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Topic

Sebastian Hoffmann

Building eLearning Organisations




09/05 - The e-learning and ICT consultant Sebastian Hoffmann sees a turnaround in the e-learning market. Mr Hoffmann has been involved in dozens of e-learning projects in the past ten years. With his team, he has developed and recently implemented a change-management solution, the Comprehensive Package for Building eLearning Organizations (CPeO). According to

Mr Hoffmann, the e-learning market has matured in that the trend toward the training of teaching staffs is increasing ...

ONLINE EDUCA BERLIN (OEB): Mr Hoffmann, how would you describe the current situation in the e-learning market?

Sebastian Hoffmann (SH): The awareness is changing. We have seen a run on e-learning tools, technology, and content, and the hidden wish and promise to become a service provider by applying these elements. This is a misconception. On the other hand the few coaching programmes on the market have not disseminated the complete multidisciplinary picture of e-learning service development, so e-learning projects in Europe and in developing countries have, to my knowledge, not enabled teaching staff to any great extent.

But in the past two years, the demand for processes to transfer the art of teaching to online mode has grown significantly. We have been, and continue to be, asked for full-service chain

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models to improve teaching service quality especially in institutions in developing countries, both vocational and academic.

OEB: How about the effect on technical solutions?

SH: Technology remains a prerequisite for e-learning. It must facilitate ubiquitous and fast access to information, communication and collaboration on the learners' side. On the teachers' side technology, has to support modularisation strategies and to ease administration through seamless business processes. Yet for e-learning to become what it was always meant to be – a new way of learning – technology alone will not do.

OEB: This shift in the e-learning market towards teacher training– how has it come about?



SH: Learners and teachers play a key role. They have grasped the requirement of lifelong learning and have a vital interest in improving their prospects in life and at work.

E-Learning, with its outreach to even remote areas, is regarded as an accelerator to such ambition. Training and education providers are wise to react to this demand. In our enabling programmes, we notice that teaching staff immediately see the need to assure quality of education through process design. A math teacher in Uganda once put this very nicely saying during a workshop:

"In the late seventies I learnt about instructional planning, defining learning objectives, evaluation, and so on. In the nineties I became familiar with constructivist teaching models. Yet I was not aware of the potential of these things. It was with the seamless and low-cost processes and tools in place that all concepts have suddenly made

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sense. Now I have all communication and contents documented, I can reach a large audience, enrich my teaching continuously, and deliver best services. The next generation of teachers must become familiar with multidimensional modes of teaching to ensure an impact on our educational system."

OEB: How does your enabling strategy respond to the demand for teacher training you have described?

SH: Our goal is to embed sustainable e-learning in the institutional service portfolio of training and education providers. We reach this goal by enabling teaching staff, preparing the institutional change process and evaluating the service quality. The core coaching during our Comprehensive Package for Building eLearning Organizations lasts about eight months; additional consultancy leads to a completion of a project within two years. Our strategy comprises three elements:

First, coaching based on Standard Operating Procedures to develop and deliver e-learning services. These SOPs can be reused when setting up teaching services. It is a multiplier programme, and we encourage participants to multiply their know-how to colleagues or even outside their institution.

Second, we have a set of tools, templates and contents that guide teachers through the comprehensive service set-up and delivery process. All components are open source and open content – this will also be a topic at this year's **ONLINE EDUCA BERLIN** by the way.

Third, we've applied a minimalist technology model that uses the latest prescribed process and content models. It assures seamless information flows. We use, for example, offline learning material; MS-Word and Power Point are

used as authoring environment for XML-Publishing. This low entry approach is especially important when dealing with teaching staff in developing countries.

OEB: Could you name the key success factors of your strategy?

SH: We pay particular attention to action learning and creating transparent service quality. We do so because we have identified both as major weaknesses of e-learning enabling projects.



Action learning guarantees that teaching staff directly transfer newly gained skills to their workplace environment. The change process undergone by the teaching staff has to be monitored, and interventions must be possible throughout the service cycle. The more they own the change process, the higher they are motivated and the better the outcome of a project will be.

Transparency of service quality means information from the past at my fingertips. All pieces of information such as scripts, exams, messages, project results are structured and archived by the staff themselves and are available to the community. This procedure allows for exchange among experts and proper evaluation of teaching by participants as well as by staff.

OEB: Could you give us an example of such an enabling programme?

SH: We have just finished an enabling project as a service provider to Crystal, a transnational project accomplished on behalf of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Crystal and the

Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH established regional networks of enabled teachers from technical and vocational training institutions in India and Uganda. E-Learning services were chosen to help increase the availability of vocational training in both countries. The lessons learnt from this successful project will be presented at **ONLINE EDUCA BERLIN**.

OEB: What do you expect from **ONLINE EDUCA BERLIN 2005**?

SH: **ONLINE EDUCA BERLIN** remains the leading European e-learning conference and offers great opportunities for exchange.

I think it is time to discuss service processes, content models, and quality assurance instruments for e-learning. This could also be interesting for suppliers since many providers reinvent the wheel and set up avoidable construction sites. **ONLINE EDUCA BERLIN** as an independent conference provider is able to contribute to sustainable results and help develop a community of practice and publishers.

OEB: Mr Hoffmann, thank you for this interview.
