

Don't let the students get you down

How to recognise and manage challenging behaviour in the EDRMS classroom.

BY MICHELLE LINTON AND KEVIN DWYER

Look, I understand why we have to use this new recordkeeping system – compliance and all that, but my boss says our unit is too busy to use it”

“This would be useful if I could use it to workflow my processes. Why are we not learning about workflow? Anyone could learn this basic stuff in one hour.”

“To my way of thinking this is a waste of time. The last two attempts at rolling out this EDRMS didn't work; no one is interested in records and we always mess up our IT roll-outs anyway.”

As these cries will be very familiar for anyone who has taught end users how to use EDRMS software. We call them challenging behaviours: constantly distracting other participants from learning the EDRMS features and making it difficult for the trainer to move smoothly through the training.

Additionally they create stress for the trainer. That's problematic enough for the occasional trainer delivering training once or twice a month. But when it comes to having to deliver consecutive sessions over multiple weeks, left unchecked the stress build up on trainers can lead to mental fatigue. Then there's the run-on effect of poorer training delivery for subsequent classes not even exhibiting these behaviours.

WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT TO DO

What kinds of behaviours can we expect in the classroom and what can we do to minimise their impact before we begin the facilitation?

By identifying and grouping the outbursts of disruptive emotions we've experienced, we've classified them into seven emotional expressions that lead to characteristic behaviours in the classroom. Much of what the participants express stems from the overload of change, stimulation and expectations, plus information they get from the project itself and misinformation they get from discussing things over coffee amongst themselves.

The key to deciding what simple, practical management techniques to use is to understand what causes the emotional expression. We may then apply framing, managing or closing techniques in response that will minimise class disruption and maximise learning attention.

INSECURE

These people may be nervous about their ability to learn new skills, learn computer skills generally or share information. In psychological terms, they will have 'low self-efficacy'. People with high self-efficacy see challenges and obstacles as a spur to new learning. People with low self-efficacy react in the opposite manner.

They may have personally experienced failure at learning new skills before, especially new computer skills. Or they may have experienced other people failing before and have perceived, if they can't do it, I can't either. More deeply embedded still may be social interactions where they were criticised for their inability to learn or practice a new skill, or where they were 'betrayed' by others when they shared information and this has dented their confidence. Or they simply may have felt stress, which is normal, but interpreted the signs of stress at their core as indicators of their lack of ability.

To provide a sense of security and calming, frame your expectations by making a comment that we don't expect full retention, just the concepts. Provide security by highlighting their training book as reference. Or if they have a specific concern, manage their concern by acknowledging it and informing them where in training it will be covered.

A management technique which requires a little more skill and is very effective is to ask leading questions to enable individuals to build personal pride in success.

OVERWHELMED

People who are overwhelmed will display a high degree of anxiety. They may already be feeling they have too much to do, or are struggling to cope with their role and responsibilities. They cannot figure out how they could possibly add learning a new set of processes and a new system to their

Story Snapshot

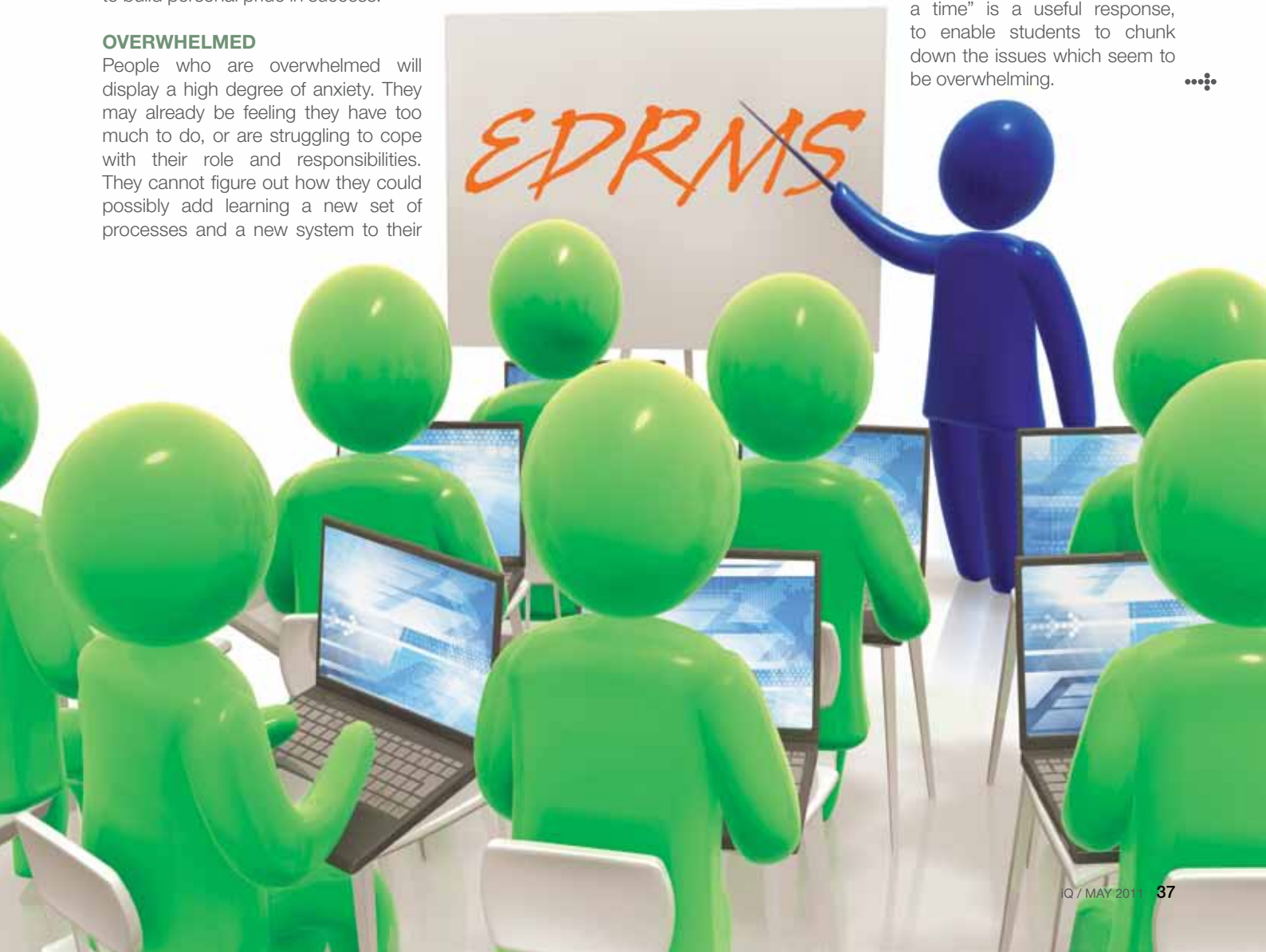
- Understanding the source of challenging behaviours
- Managing behaviours that get in the way of learning

already busy schedule. In the classroom, they'll demonstrate understanding and claim a willingness to use the system, always with a but...

Specifically, they may be concerned about:

- how to perform their standard business process in the new EDRMS
- lack of management support and cooperation
- willingness of colleagues to participate
- their existing workload.

In a rollout this is a very common challenging behaviour. In the classroom these people need to be able to visualise structured steps to moving forward such as white-boarding one current process and mapping the software interactions. Using the metaphor of "How do you eat an elephant?" – "One bite at a time" is a useful response, to enable students to chunk down the issues which seem to be overwhelming.



RESISTANT

The most annoying people in a classroom are those resistant to change. They have three classic rationales for being resistant to change¹:

- **I want to stay where I am because...**

- ...my needs are already met here
- ...I have invested heavily here
- ...I am in the middle of something important

- **I do not want to change because...**

- ...I do not understand what is being proposed
- ...the destination looks worse than where I am now
- ...I do not trust those who are asking me to change

- **I am not going to change because...**

- ...I am able to ignore the change
- ...I have the power to obstruct the change

They will clearly state they won't be using the new system, that this is a waste of time; they will be determined to find negative features in software or relate stories of how this has failed before.

It's very easy for a trainer to fall into the trap of just giving up on these people in the classroom. Try asking them "What is one thing the software will make it easier for you/ your business unit to do?" Or frame their participation in the training by pointing out the organisation policy, the participation expectations of students and current levels of use.

EAGER

The eager user is motivated generally by self-interest. They become self-absorbed in the opportunities for themselves or occasionally their teams. They may have read information about the software before the course and completed any pre-training activities.

This sounds like the ideal participant, but these people are excessive in their enthusiasm. During the course they ask copious questions beyond the scope of the course, and beyond other participants' comprehension. They prolong discussions on their personal recordkeeping requirements to the detriment of other participants' learning. Plus they keep the trainer back for half an hour after class to continue the chat!

We love eager participants, but we don't need to manage them to complete the training content. Give them some praise but reiterate the timing requirements of the course and what additional support and training they can get outside of this course.

OUTSPOKEN

Attention-seeking participants in training classes are easy to spot. They offer low-value comments, highlight their own ability and are critical of others (although rarely others in the class). Their willingness to be opinionated frequently extends to poorly instructing and advising other participants. They may be somewhat negative, but not persistently so.

Attention seekers, in psychological terms, may be driven by feelings of low self-worth built upon childhood experiences, insecurity, or may suffer from a sense of arrogance that transfers across from their daily life to the training session.

Addressing the root cause in the space of the few hours of a class is impossible. The cause of their outspokenness is not related to the training or the project. It is the way they are. Management requires techniques that allow the participants' self-esteem to remain intact. Simply thank them for their contribution and express you'd like to hear from others as well. Also try explaining that part of the learning is in using the training manual and finding your own way.

UNDERVALUED

People with a victim mentality may be missing one or more needs² prevalent in human nature: certainty, variety, significance, love/connection, growth, and contribution.

To that end they may be aggrieved at the perceived lack of inclusion in planning for the project. For example they believe they could have contributed to the process to date, the business classification scheme design or the naming conventions. They do not believe they have been able to make a contribution and therefore feel excluded. Or they may be disgruntled with the rights/permissions they have been assigned and feel that they have little significance in the scheme of things.

These people need to feel valued and empowered during the course, and leave with steps to continuing to add value to the project. Try explaining the background behind the decision-





About the Authors

MICHELLE LINTON, Managing Director, Linked Training

Michelle is a Learning & Development professional with 24 years' experience in the planning, design and delivery of training programs. Michelle has developed and delivered innovative, outcome focused EDRMS training for over 30 government and private organisations since 2005. Michelle's pragmatic approach to learning strategies leading to application adoption has been enthusiastically welcomed by the industry, and she is a regular speaker at RIM events and contributor to industry magazines. Linked Training is the training partner in the REX project which was awarded the J.Eddis Linton Award for Excellence – Most outstanding group in 2010.

- She can be contacted at Michelle@LinkedTraining.com.au



KEVIN DWYER, Director, Change Factory

Kevin is a Change Management professional with more than 30 years' experience in the planning, design and delivery of change management programs. Since 2001, and the establishment of Change Factory, he has been involved in many Change Management projects ranging from re-engineering of customs processes to reduce risk to creating and revising performance management systems to improve customer service outcomes at five star resorts. His first EDRMS project was as the change management partner for the REX project which was awarded the J.Eddis Linton Award for Excellence – Most outstanding group in 2010.

- He can be contacted at Kevin.Dwyer@changeactory.com.au

making and who was consulted, and follow up with how important the role of the student is in making the implementation a success.

It may also be helpful to take a note of their concerns to pass on to management.

DISENGAGED

People who are disengaged are easy to ignore. They do not ask any questions, avoid eye contact, may play with their phone or other application and do not stay aligned with class activities. It's easy for a trainer managing a large class to feel quietly relieved at not having to interact with all participants. But the reality is – this person isn't learning. And their behaviour may also be interpreted as a licence to others in the class to behave the same way.

There are several reasons for people to be disengaged. Many of them have other sources of emotion as their root cause. For example, people may be disengaged because they are nervous or because they have a sense of arrogance. It is important for the trainer to engage the student to attempt to understand what is driving their disengagement before trying to apply a remedy.

Being able to engage with all participants makes a trainer feel worthwhile. Firstly, take time to get to know students on arrival. Upon starting the course, request phones are on silent and only used for urgent business.

Think about your challenging students in the context of the emotional responses we have outlined. Recognise the response and manage the behaviour using a specific approach. It takes time to become accomplished, but the rewards for the trainer are great, and can be instrumental in improving uptake of the EDRMS. In particular, start with ensuring that you show real interest in students during class, asking specifics of where, how or why they will complete work with the new software. **IQ**



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