



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

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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

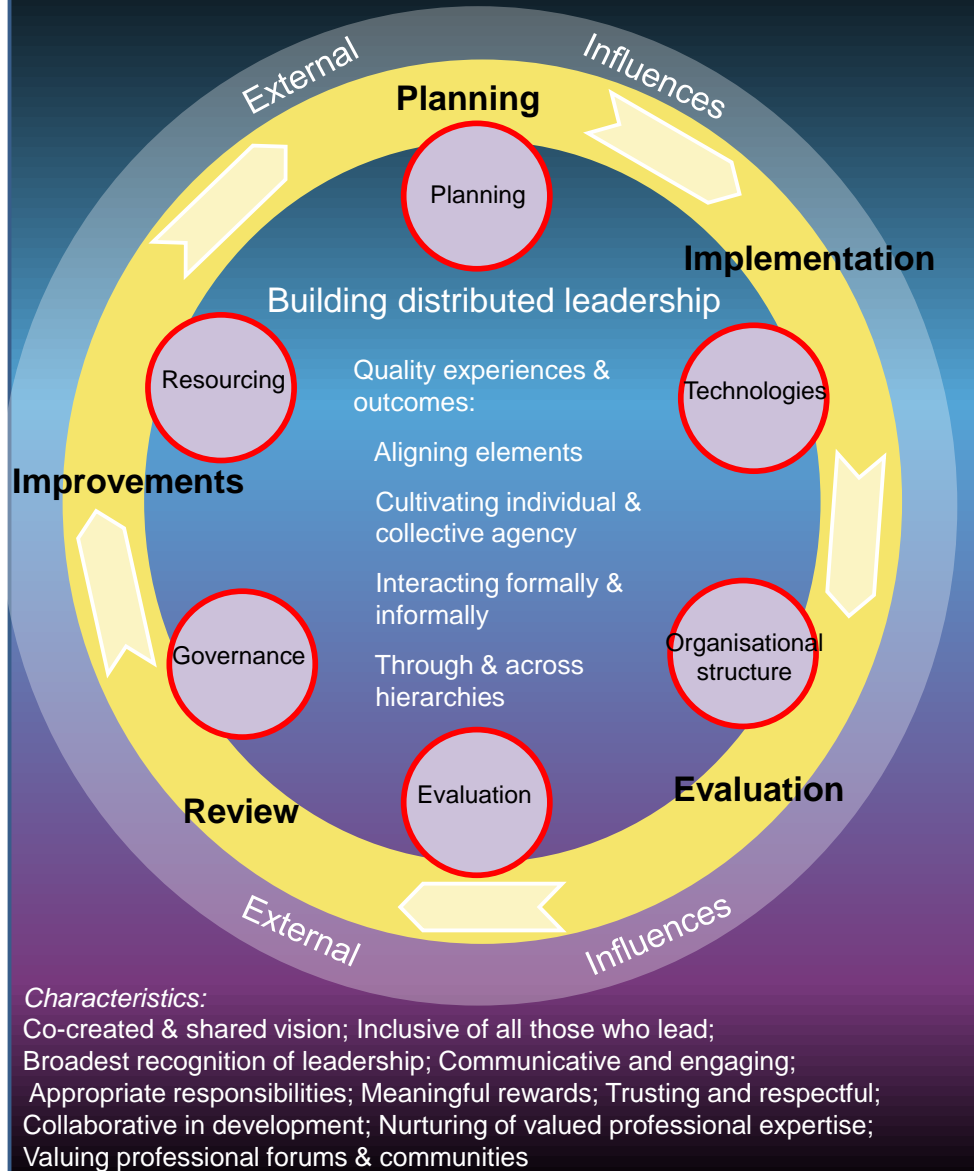


Importance of evaluation: ALTC project quality management of OLEs (2011-2012 project)

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



6EOLE Quality Management Framework





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 4th 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 – 2nd 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