

# Training & Development

in Australia

## Leadership business

Linking mission, values, strategy and skills



**It's what's inside that counts:** Leadership at Sanitarium

**Conscious culture in a crisis:** Priscilla Nelson

**The National Learning & Development Index** – what did we learn?



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF  
TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT



# Best practice: Project management meets e-learning

By Eddie Kilkelly

Employees learning new skills are no longer satisfied with traditional classroom methods, but they expect e-learning to mean much more than reading pages of text on a computer monitor. In our project management courses, we are using a variety of approaches for learning, and the mix keeps evolving as technology develops.

Project management is a core skill in business today, and many employers look for evidence of this skill when recruiting. Each week, the PRINCE2 certification exam is taken by nearly 3,000 people globally. (PRINCE2 is the de facto standard for project management; it is used extensively by the UK Government and is widely recognised and used in the private sector, both in the UK and internationally.)

We have been providing courses in business skills, particularly project management, for over 20 years, and e-learning has been part of our offering for over a decade. We also offer classroom training and practice workshops.

Our experience with learners has been that people doing the course individually and paying themselves have tended to opt for the online mode. It is more convenient and flexible in terms of time, and less costly. But organisations offering the course to groups of their employees have tended to opt for the classroom environment. This trend is very definitely starting to change

## Using a blend of methods for project management training

Our interest in recent years has been to explore how we can use each of these methods more effectively, and create more powerful and efficient blends of the methods. What we do has to be appropriate to the kinds of learning that are involved. There are three aspects of project management skills:

- the PRINCE2 process: learners need to know the steps in the process, as well as roles and the allocation of responsibilities
- practical skills and techniques: learners undertake exercises in planning projects
- people skills: learners need to understand skills such as how to motivate others, how to delegate tasks and how to present to others.

We aim to train people not only to pass the exam and become certified, but also to develop their practical skills so they are

confident to implement projects. We know that e-learning is effective for imparting foundation knowledge in a subject. We are now making wider use of this method and including it in courses that were formerly entirely classroom-based.

What this means is that class times can be shorter. Five days of class time can be reduced to two, because people already have basic knowledge when they arrive. More importantly, everyone is up to the same level, so everyone's time in class is used more effectively.

Another key feature of online learning which learners are now seeing the importance of, is the ability to replay material. In the classroom, learners may see something just once, and if they miss it, it's gone. With the online material, they can play it again and again, and at their own pace. We are finding that students now have better retention of knowledge.

The main criticism of e-learning is where it is just pages of text on a screen. We have

developed many ways of making the online experience more engaging and interactive. For example, we have created a game format based on Snakes & Ladders. It contains a bank of questions that are randomly selected as a player progresses through the game. The questions must be answered correctly to go up a ladder or avoid sliding down a snake.

The game has single-user and multi-player options, and scores can be posted to Twitter and Facebook. The format allows students to revise for the PRINCE2 Foundation exam in a fun way. Our feedback is that students find the game enjoyable, and retention of knowledge is higher.

### Advantages of online learning

We have also introduced practice sessions and case studies in the online environment, and students can get immediate feedback on their work. This is proving to have some advantages over the classroom. There is a tendency in the classroom for facilitators to give favourable feedback to students, in order to keep encouraging them. This is understandable. However, the downside is that students may leave the classroom unsure about what is right and what is wrong.

The feedback students get from the computer is more objective, and students don't feel the computer is out to discourage them. Students tend to accept it and then find the right answers.

Are there still some aspects of learning for which the classroom is necessary? Social learning is said to be an integral aspect of learning. People do have social interaction in the classroom environment, but there are ways of achieving social interaction online, where people desire it.

We are setting up forums for online learners, so people can share and discuss issues. We use LinkedIn as a way of connecting people with each other, and Facebook. This is an unfolding story, as learners get used to what is possible in these environments, and we keep a close eye on what is happening so we can respond appropriately.

There is a generational aspect to the mix of face-to-face versus online environments. Younger people are generally more disposed to use the online environment than older people.



The classroom is changing too

As we find more and more ways of using the online environment, the question arises, is there still a place for the classroom? We are finding that the classroom itself is evolving. For example, we use computer simulations and animations in the classroom, and people work on computer-based exercises together in the classroom.

We see the classroom continuing to exist, at least for the next five or ten years, but it will change. It seems obvious that the days of producing student notes in large folders are going to be superseded by digital notes kept on students' laptops, iPhones and iPads. We will use more computer-based applications in class, and develop Apps for mobile devices. We have just developed a Snakes & Ladders App for the iPhone and iPod Touch, to help students reinforce core elements of PRINCE2 Foundation and prepare candidates ahead of exams.

The continuing advances in technology will mean that students themselves drive changes in learning methods.

To keep us at the leading edge of technology-based learning we have a dedicated innovations team. It generates new ideas for using technology, ways we can



keep improving what we offer. The direction is towards a greater variety of methods for learning, used in many combinations, and ways of making the learning more engaging and interactive. We want to make amazing changes, not just incremental ones. ■

**Eddie Kilkelly** is Chief Operating Officer at ILX Group. The company specialises in project management training, including PRINCE2, ITIL, MSP and APM, to individuals and companies worldwide. Website: [www.ilxgroup.com](http://www.ilxgroup.com)