

Software solution identifies skills gaps in the workplace

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Training employees to do their jobs effectively is something many companies would like to - and need to - improve. Now European researchers are developing software tools to ensure skills gaps are identified and plugged.

In most traditional settings, companies handle learning management and [business](#) process management as two wholly separate activities. This results in a mismatch between the training provided to employees and the actual business needs of the company.

The human resources managers who are responsible for deciding on training needs often lack the necessary detailed insight into the corporate context in which training is provided. As a result, the actual training needs of the employees with respect to their changing business duties are not fully met.

Companies in this situation are not operating nearly as efficiently, or as profitably, as they could be if there was a proper alignment between individual training and business priorities.

The PROLIX project was launched in 2006 to introduce business-process oriented learning - combining corporate training and business process management - to companies and organisations in the European Union.

Analysing business processes

Scheduled to run until the end of this year, the EU-funded project has been developing new software that is able to analyse business processes - and the competencies required for those processes - to identify any skills gaps.

According to project coordinator Volker Zimmermann, “Once we have identified what is needed to make businesses faster or more cost-effective, we can then target training and provide a measured learning outcome.”

PROLIX has developed a methodology to ensure the training that companies offer to their employees fits in with business requirements so as to improve the company.

The first step is to conduct a business process analysis, which is done with software modelling tools enhanced with competency data related to the specific business processes. Process managers and HR managers within the company provide the necessary information.

This is an ongoing activity because, as processes, products and services evolve and change, so too do the skills gaps and special needs.

Once the data is entered, the process becomes automated, with the PROLIX tools conducting a skills gap analysis so employees can be given the training courses they need to do their jobs properly.

Improving call centre skills

Once the initial research and development work was done, five test beds were set up with the three main ones being the call centre at a major

telecoms operator, the credit control department of a large bank and a public-sector organisation rating social care homes in the UK.

“In the call centre example there are three levels of support for [callers],” Zimmermann says. “When a call comes in, the person who answers is the first level and he or she opens a ticket and tries to... provide answers and close the ticket. But if he can’t, it gets passed to the second level and possibly even to the third - the higher it goes, the more expensive it becomes.

“If the company wants to optimise the process, it needs to identify what knowledge the call centre agents need to make sure most tickets get closed at the first level of support.”

In this example, the PROLIX tools were able to identify the knowledge gaps of the first-level staff and make sure they got additional training to fill those gaps. As the telcos’ services change and develop, the software continues to monitor the situation and see how well the first-level call centre staff are keeping up with the new developments.

With the care home test bed, individual homes are rated as one, two or three stars depending on the specific competencies of their staff. PROLIX is able to measure the level of those competencies and identify the training which needs to be done in homes to get a higher star rating.

Commercialising the research

The project brings together a consortium of academic institutions, test bed partners, and software development partners, including the two largest European vendors of learning technology, a major business process management company, a competency management company, and a company dealing in learning games. The commercial [software](#) partners are from Germany, Italy, Finland and Belgium.

Most of them intend to continue working together once the project is finished to commercialise the system or integrate parts of it into their existing products.

“As a consortium, we are better placed than our American competitors to link learning solutions into business solutions,” says Zimmermann. “We think it is a European strength to solve complex issues and integrate our solutions with business solutions whereas the American vendors tend to develop standalone applications.”

He points out that there will only be customers for the products spun off from the project if it can be demonstrated that the process improves productivity. “We think we have already done this with the test beds, which gives us a competitive advantage,” he concludes.

Provided by [ICT Results](#)

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