

Chapter 3.6

Strategies of LMS Implementation at German Universities

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ABSTRACT

In Germany, a learning management system (LMS) has become an everyday online tool for the academic staff and students at almost every university. Implementing an LMS, however, can be very different depending on the university. We introduce some general aspects on the strategies at German universities on how to implement an LMS. These aspects are mainly influenced by two main approaches, the top-down and bottom-up approach, which determine the decisions and actions on different levels at the university. In order to show how the strategies are carried out, we are presenting three case studies from universities based in the German federal state of Lower Saxony. We are going to reveal that both approaches play a part in each strategy, however differently weighted. It becomes clear that networking and collaboration plays a crucial role, not only concerning the technical development of the LMS software but also in organisational and educational terms.

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INTRODUCTION

Using a central learning management system (LMS) in academic terms is subject to some strategies that are following the universities' goals on several levels such as for educational or administrative reasons. In this article, we are focussing on the different strategies at German universities on how to implement an LMS into everyday university life. The originating motive is that an LMS that is intensely used by the academic staff and students can also set a path to improve teaching and learning at university, either in regard of organisation or quality. We understand under the intensity of LMS usage both the quantity (*How many people are using the LMS?*) as well as the quality (*At what extend and how diverse is the LMS used?*). On the basis of three case studies based upon implementation processes at three universities in Germany, we show different ways to anchor LMS usage within an educational institution.

The article is divided into two main parts. First, we introduce general aspects of LMS implementation at German universities starting off with the description and discussion of two approaches concerning the implementation process (top-down and bottom-up approach). Then, we are going in to detail by showing how these approaches affect the decision making on one LMS, the setting up of services, the process of change management as well as the development of networking and collaboration. In the second part, we are focussing on our cases by presenting the common ground concerning strategy goals and LMS choice. Subsequently, we are going into detail by recounting how three universities in Hannover, Osnabrück and Braunschweig have gone through the process of implementation. Finally, we are comparing these experiences to the general information of the first part and are making suggestions for forthcoming processes.

As academic structures are very diverse from nation to nation and bring along different terms

for affected people and institutions, we find it necessary to clarify the terms and concepts we are using here regarding German universities. Please, refer to the section "Key Terms & Definitions" at the end of this article for more information.

TWO APPROACHES OF LMS IMPLEMENTATION IN GERMAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The use of new media, including LMS, was at least until 2004 rather subject to time-limited projects at many universities in Germany (Kleimann & Wannemacher, 2004). Although there already existed initiatives to fold up technology enhanced learning (TEL) activities within universities some years before (e.g. "NewMediaNet"¹ at the University of Freiburg), besides projects, the continuous use of new media was narrowed to single departments. This becomes apparent in the succeeding nationwide calls for project proposals issued by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (in short BMBF) "Neue Medien in der Bildung" and "Neue Medien in der Bildung 2". As the first call demanded project proposals for single eLearning-units (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2000), the BMBF recognized that it did not go any further than that: no processes were initiated to implement eLearning structures into the universities. For that reason the second call demanded project proposals to integrate eLearning into the universities sustainably (DLR, 2009). TEL related systems were operated due to the interests and the engagement of single persons and in some cases attracted larger user groups. But those bottom-up approaches were limited since they were not reflecting the needs of the university as a whole. However, particularly around that time, some universities already identified the potential of new media and launched activities to provide centralized services for the use of TEL systems. Often an LMS is implemented as a starting point for TEL at university. While the selection of an

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