

Abstract

This chapter aims to demonstrate how PAOL - Unit for Innovation in Education, a project from ISCAP - School of Accounting and Administration of Oporto - Institute Polytechnic of Oporto, Portugal - prompted new educational initiatives and new learning scenarios at a Higher Education Institution. Furthermore, it will demonstrate PAOL's lines of intervention through an extensive analysis based on the 6 years of experience that this unit has in the educational technology field; a project that began small but that, due to the force of innovation, has progressively conquered new adepts. Therefore the unit described in this chapter relates all these factors, as a whole, capable of attaining changes that influence mentalities and methodologies, overcoming cultural and technical barriers. This case study can serve as a catalyst, potentiating the creation of new multi-faceted projects in the scope of web technologies in higher education teaching-learning processes.

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Introduction

The success of any e-learning institutional project relies on the harmonization of several variables, interests and motivations. PAOL, ISCAP's Unit for Innovation in Education, described in this chapter, tries to relate all these factors as a whole, capable of attaining innovations that influence mentalities and methodologies, overcoming cultural and technical barriers.

One of PAOL's main goals is to facilitate the integration of Web Technologies at ISCAP (School of Accounting and Administration of Oporto – Porto Polytechnic Institute – Portugal) using them to complement face-to-face learning. This process of integrating Web Technologies in Higher Education Institutions occurs in a very specific educational reality – the Portuguese -demanding a profound knowledge of it in terms of the organizational structure of e-learning practices. “Background: A Global Vision of E-Learning Practices At Portuguese Higher Education” introduces, thus, the Portuguese learning structure, followed by a brief description of today's e-learning practices.

Given the difficulties in operationalizing the many approaches mentioned in the literature, “An Innovative Framework to Promote the Use of E-Learning Technologies as an Institutional Project” presents a new structure that emerged from our experience and may be of help to institutions in the development of e-learning projects, namely in the development of e-learning projects that aim at involving the entire learning community, adding value to the institution. This structure is described based on 6 years of experience, which have allowed the promotion of coherent and objective paths towards a sustainable, flexible, innovative and technology-supported learning process. The description of the

elements taken into account is based on the concepts underlined by the methodological and pedagogical principles and grouped into 3 interventional vectors: institutional, technical and pedagogical dimension.

The institutional dimension includes the management of Human Resources, knowledge creation and knowledge sharing. The sharing dynamics, both within and outside the institution, is presented as an essential vector for the success of any institutional project.

The technical dimension shows that the adoption of Web Technologies begins by naturally transposing traditional learning practices into e-learning environments. The first stage of this process began with the use of a Learning Management System, where the main concern focused on enabling the community to use it. The analysis presented in “Technical Dimension” of “An Innovative Framework to Promote the Use of E-Learning Technologies as an Institutional Project,” follows Rogers’ innovation line to better portrait the different stages and results.

The pedagogical dimension of the Project supports the belief that the success of an e-learning Project is related to its usage in the learning process. This dimension appears as fundamental in the sustainable progress of an e-learning Project, being the one that demands the most significant cultural changes and which requires more time to be implemented. Cultural changes are naturally difficult to occur and when there are no practical models to support the new approaches, many of the stakeholders in the process prefer, despite the critique, traditional teaching and learning methods.

Promoting the educational dimension of PAOL was, thus, the part that required greater effort, in particular by seeking to develop innovative projects that would motivate and drive the community to (accept) change. The creativity of the projects developed appears as one of the motivating forces for participation and, therefore, for the community’s adhesion. The description of the projects in “Pedagogical Dimension” may prove useful for future reuse in different contexts. Among many others, we have developed the “Digital Portfolios” and “Supporting Design for E-Learning” projects and have supported or cooperated with other pre-existent projects in the institution.

In each of the institutional, technical and pedagogical vectors analyzed, the descriptions of the inter-relationships that make up the systemic view of PAOL’s system are included.

For a project to be sustainable and enable the achievement of a consistent and evolving framework, a continuous process of evaluation and self-evaluation is mandatory. Thus “Evaluation” describes the successive evaluations carried out

over the 6 years, which results contributed to consecutive improvements to the structure now described.