Success Factors for efficient e-Learning Development and Implementation

Best practice example at Hamburg University: OLIM – Management for Executives

Online Learning in Management (OLIM) is a modularised postgraduate programme of study for young professionals aiming at managerial positions or update of knowledge in certain areas. The necessary flexibility for the target group in terms of time and place is realised by a blended learning concept. The programme development was funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research and the state government of Hamburg from 2002 – September 2004. Since then more than 200 students registered for one or more modules with about 50% continuing students who take more than one module. The programme covers general management, change management, knowledge management, project management, industrial psychology, organisational development and legal aspects of management.

Reflecting on the most important issues for the success of OLIM we have identified three main areas: didactics as well as e-learning competence of teachers and students alike. Moreover continuous evaluation and revision is a crucial element of the programme.

1. Didactical standards

The quality of teaching and the efficiency of learning are not automatically improved by the use of computer and Internet. However, the development and use of methodological and didactical e-learning concepts or a meaningful integration of multimedia learning modules in existing learning environments can certainly lead to the expected progress. With the appropriate didactic preparation, certain skills can be specifically enhanced using the new media. Study skills and problem-solving as well as negotiating skills are advanced by communication and group learning and by the interplay between work, learning and informing. The use of a learning platform that permits both synchronous and asynchronous work – also on shared documents – and communication, for instance in forums and chats, supports this goal.

What are our didactical standards?

- an efficient system of:
  - content
  - learning targets
  - didactical methods
  - assessment of learning success

- the appropriate use of new media
- tutoring by qualified e-moderators

Within OLIM different elements like case studies, role plays and the use of court records is realised and following expert’s opinion the results of the students final presentations and assignment are of a significant higher standard than those of traditional continuing education programmes.

2. E-learning competence of the teachers

All previous experience shows that competent support of internet-based learning processes and the supervision of the learners on the internet is an important, if not the most important, prerequisite for learning success in e-learning. Therefore the development and trialling of concepts for the further training of lecturers
as authors and moderators of e-learning modules is an indispensable component of any development planned for the area of e-learning.

Our initial situation:

A programme to train e-moderators and e-authors was set up and only qualified moderators are employed for the moderation of the OLIM - modules. The concept is based on self-experience: all future authors and moderators slip into the role of a student and experience the situation of a student. The role of moderators is that of a facilitator rather than a teacher. Moderators need to be interested and flexible in terms of the student’s individual learning process.

3. Student preparation - study skills

Because of the mix of students (across academic and professional backgrounds, age, working experience, media-competence…), we cannot assume that they are well prepared for this concept of web based continuing university education. To meet these needs all students have to go through a compulsory course “Virtual Teamwork” first. The topics covered are: getting familiar with the learning platform and its tools, time management issues, web based group work, web-related communication skills, reading and note-taking, basic knowledge of learning styles and their influence on efficient learning, individually and in groups. The didactic concept is based on doing/experimenting with the different tools, experiencing virtual teamwork and the reflection of these experiences.

The course “Virtual Teamwork” has also become a stand-alone by-product: big internationally performing companies face an increasing need to achieve results by working in virtual teams. In-house seminars using the in-house platform have been carried out with good results.

4. Continuous evaluation, revision and optimisation

A process of continuous evaluation is build into the modules. There is an online questionnaire for each module which the students are asked to fill in at the end. In addition to multiple choice questions regarding the quality of course-material, the moderation and other aspects, there are open questions for the students to let us have their opinion.

The summaries of these questionnaires build the basis for a reflection meeting among all moderators of a course. If necessary, adaptations to the course material are initiated and authors are involved. This applies to the moderation concept as well.
Conclusion

The success of the programme OLIM is widely based on the combination and interaction of didactic concepts, moderators and student’s preparation for the special needs of web based learning and a concept of continuous evaluation. In order to achieve best results on the student’s side the moderators need to facilitate the student’s individual learning process. In particular the latter can be seen as a change in the university teaching concepts of traditional universities in Germany.

References:


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