Implementing e-Learning at the University of Botswana: the Practitioner's Perspective

Regina K Masalela
University of Botswana
masalelar@mopipi.ub.bw

Abstract

The University of Botswana (UB) is undergoing transformative changes in response to internal and external influences in higher education. These include attempts to transition towards institution-wide deployment of on-line learning strategies to enhance the educational experience. An external review consultancy commissioned in 2007, recommended that, "the university involvement in distance learning should be confined to online learning programs..." In response, UB embarked on the Masters in Project Management. Unfortunately, due to a "top-bottom" approach, the pilot failed. Additionally, there was lack of a comprehensive institutional strategy based on shared vision; the absence of situational analysis of the environment to assess the viability of the project in terms of resources; facilitator attitudes and user preparedness. LASO (the leadership, academic and student ownership and readiness) model would have been suited for this endeavour because it integrates top-bottom and bottom-up initiatives where leadership incorporates with academic.

Introduction

The context of higher education is changing rapidly throughout the world and the UB is not an exception. The advances of technologies over the years offered the new paradigms for university teaching and learning, hence exerted pressure for change. The use of multimedia has strengthened the distance learning approach in general and e-learning in particular. The use of visual components such as graphics, video, animation and others help to promote learner interaction with content and to understand meaning of what is displayed on the screen or in print. Universities around the world embark on e-learning for varied reasons. Some of the reasons may include: using an online portion of the course as a supplement or hybrid; a standalone course where students are not in the same room at the same time at any point in the course; offering an online course to cater for a working segment of the population which cannot be on-campus or offering an online course to boost enrollment and retention in some cases (Thorms, 2005).

The University of Botswana is the only national university in the country. In its vision statement, it has included 'lifelong and open learning approaches" as focal points for the institution (Masalela, 2006). The university identified student-centered learning as a key component in its vision, which is one of the important features of online learning. Distance education at the UB has been provided through print materials supported by occasional face-to-face interaction for over two decades. There was no integration with UB's e-learning activities which were provided by the Center for Academic Development (CAD). At present, there are four undergraduate degree programs in Business (Accountancy, Finance, Business Administration and Management) with a total of approximately 450 students. There are also three diploma programs: Diploma in Youth Development Work, the Diploma in Adult Education and the Diploma in Non-Governmental Organization (all three with a total of approximately 40 students). Looking at the enrollments, distance education neither meets the economies of scale nor provides return on investments.

In response to international trends in higher education which are changing rapidly, the UB embarked in online learning in 2001. Online learning emerged as the vehicle through which instructional technologies could be used to teach courses online. It was hoped that the adoption of such technologies would create new avenues for learners to access educational opportunities both on campus and off campus (Uys, 2003). Ever since that time, some courses have been developed and offered partially on-line (blended courses) through the WebCT learning management system. Presently there are about five hundred and forty-four blended courses created for the August-December, 2010 semester at the UB facilitated by the Educational Technology Unit (EduTech) in the Center for Academic Development. EduTech provides leadership and technical support for the innovative use of educational technologies within the institution with particular emphasis on e-learning. In (A Framework for growth and Change: Proposed Revision of the Academic Organizational structure: 2008), one of the major recommendations was that, "the University's involvement in distance learning should be confined to on-line learning programs…" (p. 32). In alignment with this recommendation, the UB proposed a Masters in Project Management as a pilot project of an online program. The paper articulates the flaws attributed to lack of a comprehensive institutional strategy for elearning and a framework that are based on shared vision with all the stakeholders at the UB.

There was no situational analysis of the environment to determine the viability of the project in terms of resources, attitudes and user-preparedness. In the absence of these important aspects, the project failed dismally. The author recommends the use of LASO model which acknowledges that to ensure ownership and sound educational quality in elearning by faculty, it is pertinent that educators as well as educational principles are in concert for technological transformation to take place.

The Rationale for MPM online Program Project

In the Proposal for the Introduction of Masters' in Project Management (2007) through distance learning, the rationale for introducing the MPM via e-learning stated that:

> The introduction of technology-driven graduate level program has been necessitated by recent developments in tertiary education which have witnessed the emergence of new tertiary education providers in Botswana. The introduction of predominantly pre-degree providers encourages CCE to undertake a review of its strategic operations and priorities within the content of its relative strengths and advantages (p. 6).

The development of tertiary education in Botswana particularly the new private tertiary education providers created competition among tertiary institutions. The UB had monopolized as a provider of local degree and postgraduate qualifications. Presently, there are over twenty private tertiary institutions in the country some of which offer franchised programs ranging from certificate to diploma levels. The UB faced a stiff competition locally and in the globalized higher education market. Within the country, there are a number of public institutions such as Botswana College of Accountancy and the newly established Botswana International University of Science and Technology and private institutions such as Limkokwing University, NIIT and Ba Isago University College (A Framework for growth and change: Proposed Revision of the Academic Organizational Structure, 2010). All of these institutions compete for students and wanted to get a share from Government sponsorship for these students. There was also competition for students by institutions from other countries such as South Africa, Australia, UK and distance learning providers.

Like many higher institutions around the world, the UB was under pressure to undergo transformational change to gain a competitive marketplace. Reacting to this new competitive environment, the university management saw it fit for organizational change that will make the institutions more academically attractive. Offering online learning programs was deemed as one of the options. Therefore, the university management fast tracked the process of starting an MPM project.

From the author's perspective, there were structural issues which were not taken care of. Firstly, the university wanted to meet the changing demand which was attributed not only to competition of students created by new institutions offering distance education, but also by the changing culture of employment. Learners no longer keep one job for life, partially due to the advent of the 'knowledge economy. However, infrastructural aspects were not considered to scan the feasibility of meeting the demand. Secondly, the university management did factor in the pedagogical considerations and increased workload required for effective elearning programs. No consideration was given to the fact that elearning somewhat threatened the fundamental structure of the university as it could no longer retain the traditional facilities and deliveries via lecture methods and face-to-face activities. The course designers felt like they were 'forced' to develop elearning courses just to meet the university strategic plan and mission.

The strategic intent or rationale for introducing the online project was not informed by the comprehensive institutional strategy. Chung-Herrera and Krentler (2008) argued that:

> the decision to develop an online…program should be the result of a thoughtful process based on careful consideration of a number of important factors rather than a hasty call to action emanating out of a sense of urgency in a competitive marketplace…When the decision is made in haste or to "jump on the "bandwagon" rather than because it is the right decision for a given institution at a given point in time, it is likely to be an unwise move (No page).

The MPM project was a hasty call to action by the UB management resulting from mushrooming private tertiary education providers in the country. There was no strategic management for online learning. Lecturers were forced to convert their courses to online format. Consequently, there were flaws in the process, implementation and monitoring and review of the project.

Masters in Project Management (Online Project)

Masters in Project Management (MPM) was a collaborative project between the Center for Continuing Education (CCE) and the Faculty of Engineering and Technology (FET). One of the key priority areas of the CCE at the UB is *Extending Access and Participation.* The university envisioned the CCE as a technology-driven national center for tertiary distance learning which had capacity for expanding the number of part-time continuing education programs at certificate, degree level and professional qualifications (Proposal for the Introduction of Masters in Project Management, 2007). The FET on the other hand offered MPM as a conventional program on campus. The proposal to offer the MPM by distance

learning reflected new priorities to engage in initiatives in areas where CCE had competitive advantages relative to new tertiary education providers. Therefore, realizing the high demand among working professionals for the current MPM, whose recruitment areas was limited to Gaborone (the capital city) and the surrounding areas, the FET and CCE agreed in 2007 to explore opportunities for extending the provision of MPM to the rest of the country through distance learning.

Early September 2008, a follow up meeting between Deans of FET and CCE, together with heads of departments for Civil Engineering and Distance Education, established a consensus on the need to offer MPM by distance learning. The meeting agreed that the delivery mode for MPM by distance learning would be primarily online supported with other technologies such as print material, DVD and Video Conferencing. The MPM would use WebCT/Blackboard online platform as the learning management system. Some online supplementary technology for instruction would include DVD, Video Conference, mobile phones and Internet resources.

Months later, the same year, the MPM Implementation Committee was formulated. It comprised of major stakeholders such the Deans of FET (chairperson) and School of Graduate Studies; identified online tutors; some representatives from the CCE; Center for Academic Development; IT department; Library; and the head of the Department of Distance Education.

The Roles of Major Stakeholders

As a collaborative project, the stakeholders stated earlier had different roles to play. FET, through the Department of Civil Engineering owned the MPM program and was responsible for subject expertise. The lecturers who were responsible for fulltime conventional program were expected to develop the content of the online courses. The same lecturers would offer tutoring and/or e-moderating of the same. The Department would also be responsible for carrying out assessment such as processing and entry of marks on the Integrated Tertiary System.

The CCE through the Department of Distance Education was responsible for managing the development of the program for delivery to distance learners. The department also offered pedagogical leadership in developing online learning materials. Additionally, the department managed the delivery of the MPM program and coordinated assessment activities.

The CAD through the EduTech managed technology resources and advised on the appropriate and innovative uses of the different technologies in particular the use of Blackboard. The School of Graduate Studies was responsible for quality assurance to satisfy the set standards for graduate courses. One of the key stakeholders, the IT department was responsible for the management of IT infrastructure and acquisition, technical support and maintenance. The Library Services assisted with various learning resources and services from the library. Lastly, the Academic Services was responsible for the launching of the program.

Structures and Processes

A number of documents were developed in the form of frameworks, guidelines, instruments and/or checklist. The documents attempted to outline the overall plan and activities for course development and/or structures through which these activities would happen. The key documents were as follows:

1. A Framework for the development and Implementation of the Online MPM
2. Project Charter of the Online Delivery of the MPM program
3. Online course development process for the MPM program

A framework for the development and implementation of the online MPM outlined recommendations of the approaches to use in developing the course materials and a road map toward the eventual implementation of the program. The document was developed as “work in progress” and was expected to be continually reviewed to “fit the purpose” of the program. Specifically, the document outlined the course model and delivery methods recommended for the program; the course development process included training needs. It also attempted to identify an implementation strategy and suggested a roadmap and highlighted the budget items.

The Project Charter defined the MPM program and detailed its different components. It vaguely described the roles and responsibilities of the different key players and outlined the project plan in terms of milestones to August 2009. The contents of the document overlapped with the Framework document but it attempted to articulate a project management.

Online Course Development process for the MPM program document outlined the steps to be followed in the design and development of courses for MPM program. It was meant to provide guidelines to all stakeholders involved in the program. The document contained a checklist to assist quality assurance. The process was intended to be a team approach.

The key roles identified in the course development process are:

- Writer/content developer

- Editor/content reviewer
- Instructional designer/program coordinator at CCE
- Instructional designers at CAD
- Other specialists at Educational Technology Unit
- The librarian (An Evaluative Report of the Online MPM Program Pilot Project, p. 4)

Online Course Model and Delivery Method

There was preference for both Content and Support Model (CSM) and the Wrap Around Model (WAM) depending on the nature of the course. The expectation was that online interaction would increase with time as course developers/lecturers became more comfortable with the online environment and developed expertise in e-moderation. The CSM and WAM models were used to guide the design of a course. The course developer had an option to use any of the two. Using CSM meant that, in structuring the pre-existing materials, the course developer could provide course information, lecture notes, resources and case studies while with WAM; the course developer could have course information, lecture notes and resources without case studies. What this meant was that, the developer could choose one of the two.

Table 1 shows the recommended online course models

Table 1: Recommended course models for the online MPM

	CSM	**WAM**
Structure/pre-developed or pre-existing material	• Course information/guide • Course content (interactive online lecture notes) • Resources • Case studies	• Course information/guide • Resources/textbooks or other readings
Ongoing interaction and/or dialogue	• Seminars • Tutorials • Site visits	• Seminars • Tutorials/discussions • Discussion of case studies • Site visits

The guidelines and a design template aided the course developers. The ICARE (Introduction, Connect, Apply, Reflect, Extend) model of lesson/session was selected to aid lecturers to organize their lessons. The **I**ntroduction is a phase that provides context, objectives, study time etc. **C**onnect is where all the content resides. **A**pply is where all the activities, exercises etc are implemented. **R**eflect phase provides an opportunity for the learners to reflect on the knowledge they received. Different forms of assessment reside here. Lastly, **E**xtend; this phase offers remedial and/or supplemental opportunity to the learners.

The ICARE model was favored for its versatility in that it forces the course developers to think beyond what they are accustomed to in their regular face-to-face teaching. The model forces the course developers to explicate certain activities and reflect on them. However, the model was something that the course developers were not accustomed to; hence posed some challenges and impacted negatively on the progress of course development.

Training

Literature has confirmed that, the effectiveness of distance learning varies with the extent of faculty training and preparation. Support services that include faculty training on the use of technology have been reported to be key to effectively prepare lecturers to teach either for regular distance learning or online distance learning (Twigg, 2005, Wang, 2006). Schrum and Bensen (2000) were involved in the development of an online MBA program in one of the universities in the US. They reported that the lecturers involved stated that the initial training and ongoing technical support were paramount to the success of the program.

For MPM project, it was recognized that all lecturers involved in the course development process needed training, more so that online learning was an unchartered territory. Therefore, a number of training needs were identified as follows:

- Pedagogical principles of developing courses for distance learners
- Instructional design for technology learning environments
- Training in the use of the technology

- Training in e-moderation
- Information literacy skills (A Framework for the Development and Implementation of the Online MPM, p. 7)

The training was in a form of workshops where all the stakeholders were involved for cross-pollination and convergence of ideas. The workshops were anticipated to be activity-based so that tangible products in the form of online course materials or part thereof would be produced.

The first training workshop for lecturers was held from 7-10 July 2008. The workshop activities included online pedagogical advice, technological tools and support, resources information (library) and online technical support. Work on course design and development commenced immediately thereafter. The course design and development was supposed to be a collaborative activity with continued support of CCE and CAD. However, no progress was realized in months to follow. The once off training workshop had a lot of information to absorb in five days. The workshop was not activity-based as it was initially anticipated; therefore, there were no tangible products. Noticeably, the work on course design and development was rushed when the lecturers had not come to grips with strategies of developing online courses. Literature confirmed that, "without necessary preparatory training, many faculty are encouraged to teach online courses" (Shepherd, Alpert and Koeller, 2007).

Remuneration package for developing online courses and tutoring was finalized as a way of motivation. In the absence of policy guideline for online learning at UB, the rates were adopted from the print-based programs of the university administered by the CCE. Even after the remuneration package was agreed upon, there was no progress in course development. Experience elsewhere has confirmed that, 'technological decisions need to be preceded by policy and educational decisions' (Bates, 1992; p. 265).

In October 2008, the lecturers requested a refresher workshop. The refresher workshop was conducted in February 2009. At that point a new group of 'would-be" online tutors from the School of Business were brought on board. Lecturers from the School of Business started working on their courses immediately with great vigor and enthusiasm. Their counterparts from the Department of Civil Engineering on the other hand were not doing so well except for one lecturer. Resistance of lecturers came as a result of change that was occurring too rapidly without adequate consultation between the administrators and the lecturers (top-bottom approach).

Implementation Considerations

Orientation to online learning in an institution could be a daunting task. It requires proper planning and evaluation to consider "a range of perspectives in order to ascertain what is working and why, and what is not working" (Bach, Haynes & Smith; 2007; p. 43). Scholars argued that institutions that embark on online learning should have strategic management that guides the development of the process (Ubachs, 2009). The strategic management stipulates policies and plans; the role of e-learning in academic strategy; policy on infrastructure; policy on virtual mobility; collaborative ventures; research and innovation in e-learning. For the purpose of this paper, the author elaborates on the first four.

Policies and Plans

Clearly defined policies and management processes that establish strategic institutional objectives are very important because they provide direction and shape the plans of academic, administrative and operational units of the institution (Ubachs, 2009). From Ubach's standpoint, the strategic plan should cover a vision of the use and development of online learning within the institution. The plan also provides timelines for the achievement of the goals or objectives. Unfortunately for UB, neither online learning policy nor plans were developed. Therefore, there was no clear conduit in which the process was flowing.

The role of e-learning in academic strategy

One of the crucial questions for every institution to ask when considering online learning is: What role will online learning play in the overall development of the institution? The ability to respond to this question sufficiently addresses how online learning relates to existing learning programs; if the approach is flexible to cope with change and how the initiative will be managed (Bach et al, 2007). For UB, the role of e-learning in academic strategy was not clearly investigated and articulated. It was not clear how other faculties and departments were going to join in the future development of online learning programs.

Policy on infrastructure

The issue of infrastructure plays a pivotal role in the implementation of online learning. There is need for different kinds of infrastructure necessary for delivery of teaching materials and student services such as bandwidth, IT standards, software, hardware, technical staff, teaching staff and others. Consequently there is need for a policy to articulate all these issues. The policy should address "financial, physical and technical resources; staffing and staff development and management, responsibility and accountability" (Ubachs, 2009; p. 16). At UB there was no such policy, therefore, it was not clear if the kind of infrastructure available was adequate to sustain delivery of an online program.

Policy on virtual mobility

One of the many advantages of online learning is fulfilling goals of optimal flexibility to the learners due to the time and place of the learner's study activities. Online learning provides opportunities for both synchronous and asynchronous interaction between learners and tutors and between learners. Ultimately this interaction facilitates dialogues and collaboration between the participants (Salmon, 2004). It follows that a policy on virtual mobility should be developed to provide students with opportunities to study from any institutions irrespective of their geographical location. Ubachs (2009) recommends that "institutions participating in virtual mobility programs should develop policies that embrace academic, professional and social aspects of student mobility" (p.17). The potential students for the MPM program were imagined without investigation on virtual mobility. Even if the course design could have been successful, there was a potential risk of not having enough students for the program because there was no analysis on academic and social aspects of student mobility.

Collaborative Ventures

As mentioned earlier in the paper, MPM was a collaborative venture between the FET and CCE with the assistance of several stakeholders. Ubachs (2009) argued that, "the development of collaborative ventures, whether initiated through top-down or bottom-up should be formally agreed and ratified prior to the course design stage" (p. 18). In the MPM project, the roles were stated on the Framework document but contractual arrangements were not formalized, hence not binding. Additionally there were no clear reporting lines for all collaborating partners. Though the course designers were working with the coordinator of the program, activities of other stakeholders were not coordinated. The Framework document was silent on risk analysis hence the absence of a contingency plan in the event of the collaboration breaking down.

Jumping onto the Bandwagon

In its pursuit to implement online learning, the university administration did not do situational analysis of the environment to assess the viability of the project regarding preparedness (i.e. preparedness of users, facilitators, attitudes, readiness, the use of technology in teaching etc.). According to Jamlan (2004), the first step towards the successful adoption of e-learning is to seek the lecturers' opinions towards e-learning. Determining the level of lecturers' interest in e-learning and how they perceive it in comparison with regular face-to-face teaching is paramount**.** In other words, it is crucial to get "buy-in" from the drivers of online learning (the lecturers); otherwise the whole project becomes a recipe for disaster. If the lecturers are not impressed to teach online for whatever reason, the whole idea is bound to fail.

Some of the obstacles reported in studies on faculty resistance to e-learning are related to persons' resistance to or fear of the many changes that must occur at the individual and organizational level. The cause of reluctance may be due to fear of the unknown; and lack of support and the changing roles of the students (Masalela, 2009). Perceived lack of institutional support may include inadequate compensation and incentive structures; loss of autonomy and control of the curriculum, lack of technical training and support and lack of release time for planning (Clark, 1993; Olcott and Wright, 1995; Wolcott, 2003). Lecturers may also question the adaptability of courses to online format (Thoms, 2005). MPM lectures continuously showed signs of frustration on the implementation of MPM online. They asked more questions than providing answers. The lecturers' concerns were the same as the one highlighted above in literature. It was obvious that they were not consulted adequately on this project. Until and unless the lecturers involvement in online learning and institutional administration issues are addressed and fully understood, online-learning could never be a success.

Bach et al identified some barriers to online learning and how to deal with some of the assumptions. Table 2 below shows barriers of academic staff to teach online and how to deal with these assumptions.

Table 2: Barriers to online learning-------dealing with some of the assumption (Academic Staff)

Diagnosis	*Prognosis*
Need for multitasking when there is insufficient time available	Academics overwhelmed with the pace of change and so need positive support and training from the academic community
Need background ICT skills	Training needed is relevant
ICT cannot replace other personal interactive and augment skills	Academics engaging in online learning need to feel enthused about its possibilities for creating interactivity.

Adopted from Bach, Haynes & Smith, 2007

The lecturers complained about the workload, inadequate training, and unclear rationale for the project. UB did not have comprehensive online learning system in place to guide the future expansion of online activities in a holistic, comprehensive manner. With reference to Table 1, there was no diagnosis undertaken to understand the perspectives of

the lecturers who already had other responsibilities such as teaching workload. There was no ICT skills assessment to determine the competency levels of the tutors. The lecturers were not enthused to teach online because they did not understand why they had to do it when they were already teaching a face-to-face MPM program.

Evidently the rationale for starting the MPM online program project was "top-bottom" but consultation with the stakeholders was insufficient. The decision to embark on this project by university management did not involve the lecturers. Therefore, there was no "buy-in" from the lecturers. The university management was reactive to current developments stated above instead of being proactive through strategic initiatives. There was no established effective two-way communication links between management and the stakeholders (would-be online tutors).

Palloff & Pratt (2001) recommended that "in developing a comprehensive plan for the institutions, all participants in the delivery of the program must understand the needs and concerns of the other participants" (p. 38). One of the reasons for lecturers' resistance may have been because of "forced online teaching." The directive came from the university administration that lecturers were to convert their face-to-face courses to the online format. Thoms (2005) argued that "for some faculty a forced online adaptation can be the difference between a year or two earlier retirement." Lecturers were not enthused to be online tutors partly because they were not conversant with transitioning to the new medium. They had a high state of anxiety about using it. There were no established realistic milestones.

The initial training workshop to familiarize the stakeholders with the nature of online learning and how to design and develop online courses was conducted but there was no compelling strategy to guide universal online learning deployment in the university. In other words, there was no strategic framework to determine how online learning was going to be undertaken. Research suggested that, it was not wise to adopt new learning strategies without first understanding the human/cultural underpinnings (Hara and Kling, 2000) and physical/technological infrastructure needed to support that (Fahy, 1999).

First the UB management should have scanned the environment to determine numerous factors that would impact on the uptake of online learning. Such factors include the kinds of technologies available, lecturers' readiness and familiarity with technology, physical access to the Internet by both potential students and lecturers and the quantity of courses to be designed for online platform. Unfortunately this was not done and project take off was compromised. Jamlan (2004) suggested that institutions that contemplate to start a new initiative such as online learning should first answer the following questions: What sort of technological infrastructure is necessary? Is the technology scalable as demand increases? Are staff and faculty adequately prepared to support students learning online? Do they know how to use technology themselves, as well as understand how students should ideally interact with it? Do students know how to interact with teachers, tutors, and fellow students online? Jamlan argues that once these factors have been addressed appropriately, then online learning could commence.

Determining the level of lecturers' interest in online teaching will not only help construct a strategy to smoothly implement online learning in a university but also help the university to develop a "how to deploy" policy (Jamlan, 2004). Identifying both the negative and positive attitudes held by lecturers could help form the basis for an e-learning implementation plan at UB. Once the benefits and advantages of technology use in teaching were fully understood by lecturers, it would have ensured ownership of the initiative. For MPM project, there was lack of ownership of the program by FET.

Pedagogy

Delivering online learning requires tutors to be able to translate their tuition skills to the ICT medium. In other words, tutors should have clear pedagogical skills for tutoring in an online learning environment; otherwise they would have difficulties in using ICT to design online learning courses and support learning. Online learning capabilities support collaborative interaction and dialogue. In the learning process, the relationship between the tutor and the student that is based on collaboration and co-construction of knowledge is developed; therefore, tutors involved in online learning need to adjust from the role of an instructor changes from the '*sage on the stage to guide on the side'* who constantly engages critically and evaluate their own practice (Beaty, Hodgson, Mann & McConnel, 2002). These authors argued that tutors should be supported through professional development. Furthermore, these authors recommended a policy for online learning that is representative of educational values and research.

For MPM, even though there was an online course model and delivery (Table 1), it did not clearly articulate the pedagogic strategy to guide course design, process management that defined roles of individuals in the project team nor staff support for appropriate training. The ICARE Model was a challenge to the lecturers and it proved difficult for them to incorporate with the course models (CSM and WAM) and develop design statements. The lecturers did not fully comprehend how it worked. Bach et al (2009) recommend three broad approaches that could be used on the capabilities of e-learning systems include:

- Didactic learning: efficient delivery of structured teaching materials that include test and remediation. It allows flexible pace of study by distant learners
- Problem based learning
- Collaborative learning (p. 41)

It was not clear which approach the MPM project was based on. The pedagogic design would have defined the roles; not only of tutors but also those responsible for provision of online support. The two types of interaction (tutor-learner, learner-learner) would have been factored in for their significance to the pedagogic design. The two training workshops (in total) conducted for lecturers were inadequate and they did not provide hands-on experience. The workshops were too general and did not address specific needs of the lecturers. "Obtaining faculty buy-in can be a lengthy process- a full academic year to accomplish this task along is not unusual" (Chung-Herrera, 2008, no page). It is critical to give course developers reasonable time to transform and avail them the right knowledge (Govindasamy, 2002).

Monitoring

For any new institutional initiative, it is important to build in a system of monitoring and evaluation. One of the key documents developed, Project Charter (PC) attempted to articulate a project management. However, during the course design, the charter was not followed. The design process was done haphazardly with no clear established pathways. The PC attempted to specify the roles of the key players involved but they did not recognize their professional interdependence. There was no production management system to monitor the design and development process of the course materials.

Bach et al (2009) advised that "institutions developing e-learning programs …should have in place appropriate structures for the approval and long term evaluation of courses" (p. 57). These authors recommended that the development of learning materials should be reviewed and improved the same way as in conventional face-to-face teaching. Independent review of subject content, modes of delivery and the levels of interactivity should be done for e-learning courses. This review and monitoring provides feedback for improvement and redevelopment of subsequent course projects. Furthermore, the evaluation ensures comparability with national and international standards so that online learning is not relegated to second class. None of the key documents for MPM project mentioned anything on course evaluation, monitoring or course testing.

Online learning provision like any learning requires continuous monitoring and management to ensure its effectiveness. Bach et al (2009) suggested that generally, "monitoring should cover both the detailed operational aspect of the system (performance, availability, capacity utilization, user error reports etc) and also the performance of the human support systems" (p. 68).

LASO (The Leadership, Academic and Student Ownership and Readiness) Model

The "top-bottom" approach of implementing MPM program at the UB proved to be problematic due lack of clear lines of communication between management and the key players particularly the course developers/tutors. Therefore, the author suggested that UB management should go back to the drawing board and use the Leadership, Academic and Student Ownership and Readiness Model (LASO) (Uys, 2003). The LASO Model was introduced to UB in 2001 when the Center for Academic Development through the Educational Technology Unit (EduTech) was charged with promoting "appropriate and innovative uses of education technology" in the university. The Key Performance Area for EduTech is to 'Extend access to higher education through the utilization of Information and Communication Technologies within the framework of lifelong learning and open learning' (University of Botswana, 2004). In carrying out its mandate EduTech was guided by the LASO Model. LASO model emphasizes:

> …the importance of integrated top-down, bottom-up and inside-out processes. This model suggests that technological transformation occurs when leadership is integrated with academic and student ownership and readiness. Leadership is achieved though mechanisms such as defining a clear vision for the transformation, providing a reward structure for those engaging in the change process and the creation of a strategic framework to guide the transformation. Ownership and readiness for change by both students and academic staff can be achieved by using strategies such as pilot projects, extensive training, establishing workgroups in every faculty/school and using teams for courseware development (Uys, 2004; p. 73).

The main tenet of the LASO Model is that "educators and a solid educational rationale should drive the technological transformation of higher education so as to ensure ownership by academic staff as well as a sound educational quality in eLearning" (Uys et al., 2003). In this particular case, there was lack of ownership on the part of the course developers because there was no 'buy-in' from their part. Ownership of the MPM project could be further enhanced through effective communication and involvement in extensive training of the course developers.

Through the use of this model, technological innovation has gained momentum at the UB with regard to fulltime/conventional students. It followed that the university could have continued to use the LASO model as it had proved to be working. While conventional students have benefitted from the model in blended courses, distance learners on the other hand have not yet reaped any fruit from this new innovation. Guided by this model the university leadership could have engaged with academics to establish a dialogue and created a common ground for all.

Conclusion

Research suggested that transition to online learning must be done gradually (Jamlan, 2004). It is almost impossible to transition toward online learning without an institutional strategy that guides the implementation. The UB needed online learning strategic management that articulate policies and plans for its implementation. The lecturers should have been "encouraged to become active participants in the design and implementation of e-learning processes, instead of having it imposed upon them" (Jamlan, 2004). Ensuring that lecturers were comfortable using online learning technology and understand its viability as a delivery strategy was pertinent. Comprehensive training initiatives on how to teach with technology were paramount. Lack of institutional strategic plan for online learning resulted in vague roles of key players; pedagogical issues; lack of monitoring processes; lack of commitment and ownership. All of these translated into failure of the program to take off. As a way forward, UB could implement online learning within a strategically developed framework that clearly articulates a clear and shared vision and educational rationale. It is noteworthy that, "an abortive attempt is worse than a postponed decision or an action at all in that such a move is likely to make future attempts more difficult. Hence, hasty action may actually lengthen the ultimate timeline" (Chung-Herrera & Krentler, 2008; no page).The University of Botswana leadership should continue to use LASO model as a guide to engage academic staff and establish a dialogue in the pursuit of implementing elearning and other technological transformation. One of the key values in the LASO model is developing and/or creating ownership of the technological transformation by academic staff. That way, the structure supporting technology would ensure an educational focus that is based on educational principles rather than administrative desires.

References

A Framework for the Development and Implementation of the MPM Online program, 2008. University of Botswana.

A Framework for Growth and Change: Proposed revision of the Academic Organizational Structure, 2010. University of Botswana.

An Evaluative Report of the Online MPM Program Pilot Project, 2009.University of Botswana.

Bach, S., Haynes, P., Smith, L.J. (2007). Online learning and teaching in higher education McGraw Hill, Berkshire, England.

Beaty, L., Hodgson, V., Mann, S., & McConnel, D. (2002). Understanding the implications of networked learning for higher education, *ESRC Seminar Series, Dissemination Event,* University of Sheffield, UK.

Chung-Herrera, B. G., & Krentler, K.A. (2008). To go or not to go: The online decision for MBA programs. Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/odjla/winter114/chung_herrera114.html on 17 October 2010.

Clark, T. (1993). Attitudes of American higher education faculty toward distance education: A national survey. *The American Journal of Distance Education* 7(2), 19-33.

Fahy, P. J. (1999). Reflections on the productivity paradox and distance education technology. *Journal of Distance Education* 13 (2), 66-73.

Govindasamy, T. (2002). Successful implementation of e-Learning pedagogical considerations. *Internet and Higher Education*, 4, 287-299.

Hara, N., & Kling, R. (2000). Students' distress with a web-based distance education course: an ethnographic study of participants' experiences. *Information, Communication and Society*, 3(4), 557-579.

Jamlan, M. (2004). Faculty opinions toward introducing e-Learning at the University of Bahrain. The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 5 (2). Retrieved from http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/viewArticle/185/267 on the 27 September 2010.

Long, L. K., Janas, D. L., Kay, L., & August, C. (2009). Introducing online learning at a small college through a faculty learning community. Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring121/long121.html on 28 October 2010.

Masalela, R. K. (2009). Potential benefits and complexities of blended learning in higher education: The case of the University of Botswana. Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education 10(2).

Olcott, D., & Wright, S.J. (1995). An institutional support framework for increasing faculty participation in postsecondary distance education. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 9 (3), 5-17.

On-Line Delivery of the MPM Program: Project Charter, 2008. University of Botswana.

Palloff, R.M., & Pratt, K. (2001). Lesson from cyberspace classroom: The realities of online teaching. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Proposal for the Introduction of Masters in Project Management, 2007. University of Botswana.

Review of the Academic Organization of the University of Botswana, 2008. University of Botswana.

Salmon, G. (2004). E-moderating: the key to teaching and learning online. London, Routledge Falmer, UK.

Schrum, L., & Benson, A. (2000). Online professional education: A case study of an MBA program through its transition to an online model. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 4(1), 52-61.

Shepherd, C., Alpert, M., & Kroeller, M. (2007). From dinosaur to dynamo: mentoring seasoned faculty for online efficacy. Paper presented at the 12th Cambridge International Conference on Open and Distance Learning. Cambridge, UK.

Thoms, K. J. (2005). Kicking and screaming: overcoming faculty resistance to teaching online courses. Paper presented at Mid-South Instructional Technology Conference, Tenths Annual Conference "Building communities of learners" Murfreesboro. Retrieved from http://www.mtsu.edu/~itconf on 9 April 2010.

Twigg, C.A. (2005). Course redesign improves learning and reduces costs, policy alert. *The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, June.* Retrieved from http://www.highereducation.org/reports/pa_core/index.shtml 8 October 2010.

Ubachs, G. (2009). E-xcellence: Quality assessment for E-learning a benchmarking approach. European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), First Edition. Heerlen.

Uys, P. M. (2003). eLearning at the University of Botswana: A biannual reflection on progress. *Lonaka Bulletin, Centre for Academic Development,* University of Botswana. Educational Technology Special Edition, March, 5-12.

Uys, P. M., Nleya, P. N., Molelu, G. B. (2003). Technological innovation and management strategies for higher education in Africa: harmonizing reality and idealism. *Education Media International.* Routledge. Retrieved on 14 October 2010 from http://pdfserve.informaworld.com/839765_731234416_713698934.pdf

Uys, P. M. (2004, 22-26 June). Developing eLearning materials in developing settings: reflections on the team approach at the University of Botswana. Proceedings of the ED- MEDIA 2004-World Conference on Educational Media, Hypermedia and Telecommunications, Luganu, Switzerland.

Wang, Q. (2006). Quality assurance – Best practices for assessing online programs. *International Journal on ELearning*, 5 (2); 265-274.

Wolcott, L. L. (2003). Dynamics of faculty participation in distance education: motivations, incentives, and rewards. In M.G. Moore & W.G. Anderson (Eds.), Handbook of distance education, City, NJ: Lawrence Erlburn Associates, 549-565.
