

Chapter 21

Work Integrated E–Learning in Public Administration: The Portuguese School Libraries Network Case Study

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter describes the experience of the Portuguese School Libraries Network (SLN) – an agency of the Ministry of Education and Science – as a case study in the development of work integrated e-learning in Public Administration. In 2008, SLN developed the School Libraries Evaluation Model (SLEM), with the objective of collecting information about how school libraries (SLs) across the country operate and contribute to effective teaching and learning. Since 2010, schools have been invited to identify and self-evaluate performance across key domains, for which a set of critical success factors, assessment indicators, and performance levels is established. The application of SLEM implied that schools would have to deal with new management concepts and techniques, and become conversant with working methods that were until then unfamiliar to them. Two professional groups were pivotal in this process: (i) inter-municipal advisers (IMAs), and (ii) teacher

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librarians (TLs). These were the two sets of civil servants who benefited from the design and implementation of a work-based online training program specifically designed to familiarize them with the rationale and with the particulars of SLEM. The following sections of this chapter contextualize the operation of SLN, provide insight into application of SLEM, and discuss in more detail the key characteristics of the trainee-centered e-learning environment that has been established to facilitate the training of IMAs and TLs. Particular emphasis will be given to the issues of organizational support, instructional design, and alignment of instructional contents with performance requirements.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The Portuguese SLN is a governmental agency affiliated with the Ministry of Education and Science. It was established in 1996 with a clear mandate: to equip primary, basic and secondary schools with state of the art SLs, therefore benefiting a student population aged between 6 and 17. The principles underlying the foundation of SLN place the school library as an essential resource at the heart of education system, where it plays a critical role in skills and literacies development, as well as in the preparation of the lifelong learner.

In terms of organisational structure, SLN is a network headed by a national coordinator, who oversees the operation of two vectors: (i) a steering committee, and (ii) a team of IMAs. The Steering Committee is a group of individuals responsible for general operating policy, procedures, and related matters affecting SLN as a whole. The committee is multidisciplinary by definition, being composed by specialists in school librarianship and cognate fields such as information literacy, knowledge management, educational informatics, etc. Some of the core functions of the steering committee are: (i) liaising with the Ministry of Education and Science's central and regional directorates as well as with external partners and stakeholders such as Higher Education Institutions, Foundations and private sector organizations; (ii) collaborating with municipalities, public libraries and schools with a view to successfully equipping schools with state of the art facilities, equipment and resources, including information and communication technologies; (iii) providing and accrediting specialized training in school librarianship to key audiences such as TLs, teachers, supporting staff; (iv) producing and disseminating policy and guidelines. Finally, a team of IMAs ensures the establishment of local level partnerships. Their role is to establish a sense of proximity and dialogue between SLs and the steering committee, and to feed forward experiences of successes and failures from the field into the shaping of successful policy. At a more pragmatic level, they ensure compliance with technical and logistical specifications of school library management, such as

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