

Workshop Supporting the individual learner in ULLL

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The Makes and Brakes of Collaborative E-Learning: ONLINE LEARNING IN MANAGEMENT, a case study

By Dr. Marion Bruhn-Suhr

Arbeitsstelle für Wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung, University of Hamburg

Abstract

The results presented in this paper are outcomes of the e-learning project and subsequent programme ONLINE LEARNING IN MANAGEMENT (OLIM) which celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2012. The centre for university continuing education of Hamburg University (AWW) has set up a structure for all its e-learning programmes which comprises a preparation course for participants as well as a training course for e-moderators to qualify and professionalise both groups for the special needs in an e-learning environment. E-learning within OLIM is substantially based on communication and co-operation in virtual teams. The target group is adult learners with a university degree and at least one year of work experience. There is no limitation in the professional background of the participants, it is regarded as beneficial to have a mix of professions.

Companies constantly claim that employees are not well trained for team work let alone virtual team work which has become an everyday demand for many internationally active corporates. One of the aims in the OLIM-programme is to teach and train working in virtual groups. We also believe in the benefits of collaborative work as a didactical means. Especially with respect to questions of transferring knowledge into everyday life collaborative work proves useful.

Within the implemented structure the different partners (e-authors, e-moderators and students) have to be considered separately:

E-authors and moderators have to

- be trained and supported to initiate and supervise interaction
- be introduced to ways of designing effective group work
- learn about how to support students' motivation and commitment

Students have to be

- made familiar with the technical aspects of the learning platform and trained how to use the different tools
- familiarized with the ways, pitfalls and potential of collaborative work

- trained and motivated by feedback from the e-moderator regarding their performance: individually as well as in their group.

The paper will outline how the training of virtual team work is set up and integrated into the overall programme and concept of OLIM: for the preparation of e-authors and e-moderators we designed the module “Train the E-Trainer”, and all students have to do the compulsory module “Virtual Teamwork” before moving on with the programme.

The presentation will focus on answers to the following questions:

- What impact has the actual design of group activities on the development of virtual team work competencies?
- How can virtual teams efficiently be supported in their work?
- What are good tasks for virtual group work? What works well and why?
- Are there essential or supportive reasons to start a course with a face to face session – and what are the drawbacks?
- To what extent are we restricting the flexibility in time?
- Which influence do students' previous competences and qualities have on the course (e.g. in the field of communication, team work, learning styles)
- How can we best train our students to become competent virtual collaborative learners?

The presentation will give the main results of the past 10 years experience and provide some practical insight into supportive and impeding factors of collaborative learning for the target group in mind.

Observations and outcomes among others are:

- The compulsory module “Virtual teamwork” is relevant and provides a good preparation for further work in a virtual environment or else enables the students to make an informed decision to choose a different setting for their learning.
- The required flexibility of time is rather bounded if we want to focus on virtual group work.
- Excellent traditional trainers and teachers are not necessarily good e-trainers or moderators.