

From training to learning: Using PebblePad to enhance professional development

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Chosen theme(s)

Professional learning and accreditation

The context

In January 2013 the Centre for Learning and Development (CLD) was tasked with designing a program to increase the management and leadership capabilities of Edith Cowan University's (ECU's) current and aspiring supervisors. Although we delivered other management programs to our staff, we identified a gap in development for this section of our community. The program needed to be suitable for both academic and general staff focusing on the skills required to effectively supervise and develop teams, and manage systems and resources. The Program we developed follows a blended learning approach with 11 face-to-face workshops and accompanying post-workshop activities for participants to utilise within their workplace. The first four modules are foundational units which were specifically developed for this program. The other seven modules are chosen from existing professional development courses run within the University.

PebblePad was selected as the platform as it allowed participants the opportunity to not only reflect on the development sessions they attended, but also to build their own learning portfolio around the outcomes of the post-workshop activities. ATLAS provided the additional benefit of enabling participants to engage in discussions before and after the workshops as well as providing a repository for additional resources.



How it was ...

In other Management and Leadership training programs we have used ECU's Learning Management System (LMS), Blackboard. As the content is controlled and maintained by the course coordinators, participants who store their learning reflections on the Blackboard site lose their content when the site is closed down at the end of the program. In designing the Supervisor Program we wanted a way for participants to revisit their reflections and PebblePad offers a way for them to retain control of their own content as well as submitting it to the course facilitators for assessment and recording.

The approach

After attending each module participants are given some post-workshop activities. One component is to complete a learning reflection about the session. Other activities include workplace learning or research. These are all recorded in Pebble+. Resources have been developed for use, some of which have been set up to automatically submit to the course facilitators via ATLAS. Completion of activities is then recorded and feedback given.

The first resource is a workbook called Supervisor Post-Workshop Reflections Workbook and allows space to record reflections for each of the 11 modules participants need to complete. This resource was created by compiling 11 templates into one workbook with different tabs titled with the module name. The advantage of this approach is that students can use the one asset and keep their reflections together. Questions they need to address include:

- What have I learned?
- How did I find the learning process?
- How did I feel about what I learned?
- What can I do with what I have learned?

We also developed two other templates for reflections:

- Workplace Implementation – this allows participants to record the outcomes of the activities we ask them to complete within the workplace. They need to describe the activity and reflect on:
 - What learning underpinned this activity?
 - What was the outcome of this activity?
- Taking action on incidents – this is to be used to record any incidents they need to act upon in their daily work, how they handle them and what they would do differently next time. They describe the incident and answer the questions:
 - How did you feel about this?
 - What action did you take?
 - What have you learned so far that was relevant to this situation?



We also use the Resources section in ATLAS to store all resources relating to the Program. There are general resources relating to the Supervisor Program as well as specific panels for each of the foundational modules. This is where we load participant workbooks and PowerPoint slides as well as articles and information referred to within the workshop.

The main mode of communication with participants is through the “Conversations” facility in ATLAS. One of the first activities participants are asked to undertake in Module 1 is to introduce themselves on the Conversations link. We have set up a conversation entitled “Welcome and Introductions”. They are asked to write about their role and to answer the question “To know me is to know that...”. This has been a great conversation as we have had the privilege of getting to know these people a little bit more. It is hoped that not only will participants build their network but as they do they will form valuable relationships.

“Conversations” has also been used to communicate some interesting articles relating to the management and leadership area.

Follow this link (<https://v3.pebblepad.com.au/alt/ecu/Asset/View/34w9d78fkg8GpdhG93n39mRp9c>) to a webfolio which showcases information about the Supervisor Program, the use of PebblePad and some of the templates we have created.

How it is now

The program has run for one year and participants have embraced the PebblePad learning portfolio. Initially there was some apprehension from participants however after initial training and some personal coaching participants now seem to be comfortable submitting required learning reflections for assessment and feedback. The Conversations space has been used for sharing of information and research regarding topics covered in the Program. Participants are building their Learning Portfolios and are beginning to make use of the other features in Pebble+ to store additional information relating to their career development.

The benefits

This has been a great way to encourage our staff to focus on their career development. PebblePad is available to all staff within the University; however most people are unaware of what it is. By promoting the use of PebblePad within the Supervisor Program, staff have had the opportunity to become familiar with it and can now see the value not only from developing a learning portfolio, but also as a way to collect all career related information in one place.



We received several testimonials from participants, some of which are included below:

"I find Pebblepad useful when working on my reflection journals because:

- It allows me to work at my own pace, providing me with the flexible editorial functions which make working on my journals really easy;*
- I am assured that the materials I have on PebblePad are secured, well organised and easily retrievable on and off campus; and*
- I also use PebblePad to organize my other CV assets so that I can find them all in one place."*

"Writing reflections using PebblePad is beneficial. Having a chance to sit back and reflect on what we had gone through during the sessions and documenting those reflections on PebblePad allowed me greater clarity and insight of not only what I had known before and what I had gained from the session, but also what areas I could improve on. My working life is so busy that it is easy to just keep going the same way as always, whereas this reflective process has highlighted the need to use reflection as a way to not only improve my working outcomes but also as validation when appropriate."

"The Post-Workshop Reflections Workbook reflections provided on Pebblepad are completed fairly quickly with specific questions to answer. I find that having attended a workshop it is useful to reflect on why it was helpful and how the new knowledge I have gained will assist me with my work practice. I have found that by writing down my ideas I am better able to remember what I have actually learned; otherwise it is forgotten too quickly. I keep the reflections as a record of my learning experiences and find this a valuable follow up to a workshop."

Lessons learnt

During the 2013 Supervisors Program we found that people embraced PebblePad at different rates. Some staff achieved proficiency quickly whereas others need individual help for quite a while. We found it necessary to provide "Drop-In" sessions after each of the face-to-face modules to allow people to get the help they needed. We also found it necessary to follow up with people to see why they had not submitted their reflections. This was often because they did not understand how to use PebblePad and were too embarrassed to admit it. After some coaching we were able to get them using it well.

In future we will be providing more guidance from the beginning of the Program and ensuring participants are aware of the help available both within the PebblePad site and the Centre for Learning and Development at ECU.

Another issue has been to train participants to check the Conversations page each week to see what new things have been added. We have begun giving them some post-workshop activities which require them to load information into this page which helps to develop a habit of checking it. This is an on-going challenge.



In brief

- Participants now have a platform to record their own reflections after a workshop which enhances the learning, whereas previously they would attend a workshop and if it wasn't used immediately would gain little benefit. It encourages them to look at what they have learned and see how it relates to their individual situation.
- By asking them to submit a reflection on their Post-workshop activities we are providing an impetus for staff to apply what they have learned in the workplace and reflect on the outcomes of this.
- Staff are using PebblePad to gather a variety of information relevant to their career development including the documenting of new knowledge.
- The "Conversations" area has been a useful tool to help participants build networks with their peers.

