



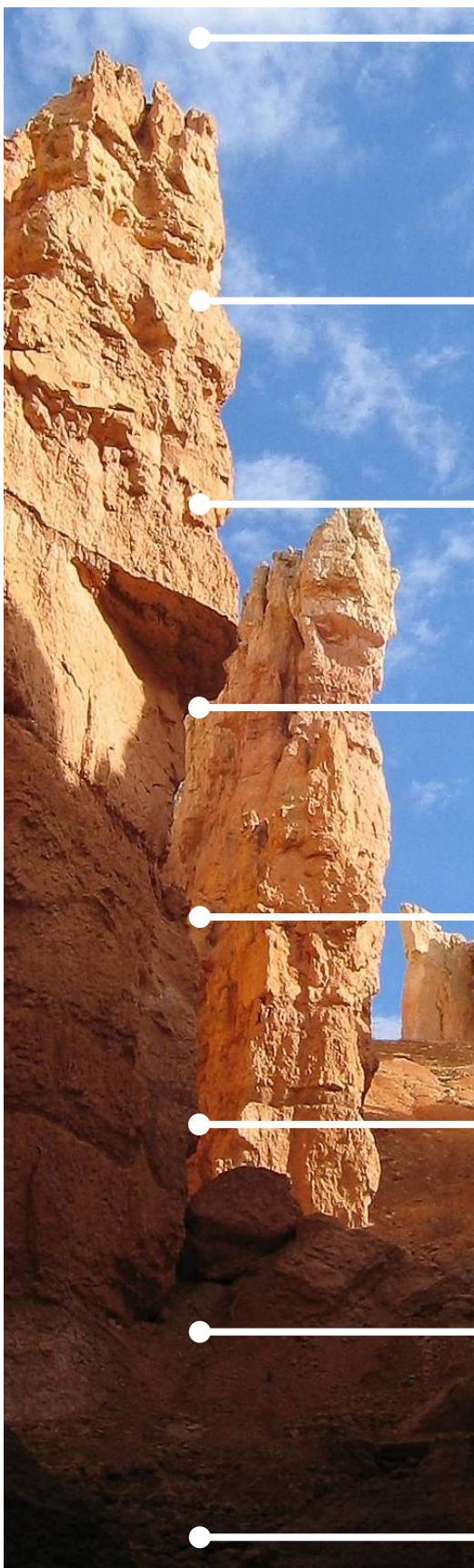
eSee

eLearning Landscape

Version 1.2

Nine **Lanterns** 

eLearning Landscape – mapping the terrain



The larger landscape

- Rational
- Procurement
- Content
- Technology Environment
- Physical Environment
- Readiness
- Learning Design
- Organisational Structure

The elearning landscape is a metaphor for engaging with the principle characteristics or components that make up an elearning implementation, helping you map your organisation’s place on that landscape, identifying what parts of the landscape you know well and those that are still an unknown quantity.

Pivotal parts of this landscape act as observation platforms, enabling you to form a view of the surrounding terrain, working out just where your elearning implementation features in the context of each key aspect: (i) the rationale for implementing elearning into an organisation; (ii) its procurement – whether it will be in-sourced or outsourced; (iii) what type of content will be made available and how will this be created; (iv) the technology used for delivery and perhaps maintenance; (v) whether the learning to be delivered is, in fact, all online or maybe blended with classroom learning; (vi) the readiness of your organisation for elearning (really important); (vii) the ‘generation’ of elearning design that is most applicable to your organisation; and, (viii) who are you, as an organisation, as an entity that has objectives and policies to adhere to.

Remember, the whole point of drawing up this landscape is to help you make the right choices, by always keeping in view the bigger picture and not getting overly tied up with just one or two parts of your elearning plan. The landscape is most valuable for helping you negotiate your elearning journey, and for revealing where you have ended up when you feel you may have lost the way.

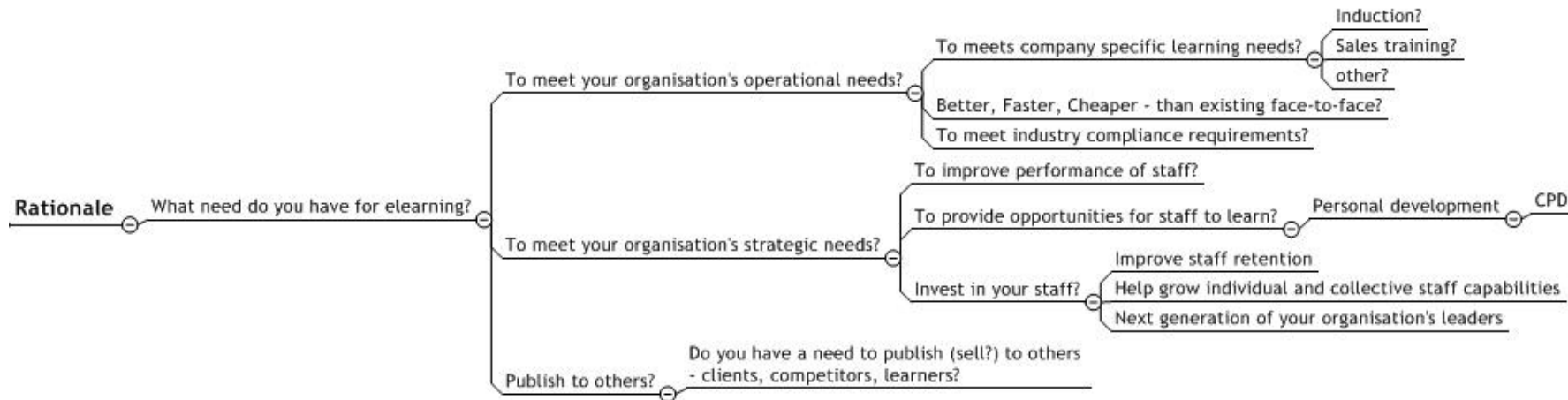
Alternatively, give us a call. eLearning is what we do and all we do. We are happy to help and point you in the right direction. Trust us when we say that we are great friends to have. We have so much research on our hands we really don’t mind passing on knowledge, because if eLearning as a whole can grow then so can we. So give us a call on +61 3 8689 9400, or email at info@ninelanterns.com.au

eLearning Landscape – mapping the terrain

Rationale

There are a number of reasons why you might be considering elearning. In the past a rationale might be built from an ROI argument and seek to deliver efficiencies to an organisation’s operations (i.e. getting more staff to be compliant more quickly).

Increasingly however, companies are identifying strategic, longer-term, outcomes as a basis to build an elearning capability. Strategic outcomes include staff retention, empowering staff,



growing core business capabilities and improving performance.

Figure 2: Developing a rationale for elearning

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Procurement

Procurement covers all aspects of elearning, from an initial consultancy to building the business case, to identifying a best-fit learning management system, to the development of content. For many organisations, the start-up and infrastructure costs embedded in establishing an internal capability in elearning systems sees them outsourcing almost every elearning function, even hosting. In fact, there are a wide range of providers that provide such hosting solutions across a number of industries (finance, banking, insurance, for example).

For most organisations, there is level of comfort and practicality found in first identifying the most appropriate Learning Management Systems and Learning Content Management Systems (LMS and LCMS) and then getting an external provider to host and manage the system for them. Most LMS and LCMS providers also offer hosting services. This is commonly referred to as an ASP (Application Service Provider) model, where the application is the LMS.

Incidentally, the difference between LMS' and LCMS' is one of functionality – the former provides the functions to manage the learners (adding, deleting, changing) and the learning process (tasks, resources, activities); whilst the latter does the same thing together with additional tools to manage the learning content (authoring, updating, maintenance).

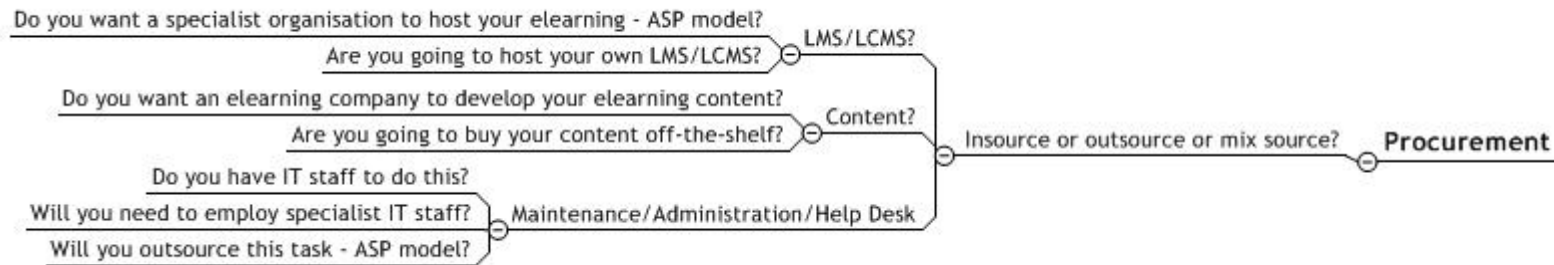


Figure 3: Procurement

eLearning Landscape – mapping the terrain

Content

Once an organisation has access to an LMS or LCMS it is very often all about the content. Not only what content to deliver but how it is to be sourced: Is it to be had from a third-party (a content developer), or built to specific requirements? Or is the content to be bought on a per-seat (per-learner, per-session) basis, off-the-shelf?

Few organisations have the internal resources required to develop their own highly interactive content although a number do invest initially in tools to create ‘flat’ low-interactivity content (lots of ‘next’ buttons, mountains of text, image maps, screen graphics and the like) – with tools such as Articulate or Adobe Captivate amongst others. The issue here is not the tools but rather the skills and resources of those using them. In the hands of competent instructional and visual designers, they are often used well to produce effective learning. Used without a good understanding of what and why elearning works, and without an effective model of learning and the learner, they create learning that is flat: pages of text punctuated by a few graphics and poorly constructed Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs).



Figure 4: What type of content?

Other organisations will purchase licences to content modules, sold by third-party suppliers (there are many of these, peddling generic content especially in soft skills and IT ('Advanced PowerPoint skills'; 'Team Building'; 'Staying Positive', and the like). A number of organisations typically start by purchasing these one-size-fits-all content products and then graduate to working with high-value content developers to create content products specifically for their own learners. For example, an *Induction Course* developed for a specific organisation will be very different to one available in a content library, designed to be used by many different organisations. Of course, some content products can't be found in a content library and need to be developed from scratch.

As a broad rule of thumb, many of the more *ineffective* elearning products tend to be found in large-scale content libraries. They are ineffective simply because they are generic and do not address a specific organisation, its processes, its business and its people. They lack *context*, and context is singularly important in the transfer of learning to performance, so that it results in positive change.

Of course it doesn't stop at content. Thereafter you will need to consider a 'help' or support system. Where the LMS is hosted in an ASP model, the Help or support services can be bundled into the licence fee and delivered by the hosting organisation. Otherwise, there may be an additional fee charged for this service. Where an organisation hosts the LMS internally, it will also need to deliver a support service to learners, internally resourced (often through an L&D team). More than this, support services can also be divided into technical and learning support – the technical issues can often be directed to specialist staff in IT; learning issues to L&D and subject experts.

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Technology environment

The question of the technology environment is really one about the level of integration of your elearning infrastructure with existing systems. For large companies integration is vital, particularly with Human Resource (HR) and other legacy systems. However, for smaller companies this issue is not a sticking point. And once you've got an LMS (to deliver your content and to manage your learners), and some content to be delivered, you will need to consider how to get best use from both the technologies and the content. This may lead to you establishing some tools that allow your learners to talk online with each other; to share their own content with peers; to participate in collaborative problem solving. These activities are all enabled by what are being called 'Web 2.0' or 'eLearning 2.0' tools – tools that help build a community of learners, a community that can focus on a common goal (to get a qualification) or business problem (how to improve sales).

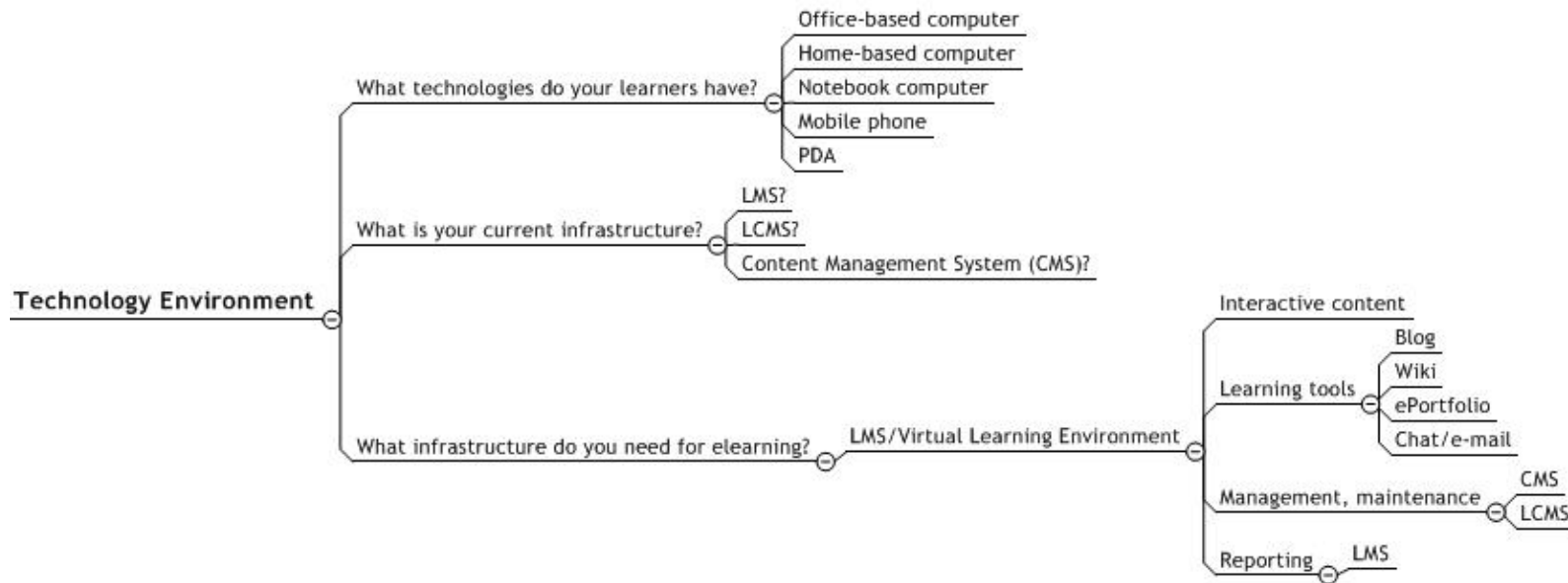


Figure 5: Technology environment

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Physical environment

The physical considerations are focused on where your learners, your staff, are situated and what resources they have to use, when they engage with online learning. Will they be expected to learn in the workplace or at home, or perhaps a mix of these? Do you intend to use a classroom to deliver any part of the learning or will it all be online? Will your learners be expected to learn collaboratively and if so, do you want collaboration to occur only online or perhaps in a workplace or classroom environment as well. The considerations are long. The key is, don't assume to replicate or extend your current training/learning contexts in the implementation of your elearning programme. Think about best-case scenarios. It's highly unlikely that the physical environment in which you deliver elearning will look anything like it does in delivering offline, face-to-face, learning. Or at least it shouldn't!

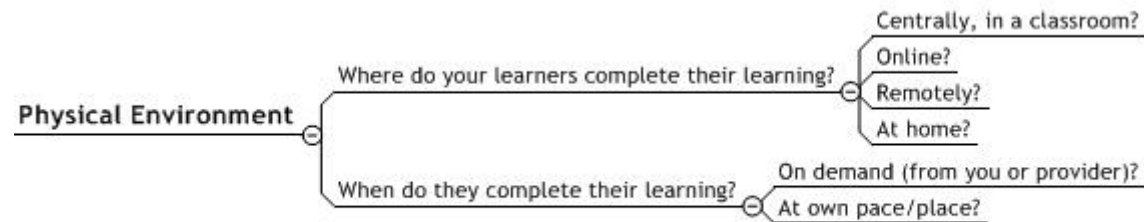


Figure 6: Physical environment

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Readiness for eLearning

Readiness factors are all internal and relate primarily to the readiness of people: the key stakeholders who will make the budget available for elearning; the people responsible for the vision and strategic directions of an organisation (embracing a vision as a 'learning organisation'); the people charged with managing the elearning initiative; and of course, the people that will apply and maybe contribute to the elearning – everyone from the 'new intake' person to the CEO and leadership teams.

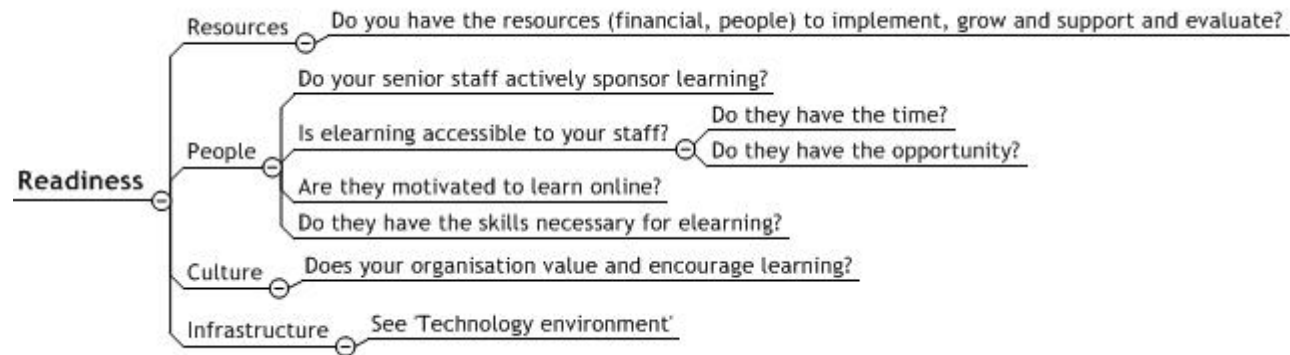


Figure 7: Readiness factors

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Learning design

For those who are either creating their own learning in-house; or using an external provider to do this for/with them, learning design will be a consideration. Learning design is both an art and a science: there are certain contemporary learning theories, for example, that lend themselves to elearning and should certainly be applied to inform the design process. But each module, each course, each context of use, is different. And when you then bring in the notion of ‘blended learning’, where a course is designed to be delivered partially online and partially in a formal classroom, an additional complexity is introduced.

This is most certainly an area to involve ‘learning experts’. One of the potential dangers here is to discount the value of experts in designing courses to maximise learner engagement and effectiveness. Everyone knows how to design good learning experiences (well, we’ve all been students at one time or another), so it’s easy to think we can all design effective elearning. This is one of the most common and erroneous assumptions that can come back to haunt and help destroy your carefully planned and expensive elearning implementation. Beware!

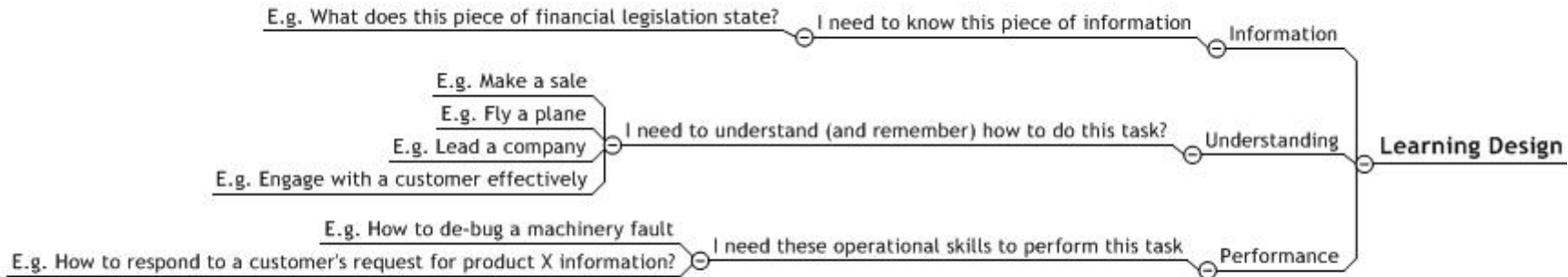


Figure 8: Learning Design

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Conclusion

One final piece of the jigsaw left out has been 'organisational structure' – the nature of the corporation and how this might impact your elearning initiative. For example, we've had clients that have eagerly embraced elearning and put all the correct elements in place, including budget, to drive effective and exciting learning, only to be told by Head Office in Switzerland/US/UK, they are to receive and use only authorised (sanitised?) elearning products. Great in theory (well, it saves money); often disastrous in effect, since these 'one-size-fits-all' solutions lack the context to be relevant in local conditions.

I guess the key message here is; stakeholder buy-in and top management level sponsorship of your elearning programme. Where elearning represents a change from the status quo, it becomes a classic change-management issue and you should apply change management strategies as necessary.

So final words....use this landscape to help you map your vision, strategy and implementation plans. Use it in its entirety and you can never get lost!

Alternatively contact us. We can come to you and help you understand exactly where you are positioned and what lies down the road for you. We are a company of learning and learning design. Specifically though we are an eLearning company, it's what we do, it's all we do. And, we are happy to help you get your eLearning to where it can and could be.

We look forward to hearing from you soon!

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