

# PROWE

Personal Repositories Online Wiki Environment

## 'How To/Questions to Ask' Guides



*Guide One:*

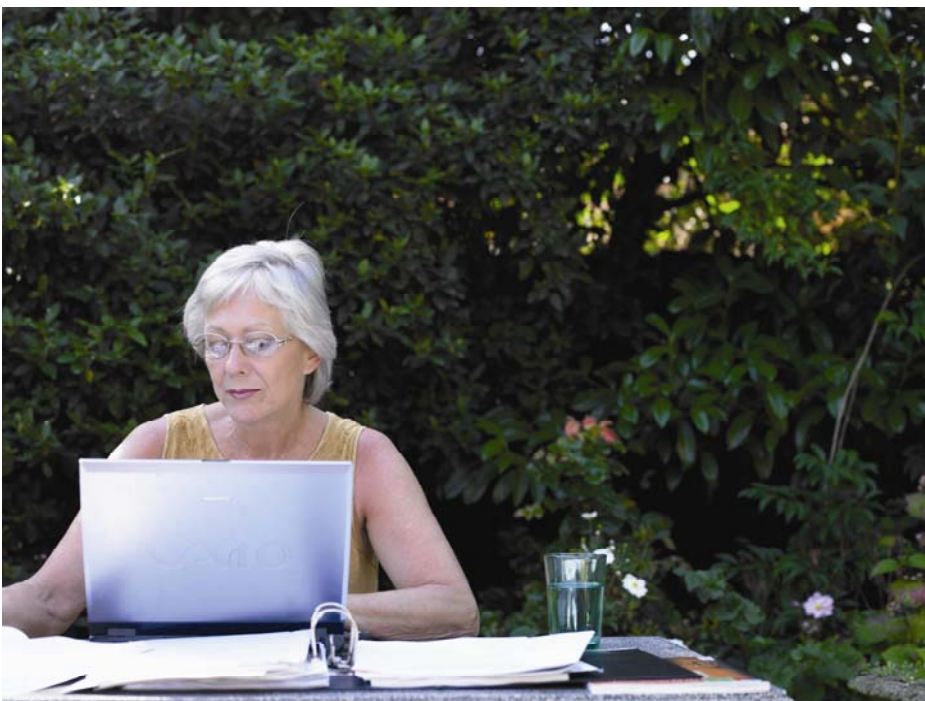
Barriers and enablers to system uptake  
or use

## Barriers and enablers to system uptake or use

Uptake and use of any system is fraught with problems because of a number of intervening issues. One of the most significant for PROWE was the personal resource management strategies (PRMS) favoured by individual users. Some of these PRMS are explored below.

Whilst many of the intervening issues are very individual or group specific it is however possible to distinguish generic factors which are liable to impact, and in some way have a bearing on, system uptake – either negatively or positively. Furthermore, within any one group of potential users the same factors may both support and inhibit potential uptake. So, for example, a system which is heavily endorsed by the institution setting it up may nonetheless fail because it is perceived by potential users as simply duplicating what is offered by other existing systems (the accuracy of such a perception, or the reason it has arisen, is irrelevant in this context). On the other hand, the new system may succeed simply because using it makes doing other essential or everyday activities easier. For example, system outputs may slot easily into other institutional systems e.g. provide evidence for use in a staff appraisal system.

The **pressure on time** is one of the few universally perceived issues amongst potential users of any continuing professional development support system for part time distance tutors. This needs to be borne in mind when interpreting what follows below.



## Matrix of intervening factors

	<i>Users</i>	<i>System</i>	<i>Institution</i>
<i>Users</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior experience of technology</li> <li>• Understanding of institutional culture and place and role of self within it</li> <li>• Personal resource management strategies [see detail further below]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workspace design</li> <li>• Usability features e.g. Icons, shortcuts etc.</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> <li>• Interoperability – with other known/used systems and software</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codes of conduct</li> <li>• Terms and conditions of service</li> <li>• Other regulatory structures</li> <li>• Status</li> </ul>
<i>System</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workspace design</li> <li>• Usability features e.g. Icons, shortcuts etc.</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> <li>• Interoperability – with other known/used systems and software</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interoperability with other systems generally and in (different) workplaces specifically</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> <li>• Usability</li> <li>• Integration with other systems</li> <li>• Ease of access from multiple (work) locations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philosophical integration with other institutional systems e.g. VLE, CMS etc.</li> <li>• Technical functioning within institutional systems</li> </ul>
<i>Institution</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codes of conduct</li> <li>• Terms and conditions of service</li> <li>• Other regulatory structures</li> <li>• Status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philosophical integration with other institutional systems e.g. VLE, CMS etc.</li> <li>• Technical functioning within institutional systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional culture and way things are done e.g. Open discussion of mission, aims etc.</li> <li>• Institutional support, or lack of it, for individual/group endeavour</li> <li>• Reporting systems</li> <li>• Policy making systems</li> </ul>

Contrary to the assumption that users are simply part time tutors working in an institution creating content via a system, the players in implementation and use of any system in fact have many roles and positions. Each of these will impact to a greater or lesser extent on how the system succeeds or fails. This table attempts to identify generically some of the most significant in relation to success or failure in implementation.

## Key characteristics of main contributing 'elements'

<i>Users</i>	<i>System</i>	<i>Institution</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roles and positions as understood by them e.g. as part time employee, as tutor, as subject specialist etc.</li> <li>• Norms and expectations of those roles and positions e.g. (what) is tutorly behaviour? is this the way tutors learn? is it 'done' to share or generate knowledge in this way?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authentication systems – internal and external</li> <li>• Similarity/difference to other systems in use in the institution</li> <li>• Compatibility with other systems in use in the institution and other institutions with which tutors are affiliated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional culture in relation to               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ new technology,</li> <li>○ sharing</li> <li>○ the role of tutors</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Support for rollout of new systems</li> <li>• Recognition and reward systems</li> </ul>

Once again, when the main contributing 'elements' intersect a number of roles and positions are evident for each of them. The generic 'intersections' shown in the following table may make understanding success or failure easier.

## Understanding key interactions between main contributing 'elements'

<i>USERS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workspace design – e.g. how new system software relates to software already in use by tutors</li> <li>• Usability functions – e.g. links and shortcuts to new system from within desktop and menus i.e. are they on the way to other daily activities for users?</li> <li>• Accessibility – is system/software design fit for these users' purpose?</li> <li>• Interoperability – is software compatible with other systems in use?</li> <li>• Does the system make sense to users in the institutional context in which they are meeting it?</li> </ul>	<i>SYSTEM</i>
<i>INSTITUTION</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location and priority (or not) of user needs as opposed to institutional needs or priorities</li> <li>• Commitment to resources for implementation and development</li> <li>• Location of agenda for implementation</li> </ul>	<i>SYSTEM</i>
<i>USERS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions of ownership- of work and access to system</li> <li>• Understandings of rights and responsibilities</li> <li>• Institutional culture and questions of how "new" is dealt with</li> </ul>	<i>INSTITUTION</i>

## Understanding the origins and effects of personal resource management strategies (PRMS)

An initial evaluation of the potential of PRMS to impact uptake and use of any PROWE system was done in the early stages of exploring user system needs. The original analysis is to be found in full in section 5 of the 'PROWE – understanding the OU user perspective' report<sup>1</sup>. The evaluation concluded with the following:

The emphasis for understanding PRMS needs to be placed on the "personal" – you simply cannot legislate for how things are done, at least, not completely, the personal/individual element is too strong. Even if you require certain things to be stored/logged different people will exercise the requirement in different ways, not necessarily the most technically sensible. And, attempts to control what happens may lead to shadow or parallel storage systems too. You can take a horse to water, as the saying goes, but you can't make it drink. (p17)

Further review, as the project moved forward, clarified some aspects of PRMS but there is still a need for better understanding of how these develop, and the impact they have. Somewhat tentatively three inter-related categories of strategy are proposed for future investigation. As with other issues identified above, these categories may not just inhibit use of a system but, on occasions, may also induce take up - if the system supports (intentionally or not) that particular PRMS.



---

<sup>1</sup> available from [www.prowe.ac.uk](http://www.prowe.ac.uk)

In brief the proposed categories are the three points of a triangle as follows:

### ***Perception of security***

*Example - Angela prints out all her work and keeps hard copies because once, long ago, she 'lost' a document she had saved on a (faulty) disk. Kathleen has partitioned her hard drive and saves copies to both sides 'for safety's sake' although the other side is as likely to fail as the one on which she created the original work.*

Here, an existing or previous system is known and familiar and provides perceived security even though the new system would actually be much more reliable; commonsense is defied. This approach is related to:

### ***Comfort zones***

*Example - Harold has been told to send copies of all his tutorial PowerPoint presentations to his regional office after he has used them. He has no idea why he does this, nor what happens to the files but he has done this religiously for more than 10 years and he doesn't feel he needs to worry about his files should he ever need to get copies back. Sending the files is done almost as a Pavlovian response to the tutorial stimulus; uncertainty is minimal if not non-existent. Using a new system would require time to learn new ways and, anyway, new technology is not always reliable, is it?*

Here there is not only an underlying perception or, at least, an assumption of security but there is also an unwillingness to engage with any change, and no need for new endeavour. It may well be that the new system would be easier and more appropriate but the present system works with no effort so why not stay comfortably there where one is already? This approach is related to one other:

### ***Am I bothered?***

*Example - George backs all his work up on to floppies. He has a rota for using and replacing them. It takes a while to do a back up now as he needs multiple disks in order to back up everything but, as he says, "better safe than sorry"*

Here the known is better than the probably more effective, and definitely easier, process that would be offered by the new system. Why change the system if the old one, albeit time consuming, works efficiently?

These three approaches share common ground and assumptions whilst varying slightly in motivation. They are individual but shared and very personal and entrenched. They pay little heed to any of the key features of a personal repositories programme - like efficiency; time saving; reliability etc. all of which might otherwise be thought to be strong selling points for uptake. It would seem that PRMS change has to both come from individual motivation and involve minimal deviation from present practice. A system which does not take into account the PRMS of potential users will find them a disruption to implementation of any new system.

## PROWE

Personal Repositories Online Wiki Environment

Contact

[info@prowe.ac.uk](mailto:info@prowe.ac.uk)

[www.prowe.ac.uk](http://www.prowe.ac.uk)