Thinking about a new LMS: Comparing different institutional models and approaches

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Selecting a new Learning Management System (LMS) is a strategic decision. The LMS is a key part of your institutional culture and shapes not only the student experience but also the future direction of your institution. This symposium describes the experience from the initial selection phase to early implementation of Moodle in four case studies: University of Waikato, University of Canberra, University of Canterbury and Massey University. The central question explored is: how do you successfully implement a new LMS within a large institution?

Keywords: Moodle, institutional culture, Learning Management System, implementation models.

Introduction

This symposium is framed around the question: how do you successfully implement a new LMS within a large institution? In answering this question the symposium compares and contrasts different models and approaches to successfully implementing such an important educational innovation and large-scale institutional change. The symposium shares lessons learned from four different case studies and offers participants an excellent opportunity to hear first hand about the benefits and challenges of adopting an open source LMS in the university sector.

Case study 1: University of Waikato

In 2007-2008 Moodle was successfully piloted and rolled out at the University of Waikato. Notably the University chose a full rollout to all areas of the University at one time. To manage the degree of up-front change, Waikato decided to dissuade teaching staff from major pedagogical review until a post-transition stage. Additionally, Waikato committed to developing Moodle to ensure there was no loss of functionality in comparison to the previous LMS. Waikato also decided to forego automatic migration of content from the previous LMS but to treat the transition as a positive disruption providing the opportunity to educate staff about the new environment. Additional support structures were put into place to help staff navigate the transition including employing part-time staff to provide one-to-one support during the initial implementation.

Case study 2: University of Canberra

In 2008, the University of Canberra selected Moodle as its replacement LMS for WebCT. A notable feature of the selection was the decision to externally host Moodle. This option was seen as an effective way for the University to manage change and the risks around an open source solution. Using the services of Netspot the University has successfully managed the implementation of Moodle and the experience has been positive. There is growing momentum for the use of Moodle by staff and the case study provides reflections on the experience of the first year. Notably the University of Canberra has taken a leadership role in the Moodle community and recently hosted a successful Moodleposium for the higher education sector.

Case study 3: University of Canterbury

In 2008, the University of Canterbury evaluated Blackboard (WebCT CE8) and Moodle. A pilot was conducted in Semester 2 and Moodle (aka *Learn*) was chosen. The selection methodology and the decision to adopt Moodle are described along with the implementation process. Staff workshops began in April 2009 and will continue over the next year. The response to *Learn* has been favourable, though the implementation process has been challenging and the number of staff delaying the inevitable move to Moodle remains a concern. The case study shares a number of strategies which have been adopted by the University of Canterbury to support staff in the transition to a new LMS.

Case study 4: Massey University

In 2008, Massey University made the decision to adopt Moodle (aka *Stream*) as its replacement LMS. This decision was not easy and followed a small pilot initiative and protracted consultation process. Critical to the selection methodology was the explication of guiding principles, pedagogical criteria and identification of institutional requirements. The implementation of Stream is supported by a comprehensive business case, which provides a significant level of new resourcing over the next three years. Following a defined project methodology a number of new permanent staff has been employed to support the technical and pedagogical implementation of Stream. In contrast to the use of WebCT, the goal is to implement Stream in a carefully planned manner on a programme wide basis in order to fundamentally redesign the student learning experience. Early lessons are shared from the Stream Project.

Summary

The above case studies describe four quite different approaches to the challenge of selecting and managing the implementation of a new space—namely Moodle—in a large institutional context. The symposium identifies important differences between implementation models and outlines the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. The contrasting examples help participants to answer and reflect on the question of how to select and successfully implement a new LMS in their own institution. Overall the symposium offers a unique opportunity to learn from key people leading the implementation of Moodle in four different institutional case studies.

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