

Chapter XXIV

Integrating Online Educational Activities in Traditional Courses: University-wide Lessons after Three Years

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a case study of how a university responded to educational and technological change. After an introduction to Bocconi University (an Italian private business university) and the recent changes in the Italian university system, the case describes the initiation and management over three years of a project to integrate Web-enhanced learning (WEL) into classroom-based courses. The case includes identification of profiles of WEL adoption and description of the technology choice, how the teachers adopted the innovation and how students responded. The project is presented as organizational innovation and compared with the stages of the Rogers' model of diffusion of innovations. Two groups of conditions for success were identified. Conditions common to IS innovation included top management commitment, a supportive environment, and appropriate ICT infrastructure. Conditions specific to WEL included teacher preparedness, appropriate use, appropriate scale, and flexibility.

This chapter addresses the issue of integration of online learning into classroom-based learning to achieve effective and manageable Web-enhanced learning (WEL) for on-campus students. The focus is on change across a university system rather than in an individual classroom. While some excellent works are now available on implementing new approaches to learning in individual courses (e.g., Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Palloff & Pratt, 2001), and general texts and models of conditions needed for wider diffusion are emerging (e.g., Bates, 2000; Surry, 2002), the available case studies tend to be about new wholly virtual universities or about the adoption of new technologies for wholly distance learning. Many of these are short vignettes rather than analytical case studies, and with few exceptions (e.g., Friedlander, 2002; López del Puerto, 1999), lessons are not clearly drawn from these cases to wider principles or to applications for other universities. Those principles that are drawn tend to focus on specific lessons for implementing distance learning (DL) rather than for using Web-based technologies to complement or to improve the quality of classroom-based learning (e.g., Friedlander's "Use DL only when other traditional forms do not work," p. 3).

Systematic studies of traditional universities' attempts to introduce large-scale WEL have not identified great success. After a two-year study of the UK context, Pollock and Cornford (2000) concluded "that the universities which we have studied have found the introduction of new technologies, alongside their more traditional methods of providing teaching and learning, extremely difficult ... What we have found is that the Virtual University works in theory but not in practice." Pollock and Cornford place the blame on the approach taken by universities. They criticize the bottom-up approach, in which individual teachers and courses adopt new technologies in the absence of a university-wide vision. They note how implementations have failed to engage all aspects of the university required for success, including academic staff, computer services departments, and partner institutions. Finally, they caution against approaches that call for standardization without vision.

Attempts to identify characteristics of successful diffusion of instructional technology in higher educational institutions have produced several different models. Some focus on aspects of diffusion: Hall & Hord (1987) considered the role played by people in facilitating change; Ely (1999) considered the conditions that facilitate the implementation of an innovation; Stockdill and Morehouse (1992) developed a checklist of the factors that affect adoption; Farquhar and Surry (1994) listed four categories of factors affecting the adoption. Other authors have taken a broader view, incorporating evaluation of teaching technologies among their models of success (Bates, 1995, 2000; Surry, 2002). Despite their apparent differences, most of the cited works have roots in diffusion of innovation theory and, more specifically, the work of Everett Rogers (1995), yet none uses Rogers' complete framework of organizational diffusion of innovation to systematically study technology-based innovation in education.

The case study presented here describes how Bocconi University, a private business university in Milan, Italy, is developing methods for integrating Web-based education into its classroom-based courses. The case identifies the vision that has driven the change, and the ways in which critical actors have been engaged during the first three years of the university's experience. Diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 1995) is used as the organizing and analytical framework for the case. Working from this established theory, the case demonstrates how change associated with adoption and diffusion of new educational technology follows stages similar to those of innovation processes in other types of organizations (Holloway, 1996). As Pollock and Cornford's work suggests, the case demon-

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