

**Identifying a leverage point to improve
business performance through eLearning:
A case study in a financial institution**

by

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2: Abstract

In an ever-changing world of work Absa, as a business, is faced with various challenges including the continuous development of skills. Due to technological advancements, eLearning can provide a mechanism to rapidly build the required strategic and tactical skills that the organisation needs. This study explored the challenge of articulating the contribution of eLearning to business performance in an unbounded way.

The study focused on the **creation of knowledge about how the contribution of eLearning to business performance can be improved**. In the process of knowledge creation, the study focused on identifying the point of value creation between Business¹ and an eLearning intervention. This **point of value creation** can be seen as a **leverage** point. Systems Thinking was implemented as an approach in order to identify the leverage point.

The following **research objectives** were defined:

- To identify the **driver problem**² that prevents eLearning from improving³ business performance.
- To design the **systems dynamic model**⁴ that represents the driver problem.
- To identify the **leverage point**⁵ within the systems dynamic model.
- To reflect⁶ on the **effect** that the **behaviour** of the individuals, participating in the research process, has on the research inquiry.

¹ In this study the word '**Business**' refers to the eChannels: Contact Centre Division. It implies that the following stakeholders are part of the grouping – operational management responsible for business results, team leaders, and the employees (also referred to as learners). A detailed description of this sample is available in Chapter 3.

² The driver problem is the leverage point in a system of problems. Removing this driver problem will influence the system the most.

³ Contributing to a positive influence, or taking advantage of (Senge *et al.* 1994).

⁴ A **systems thinking diagram** is a tool that supports us to see the underlying structures of events and patterns (Salisbury, 1996).

⁵ **Leverage** in a systemic context can be seen as the concept where specific element/s of a system have a **large influence** on the holistic system by even the smallest action.

⁶ Reflection includes the observation of the behaviour of the Focus Group participants and the attempt to understand the effect of these behaviours on the outcome of the study.

The sample of 28 focus group participants was selected from two specific divisions of Absa – the eChannels: Contact Centre and the Learning and Development Department. This sample consisted of Operational Management, Team Leaders, Contact Centre Consultants and learning design experts. Executive Management was excluded from the focus groups, but was included in the process as verifiers. This created an opportunity for Executive Management to voice their opinions.

The results of the study indicate that the leverage point for successful contribution of eLearning to business performance is ...

A shared mental model of expectations between the participating stakeholders.

Once Business and the Learning and Development Department start going through the constructive cycle of the systems dynamic model repeatedly, they will continuously build the **shared mental model of expectations**. This cycle will also build on the: 1) Level of **visible support** of the line managers; 2) Level of **clarity of business needs** to all relevant stakeholders; 3) **Number of requests** from business for eLearning opportunities; and 4) Level of **awareness and understanding** of appropriate eLearning interventions per target population. The effect of the positive reinforcement of the recurring cycle will ensure that eLearning continuously contributes to business performance.

During the study the effect of the research process on the focus group participants as well as the effect of the focus group participants on the research process was also accounted for. Observers reflected on the behaviour of the focus group participants and found that their opinions and thought processes influenced the outcome of the study. The focus group participants felt that they had learnt something new, that the tasks set to the groups was clear and that the topics they had learnt most about were '**systems thinking**' followed by the '**relationship between eLearning and business performance**'.

Keywords: eLearning, Business performance, Leverage point, Systems Thinking, Driver problem, Focus Groups, Systems dynamic model, Financial institution, Return on expectation, Return on investment.

3: Acknowledgements

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