NETWORKED LEARNING 2002 SYMPOSIUM: Change for networked learning

Overview of Symposium

This symposium aims to bring together research on the management of change issues in the introduction of elearning in higher education. Networked learning has thrown many challenges to the current structure and organisation of higher education. Universities have been variously attempting to make use of opportunities of the new technology and at the same time to respond to the inevitable consequence of rapid system changes. The volatile nature of change in higher education has prompted many experiments and the papers in the symposium will report on research from major change initiatives within institutions and across institutions.

The research papers report on the effects of strategic management and policy direction. The research has mainly been conducted as action research and case study research. The findings are based on longitudinal analyses of implementation of strategies over a period of three to four years.   Two of the three papers are based on individual institutions in England where different approaches have been taken to the introduction of elearning and the third is based on an analysis of trans-institutional change fostered in Scotland through the Virtual Learning Space (VLS) initiative.

The Symposium will contribute to the conference themes of elearning, and the e-University, and to methodologies for researching networked learning. In relation to the first theme this symposium will focus on institutional level issues of management and policy and consider the aims and appropriate structure for universities in a networked world. The research reported will also offer a contribution to issues of researching the management of change in networked learning. The case studies reported are of a wider scope than many existing case studies and have data related to an era of unprecedented change, which may in time be viewed as transformational.

Contributors

Chair person: Professor Liz Beaty CHED, Coventry University
e-mail: e.beaty@cov.ac.uk

Papers and names of authors
PAPER 1: Introducing networking learning via a community network: a teaching and learning strategy in action – Liz Beaty, Frances Deepwell and Glynis Cousin, CHED
Coventry University
e-mail: e.beaty@cov.ac.uk
PAPER 2: Developing institutional readiness for implementing networked learning
- Sheena Banks and Adrian Powell, University of Sheffield
e-mail: s.b.banks@sheffield.ac.uk
PAPER 3: Trans-institutional implemention of peer to peer networked learning – the Virtual Learning Space case study – Rachel Harris, University of Glasgow.
e-mail: r.harris@udcf.gla.ac.uk

PAPER 1
TITLE
Introducing networking learning via a community network: a teaching and learning strategy in action.

AUTHORS
Liz Beaty, Frances Deepwell & Glynis Cousin.

INSTITUTION
Coventry University

SESSION TYPE
Contribution to a symposium

NAME OF CONTACT PERSON
Prof. Liz Beaty, CHED, Coventry University, Priory Street Coventry, CV1 5FB

TELEPHONE
02476 88 7595

EMAIL
e.beaty@cov.ac.uk

Number of words

Five Key Words
Management
Change
Strategy
Evaluation
Community

Proposal

Introducing networking learning via a community network: a teaching and learning strategy in action.

In 1997 Coventry University adopted a teaching and learning strategy which aimed to make the best opportunity offered by new information and communication technology (ICT). Over the past four years a task force of seconded academic staff has been used as a development community to evaluate, experiment on and support the implementation of an online learning environment. Over this time research has been concurrent on the activities of the task force and their perceptions of the changes. Evaluation of the use of online learning by staff and students has been collected and fed into decision making process at each stage of development. The process of the change management has been the focus of the action research reported on here. The paper analyses the stages of change in the way the task force group has acted alongside the focus of strategic change management.

PAPER 2

TITLE
Developing institutional readiness for networked learning:
University of Sheffield case study

AUTHORS
Sheena Banks
E-Learning Research Associate
School of Education
University of Sheffield
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield S10 2JA
TELEPHONE: 0114 222 8155
e-mail: s.b.banks@sheffield.ac.uk

Dr Adrian Powell
Learning Advisor

Learning Media Unit
University of Sheffield
TELEPHONE: 0114 222 2475
e-mail: a.powell@sheffield.ac.uk

INSTITUTION
University of Sheffield

FIVE KEY WORDS: strategy, impact, evaluation, realignment, mainstream

Proposal

Developing institutional readiness for implementing networked learning

The development of networked learning at the University of Sheffield has been an evolutionary process which nevertheless has over a period of 3-4 years led to major realignment of human and technology resources and considerably progressed the opportunities for high quality implementation of networked learning, while at the same time reduced constraints.

There have been a number of drivers for change which have contributed to this state of institutional readiness for networked learning. These have been the implementation of the learning and teaching strategy, the introduction of WebCT as the main delivery platform for ICT-based learning and the consolidation of support services into a central unit – the Learning Media Unit. A national TLTP project in computer supported collaborative group work (CBCGW) which ran from 1998-2001 has been another driver of change, occurring simultaneously with these other strategic developments. Evaluation studies have been carried out in the Project on the readiness of the institution for implementing ICT-based learning and teaching. These have examined a number of factors relevant to institutional readiness and in addition, an evaluation study was carried out at the end of the Project which assessed the impact of institutional strategies on implementation of networked learning. This paper identifies and reflects the factors which constitute 'institutional readiness' for networked learning within a learning and teaching framework, and gives some examples of networked learning implementation within courses at the University of Sheffield. There will be a particular focus on the educational issues of using new technologies – rather than just the technologies themselves.

PAPER 3

Title of proposal: Trans-institutional implementation of peer to peer networked learning - the Virtual Learning Space case study

Theme: Symposium on Networked Learning Policy - Implementing Networked Learning in a Policy Framework

Contact Details:
Dr Rachel Harris,
Scottish Centre for Research into On-Line Learning and Assessment
University of Glasgow
Florentine House
53 Hillhead Street
Glasgow, G12 8QQ

0141 330 2878
r.harris@udcf.gla.ac.uk

Abstract:
The Virtual Learning Space (VLS) is a collaborative online environment where communities of interest can meet to share experience and understanding of C&IT in relation to learning and teaching. The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council financed the original project, within their Scotcit programme. The scope of the project was very much based in Scotland, and aimed to establish the use of VLS in three institutions in the Aberdeen area – The Robert Gordon University, University of Aberdeen, and Aberdeen College. The project partners thus included a 'new' and 'old' university, as well as a further education college. It therefore seemed likely that the kinds of challenges facing different kinds of institutions would be represented in this project. Although the partner institutions were all based in one city, which may have presented its own particular conditions.

The development of the VLS included using focus groups, an online Delphi technique, online discussion and brainstorming sessions with staff from all partner institutions. Great care was taken to connect with staff at all levels in order to engage the potential target audience in the project, as well as aligning the development of the

environment with their particular needs. Some differences amongst the institutions and staff groupings were found at the early stages.

The project has progressed such that initial implementation, evaluation and second stage implementation have been completed. The VLS is now an active collection of almost 1700 individuals who share experiences within an online learning community. The scope of the project has widened considerably, with people joining the VLS from over 800 organisations. The majority of the membership is drawn from the UK (1160), with the three partner institutions being represented by more than 270 members.

The paper will reflect on some of the strategic developments that were being undertaken within the partner institutions at the time of the project, and discuss perceived differences encountered in the three institutions. The latter will include reference to technical, pedagogical and organisational issues.

The VLS: http://itlearningspace-scot.ac.uk/