

Users Group: Kaleidoscope
Case Study: Project MASSIVE, users as stakeholders

Table of contents

1. Introduction and relevance of case study: users as stakeholders	2
2. Description of the case study	3
3. Highlights of results	4
4. Lessons learnt/message to KAL	6

1. Introduction and relevance of case study: users as stakeholders

This report presents a case study which reflects the point of view of users as stakeholders. This point of view provides the analytical basis for the elaboration of recommendations useful for the Kaleidoscope community and researchers.

According to the Users Group, the approach of studying “users as stakeholders” represents the last step in the analysis of users’ involvement in a process that starts with the study of users as validators, followed by users as participants in research. This will facilitate the understanding of the different profiles of the users in relation to the researchers’ agenda for approaching users, since the UG understands that **users involvement implies a different level of complexity in the map representing the different users involvement**. The three steps fit the plan of the UG to go from the users and researchers workshop to the users’ conference to provide inputs to the research agenda.

The outcomes of the case studies will contribute to the elaboration of a set of tools which will be made available to KALEIDOSCOPE researchers (experts in Technology Enhanced Learning, TEL) to help them structure their dialogue and negotiation with Users.

The case study is based on the project **MASSIVE¹ (Modelling Advise and support Services to Integrate the Virtual Component in Higher Education)**, an e-Learning project coordinated by the University of Granada (Spain), which at this time is in the last phase of development. The goal of Massive is the study of the adoption of e-Learning strategies by “traditional” Universities, and the subsequent design of a model of support services for European traditional Universities to help them successfully implement the virtual component of education.

Many initiatives have proposed and/or documented approaches and strategies to integrate virtual Campuses into higher education. The adoption of e-Learning strategies by “traditional” Universities does not only require integration of pedagogical or technological approaches into their strategies but provision of a set of support services that can facilitate their integration into the University.

Within Massive, six service areas were proposed as particularly critical in the implementation of ICT/e-learning in EU higher education institutions: University strategies towards the integration of virtual components, Evolution of University Libraries, Management of IPR, Training and teacher support, Student support, , and Virtualisation of contents / online course design.

The project began the research with a collection of **case studies** focusing on eLearning support services for the virtualisation of universities, The aim was the identification of indicators and possible development paradigms in each of the six areas considered. The second action was **Seminars**, focusing on the areas of potential support services. The next action was **Peer Review Visits** to selected institutions, visits of project partners—peer experts in the areas identified for the support services—to the six universities involved in

¹ <http://cevug.ugr.es/massive/index.html>

the project; the aim being to develop a definitive Model of support services for the virtualisation of traditional universities.

The cases selected needed to represent typical examples of the variety and range of forms of 'virtual Higher Education'. This meant that each case would reflect different configurations of scale, geographical coverage, objectives, stakeholders and service models.

Concerning users' involvement, we describe the process of discussion with key stakeholders at the **University of Barcelona**, one of the cases selected in MASSIVE. The research done in this project conceived the **stakeholders** as having an integral part in an ongoing discussion within the university community about how to integrate e-learning into face-to-face teaching, in order to improve the overall approach to teaching and learning. So in this case we understand **users as stakeholders as a user community**, in this case the University of Barcelona, involved in discussing TEL adoption strategies in the day-to-day operations of the institution, including which services the university should deploy within the academic community.

2. Description of the case study

The exchange with the stakeholders of the University of Barcelona took place in two phases; roughly, the first one was based on questionnaires sent to a selected number of staff, and on the interviews with key informants made by local MASSIVE researchers. The second phase took place some months later as a set of Peer Review sessions conducted by a team of researchers of the project MASSIVE with different stakeholders selected within the institution.

The MASSIVE project areas of research and discussion with the stakeholders were: University strategies towards the integration of LMS, evolution of the University libraries, management of IPR, Teacher training and support, and Virtualisation of contents. The area named "students support" was left out given the difficulties to gather data.

Data collection involved a combination of methods and instruments. The case study began sending structured questionnaires to people related to the above mentioned areas. Following this, a 'positioning interview' with key informants selected according to the responses gathered in the mentioned questionnaire. The main instruments were:

Positioning interviews – this is a structured interview with a key informant who can give an overview of the current situation regarding virtualization in each case.

Focus groups – a group interview with a small number of stakeholders.

Documents and Archives – these encompassed a range of 'secondary' data, including: documents and reports (brochures; prospectus and course outlines; 'mission' statements; records of Committee meetings; evaluation reports; and information in different university's websites).

An effective means of carrying out data case study collection using this range of methods and instruments was through a 'site visit'. Key actors that were engaged in the case study during the site visit were:

- University Management: the vice-rector of teaching, and the technical delegate for innovation and evaluation
- Teaching staff involved in the delivery of courses: six teachers from different subject areas
- three staff responsible for course design; platform design and maintenance;
- one course administrator
- three librarians, involved in supporting some activities in the LMS of the University of Barcelona
- two specialists in charge of designing the training of the university teachers,
- one specialist in intellectual property rights at the University of Barcelona

As previously mentioned, the researchers proposed in the case of the University of Barcelona five of the six areas of the virtualisation of traditional universities to be explored: University strategies towards the integration of LMS, evolution of the University libraries, management of IPR, Training and teachers' support, and Virtualisation of contents. These areas were proposed by the project itself, out of the literature review and particular experience of the researchers participating in Massive. Although representatives of staff related to the areas were involved in the research, it was significant that the final users, the students or students' representatives, did not participate in the discussion. This was due to the difficulty to find representative students that could give their views.

During the research, no other dimensions emerged than the ones mentioned. This was due to the fact that these dimensions were broad enough to cover most of the issues involved.

3. Highlights of results

Following the onsite visit, the review team discussed the interviews and other data that had previously been collected in order to create a brief preliminary report for the university to be given orally in a meeting with the designated person. Later a full written report containing observations and suggestions was submitted. Some of the key points are presented below:

It would appear that lack of administrative support, general lack of interest and lack of cooperation are the big hurdles to overcome. There are technical support demands that are not being provided (for institutional reasons or lack of resources or the different approach technicians have with respect to innovation, or that the technology support system is not appropriately embedded within the innovation plans, or that it supports the tools, not the innovations themselves, etc.) There is also a great lack of information and communication, each group within the university organising its own resources without knowing who may have the same needs. The management of knowledge within a large traditional institution needs its own model that fosters communication and disseminates information throughout its complex and heterogeneous structure, rather than a business model that may have a hierarchical structure without many mechanisms for communication.

Currently, much staff development for e-learning focuses on the level of technological delivery strategies when other more human issues, such as the educators' own conception of learning, should have a major influence on the planning of courses, the development of teaching strategies and the material that the students actually learn. More and more it is being realised that implementation of ICT/elearning is as much a psychological matter as a technological one. There needs to be a bottom-up approach for course design in which the users also play a role.

The subject area of “virtualisation of contents” is not isolated with respect to the other areas; it is mainly connected to the university libraries area and the IPR issues with a clear link to teacher training and teacher and student support—these are a priority for the efficient design and use of online courses. Furthermore, the design itself needs different approaches; developing learning materials and learning experiences is an interactive process including users in the design as much as possible.

The evolution of libraries is deeply connected with the other areas involved in/elearning, as they all share some of their main concerns and challenges. First of all, the university strategy towards the integration of virtual education will have clear influence in the convergence of computing and library services. The library management team will have to deal on many occasions with the management of the intellectual property rights of resources. As for training and support of teachers and students, the library has to make changes in this area as well; otherwise the users will not be prepared to take advantage of the new library facilities and opportunities. Finally, in the future there will be a natural relation between all kind of elearning activities and the use of the library facilities embedded in the learning experience on-campus or off-campus. In this sense, the challenge will be in adopting standards and in the interoperability of the systems.

IPR and e-content is an increasingly important issue in education that requires that strategic decisions be taken by the universities. There do not appear to be clear best practice models that can be applied without controversy. It is important to create awareness amongst the different stakeholders of the risks and opportunities that the digitised environment has to offer. The whole university system needs to agree on rules for collaboration, for sharing, for respecting commercial rights, etc., in the knowledge society.

The profile of the elearning teacher is complex and multifaceted, covering issues such as pedagogical mastery, communication talent, awareness about the use of technology, online interaction and negotiating processes. Training and practice are required in order to improve teachers' professional profiles and to develop and to set forth effective results in pedagogical as well as in organisational terms.

Introducing teachers to the use of technology is not enough. There must be activities aimed at introducing teachers to the different possible elearning models that can be implemented. And also that they be helped to attain the professional competences needed. Perhaps the growing interest in blended learning, a combination of face-to-face and online activities in a course, is the way to bridge the gap between the old and the new—ICT/e-learning seen as enhancement rather than replacement.

One common perception is lack of time for adapting to the changes, given that teachers have heavy workloads, and some teachers aren't convinced that they want to or should invest effort in learning e-learning skills. There are many issues that teachers need to be involved in to help plan the future; it is becoming increasingly clear that there are many reservations, worries, objections and questions about ICT from the pedagogical, professional, and sociological points of view which must be taken seriously.

4. Lessons learnt/message to KAL

In this MASSIVE peer review process at the University of Barcelona, the experiences of the reviewers/researchers have produced some insights into the researcher-user relationship.

- In a dialogue about institutional innovation with stakeholders belonging to the institution, it is necessary to consider that the institution has a history related to the particular innovation which should be carefully studied and taken into account when planning the research agenda.
- The kind of research analysis performed by the MASSIVE peer review teams is holistic in nature, which requires looking at the interconnectedness of all the areas involved in ICT/e-learning implementation.
- The stakeholders/users of a complex organisation such as a large university are diverse and many. Therefore, the researchers need to know as much as possible about the different types of stakeholders/users—the unique responsibilities and concerns of each one as well as how they connect to one another. The needs and problems of one group will necessarily be connected to another group.
- Doing research on a complex organisation in order to understand its needs and help solve its problems should be seen as doing research on a network of shareholders/users who are involved in very different, but interdependent aspects of the organisation's operations.
- The researchers in the MASSIVE project have had to develop techniques of communication with the different types of stakeholders/users in order to encourage them to speak frankly about their work, duties, concerns, visions, etc. We found that relaxed guided conversation with three friendly strangers in a pleasant environment was conducive to learning about the individuals as people—as opposed to exam-type interrogation, for example. Rather than simply answering prewritten questions, the researchers tried to make the interviewees feel free to express themselves in their own ways and to talk about what they wanted to. This requires an attitude of respect and some knowledge of the interviewees' roles as well as a range of possible responsibilities and concerns learned from desk research.
- In addition to interviewing key stakeholders/users, the MASSIVE researchers also investigated the background of the institution and its ICT/e-learning history as well as the roles and relationships of the various stakeholders/users.

- When possible, the MASSIVE researchers observed the stakeholders/users in their own environment in order to better understand their work.