

mlearning ebook

Corporate Mobile Learning: Where is it heading?

A research report undertaken by Aston University

Prosell

When performance matters

Foreword by Simon Morden, CEO of Prosell Learning



It is an exciting time for mobile learning, today about half the adult population owns a smartphone and 80% will by 2020. With the boom in affordable smartphones and improved mobile networks for internet access, mobile learning has now become the norm in organisations rather than the exception. On average seven out of ten businesses are adopting mobile learning solutions. If organisations want to stay ahead they will need to get involved.

Prosell has always had an active interest in how technology can aid learning. As we feel it is important to understand how the latest technologies are supporting workplace learning, we sponsored two Aston University post-graduate students to conduct a comprehensive independent study of mobile learning in the corporate world.

This eBook, based on their findings, will give an insight into what is happening in the mobile learning arena, how companies can implement mobile learning successfully and explain why social learning is the future.

If you would like to discuss any of the report's findings in greater detail, please do get in touch. We would be delighted to hear from you.

The Aston University Researchers

This project was undertaken by two post-graduate students from Aston University.



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Introduction

Over the past 10 years mobile phones have developed rapidly and become a part of our everyday lives. We rely on them for instant communication, information, news updates and social connectivity. This has revolutionised the way we learn and paved the way for a more personalised learning approach. Compared to just a few years ago, employees now want just-in-time learning and are proactively seeking different learning and development channels via their smartphones. They download apps, seek information via search engines and even engage via social networks to find out information from their peers (Deloitte, 2014).

In contrary to many people's belief, mlearning is not about converting computer based learning into a mobile format, but to consider how mobile devices can be used to strengthen an overall learning strategy. In this report we look into how mobile learning can be implemented successfully as part of your overall learning strategy to create a more effective blended and personalised learning approach.

The report was prepared by reviewing existing research on mobile learning, and by taking into consideration results from the mobile learning survey we commissioned. The survey, which investigated the opinions of Learning Directors in blue chip companies, uncovered some intriguing results which will be invaluable to L&D Directors.

1 What is mlearning?

A new way of learning

There is no agreement on a general definition of elearning and mlearning. However, we can say that elearning is the use of electronic technology for learning and that mobile learning is an elearning method, which relies on the use of mobile devices for learning.

The clear advantages of mobile learning; portability, immediacy, individuality, and accessibility, make a huge difference in how people learn using mobile devices.

The benefits of mlearning are:

- Better adaptation to individual needs
- Flexibility of location and time to learn
- Instant feedback
- Engaging activities that use multimedia to embed learning
- Provides elearning features and resources that are instantly accessible
- Gives learners fingertip knowledge

“Mobile learning is unique in that it allows truly anywhere, anytime, personalised learning. It can also be used to enrich, enliven or add variety to conventional lessons or courses.”

2 The growth in mlearning

Reasons for growth

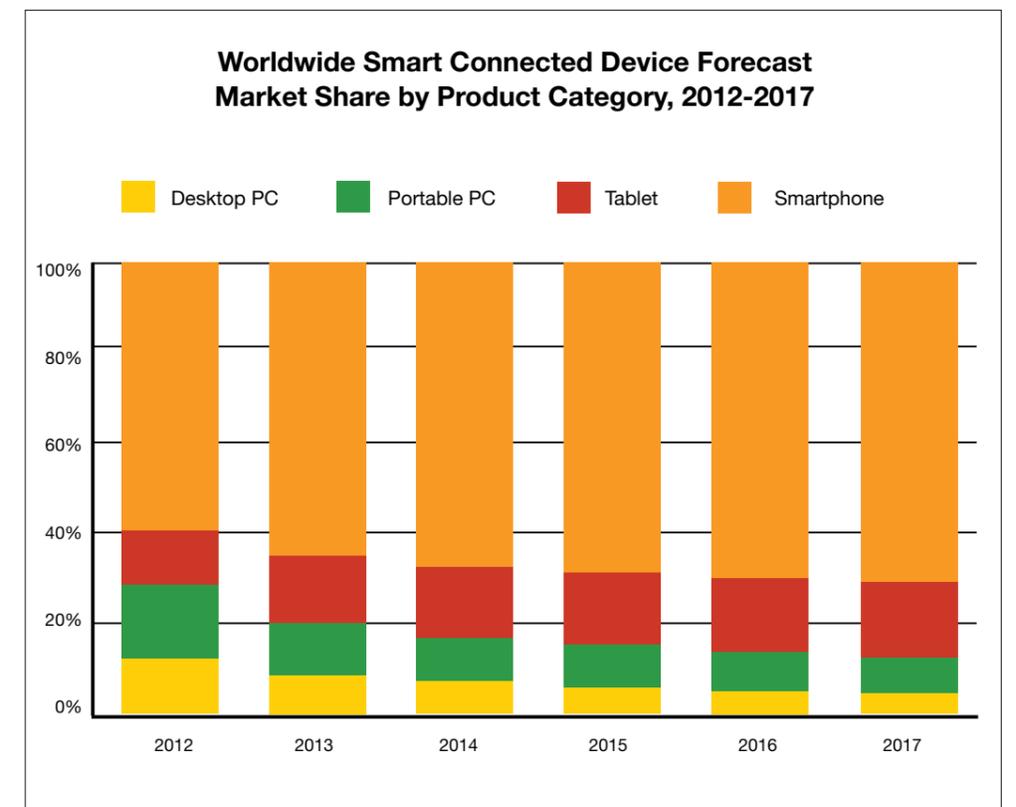
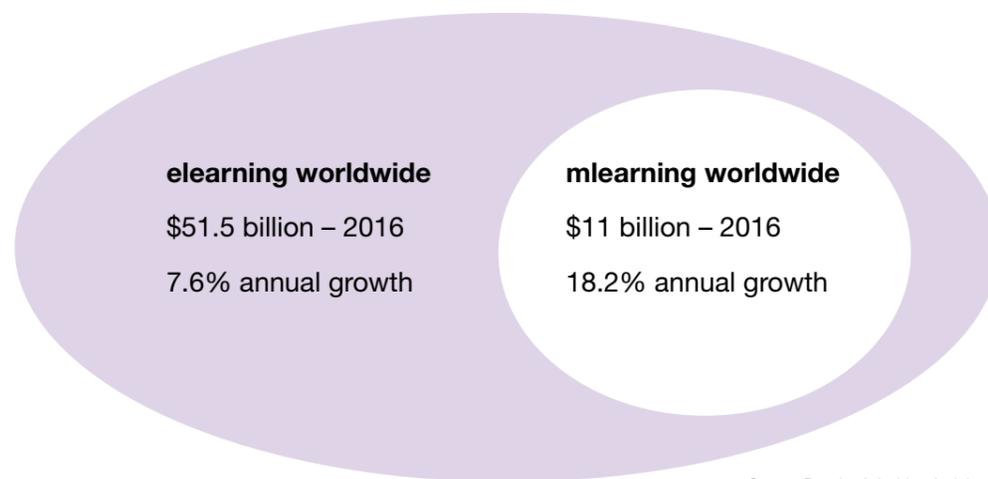
The 2014 eLearning Market Trends report by Docebo shows that there are four main reasons for the growth of corporate mlearning:

Soaring use of internet and smart connected devices

Worldwide growth

The worldwide market for self-paced elearning is growing rapidly with an annual growth rate of 7.6%. It reached \$35.6 billion in 2011 and revenues are expected to increase to \$51.5 billion by 2016 (Docebo, 2014).

In comparison, the mlearning segment is growing even faster with an expected annual growth rate of 18.2%. The worldwide market for mobile learning products and services reached \$9.3 billion in 2015 and it is predicted that by 2017 the market will have reached \$12.2 billion (Ambient Insight, 2013).



Source: IDC

A huge share of the working population in the UK can now access the Internet from anywhere through their smart connected devices. The smartphones sales figures confirm the enthusiasm for high connectivity. IDC claims that the number of PCs will fall from 28% in 2013 to 13% of the device market in 2017. Tablets will increase to 16.5% and smartphones to 70.5% (in 2013 they were respectively at 11.8% and 59.5% levels).

Employees are already using their smartphone for work purposes while commuting. Research shows that US workers who use a smartphone are considered more productive. On average, they work more than 50 hours a week, and they rely on their smartphones as productivity tools.

In addition, there is a trend towards BYOD (Bring Your Own Device), permitting employees to bring personally owned mobile devices (laptops, tablets, and smartphones) to their workplace, and to use those devices to access privileged company information and applications, suggesting that employees would get accustomed even more quickly to an mlearning platform by using their own smart device.

The Cloud is changing the way the corporate sector interacts

Organisations and employees have been changing the way they work and collaborate more quickly than ever before, thanks to new technologies (Docebo, 2014).

Cloud computing has had a huge impact on the working habits, as well as company efficiency and effectiveness. In particular, Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) based systems are very popular, replacing many legacy CRM, ERP and HR management systems.

According to numerous surveys, SaaS has been very popular for three main reasons:

- Speed of implementation
- Savings on capital expenditure
- Savings in terms of operational expenses

SaaS is responsible for helping to increase the size of the elearning market. Many large companies have switched from in-house Learning and Management Systems (LMS) to an all inclusive SaaS LMS. Smaller companies have also adopted SaaS LMS in order to reduce costs (Docebo, 2014).

Cost efficiency

During the recent economic downturn, many organisations began to look for alternative learning methods to fit with new budget constraints. Many organisations turned to mobile learning recognising that it is cost-effective, efficient and particularly advantageous when training employees on a global scale (Docebo, 2014).

Post-secondary education users are accustomed to mlearning

eLearning and mobile learning platforms are widely used in the educational sector. The generations now entering the labour market have already been exposed to mlearning technologies and are more likely to quickly adopt mlearning at work (Docebo, 2014). This has helped to increase adoption rates of mlearning in corporate organisations.

3 Corporate mlearning

Learning & performance

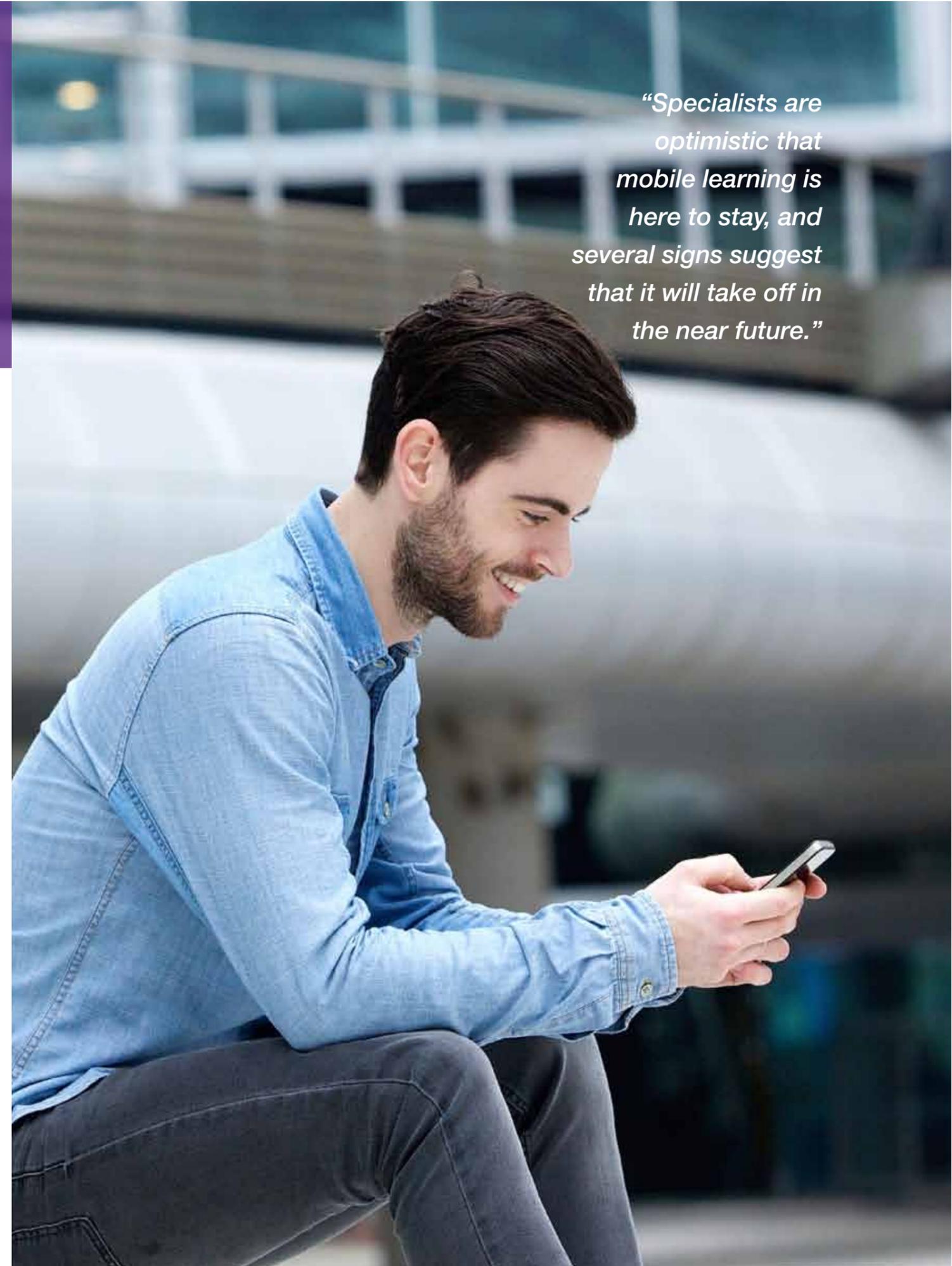
To understand the state of the corporate mobile learning market, the study drew upon two reports. The 2013 - 2017 Ambient Insight report on worldwide mobile learning and the Docebo 2014 - 2016 eLearning Market Trends & Forecast report. These both show how attitudes towards mobile learning is changing in the corporate sector.

In 2013 the Ambient Insight report noted that there is a “consistent pattern across the globe with the absence of mobile learning used for internal corporate training and education”.

Interestingly, the report mentions that corporations were using mlearning methods to develop customer-facing educational apps, such as product manuals and technical reference. However, these were not meeting the training needs of corporate buyers so organisations began to develop apps which focused on training skills to boost performance.

According to the 2014 eLearning Market Trends & Forecast report by Docebo, the corporate mlearning market is in an earlier developmental stage than the education and private mlearning markets. However specialists are optimistic that mobile learning is here to stay, and several signs suggest that it will take off in the near future.

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4 Design considerations

Five key areas should be considered in mlearning programme design – the type of training, accessibility via a range of devices, accommodation of different learning styles, familiarity of target workforce with technology and the required content.

Type of training

In general there are two types of mlearning programmes:

Learning in the learning context

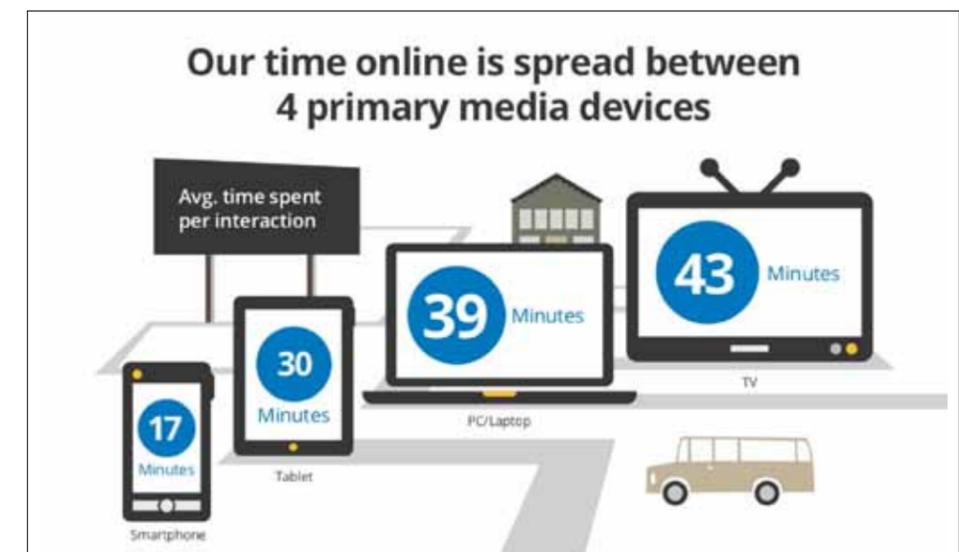
Mandatory forms of learning required to carry out one's job such as hard skills training and compliance.

Learning in the performance context

This is when the focus moves away from how to do a job and puts the emphasis on doing the job effectively – in other words developing the soft skills to do one's job better. Whilst this form of learning can be mandatory, the research found that it is most effective when the individual is committed to improving their performance and has a drive to want to succeed in their job. For example, in a sales environment, individuals may be motivated to perform well to reach their targets.

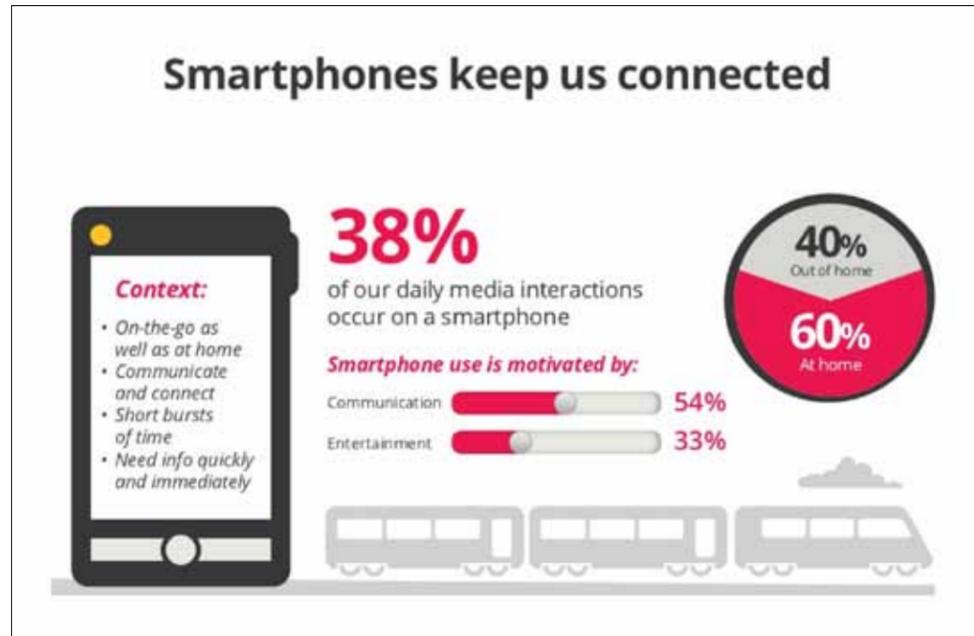
4 Design considerations

Therefore, it could be argued that whilst motivation for learning in a learning context is not of great importance, with regards to learning in a performance context, motivation is a highly important factor. Therefore, when designing an effective mlearning programme for performance improvement, the programme needs to be alongside an approach aimed at improving employee motivation towards learning.

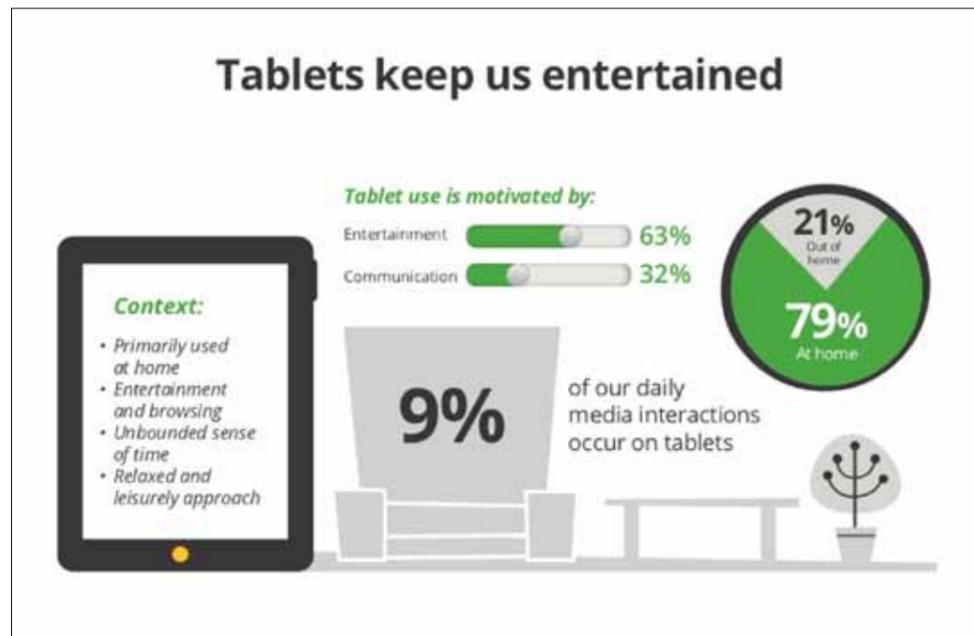


Interactions with mobile technologies

A research report by Google into how we interact with media, found that the average individual spends 4.4 hours of their leisure time in front of screens each day. The average time was 17 minutes with a mobile phone, 30 minutes with a tablet and 39 minutes on a laptop. This suggests that for an mlearning app the modules and exercises should be relatively short in duration in order for the learners to be able to complete these in a time frame that does not feel overwhelming.



Source: Google



Source: Google

The report also identified that 38% of daily media interactions occur through smartphones and were mainly used outside the home and for communication purposes. Tablet use, on the other hand, was primarily used at home for the main purpose of relaxation and entertainment. This suggests that for optimum use, an mlearning platform should be developed with both a tablet and smartphone in mind. It should also aim to be entertaining and include communication features.

Furthermore, 90% of individuals studied, used multiple screens sequentially to accomplish the same task. Simultaneous use of portable devices is also common where by 66% of people studied used both a smartphone and a laptop together. This suggests that mlearning programmes should be easily accessed from different mobile devices. In addition, there should be a saving progress feature throughout the activities to enable progress to continue through multiple devices.

mlearning should:

- Use bite-sized modules
- Be developed for smartphones and tablets
- Make learning entertaining
- Include communication and progress features

Learning styles

It is well known that everyone processes and learns new information in different ways. Mobile learning programmes can be designed to adapt to different learning styles, which can increase its effectiveness for learning transfer.

For example, one way is to offer different types of content which will adapt to a range of learning styles. Videos are particularly effective because they include graphics, pictures and audio. Therefore they are able to adapt to the needs of visual and auditory learners.

For kinesthetic learners, activities which require the use of a camera to record the learner carrying out a particular task can be included. This enriches the learning experience.

Familiarity with mobile technology

A study by Chang et al (2015) showed that students more accustomed to technology are more likely to adopt mlearning quickly. It is beneficial because they can spend more time on materials they do not understand, which allows for self-paced learning. This can enhance overall learning motivation. However students with less interest in using technology may be afraid of learning in such an environment and have an increased risk of discontinuing their involvement in the course. To engage students who have less acceptance of technology, interaction and clear instructions are needed to assist them when enrolling on an mlearning course. Providing the learner with more opportunities for group study may also improve their engagement as the problems and ideas can be discussed with other students.

Content strategy

Employees are more focused on the usefulness of the mobile learning as opposed to the ease of use which is currently more of a concern to the managers (Lee et al 2014). When developing content the needs of the employee as well as the requirements of the organisation should be incorporated into the mlearning programme.

5 Structuring an effective mlearning programme

When structuring an effective mlearning programme, research on the psychology of learning should be considered. Our report reviewed two main studies; the learning principles for multimedia learning and the psychological principals which could negatively impact the effectiveness of mobile learning.

The principles of multimedia learning

Mayer and Moreno (2005) developed a theory for multimedia learning where by the following principles should apply:

Coherence

Eliminate extraneous content to promote coherence. Less material is better for learning.

Signalling

Cue the learner on how to process information. Tell them how the information is going to be presented and how it will be assessed so that they are aware of what they will have to do.

Spatial contiguity

Place words and pictures near rather than far from each other on the screen.

Cognitive redundancy

People can't focus when they both hear and see the same verbal message during a presentation. Therefore mlearning programmes should only use animation and narration, rather than animation, narration, and text.

Temporal contiguity

Students learn better when corresponding narration and animation are presented simultaneously rather than successively.



Challenges to effective mobile learning

Terras and Ramsay (2012) examined five psychological principles that are challenges to effective mobile learning and how organisations can overcome them.

Memory is context dependent

Studies have demonstrated that recall is enhanced if it takes place in the same place it was studied. This may be affected by the use of mlearning, since it is often on the go.

Human cognitive resources are finite

Incoming stimuli when studying on the go makes it harder to remember and pay attention. Learners are more likely to get distracted. Users should be encouraged to learn in a quiet place.

Learners reshape and reorder

Learners reshape and reorder their understanding of learning content whilst they are interacting with the learning material. This is an advantage of mlearning as they can learn at their own pace. The ability to promote and support interconnectivity is also an advantage of mlearning since social media and web searches can enhance their understanding.

Metacognition is essential for mlearning to be effective

“Awareness and understanding of one’s own thought processes” is the key to effective mlearning, therefore design should ensure that learners understand how they learn and how mlearning will meet their learning needs.

Individual differences matter

Learning in different ways is a strength of mlearning since content can be presented in several ways. Ensure that different forms of content are provided, for example video, podcasts, quizzes, and pictures to cater for different styles of learning.



6 Features of mlearning

The mobile learning survey included an in-depth interview with Learning Directors, investigating their use of mobile learning in the workplace, and essential features that should be included in a mobile app. The top features were:

Video

Research shows video is the most effective form of content for learning. Learners also find this much more engaging than traditional script based training. The video clips should be short, to the point and provide narration, animation and keyword labels.

Notification features

These should be sent to users in order to encourage and remind them of their learning and to promote any noteworthy news. This will help to reinforce learning due to repeated exposure.

Social/collaborative media

Social media enables users to share knowledge and should be encouraged in the workplace through an mlearning platform. By harnessing social and informal learning, the learning department creates a learning environment where employees feel responsible for their own training, whilst being supported by the company.

Communication features

The ability to communicate directly with the line manager would be advantageous. Several research reports have shown that frequent and specific communication and feedback from management improves employee performance and lowers turnover rates.

Gamification

Various studies have demonstrated that the use of games in learning helps increase engagement with the learning content as well as improving effectiveness of learning.

Quizzes

Through the use of quizzes, module content can be solidified and understood. This will also help to retain information.

Resource folder

A section in the mlearning platform with useful content will help the learners' access information quickly at the point of need.

Tracking and reporting

This feature allows the manager to track the progress of learners and see how well employees are doing on the programme, supporting them when necessary. Tracking and reporting also allows the effectiveness of the programme to be monitored.

7 When can you use mlearning?

Participants of the study also highlighted six main reasons for implementing mlearning. These were for:

Reinforcing learning

Mobile learning looks to be accepted as a tool for reinforcing learning more than a learn-from-scratch tool. It is recognised as an integral part of blended learning, rather than a replacement for face-to-face training.

Constant updates

Mobile learning platforms provide a useful tool to transmit updates on specific products, features or news.

Just-in-time learning

Just-in-time learning was found to be one of the most common reasons for mobile learning. Participants mentioned that their sales staff have access to tablets and refer to it for instant product information when selling to a customer, helping speed up the sales process.

Compliance training

Mobile learning is ideal for training on very specific areas and subjects that require a base knowledge in bite-sized chunks.

7 When can you use mlearning?

Soft skills training

Organisations are beginning to introduce soft skills training as part of their mlearning programmes – for example management development, leadership, communication and basic people management skills including how to properly conduct appraisals and reviews. Our research found that this type of training is difficult to pick up solely with mobile learning. It is best used in conjunction with classroom activities and one-to-one coaching.

Lifelong learning

An individual's learning should be lifelong, especially in a world of ever changing technologies and fast moving markets. Businesses need to keep developing the skills and knowledge of their employees in order to stay competitive. An organisation can facilitate this by providing continuous learning through a mobile learning platform. Social media features also help to encourage this form of learning, as it allows employees to share up-to-date knowledge with each other.



8 Where does mlearning work?

Mobile learning is appropriate for both those employees who are office based as well as those who work on-the-go.

Office based teams

For office based teams the use of mlearning will enhance the convenience of learning. Most organisations are already providing elearning programmes, therefore switching to mlearning would not be a radical change and would provide the added benefit in that it can be completed at the employee's convenience through their mobile devices.

Induction training can prove to be more cost effective using mlearning. For example, some onboarding tasks could be conducted prior to arrival in order to make the process quicker. Also Haag (2011) shows that employees actually prefer learning using a mobile device as opposed to a PC/laptop as it is more engaging, convenient, flexible and user friendly.

Another benefit of mlearning is that the information is available to users at any time. This means that post course completion, they can refresh their memory of the course content whenever convenient.

8 Where does mlearning work?

Furthermore, mlearning can be used as a mechanism to test the participant's understanding of concepts/theories. If participants are underperforming, the mlearning platform can be designed to notify a manager who can provide additional support to the learner.

Dispersed teams

As jobs become less permanent and workers become more mobile, organisations that use technology to cultivate transferable skills will attract the best and the brightest employees.

A recommendation is to incorporate a virtual coaching feature. As remote workers have less ability to obtain face to face support from line managers, by incorporating virtual coaching features, it is easier for line managers to provide feedback to employees which will improve learning transfer.

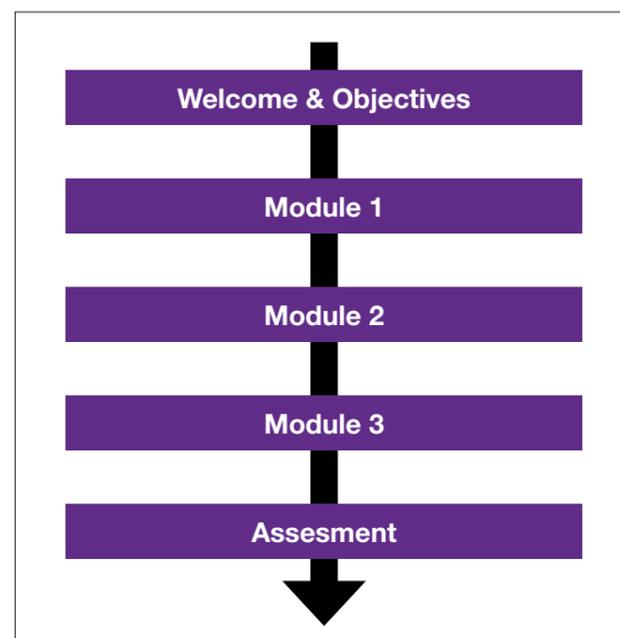


9 Push or pull approach?

The study identified two main approaches for mobile learning programmes. Each of these has their advantages and disadvantages.

The push approach

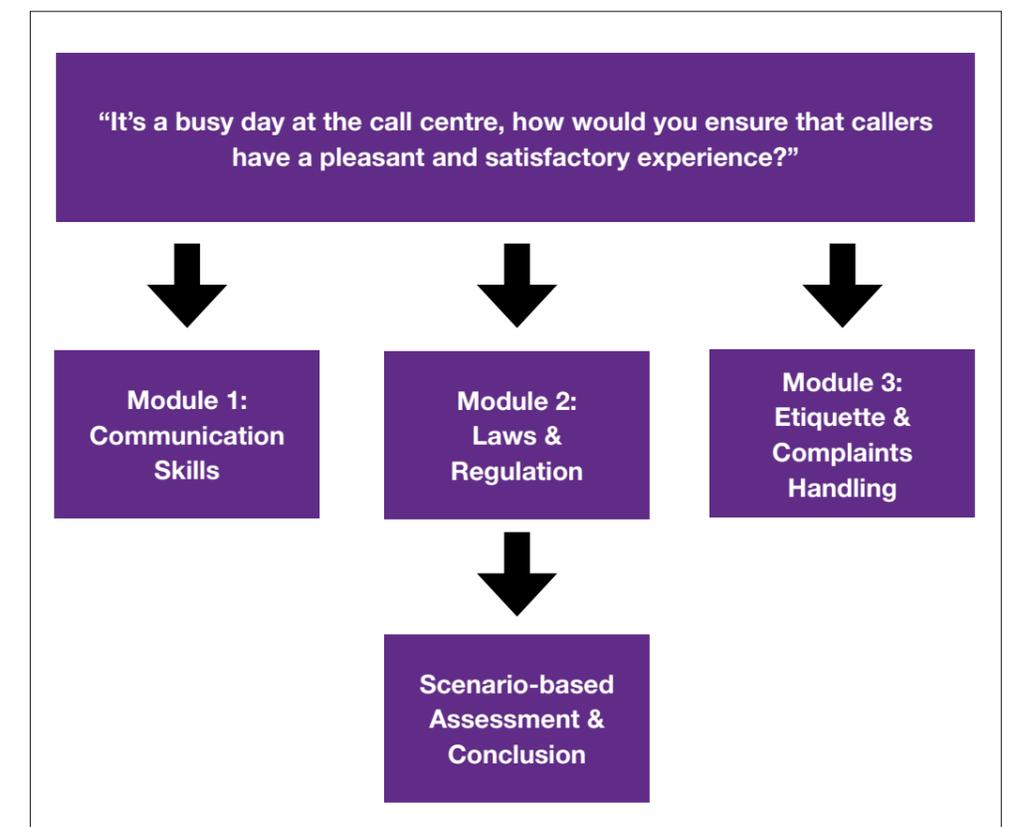
Many traditional forms of training follow a push style approach. This is where there is a set programme of modules which participants have to follow. Each module is mandatory and once they have worked through the sequence of modules there is normally a final assessment to test participants' knowledge.



This kind of programme is very easy to build and the modules are chosen to meet the needs of most people. If it is designed well, participants tend to find it engaging. Compliance type training is particularly appropriate, as there are no real performance requirements for the course. The disadvantage to this approach is that it assumes that all the information is equally relevant to all the learners, when actually learners tend to have different learning needs (Articulate, 2009).

The pull approach

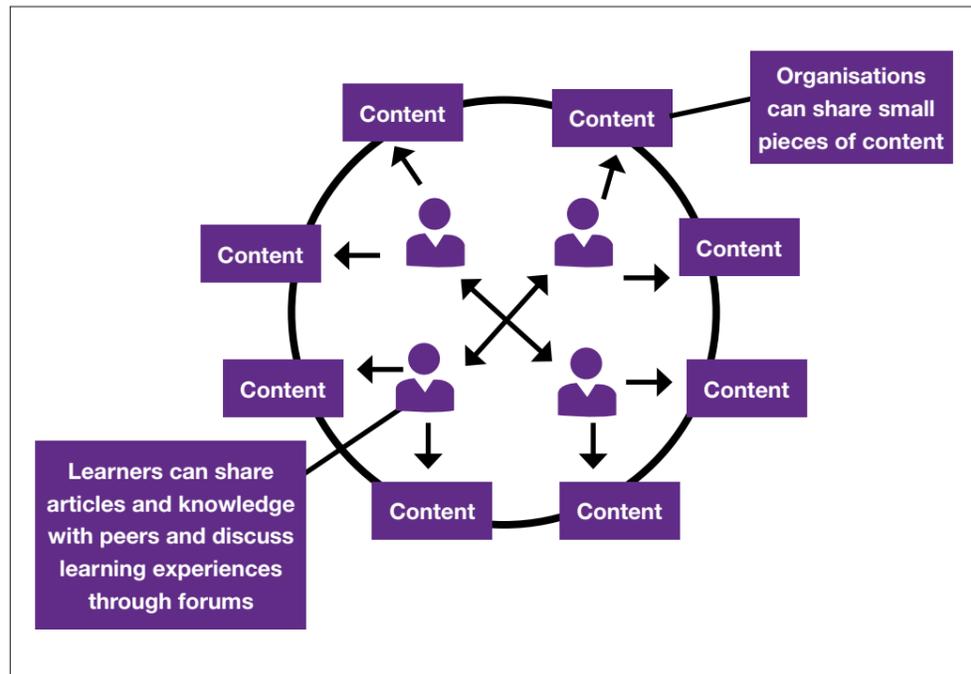
The traditional pull approach focuses on what the individual wants to learn. When using this approach, organisations tend to create small bits of content which are then added to a learning platform. Participants can choose what they want to learn based on the gaps in their knowledge and they can then be tested. This is a more interactive and engaging way of learning since the participant has more control.



The success of the pull approach depends on the L&D department creating a need for their people to use the content. For example by using scenario based assessments or problem solving activities. In this way the participants will be motivated to find a solution (Articulate, 2009).

Pull learning via sharing platforms

Another approach to pull learning is by incorporating a sharing/collaborative feature to facilitate social learning. As well as searching for content, participants can also share their own knowledge and share content found via the internet. The platform then becomes a facilitator of learning rather than a supplier of learning, which is a more advanced approach to pull learning.



The advantages of pull learning through sharing platforms is that most people are already accustomed to sharing information via social media through their smartphone and searching for useful content on the internet to help improve their knowledge. It is also a way to connect everyone in the organisation to improve the flow of knowledge. For example, forums can be created to specifically discuss and share information in a certain topic area and employees can look for advice from others when encountering challenges in their role.

The disadvantages of this type of learning is that some employees may feel reluctant to share information. However participation will organically increase if encouragement is given by leaders by providing feedback and sharing success stories. Over time employees will see the value of participating on this type of platform as they will be able to do their jobs more effectively (J. Stempel, 2014).

Many L&D professionals are concerned with how to measure social learning. Rather than following customary reporting such as number of participants and ratings, L&D should look at the impact of the efforts. How valuable is the experience to learners, has it helped them resolve a problem more quickly or get information faster to close a sale?

10 The power of social learning

Social media can be defined as “a set of technologies and channels targeted at forming and enabling a potentially massive community of participants to productively collaborate” (Bradley, 2010).

According to Nigel Paine, “leveraging social and informal learning massively increases the impact of any formal programmes and is a fundamental building block to developing a learning culture and a learning organisation”. By harnessing social and informal learning, the learning department creates a learning environment where employees feel responsible for their own training, while being supported by the company.



Implementing a social media function

Adapting a social media function to mobile learning helps to bring about a shift from building courses and classes, to creating a work/learn environment within the workplace. Thomas and Akdere (2013) conducted a literature review on the effects of social media in workplace learning. Although it is a relatively new tool, they were able to draw some conclusions and provide some recommendations on how to implement social media into a mobile learning platform:

1. Repositories

Firstly, repositories can be built for the knowledge created through social media. Posts can be tagged by topic and stored in a searchable database.

2. Promote collaboration and virtual socialisation

By allowing the use of social media, a firm can then encourage its members to share ideas, look to each other for information, and to work collaboratively on projects and to solve problems.

3. Facilitate knowledge search and discovery

Once a knowledge management system is established it would be beneficial to add a search function. Members of the organisation will become accustomed to looking for answers in the knowledge databases created by various forms of collaborative media as well as sharing it with their peers.

Challenges to implementation

Not all organisations embrace or foster a culture that supports collaboration, learning, or new technologies. An organisational culture may in fact take on what is referred to as an “anti-learning culture”. It discourages learning, reflection, and knowledge sharing – for instance, by putting value exclusively on individual tasks and performance. In such organisations it is unlikely that this form of learning would be effective.

Bingham and Conner (2010) suggest a collaborative culture is achieved by the support and usage of open, collaborative, and trusting relationships from leaders and managers, whereby the efforts of employees are recognised, which in turn motivates them to learn. This demonstrates the importance of the manager’s role in the successful deployment of such learning resources in order to ensure maximum effectiveness.

A further challenge to social learning is that some managers are not confident with the use of technology themselves. However, whilst managers may not be fully up-to-date with the latest social media platforms, Bingham and Conner (2010) determine that the majority of the present and future workforce are “already widely using collaborative media tools. Therefore they are more knowledgeable of such tools than organisations tend to assume.”

Furthermore, managers may emphasise the word “social” in social media and assume that it will be used for non-work related purposes. It is suggested that the term “collaborative media” might be better employed to describe any social media tool used for productive work-related purposes to avoid any misconceptions regarding its usage. In this way it is more likely that

organisational leaders and managers will consider the implementation of these tools to foster informal learning among employees.

The benefits of social learning

If an organisation does foster social learning successfully the benefits are that:

- The organisation will stimulate creativity, innovation, and complex problem solving and more likely to remain competitive.
- Incorporating a social media aspect into an mlearning platform, will enhance the benefits of using social media at work whilst minimising the negative impact that some social media websites can have.
- The L&D department at last get to organise, control, influence and measure informal learning through mobile learning.



The potential of social learning

Incorporating social learning into a mobile learning platform will positively impact an organisation. This is because:

Informal learning is responsible for 80% of people's learning

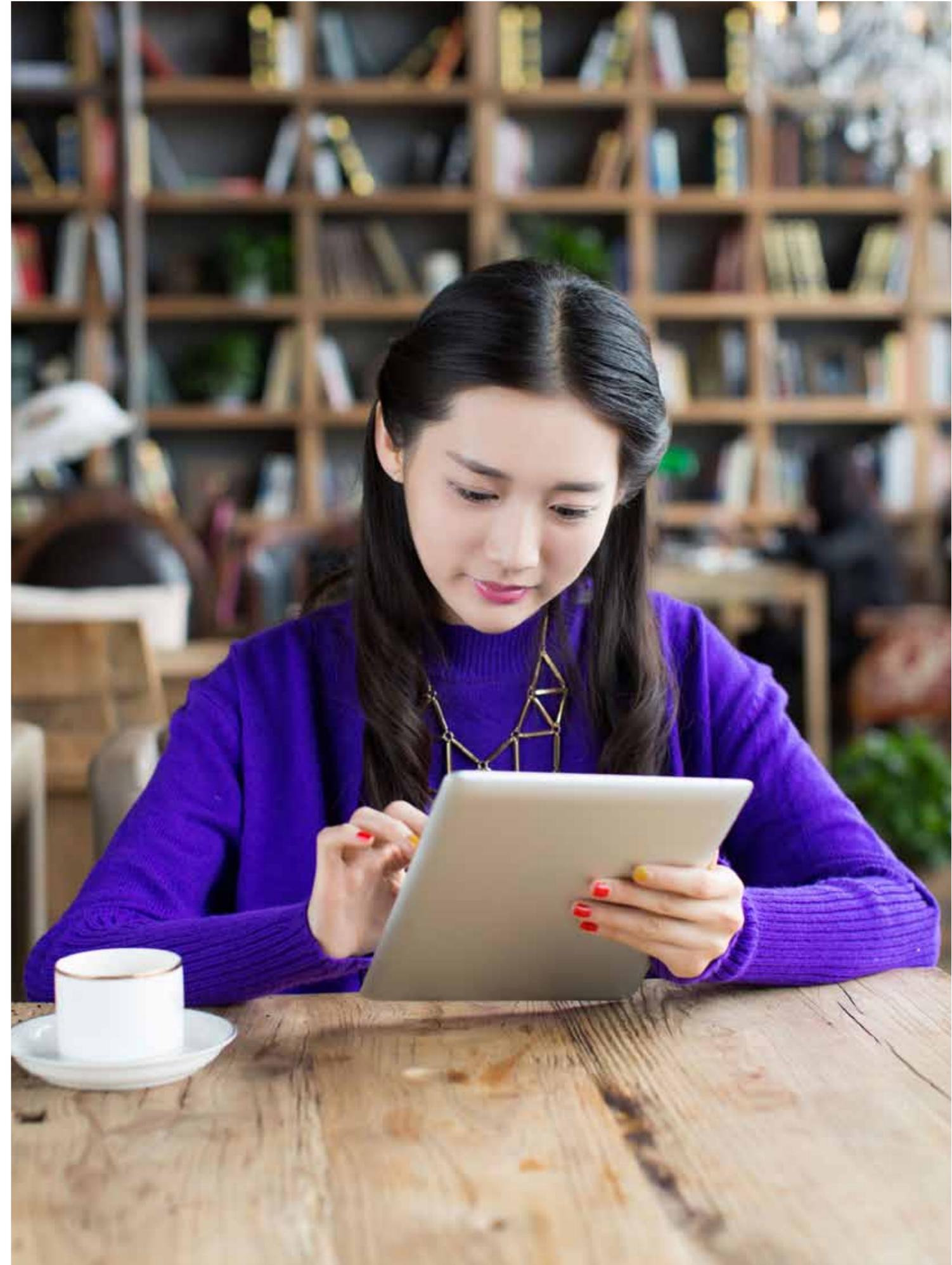
Almost 80% of what people learn at work comes from informal learning. If organisations do not use social media as part of their learning strategy, they are in danger of getting left behind. L&D departments could become irrelevant because people are going to post and share knowledge with one another without involving the learning function. It's a call to action for L&D departments to become really involved in social media in order to facilitate and enable informal learning.

Collaborative tools are required to solve complex problems

Those familiar with collaborative media tools are aware that problems, particularly in larger organisations, have become too broad and complex for any one person or, in some cases for any one team to solve. Collaborative media tools can be particularly effective in overcoming issues of this size and scope. Therefore collaborative media tools serve not only to create a culture that is attractive to talent, but also practical for problem solving.

Allows more effective working in global or dispersed organisations

As organisations become more global, workforces become even more dispersed, and supervisor–employee relationships can become increasingly less personal. Collaborative media tools will become more valuable not just for their ease of use for accessibility purposes but also because they will allow employees to work more effectively and efficiently on a global scale.



11 Eight key takeaways

From this report it is clear that the use of mobile learning is rapidly growing and that many organisations will find its application beneficial as part of their training mix. The challenge is how to roll-out mobile learning initiatives, that responds to the needs of each learner and that achieves the best results for both the individual and the organisation.

Below is a summary of the main findings of this report:

1. A widespread interest into corporate mlearning

There is no doubt that there is an appetite to research and implement mlearning. The businesses questioned were already knowledgeable about mobile learning and its potential.

2. mlearning is under experimentation or recent implementation

Around 50% of the companies questioned were already using mobile learning, and had experimented with it over the past few years. Generally mlearning solutions were not currently satisfying their training needs and they are in an ongoing development phase, tweaking them in order to create a more effective tool.

3. Features of current mlearning platforms

Video was the most effective means of presenting content, followed by audio and text. Quizzes are also a very popular feature – used as a way to consolidate what has been taught. In the sales environment gamification elements were found to be effective to increase engagement in learning.

4. The necessity of formal learning remains

It takes more than mobile learning to teach people how to change the way they do things, and how to think differently. A blended learning solution is recommended; one which includes classroom training, coaching and mobile learning.

5. Importance of feedback in the learning process

Feedback is very important in the learning process. Mobile learning can incorporate communication features to assist managers with providing coaching and feedback. However our research found that mlearning should not try to replace a manager's personal coaching role or the relationship they have built with their people – but rather support it.

6. Motivation is more influential to learning than the method used

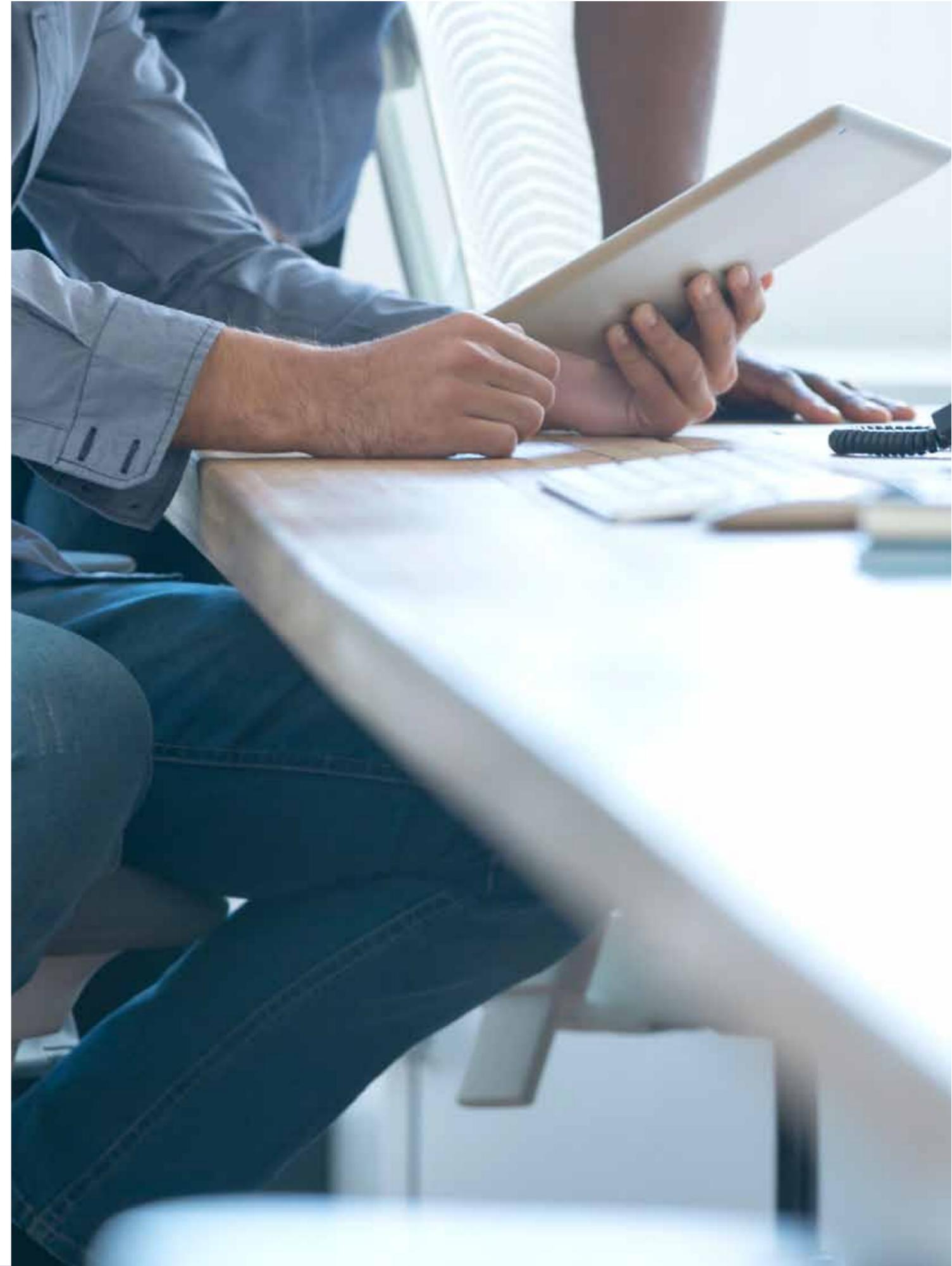
Research has shown that there is a low correlation between the way people learn and their performance. According to Gu (2014), motivation is key. Organisations need to ensure they are doing all they can to improve motivation for mlearning.

7. mlearning should not be regarded as learning

Employees are currently struggling with the concept of mlearning. The study found that by simply not calling it mobile learning, and viewing it not as a training tool, but rather as a way to help employees, would be the most effective approach. Designing a programme that learners will enjoy and not feel like they are “learning” would deliver the best outcome. By starting with the employee’s needs and what they would ideally like to achieve, would make employees more motivated, and more likely to incorporate a mobile app into their everyday lives.

8. Future of mlearning is within social learning

Whilst the use of collaborative media is fast growing, it is still within its early stages of use. Collaborative learning is highly beneficial to employees because it’s learner-focused and accessible to learners anytime and anyplace. Due to the instantaneous applicability, learning that occurs through collaborative media tends to be retained more easily and shared more readily. If organisations are to remain competitive they will need to harness the power of collaborative learning.



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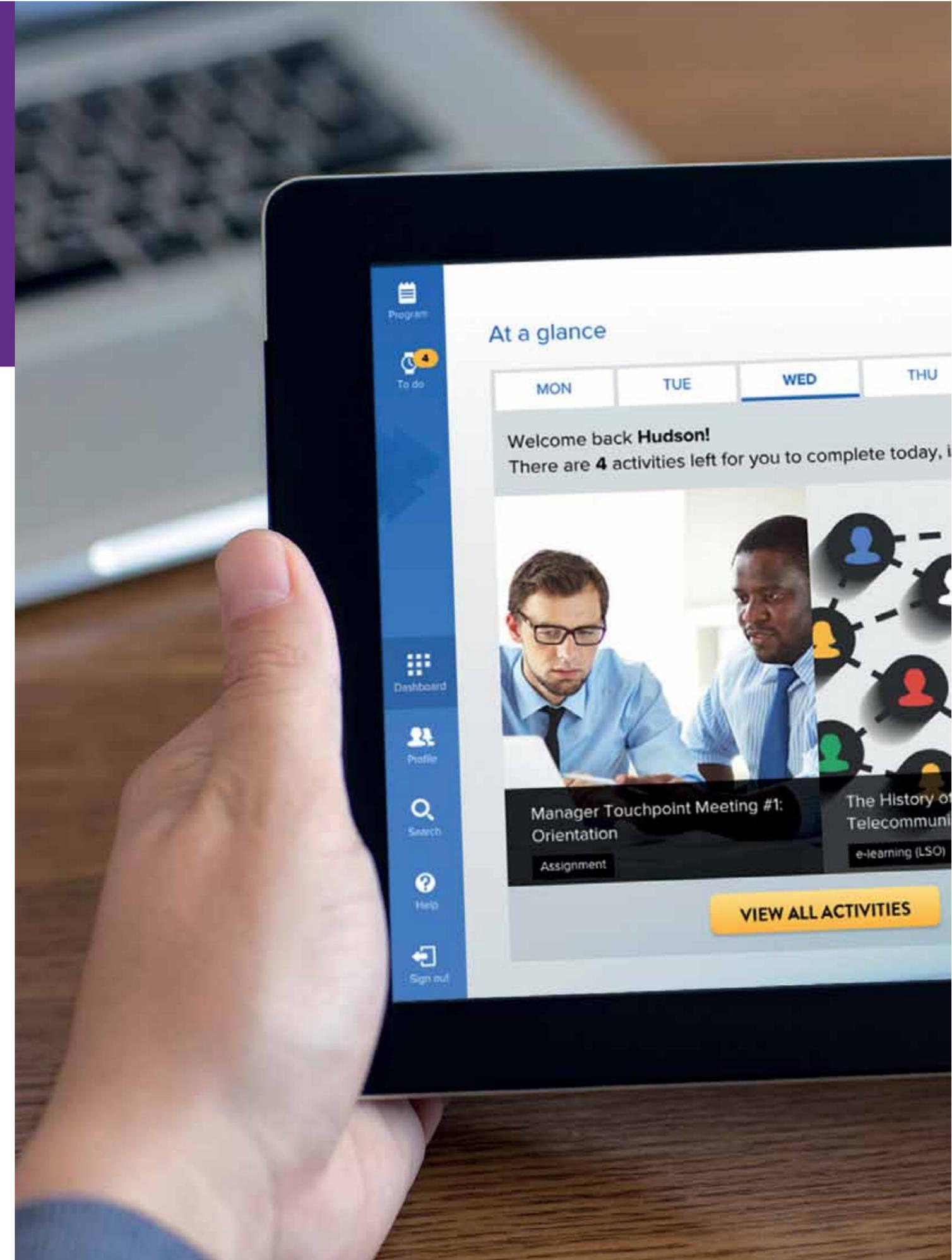
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