and guidelines to the freshly minted rapid e-learning project manager.

Introduction

Project management can be complex in large organisations, and while many begin with great ambition, others can end-up shelved before completion. But if a project is managed smoothly the many benefits gained are significant:

• Overall project costs are reduced
• Strain on working capital is minimalised
• Resources are used effectively
• Projects are completed on deadline
• Course quality is enhanced

In order to realise these benefits effectively, the project manager must be able to balance three distinctive elements of the course creation process. These are: learning & content design; software; and corporate communications.

Why Rapid?

Moving from the traditional external supplier model towards an in-house course development process delivers key benefits not just for the project manager, but for the wider enterprise as a whole.

• By leveraging the experience and knowledge that already exists within the business, production costs are reduced and course relevance is enhanced.

• By equipping a business's most knowledgeable and experienced workers with the tools they need to adopt the role of Subject Matter Experts, the course authoring process becomes internal rendering the need for external scriptwriters redundant.

• Content is directly written into the flash templates and instantly previewed so any required editing can be immediately completed.

• Advanced track and trace features help ensure compliance, stakeholder buy-in and encourage a modern, collaborative approach to course creation. Course versions are shared easily and feedback from all stakeholders is retained throughout the development process.

• Templates can be easily reused, reducing the time required to develop similar courses, and keeping costs to a minimum.

• Rapid e-learning courses can be tracked in a company's Learning Management System for measurement and reporting. While bespoke content had often compromised tracking effectiveness in the past, these early problems do not apply to today's "best of breed" rapid e-learning systems.

Main benefits with Rapid e-Learning

• Significant increase in volume of learning created
• Reduced development time for course creation
• New capabilities in software enable easy management of development
• LMS tracking and reporting ability

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Harnesses rapid e-learning and realising the benefits: The Rapid E-Learning Development Model

By choosing to develop courses internally rather than engage with external suppliers, a number of key changes have evolved for the e-learning project manager.

Traditionally, the complexity of managing stakeholders and an external bespoke supplier called for strong process management skills. Now, with the development of internally driven rapid e-learning, the project manager is faced with new challenges. Leveraging the intrinsic involvement of resources within the enterprise but outside the traditional e-learning team, such as the identified Subject Matter Expert, becomes critical. To successfully manage this change the project manager must have a sturdy development process and relationship skills strong enough to nurture and encourage resources that may not have been exposed to e-learning before.

The impact is that, potentially, anyone within the organisation could find themselves leading the development of an e-learning course and indeed this is desirable if the organisation is seeking to create a learning culture, advantageous in any competitive changing market place.

This organic growth represents a significant managerial challenge for the project manager and requires a sturdy development process. Ideally, this should be done by mapping out the workflow required for e-learning development.

A Rapid E-Learning Development Model that breaks down the development process into a series of four stages is most effective. These stages, known as "the workflow", are outlined below.
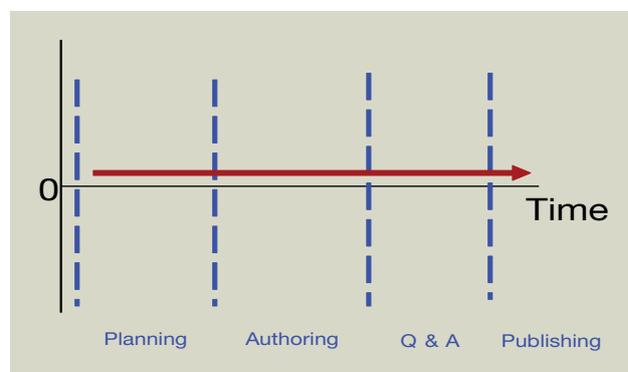

The model above illustrates the four stages of workflow in order of execution.

The four stage workflow is broken down as follows.

1. Planning –confirming the scope of the project, which includes the learning objectives
2. Authoring –The content development stage
3. Q & A – This is the quality assurance stage
4. Publishing – Uploading the course into the LMS

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Although this process appears quiet logical to the experienced project manager, in reality the development process is not always as smooth as the red line in the graph above indicates - especially if a course development model is not used before starting the content creation process or if the appropriate level of rigueur is not applied to each stage within the process.
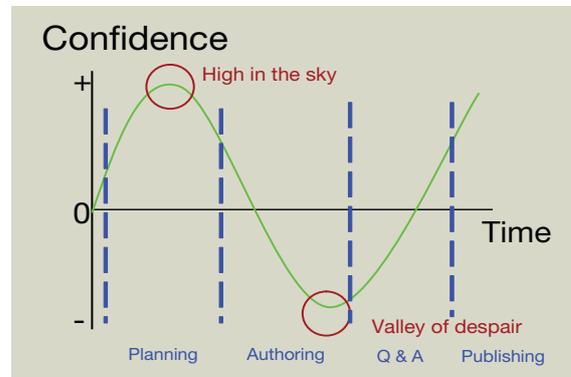
The diagram above illustrates the challenges that can result if workflow model is not used.

In this diagram, the axis on the left indicates confidence in the project and the horizontal line is time. The green line indicates the varying level of confidence that both the stakeholders and the e-learning team can have in the successful development of an e-learning course.

The project manager must remain mindful of this dynamic if they are to effectively navigate the team through the euphoria that comes with "High in the Sky" enthusiasm and the subsequent "Valley of Despair" that often follows.

1.**"High in the Sky"** – This typically occurs early on in the process when those involved have unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved.
This usually manifests as a combination of the following:
- Unrealistic expectations regarding timings
- Unrealistic expectations in regards to breath of topics covered in the course
- Unrealistic expectations in regards to the depth of detail that can be included in the course

2. **"Valley of Despair"** – This occurs as reality clashes with preconceived unrealistic expectations. Typical characteristics of this situation are:
- Project falls behind schedule, as time has not been allocated to authoring
- SMEs start worrying about the quality of content being developed
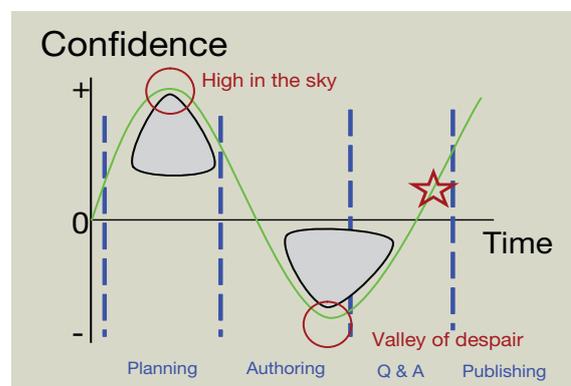

Shaded areas in the diagram above show the degree of reduction in the influence of these extreme dynamics a project manager can achieve when applying a robust development process model.

Obviously, the rapid e-learning project manager must try to minimise these highs and lows so that the project development is smooth and successful and project delivery is on time and meets objectives.

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Let's explore the characteristics of each stage in detail and walk through the solutions that can help ensure a smooth course delivery process.

Stage 1: Planning

When it comes to rapid e- learning content development, the process involves completing a series of stages leading to the publishing of an e-learning course. To ensure that each of these stages are completed smoothly it is important to understand how long each step will take.
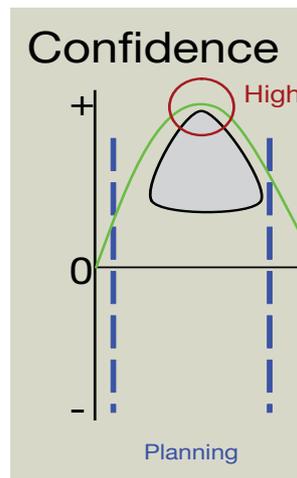
The project manager needs to be able to anticipate and manage upcoming resource requirements, paying special attention to any review requirements allocated to specific stakeholders that may have limited time to deliver input.

The first step to ensure that a project is completed satisfactorily and expectations are correctly managed is to agree the project scope. In the case of e-learning this is particularly important as it will drive the learning outcomes.

Project Managers must be aware of any misconceptions within the stakeholder and SME groups that may trigger "High in the Sky" expectations. Remaining sensitive to the possibility of individual misperceptions throughout the planning stage will pay dividends.

The three key objectives to consider during the planning stage are:

1. Allocation of resources
2. Scope and objectives
3. Expected results

Managing - High in the Sky

Critical to the success of the project, the next step is to agree the scope and objectives of the course. To do this it is important to identify who the stakeholders are and make sure they are involved in this initial planning stage. If
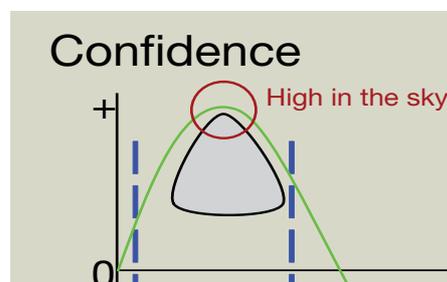
a project manager handles this stage successfully, they can significantly reduce unrealistic "high in the sky" expectations.

By scheduling a "workshop" style meeting with all stakeholders and communicating a clear agenda (which should include the objectives previous outlined), the project manager can ensure everyone stays on track and the scope of the project is universally understood and agreed.

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The workshop with stakeholders

The first part of defining a project's scope is to agree what the learning should include: is it simply a course designed to educate the sales department on the benefits of a new product or is it an organisation-wide initiative?

Once the scope has been agreed, it is time to drill down and define the project's target audience together with the learning objective for the group that will take the course (If it is a complex initiative containing a series of courses then it is recommended that a series of workshops be scheduled to agree the scope of each course within the umbrella initiative).

It is essential to manage the scoping process carefully as stakeholders will often want to extend the planned objectives or the learning content. Use the defined learning objectives to manage the relevance of any extra elements or suggestions suggested by stakeholders.

Managing scope & input

Understanding the target group and learning objective will deliver the scope of the course. Always use learning objectives to manage scope & input from stakeholders.

Once the scope has been agreed, refine the structure by including chapters and learning outcomes. Course chapters can now be allocated to named SMEs and any necessary negotiation between the project manager and the SME's line manager can begin. Blocking out agreed dates in the SME's calendar is recommended to ensure time is allocated and content is completed.

To understand the resource requirements it is wise to review each step and identify the following:

1. What are the skills needed?
2. Which individuals have these skills? And are the preferred choices for the task.
3. When are they required?
4. Where are they?
5. Is any training required before they become involved?

Certify buy-in by ensuring that all stakeholders sign off on the agreed planning document at the end of the workshop.

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Finally, develop a detailed schedule for the project and allocate time for the first workshop with the chosen SMEs.

Managing "High in the Sky"

- Agree target group
- Agree learning objectives
- Map out structure
- Secure approval from stakeholders

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Planning tips for the Project Manager

Courses will often have a hard delivery deadline such as a product launch. It is important that the project manager respects any time constraints when scoping the course.

Learn how to tactfully say "no". Often stakeholders will want to include content that is not essential to the learning objectives, so it is important to be able to manage these ideas, while still ensuring support for the course.

Stage 2 : Authoring

The intuitive software that supports rapid e-learning has allowed the job of authoring content to move away from technical experts and into the hands of the people that really matter, the SMEs.

Valley of Despair
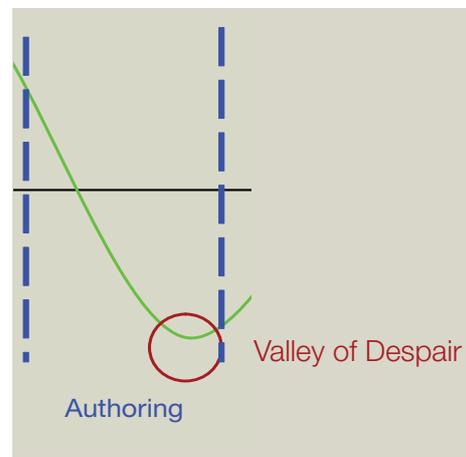
Authoring

If adequate care has not been made during the planning stage, difficulties can start to emerge when the SME begins authoring. This is the "Valley of Despair".

The SME will always be prone to wander the "Valley of Despair" if the content creation process is not supported by clear well defined learning objectives. This is because it becomes challenging to identify which content is relevant and what is not, thus resulting in creeping of scope.

If the stakeholders and the SMEs have not had their expectations corrected in the planning stage then the creeping scope of the project can become overwhelming and doubts can surface.

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Two main characteristics signposted en route towards the "Valley of Despair" are:

1. **Time pressure:** Time has not been appropriately allocated to content creation resulting in the SME not developing the required content. Often this is due to their reporting manager's lack of buy-in.

2. **Loss of confidence:** A SME working alone may have a level of uncertainly or doubt about the quality of the content they are developing, moving the task further down their priority list and further slowing the process.

Managing - Valley of Despair

To avoid the onset of the valley of despair, it is recommended that the following steps be taken:

Firstly, ensure the planning stage already discussed is completed (with the learning objectives agreed) and ensure that stakeholders have realistic expectations for the project.

Secondly, ensure resources have been identified and an appropriate commitment from relevant line managers is secured to ensure the SME has had appropriate time allocated to the content creation task.

Thirdly, use the learning objectives from the planning stage to create the content structure (as already outlined in the planning stage) this will allow easy management of content development and help ensure that only content relevant to the learning objectives is developed.

Once these preliminary steps have been completed, it is time to engage with the SME and begin content development. This is best administered via a series of carefully monitored workshops that combine training and authoring.

Let's explore these workshops in more detail.

Workshop 1

With the content plan agreed, the project manager schedules a preliminary workshop with the SME. This training workshop gives the SME the opportunity to explore the e-learning interface and become trained to work with a rapid e-learning solution. By presenting the first workshop as a training session the SME has the comfort and freedom to explore the solution and begin creating content in the solution's templates.

Since the SME has a specialised area of knowledge, the project manager is essentially getting them to develop content, even at this early stage. If the project manager is matching content to the learning objectives outlined in the planning stage then they are well on their way to completing the authoring stage of the course.

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In addition, this session is used to allocate responsibility for each piece of content development. When completing this step it is recommended to give the SME responsibility for small pieces of content (usually one chapter in each course). By ensuring they don't feel overwhelmed they are more likely to complete the allocated content.

Managing collaboration

In large organisations where resources are widely dispersed geographically, email and similar web-based programs are often used to communicate between offices. In these instances it is a wise choice to leverage a web-based software solution that allows team members to collaborate on content development anytime from anywhere.

The final step in this workshop is to agree the dates for the next workshop and the content that will be developed by the SME before this next workshop begins. Securing this agreement from SMEs motivates them to be more committed to the work they are responsible for - in a shorter period of time.

Content creation tip

If the SME intends to use media such as visuals or sound, it is the project manager´s responsibility to make these files available to the SME.

Workshop 2

Follow up on the original content created by scheduling a second workshop. Here, the SMEs can share the content developed since the previous workshop thereby expanding their knowledge and experience with content creation.

Any questions or problems that the SME will have at this stage can be addressed and solved during this session, with all participants making good use of the shared information. This nurtures a more creative environment and ultimately delivers a better course content. Depending on the size of the course and the experience of the SMEs, the project manager can continue this cycle of workshops until all the course content has been developed.

Authoring tips for the Project Manager

At this stage in the project the project manager needs to have strong training and leadership ability so that the SMEs learn the skills they need to develop good content, enjoy the process and are encouraged to do more.

Managing the Valley of Despair

- Rigour in planning
- Training the SME
- Follow up

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If there is a general falling behind by SMEs on the agreed development schedule the project manager should proactively organise a further workshop. This provides the opportunity to develop content and share any problems underpinning the delay.
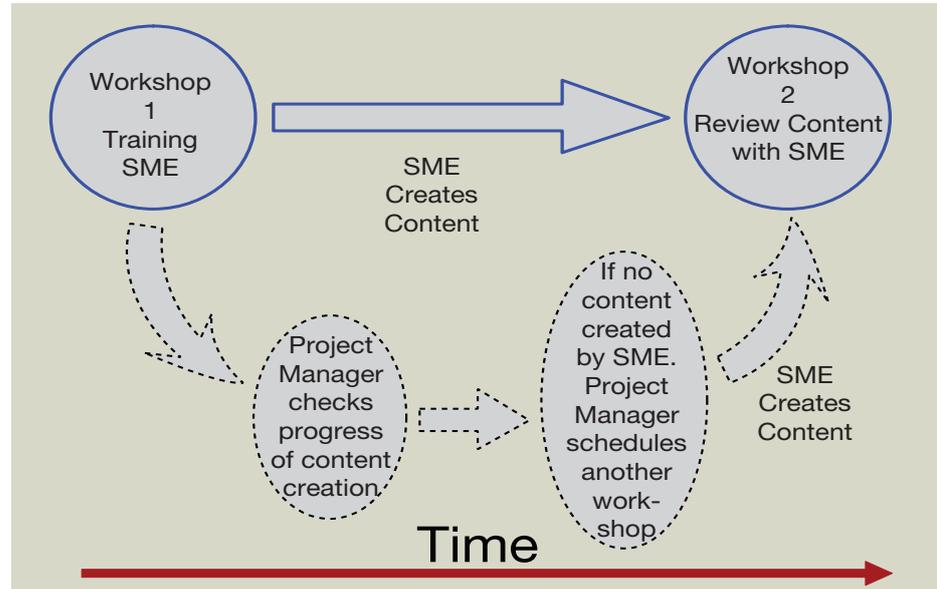
Workshop model for content creation

Stage 3 – Q & A Review

Once content is complete, the Quality Assurance (Q & A) Review provides a critical opportunity for feedback.
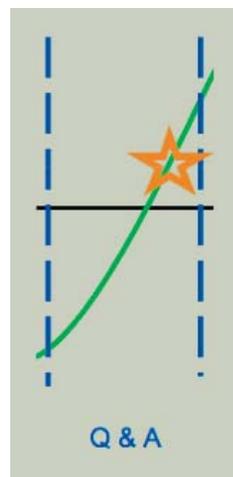
Working with Input received

This is an exciting stage as it can signify a turning point in the e-learning project. Feedback on content is an important step towards addressing the symptoms associated with the Valley of Despair and advancing the project into more positive territory.

Two key benefits of the Q & A Review are:
• It builds, or even re-ignites enthusiasm for the project and assists with buy-in. In turn, this helps with stakeholder management.
• It demonstrates progress: The team is now working with the first draft of an e-learning course and stakeholders can experience the learning simulation.

However, it is important to note that there is a danger associated with this stage: comments that have not been efficiently received and reviewed can add further time delays to the project.

Q & A Review Cycles

To gather input on authoring the project manager should schedule a series of review cycles. During these cycles content is shared, questions asked and feedback received. In order to move through this stage as efficiently as possible it is important to make content available on a timely basis to those required to review it.

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To assist in rebuilding enthusiasm and confidence in the project scheduling an initial content review with the SMEs peer group, such as the project manager or another experienced SME is recommended. In this initial review it is important to appraise the content against the learning objectives with the SME and share any relevant feedback.

Once these changes have been made, the next step is to launch a second review cycle, enabling other specialists or departments within the company to provide feedback on the content. Examples could include legal and marketing departments.

When input is received from these areas, it is vital that all comments are again reviewed against the learning objectives. Often, the real challenge at this point is to separate the comments that are relevant from those that are not.

Using a solution that allows the project manager to circulate content to multiple parties quickly will shrink time spent on this process significantly. Robust audit trail capability will also speed and simplify the review process.

Once all comments are processed the project manager can secure approval from relevant stakeholders.

Stage 4. Testing/Publishing

This is an exciting part of the project as it signifies the completion and approval of the content. It is now ready for the final stage before being uploading into the LMS. This stage tests the end-user experience to ensure that the simulation runs smoothly and tracking is achieved.

Tips to managing feedback:

Encourage clear feedback from your review team. As a guide, comments should reference the page number where the error occurred and clearly detail the change required. Unspecific feedback is difficult to implement and could be misinterpreted resulting in additional rounds of changes and further costly delays.

Tests should be first be completed by the project manager and then by a small group of end users. Tests that should be completed prior to loading the course into the LMS include:

Technical testing

It is important to test the e-learning course in different web browsers and operating systems to ensure the experience is consistent for all users regardless of their computer set-up.

In addition it is also important to test the course on different bandwidths. This ensures that the learning experience is not compromised for any dial-up or remote users with low-end internet connections.

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The second area of testing is the LMS testing. An important point to note here is that any rapid e-learning solution should be pre-tested with the LMS prior to purchase to ensure that tracking is possible.

LMS Testing

This testing relates to the tracking of the course within the LMS. It is important to run a series of course cycles to monitor the results that are documented in the LMS and ensure the results are correct.

Conclusion

Using a Rapid E-Learning Development Model that includes good workflow process allows even fairly inexperienced project managers to create high quality, scalable rapid e-learning internally.
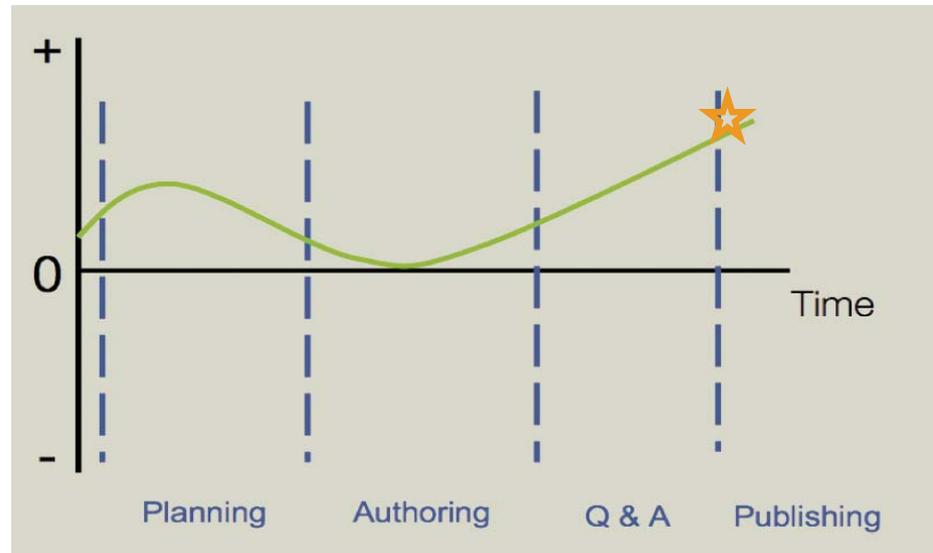
Reduced peaks and toughs associated with developing rapid e-learning.

In simple terms, the larger and the more dispersed the course creation team, the more likely project managers are to benefit from using the scalable model outlined in this paper.

The processes and techniques outlined here enable our most forward thinking organisations to cultivate the strong ´knowledge sharing´ culture that is becoming critical for success in today's rapidly changing business environment. As this culture matures and spreads wider across the enterprise, our most successful e-learning initiatives will depend as much on how we use the technologies we have at our disposal as the technologies themselves.

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About Mohive

Mohive develops the Mohive e-Learning Publishing System (eLPS), a system that enables an organisation to collaboratively plan, author, review, and publish e-learning. It is a web-based software system that publishes e-learning content directly into an LMS. In other words, Mohive, combined with an LMS, provides the critical infrastructure needed to unlock the potential of e-learning within an organization. A partial list of Mohive customers include: BBC, Charles Schwab, Hornbach, UPC/LibertyGlobal, PepsiCo, Promina, and If Insurance.

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