THE WIZARD OF OZ – MIGRATING FROM ONE LMS TO ANOTHER: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT: Much like the Wizard of Oz when Dorothy’s farmhouse is spun in a cyclone and dropped in Munchkin County in the Land of Oz, the new LMS is dropped on instructional design teams of online universities. Spinning in the cyclone is akin to making the LMS decision about the upgrade. Once the decision is made and the new LMS is implemented, the farmhouse is dropped in the Land of Oz. The Good Witch is represented by all of the new features and the best support money can buy from the vendor. The Bad Witch is represented by all of the unknown stumbling blocks and the witch’s castle. The path to success is represented by the Yellow Brick Road and all of the strategies to be implemented to successfully reach Emerald City. This case study will present these different components of the new LMS implementation process, with the focus on success strategies for implementing the new LMS and reaching Emerald City.

Keywords: LMS, Learning Management System, LMS Implementation, LMS Implementation Process

INTRODUCTION

It’s time for the upgrade! Which LMS do we choose? How do we know? How do we make the decision? Time and money are of the essence. We need to keep the faculty, administrators, IT, and all other constituents involved in the process relatively content. The decision is with the instructional design team, or is it? A key decision of this type is generally determined by an executive team across the college or university. The actual users of the system are not necessarily consulted or even involved. In fact, the key decision makers may have little to do with online learning and course administration. However, at some universities, key technical individuals and designers may have a role in selecting a product for implementation. Despite the usual strategy implemented in most institutions of only including administrators generally removed from the day-to-day LMS functionality and implementation, there still are some best practices that can be employed to make the process easier during the implementation.

LMS IS DROPPED ON INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN TEAMS: FARMHOUSE SPINNING IN A CYCLONE

The decision is made that a new LMS will be selected, and this can push the instructional design team into a spin, akin to the farmhouse spinning in a cyclone in the Wizard of Oz. The team does not know that to expect or what preparedness measures to take. The decision is made from above that a new LMS or new version of the LMS is to be implemented. As Schmidgall (2010) describes in the title of his blog, “Resistance is Futile: Embracing an LMS Migration,” understand that change will occur. You will not receive the LMS delivered, ready to go, and customized for your needs; and moreover, the LMS will not support the “old” way of teaching and learning online. Courses may be built differently. Older supported technologies will become obsolete. Change will be imminent, yet may be effectively managed with a clear plan in place, significant training, technical and management support.
LMS IS CHOSEN AND READY TO IMPLEMENT:
FARMHOUSE DROPPED IN THE LAND OF OZ

Now, the LMS is chosen, finally, and the instructional design team is instructed as to what will need to happen. What is critical is to test features, templates, designs, and strategies. Course developers and early adopters will help drive the successful implementation of the LMS, hand-in-hand with the instructional design team. It is not enough for the instructional design team to go off on its own and build courses; online learning stakeholders need to be engaged and considered (Schmidgall, 2010). Additionally, by choosing the heaviest users and providing dedicated one-on-one support to move courses to a new LMS (Briggs, 2010) faculty enthusiasm and the support of early adopters can help to move the process forward.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT CHOICE: THE GOOD WITCH

There are full ranges of technical support available, from hosting and maintaining the LMS with the vendor including updates applied as a part of the plan, to local hosting by the customer with updates applied as desired or needed. Sometimes updates fix one part of the system and break another. This is always somewhat of a risk, just as there is to apply updates on your own system. Depending on the monies budgeted, initial training and technical support may be provided by the vendor company, along with ongoing technical support and training. Oftentimes, there is a push for and budget for initial training, but not monies budgeted for ongoing training. LMS’ generally have planned obsolescence, too. For example, once a client has used version 7 for two years, the vendor may choose to no longer support version 7. This is indeed a reason to stay ahead in terms of the technology and training, as the budget permits.

STUMBLING BLOCKS: THE BAD WITCH

There will be issues with the upgrade. Face the issues head on and work to get them resolved. Keep key constituents and early adopters, as well as the instructional design team informed. Maintain good records in dealing with issue tracking. It is easy for the LMS vendor to sell the product, yet a little more difficult to deal with ongoing issues during installation, migration, and day-to-day use. It is quite necessary for the implementation team to keep track of the issues and ensure the vendor stays up-to-date with problem solving and commitment dates.
PATH TO SUCCESS: THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

Robinson and Pickles (2009) created a project planning workbook with the steps detailed below that may serve as a fundamental guide for strategically implementing an LMS:

1. Define the project scope
   A committee should be brought together to develop the full scope of the project, even including a mission statement for the implementation. An example may be:

   “The web-based Learning Management System solution will support and enrich the student educational experience at the institution for the next five to ten years. The LMS solution selected will also allow the institution to remain competitive in the higher education marketplace – both online and on-ground.” (Robinson & Pickles, 2009, p. 2)

2. Identify the scope of the project, including the stakeholders and key decision makers, technical resources, project managers, consultants, early adopters, and others. It is critical to success to have a clear understanding of the responsibilities held by each of the teams. As well, it is necessary to understand the budget and timeline for implementation, a critical piece of the project. In regard to the budget, remember that into the future, students will probably spend as much or more time in an LMS than in any building on campus. This becomes a simple cost to justify (Neiswender & Hoffman, 2011).

3. Define communication strategies to effectively move the project forward, meet the goals and timelines. A detailed project plan (a snapshot shown below) with clear timelines, as in the example provided by Heiney (2008), helps all constituents involved in the project move from step to step in terms of handing the processes and responsibilities. This project plan also facilitates and drives communication between the teams and by the project managers.

   Project Plan: first few steps of a 74-step process, (Heiney, 2008, p. 37)

4. Detail clear distinctions between each phase of the project plan (Robinson & Pickles, 2009, page 2), including discovery, assessment, planning, evaluation, and implementation. This paper does focus on the implementation of the LMS; however, it is important to note that once the three steps before this one are completed successfully, the implementation is that much easier.

5. Identify the successes and challenges during the implementation. Maintain detailed notes of the implementation process, keeping track of which processes went smoothly and which represented opportunities for improvement. Procedures are put into place, modified, integrated, reviewed, and modified yet again during an effective implementation process.

   What is important to recognize is that the process is ongoing, as the LMS Adoption Process model indicates below. Although the process begins with Discovery and ends with Implementation, upon completion of the Implementation, the model moves to Discovery again. The chain is not broken, so as to replicate the process of continuous improvement.
Continuous improvement is what will guide the adoption process in a successful direction. Moreover, in terms of continuous improvement, the early adopters can provide tremendous help. To the extent possible, reward the early adopters for their efforts, perhaps with a camera, an iPad, an eBook reader, or another piece of technology that would be helpful or appreciated.

CONCLUSION – EMERALD CITY

Nobody said it would be easy. Dorothy in her red slippers in the Land of Oz could wander aimlessly without a team devoted to her success to reach Emerald City. Likewise, the instructional design team cannot manage the entire LMS adoption process on its own. It takes key stakeholders, early adopters, and a strong management team to effectively coordinate and implement a new LMS or LMS upgrade. “The LMS has become the most important technology at most universities. Yes, people use their email all the time, but try having your LMS down for an evening during the last week of a semester.” (Neiwswender & Hoffman, 2011, p. 3).

REFERENCES


