

8 Basic Questions About Learning Management Systems: The Answer Sheet

2012

1. How will new developments in Learning Management Systems (LMSs) impact students, instructors and administrators?

Fundamentally. They offer up the opportunities to teach in new ways that may be a better fit for the knowledge and skills needed in the 21st century.

2. This is a two part question:

(a) Is the future of LMSs limited?

No – they are developing and changing all the time.

(b) Can LMSs be combined or modified with new Web 2.0 tools?

Yes– faculty members and technology colleagues are finding new ways to integrate social media and web 2.0 tools all the time.

3. Does the use of LMSs restrict the potential value of learner-controlled and managed technologies, such as social media, search engines, and mobile technologies?

Depends on both the LMS and on how instructors choose to use it, but in general the answer is: no. However, change in LMSs is being driven by developments in cloud computing, open access to content, and the low cost of new web 2.0 technologies. Most change initially occurs outside the LMS, and later becomes integrated, based on observed uses.

4. How much demand is there for new learning designs built around open educational resources(OERs) and learner-created materials? Can these new designs be accommodated within the LMS?

It's rare at this time to find significant use of OERs, but there are several examples of learner-created materials, and increased learner involvement in the management of their learning. We expect both approaches to significantly increase in future. In general, these approaches will need a combination of LMSs and new web 2.0 tools that at the moment sit outside the LMS.

5. Are there areas of technological stability or sustainability that will enable institutions to plan and manage without continuous disruption to teaching and learning?

No, but it is possible to manage change in such a way that it supports and also influences the goals and strategies of institutions, instructors and students - but if there isn't disruption to the current models of teaching, the institution is stagnating and probably meeting the needs of the last century.

6. What should an institution do now to prepare for learning technology developments already in the pipeline?

- Ensure that there is a strategic or academic plan in place that can guide strategies and policies for learning technologies; in particular decide whether or not innovation in teaching and learning is a high priority;
- Make sure there is an appropriate governance structure in place to cope with ongoing change and the need to develop and review strategies, policies and support for new learning technologies;
- Continuous training of its instructors in both pedagogical and technology developments;
- Give instructors the freedom to choose the technologies which best suit their teaching needs, but within clear and well communicated institutional policies regarding accessibility, privacy and technical support.

7. What should an institution plan for five - or ten - years ahead?

- The management of constant and rapid change in the development of new technologies that can support and change teaching and learning;
- A move towards more learner-created material and the development of so-called 21st century skills through the use of new technologies;
- Development of rich, multimedia learning environments that facilitate the management of learning, as well as new ways of teaching and learning.

8. What implications, if any, are there for government resulting from current and forthcoming developments in teaching and learning technologies?

Not many and much less than many expected (especially financially), other than:

- Finding ways to encourage and support institutions that are exploring new teaching methods and the use of new technologies;
- Providing a regulatory framework that ensures competition between Internet organizations, the free flow of information, low Internet costs, and protection of privacy.