Distance Learning as a Tool to Support a Classroom Based Learning: College of Business Administration Challenge

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ABSTRACT

Technology is now revolutionizing the way we teach and learn allowing new learning methods, tools and techniques, and other benefits for life long learning.

E-learning is becoming a very important tool for the learning organisations and also for academic organisations. This paper will review College of Business Administration e-learning project and describe our approach for e-learning as an effective teaching tool in Higher Education programs curricula.

We'll present how ESCE/IPS will use e-learning as complement tool for the traditional classroom education, which means a hybrid approach – blended learning.

Figure 1. Distance Learning subsets, in *Urdan and Weggen, 2000*

INTRODUCTION

The change rhythm that organisations are actually confronted has been increasing with globalisation and technological evolution. Communication and Information Technologies (CIT) came to contribute to organisations regeneration, increase information sharing, open to external world, and increase their action ray (Mendes, et al. 2002). In this context of digital economy and e-commerce explosion, the organisations and people development are influenced by CIT (Gaivéo, 2001). Distance Learning using possibilities takes us to consider the relief paper that Higher Education Institutions (HEI) can assume face to actual change context imposed by globalisation.

HEI, as complex organisations, also come across with some difficulties at a management level, need to rethink their environment position. They have been pressed to alter their management and organisation methods as a consequence of the new roles that are requested them by Society: life long training, distance learning, quality of supplied teaching, and larger approach to social and economic realities (Mendes and Silva, 2002).

In accordance with its mission and strategy, the College of Business Administration (before referred as ESCE – *Escola Superior de Ciências Empresariais*) intends to position its activity area, developing their educational and social functions governed by quality patterns, and also as an entity that is recognised as a well-founded partner in economic activity. For that, ESCE seeks with an enlarged use of new CIT, the development of their activities as a modernization and differentiation form in its environment.
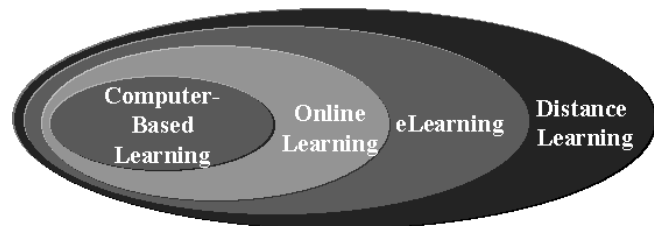
DISTANCE LEARNING – THE NEW TRAINING WAVE

In this accelerated change environment, where social nature subjects (employing, training, and self-esteem) are put in a pertinent way, it is necessary to find an answer to people needs. Distance Learning can play a fundamental part allowing each individual to reach its own purposes.

CIT potentialities should be used in several ways of education/training. In this extent Urdan and Weggen identified several Distance Learning subsets: Computer Based Learning, On-line Learning, e-Learning and Distance Learning, see "Figure 1".

When teaching is supplied through computer use, is designated by Computer Based Learning. Another learning form is Online Learning, where edu-

cation contents are provided by Internet, Intranet or Extranet. The e-Learning method collects a united square of applications and processes as Online Learning, Computer Based Learning, virtual classes and digital collaboration. This includes contents availability through Internet, Intranet or Extranet, audiocassettes and video, satellite communications, interactive television and CD-ROM. Distance Learning method is more embraced and is used when teacher and students meet separate for time, location/space or both. Teaching is made remotely through synchronous and asynchronous sessions including correspondence change, texts, graphs, audiocassettes and video, videoconferencing, interactive television, fax. This is a method that includes all of electronic and non-electronic means.

Like this, in a basic level, Distance Learning happens when teachers and students, separated for physical distance (Santos A., 2000), they use technology to establish processes that allow neutralise or reduce that distance. Teaching methods types above referred, gives to students' a support system to traditional teaching, once relative limitations at time, distance or derived of physical deficiencies, stop being impeding factors of its constant actualisation and increase of knowledge base. In a subsequent phase of development, this system can facilitate to adults renewing its knowledge base, acquired updates in traditional system, or a second opportunity in higher education.

Independently of the used method, teaching process includes at least seven basic elements: (1) motivate student, (2) explain what should be learned, (3) help student reminding him their previous knowledge, (4) supply pedagogic material, (5) make available orientation and attendance from teacher, (6) test his understanding, and (7) contribute for his enrichment (Dick and Reiser, 1989).

Is essential to enhance the importance of a clear and perceptible adaptation of contents that will be available, in way to guarantee that students build a mental connection between the acquired information and some information that has been kept already in his memory, fruit of his involvement in sessions they had attend (Gagné, 1985).

Students' relationship with CIT means can be translated in positive results since these meet the created expectations. Dodge prosecutes eight spe-

cific strategies based on (Marzano, 1992) work, which can be attributed to assure that students produce results of its knowledge. These strategies request that students compare, classify, induce, deduce, analyse mistakes, build a maintenance theory, make abstractions, or analyse different perspectives of knowledge that find in pedagogic materials that are supplied them through web (Dodge, 1995).

Is also necessary that, the prospective Distance Learning users acquire competences to create HTML pages or use other tools to support contents availability. So, is crucial to stimulate the use of several services, that Internet makes available, to foment the debate with students and teachers, trying to motivate them for learn, making available orientation and necessary attendance simultaneously to optimise virtual teaching system potentialities use.

Distance Learning allows to increases flexibility and enlargement of training geographical covering. However, its use as support system to teaching can only be seen as advantageous if it obtains an improvement of traditional teaching pedagogic results.

In broader terms e-Learning benefits can be several (Rosenberg, 2001):
- **Lower costs** – an investment optimisation in training, when reducing the costs associated to dislocation, as well as costs associated to traditional teaching infrastructures;
- **Solid and coherent contents, depending on the needs** – exists a larger uniformity and consistence in the form as contents are made available and introduced to students;
- **More actual contents** – it passes the simplest and fast being the renewing of pedagogic contents made available;
- **Possibility to learn it any hour** – Distance Learning makes possible the learning in any hour at any place;
- **New communities' emergency** – foments virtual communities' emergence, where pedagogic contents are discussed even after teaching program finish.

DISTANCE LEARNING AND PORTUGUESE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

In Portugal, and not only, Distance Education/Training don't have a prominence room in business calendars of most organisations. This tendency was confirmed in Training Director's Forum (TDF, 2002), where the elected training method for most organisations in 2001 continues to be room training (about 75% of preferences).

However, according to same study, it is expected that this tendency lose temper in next years, originating the search of a method that combines traditional method with on-line method (training offered through technology). So, the new tendencies, that will occupy a prominence place, in most organisations will be - distance learning.

Some organisations, which come across budget problems and difficulties with improving their resources, relegate usually training for second plan. For this purpose, Rosenberg defends the implementation (Elliot Masie works) of a mixed solution - blended learning (b-learning), attending to costs decreasing in organisations (Rosenberg M., 2002).

It is necessary that organisations innovate and motivate Human resources, for competences development of their human assets (Senge P., 2002). HEI plays an important role in this subject. Is necessary to rethink education, according to Marçal Grilo, they must improve flexibility to allow individuals to face any challenge along their life (Grilo, M., 2002).

The Technology adoption, by different HEI in Portugal, for training/education as tool for traditional training or for distance learning, is growing up. Platforms like WebCT, TWT or Learning Space are the elected. We verify that preferences are in most cases for tools that presents a smaller cost for the HEI.

Untraditional training/education of our HEI has begun in the ends of the 80s' with Open University emergence. Their population goals are essentially "adults, endowed with maturity and motivation". To the similarity of Open University, also Catholic University, has distance training courses, attributing a specialisation diploma to individuals that its.

More recently (2001), Institute for Statistics and Information Management (ISEGI) of Lisbon New University, makes available a Master's degree Course totally at distance, except the dissertation defence that takes place in the Institution.

Other HEI are using a mixed method (b-learning) as complement to tra-

ditional teaching, retrieving from CIT advantages to acquirement of knowledge. Examples are, Aveiro University, Évora University, Minho University, Porto University, Porto Polytechnic Institute and Viseu Polytechnic Institute, and in a close future Setúbal Polytechnic Institute (IPS).

HEI approach to business tissue has been a part of delineated strategies by these institutions. Aveiro University and Viseu Polytechnic Institute are examples. They have an organism that provides adults professional training allowing the acquisition of needed competences independently of its location.

Nowadays, HEI have conditions to define a strategy to create a Distance Learning system, contributing to the development and improvement of new learning paradigm and business world connection.

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AND REASONS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

The College of Business Administration (ESCE) is one of the five IPS Schools, born in 1994 December. The main function is intervening in Business Sciences areas, complementing the slope Education and Technology presented by the other IPS Schools, Education School, Technology School of Setúbal and Barreiro and Health School.

ESCE has as mission: to Teach, to Investigate and to Research the Business Sciences, dignifying the Man and promoting Setúbal region and country development.

In the academic year of 2002/2003, ESCE counts with a 100 teaching staff, with superior academic graduation, approximately 2000 students and 25 employees.

About facilities, ESCE has the conditions, underlying to their strategies, for the accomplishment of a b-learning or Distance Learning initiative. It is essential to refer that, about technological resources, school and students have a free use computer science rooms (24 hours a day, 7 days a week), with Internet access, and whole software and equipment needed to prosecute their academic activities.

ESCE in its youth is watchful to deep technological changes and fast modifications in job market conditions, and knowing that superior education system is constantly challenged to increase the supply of education opportunities, obtaining as compensation successive budget cuts.

Looking to School region, Distance Learning constitutes today an alternative to knowledge democratisation, in normal learning process, in along life learning process (life long learning), in continuous professional improvement. ESCE intends to adopt Distance Learning, in slope Online Learning, as a support tool to traditional teaching way, to optimise supplied teaching and also to foment a larger use of new CIT, by students and teaching staff.

ESCE is characterized by possessing an own organisational culture, where participation, democracy and human values are an acting pillars, trying to stimulate the involvement of their members in several activities, promoting a narrow connection with community. Through a Distance Learning program, ESCE seeks, besides geographical base enlargement, a larger opening to its involving community, increasing the offer of teaching actions along life, creating a complementary mechanism to traditional room based learning.

CONCLUSION

According with analysis concerning CIT advantages to support new learning forms, and looking to actual competitive context, where people and organisations are included, becomes necessary to HEI find appropriate answers to its position as knowledge repository and transmission.

According with ESCE mission and its objectives prosecution, Distance Learning becomes an important contribution for increasing process efficiency, that interactive teaching-learning is intended, in a way that is possible to accomplish its important functions as HEI – the knowledge spread.

In this way, our perspective is that ESCE will adopt a Distance Learning system, initially in b-learning approach, as complement to traditional teaching, seeking to increase value to actual model.

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