

22 October 2007

Learning Maturity Models

Even technology aficionados will agree that automation may not be the key to learning success. The human element is still essential to any learning initiative. While this may continue to be the case, technology, to a large extent, has redefined the way people learn. With technological support, organizations could maximize employee productivity to gain the competitive edge.

Where learning is an organizational priority, technology provides the path to success. But as organizations face the constant challenge of updating learning technologies in order to maintain their competitive edge, they may need to decide which technologies they will rally around and implement to strategically impact the way learning drives business value. Coming up with the best answer to this question requires organizations to assess the maturity levels of their learning culture and systems.

Daffy definitions!

A typical maturity model begins at the chaotic state, more commonly known as the ad-hoc stage. The objectives of this stage are to validate and control learning initiatives. The next stage is that of managed learning, where organizations learn to appreciate budget constraints and manage their learning costs. Stage three is competency driven and aims at achieving desired competency levels. Stage four is that of integrated performance where organizations concentrate on improving their competitiveness. This stage ushers in stage five, that of an optimized workforce.

Moving along

Learning activities in stage one are tactical in nature, and as the model evolves, they become strategic. This is when the organization is ready to move into the fifth stage of “nirvana”. Additionally, the use of learning technology advances from a “partially engaged” state to a “fully engaged” one. By keeping this maturity model as a framework of reference, organizations can:

- Develop strategies to reach the learning objectives of a particular stage
- Measure and track the progress of their learning initiatives

Designed for a group of software development organizations, Carnegie Mellon’s widely recognized maturity model, the Capability Maturity Model, helps organizations maximize returns on investments, efficiency and quality by improving communication and evaluation strategies and streamlining their work processes. The CMM can serve as an example to help organizations envision the benefits of using a framework, in the shape of a maturity model, for their learning initiatives. However, following a sequential process is a prerequisite to applying such a framework.

Sequence?



TenStep Supplemental Paper

As organizations evolve along the maturity framework, the involvement of technology will increase proportionately. Building a technology infrastructure needs a systematic approach, similar to that of constructing a house. For instance, a builder would not think of constructing a second floor without first laying the foundation! Similarly, organizations will have to begin with collecting tools and technologies that assimilate and store learning program information before developing learning infrastructure.

The LMS

An ideal way to develop a learning infrastructure is to implement a Learning Management System (LMS). Just as the CMM, by way of source and systems management, helped the software development organizations to formalize and standardize their progress along the maturity model, organizations too can employ the LMS to do the job.

The beauty of an LMS lies in its flexibility. The range varies from the functionally rich “pure-play” LMS to those designed to provide niche solutions, such as the Continuing Medical Education (CME) model that is designed specifically to maintain health care records. Additionally, the LMS can incorporate both learning technologies and processes.

This feature comes into play when organizations need to implement the associated learning technology as they evolve along the maturity model - for instance, competency management technologies for stage two (the competency driven stage), collaboration, performance and talent management technologies for stage three (the integrated performance stage) and knowledge management technologies for stage five (that of an optimized workforce).

With the LMS as its core technology, organizations can, from a central source, identify stage-by-stage training requirements, develop processes for delivering training and measure the impact of their training programs. Additionally, all LMS's can be updated by integrating advanced learning technologies such as knowledge management systems (KMS).

The KMS

When KMS's were first developed, organizations were quick to implement them. However, with time, a poor success rate relegated this technology to disconnected knowledge warehouses. However, with the LMS as the core technology, knowledge management systems can be of better strategic value. The LMS manages the entire learning process by identifying and plugging performance gaps. By integrating a KMS, an organization has better access and can better manage unstructured information and processes. By itself, a KMS is nothing more than a repository of knowledge-related tools, technologies and processes. A KMS boosts an LMS' ability to deliver training in anticipation of training requirements. As one trainer says, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts!”

Wisdom with age



TenStep Supplemental Paper

This understanding and appreciation of the role an LMS and other advanced technologies play in the success of learning initiatives comes with maturity. With this understanding, organizations can engage the right technologies and gradually increase their dependence on them to create a continuous learning culture.

Another factor that needs looking into is building close relationships with the IT department. IT support levels will have to increase as the organization progresses along the maturity model. Additionally, as learning forms an integral part of enterprise-wide processes and systems, implementing learning technologies has to be a collaborative effort. Close IT relationships aside, it makes sense to get the green light from upper management.

As organizations continue to map their learning initiatives along the lines of different models, in this case the maturity model, it is the infusion of technology that brings these models to life. With a framework in place, organizations can identify the right technologies to enhance their learning initiatives.