



eWBL – Making work-based learning work in an online environment

CASE STUDIES – GERMANY (WP1)

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Exploring the challenges met and the alternatives found by WBL providers across Europe in their shift from WBL to eWBL.

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CASE STUDY REPORT 2

Country(-ies)	Germany
Disciplinary sector	Dual Study Program
Case written by	Maynara Furquim
Executive summary (summarise the case in 200 words)	
<p>The case study is based on a dual study program, a very common practice in Germany. There, the student gets the semesters divided into theory and practice slots – three months in the company, working in different departments, and three months at the university, studying – to maximize the student’s learning and development. Before the pandemic, the student was already in the company and experienced the shift to online when Covid occurred. Therefore, some aspects were easier for the student to adapt to (e.g., company culture), and others had to develop new abilities to keep going in the program (e.g., self-organisation). The company also faced some challenges, especially when making their employees socialise online. Moreover, the university did not change much regarding supporting the students nor saw much impact in general.</p>	

Section	Answer
1) Organisation’s background	<p>The University of Applied Sciences has a strong reputation in the region and beyond. It is the largest and highest performing university of applied sciences in Lower Saxony. Four faculties and the Institute of Music form the backbone of the university at the two locations.</p> <p>With around 110 degree programs, the Bachelor’s, Master’s, and advanced training levels are truly comprehensive. Our university has been a pioneer in many areas of academic training – in the establishment of new degree programs, for example – and has thus earned the reputation of being an innovative and progressive institution of higher education. Now with 13,700 students (as of Dec. 2016), our ever-growing university has reached an impressive size. Nonetheless, it has cultivated and maintained the character of a familiar and personal place of teaching and learning.</p> <p>The dual Bachelor’s degree program in Business Administration is a seven-semester degree program combining business studies with professional commercial training.</p> <p>During the first two years, students complete their vocational training in a company and a vocational school and pass their IHK exam in conjunction with their studies. The second training period encompasses scientific courses at the university to deepen the knowledge students have already gained. In addition to the general principles of business administration, specialisation modules are offered in all the essential functional areas of a company. Students also receive basic training in business mathematics, information systems, business English, economics, and commercial law.</p> <p>The company is an international leading manufacturer of high-quality cameras and accessories for applications in factory automation, medicine, traffic and various other markets. The company is home to approximately 1000 employees at its headquarters in Germany and other locations in Europe, Asia and North America.</p>



	<p>Key factors in our 30-year success story include the courage to take risks, the willingness to see constant change as normal and the passion for pursuing customer-oriented innovations. These strengths arise from our value-based corporate culture, which makes us a reliable and trustworthy partner for customers, service providers and employees.</p>
<p>2) Design, delivery and management.</p>	<p>The university didn't take any initiative to support the students in the transition from in-person to online. However, the university has a platform where companies can offer internships and specify the nature of it (online, hybrid, e.g.); but the students need to search for the internship independently. Also, it was the students' choice. Some of them postponed the internship phase to do it afterwards, in a non-online format (i.e., in-person). Some already embraced it and did it online, and the university accepted it. Moreover, the university also offered consultation hours to students and staff on how to work with Zoom, for example, how to do an interview or a presentation using the tool, but that was only at the beginning of the pandemic when the whole shift to online started – it is not offered anymore.</p> <p>Due to the dual study program, the company already had the student integrated into the team before Covid. However, it was hard for them to make people familiar with the new faces and the use of online interfaces. They mainly use Microsoft Teams for digital work and communication but still try to assign tasks individually to each intern and teammate. They have weekly or biweekly meetings to discuss the next steps, tasks, and other topics. Even before Covid they already used One Note and other tasks-managers in a digital form. The HR and Learning Development department took care of onboarding processes, but no further details were given. They believe learning by doing is the fastest way to find the best practices.</p>
<p>3) Difference and similarities</p>	<p>Overall, the management and technological structure didn't change much. However, keeping the students motivated and pushing them was more difficult online, as it depended more on the student. The company frequently needs to ask about the status of tasks, as the students usually needs a push to ask for feedback, questions, and help as they are not sitting next to a person are not inclined to call with only one question. It is important to have high frequency contact, in the beginning, to push and motivate the student to ask for help and try to show them the things they miss from not being in person. On the other hand, the student didn't see it as a challenge because he always had one person in the department with whom he could talk and get help from.</p> <p>All tasks were given to the student online in the same structure as in person, with the help of many meetings. Once, the student had the opportunity to follow a colleague to all his online meetings, where much knowledge was gained. The performance evaluation didn't change much: the head of the department, someone from HR, and the student met after the 5-6 weeks of work in one department and did a de-briefing session with evaluation forms.</p> <p>From the university side, evaluation and any other assessment form remained the same. Students still must write and submit a report to get credits for the mandatory internship in the curriculum. Professors supervising the intern could ask how the online experience is going (like an oral report), but that is something personal and not implemented.</p>
<p>4) Learning outcomes</p>	<p>Transversal skills were affected. From the company perspective, they were lacking a little, especially for the things that are not listed or stated in a process, or who are the people and their roles in the company, for example. Moreover, they believe hybrid is</p>

	<p>the key for developing soft skills, and a direct face-to-face meeting is necessary to make it feel real. However, from the student's perspective, it didn't negatively affect them that much. It was more about adapting his communication style, for example, as he could not visit clients anymore and had to do presentations online; his problem-solving skill, as in he would try to solve issues by himself before asking for help; and the development of self-organisation skills to work from home. The university representative could only mention that communication is more impacted by the shift to online.</p> <p>The company doesn't see a difference in technical knowledge, and these skills can be transferred well via e-based learning. The same applies to the student's view; although it depends on the tasks and tools, the student always tries to see the connection between practice and theory regardless of the online or in person aspect. However, the university sees a difference when comparing face-to-face to an online internship due to the communication skills – e.g., some presentations are better held in person.</p> <p>However, their professional network is highly impacted as well as the students' immersion into the company's culture – it is not something that can be transferred via a screen. Corporate culture and people's behaviour are lifted and transported non-verbally throughout the day. Networking and the company's culture are easier in person, and the company and the university have not done much to support the students. However, the student made an extra effort to socialise by setting up meetings with every person in the department to get to know them outside work.</p>
<p>5) Pedagogical innovations</p>	<p>The company implemented digital cafes regularly, but it was unsuccessful due to people's non-frequency and non-commitment. It was organised in Microsoft Teams. They also tried some online lunches to talk about anything but work. They adapted their Christmas party to an online format, where there was a chat roulette, so people got to talk to different colleagues and create a network. Nevertheless, in terms of quality and sufficiency, it was lower than in person.</p> <p>From the university side, nothing was done in this aspect.</p>
<p>6) Technological innovations</p>	<p>The main tool used was Microsoft Teams, as the company strictly uses only Microsoft products. Other tools like Zoom, WebEx, and Skype were used by the university. Other than that, nothing was implemented.</p>
<p>7) Drivers and barriers to eWBL</p>	<p>For the university, the main barrier is the internet connection, as a lot of students live in dorms and don't have a stable internet connection. Also, if students go to the library or a learning area, they don't have privacy for meetings and so on. Communication is harder online, with cases of miscommunication and non-reachability of colleagues or the boss, for example. In contrast, for the drivers, flexibility was mentioned, so students can work from companies based in different cities; time cost in the case where students can manage their work time; and focus, as the student doesn't have all the distractions an office can bring.</p> <p>The main challenge from the company perspective is to show the implicit/non-written things, such as roles, processes, guidelines, etc., integrated by looking at and copying. They see no other barriers (technological or administrative). Therefore, it is more about the right inter-social connections and how to manage people. On the other hand, the main driver is interconnectivity, the independency of the location, especially in getting specialists. However, it also depends on the department. For some, it is harder to manage this. There is more efficiency for the explicit things (work itself),</p>

	<p>and it is easier to meet with more people simultaneously and transport knowledge to more people simultaneously.</p> <p>From the student's side, the main barrier is task management and self-organisation in an online environment, as they need to be stricter with themselves. The online work environment helped to develop that skill. The main driver is the organisation that is easier online, with no rush to meeting rooms, for example. Thus, the student is optimistic about his employability but believes he is more suitable for in person work.</p>
<p>8) Long-term impacts of eWBL</p>	<p>The explicit things, as it was called, and topic-related aspects are most likely kept, such as onboarding, organisation, and training, can be put in a PowerPoint/Word document for efficiency reasons. Moreover, in general, online and hybrid internship formats are also likely to be kept. However, it will depend on the field of work (marketing is more adaptable than HR, for example).</p>

