

AUSTRALIAN **FLEXIBLE LEARNING** FRAMEWORK

Managed by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group on behalf of all States and Territories in conjunction with ANTA

2002 RTO Case Study Project 'Against the odds!'

Pelion Consulting Pty Ltd.



November 2002

RTO Case Study Foreword

The following case study is one of 18 case studies that document the use and application of Australian Flexible Learning (AFL) Framework products and services by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). The case studies are an initiative of the AFL Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System 2000 – 2004 as a means of offering ‘real-life’ examples of how RTOs are implementing elearning strategies with the assistance of AFL Framework products and services. Each participating RTO has documented their experiences over a six month period (June 2002 to November 2002) and have been selected from each State and Territory representing the TAFE, Private Provider, Enterprise and VET in Schools sectors.

Each case study will provide you with an insight into how RTOs are implementing flexible learning and is critical reading if:

- You are interested in finding out about the possibilities of flexible learning
- You are currently implementing flexible learning within your organisation
- You are looking to extend your flexible learning delivery capabilities

Each case study covers areas such as;

- How to implement AFL Framework products and services
- Change management practices
- Customisation of flexible learning products and services
- Professional development
- Access and equity considerations
- Flexible learning strategic planning
- Blended learning techniques
- Marketing and much more.

Each case study highlights the various ways in which AFL Framework products and services can be applied to the learning environment to enhance client delivery and service.

For further information pertaining to AFL Framework products and services or to access other case studies visit discover.flexiblelearning.net.au or phone 07 3234 1852.

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Overview

This case study tells the story of our journey as we build an online product; the *'Rigorous Training Organisation'* to fill a niche in the demand for flexible, constructivist, positive, supported, online assessor learning experiences. The journey, made possible by Australian Flexible Learning (AFL) Framework products and services, explores and establishes how the chosen products and services assisted in our journey.

An underlying theme of the case study is that small, private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) can collaborate, at a distance, to develop and implement flexible learning and that micro RTOs can enter flexible learning without expensive infrastructure and investment. Australian Flexible Learning Framework products and services can support you to do it.

The AFL Framework products and services used in this case study include:

- Assistive Technologies for Online Training Delivery Report
- EdNA Online Website
- Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework
- Flexible Learning Leaders
- LearnScope
- Virtual Learning Community
- NET*Working 2002
- Online Guide to Resource Catalogues

In early February 2002 Pelion Consulting Pty. Ltd., a Tasmanian based RTO and E-learn.WA, based in Western Australia, commenced a self-funded collaborative project to develop a customisable online, multimedia learning resource, covering the 3 assessor units of the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. The prototype uses current metaphorical teaching and learning environments, incorporates educational design principles underpinning toolboxes and includes a recognition process.

We believed the *'Rigorous Training Organisation'* project would be a good focus for a case study. Our experiences, good and bad, exploring AFL Framework products and services would be recorded and available for others to learn from. For the purposes of the case study, Pelion Consulting Pty Ltd took the lead role, with contributions to the case study being drawn from appropriate sources including Pelion Consulting Pty. Ltd., E-learn.WA and individuals trialing the prototype. We commenced the case study in May 2002 and it was completed in November 2002.

2. Introduction

2.1 Organisation overview

Pelion Consulting Pty. Ltd. is a micro Registered Training Organisation, a two-person consultancy specialising in flexible learning and development, through communication and reflection. We are a virtual team, operating from our two home offices in Tasmania and using online technologies to have our regular business meetings. We work associatively, partnering colleagues as specific projects require particular expertise. We are yet to own a server, so we need the Web for our business. We work to stay lean, keen and responsive!

Pelion Consulting Pty. Ltd specialises in e-learning - developing people to facilitate learning, knowledge management and knowledge creation in flexible and online environments. We have extensive experience in designing, developing and delivering flexible learning, through communication and reflection. We have been working in the area of flexible delivery, as an organisation, since we formed in 1996.

Pelion is so named after Pelion East and Pelion West, complementary peaks in the Pelion mountain range in the highlands of Tasmania; an area renowned for the reflections in its alpine lakes and tarns. Mt. Pelion (Greece) was also the mountain that Atlas stood on to reach the heights of heaven!

E-learn.WA is an RTO that focuses on developing and implementing flexible learning solutions in partnership with enterprises, schools and other training providers. It is adept at identifying and responding to niche markets for flexible learning in Vocational Education and Training (VET), and is highly committed to developing educationally sound online products and services that are in tune with the needs and contexts of end-users.

Josephine Murray and Frankie Forsyth co manage Pelion Consulting and Frank Bate and Jean Macnish do likewise at E-learn.WA.

2.2 Where we were 'at' before the case study project

Experienced in writing flexible learning materials, Pelion Consulting Pty. Ltd. consultants had personally designed and developed our website and learning materials for the web-delivered professional development, using html editors such as Netscape Composer and Dreamweaver. Some of us had also played around with animations and sound design in Flash, but we had not previously designed and developed materials collaboratively 'at a distance', using storyboards, which others would interpret remotely.

Our strengths also lay in the networks we had developed over time and especially through Flexible Learning Leaders and LearnScope activities. We had our 'hunches' about marketing opportunities for web based courses, so despite little global marketing experience, we knew, with our local national and international networks to fall back on, that we could source this information. We had positive and extensive experience of working as a virtual team, and confidence this could be transferred to the case study project.

3. Getting started – Selecting the right AFL Framework products and services

3.1 Description of case study, the products we selected and why?

We had commenced the collaborative design of online learning materials for the 3 assessor units of the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training, using current educational design principles underpinning toolboxes and incorporating a recognition process. The prototype is called the *Rigorous Training Organisation* (a pun on Registered Training Organisations) and can be used in the same way as a Toolbox. We saw the need for such a product and, as two private enterprises, chose to self-fund its development.

The impetus came from our experience trialing the Series 1 Assessment and Training Toolbox with a LearnScope team of 11 separate RTO representatives and from the more recent Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) quality standards for how assessments should be conducted. From June 2002, RTOs were required to ensure that assessments are only conducted/managed by staff that have achieved competency in the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training - a pivotal qualification for VET practitioners. The three assessor units form part of that qualification.

We believed the '*Rigorous Training Organisation*' project would be a good focus for a case study. Our experiences, good and bad, exploring AFL Framework products and services, would be recorded and available for others to learn from. We were quite ambitious in the number of AFL Framework products we chose to include in this case study, but we believed that all would have a role to play in our journey. Some like the Flexible Learning Leaders program, we had already benefited from, and others were new to us. So, which ones did we choose and why?

3.1.1 Assistive Technologies for Online Training Delivery Report

This report provides information about how to ensure online products, such as our *Rigorous Training Organisation*, follow the principles for inclusive design and adhere to W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. We chose it as we believe in and support the principle of [universal design](#). This principle is defined by the Trace Centre as 'the process of creating products (devices, environments, systems and processes) which are useable by people with the widest possible range of abilities, operating within the widest possible range of situations, (environments, conditions and circumstances)' (1966). We also wanted to see what design features would be affected by applying the report's recommendations.

3.1.2 EdNA Online

The [EdNA Online site](#) is the gateway to information about education in Australia and is designed to promote the use of information and communication technologies and the Internet in Australian education. EdNA Online has an expanding database of over 375,000 educationally relevant websites. But this was not why we were interested in EdNA Online!

EdNA Online also offers tools such as forums, discussion lists, noticeboards, standards, a metadata toolset etc. free to the education sector. We were specifically interested in the 'listserv' tool, which we hoped would provide a safe and speedy way for our team to communicate while designing our product. We were interested in how easily it could be set up and maintained and how effective a medium it would be for such a project.

3.1.3 Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework

[The Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework](#) is designed to facilitate the effective development and delivery of sustainable flexible delivery solutions. It provides a planning model in which five key areas associated with flexible delivery are covered. Questions are provided as a starting point for planners to inquire into aspects of flexible delivery relevant to their situations.

The framework consists of the following sections:

Section	Focus
Strategic Directions	Understanding the strategic context for developing flexible delivery
Business Case	Assessing the market's requirements and the viability of potential delivery solutions
Solution Promotion and Development	Promoting and developing flexible delivery solutions
Solution Delivery and Evaluation	Delivering and evaluations flexible delivery solutions
Learning and Improvement	Identifying and implementing opportunities for improvement

We chose the Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework because we wanted to ensure that our project planning for the implementation of our flexible learning product was thorough and consistent with good practice. We planned to review our planning for the development of *Rigorous Training Organisation* in the light of the questions posed and checklists contained in the Framework, and highlight the most useful aspects of the Framework in the Case Study.

3.1.4 Flexible Learning Leaders

Flexible Learning Leaders is a professional development program that has provided development opportunities for VET managers, change agents, leaders or innovators to increase their effectiveness in implementing flexible learning.

Two of the *Rigorous Training Organisation* project designers (Frank Bate and Jo Murray) were Flexible Learning Leaders in the 2000 cohort. The Flexible Learning Leaders project provided a pivotal opportunity for both to further their flexible learning skills and knowledge and to network with other leaders. This led to the collaborative approach taken by our two small RTOs in developing *Rigorous Training Organisation*. We wished to acknowledge this in the Case Study and track (in brief) the events and networking, arising from the Flexible Learning Leaders project, which resulted in the development of the *Rigorous Training Organisation*. We planned to include reflections from the perspectives of both Flexible Learning Leaders, focusing on how small RTOs can be responsive at the cutting edge of online activity.

3.1.5 LearnScope

[LearnScope](#) is a team-based professional development project. A group of people work together to achieve skills and capabilities for delivering their services and products more flexibly, using new learning technologies.

We believe LearnScope to be one of the best mechanisms for professional development currently in operation. In a small way we wanted to showcase this service in the case study as a series of LearnScope projects we had undertaken where instrumental in our having the skills we needed to develop the *Rigorous Training Organisation*.

3.1.6 The Virtual Learning Community

The [Virtual Learning Community](#) provides a range of resources, online learning activities, showcases and forum discussions for people interested in extending their knowledge of flexible learning.

We hoped to find participants in the Virtual Learning Community who would critique the prototype *Rigorous Training Organisation*.

3.1.7 NET*Working 2002

[NET*Working 2002](#) was a major online event which attracted over 2,600 participants. We presented at the event, showcased our prototype and sought critique and debate about it. We chose this event as we wanted to describe the process and outcomes of opening up our prototype for comment and discussion during NET*Working 2002. We believe this was an innovative method of gathering feedback.

3.1.8 Online Guide to Resource Catalogues

The guide provides a description of the major registers of VET learning resources in Australia, with links to their websites. The description of each register covers:

- the scope of the site, including the quantity and nature of material it covers
- the types of services it offers (eg. can materials be purchased?).

[The Online Guide to Resource Catalogues](#) seeks to assist staff searching for flexible learning resources to deliver. We planned to use it to inform our choice of resources for *Rigorous Training Organisation*. We intended to search this guide to establish what resources are available and suitable for use in the development of the *Rigorous Training Organisation* product.

4. Putting flexible learning into practice with AFL Framework products and services! (Implementation)

4.1 How the AFL Framework products/services assisted us with our organisational goals

4.1.1 Assistive Technologies for Online Training Delivery Report

This AFL Framework product provides an extremely useful overview of issues, information and advice concerning the development/delivery of online learning for learners with disabilities and provides very useful links to other publications

We found the definitions clear and the descriptions of assistive technologies very useful in understanding how people with disabilities access computer based learning. For example, voice synthesizers such as JAWS TM (Job access with speech) enable people who are blind to access courses, by speaking text that is displayed on the screen.

Our product and content designers followed the recommendations outlined in the report and in subsequent publications, in particular the highly practical [EveryOne Online AFL Framework Strategy 2002 Project – Guidelines for universal design](#).

As our team said,

'I hadn't really considered online learning from the perspective of a person with a disability before. I've learned that assistive technologies do help, but only if the product designers consider how they might interface with their product. For example, such a simple thing as use of clear text instructions - "Click to read Maureen's memo", which tells you what will happen when you do click, makes it much easier for someone who is blind to access the course using JAWS TM (Job access with speech)'. FF

'There are so many simple things that we can do to make our products and services more accessible – they don't cost much, it's just a matter of knowing what makes a difference and including it in the initial design phases and, of course, testing it with users along the way.' MJ

The design team included a mix of people whose experience in designing products for users with disabilities ranged from very little to extensive experience. Because of this collaborative approach many of the design features had already been tested, in earlier products such as TruVision, using groups of users with specific disabilities – focusing especially on the vision impaired.

Other design aspects that were considered in the light of people with disabilities included:

- use of highly contrasting colours for people who are colour blind/sight impaired
- providing both audio and text versions for people who are deaf and/or on low bandwidth
- use of plain English and clear explanations, glossary
- limiting popup windows
- large 'landing' zones for mouse pointers

- keeping the size of downloads as small as possible.

Feedback on the prototype's design was positive,

'The text alternative to sound is a great idea. Obviously for those who have a hearing difficulty, but also for those who do not have the appropriate technology. My speakers picked up the sound but the quality was not great - some static and volume had to be turned up high and even then the sound was just OK. Not sure if it is my speakers or the program itself'. Interaction is great.' LF

We believe that by making our product more widely accessible to a broad range of clients we have fulfilled our social justice policy as a Registered Training Organisation and increased our potential market share as a byproduct.

4.1.1.2 Tips for making the best use of the Assistive Technologies for Online Training Delivery Report

- Use the report to provide you with excellent background information and then **dig deeper** into the areas that impact on you the most.
- Focus on your client group but remember to road test your product with a variety of users before going too far along the development path! Test, test and test again.

4.1.2 EdNA Online Website

Developing the *Rigorous Training Organisation* prototype is a collaboration with E-learn.WA in Western Australia. While some travel was possible between the two organisations, distance and other considerations meant that the bulk of the work would be done at a distance, so finding an inexpensive, fast, efficient, secure collaborative mechanism was crucial. We were fortunate in that Pelion Consulting Pty. Ltd. consultants already had experience in working as a 'virtual team' and so we were able to transfer those skills to the case study project.

Before we commenced the case study, in the initial stages of the *Rigorous Training Organisation* project, we were using a commercial listserv set up by one of our team. However, as a 'private' list on a very 'public' and well-known site, there was a concern about the potential for spamming and hacking as well as fluctuations in the speed of the messages. Because of this we decided to move to EdNA Online as our listserv host.

Setting up the EdNA Online listserv was more cumbersome and lengthy than doing so with the commercial site, but once over that hurdle, the listserv worked well. A listserv is an email address with a database of members it serves. It works like a group email ie. an email list with multiple names, except you don't have to remember to hit the 'Reply All' button, as everyone on the list (in the database) automatically receives and can reply to any message sent to it. Messages are sent and received via members' email programs.

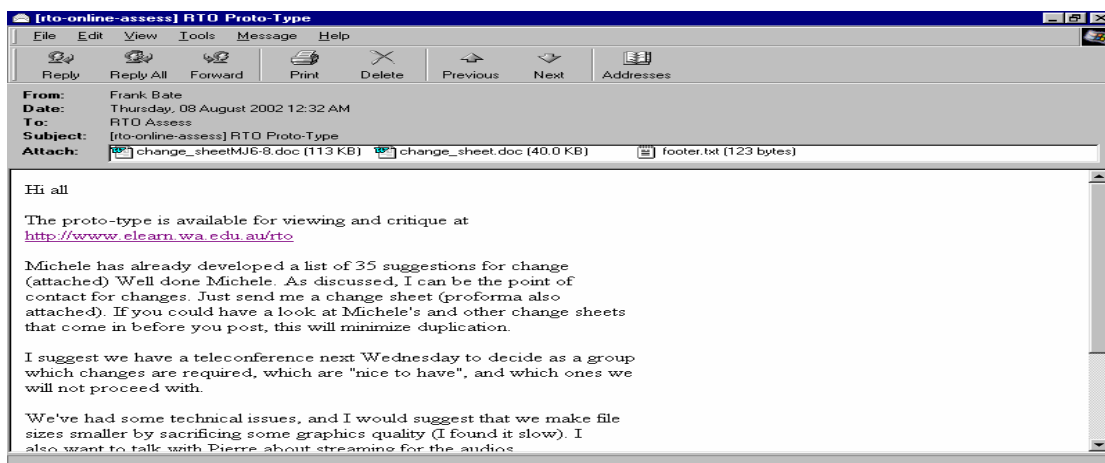
We used the listserv to keep in touch about the project, send attachments, discuss issues concerning the project, communicate our basic learning design and draft our prototype work based project. It was also great to track our progress over time. We also used the phone and had a couple of face to face sessions, but our primary means of communication was the EdNA Online listserv.

In the lead up to our presentation at NET*Working 2002 the listserv was very heavily used and proved an effective means of communication for resolving last minute issues and getting ready to showcase our prototype. We did have a problem with 'slow' turnaround times in the listserv – this wasn't critical, but worth knowing about if you need almost instant responses. To put this in perspective, by 'slow' I mean a delay of perhaps 2 – 2.5 hrs in response times, as opposed to the almost 'immediate' email times we've come to expect.

One positive that came from this experience was that the team at EdNA responded quickly to our queries about this problem. The Information Manager tested the site and the response times and the general conclusion was that the problem lay with one of our member's servers,

'Email can go through numerous email servers to get to its destination and it may be that one of those holds email (including listserv email) before sending it on. Some email servers are configured to hold email and send it in batches or to send it when other Internet traffic is light.' EdNA Information Manager

So, if 'instant' responses are important to you, it's worth testing a listserv, at different times. Overall, we found the EdNA listserv did the job we'd intended it to do and the backup support was good. One especially useful feature was the automatically generated report, which let the listserv manager know who had subscribed (joined) and who had left the list, in the timeframe covered.



4.1.2.1 Tips for making the best use of the EdNA Online Website

- Be persistent in setting it up and allow a few days to do so – it's a little tricky but once done it's very effective and user friendly.
- Test the time turnaround if speedy responses are important to you.
- Ensure all email addresses used by members are included so they can post to the listserv from any computer or site – especially laptops.

Another option worth investigating is peer to peer collaboration. These tools are becoming available at little/no cost for teams working at a distance. For example, [Groove](#), provides a forum for instant and asynchronous messaging, project management, meetings, browsing together, co writing and editing, sharing documents/graphics and talking over the net (VOIP). One disadvantage of a program like Groove is that for it to operate as a 'listserv', e.g. in order to know that a message has arrived it needs to remain open on your desktop – and that uses up memory. It's all a question of horses for courses!

4.1.3 Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework

Our intention in using the Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework was to check that our planning for the *Rigorous Training Organisation* project was thorough and consistent with good practice. In the end, time pressures meant that we really only used the framework as a check, to ensure that we hadn't forgotten anything in our planning process. For us, by far the most useful components of the Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework, were the questions posed in each section.

We skimmed through most of them as our earlier planning process had covered many of the aspects identified in the 5 sections. We did identify some gaps in our marketing strategy and took some steps to remedy these. Using the Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework has broadened our thinking in terms of the likely markets for our *Rigorous Training Organisation* product and led us to contact another organisation with greater experience in marketing such products both in Australia and overseas. This was the key message we gained from that organisation.

*'There's no point in first developing a product and then thinking about the market, you need to work out the market first, talk to your likely buyers about what **they** want/need, and then design your product to meet their needs'* JB

4.1.3.1 Tips for making the best use of the Flexible Delivery Business Planning Framework

- Build in time for planning in the early stages of your project and be ruthless in pulling out those questions, from the framework, which your project needs to pursue.
- Incorporate the framework questions into your pre-existing planning structure rather than creating a separate one.
- Use them as a starting point to dig deeper and deeper into the planning areas where you're weakest – it'll pay in the end.
- You may need to create some complementary planning frameworks if you don't already have these in place.

4.1.4 Flexible Learning Leaders (FLLs)

In a sense, without the Flexible Learning Leader program, this case study would not have come about. The benefits from sponsoring a Flexible Learning Leader in the 2000 cohort are still unfolding. The worth of learning and networking opportunities in the program, have already been proved in the setting up of this collaborative development project. It is unlikely that these relationships would have occurred, let alone to such depth, without the program.

The project idea was borne in an email exchange between the two Flexible Learning Leaders, about the need for an educationally sound design for online assessor training, with greater flexibility and options for delivery. They were both curious to work together, to try something new. The challenge, to enable two small private RTO's to collaborate across distance, and to provide a cutting edge product, was undeniable but intriguing. The idea started out as follows:

There's got to be a market for well designed online assessor training, especially within the TAFE sector, with the AQTF requirements. We've got the experience and the know how, we just need to put it together. Things are a bit quiet at the moment...let's have a go. JM

Reflections after NET*Working 2002

*It has been a challenge to take a punt on this project and to fit it into increasingly busy schedules, which we probably could have foreseen, but couldn't bank on back then. We had to take the fantastic user-testing opportunity that NET*Working 2002 provided! JM*

Ideas to improve our collaboration:

Being clear about communication protocols, having consistent project workers and using Groove to manage the crossover between developer and designer will improve the development process. FB

The amount of interpretation may be reduced by doing the bulk of the text directly into Dreamweaver, mapping the design onto storyboards in synchronous collaborative sessions in Groove and then following up with Change Sheets. I'd certainly continue this sort of collaboration as we're just fine tuning the process now. JM

The team still has to test some of these ideas.

4.1.4.1 Tips for making the best use of the Flexible Learning Leaders

- Estimate the time, treble it and back fill your position – it will take more than you think, but will be worth it!
- Find yourself an individual mentor or personal leadership coach and use that person well.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate, within your organisation and within the FLL group
- Look for collaborative opportunities with other FLLs.
- Ensure you have some time to yourself, to work and reflect, away from your workplace
- Identify other FLL people 'in all but name' in the organisation and enable them to learn from, feed into and support you and your project.
- Provide sufficient enabling mechanisms to allow FLLs room to implement new ideas and move the organisation forward.
- Plan the reward for your family and/or support system.

4.1.5 LearnScope

Both Pelion Consulting Pty. Ltd. and E-learn.WA are strong supporters of LearnScope and between us have initiated, facilitated and mentored LearnScope projects since the

program's inception. The professional development gained has been sustainable, long term and has assisted both organisations to develop and work in the area of flexible learning. In short, aside from the Flexible Learning Leaders program we consider it to be one of the best professional development mechanisms currently in operation. For the case study we again and again drew on skills and knowledge gained from previous LearnScope projects.

4.1.5.1 Tips for making the best use of LearnScope

- Be really clear in your project plan and choose a great facilitator
- Draw on the expertise available from the LearnScope team – national and state
- Build in plenty of time for testing and reflection in your project
- Reward your effort
- Check out the masses of information on the LearnScope project_site (learnscope.flexiblelearning.net.au)

4.1.6 Virtual Learning Community

We had planned to test and 'fine tune' our product based on the feedback provided by members of the [Virtual Learning Community](#) (VLC). However, while we set up a community within the site during NET*Working 2002, to accommodate those members of the VLC who were not registered for the NET*Working 2002 event, our timing was not the best. Or perhaps there weren't any! In any case, the low response from the VLC was, we believe, influenced by the huge numbers of people accessing NET*Working 2002 and what was on offer.

On reflection, we could have accessed the VLC in a smarter way by targeting our 'community' better, and/or changing our timing. For example, we could have run another community discussion after NET*Working 2002 or targeted specific LearnScope groups with an interest in assessment. However, our need for immediate feedback was met in the NET*Working 2002 event. We maintain the VLC forum on the *Rigorous Training Organisation* in case anyone is either browsing around or wants to comment. We still believe the VLC offers fabulous networking facilities and information and we are using it for a range of purposes outside of the case study.

4.1.6.1 Tips for making the best use of the Virtual Learning Community

- Register as a member – it's free and greatly enhances the features you can access.
- Spend some time familiarising yourself with the site layout – there's heaps there and it's easy to miss something.
- Consider what else is competing with you at the time you plan to run your discussion – there's only so much people can do in the time available.
- If you're not sure where to post or what section you need to be in, contact the VLC coordinators for advice.
- Use the instant messaging to network with people outside the VET sector.

4.1.7 NET*Working 2002

We believed that by participating in NET*Working 2002 we would be able to gauge interest in our product, obtain comments and then 'fine tune' it based on the feedback provided by members of this community. Did it work? During NET*Working 2002 our showcase 'Jump into the deep end of assessing' had 2,043 'views' of this event (including the discussion areas). That's a lot of hits!

People commented,

'Had a look - reckon it could adequately deliver the 3 competencies - and is a vast improvement on the Toolbox that attempted the same thing...well done - hope to see the final version'

(note: the Toolbox referred to here was the initial Series 1- known as the 'experimental stage' they have greatly improved since then.)

'The text alternative to sound is a great idea.'

'The interactivity on this course is a lot crisper and much more realistic.'



We received some feedback on areas where there were glitches for example one person commented,

My sound is not working and I couldn't download the text of Bill's discussion

We used the listserv to notify our developers and it was fixed the following day. We also set up a register for people wanting more information about it. 36 people indicated their interest and we followed up their interest via email with a short questionnaire.

Comments included:

I feel that the RTO prototype will assist lecturers working in remote areas to develop their skills in a manner that does not require them to travel long distances. I also feel

that the experience gained will assist lecturers/staff etc to experience online learning so they gain a better understanding of how students may feel when attempting an online course. It provides an opportunity for RTO's to discover difficulties associated with online learning and will encourage lecturers and support staff to develop answers and programmes that should address these difficulties. AG

I liked the look of the interface as it simulated the workplace and would allow learners to practice workplace assessor competencies in a 'safe' environment. It would also be useful in giving some of our staff experience in using an online course. I am looking forward to seeing more of the course as it is developed. JW

I feel that the RTO prototype will make a great professional development tool that can also be utilised as part of a training program for 'wanna be' trainers - great for self paced training. MK

The sheer size of NET*Working 2002 was in many ways overwhelming but the team greatly valued the opportunity to showcase our prototype and the immediacy of the feedback we received.

4.1.7.1 Tips for making the best use of the NET*Working 2003/4 (note the conference alternates between a fully online and mix of face-to-face and online)

- Attend/present at the 2003 face to face conference and/or access any online information about it.
- For the 2004 online event - negotiate at least 2-3 days worth of professional development leave from your organisation and schedule regular times to participate
- Read the guide for the handy tips and check the program as early as possible.
- Plan for the event as far in advance as you can – there's always so much to choose from.

4.1.8 Online Guide to Resource Catalogues

We had significant experience in delivering assessor training to a range of groups and had developed a good bank of resources for delivering face to face, as well as trialing some more reflective and discursive online techniques with learner assessors using mixed mode delivery.

When we came to design the *Rigorous Training Organisation* we spent a short time searching the databases contained in the Online Guide to Resource Catalogues. We found some useful links to Toolboxes but decided that it was preferable to start the design from a 'blank page' and then seek out resources to back up the core projects we developed specifically for online use. We found that in most cases we already held suitable downloadable resources (definitions, proformas etc) for the prototype and could redesign our existing resources to suit the online environment faster than searching for others' work and then having to adapt it.

Another consideration was the copyright issue, we wanted to be very clear on ownership of material and it was, again, easier to use our own material rather than source and obtain permission from others. Time was a major factor here. We believe that some of the current AFL Framework projects i.e. the Legal and Regulatory Framework for Flexible Learning (flexiblelearning.net.au/resources/1resources-s163.htm) and work being done on improving the indexing and search abilities of

resource catalogues will increase the usefulness of online resource catalogues generally. We'll certainly be checking them again as we identify resources we don't have.

4.1.8.1 Tips for making the best use of the Online Guide to Resource Catalogues

- Focus on which specific resources you need and give some thought to what they might be called before you start searching. The more specific you are the easier it is to locate them.
- Be confident in following the links – you can always use the back button to return to a previous frame.
- Consider whether you are prepared to pay for resources or prefer freebies.
- Check out any examples provided to get an idea of the type of resource and whether it will meet your need.

5. How to get the most out of AFL Framework products and services

Tips on how to best use AFL Framework products and services

We've scattered our tips throughout this case study but we'd also like to suggest that it pays to have a diary reminder to check the new products and services in [The AFL Framework Products and Services Guide](#). It provides a brief product/service description and outlines the benefits associated with each product and service within the AFL Framework and who they are most suited to. This is a must read to keep up with the latest information.

Another aspect we'd like to emphasise is the friendliness and helpfulness of all those involved in the various products and services we used. If you are considering doing so, but have any queries or just need some help to get started, we found that the project coordinators are more than willing to offer a helping hand or to overcome difficulties.

6. Conclusion

Brief summary of how our involvement in the case study has contributed to improving our organisation's flexible learning capabilities and how our experience can assist other RTOs.

Wow! It's been a fabulous journey and so much has been learnt along the way... and we've really only paused briefly to write up this journal before the next phase begins. Two small private RTOs have successfully collaborated on a multimedia development project, at a distance, using a range of technologies and on a shoestring budget. Against all the odds - it can be done!

We've broadened our thinking in terms of the likely markets for our *Rigorous Training Organisation* product and enhanced our profiles as developers/facilitators of online learning programs. We've made time to explore many of the wonderful resources and products and services developed under the AFL Framework

Through our participation in the *Rigorous Training Organisation* and writing our experiences in this case study we have confirmed that we're moving in the right direction. Our experiences in the case study have reinforced the many benefits that flexible learning provides us and other training organisations.

It has shown us that flexible learning is not a replacement for face-to-face delivery. Though it can do this, for us it's not an 'either or' scenario. It certainly requires additional skills to create good quality resources and still relies on good teaching/facilitation. We see flexible learning as a great value adding tool for pedagogy that also increases options for learners. The web's use as a learning medium, as a communicative, collaborative tool, is still relatively new to many. But we'd suggest not for long!

To sum up, one of our members wrote in the listserv,

There's been so much money and effort put into these AFL Framework products and services that I really did wonder how useful they'd be. Well, now we know it's been worth it!

7. Acknowledgments

People involved in the case study

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