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## **Some reflection about implementing Elearning at the University of Porto**

The analysis covers a period of seven years starting at the end of 1998 and assuming the role of Pro-Rector at the university. The tasks as administrator were initially the continuing education and professional development. Later, due to the needs of the sector, it included the support of the E-learning activities. During the initial period of my service the Rector took the decision of fostering the use of E-learning in the university. Several steps were taken and the main ones were the designation of a Vice-Rector with this assignment, the creation of a supporting office, the cooperation with other universities and the recruitment of experts. Some of the important aspects of the experience to retain are:

a) Synergy - The Vice-Rector was also in charge of other relevant tasks and consequently there were some concerted efforts with the sector of continuing education. The training of teachers in E-learning was considered continuing education. Therefore the structure, the funds, the motivation and the methods of an existing organization were already in place and had already been tested and improved.

b) Opportunity - The Bologna process was under way and the occasion for changes beyond traditional evolution was expected by staff and by administration. The atmosphere was ready for change and the change of paradigm from teaching to learning helped the creation of a mental attitude towards new teaching methods.

c) Quality - The choice of case studies that could be used as reference and the invitation to external experts were made with care. The presentation of examples from other universities that had none or with little relation to the university environment could have caused rejection. The use of opinions from experts that could not interpret the local situation was useless for most teachers.

d) Mobilisation - Academic staff had to be interested in the use of learning in their classes. The rate of increased courses using E-learning is slow compared with expectations and with growth possibilities due to the lack of global interest from teachers. The incentives offered, like prizes and adequate support, have managed to convince a low percentage of the two thousand and two hundred teachers.

e) Evaluation - The analysis of the results of the impact in the learning is still in its early stages. That does not allow a possible change of policy and of strategy. This analysis

requires serious research about the relationship between the innovations and the performance of students. This requires planning, involvement and dedicated manpower that have to perform this important assessment.

f) Quality - The activities in this area must have quality in all aspects. The production of educational materials, the administration of the courses, the support of academic staff and of students, the hardware, the learning platforms and the technical staff have to meet high standards. A weak part in this complex process may compromise the evolution of E-learning for long periods. It is indispensable that some care is taken to avoid basic flaws.

g) Investment – E-learning requires investment in time and in funds. The first one is very important since representatives from all stakeholders (teachers, administration, government, students, technical staff) must be involved in this innovation processes. It is not possible to carry these changes without the effective participation from the interested parties. Funds are less relevant but they are also necessary to pay for the technical infrastructures and for the work of the academic staff.