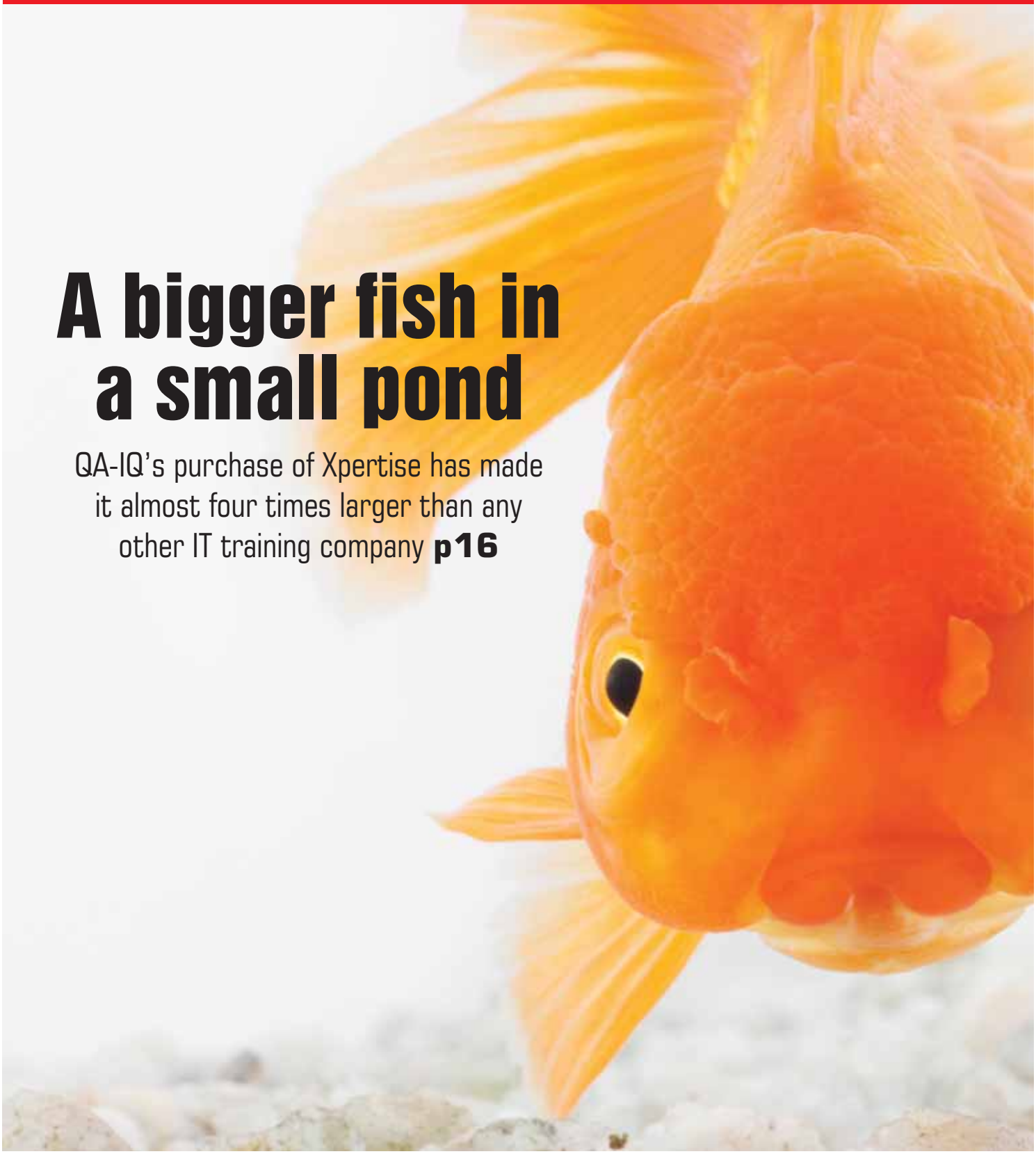
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A bigger fish in a small pond

QA-IQ's purchase of Xpertise has made it almost four times larger than any other IT training company **p16**

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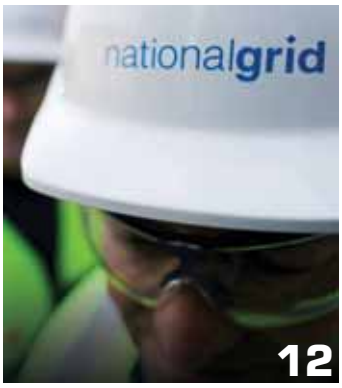
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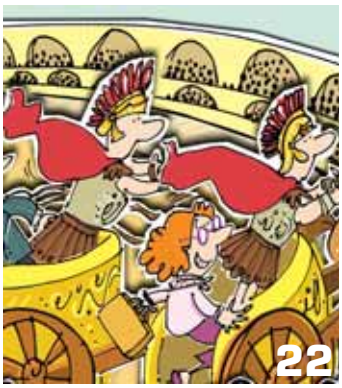
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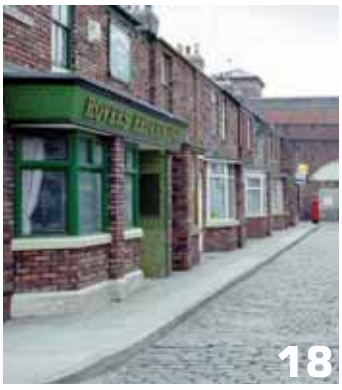
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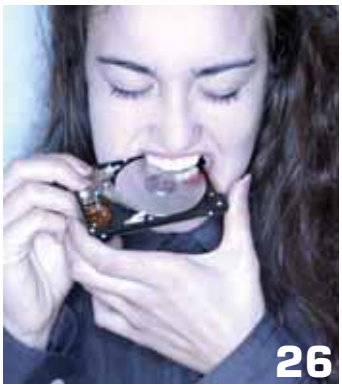
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Editor's intro

A silver lining as the clouds thicken



In every cloud, or, in this case, every downturn, there's a silver lining, so the saying goes. Alan Bellinger is out to prove that saying right, finding a positive point among budget cuts. In his column, he argues that a period when budgets are being trimmed is a good time to bury projects that are time wasters. This allows you to free up cash to do the really essential projects. Read all about it on p8.

It's obviously also a good time to potentially make purchases on the cheap, assuming you can raise the cash. Certainly the weak stock market played into QA-IQ's hands when buying Xpertise. It paid around £9.6 million for the shares of a company that achieved a turnover of £22 million last year.

QA-IQ's purchase of Xpertise was, I think, arguably the biggest news story in the IT training arena since I started editing this magazine, almost two years ago. Well, at least in terms of the training provider landscape. On the one hand, you could argue that it's not such a novel development as the bottom line is that QA-IQ has just got bigger. Even that fact, however, has significance for the market, as a company with a larger market share increases its clout with vendors and suppliers. Plus, one of QA-IQ's main competitors is no longer in existence. See p16.

The other big shake-up of recent times was Microsoft's revamp of its qualifications. In this issue, Gary Flood catches up with how the new scheme is working out for the .NET community, which appears to have embraced the new style – p 25.

Change is the theme of this month's interview with Brian McNamee – p12. His change management role is one that could be a possible career route for a learning and development manager, as training, mentoring and coaching take up a large part of his time. One of his approaches is that you only need to train for technical skills and that you can use your workplace as your learning environment for everything else. He has adopted this with people who work for him.

Brian's approach is another way of saving money in a downturn. Another cash-saving proposal comes from e-learning guru Clive Shepherd, who suggests e-learning can offer a cost-effective way of training – see p34. With so many suggestions of ways to beat a downturn, perhaps by our next issue we'll be finding the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

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IT training

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Advertising telephone +44 (0) 20 7306 0300 Ext 116
Advertising email: ittraining@mongoosemedia.com
Subscriptions: **www.bcs.org/ittraining/subs**

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Tim Bulley, licensing director.
Telephone +44 (0) 20 8267 5078
Email: tim.bulley@haymarket.com

IT Training magazine is published quarterly.
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Update

A round-up of the latest news and developments for IT training professionals

Seventy-four per cent of IT workers employed in Europe said that they have been asked to do tasks for which they were **not trained**, according to a survey by SkillSoft.

The survey also found that the majority of workers think ongoing training and development, and the flexibility to take the training when necessary, are essential.

Technical tasks ranked fourth in the top 10 tasks that managers in the UK are asked to undertake without receiving proper training, after managing people, project management and leadership. Of the 2,000 UK employees polled, 67 per cent said training is most important for senior managers.

On the positive side, managers across the globe agreed that training and development is an essential part of their organisation's strategy, in the survey conducted by OnePoll on behalf of SkillSoft.

Yet, in a survey of learning and development professionals conducted by the World of Learning 2008, management buy-in was cited as the key stumbling block for **learning retention** – by 40 per cent of respondents. Thirty-seven per cent of respondents believe that lack of follow-up also hinders learning retention, 25 per cent blamed lack of coaching/mentoring, and 24 per cent cited learner buy-in.

Qualifications have, however, been shown to increase earning potential by up to 40 per cent – at least in the case of an IT professional becoming qualified in ITIL, according to a survey by Axios Systems, an IT service management company and recruitment specialists, Globe One.

Based on an assessment of Globe One's current clients, all of its current employers prefer that candidates have an ITIL certification, either manager or foundation level, awarding a salary increase of up to 40 per cent for candidates with the qualification. For those candidates without an ITIL qualification, employers want at least 10 to 15 years of on the job experience for the same pay bracket. This trend demonstrates that IT employees could stand to increase their salary by up to £16,000 by completing the training.

Lauren Needoff, divisional manager for Globe One, says: 'We have worked with organisations in the IT service management space for many years and a trend that we have identified is that many positions simply are not open to candidates that have not attained the ITIL certification. This is particularly true in the public sector and financial services, as well as for managed service providers and consultancies. The IT skills gap, particularly for more junior positions, is a well worn topic of debate in the recruitment community and the financial incentives for reaching a certain skill set offers a fair reflection of the state of the market. ITIL has steadily become an industry imperative and by offering higher salaries companies are

Video debate: on the computer graduate dearth



The possible impact of the dearth of computer science graduates on the UK's competitiveness are discussed in a new online video series, BCS Debates. QA-IQ is represented on the panel, along with a university, a major employer, an IT recruitment firm and BCS. **www.bcs.org/videos/debate1**

clearly recognising its business value.'

Version 4 of the **competency framework**, Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA), is to be launched at the SFIA conference on 4 December.

An open consultation period was held from May to September 2008 where individuals could comment, and corporate users and other stakeholders were invited to give input. As a result, a lot of new detail has been agreed for SFIA version 4. BCS is planning to release its update to SFIAplus, which adds extra features to SFIA, in December.

The SFIA conference will present a range of speakers from industry and government. The management and implementation streams will address strategic and tactical issues concerning the management of improvements to IT capability.

The government has given the go-ahead for the **National Skills Academy for IT**. It is now proceeding to the business planning stage, and will add to the existing network of 12 national skills academies, ten of which are operational and two in business planning. It is due to open in 2009.

The National Skills Academy for IT is to provide a centre of excellence for apprenticeship training, a university-accredited IT Professional Foundation Programme and a suite of new training options for career changers.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills has published its first-year business plan, outlining the organisation's objectives and the projects which will be carried out over the course of the year, including the relicensing process for Sector Skills Councils.

Supplier briefs

QA-IQ succeeds in Xpertise purchase

QA-IQ has acquired Xpertise, creating an IT training company with revenues far outstripping its closest rivals in IT training. QA-IQ made an estimated £63 million last year while Xpertise netted £22m. The second player in the market, Learning Tree, made £23 million.

The management team of the new company, temporarily known as QA-Xpertise until a new name is picked, is comprised of senior members from both organisations.

The takeover put an end to Xpertise's attempt to acquire Parity, the eighth largest IT training company last year, according to IT Skills Research.

Full story: p16

Salary.com acquires InfoBasis

Salary.com, a US provider of on-demand compensation and talent management solutions, has acquired InfoBasis, a UK competency-based, learning and development software company for around US$5 million.

The acquisition expands Salary.com's reach with a UK-based presence, and is consistent with Salary.com's strategy of acquiring companies that add complementary, compensation and talent management solutions.

Premier IT buys creative company

Premier IT Group has bought Major Training, a London based company providing IT training for the creative sector. Major Training specialises in web-based applications and desktop publishing training, while Premier IT concentrates on bespoke business applications, e-learning content development, Microsoft technical and applications training and project management courses. Premier last year had a revenue of £3.5 million, ranking 37th in the top IT training companies list by revenue compiled by IT Skills Research.

The employees of Major Training will move to Premier IT's facility in Russell Square.

Ian West, chairman of Premier IT Group, said: 'We have co-operated for a number of years and although located less than a mile from each other, there is almost no overlap in our customer base.'

Edvantage buys Futuremedia Learning

Edvantage group, an e-learning company and managed learning services provider, has acquired Futuremedia Learning, the e-learning division of Futuremedia.

Post merger, Edvantage group will have combined revenues of £12m, and a customer list of over 200 organisations. The company will employ 36 team members at offices in Brighton and Stamford. Andrea Miles, managing director, Futuremedia Learning has been named managing director, Edvantage group UK.

Global Knowledge gets into Google training

Global Knowledge has joined the Google Enterprise Partner program and is specialising in delivering instructor-led Google Search Appliance Training in Europe. Global Knowledge began offering the Google courses from October in EMEA.

Global Knowledge has also started offering VMware virtualisation training.

Firebrand opens Nordic subsidiary

Firebrand Training has begun offering its accelerated IT and project management training in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The new division will be headed up by Frank Højgaard, former UK managing director of Global Knowledge.

Firebrand Training has also unveiled two new courses which focus on developing bespoke web-based applications.

They can help IT workers steer their companies through the downturn by developing innovative, bespoke applications and embracing emerging models such as cloud computing, according to Robert Chapman, CEO of Firebrand.

The two accelerated learning courses aim to provide application developers with the skills and knowledge to create web applications using Microsoft's ASP.NET 3.5 framework.

Maven launches skills academy for projects

Maven Training has launched a skills academy – a specialist division focused on delivering project and programme management success through the development of excellence in interpersonal skills.
The Maven Training Skills Academy offers a series of skills-based courses.



Alan Bellinger

Drop pesky projects now

As I write, the jobless total is moving inexorably towards the 2 million mark, and the expectation is that it'll rise to 3 million. So, as L&D managers, what can we do about it?

To paraphrase that wonderful John F. Kennedy quote: ask not what you can do about it; ask what you can't do. Or, to put it another way, what projects can you drop? Because, to paraphrase the Joanne Moore quote, this is a great time to bury bad projects.

Any L&D manager, who has been in post more than the legendary first 100 days, will almost certainly have accumulated some baggage in terms of projects that are politically motivated – as opposed to value. For example programmes that were set up because someone shouted louder, or because of a commitment made by others, or even because someone needed to win some brownie points. The result is inevitably that you finish up doing, or managing an external resource to do, something that adds minimal value to the business as a whole.

It may not be possible to get out of the project totally, but by identifying projects that add little value, and then looking at ways to create a good exit strategy, you should find that you can find a number of bad projects to bury. But don't jump on to those regulation and compliance projects too quickly, however tempting it may be. Remember it's not just about how much value you can create but also about how much damage you can avoid.

Your boss should be pretty keen to see the end of these timewasters – and so you're pushing on an open door. But don't do it until you're ready. And that means proposing what you should be doing instead of the projects you've identified. Tell the boss too early and you'll be downsized.

So what can you be doing right now? For most organisations, the key business issue is that of sustainability.

To come through this recession, and emerge leaner and fitter on the other side, management is bound to be working through a number of business initiatives. And the critical question to ask is what are the skills impacts of these? The more the resources you've released, by dropping those bad projects, are aligned to these critical initiatives, the greater the chance of sustainability – and of your own employability.

These business initiatives are likely to have a number of common features, such as scalability, risk management, evolution (not revolution) and a focus on the core operations of the organisation. In many cases, they'll also involve retrenchment. But each will require skills that people don't have at the moment; and therefore the more you can position yourself as a change agent, rather than a trainer, the better you'll be positioned in terms of sustainability.

BCS Information & Technology Training Specialist Group

Online meeting tackles ethical training

Ethics and professionalism in IT training was the subject of the Information & Technology Training Specialist Group (I&TTSG)'s meeting in September, which was held online, encouraging a large number of overseas registrations.

Penny Duquenoy, manager of BCS Ethics Forum, gave a presentation, which had two main themes: addressing the ethical dimensions of the technology; and the professional ethical issues in training. The presentation is summarised below.

Technology can be more, or less ethical. It would have a higher degree of ethics, for example, in the case of privacy enhancing technologies. But it would be less ethical when used for certain monitoring or web filtering activities. Technology can even distort the 'reality', for example, in the case of the firework display at the Beijing Olympics Games, which was allegedly digitally enhanced for news stories.

However, technology also has benefits, such as in healthcare helping with Parkinson's disease, or enriching the lives of people with disabilities.

The message is therefore that technology can have values designed in, which can make life better, or worse. It offers choices to make good or bad actions. It can enable or deny access to information.

Ethics is often about conflicts, for example between your duty to your employer or an individual employee.

In the case of training, if online training can be monitored to assess a learner's skill competency and/or aptitude for learning, do you tell them they are being monitored?

You need to consider whether knowing this could affect their performance. Does the employer want them to know about the monitoring? Is it important they know, regardless of either of the above?

What are your priorities? Who takes precedence – your employer, the learner, or personal principles? Where do your duties and obligations lie? To your profession, employer, learners, or the wider public?

A range of ethical dilemmas in training were discussed and the conclusion was that ethical issues should always be considered, and a personal decision, based on moral principles, should be made.

More information on ethics in IT can be found via the BCS Ethics Forum: **www.bcs.org/forums/ethics**

Next meeting

On 9 December, at the BCS London office, the I&TTSG is going to hold a BarCamp, that is an open, participatory, knowledge-sharing, workshop-style event to see what the group's skills and knowledge can produce. Contact chair Jooli Atkins jooli@matrix42.co.uk to register interest.



Hear it on the podcast

Listen in to the second IT Training podcast for information on how to go about training for a system roll-out. Podcast three covers professionalism and training and our fourth episode describes how National Grid approached training for a large programme.

In the second episode of the IT Training podcast, Alan Bellinger, IT Training old timer, and David Kelly, MD of Watsonia, give advice on how to run training to accompany the roll-out of new IT systems.

Bellinger explains that, when a new system is introduced, learners would eventually get to grips with it themselves, but training would make the skills gain quicker.

The first thing to do when planning training for a system roll-out is to understand the audience, according to Bellinger. 'Many trainers would start from what is new in the system, but it is better to start with what the audience do and the way they will use the system, and map it back from the audience to the skills, rather than from the system up to the skills,' he said. 'You can categorise them into As who will learn quickly, the Bs who won't do bad, and the Cs who will present you with problems. The worst thing to do is to dumb down the training to the Cs and deliver it to the As. You need to be able to structure cohorts and to have a series of cohorts that you can take through at different paces.

'The other important part is what you need to do to contextualise the training to different audience groups. Delivering the same training to a sales person as an operational person would be ridiculous.'

In the lighter section, Kelly said he would like to put into Room 101 difficult learners, who try to trip up trainers, while Bellinger would like to replace the terms 'trainers' and 'instructors' with 'facilitators'.

Professionalism

The third episode of the IT Training podcast revolves around professionalism with guests Robert Chapman, CEO of Firebrand Training, and Adam Thilthorpe, manager of the BCS Professionalism in IT Programme.

Professionalism means many different things to different people, according to Thilthorpe. For CEOs, it's usually about competitive advantage, while a professional body may emphasise ethics as well as delivery. For him, it also covers competence, ability to do the role, grow in it and take it forward.

Chapman sees professionalism as about attaining a certain standard, which can represent training, or a moral code, by which people outside the industry can judge it.

'In more mature professions there is a set standard, but with IT it's more difficult as it's not so mature and that standard is not so ubiquitous and not understood by the lay person,' says Thilthorpe.

Chapman thinks that the challenge is that IT is very stove pipe compared to, say, chartered surveying. 'A programmer and a systems administrator have totally different skills and there isn't a common theme that underpins both. So they go to a vendor and take their badge, rather than one that covers the whole profession.'

Chapman and Thilthorpe then explored ways to try and increase uptake of a chartered standard in IT.

Moving on to a different subject, Chapman describes how Firebrand is using the photography website, Flickr, for internal communications – as a sort of living history of the company – for company events, attending conferences, and so on.

'It's good way of keeping disparate individuals in different places up-to-speed,' he says.



Project case study

The fourth episode of the IT training podcast focuses on the real life case of how National Grid approached the training element to accompany a transformation programme.

Brian McNamee of National Grid, and Jooli Atkins of Matrix FortyTwo and chair of BCS I&TTSG, talk about how training was organised to accompany a programme to update IS processes for new highway legislation. The gas engineers were trained to start sending accurate and timely notices on laptops directly from the highway when working on an emergency.

'We went beyond training the field force – who hold the primary accountability for compliance,' says McNamee. 'We gave a different line of training to the first line supervisors – and then another level for second line managers – all the way up through the hierarchy – so they all knew what their responsibilities were.'

Atkins comments: 'One thing we did that I think made a difference was to competency test them all.' She also suggests a success factor was the training team working very closely with IS.

In the lighter section, Atkins says her favourite training mantra is to remember it's about the learner, not the trainer.

The IT Training podcast is recorded monthly with different participants.

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On the ground

What advice would you give on how to approach evaluating IT training straight after a course and longer term? We asked trainers to share their advice and guidance.



Firstly, don't start from there. Evaluation is only of any use if you know what has changed as a result of the training. If you don't know what your learners could do before the course, you can't evaluate in its truest sense of 'ascertaining or value or worth of' after the course because you have nothing to compare against.

Evaluation should start before the event to get any real benefit from it. Even if all you can do is a quick 'test' of skills at the start of a session so that when the objective(s) is assessed at the end you can evaluate the difference, you can ascertain value.

Kirkpatrick's four levels of evaluation – still the most widely used in training – is often only tested at level 1 – reaction to the event. We all use 'happy sheets' that tell us that we were entertaining and the food was lousy (or vice versa) but don't do anything else.

Incorporate level 2 and 3 questions into the post-course questionnaire to get at least some value from it:

'Please give an example of at least one way in which you will use your new skills when you return to work.' and

'In percentage terms, to what extent has your skill/knowledge of the topic been changed by attending the course?'

In the longer term, make a diary note to ask similar questions in three months' time, then again after six months. Even if you don't get the responses back, you will have reminded the learners of the topic and that in itself may be enough to make them think about how they can use it. Each time they have that reinforcement the learning is strengthened.

Jooli Atkins,
Matrix FortyTwo

Next issue

What advice would you give fellow trainers on training technophobes? How can you make them feel more at ease?

Breaking developments

How can you manage differing abilities in the classroom?



The answer to managing differing abilities is, obviously, like me you are thinking ... with patience, confidence and a well-controlled temper.

In all seriousness, though, this is not easy and it is a credit to every trainer who intuitively makes it happen.

Here are a few suggestions to ensure that you keep both the least and the most confident participants engaged and involved.

Everyone in that room is there to learn from you and so you are already the most influential person in the room. People will generally do as you ask. You have the power to ask questions, give praise and stretch the participants beyond their limits. Particularly make sure that you use different questioning styles to appeal to different people. For example you can ask closed simple questions of the least confident members of the class or you can ask broad open questions of the participants whom you think are in danger of losing interest.

You can stretch the most capable by taking them on to another level. For example, if they are learning about project management, ask them 'How this might relate to programme management?' Additionally, you can use your more capable participants as a resource to add some 'colour' by relating their past experiences to the learning.

Don't forget that you also have the power to combine or to separate pairings or groups of participants to ensure that they have no distractions and learn to the best of their ability.

Eddie Kilkelly, Best Practice Division, ILX Group

More advice and tips at:
www.bcs.org/ittraining

Trainers: this is your page – please send in your views for the next issue to the editor:
helen.boddy@hq.bcs.org.uk

Advisers: Jooli Atkins, Matrix FortyTwo and Dave Britt, BCS Trainer of the Year 2006.

Next issue

What does a trainer need to think about to reach out to remote workers? What sort of training will best suit them?



Committed to change

When you're implementing change, getting buy-in from the workforce is essential. Brian McNamee, change and communications manager at National Grid, talked to Helen Wilcox, about how coaching, training and learning fit into his role in leading transformation programmes.

How did you end up in your current role?

I joined British Gas Corporation in 1976 and have worked for all of the successor companies such as TranscoBG, Transco, National Grid Transco.

I started out as apprentice craftsman and worked my way through various operational roles, finally becoming a senior manager in 2002 when I began to lead business change and manage programmes. I got into this role by an evolutionary and developmental process and it has had the very positive effect of giving me great variety in my various job roles as well as helping me to gain a breadth of expertise in a number of disciplines.



Not doing training can damage the reputation of the company

Brian McNamee

How does training fit into your role?

Training is an essential piece of programme management. The consequences of not doing training can be to damage the reputation of the company. Terminal 5 at Heathrow is a good example of this. It is a great piece of engineering, with excellent, practical and effective safety systems, close to a zero tolerance approach to personal injuries, but the implementation appeared to have been messed up because of poor or insufficient training. As a result, the company's, and I'd even say the country's, reputation suffered.

I think the way to plan change is to work with people. You need to have a view of where you want to get to, and how to get there, but you need the people to help you work out the way to get there.

When asking people to make changes, you have to consider how people feel about them. You have to allow people to feel reluctant and suspicious – change management is about how to progress to them being supportive and committed. That means asking a lot of pertinent questions, listening hard to the responses, reshaping what you planned to do and feeding that back. Mentoring and coaching and providing general support also help change their mindset to one of being prepared to give it a try. You need to get people to tell you about what



Brian McNamee's career path

Joined British Gas Corporation in 1976 and worked for all of the successor companies such as TranscoBG, Transco, National Grid Transco. Roles listed with most recent first:

Gas transformation business change & communications manager;

NRSWA/TMA business programme manager;

New corporate identity project manager for UK regulated and non-regulated businesses;

Lead emergency & metering operations manager;

South of England and Wales operations manager for emergency & meter services;

Replacement brand manager;

South of England LDZ operations manager;

Various roles as a senior and junior manager, moving up from apprentice distribution craftsman.

they value about what they are doing now, and how they feel about the changes and what their related concerns are. You must also value the people whose views are voiced with great passion. If they are not consulted about the changes, they will not feel involved and they will build strong resistance to the proposals. Once people are committed, you can move on to training.

Creating positive change mindsets is particularly necessary in National Grid, as it is an engineering based company embarking on a global transformation programme. Most people in the business are what I'd called hard-wired. They have great process and technical skills, as they have to be results focused, but they often do not fully appreciate the people dimension of change highly enough as a consequence when planning change.

These views I put forward about change are just not my views: The PROSCI survey in 2007 of 400 global blue-chips found that the key factors in all good programmes are communication, engagement, having a compelling case and managing the pace of change.

Would your sort of role suit a learning and development manager?

Learning and development managers are generally open-minded and value the available benefits of effective training, run inductions, and are good at communication – those are real, good foundations for programme management.

What sort of programme do you work on?

One recent programme was to update our IS systems and processes in order to meet the new conditions introduced in the Traffic Management Act (TMA). The act is about making sure traffic can flow better on the streets of the UK. Utility companies have to have a licence to carry out highway based works and have to make sure that they don't disrupt the traffic flow unnecessarily. The penalties for not meeting the conditions go into multi millions of pounds for an organisation of our size.

Learning outside the classroom needs to be included after formal training. There needs to be regular reviews of what has been learnt and where we are in the transfer process of taking ownership

Brian McNamee

The new TMA means, for instance, a certain number (usually around 10 for a small job) of electronic notices have to be issued – for permission to open the highway, how long it will be open, and so on. By way of an example, if there is an emergency gas leak, as well as achieving our main priority to safeguard life and property, we have to issue a notice to the Highways Agency within two hours.

Therefore these notices have to be timely and accurate. The field force – the gas engineers – sends these notices from laptops.

To implement a new system to meet the conditions of the new TMA involved over £10 million of IT spend for us. The IS challenge was that the workers are experts in dealing with gas leaks and digging up roads, but were not used to using laptops to send electronic notices to tight time schedules. They were not necessarily used to focusing on data quality and did not necessarily appreciate the consequences of not getting it right.

Working out where the accountabilities lay in the process was essential to achieving high performance and so we did a lot of

preparation to convince the workers of their accountability to issue accurate electronic notices.

As part of this approach we held a lot of awareness briefings, so that all of our people were ready and open to learning the new systems when the systems training started. Training on the new systems was then a major part of that change – for the teams out on the roads – and the back office staff.

Does National Grid run its own training?

Our business model is to outsource training. We have internal learning strategists but use outside training capability. We try to retain some of our contractor capacity to keep the expertise especially high. It's one thing to write material, it's another to deliver it. Our training varies from training office based clerks through to the field force, so you need trainers that can effectively create and deliver both.

We also have a network of our own train the trainer people. That helps sustainability of knowledge, and develops a level of expertise in training among our subject matter experts and team leaders. These trainers have to have very good facilitation skills to ensure that the learning transfer takes place, so we put them through learning facilitation courses.

What form does training take?

We try to make training participative. Learning should be fun.

In the train the trainer courses, we leave lots of breaks for networking, and we try to keep the group overnight, so that we can ask how it is going in a more relaxed environment. We often invite people back onto courses where they have been participants on the previous course – regarding major change, their personal stories of initial resistance to being supportive of the new ways of working always helps reduce any resistance from the group.



I believe in using work experiences as your learning zone, as well as the classroom

Brian McNamee

After the training, we open an intranet site where our team can see previous Q and As and also ask new questions. Our team commits to a fixed period of time to get answers to questions, which helps build trust.

We also concentrate on experiential learning. I believe that for highly effective training for busy people, it has to be relevant to their job role. I believe in using work experiences as your learning zone, as well as the classroom.

Companies often pull out training support once the programme implementation has been met. But there is a lot of learning available post implementation and there is always a need to help individual's immediate progression up the competency curve. Technology training is no exception. Learning outside the classroom needs to be included after formal training. There needs to be regular reviews of what has been learnt and where we are in the transfer process of taking ownership.

A lot of learning can also come from collaboration. In our line of business, we have to renew our regulatory conditions every five years, which always means another finance based regulatory challenge is introduced. Therefore we have to continually come up with new ways of working. It's a journey of collaboration. We have to have an open culture and a coaching style of approach for collaboration to succeed.

Who do you admire?

I'm a big fan of Stephen Covey, whose seven habits of highly effective individuals model says you are on a journey from independence through dependence and on to interdependence. When you are independent you can feel more in control but in our environment you are only effective in collaboration. The right behaviour is a desire to create win-win solutions to multiple and complex challenges.

Other tips?

One of my previous directors used to be a learning and development manager. He had the mindset that you train for technical skills only and use the workplace as your learning environment for everything else.

I've adopted that approach, and I now use it with people who work for me. Every six weeks, or so, I ask them to tell me about their best successes and hardest challenges in that period. We use these as case studies and dissect them, which enables us to gain insights and gives us both the maximum learning. It becomes more and more effective with practice and is always worth the time commitment. Some people take a while to open up to that approach and you have to tailor the depth of the conversation to the capabilities of the person in the beginning.

What it means is that we are continually looking at how to do the job better. Doing that is an inherently motivational experience and one that I call being 'designed to succeed'. I give them ownership and ask questions, challenge thinking and probe into what they are doing in order that they get the feel good of the enhanced achievement.

Similarly, in a big change programme, we analyse every single day of training. We ask daily: 'How did it go? What did we learn?'

That means we are not just going through the motions of training. We are asking the question, 'Can we do everything better', all of the time. It's a lot of work but most people love it and it's very energising.

You can hear Brian McNamee in the latest IT Training podcast talking about the training programme run by National Grid to acommpany the IS systems and processes introduced to meet the new conditions introduced in the Traffic Management Act: **www.bcs.org/podcasts**



Authoring system offers quality control

Following BT's introduction of a collaborative authoring system to help standardise content creation, the number of people using it has gradually risen. Helen Wilcox reports.

BT takes learning seriously. Its 100,000 employees completed 550,000 courses last year, 73,000 of which were instructor led while the rest were e-learning.

BT offers its employees three sorts of e-learning content:

- mandatory/governance type courses destined for large numbers of staff (produced by professional suppliers);
- generic content, for example, Word, Excel, ITIL (supplied by Skillsoft);
- content produced internally with authoring tools.

Back in 2006, BT used a selection of different authoring tools across the organisation. Peter Kelly, organisational learning manager, was keen to move to a company-wide authoring system, so that content could be produced on a single tool, and easily uploaded onto BT's new learning management system (LMS). A related aim was to move to standard templates across all the lines of business, so that material for all courses was presented in a similar format for learners.

So, in 2006, the search began for a new authoring tool, and Kelly involved all the major stakeholders in BT to create a brief. After judging potential suppliers on their agreed criteria, the evaluation team selected Atlantic Link's authoring system.

Atlantic Link built ContentPoint templates for BT so that the content appears in a standard format. The templates ensure consistency for learners, with navigation buttons in the same place on each course. Templates also help to make sure that content is compliant with the Worldwide Web Consortium's (W3C) web content accessibility guidelines (AA) for conformance for individuals with disabilities – one of BT's main requirements.

In December 2006, BT launched the new tool with 25 users authorised and trained to use it, and seven Atlantic Link ContentPoint licences for them to share.

To help ensure good quality content, authorised content creators had to complete e-learning courses on publishing standards, and a two-day face-to-face course on using the tool, taught by Atlantic Link

As user numbers have risen, with now 120 people authorised to create content, BT has increased the number of licences, which now stand at 32.

The user can create an audience which has access to a certain bit of e-learning – this could be all of BT, or a line of business and so on. E-learning courses can be made into a certification, or can be made mandatory to fulfil an employee's objectives.

Content is created for a variety of skills, including IT. Examples of IT training courses that are created using the system include:

- systems training, for example for the NHS IT programme;
- applications training, for example on Agile design;
- customer service training.

Atlantic Link is currently working on making data available to the LMS via sharable content object reference model (SCORM) to make more information available, for example to provide more information on the specific answers to quiz questions rather than just a pass/fail score.

'Knowing the answers people give will help us to understand what is not clear to the learner and allow us to follow up with revisions to the learning content,' said PeterKelly.

Such tweaks to the system, and Kelly's team's ever closer monitoring of content quality, should help ensure that e-learning in BT keeps its popularity.

Knowing the answers people give will help us to understand what is not clear to the learner and allow us to follow up with revisions to the learning content

Peter Kelly

Read the full article online at:
www.bcs.org/ittraining



A bigger fish in a small pond

With QA-IQ's purchase of Xpertise, the largest IT training supplier has grown to almost four times the size of its nearest competitor. What are the implications for itself, its clients and competitors, asks Helen Wilcox.

Drama came to the usually relatively quiet waters of the IT training industry in the last few weeks. It kicked off with Xpertise, placed third in last year's IT Training company revenue charts compiled by IT Skills Research, making an offer to buy Parity Training on 23 July. However, before its shareholders had chance to express an opinion, industry number one QA-IQ leapt into action, and made an offer to buy Xpertise shares.

A condition of that offer was that Xpertise abandon its proposed purchase of Parity Training. At the shareholders' meeting on 26 August, Xpertise shareholders voted to reject the Parity deal, freeing the way for the QA-IQ takeover to go through.

The next day, QA-IQ increased its offer to Xpertise shareholders from 150p to 165p per share, more than twice the closing price of 77p on 21 August, the last business day prior to the initial announcement.

Never has a player in this industry been so dominant

David Pardo, IT Skills Research

Xpertise directors recommended the 165p offer and, by 19 September, QA-IQ had received pledges of more than 50 per cent of shares, making the acquisition unconditional.

The revenues of the combined company, QA-Xpertise (a working name until a definitive one is picked), add up to over £80 million (QA-IQ £63 million and Xpertise £22m), almost four times those of second placed Learning Tree, which made £23 million last year.

David Pardo, MD of IT Skills Research, said: 'Never has a player in this industry been so dominant – the combined business now has a 17-18 per cent market share. That said, compared to other industries, its share is not so large and the industry is still not particularly consolidated.'

William Macpherson, CEO of QA-IQ at the time, and now CEO of QA-Xpertise, echoed Pardo's views. 'We are quite large in our industry but not compared to the suppliers and customers. The latter look at the range of courses, locations and services we offer.

'Being larger can give enormous advantages in terms of range, frequency and number of locations. The advantages of scale mean we have a stronger offering. If businesses were available to buy, it made sense to us.

'Englefield, the private equity investors, who bought QA-IQ last summer, had always admired Xpertise, as had I. However, when Xpertise announced the Parity deal, it's not the route we would have chosen to go down.'

Why did the terms of the QA-IQ offer exclude Parity? 'We did not want to buy two things at once,' said Macpherson. 'We were eager to have Xpertise, but didn't want to buy it in the middle of an integration. Also, I know Parity less well.'

The conditions for the acquisition were in QA-IQ's favour, as Pardo explained: 'Xpertise's vulnerability was that its share price was low, making its market capitalisation disappointingly small. QA-IQ only paid £9.6 million for a company with a turnover of £22 million, despite Xpertise growing and being profitable with one of the strongest management teams in our industry.

'It's a strategic strike by QA-IQ, which has taken out a company that had become its closest rival on both quality and reach. It's unusual for a company to acquire another with such a similar offering; they usually look more for complementary businesses.'

Macpherson, however, emphasised that the union does strengthen certain areas. For instance, Xpertise had a stronger schedule in Leeds and Manchester, and the merger therefore increased the service offering there, which means more frequency for certain courses. QA-IQ was strong in technical team leadership, while Xpertise was strong in customer excellence, he said.

Mergers and acquisitions in IT training have not always been successful, however, Pardo pointed out. Indeed, QA's takeover of the Capgemini business could be blamed in part for the financial difficulties that led to its takeover by Interquad to form QA-IQ. However, this is the first time that a private equity firm has got involved in the industry, and its influence and experience may make the difference.

Macpherson naturally thinks they can pull it off: 'QA-IQ and Xpertise are surprisingly similar. There are far more similarities than differences. I've done more than 20 acquisitions of education businesses. This one is trickier because we are aiming for a merger, which is more complicated than integrating a stand-alone business or a simple takeover of a business, but the prize is worth it. The trick is to communicate early, and business as usual has to be the key focus.'

Richard Chappell, UK MD of Learning Tree, is not surprisingly more cynical: 'There are always challenges to merging different organisations. Interquad was seen as responsible for commoditising the IT training market and deflating prices in the industry. Now it's becoming a grown-up in terms of infrastructure and costs, and not under the same price pressure from the recent price war with Xpertise.

'We'll charge no different, but it will be interesting to see what QA-Xpertise do.'

On pricing, Macpherson said: 'Our hereditary culture has been about providing great value. With a greater offer, value is about reducing price. Many of our customers are facing harder economic times and we want to help reduce cost where that is their wish. The market will stay sensitive to price. We intend to save costs centrally.'

Being larger can give enormous advantages in terms of range, frequency and number of locations

William Macpherson, QA-Xpertise

Combining two businesses

Macpherson was at pains to stress that although QA-IQ bought Xpertise, they are approaching it as a merger inside, combining two businesses. Representatives from both companies are, for example, on the executive board.

'It's very much a merger of best of breed,' said Macpherson. 'Glen Pike and Bill Walker [former Xpertise directors] have joined our executive board. The head office functions will be spread over the three former HQs – Slough, Swindon and Leeds , along with the executive board.

'Our first task is managing the integration while focusing on business as usual. That will take a couple of months or so. We also plan to cement our position as first choice provider for technology training.

'The second task is to have an unparalleled offer in terms of managed learning services.

'Thirdly, our ambition is to grow in soft skills – professional skills, ie ITIL, project management – and in the management development space. We would also aim to target non-technology departments.'

Are there more acquisitions on the cards? 'Well that's like asking someone to dance, we need to ask and get a positive response,' said Macpherson. 'We would acquire the right businesses at the right prices.'

And what about the rest of the market: 'I think consolidation in the market is likely to continue for the reasons that we have grown.'

One thing for sure is that certain IT training companies are already for sale. Parity is back on the market and Global Knowledge has reportedly been for sale for a while. Learning Tree, too, is seeking a buyer. Chappell confirmed: 'A couple of American investment banks are doing due diligence, but it will depend on what offer they make as to whether the bid is successful. The co-founders are looking to retire, but the company is cash rich, so it doesn't need to sell. It's not a good time to get an attractive price.'

It may not be a good time to sell, but it's arguably a good time to buy, so watch out for more ripples in the waters in the months to come.



New face at the top

William Macpherson is a new face in the IT training industry, shifting over from running education companies specialising in accountancy. Most recently he was the chief executive of Kaplan Professional and International, a major learning services organisation with sales in excess of $500 million. Kaplan is now the second largest in its market in the UK.

Macpherson first began leading training companies in 1995 when he became chief executive of Financial Training, which he built into one of the UK's largest accountancy training businesses.

Why did he take the QA-IQ job? 'I love the world of commercial education – we can be really proud of what we do, providing education skills that make people do better in their job,' he said. 'It's a growing industry in the long term – people need ever more education and more skills.'



Not turned off by blended learning

ITV has set up a toolkit for its managers where e-learning content is mixed with its regular intranet, giving a different meaning to the word 'blended'. This approach helps staff find content, plus has allowed recovery of initial costs within 12 months, as Gary Flood explains.

ITV is one of the biggest brands in UK broadcasting, producing a range of popular shows ranked in millions of viewers. The firm's activities range from traditional (terrestrial) broadcasting to digital television to advertising to film-making (see box top-right). Its approach to high-quality but highly accessible programming has carried over into all aspects of its working culture – most assuredly in the way the firm has approached blended learning. The company built a very successful platform that contains human resources (HR) guidelines and information for its managers. It has just recently been extended to all staff – around 5,500 – who are mostly based at its Grays Inn Road HQ in London.

The system – the ITV HR Toolkit for managers – wasn't just set up to deliver this information as a one-off training event. Basically, it acts as a self-help tool so senior management and staff can develop their own knowledge and access information at the moment of need without always depending on the internal ITV HR team. The ultimate aim is to release more of ITV's HR internal practitioners' time so they can take a more strategic and consultative approach to personnel development issues in the group.

In July, the system came first in the Most Innovative Use of Technology category in the *HR* magazine 2008 awards, with the judges particularly impressed with its alignment to the corporation's five-year business plan.

We set out to blur the lines between the corporate intranet and e-learning style

Pete Hallard, ITV

As might be expected from a creative media organisation like ITV, presentation has been a key aspect of why the system has been received so well.

'Our people are very creative, very bright, and are focused on making great programming content,' says Pete Hallard, director of learning and development at ITV and the leader of a team of 15 HR professionals at the group. 'They will just get turned off if we tell them they have to go and look at some "e-learning content". The things they see on the site have to be at least as good as the other things they work with day by day – or they just won't use it.'

ITV is trying to offer an attractive combination of a regular website and interactive e-learning, says Hallard. This hybrid between a webpage and a more familiar online learning course enables managers and staff to find information in a familiar website environment and then follow an online learning course in a structured, but flexible, way.

To meet that aim, the company worked closely with blended learning consultancy Redtray, which provided the overall design of the systems as well as the underlying learning management system (LMS).

Toby White, the firm's sales director, says, 'One of the largest challenges we faced was how to take such a vast amount of information – all of ITVs' HR policies and procedures – and put it into a system that was intuitive to navigate and engaging to its audience. We needed to

make sure that the tool was easy for staff to use and leave them happy to come back and use the toolkit again and again.

'The end product really shows how technology has evolved in the context of learning and development, I think: we started by recognising a business problem and then applied elements of e-learning, performance support, informal learning and website design to the final solution which has delivered huge benefits to the client.'

ITV is trying to offer staff less compulsory training but instead an attractive combination of a regular website and that interactive content. This hybrid approach enables managers and staff to find information in a familiar online environment and then follow an online learning course at their own pace.

Intranet meets e-learning

The best way to think of the toolkits is as a mixture of a standard "flat" intranet and e-learning,' believes Hallard. 'We deliberately set out to blur the lines between the corporate intranet and any e-learning style "module" based approach. To work for our people, it always has to be both intellectually challenging and readily accessible.' Measures to promote the latter include a single sign-on approach so that staff don't have to learn yet more passwords to access the material, for instance.

The system provides not just a quick way to update and refresh information securely but also tracking tools so that detailed reports can come back to Hallard and his team on what parts of the system are being accessed most frequently. Such tracking and reporting facilities are also helping identify further training or awareness needs of managers and the ability to improve the toolkit based on popularity of topics, comments and feedback.

One other feature of the toolkit is the 'Ask The Expert' functionality. If a manager cannot find the information they are looking for, they can contact their HR advisors through the toolkit itself. ITV's HR team can then respond directly but can also choose to publish the question and their response back into the general toolkit.

'This is a great example of how informal learning is being applied through technology, effectively creating a blog, which can often provide more timely, and pertinent, information to a business, with zero cost implications,' says White.

As noted, the original core managers' toolkit has now been extended into a company-wide version for all ITV employees. The new Employee Toolkit has a similar style to the manager's version and uses much of the same content, but it has extra topics designed from the outset to be more directly relevant to staff; there is much emphasis on help for them to deal with the 'nuts and bolts' aspect of the processes they need to fulfil to build content and a rich set of tools with lots of 'how to do x' guides, for example.

The toolkit can also be used as a piece of e-learning for those dealing with a particular situation for the first time. Led by a set of on-screen questions, it provides step by step advice and guidance as it takes users



The things they see on the site have to be at least as good as the other things they work with day by day – or they just won't use it

Pete Hallard, ITV



Owner of the Rover's Return

ITV is the biggest commercial television network in the UK, with a network made up of 15 regional licences (11 of which, the England and Wales licences, being owned by the ITV Plc company), formed in 2004 following the merger of Carlton and Granada; SMG owns the two Scottish licences, Scottish Television and Grampian; UTV and Channel Television own the licences for Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands respectively.

ITV plc also owns a growing digital channel portfolio – ITV2, ITV3, ITV4, CiTV – and a range of new media and interactive services via the internet, such as the Friends Reunited brand. It is world famous for such content as Coronation Street, X Factor, Secret Diary Of A Call Girl and many other programmes.

As part of an ongoing five-year turnaround strategy, the company is seeking to grow its annual revenues to £1 billion by the end of 2012 with a further £150m from online activities.



ITV HQ - Grays Inn Road, London

E-learning and compliance

ITV is using e-learning as a key tool to address compliance issues across the company. Call line irregularities were high profile last year, following a series of well-publicised issues with the way viewers were treated when voting in game shows, so a special new e-learning course addresses this.

Other e-learning modules cover the making of compliant TV programmes, most specifically looking at how reporters must produce balanced news reports. All the courses reflect the media capabilities of ITV and carry rich media e-learning with video scenarios that bring the subject matter to life – the making of a compliant TV programme includes a ten minute mock drama that learners are encouraged to critique, for instance.

The delivery of the e-learning courses are through a LMS. ITV can pull off detailed information on who has completed the course so it can follow up on areas where further training may be required plus it identifies those who have not participated and an automatic chase system is set into operation.

We started by recognising a business problem and then applied elements of e-learning, performance support, informal learning and website design to the final solution

Tony White, Redtray

through a particular procedure, offering tips and further resources.

Hallard and his team are insistent that the system is a lot more than just a training system – important as that is. 'It's great to know we have all documentation in a single place,' he says. 'It's an excellent platform for the introduction of e-forms, which will streamline ITV HR processes such as contracts, change of details and salary increases – we will be able to provide a window into these forms with detailed explanations, for instance.'

As 'living' technology, the two toolkits are constantly monitored, evaluated and updated with the ability for documents to be maintained within the firm. The manager's version of the toolkit is restricted to use by nominated senior staffers only, so they see content specific for that audience's set of job roles, while the employee version is open to anyone who has an ITV log-in.

The toolkits have been a huge success, says Hallard, claiming initial project costs have already been fully recovered in the 12 months following the toolkits release. 90 per cent of ITV's middle and senior management population have signed up to the toolkit so far.

'The savings have been delivered through the toolkits' ability to reduce the time spent by HR practitioners on basic HR queries without reducing the quality of their service. It has also reduced the volume of external consultants and project managers since HR practitioners now have more time to spend on strategic and project work.'

Hallard is confident a 500 per cent return on investment over a five-year period is an achievable metric on the system's contribution to ITV as a whole. 'This system has done a fantastic job of shifting attitudes and making us a much stronger company,' concludes Hallard – which seems the ideal combination of technology innovation and positive company impact.

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Employers take hold of the reins in skills race

The global race to improve skills has led to the government according rights to certain employers to award their own qualifications. Donald Taylor looks at employers which have become awarding bodies and how to go about it.

In training at work, both employees and employers want a positive result – but not typically the same one. The employer looks for knowledge transfer, leading to an improvement in current or future performance. Trainees may want that too, but will also ask what's in it for them. Most employees want to learn valuable skills and to show that they have them – two things best achieved by training for, and attaining, a qualification. Any level of qualification, from end-user ECDL to PRINCE2 project certification, shows a recognised level of expertise.

And yet recognition has always represented a problem for employers. A qualification that is recognised makes an employee more attractive in the open job market. And that is not the only difficulty employers have with externally-recognised qualifications. Another problem is their utility. Unless you are a specialist in a field with well-developed qualifications, most certifications simply cover too much ground that an employer would find

We are no longer engaged in a global arms race. We are in a skills race

Gordon Brown

irrelevant. The original ECDL, for example, required knowledge of presentation and database applications, regardless of the responsibilities of the person taking the exam. BCS has now moved towards a modular approach to user qualifications.

Even if an employer accepts that the extra material on the exam curriculum will add to an employee's value, and accepts what research tells us – that certified employees are more likely to stay with an employer than non-certified employers – there has always been one final stumbling block in the way of employer-funded qualifications: cost.

Most employers would argue that while a national qualification is of no tangible value to the employer – unless it is a compliance requirement – it certainly carries a tangible cost. They would rather train employees to exam standards, but not have them sit the exam.

These three factors, led by cost, have left the UK languishing compared with international vocational qualifications. Of 29 OECD countries, the UK ranks 21st in numbers of 25-34 year-olds with a level 2 qualification (equivalent of GCSE grades A*-C) or higher.

The Leitch call for action

The 2006 Leitch Review highlighted this low national level of vocational skills, and provoked an action plan from the Treasury in response: 'Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills'. The title tells it all: the government sees this as a national priority. As the UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, said: 'We are no longer engaged in a global arms race. We are in a skills race.'

A core part of 'Prosperity for all' was the need to shake up vocational qualifications, and give employers a much greater say in what qualifications were available, including making it possible for employers to award qualifications themselves. Why should they want to? According to Simon Witts, director of safety, quality and training at Flybe, its decision to become an awarding body was part of the airline's continual process of quality assurance. Responsible for Flybe's central safety, quality and training team, Witts ensures that not only compliance but also the related overall airline targets are delivered.



Lower staff turnover is one of the key benefits of being able to award a nationally-recognised qualification

Samina Khan, QCA

'Being a highly-regulated industry, we'd had a good programme of ongoing training in place for years,' says Witts, 'but it was isolated. We wanted to turn the results of training into a qualification. Our CEO had committed the company to this course of action by signing the Skills Pledge; we want to recognise the skills of our employees. That gave us the top level buy-in we needed, so we set about getting approval for our existing cabin crew qualification.'

The motivation for Flybe may have been recognising the skills of their employees, but now, after awarding 600 of the qualifications, a solid business benefit has emerged. 'Cabin crew retention has never been better,' says Witts. 'We can't claim that it's all down to the qualification, but there's no doubt that people feel good about reaching a national standard.'

Lower staff turnover is one of the key benefits of being able to award a nationally-recognised qualification, according to Samina Khan, acting head of lifelong learning and skills at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). And this goes beyond the normal good retention rates associated with highly-trained workforces.

'Employers such as Network Rail which have become awarding bodies are very articulate about the benefit,' she says. 'One is the resultant national recognition for both the organisation and the employees.' A key business benefit, though, is improved staff morale and retention: 'Employers are saying "if you've never achieved an A level or a GCSE before, here's your first", and that's highly motivational. People want to stay with employers who show that commitment.'

Employers must develop their qualifications for one of the nine levels on the National Qualifications Framework, from entry level to level 8. Level 3 is A level and level 8 is equivalent to PhD.

First accreditation steps

The first step for any organisation thinking of becoming an awarding body is to get in touch with QCA email: recognition@qca.org.uk. Rather than impose a structure from outside, says Khan, they will work with the employer to see how its existing practices may already marry with what an awarding body should be doing. This consultative approach is vital, says Witts. 'They don't just send you a form,' he says. 'They go through things with you step by step. The whole process of becoming an awarding body took us about a one person week of work spread over three months.'

The work of assessing the employer is carried out not by QCA, but by the Office of the Qualifications and Exams Regulator (Ofqual). Khan explains that Ofqual's work can take as little as six to eight weeks, and that they are typically interested in the employer's expertise in qualifications delivery and assessment, and in the employer's existing processes around quality assurance.

The awarding body status, though, is confined to a specific qualification, points out Khan. 'It does not grant you a licence to hand out GCSEs and A levels to everyone.' In Network Rail's case the recognised qualification was in track laying, for Flybe it was cabin crewing. Any additional qualifications all have to be checked individually by Ofqual.

This is a step away from the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) approach, which leaves little flexibility for the employer in assessment methods and demanded the collection of a substantial portfolio of evidence as part of the

qualification. Ofqual demands rigorous assessment of learning, says Khan, but adds: 'The body does not dictate how this should be done, only that it must be fit for purpose.'

Options for smaller outfits

QCA recognises that not all employers are the size of current awarding-body-employers Network Rail, the MOD, McDonalds or Flybe, and not all will be able to dedicate the resources to managing their own exams. For such employers, two alternative approaches exist.

One is to work with an existing awarding body and tailor an existing award to their own needs. This is the most popular approach, but an increasingly popular alternative is to work with a third party – usually a professional body or a college, which already has approval for an industry-specific qualification.

The Institute of IT Training (IITT) has already taken this step. It launched its new IT Trainer Performance, Monitoring and Assessment service (TPMA) in September to ensure members' continuous professional development. Employers that already have internal training and assessment programmes for their trainers can work with the IITT to ensure that these programmes conform to a national standard, governed by the awarding body OCR. Alternatively, they can send their trainers to a centre for assessment. In both cases the assessment can result in one of a set of nationally-recognised qualifications starting at level 3.

'TPMA is about empowering training departments, rather than dictating to them,' explains Ed Monk, managing director of the IITT.

This approach reflects the general post-Leitch approach to workplace training and qualifications. Good work is already being done in workplace learning and development. Rather than force training towards centrally-dictated qualifications, QCA and other government agencies are now keen to recognise the quality of existing L&D departments, and to ensure that both employers and employees get what they want out of training.

Ofqual demands rigorous assessment of learning, but the body does not dictate how this should be done, only that it must be 'fit for purpose'

Samina Khan

Resources

www.dius.gov.uk/publications/worldclassskills.pdf

QCA email: recognition@qca.org.uk

www.qca.org.uk/recognition

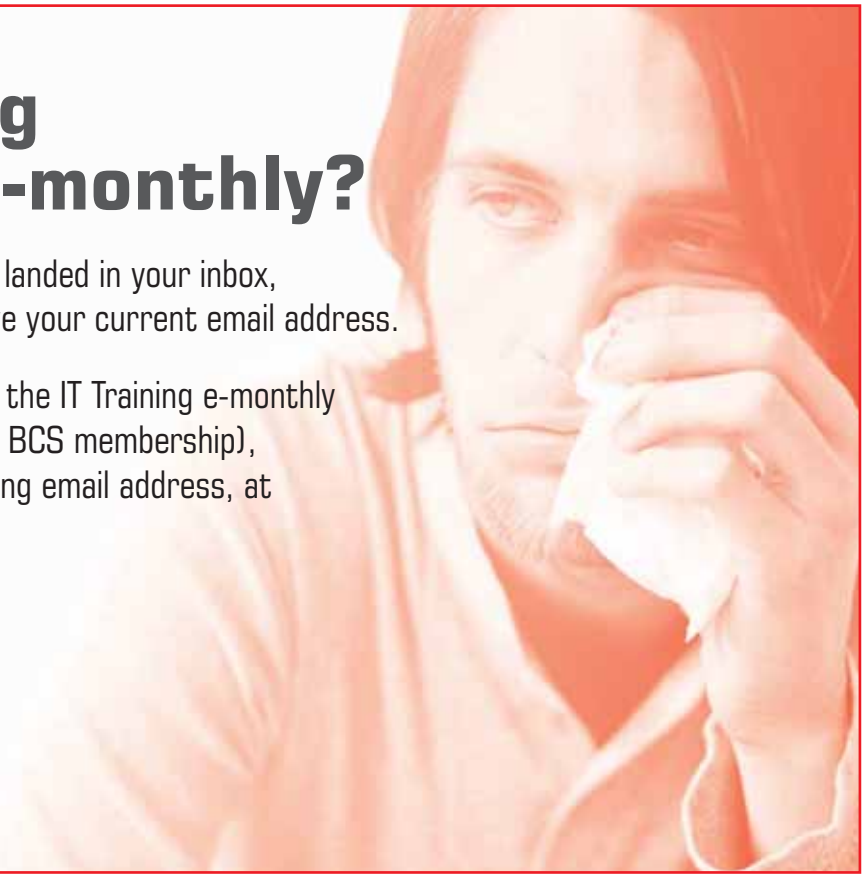
www.ofqual.gov.uk/

www.iitt.org.uk

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ITtraining e-monthly

Hooked into .NET certification



How popular is .NET certification proving, and what is its format, following the introduction of the new style Microsoft examinations, asks Gary Flood.

In February, I wrote about how Microsoft has been revamping its entire certification stack as part of a move away from the Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE).

A case in point is what the Redmond giant has been doing in its core .NET technology, which is hugely important to anyone in the Microsoft programming world for building applications. It is the technology behind all kinds of systems and web presences (from recruiters Reed's new global portal to the basic platform used by social networking site MySpace).

So what has been the impact from Microsoft evolving its certifications to be truly post-MCSE for the .NET expert?

The answer came back, unsurprisingly quickly and emphatically but convincingly nonetheless: this is both real and all starting to ramp up very quickly. 'We have seen a lot of interest from the market, with in the UK alone about 150 people attaining .NET certification, about double where it was this time last year,' says Garry Corcoran, Microsoft UK group manager for skills and partner readiness.

Of the two main constituents of .NET qualification candidates – systems integrators and independent software vendors plus individual developers – it's the former camp that seems most interested, at least so far, according to Corcoran.

Sometimes, though, you find a bit of both. Geff Lombardi is a senior .NET developer at a small software house called 1st Software that develops packages for the independent financial adviser market. In the past 12 months Lombardi has taken a slew of .NET and .NET-related certifications. The company supported him and paid for the exams but all study was strictly in his own time.

Why put himself to all the trouble when each exam represents, in his personal estimate, at least 30 to 40 hours of study time? 'There's a sense of achievement here, a real confidence booster. And the fact that I have been doing things not strictly needed in my day job has made that job more interesting as I can see it all in more context now.'

I am impressed with Microsoft's commitment – whenever a new technology becomes available, so does an exam, more or less

Geff Lombardi

Also, as a Microsoft Gold level Partner, 1st Software benefits from his hard work as it demonstrates its competence to the market.

Lombardi likes the material available from Microsoft's own Press range of books and Microsoft Developer Network **http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-gb/default.aspx**

'There are all sorts of useful things, I found, from documentation to blogs to discussion groups,' he enthuses. 'I think that's helped me both pass the specific exams but also produce better quality work all round.'

Microsoft UK also works with stand-alone training providers for .NET certification, such as Xpertise, Firebrand, Pygmalion and Global Knowledge.

Do people like Lombardi feel Microsoft is taking the new style .NET certification process seriously? 'I have to say I am impressed with Microsoft's commitment here - whenever a new technology becomes available so does an exam, more or less.'

So the verdict has to be that Microsoft is very much 'on message' when it comes to the post-MCSE world, and as new .NET elements like the newer versions of the Visual Studio development environment come on stream, relevant qualifications soon follow.

Useful links

Microsoft's certifications
www.microsoft.com/learning/mcp/default.mspx

How combinations of exams can build up for .NET expert, such as the Certified Professional Developer
www.microsoft.com/learning/mcp/mcpd/default.mspx

Biting off exactly what's chewable

Bite-sized chunks has long been a mantra of all aspects of skills transfer – but now it's time to make it a reality, argues Alan Bellinger.

Just think about this for no more than five seconds: how many learning objects would there typically be in a five-day classroom course? If you assumed that learning objects were synonymous with learning objectives then the answer would probably be in single figures. But take a more realistic approach, using the traditional definition of a learning object, and you'll be closer to three figures.

There's a point behind this simple exercise – it comes down to this: what is the optimum granularity of content to transfer skills effectively? And the imperative that will determine how you think this issue through is that modular and miniature rules the day.

Granularity

In fact, you could argue that, outside the classroom, people have always developed knowledge and skills in this way. Even before the internet, people would get the reference book they thought most appropriate, look up the key words and phrases in the index, and then 'mashup' the results into the conclusion they sought.

With the advent of the internet, it's simply an issue of replacing all those indices with Google, going to the urls that look most promising and cut and pasting the elements that best fit, and they feel they can rely on.

This really highlights the fact that we look for learning objects in a non linear way. And so, any repository of skills content must comprise sufficiently granular, independent components to meet the skills needs of the organisation. Those needs will be that the learning objects will satisfy many different scenarios, and they'll need to be made available through a number of distribution channels.

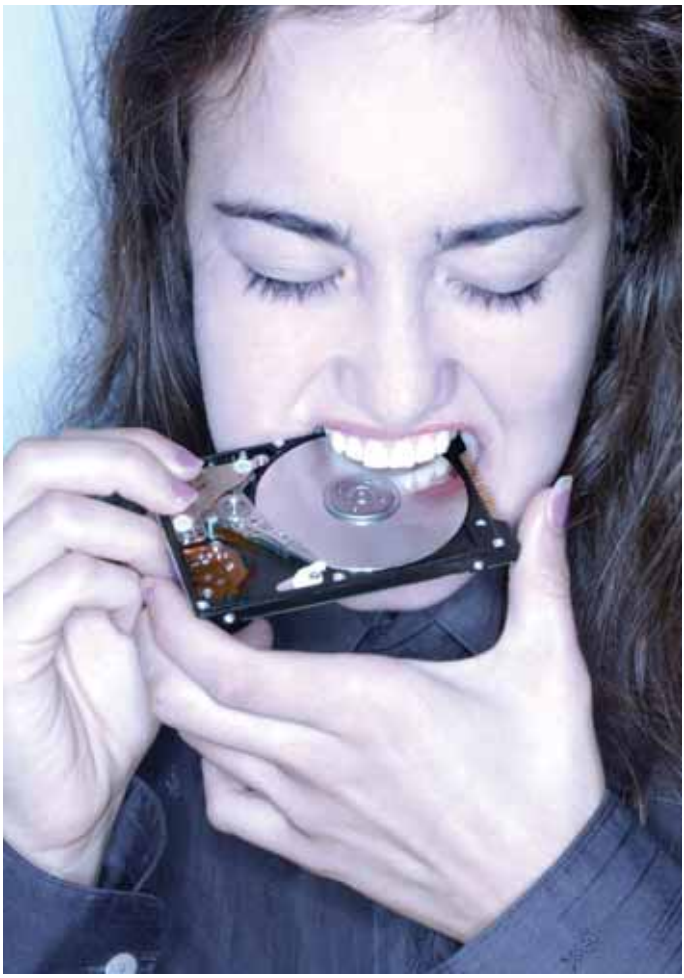
Formal and informal

Now there are two ways of looking at that simple phrase 'distribution channels'. The first is that it could be made available using different types of media (e.g. e-learning, content collaboration, performance support, or even in the classroom); the second is that it could be used in both formal and informal learning interventions.

For some time now I have argued that there is a new meaning to that old chestnut, blended learning, and that is that it describes the integration of formal and informal learning to ensure effective skills transfer. And the reality is that informal learning interventions will require far more modular and miniature than is the case in a formal intervention.

Let's look at a simple example: you're rolling out a new customer relationship management system. At the start of the roll-out the level of understanding of the new system is low and you'll want to kick off the skills development program with some form of formal training – in all probability using a combination of media-based content and exercises backed with some face-to-face activity. At this stage, the learning objects will be fairly large and amorphous.

If you use that as the criteria for determining the granularity of the content you'll almost certainly find that you'll have to re-develop it when it comes to re-using it in an informal environment. Because that's where the 'bite-sized chunks' are really required.



The practice of learning object design and generation is not intuitive

Alan Bellinger

There are three drivers to informal learning. The first is that people have forgotten a skill, the second is that they never learnt it in the first place and the third is they knew it, but not in that context.

In each of these events, the learners will need the learning objects to be available within very focused activities. And so the first rule of granularity is to let informal interventions drive the granularity, and aggregate them as appropriate within formal interventions.

Delivery channels

The next key principle of managing learning objects is that a single object should be capable of being aggregated and delivered to the learner in different ways. We noted a typical example in our discussion of the CRM roll-out; this was where a single learning object was used in e-learning, the classroom, collaborative content and performance support.

Such independence of delivery channels creates an outstanding opportunity – it resolves all of those issues around learning styles.

We've spent years trying to understand learning styles and how best to relate to them in the learning experiences we create. But now we don't need to bother any more (tongue in cheek I admit, but it's real). By providing the repository, and multiple ways to access it, it becomes the learner's responsibility to decide how best they want to manage this learning intervention.

And so we come to the second rule of granularity – ensure that the object is able to be delivered using multiple distribution channels.

Metadata

All this discussion about the granularity of learning objects highlights a major issue – the smaller and more modular they are the harder it is to find them again, and once they're found you'll still need to resolve the aggregation issues. That's why we need metadata. The shorthand definition of metadata is that it is 'data about data', although many purists will argue that that basic definition is both misleading and overly simplistic. But let's not get into that argument here.

From our L&D perspective the metadata we create to describe an object needs to clearly describe what it is, any security provisions around it, the delivery media options and the job roles to which it could apply. Once that's resolved, all we need is the repository in which to store it, the retrieval routines to find it again, and the aggregation routines to compound it into the learning interventions we're seeking to provide.

Let's use an example to see how this works in practice. Let's assume we've created a learning object for creating pivot tables in Excel; we would probably need more than one object for this, but let's keep it simple at this stage.

Once we have the pivot table learning object, we could aggregate it with other learning objects to give it context – for example debt collection, sales performance analysis, or marketing campaign management.

The metadata would provide the descriptions we need and one basic object can be re-used to provide real learning opportunities that are context related. It will also provide a much better driver for skills development.

Ask someone if they'd like to learn how to use pivot tables and you'll get an answer along the lines of 'when I have time'. But ask them if they want to carry out a more detailed level of sales performance and you'll get a totally different answer.

The third rule of granularity therefore is to spend time understanding metadata and the way in which it manages the learning objects it is describing. There have been a number of examples of L&D managers finding that they can't manage objects in the repository because the metadata didn't meet their needs. This really is an example of 'losing the battle, all for the want of a horseshoe nail'.

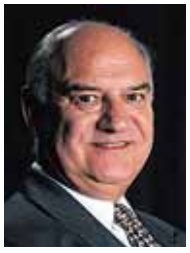
Key principles

A word of caution: the practice of learning object design and generation is not intuitive. But the good news is that your colleagues in the IT department have just been through a similar challenge, and they've learned all the appropriate lessons that you need right now.

That experience came from learning to deal with service-oriented architectures, and the mistakes they made (or, let's be charitable, avoided) in services development can help you to design an effective learning repository and start using it to derive real benefit.

In doing that, it is important to:

- Plan big but start small. This is an evolution issue rather than a 'big bang'. Use one of your smaller and less exposed projects to start with and let it evolve from there.
- Expect reuse. Start from the basis that learning objects will be reused in the future. In fact, if you're concerned that the object won't be reused then really question if it's really needed.
- 'Right size' learning objects. It's very tricky to get this right. The key question to ask about any content element is 'can I reduce it further?' Go too far and you'll condemn it to a life in which it is always tied to some other content. Essentially, the right size for a learning object is the smallest size at which you perceive that it has value by itself. Any larger and you'll reduce its reusability; any smaller and it'll always be tied to other content.
- Drive reuse. If you don't keep pushing it, it'll never happen. People have an incredible penchant for wanting to re-invent the wheel, and, just like the case with the wheel, it's wasted effort. And the really interesting part of this is that learning content can start to be used in any number of ways – they're not restricted to learning.



Essentially, the right size for a learning object is the smallest size at which you perceive that it has value by itself

Alan Bellinger

Process – not event

We've long argued that learning should be a process, and not an event. But, apart from appraisals and personal development plans, we've never had the tools to make this a reality. But now that L&D is making a much stronger play in the informal learning space, it's not lip service any more.



Technically ready to be in charge

When moving into a management or leadership role, is it best to go on a course designed for those from a technical background, or mix with other managers? That depends partially on who you are managing or leading, as Helen Wilcox explains.

Management skills training is a neglected area, leading managers to feel less confident in their ability to manage and lead people, according to a recent survey by SkillSoft.

The survey found that the top three tasks that managers in the UK are asked to undertake without receiving proper training are: 1. managing people, 2. project management, 3. leadership.

The survey also found that those considered most in need of training in the UK are 1. line managers, 2. supervisors, 3. senior managers. Around 2,000 UK employees were questioned and around a sixth of the global total were from IT companies.

There seems little doubt from that survey that the personnel on the ground see training in management and leadership skills as valuable, as not surprisingly do the training companies.

William Macpherson, CEO of QA-Xpertise, said: 'We can all be enhanced by correct training and learn something we can apply. It may be something you were doing intuitively but then you learn a framework to do it in.'

Richard Chappell, MD UK of Learning Tree, added: 'Someone

A leader needs to recognise, for instance, that some developers will lose themselves in problem solving and forget about deadlines

Salma Shah, Beyond

inexperienced can be a good manager because that person has the right experience, skills set and style. Even for that person, courses will give some tips and tricks to help with challenges and avoid pitfalls.'

Not everyone may agree that leaders can be made. But a debate on whether or not leaders are born could fill more than one article, so for the purposes of this article, let's assume that the Skillsoft survey is correct, and some training is worthwhile for your leaders and managers.

Which brings us to the next dilemma: are you trying to train

your top brass to be managers or leaders? The difference between management and leadership is another area that could be debated over several pages, but we can only skim quickly over some arguments.

Coach4Growth's definition is: 'In order to be fully rounded, you must have the ability to manage the day-to-day tasks and deliver results, while seeing the opportunity for change and the big picture.'

Bill Walker, commercial director, QA-Xpertise, said: 'I think the difference between leadership and management is that you can learn management skills, but leadership is more what grows with the team. A course, however, can teach you leadership tasks.

'For instance, Richard Branson is a great leader. He's got charisma. You can't teach those skills but you can learn by studying what makes him a leader, and then try and apply what you've learnt.'

Let's make another assumption then that training in management and leadership is necessary for your top dogs, and go on to the question of what value you gain by sending them on a course specifically aimed at IT leaders/managers.

Tailored or not

'There's huge value in having a course tailored to your experience,' Macpherson said. 'But on a closed course there can be an advantage to mixing disciplines – you can see the value of different bits of the business and see common problems. Its usefulness also depends on the seniority of the person.'

Chappell said: 'If you are studying something with a technical bias, for instance ITIL, a technical course is appropriate. But for more generic courses, such as on presentation, public speaking, management skills, it's useful to have a broader mix because individuals mix with general managers and would-be managers.

'On the other hand, if you are a technical person, and you've always been in a technical role, it could be a good thing to go on a course with a technical bias.'



On a closed course there can be an advantage to mixing disciplines – you can see the value of different bits of the business and see common problems

William Macpherson, QA-IQ

Salma Shah, director of Beyond, believes that technical leaders often require tailored training, depending on who they will be in charge of. 'Within one department an IT director or manager needs to manage very different types of individuals whose roles vary greatly,' she said. 'They may also have a diverse team with virtual or overseas members. They may be managing contractors, which requires different leadership skills. Often, IT is not a profit centre but a cost centre with internal customers. As companies often outsource part of IT, a high level of IT is required in-house. They need to have closer links to the business, but retain depth of knowledge.

'You need to understand what sort of people the leader is leading and the point of the business. An IT leader may typically be managing technical people. The skills required to manage them are quite different from some other roles. How do you motivate a technical mindset? Project managers and business managers have different mindsets. You may be able to deal with a project manager more directly, as they are used to working to deadlines.

'A leader needs to recognise, for instance, that some developers will struggle with time management as they lose themselves in problem solving and forget about deadlines while the help desk agent may lose their temper or get frustrated with overbearing clients. The style and skill required to lead this group will need to be flexible. One way will not suit all.'

Walker, however, thinks such arguments can come undone , particularly if you are working with a cross section of other roles: 'You can say technical people are motivated in a different way, but so are sales (by money) and operations (perhaps by fantastic processes). It's still good to learn with others to work as a complete team, rather than have IT in a bunker. I'm a firm believer that IT must be integrated with the business.'

One thing that is hard to dispute is that for a manager taking on a team in a subject area he doesn't know, it would be useful to get a manager's overview of that area. 'Then you can't get hoodwinked and can talk the language,' said Chappell.

So in deciding what sort of course to pick, looking at what the role is, the seniority, who will be managed, and the manager's own background is essential. Luckily, there are courses to suit all variations available, whether you require one for IT professionals or the wider management team, with titles of courses varying from 'managing virtual teams' to 'stepping up to management'.

Check course content

Shah advises that when buying a course, the purchaser should also check course content closely. She gives the example of a time management course, which could be very general with common sense suggestions, or may go deeper, teaching you how different personalities manage time differently, and how to influence people to get things done on time.

Shah is also very much an advocate of customised courses mixed with longer term mentoring: 'My belief is that you don't change people's personalities but you can change a behaviour. A two-day course is going to give you hints and tips, but as a leader you need to understand your own value and your own motivation. There are operational skills needed, plus understanding your own behaviour and motivation. That evolves over a period of time.

'Training alone isn't enough; follow-up through coaching and personal development is crucial to successful leadership.'

Book reviews

Our IT experts review a selection of recently published books covering an array of subject areas. For more reviews, see www.bcs.org/bookreviews



IT-Enabled Business Change Successful Management

Sharm Manwani, 150pp

BCS, £24.95

ISBN: 978-1-902505-91-6

Rating ★★★★★

Dr Sharm Manwani lectures and directs programmes in IT-enabled business change at Henley Business School. He has previously been the European CIO of two leading multi-national companies where he directed large international IT-enabled change programmes.

His premise is that most IT projects should be viewed as IT-enabled business change projects. This changes the way they are approached and increases their benefits. With this book, he aims to help those involved in such projects to understand the issues and become more successful.

The book is aimed at all those involved in, or affected by, IT-enabled business change projects. It is intended as an introductory text, with no specific prior knowledge assumed. The book follows the life cycle of change, starting with an overview that considers the major tasks and roles involved in the complete cycle.

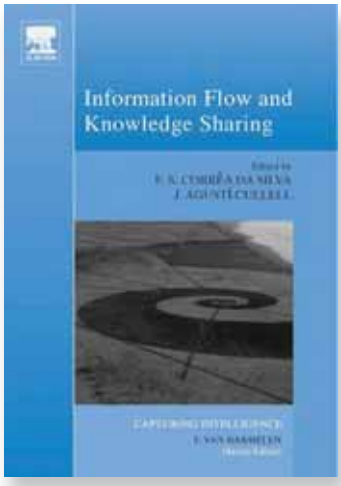
The book considers how business and IT alignment can be addressed through the use of simple, tried and tested models. This approach is followed in the chapters on improvement definition, design implementation and benefits management.

The chapter on business change design introduces the basics of organisational structure and culture change, process design and structuring information for strategic, tactical and operational levels. This focus follows through into the chapter on implementation.

The final chapter summarises the techniques introduced in earlier chapters and reviews the skills needed in relation to the competency model, Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA).

This book succeeds as an introductory text, most particularly in its description of the entire scope of an IT-enabled change project in a manner that seamlessly integrates organisational and technical discussions. Those not having a basic understanding of some of the techniques (e.g. value chain analysis) or models (e.g. ITIL) may find it helpful to access other sources as they come across the terms. The notes and references at the end will help in locating such sources.

Reviewed by Sheila Bullas MBCS



Information Flow and Knowledge Sharing

Flavio Soares Correa da Silva, Jaume Agusti-Cullell, 279pp

Elsevier, £76

ISBN: 978-0-444-52935-0

Rating ★★★★☆

Do we construct the reality in which we live? Not perhaps a question which you would expect to be asked in a book forming part of a series on issues in artificial intelligence. But, as the authors themselves admit right at the end, they had intended to write a book on the design and implementation of knowledge-based systems.

Instead, their dissatisfaction with the treatment of the concepts they needed to deal with, coupled with their own revealed ignorance, resulted in a book essentially dealing with the metaphysics of IT. Now, if that 'm' word makes you recoil in horror, that's all the more reason to read on, because this book deals with issues of real concern to anyone working in IT.

Perhaps the first thing to note is that the authors are writing around the core concepts contained in the title, rather than about them. That makes this a rather unconventional kind of text book, since you won't find many hard-and-fast definitions. Instead, the book challenges the reader to think afresh about her/his own glib assumptions.

The structure of the book is novel as the chapters are interspersed with 'intermissions', which together form a short story, each episode of which reinforces in narrative terms, the main points of the preceding chapter. For me, the intermissions rather got in the way of the developing picture.

This book is not the best treatment I have seen of the issues it deals with, but it is, after all, targeted at a readership which would not normally concern itself with such things. To its credit, it does deal with them in non-technical language.

I liked this book because the authors are very personable and offer a fresh view of many of the issues we prefer to gloss over when talking of information flow and knowledge sharing. I liked it because there is no patina of scholarship to scrape off before getting at the authors' essential message. Most of all, I liked it because of the authors' sheer courage in writing a book on a difficult technical subject in so humanistic a way.

Reviewed by
Bob Bater MBCS



ICT Futures: Delivering Pervasive, Real-time and Secure Services

Paul Warren (editor), John Davies (co-editor), David Brown (co-editor)

Wiley, 268pp, £58

ISBN: 978-0-470-99770-3

Rating ★★★★☆

This book claims to present what we may expect from ICT in the coming decade, in terms of the technology and its impact on our private and professional lives.

In the main it achieves this by discussing how existing technology will evolve or adapt over the next few years, rather than present any new or radical technology. So do not expect a book on futurology, but I think this is deliberate; a key message in this book is that technology, and the use of technology, is something that tends to be very difficult to predict. Users will often unintentionally be innovators.

As you read the book you should be able to understand the technology discussed because, in its basic form at least, it exists now. However, you get the wow factor when you read how the technology may be used in the near future.

The book is divided into four parts. The first looks at the relationship between people and the technology. The second focuses on the infrastructure. The third examines application of technology, in particular in three sectors - healthcare, retail supply chain and financial markets.

The final and shortest section of the book looks at the longer term view of all of the above.

Each chapter is written by different authors, yet there is consistency throughout the book, in terms of presentation and depth of content.

This book is written for anyone working in IT just wishing to understand how the technology, and its application, may change over the next few years. I believe it achieves this and would certainly recommend it.

Reviewed by
Mehmet Hurer CEng MBCS CITP



Making Things Happen; Mastering Project Management

Scott Berkun, 408pp

O'Reilly, £24.99

ISBN: 978-0-596-51771-7

Rating ★★★★★

This book is a revised edition of the author's bestselling book *The Art of Project Management*. The book is intended not just for software project managers, but also for team leaders, developers and students. It describes a practical, people-centred approach to managing all aspects of software development.

The chapters are grouped under three headings: plans, skills and management. A few example chapter headings give a flavour of his style and coverage: The truth about schedules; How to make good decisions; How not to annoy people; What to do when things go wrong; Why leadership is based on trust; End-game strategy; Power and politics.

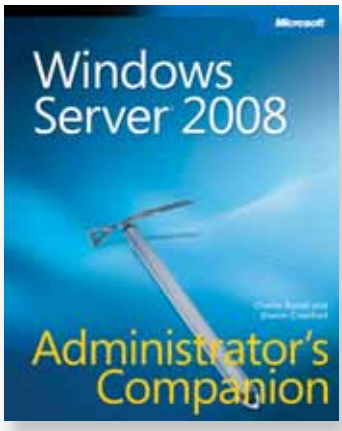
The author was formerly a project manager at Microsoft. This helps to explain his perspective: large-scale, in-house software development. This leads me to my main criticism: there are several topics in contemporary software development that are just not covered. No mention of sub-contractor management, outsourcing or offshoring. No discussion of formal processes such as Prince2, ITIL or similar.

The book is well written and produced. The advice he gives is intelligent and insightful. The emphasis is on practical, situational techniques to solve common problems.

The book reads well and lends itself to skim-reading or specific problem-solving. It works well as a mid-level text. If you need detail, say on estimating, you will need to look elsewhere.

Overall it's a good book giving useful and practical advice. What is described is done well, but beware of its gaps. For its size, it is good value for money. Recommended.

Reviewed by Simon Clarke
CEng FBCS CITP



Windows Server® 2008 Administrator's Companion

Charlie Russel and Sharon Crawford, Microsoft Press, 1,319pp, £37.99

ISBN: 978-0-735-62505-1

Rating ★★★★★

This is a fully comprehensive reference to the deployment, administration and support of Windows Server 2008.

Every chapter is well covered by a step-by-step approach. The authors have addressed the need to plan and how to upgrade from an existing version of Windows Server OS to Windows Server 2008.

One of the strong points of the book is the accompanying screen shots. The authors have explained new features such as server manager, Power shell, and virtualisation in relative detail. The companion CD is an additional valuable resource.

The book is extremely well written and presented, easy to read and understand. It serves as an excellent tutorial and technical resource.

Reviewed by Uma Kanagaratnam MBCS, systems analyst

For further information on these books please contact the sales team at C.B.Learning.
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Centres sign up for Trainer Performance Monitoring and Assessment Service

The first organisations to be approved IITT Authorised Qualification & Assessment Centres have been announced by the Institute of IT Training (IITT).

The IITT's new initiative to upgrade and monitor the performance quality of trainers of all disciplines – Trainer Performance Monitoring & Assessment (TPMA) – was launched at the Institute's national conference last month.

Training Synergy, Happy Computers, Train & Certify, Verridian and Matrix FortyTwo were the first companies to gain approval to become IITT approved centres.

There are now over 20 organisations which are in the process of being verified and authorised, including IBM, global IT vendors, internal training departments, external training providers and freelance trainer agencies.

'We are overwhelmed with the extremely positive response from all sides of the industry,' explained Ed Monk, managing director of the IITT. 'It proves that this is exactly what the whole professional training industry has been waiting for – one national standard, one nationally-recognised certificate on the Qualifications Credit Framework, and the ability for organisations to assess and monitor the quality of their trainers.'

Leading educationalist with huge IT training industry experience Dr Brian Sutton has shown his total support for the IITT's TPMA service.

'To be a great trainer you need to have a sound grasp of your subject matter and an even better grasp of how people learn,' he said. 'You also need the ability to build an effective rapport with learners so that you enhance rather than hinder their process of learning. The only way to judge a trainer's effectiveness is to watch them in action, to see how a relationship develops and to witness the creation of trust between trainer and learner.


Dr Brian Sutton


Peter Bayley

'I applaud the IITT for this bold move to shift emphasis from the acquisition of theoretical training techniques to the practical application of those techniques where it matters, at the sharp end with real learners grappling with real performance issues.

'This new qualification applies a light touch approach to recognise and align trainer competencies against national standards. This in itself is a huge step forward for the industry. But what really excites me is the fresh new focus on excellence in delivery.

'Every interaction with a learner is a moment of truth – an opportunity to open new learning possibilities or slam doors on dawning comprehension. Just like our learners, we trainers are also on a learning journey towards being better trainers, a key component in that journey is open, honest and transparent feedback based upon real meaningful assessment of live performance. This new qualification provides an affirmation of our skills, an opportunity to learn and develop personal excellence and sets a new benchmark of performance that must result in a better experience for our learners.

'This is the right service at the right time, I urge you to take a close look at how this can work for you.'

Pete Bayley, qualifications director at BCS, is fully backing the new TPMA service and is delighted that the IITT has brought together the standards from the various bodies to provide one national standard.

'The BCS is delighted to support this initiative from the IITT, which provides a very strong benchmark of quality for trainers of any discipline,' said Bayley. 'It demonstrates that the BCS fully supports training professionals as part of the IT profession. The IITT has worked with BCS and LLUK to create a single set of standards. The joint standards provide a single standard and assessment for all elements of the IT industry, leading to a joint IITT/BCS certificate and an optional

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National IT training standards

level 3 LLUK/OCR "Preparing To Teach in The Lifelong Learning Sector" national certification.

'The new TPMA service at last provides a clear industry wide set of trainer quality assessment and monitoring standards suitable for all training professionals, whether they are trainers, tutors or teachers.'

'The IITT has long recognised the need for training managers to become empowered to assess, monitor and benchmark the performance of their own trainers, the outcome of which is the provision of a National Qualification (or Award), which is recognised on the Qualifications Credit Framework (National Qualifications Framework),' said Colin Steed, chief executive of the IITT.

'This monitoring and assessment service, which is authorised, governed and monitored by both the IITT and Oxford Cambridge & RSA Examinations (OCR), is a record of the training professional's quality of performance in a live environment aligned to National Standards – a real quality benchmark of your trainers.

'The service is designed to be cost effective. You may already have an in-house train the trainer course that you would like us to map against our national standards. By ensuring your trainers are adequately assessed and monitored within your own organisation, the IITT can authorise this and subsequently provide national certification for your own trainers.'

This new trainer certificate is a joint award from the IITT and BCS. The Level 3 Award – Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) – is a national qualification and is recognised for IITT membership at the Professional grade of Senior Associate.

The IITT has for the past 13 years been successfully working with its members in raising the standards of training. In the past, it ensured that members were certified to at least level 3 equivalent standards but has been working closely with national Sector Skills Councils and awarding bodies, including LLUK, OCR and the BCS, to update the quality requirements for training provision to modern standards.

Following an extensive programme of research and development, the IITT has combined government, LLUK, BCS and IITT standards to create a best of breed, de facto, national standard for trainers, tutors and teachers. The IITT believes this will significantly upgrade the standards of performance of training delivery for the entire training industry.

This provision allows for a clear industry-wide set of standards suitable for all trainers, whether they are trainers, tutors or teachers.

Colin Steed, the IITT's chief executive, explained that today's training manager, irrespective of the type of organisation, must ensure that:

- the quality of all training is performed and monitored to the highest quality standards, which are aligned to national standards on the Qualifications Credit Framework;
- that the learners actually acquire a sound learning experience and that the learning acquired is able to be applied to the learner's workplace;
- all training delivery is consistent and monitored for quality across the organisation.'To facilitate this, it is imperative that each trainer is assessed in a live environment on a regular basis and that each assessment conforms to National Standards, is maintained and governed externally and independently, and is then linked to each candidate's continual professional development. This also can, and should, be linked to the individual's appraisal process.

'The IITT strongly believes that the true way to judge the ongoing quality of performance and that a regular, live, independently governed assessment is the only way to ensure that every training professional:

- facilitates/delivers learning to the national standards benchmark;
- receives objective guidance on potential improvement and developmental activity, which should link to appraisals;
- provides the employer with an objective benchmark to monitor the performance and quality of all trainers and the learning for all employees;
- achieves a nationally recognised level 3 award on the Qualifications Credit Framework;
- achieves Professional membership of the IITT, with post nominals.'

www.iitt.org.uk

IITT North West region events

24 November 2008
Acrobat 9: Going Beyond Reader (Local)
16 December 2008
Flash: Streaming Media Magic (Online)
12 January 2009
Spry: Ajax in Dreamweaver CS4 (Online)
20 January 2009
RAW Alchemy (Online)

Further details:
http://nwiitt.org.uk/apps/pressoffice/



Clive Shepherd

Make or break times for L&D

With the economic downturn in full swing (assuming, that is, that downturns can swing) and training budgets as ever looking vulnerable as the first candidate for cuts, I'm beginning to hear once more that well-honed argument that training should be regarded as an investment and not an expense. As if that was all there was to it. 'Oh, please accept our apologies for this misunderstanding,' say the senior management team in unison. 'How much money is it that you want?' Some chance.

Let's leave aside for a minute the accounting argument about what actually constitutes an investment, and just use the term in its everyday sense. Surely most forms of expenditure incurred by an organisation could also be viewed in this way: accounting as an investment in future financial security; customer service as an investment in customer loyalty; marketing as an investment in future sales growth; research and development as an investment in new products; and so on. This means that learning and development is not really that much further along the path in securing funding than all these other departments.

Technically, it's hard to see how training could be seen as an investment in the accounting sense, because employees (other than professional footballers) are not assets that can be sold – in fact they can leave anytime they want, and frequently do. At best, they can be regarded as one of an organisation's intangible assets, contributing to the 'goodwill' of a business. But no-one has ever dared put employees on the balance sheet, and they probably never will.

But let's just go with the idea that training can be seen by senior management as an investment. Is that enough to open the purse strings? I think managers might have a few questions: What sort of return can we expect on this investment? How long will it take for this return to occur? How confident can we be about this return? Would other measures (hiring and firing, mergers and acquisitions, new incentives and disincentives, better working conditions, improved tools and equipment) yield better returns in terms of performance improvement? Would we get a better return if we just left the money in the bank (assuming we can find one that's safe enough)?

Very few organisations have so much money that they can respond positively to every request for funds, so the process of budgeting is inevitably competitive. Unfortunately, being competitive is not something learning and development departments have historically been very good at. They need to learn – and quickly.

Now is definitely the time to dust off that training evaluation manual and put it to work

Of course, in any downturn, some training is quite clearly critical to an organisation and will be maintained without question. However, there's also likely to be a substantial portion that does not provide obvious benefits and has never been properly validated – now is definitely the time to dust off that training evaluation manual and put it to work. Trainers might also like to consider how much of what they deliver can really be justified, given huge recent advances in neuroscience and learning psychology – is there really a place for the pseudo-scientific claptrap (I would mention NLP here but don't want the death threats) that permeates so much soft skills training? And lastly, how much training that we deliver is based on outdated and distinctly environmentally unfriendly media choices.

Which brings us to e-learning. Trainers had better ensure they're fully engaged with technology, because like it or not, e-learning will be in demand. After all, e-learning is better placed than most industries to meet a downturn, particularly one that is being fuelled (excuse the pun)



by high energy costs. Let's look at the arguments: self-study e-learning is twice as quick as its classroom equivalent, and that's a money saver; e-learning in all its forms saves bucket loads of cash when it comes to travel and subsistence costs; e-learning is more flexible and accessible (which, if you're cynical about these things, might just mean employees doing it in their own time); and as a bonus, e-learning is the green alternative, providing employers with a positive spin that they can put on any decision to axe classroom events.

When times are tough, no trainer can survive on the basis of their past successes alone. Businesses will reward those departments that take a proactive stance to dealing with current problems; that show that they are in tune with business priorities. These are make or break times for learning and development; what emerges following this recession will be leaner, more innovative and more responsive than ever before. Make sure you're not confined to history along with the dinosaurs.

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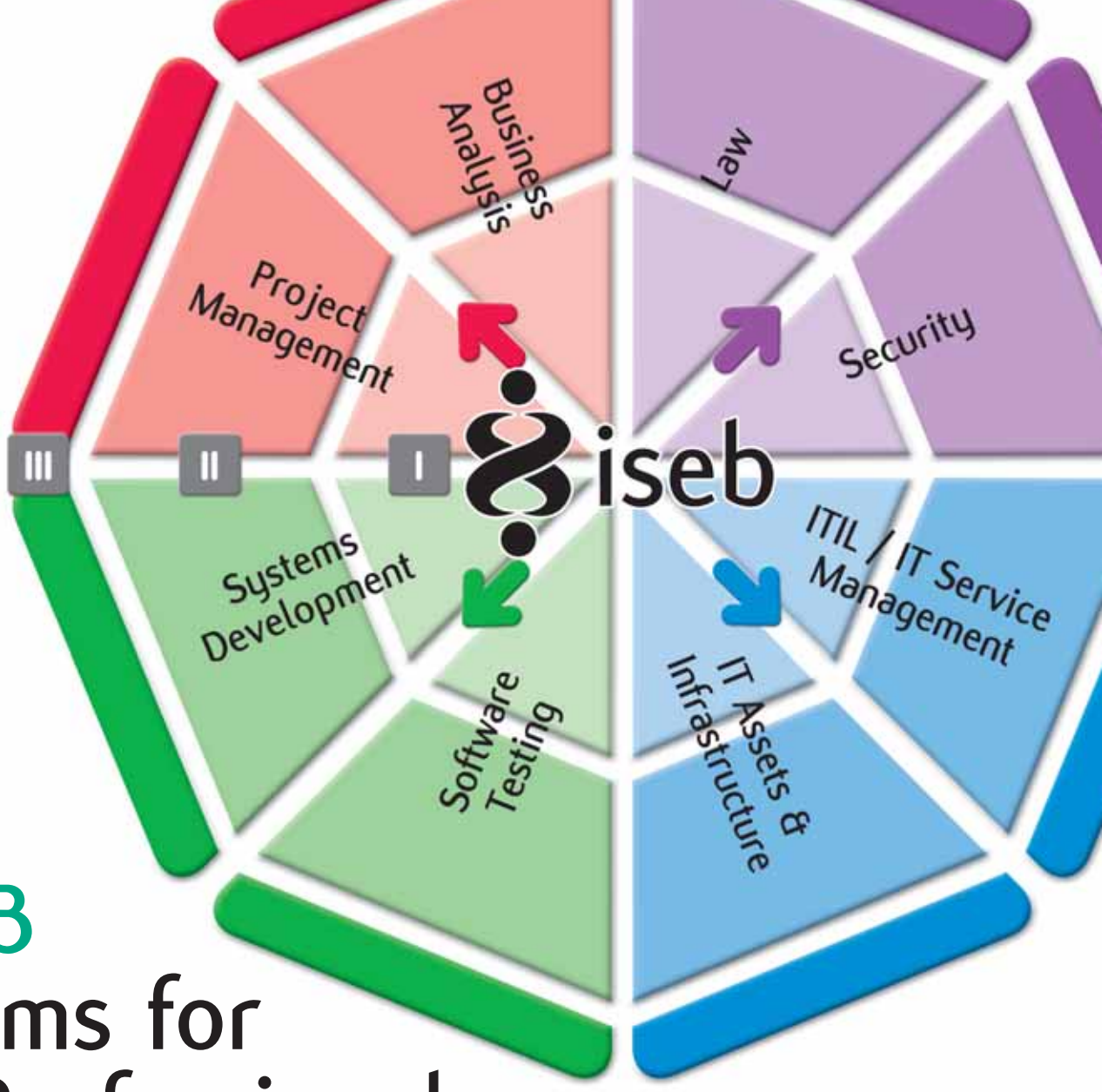
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