A DIFFERENT KIND OF ELEARNING FOR A DIFFERENT KIND OF LECTURERS?
A CASE STUDY ON A PART TIME PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME

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Abstract
The successful implementation of eLearning elements can be seen as the key factor to establish part time professional education programmes. Supported by these instruments, students can organise their workload completely by themselves – based on a given, well structured learning platform.

On the one hand, the mix between eLearning and in-class lectures seems to be dependant only on the organisation of the programmes. But as we can learn from practical experience, there are some other elements that limit options to effectively adopt blended learning concepts.

The focus of this paper will be on the lecturers as enabling or restraining elements for the implementation of different, sometimes blended learning concepts in professional education. We will present a small scale case study from the masters programme “Nonprofit Management & Governance”. This quite new course of studies is one of a kind and is realised at the Centre for Social Investment in Heidelberg, Germany. The underlying hypothesis is that especially two characteristics (i.e. age and the level obtained in the academic hierarchy) of teachers have significant influences on the implementation success of eLearning elements. We will show differences in the individual behaviour and attitudes towards eLearning and will analyse them with respect to our research question.

Our analysis can be used as groundwork for the generation of further informed hypothesis. It should not only give an overview – but much more a stimulus to take the particular teacher into account as a limiting factor when introducing new programmes.

Keywords: professional education, eLearning, blended learning, vocational training.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Analysis of different styles of eLearning at different lecturers / Case study / Introduction of CSI and its masters programme, idea of blended learning, traditional in-class lectures and eLearning

Since fall 2008, the Centre for Social Investment (CSI) of Heidelberg University runs the masters programme “Nonprofit Management & Governance”. It aims at executive leaders in nonprofit organisations and is described as part time programme that can be completed besides working full-time.

To live up to this claim, the programme consists of some 50 days of in-class courses in two years and an extensive share of virtually organised training. This extensive eLearning component requires a respectable amount of organisation capacity to maintain content and to support lecturers in providing all material they consider useful for their classes. Therefore, it seems important to reflect options to improve the interaction between lecturers, students and organisation staff.

The process of teaching and learning in a programme like this can be understood as a process of communication between teachers and students, facilitated by organisational staff and using not only linguistic but also technical means of information transport. Only an optimised and reflected interplay between the elements of this process can provide an excellent result in terms of learning effect on the side of the students. In our research we concentrate on the relationship between lecturers and teaching medium, i.e. eLearning tools.

With the display of experiences with different lecturers and their approach to the implementation of eLearning, we want to point out that it is not only technical skills and manpower on the side of the organisation offering training but also some specific qualities of the teachers that delimit the successful implementation of eLearning elements.

Our hypothesis in this context is that we should expect differences between teachers along the variables of age and depending on their academic position. Thereby, older and more established academics are expected to be more reluctant to make use of “modern” eLearning tools and to stick more to traditional forms of teaching. On the other hand, we expect younger and not that much established teachers to be keener to adopt the newest tools and trends in training techniques.

For this presentation, we will proceed as follows: first we will depict the Centre for Social Investment of Heidelberg University and the master programme “Nonprofit Management and Governance” in a more detailed way to clarify the context of the study. Second, the methodology used in this survey will be defined. Thirdly, the case of the master programme will be discussed and finally analysed in the light of the research question, described above.

1.1 The Centre for Social Investment in Heidelberg, Germany

The Centre for Social Investment is located at the University of Heidelberg and displays a central academic research institute, cooperating with the economic, social science, law and theological faculties. The main objective is NPO research and the examination of social investment throughout Germany and international environment.

The CSI was established on July 1st, 2006 by Prof. Dr. Helmut K. Anheier (Ph.D. Yale University, 1986), who serves as academic director and Dean and Professor of Sociology at the Hertie School of Governance. The CSI consists of three departments – research department, consulting department and teaching department - with all in all 36 employees and student assistants 2 In the latter, the

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2 As if May 2010
teaching department, the master programme “Nonprofit Management and Governance” is domiciled, where upcoming NPO experts and managers are educated.

1.2 The Masters Programme “Nonprofit Management and Governance”

Modules of the programme / concept of blended learning / in-class lectures / eLearning

The master programme shall prepare prospective managers in NPOs, NGOs, associations or foundations. To do so, the Programme consists of interdisciplinary training. The modules are designed in a problem-oriented way, i.e., they integrate those scientific disciplines that are best suited to analyse and solve the problems that are specific to this sector. The courses are to be offered by members of such faculties as the business school, the faculty of social sciences, the theological faculty and the law school at the University of Heidelberg. Furthermore, the Master's programme will include cooperation with experienced experts and practicing executives as well as from the Centre of European Economic Research Mannheim.

The aim of this master programme is to impart the specifics of leadership in the third sector focusing on such fields as strategic development, legal basis, governance and leadership. The master programme is designed to take four semesters with an overall total of 120 credit points. It requires a one-and-a-half year period of actual course attendance in Heidelberg (which consist of seminar blocks, mostly on weekends) plus an internship and exams. The number of participating students will be limited to 25 every year.

This programme is of interest to executives and prospective executives of nonprofit organisations, foundations, cultural and educational institutions, charity organisations, development aid organisations, centres of economic and work life, NGOs and social enterprises.

The modules of the master programme are:

- Module 1 – Basic knowledge I: Theory and history of the nonprofit sector
- Module 2 – Nonprofit management I: Organisation und strategies
- Module 3 – Nonprofit management II: Benefits and returns for society, social investment and communication
- Module 4 – Nonprofit leadership & ethics
- Module 5 – Corporate governance and public affairs management
- Module 6 – Law
- Module 7 – International and global nonprofit trends
- Module 8 – Area-specific concentration
- Module 9 – Management techniques
- Module 10 – Master thesis

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Methodology

For the purpose of this paper, we use the form of a case study to test our hypothesis that older and more established teachers are more reluctant to implement eLearning elements in their classes and therefore constitute a restricting factor in the development of state of the art programmes. Since there is not much empirical material on this topic, we consider our studies to be explorative to a large extend and a starting point for further inquiries.

The results are not to be understood as generalisable in any way but very much restricted to the one case observed. We see the benefit of our study not so much in the production of generalised knowledge but in the foundation of a research question open for larger and broader research.
Despite the explorative character of the study, we need an analytical framework to understand our findings in the first place. In this case, we observe some characteristics of lecturers in the master programme and try to see connections between these and the behaviour regarding the implementation of eLearning elements.

We stand back from conducting a quantitative correlation analysis using a standardised questionnaire for two reasons. First the number of cases is too small to obtain reliable results and second we consider it most important to stay open for influencing factors, not thought of before. Nevertheless, our analysis combines qualitative and quantitative methods in the sense that we do not only recount the narrative of the master programme but classify our observation in a theoretical framework of ideal types that allows (at least to a certain extent) quantitative calculations, too.

2.2 Types of Lecturers and their eLearning participation

As mentioned above, the two variables we consider to be most important to explain differences in the use of eLearning components are age of the lecturer and his/her position in the academic hierarchy. These two variables are not independent from one another but it seems worthwhile to examine them separately.

The starting point of our considerations is that using eLearning tools means to be willing to experience/learn something new. The technological development is so fast that nearly all of our lecturers did not have extensive experience in using these tools beforehand. So the question is what type of lecturer is supposed to learn the handling of these tools more likely than his colleague?

We base our hypothesis on several assumptions. First we take into account that learning new skills generally gets harder as older people are. At first glance this might appear trivial. But the phenomenon - that mature people do not easily change the tools they use to achieve a task - is much more complex. There is not only a diminished ability to learn new techniques with advancing age but also a growing portfolio of experiences that provide possible solutions to a problem at hand. If some of these tools worked in the past to reach a given goal (e.g. to teach a class satisfactory), this experience stands in the way of the process of getting accustomed to the use of alternative tools.

The other way around, younger teachers will probably be closer to recent developments in training technologies.

The respective hypothesis would be:

The larger the clearance between the time a teacher has been socialised in the academic world and the current date, the lesser is the probability that he or she will adopt state of the art eLearning tools.

The second characteristic of teachers, we look at in the context of this paper is the position in the academic hierarchy, he or she obtains. We assume that a certain academic seniority provides somewhat the freedom of not having to follow all latest developments.

A more established lecturer will be in a much safer job position than his less settled colleagues, which leads to a diminished probability that he implements eLearning tools he didn’t know before.

On the one hand, successful teaching and the use of up-to-date didactical instruments only gets a really important evaluation criterion for more junior academics and is less important for long-serving professors. On the other hand is a high position in academics closely connected to a large amount of experience and therefore with the same argument than above for the age of the lecturer.

We can now construct three ideal types of lecturers, who represent in an idealised way the different values of the two variables.
Table 1: Types of Lecturers

For reasons of clarity, we only focus on two of four possible cases. This also seems appropriate because a combination of the two characteristics outside of the diagonal (e.g. a young teacher who obtains a high academic position or vice versa) does not occur in the observed field.

It seems important to mention that the types constructed here are only theoretical and are not expected to be found in empirical reality.

The first type we distinguish is the “Young and Hungry” type of lecturer. This is the young academic professional who maybe just finished his doctorate and struggles for a position at a good university. This type has to deal with a period of difficult job arrangements and personal uncertainties. He is under constant surveillance and evaluation which forces him to perform as good as possible both in research as in teaching aspects. This makes him eager to keep his skills up-to-date as they are comparative advantages towards his competitors. Also he will try to fit into the institution he works for to improve his opportunities on the market.

This type is not yet properly established in the academic community and does not offer an extensive reputation for the institution that employs him. Nevertheless, the “Y&H” lecturer is attractive for organisations offering training programmes.

Even though the “Y&H” type might not be so settled or well known in his institution does not mean he’s not professional excellent. For example, because of his age, the “Y&H” lecturer is more likely up to date with actual technology and different methods of pedagogic information technology. Also, he/she is more enthusiastic concerning the quality and diversity of teaching.

The second type of lecturer we observe is the “Old and Saturated” type of lecturer. Well established in the scientific community and obtaining a stable position at the university, he has not much to proof in terms of keeping his skills up-to-date. This is what makes the “O&S” type of lecturer rather reluctant to implement eLearning tools in his teaching repertoire. If anything, he relies on more traditional forms of teaching or delegates tasks to organisational staff.

3 CASE STUDY

In the following, we present some observations from our master programme. We do not go into too many details at this point but concentrate on findings that are directly connected with the hypothesis and the typology.

First we depict eLearning elements that are used in the programme and secondly we present some findings on who uses what of these tools.

3 From an analytical point of view, this makes an important difference because if eLearning tools are in fact used but not from the lecturer himself, this means a larger effort on the side of the organisation and not necessarily the same output for the students.
3.1 Blended Learning

Learning within the master programme consists of two parts, in-class teaching and eLearning between those stages, the so-called “Blended Learning”. In this paper we like to turn towards the factor of eLearning and discuss whether it has been used in a passive or active way by the CSI-lecturers in the recent past. ELearning was chosen to prepare the students to in-class-lectures and to give an opportunity to review the shared lessons in the aftermath. Other intended effects are time-saving reasons for both parties and a decentralised, individual and time-independent style of learning for students.

In addition to this procedure, we split all eLearning activities, performed by the lecturers, into two categories: passive or active learning elements.

The passive elements cause a rather consuming demeanour on the students and indicate a more traditional way of teaching in the eLearning concept. Courses on the learning platform are used to distribute literature electronically to allow an individual access and a better preparation before in-class-sessions. Presentation slides are distributed as well. Further consumptive ways to make learning more tangible can be provided – e.g. by producing audio recordings of some meetings to offer students a new kind of repetition. To achieve a consolidation of the acquired knowledge more profound internet links were given.

On the other hand, interactive elements are used to permit a new way of collective and cooperative learning to students. It aims to develop a better exchange and support between students, but also between lecturers and the teaching department. Some lecturers gave adaptive instructions to initiate proactive self-learning activities and to avoid passive knowledge reception, for example cooperative construction of a “NPO wiki” based on already learned content [1]. Guided case studies give examples of actual NPO challenges and ways of looking at these problems. There were training questions to prepare for exams. Some of these exams were written online at home – for the students to avoid long travelling and to make them feel more comfortable. In constant intervals a coaching and mentoring programme takes place in the CSI – during the coaching lessons the students have the opportunity to exchange about problems with the learning or content of the different courses. This special offer is accompanied by a trained educational psychologist. The Mentoring is taken individually by expert practitioners within the German NPO sector, who provide the particular student with news and help and keep in touch with their protégé. In the effort to merge the cohorts of students and animate exchange of content, there are expert panels to debate about NPO routines, responsibilities and future developments.

3.2 Our experiences

In the course of the years 2008-2010 there have been four semesters to elaborate the lecturers’ integration of eLearning in their courses. We took all lecturers from the master programme and classified them into their particular academic degree, age, sex, elaborated type, use of eLearning and rated use of eLearning. As elaborated types existed the ones listed above in 2.2, that means “Young and Hungry” or “Old and Saturated” were allocated by our experience. The use of eLearning was predetermined by the lecturers’ involvement on the concerning course within the learning platform. Based on this involvement, the participation in eLearning was rated.

Our experiences in general are (in accordance with the hypothesis formulated above) that the older the lecturers are and the higher their academic degree is, the fewer contributions in eLearning they add by themselves. The “Old and Saturated” mainly concentrate on delivering literature and presentations slides via the learning platform. All other materials which the “O&S” planned to deal with were offered as paper during in-class-lessons. The (electronic) communication between the students and the “O&S” was arranged by the teaching department most of the time, for better or for worse. This resulted in long and slow communication chains via Email or telephone and therefore in long breaks between the student’s question and the lecturer’s answer in the message boards. This delay in communication should not be underestimated as a drawback for the organisation itself. Since electronic channels of communication should accelerate the communication process, it also can be slowed down again if new relays are forced into the communication chain.

Hence, many eLearning activities were animated externally by the teaching department or the students and were then assimilated by this group “O&S”, they should not be attributed to the teaching skills of the lecturers.

Content had often to be requested and was integrated in the electronic learning course.
From the general result that most empiric “O&S” fit into the picture of the ideal type, there are – at least in our case - only two exceptions. Two of the 15 “O&S”s tried to gather new knowledge and skills in eLearning tools. Despite several attempts to attract the other lecturers to a training session in eLearning or the distribution of information material on the possibilities, the system offers, none of these were accepted.

In this sense, our experience with our own CSI-internal “O&S” lecturers is disappointing. From the organisational angle, we come to terms with the finding that we have to collect teaching materials (mainly in the form of written text) from the teachers and process this into the eLearning System. We do not expect any further input in terms of eLearning elements from this group of teachers.

The group of “Young and Hungry” contributed by themselves and integrated ways of modern communication and “web 2.0” technologies into the courses, e.g. YouTube videos, Wikis or returned feedback on given exercises to illustrate content and possible solutions to problems. This group experimented with new ways of pedagogy and communicated with the participants via eLearning.

It is clear that the “Y&H” lecturers are keen to be up-to-date in their teaching skills. But it seems that not only the above suggested reasons for this behaviour occur among the teachers. They see eLearning tools as means to support the learning process but also as devices to facilitate their own work. E.g. someone who answers requests via Email on a regular basis can set aside physical consultations.

In our case, there is a middle group of so called “Mainstreamers”, who can be described as lecturers, not high enough to delegate tasks or communication within their courses, but on the other side not young enough to be willing to integrate “web 2.0” technologies either, although they have heard from these possibilities. Empirically, this group tends more to the group of “O&S” than to the “Y&H” and uses eLearning for small discussions or decisions and the distribution of literature only.

Besides the finding that most of the lecturers in our programme fit into the typology, we can report some more explorative findings. There seem to be some more criteria of differentiation that would make sense to be evaluated.

First, it seems plausible that teachers adopt eLearning tools dependant on their area of expertise. The ad-hoc hypothesis would suggest that lecturers from the humanities or in general from more theoretical disciplines are more reluctant than natural scientists or empirical oriented teachers to implement new ways of learning.

Secondly, we concentrated in our analysis on lecturers who are employed at universities. It could be interesting to compare this group with practitioners that perform only small teaching assignments.

3.3 Possible adjustments

Although older academic instructors bring a lot of reputation, younger ones are comfortable with modern communication and learning technologies. What can be done to animate the “Old and Saturated” lecturers to involve them into a better way of eLearning?

A first possibility could be to target the “Young and Hungry” to break new ground. This should be a much easier technique; young lecturers are often inspired by new “web 2.0” methods, which can be integrated into the eLearning didactics. At the time when students got interested into these new options, they could animate other lecturers to absorb this by themselves. Combined with careful suggestions from the teaching department this would work as a bilateral influence towards the “O&S” academic instructors.

A second alternative could be to offer further training within the university and its adhesive institutes like the eLearning centre with their beginner introduction courses of the learning platform and its possibilities. If a student tele-tutor would provide additional help to the academic instructors, they could overcome their inhibitions and might motivate them to get more involved into this new material. Besides, the new modified self-concept of lecturers and learners should be pointed out [2].

Luckily, today personal computers are an integrated part of our working environment and these “innovations” and huge easement of all fields of work is used by almost every academic lecturer. Accordingly, a third potential could be the examination of basal electronic communication channels, e.g. Emails or message boards, to get the “O&S” used to the learning platform.
Fourthly, an adjustment in the culture of learning and teaching has to be made [3]. Because of the small likeliness to be changed from “bottom up”, a harsh way could possibly be to pressure changes “top down” as formal legitimation per superior bodies at the university.

4 CONCLUSION

The results of our small scale case study indicate that different lecturers make different use of eLearning tools for different reasons. The specific relation between lecturer and eLearning means should be taken into account when planning and organising training programmes. There are very good reasons for choosing teachers of the one or the other type. But one has to be aware of the consequences; this choice might have for the character of the programme.

“O&S” teachers imply more reputation and therefore also a better standing of the programme and, in the end, also of the organisation itself. On the other hand, they require more work on the organisational side. Larger parts of the communication process between students and teaching staff have to be facilitated by organisational staff and additionally most of the technical work on virtual classes is not done by the lecturers on their own.

“Y&H” lecturers are easier to manage in the sense of the respective programme. And they probably are more willing to enlarge their teaching tool box. On the other hand, this type of lecturer is not that valuable for the organisation since his standing in the scientific world still has to be established.

The choice between types of lecturers often will be limited by many more factors than these considerations, e.g. who belongs to the organisations staff anyway, who is available, who is in the organisation’s network etc. Nevertheless, in our case we try to find a good mixture between these types to provide both academic excellence and the commitment to state-of-the-art teaching tools.

REFERENCES

