



# Leading an evidence-based, multi-stakeholder approach to evaluating the implementation of a new online learning environment: an Australian institutional case study

**Dale Holt, Stuart Palmer and Mary Dracup**  
**Institute of Teaching and Learning**  
**Deakin University**



There is convincing evidence that technology-based teaching succeeds best when courses are redesigned to exploit the benefits of technology, using well established quality assurance methods. **To our surprise, though we found that none of the case study institutions had a formal, systematic, and comprehensive strategy to evaluate its use of technology for teaching across the institution.**

Bates, A.W. & Sangra, A. (2011). *Managing Technology in Higher Education Strategies for Transforming Teaching and Learning*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, p.131. Based on information collected from 30 tertiary institutions (including 25 universities) primarily located in North America and Western Europe. 11 detailed case studies.



## Case study of framing an institutional evaluation plan for a new OLE: from conception to implementation

- New learning management system (LMS) driving new online learning environment (OLE)
- Three-year period
- Evaluation as key element of quality management
- Perspectives from key stakeholders, e.g. students and staff
- Issues relating to piloting through to mainstreaming
- Use of data in governance and decision making
- Evaluation in more devolved environment, including deferred central services restructuring

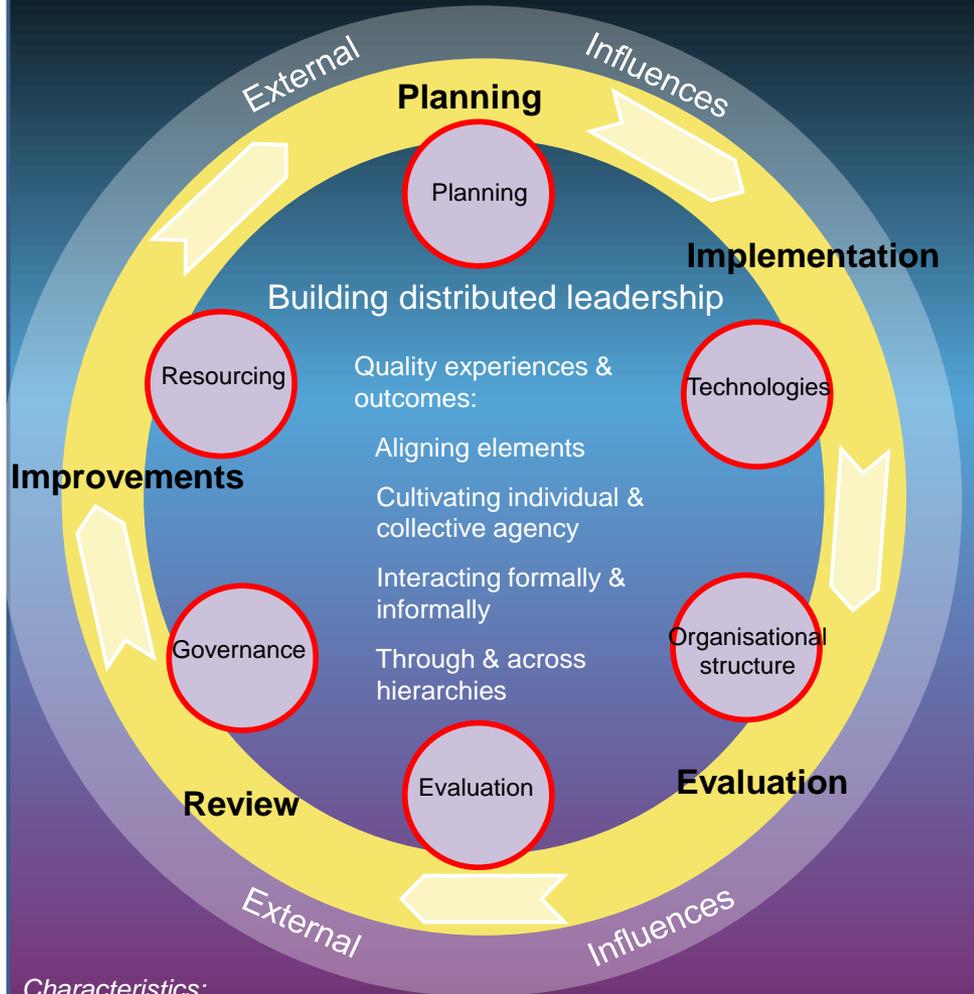


## Importance of evaluation: ALTC project quality management of OLEs (2011-2012 project)

- Planning
- Resourcing
- Organisational structure
- Technologies
- Governance
- **Evaluation**



## 6EOLE Quality Management Framework



*Characteristics:*

Co-created & shared vision; Inclusive of all those who lead;  
 Broadest recognition of leadership; Communicative and engaging;  
 Appropriate responsibilities; Meaningful rewards; Trusting and respectful;  
 Collaborative in development; Nurturing of valued professional expertise;  
 Valuing professional forums & communities



# Institutional background

- Approx. 40 000 students; approx. 12 000 off-campus students
- 4 campuses: Melbourne, 2 Geelong, Warrnambool
- Mandate in distance education
- Strong current focus on flexible education, including blended learning with on-campus delivery & support
- **Now moved to 4<sup>th</sup> LMS/CMC corporately supported system (evaluation focus). LMS plus called Deakin Studies Online (DSO)**
- Last major institutional evaluation of previous LMS 2004-2005
- From 2006-2010 reliance on 2 items in unit student evaluation survey for DSO



# Conceiving evaluation plan: evaluation working party

## **Purpose of the evaluation**

To inform all relevant stakeholders and their leadership on progress in realising the benefits of the new DSO in enabling the achievement of Deakin's flexible education vision, along with providing them with a basis for informed decision making.

**Key question: Does the new DSO environment make a difference to teaching and learning at Deakin University?**

**Subsidiary question:** If the new DSO environment does make a difference, in what ways, how, when and where are the differences experienced?



# More specific questions: evaluation working party

Does the new DSO:

- enhance the quality of learning and teaching?
- enhance the efficiency of learning and teaching?
- enhance the satisfaction of learning and teaching?
- enhance accessibility to learning opportunities?
- enhance the administration and management of learning?
- impact academic workload (new compared to the old system)?
- provide opportunities for the advancement of higher education research/scholarship?



# New LMS benefits and KPIs: from project manager on behalf of senior management – 2<sup>nd</sup> iteration

## **Benefit 1: Improved student experience**

- KPI: More positive student perception of enhanced learning quality
- KPI: More positive staff perception of enhanced learning quality
- KPI: Increased student satisfaction with use of teaching and learning technologies
- KPI: Maintained student satisfaction with DSO

## **Benefit 2: Reduction in online course delivery costs**

- KPI: Reduction in staff time required to administer units in DSO
- KPI: Increased ease of use for staff (compared with previous LMS)
- KPI: Reduction in ITSD [Information Technology Services Division] staff time required to support DSO

## **Benefit 3: More contemporary and flexible learning programs**

- KPI: Increased innovations to program delivery via DSO
- KPI: Increased ease of use of online learning tools in DSO



# Table: Institutional plan of evaluation foci and activities

| Evaluation/research activity  | 2011   | 2012   | 2013   |
|---|--|--|--|
| <i>Institutional surveying (teaching and learning centre)</i>                     | Baseline staff and student data on current OLE                               | Staff and student data on new OLE                          | Staff and student data on new OLE  |
| <i>Faculty developmental evaluation (Faculties)</i>                               | New OLE pilot unit program   | New OLE initial roll-out                                   | OLE mainstreaming  |
| <i>Faculty summative evaluation (teaching and learning centre with faculties)</i> | New OLE pilot unit program – interviews with staff and surveying of students | Being determined   | Not required   |
| <i>Research on integration of new OLE with curriculum development</i>             | NA   | To be determined by faculties and teaching/learning centre | To be determined by faculties and teaching/learning centre                   |
| <i>OLE technical evaluation (IT Division)</i>                                     | New OLE pilot unit program   | Going live across the institution                          | Monitoring ongoing performance   |
| <i>OLE change management effectiveness (Project management centre)</i>            | New OLE pilot unit program   | Going live across the institution                          | Full embedding of new OLE in institution's teaching and learning environment |



# Issues

- **What types of evaluation should be conducted?**
- **Who needs to approve evaluation?**
- **Who needs to accept responsibility for funding and conducting evaluation?**
- **How long should the evaluation task be sustained?**
- **How can evaluation best inform decision making and improve practice?**
- **The overall evaluation futures orientation**



# What types of evaluation should be conducted?

- Consistent institution-wide data collection methods including both quantitative & qualitative data, e.g. surveys and unit leader interviews
- Varied faculty-based data collection methods sensitive to school/course/discipline/unit needs



# Who needs to approve evaluation?

- Institution-wide: Senior Executive through OLE sponsors and associate planning unit requirements
- High desirability of university ethics clearance
- Faculty-based: Senior faculty leadership & high desirability for faculty-based ethics clearance



# Who needs to accept responsibility for funding and conducting evaluation?

- OLE implementation budget should make some allowance
- Reasonable expectation for institutional work to be undertaken by teaching and learning centre
- Faculty OLE implementation plans and budget should fund local evaluation
- All reporting should flow through OLE governance structure



# How long should the evaluation task be sustained?

- For new OLE, at least 3 years
- Satisfaction takes time to build
- Major curriculum development around any new OLE can take longer



# How can evaluation best inform decision making and improve practice?

- Need to document and report
- All reports (institutional & faculty) need to flow through OLE governance structures
- Governance must consider and be prepared to act on significant issues
- Reporting needs to underpin professional development, training & support more generally
- Dissemination through institution and locally based forums & events



# The overall evaluation futures orientation

- Evaluation informing and being informed by design-based principles & good practices
- Evaluation as integral to curriculum review and transformation
- Evaluation both on satisfaction, usage and ultimately enhanced learning outcomes
- *Research on integration of new OLE with curriculum development directions*



## 2011 DSO benchmarking observations

**Respondents:** 1322+ students; 274+ staff

**Access place-** home: 85.7% students;  
27.0% staff

**Access mode-** laptop: 70% students; 44%  
staff

**High ratings:** accessing/reading/downloading

**Mid ratings:** online communication

**Best aspect:** access anywhere/anytime



# 2011 new DSO implementation evaluation: unit chair interviews

**T1:** 4/4 unit chairs; **T2:** 30/54 unit chairs  
interviewed

**Transition:** smooth, due to support, intuitive  
interface, similar content and approaches

**Differences to teaching/learning:** themes  
included streamlined e-assessment, easy  
navigation, more efficient management and  
communication, greater flexibility.

**Issues:** discussions tool, sustainable  
training/support model



# 2011 new DSO implementation evaluation: student survey

**T1:** 75/765 students (9.8%) **T2:** 670/7770  
students completed survey (8.6%)

**Strong trends:** 75% found it easy to access  
and use D2L; 50% found it equally as  
easy/difficult as Blackboard; 54% found it  
easy to learn

**Best aspects:** content layout; mobile  
access/view, news, updates, navigability

**Needs improvement:** discussions tool



## Recommendations

- Active Senior Executive support
- Clear statement of proposed new OLE benefits
- Understanding of how identified benefits relate to the information needs of major parties/stakeholders
- Evaluation plan determined for an appropriate period of time
- Use of an appropriate range of data collection methods



## Recommendations (cont'd)

- Clear distinction between evaluation to be conducted to meet institutional information needs and specialised research projects
- Timetable for data collection & dissemination of evaluation reports
- Protocols for the approval & dissemination of completed reports
- Consideration of evaluation reports through well established governance mechanisms with a focus on required decision making
- Flexibility where required to focus evaluation efforts on priority areas as they emerge over the implementation period