

The importance of being e-earnest: How key personnel can affect the success of change management programmes concerned with e-learning in HEI's.

Liz Beastall

University of York, York, United Kingdom

Background

This paper documents one important finding of research undertaken as part of studying for a doctorate between 2006 and 2010. The main aim of the study was to investigate the cultural effects of the managed implementation of a centrally supported VLE in a higher education organisation and to establish what happens to teaching and learning during this time. The research was not an evaluation of the particular VLE software, in this case, Blackboard Suite™, nor was it to be an evaluation of the chosen model for change, although this was discussed in the thesis. Instead, the research aims to provide an analysis of how and if change management, relating to e learning in HEI's, affects both the individuals and the structures within and to establish a transferable model for change that could also be adopted in non-education organisations. This paper will explore how the appointment of key non academic personnel can have a positive influence on the outcome of e-learning projects and how important this can be to its long term strategic position.

Research Questions

The research design followed a qualitative path based around the following research questions:

- How does the implementation of a centrally supported VLE affect staff and student approaches to teaching and learning and what are the associated cultural changes?
- How has the change process been managed, what are the lessons learned and how can these inform the strategic planning of other large scale changes in Higher Education Organisations?
- How is the VLE addressing an increasing need for flexible and blended learning?

The findings on this particular area affect all three of the over arching research questions and are therefore considered to be significant.

Methods

There have been many lessons learned papers, from many leading Universities, that have detailed their findings on dealing with embedding e-learning into HE. This research considers both generic and HE specific models for approaching change in large organisations, (Graetz et al., 2002; Burnes, 2004; Child, 2005), and a review of the key issues faced during large-scale changes, including problems encountered through resistance to change (Hill and Jones, 1998; Smale, 1998). This paper reviews the potential for impact in HEIs following the introduction of learning technologies (Newland et al, 2004; Stiles and Yorke, 2004; Selwyn, 2005). Barney (2004) suggested that the evolving 'network society' would mean changes in the way large organisations use and manage information, resulting in an increase in the importance of the role of learning technologies and the level of reliance upon them. Various lessons learned papers are then surveyed, with several key themes emerging regarding implementing changes in HEIs that are specifically related to e-learning technologies (Stiles & Yorke, 2004; Quinsee, 2005; Sharpe et al, 2006; Stiles & Yorke, 2007; Salmon et al, 2008.) in addition to recommendations by JISC for a successful change programme. Within Universities, there are, as Becher and Trowler (2001) highlighted, elements of tribal behaviour, where any shifts in territorial boundaries can often result in some sort of impact on the individual. What is considered to be blended or flexible learning can mean virtually anything, making it problematic as a research object. In short, this paper reviews the key theoretical areas concerning organisational change and the introduction of

e-learning technologies into HEIs, with particular focus on VLE and the associated training given to Academic staff in one institution.

Frame

Further details will be provided here at a later date.

Research findings

This research demonstrates how the appointment of key non academic personel had a positive influence on the outcome of this e-learning project and how important this can be to its long term strategic position in terms of change management. At the time of writing this thesis is still being concluded and further details will be provided in the full paper in September.