

Promoting the value of **online learning** in the public sector



CetasKinetic
Bringing positive change

**PASSION,
ENERGY AND
INTELLIGENT
THINKING.**

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BUSINESS.**

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INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that there is a high level of unemployment in the United Kingdom, which was triggered by the global financial crisis in 2007 and 2008. The crisis has taken its toll on the job prospects, skills and training of the working age population in the country. The unemployment rate stands at 8.1% – the highest since 1996, in contrast the rate of unemployment among 16-24 year olds currently stands at 23% in Britain. Recent reports suggest that the widespread long-term unemployment rate in the UK could result in huge economic and social costs.

The current state of unemployment in the UK and the effects on society means, it will be the public sector frontline staff that will face the brunt of societal pressures. However, the public sector is also going through a flux of change, as it moves away from a top-down, target-driven approach to one that is more local, more outcomes focused and easier on public money.

The move over the last several years in the public sector to achieve improved and sustainable outcomes for the public has meant that understanding the workforce has become more important than ever. Change in behaviours, commissioned services, collaborative outcomes, and the 'big society', depends on the success of the workforce. However, in an era of austerity, the first, sometimes easiest budgets to slash are those that struggle to prove their worth. Rapidly demonstrable results become the way to ensure that valuable work continues. So it follows that training budgets are often the first hit with financial cuts.

With the current financial difficulties facing the public sector, it is vital that public sector organisations ensure they are cutting the right budgets, yet continuing to invest in what matters, the workforce. Outcomes like resilient and integrated communities are down to the quality of service provided by the servants of this country. These interactions depend in large part on the skills individuals choose to deploy.

The most valuable skill in a public sector of shrinking budgets, localisation and outcome focus, is a need to approach issues in an engaging, interactive and inspiring way, to change behaviours to accept a smaller, more cost effective and better UK public service.

Public sector organisations must learn to engage their staff, encouraging openness and transparency, to trust in the decentralisation of government agencies but to also create time and space to reflect and motivate the workforce to understand their role in the national change agenda.

THE CURRENT STATE OF TRAINING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

In the recent annual CIPD Learning and Talent Development survey, it was highlighted that in 2011, UK organisations became accustomed to reports constantly revising economic growth downwards and forecasting a bleak outlook for 2012. The CIPD highlighted that only a minority (10%) report that their economic/ funding circumstances have improved over the past 12 months, three-quarters of public sector organisations report their situation has got worse, twice as many as in the private sector, reflecting the impact of government austerity.

The CIPD report continues to paint a bleak picture of training budgets. Of the 601 organisations polled, 78% of public sector managers said they had less money to spend on training budgets in 2011 than the previous year – and the same percentage believed this budget would fall further in 2012. Just 1% of public leaders reported an increase in their training budget, compared with 16% for the private sector and 15% for not-for-profit organisations.

Overall, 75% reported that their economic circumstances had declined in the past 12 months. This has had a corresponding impact on the resources available for learning and development (L&D) with a third reporting resources had declined over the past year. The public sector was particularly likely to report that L&D funding and headcount had reduced.

Over a third of training departments report they had become more business-focused over the past 12 months, continuing a trend observed last year. Over a third of public sector organisations had undergone a reduction in external suppliers and moved to in-house provision, redundancies of staff, rationalisation and 'reduction' of departments including redeployment, while 22% had closed or rationalised their training facilities.

Most organisations have a training budget. Training budgets usually cover external courses and conferences (95%), hiring external consultants and trainers (81%) and books, training manuals, and so on (80%). They cover training technology in more than half of organisations (56%).

The median annual training budget per employee was £276, less than last year (£350), with a particularly dramatic reduction in the public sector. The median number of training hours employees receive per year was 24, again a reduction on last year.

In very similar findings to last year, just one in ten organisations anticipates that the funding of L&D will increase in the next 12 months. Nearly two-fifths anticipate reductions. Unsurprisingly, public sector organisations were most pessimistic regarding their future L&D funding.

WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR WORKFORCE?

Local government sources are reporting a wholesale reduction in workforce development, as HR departments are faced with the stark choice of cutting training budgets or cutting staff. Statutory training is of course continuing, as is council member training and refresher courses on new systems and practices, but the overall picture is of discretionary training, such as continuing professional development, taking a hit.

WHY IS CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR THE WORKFORCE SO IMPORTANT?

For the first time in modern history, we have four generations of workers in the workplace. The conflicts of these generational dynamics immediately change how we deliver learning or training to these different groups.

The four generations of workers:

- ▶ Silent Generation - (born 1925 - 1945)
- ▶ Baby Boomers - (born 1946 - 1964)
- ▶ Gen X - (born 1965 - 1976)
- ▶ Millennials - (born 1977 - 2000)

THE VALUE OF ONLINE LEARNING

Four generations in the mix at the same time generates some interesting dynamics for us in L&D, meaning we have to identify and deal with varied technologies, modalities and delivery methods that address the preferences of these different generations.

Technology has massively changed the way in which we live, work and play. Here are some stats to highlight the point:

- ▶ 1.9 billion people are using email daily and 294 billion emails are sent per day
- ▶ 286 million people send a combined total of 5.1 billion texts per day
- ▶ 140 million people on twitter are sending 340 million tweets per day
- ▶ 150 million users of LinkedIn, 1.6 million of these folks visit LinkedIn on a daily basis

So what does this all mean, it is just stats after all. What we can digest from all this is that the way we work has changed; we are now moving from being an individual, to being a part of a network; we are moving from the physical world to the digital world. Therefore it is also time to match the way we learn to the way we work.

Public sector agencies that succeed will be the ones that make the most effective use of available resources, and the best way to do this is to have well-educated employees, stakeholders, partners, suppliers, and customers. The public sector must train the workforce continually – including the rapidly growing numbers of remote workers – to ensure that they have the most current knowledge, skills and information.

Why is continuing education so important?

1. Retiring baby boomers are taking their skills and education with them out the door. Transferring institutional knowledge between generations is a critical requirement.
2. Relevant knowledge is changing at a much faster rate. Key specialists need to be retrained as often as every 1-2 year.
3. Public sector agencies need people who are cross-trained in more than one job and are able to perform a much wider variety of tasks.

In todays training, there are many choices being utilised to train and motivate workforces, such as gamification, self-paced reading, micro-learning, mobile learning, web based training, social learning, live virtual training, simulation and experiential, to name but a few.

Before considering the style of training, we need to ask ourselves the following questions, why do we learn? How do we learn? Where do we go to learn? The answers unfortunately are vague; it depends, one size does not fit all!

The role of L&D in the public sector has often been driven by the rapidly changing needs of the public and government guidance, both seeing L&D jumping to fill the training gap. L&D need to see themselves as architects rather than reactors; the first step of the architect is to consider the needs of the workforce.

L&D can match the way their workforce learns to the way they work by shifting the learning programme from the physical classroom to a blended mix. Change the delivery of training from a scheduled event to a continuous process; move the location from the physical world to the digital world; shift the focus of training from the satisfaction of the learner to the application of learning and business impact; the learner community can no longer be exclusive, it needs to be inclusive; the style of training needs to be learner centric and integrated.

WHY DO WE LEARN?

We all have our own motivations, sometimes we learn because we have to, sometimes we learn because we want to. Either way, any L&D program needs to understand the motivations of their workforce and ensure that learning is transformational, not just informational.

HOW TO LEARN?

This is where we can start to have fun, motivate and ensure that the return on investment (ROI) of training is measurable. The blended mix of learning should include:

- ▶ Instruction
- ▶ Discussions (facilitated/non-facilitated)
- ▶ Q&A
- ▶ Case study
- ▶ Observation
- ▶ Coaching
- ▶ Self-study
- ▶ Collaboration
- ▶ Application
- ▶ Experiential
- ▶ Gamification
- ▶ Assessment

WHY E-LEARNING IS NOT THE SOLUTION

In the last recession, e-learning was lauded as the solution that would provide the blueprint for future learning. It's easy to see why the public sector was seduced by the concept of e-learning. Not only did it fit well with the drive towards e-government, it promised that people could learn at their own time and pace, on a one-to-one basis, as and when needed.

Combine this with a cost advantage of utilising re-usable resources - and less time spent away from the workplace - and you can see its appeal. The reality of course was very different. Many e-learning courses were static, poorly designed and dull - a poor man's version of an instructor-led experience. There were problems with internet access and also with workplace culture.

Not everyone wanted to learn in isolation by following a structured pathway. People missed the social aspect of learning. So what's changed?

For one thing, technology can now provide those social contacts and contexts that can make learning more effective.

Online learning can make learning less of a lonely experience - and with the rise of Twitter and social media networks, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, people are more used to collaborating online. The advent of 'streaming video', popularised by the likes of YouTube has evolved the integration of video in learning.

Online learning is now a combination of self-study, online resources, community/group projects, and interaction with an instructor, assessment and finally, transfer. L&D teams need to get the 'magic in the mix' by identifying which different components will make the optimal blend. Instead of providing learning at specific times, their role is to help individuals make the best of the learning that's available and to access it on-demand.

They also need to create an environment in which people can work and learn almost seamlessly. Instead of managing the content, they should aim to manage the climate for learning. Online learning has become a vastly different proposition. Will the public sector give it a second chance?

DOES ONLINE LEARNING GO FAR ENOUGH?

It is clear that the time has come to merge all the good elements of training practice but deliver it in a way that is accessible to everyone. Public sector training programmes need to provide an optimal mix to its workforce.

One solution that addresses this is blended online synchronous learning. Blended online synchronous learning is delivered remotely through a computer (or tablet/smartphone). Delegates access an online training space dedicated to their course and follow a live instructor led training session. Each session is interactive, allowing delegates to engage with not only the instructor but also the other delegates through whiteboards, breakout spaces and chat facilities. As blended online synchronous learning is accessible anywhere with an internet connection, it allows people from across the country to learn together.

WHY BLENDED ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING PROVIDES THE SOLUTION

As new technology is introduced and adopted, it immediately becomes integrated with training methods previously utilised. This is called Blended Learning delivery, demonstrated by the figure below.

Live (synchronous)			(asynchronous) On Demand			
Face to Face Classroom	Live Online	Coaching	Collaboration & Community	Multimedia	Web-based Learning	Performance Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Classroom • Field Trips • Lab 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual Classroom • Webinar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching • Mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portal Site • Blog • Wiki • Chat • IM • Threaded Discussion • VoIP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video Streaming • Podcasts • Distance Learning • CD-ROM/ DVD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet/ Intranet • Self-paced Tutorials • Simulation • Games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge Management • Workflow Automation • Performance Support • Mobile & Wireless

THE BENEFITS OF BLENDED ONLINE SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING

Avoidance of travel costs. As much as 40 pence of every pound spent on in-person training goes to travel and accommodation costs. Those and other fixed expenses are avoided entirely when blended online synchronous learning replaces classroom instruction. The result is dramatically lower costs per-person trained. That fact alone often justifies the switch to online training.

Convenience. Instead of mandatory travel to a single location to receive instruction, busy employees can participate in training and meeting sessions on their laptops/desktops/smartphones at locations convenient to them.

Increased retention and productivity. Collaborative learning events increase participant retention and satisfaction, resulting in higher productivity. Factors include more time on the job with the elimination of instructional travel.

Security. Online learning can be held with complete assurance for the safeguard of valuable intellectual property with password-based user authentication, end-to-end encryption and other available security features.

Interactivity. Rich interaction capabilities with and among participants are a principal benefit of online training. Tools include whiteboards, polls, and question/answer capability, enabling participants to interact and presenters to obtain instant feedback.

Flexibility. Presenters can conduct large and small meetings in user-friendly and appealing forums that run the gamut from formal presentations to the most impromptu brainstorming session or just-in-time training instruction. Events can be recorded and archived for on-demand viewing, making the content available around the clock.

Informal learning. The ease of launching spontaneous online meetings corresponds with today's emphasis on informal learning, a growing segment of corporate knowledge transfer within many organisations.

Ease of preparation. Some Web-based training applications can be easily mastered and immediately employed by subject matter experts without IT support. This will increase their motivation to consider online training when the need to communicate arises.

Ease of reporting and analysis. Live session registration identifies registrants for future communication, gathers feedback and assesses overall interest. Built-in reporting capabilities allow moderators to track attendees for each session including questions they ask and response to polls/Q&A. This is especially useful for evaluation, as well as compliance and other mandatory training where specific reporting is required.

Accessible data. Readily available data also enables appropriate and timely follow-up, including evaluation and immediate contact of participants. That is especially valuable for customer training, and sessions where time-to-market urgency is important.

Enhanced productivity. The public sector can get multiple usage meaning less time spent on planning and managing activities.

Measurable global impact. Public sector organisations can reach distant customers and representatives with valuable training, leveling the playing field with larger organisations. Data gathered from participating delegates allows organisations to respond to ever-changing market conditions.

PROMOTING THE ROI OF ONLINE LEARNING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Online web technologies have helped spawn another 21st-century business phenomenon, the collaborative workplace. It's an environment where information travels freely, employees are networked with peers both inside and outside the organisation, and where people solve challenges together. In short, it's where employees work as a unified team.

In this environment, tech-savvy team players thrive on text messages and e-mail, online meetings, and social networking tools. They prefer unstructured, just-in-time learning opportunities to formal training sessions, with information presented in bite-sized morsels precisely when it's most needed. Dull instructor-led classes and PowerPoint presentations bore them to tears. This is why online training meets the needs of today's multigenerational workforce. The public sector no longer needs to view training

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as an entitlement, but rather as a tool to drive performance excellence and business results. They need to encourage L&D to perform their rightful role in the drive for productivity and efficiency within the organisation.

Today's business world demands a combination of formal and informal learning with an emphasis on collaboration, knowledge sharing, social networking, coaching, and mentoring. While formal, instructor-led training is not going away, it is becoming a smaller and smaller percentage of training budgets. HR and L&D must think differently about corporate training and focus on those informal and collaborative strategies that will save money and increase the breadth of organisational learning.

The new learning model features short and tightly focused instruction sessions delivered to individuals or groups that need it at precisely the right times. Results are measured not solely by the number of courses delivered and employee satisfaction levels, but by the achievement of key performance benchmarks and bottom line impact. It is nothing less than a paradigm shift from training to performance, made possible largely by advances in web-based instruction.

Now is the time for public sector organisations to reposition the training function. And indeed they are. The public sector is trimming staff, cutting most non-strategic training programs, curbing travel and increasing their reliance on online learning.

The blending of old and new training methods, and more technically blending a sequence of both synchronous (live) and asynchronous (on-demand) learning, is setting new benchmarks in public sector L&D.

ABOUT CETAS KINETIC

Cetas Kinetic was established in 2010 to provide engaging, bespoke training and support to organisations to help them tackle any problems they're facing and build on the positive work they've already achieved. As well as its directors having over 20 years experience working in the public, education and healthcare sectors, Cetas Kinetic is pioneering online learning within the UK, who have a team of highly skilled and talented trainers. These include neuro-linguistic programming practitioners, online learning experts, business coaches and stress management consultants.

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