

Benchmarking E-Learning Capability: An International Application of the E-Learning Maturity Model

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Abstract:

The E-Learning Maturity Model (eMM; Marshall and Mitchell 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006) provides a means by which institutions can assess and compare their capability to sustainably develop, deploy and support e-learning. The eMM is based on the ideas of the Capability Maturity Model (CMM, Paulk et al., 1993) and SPICE (Software Process Improvement and Capability dEtermination, El Emam et al., 1998; SPICE, 2002) methodologies. The key concept is that the ability of an organisation to be effective in a particular area of work is dependent on their capability to engage in high quality, reproducible, processes that can be sustained and built upon.

A problem with many existing maturity models is that they presuppose the capability being measured falls neatly within a continuum of hierarchical levels. Implicitly there is a presumption that success cannot be achieved at higher levels without being fully capable at the lower levels. More explicitly, assertions are made that the higher levels are inherently more effective than the lower levels in providing the capability being assessed. The concept underlying the eMM's use of dimensions is holistic capability. Rather than the model measuring progressive levels, it describes the capability of a process from the synergistic perspectives of Delivery, Planning, Definition, Management and Optimisation.

A key aspect of the eMM is that it does not rank institutions, but rather acknowledges the reality that all institutions will have aspects of strength and weakness that can be learnt from and improved. The model's focus on collecting and sharing effective practice, rather than measuring against a pre-determined outcome means that the eMM can evolve as technology and pedagogy change. This model has been successfully piloted and refined in New Zealand (Marshall and Mitchell 2005; Marshall 2005, 2006) and used to both guide individual institution's understanding of their e-learning capability as well as providing useful information on the sector as a whole - outcomes which can be translated into any other institutional and regional context in order to guide strategic and operational planning and investment.

This presentation describes the extensively updated set of benchmarks that constitute the current version of the eMM along with results from further application of the eMM in the UK and Australia. Lessons learnt from both an e-learning leadership and a quality improvement perspective are included.