
NO FUTURE LEARNING WITHOUT PRESENT STAFF – THE ROLE OF FACULTY IN UNIVERSITY INNOVATION

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Abstract: Based on findings from a large-scale international survey on eCompetence measures, the key assumption of this paper is that a successful development of eStrategies and management of technology-driven innovation in universities depends on their ability to actively involve faculty in the organisational change process [Schneckenberg 2007]. The motivation of academic teachers to acquire eCompetence and to use eLearning depends on a portfolio of institutional incentives and learning environments that universities offer [Kerres et al. 2005, p. 6]. Two essential preconditions need to be met to attain the active faculty involvement in eLearning innovation: first, faculty members need to become aware on the technology-driven change and potential of eLearning in higher education - they need to develop eCompetence; and second, they need to make persistent use of the potential of ICT in their personal work routines and teaching practice [Euler & Seufert 2004, esp. p. 13-4; Johnson 2003, p. 10-11; Salmon 2004, p. 3-4].

Keywords: eCompetence, eStrategy, Faculty Development, Organisational Learning, University Innovation

Technology plays a central role within the fundamental changes in the European higher education sector. Due to its pervasive nature, information and communication technologies (ICT) have the potential to enhance the production and transmission of knowledge in universities. New technologies can be applied to innovative educational concepts and teaching and learning scenarios. Amongst other things, ICT can help to efficiently organise mass lectures through the storage and dissemination of electronic learning material; ICT can enhance flexible learning by providing students with permanent access to learning resources and by widening their learning options independent from place and time; and ICT can help to raise quality standards and to create a culture of excellence in teaching and learning by adding digital communication channels for increased interaction, collaboration and dialogue to the course setting. [Bates 2000, p. 21; Nowotny et al 2001, p. 88 ff; Salmon 2006].

But in many universities this innovative potential of technology has not been fully recognised nor systematically exploited on macro-level of their strategic options and on micro-level of their educational work processes. Technology tends to outpace strategic thinking and pedagogical design. Studies show that the diffusion of new technologies into educational scenarios is threatened to stall at a margin that has been dubbed 'the 5% hurdle of eLearning integration into universities' [Barrios & Carstensen 2004, p. 309 ff.]. Zemksy & Massy resume in an extensive US study that the use of eLearning has slowed down to a thwarted innovation and does still not have a wider impact in the daily business of universities [Zemksy; Massy 2004]. The sustainable integration of ICT into higher education establishments remains a major challenge [ODL Paper 2004].

How can the potential of new technologies be adequately used in higher education? This contributions proposes that universities need to substantially increase efforts to involve and engage their faculty, which play a key role in education innovation. Academic teachers are the process owners or gate keepers of the research and teaching activities within universities [Kerres et al. 2005; Schneckenberg 2007a]. The paper outlines the main flaws of traditional training [Saks 1997] and suggests a set of innovative approaches, which focus on informal learning activities and aim to increase the motivational involvement of staff for the use of ICT.

The discussion of a portfolio of faculty measures takes the important interrelation between individual and organisational learning into account. This interrelation between the organisational capability of universities to steer innovation and the impact of eCompetence measures on the ability of faculty to use ICT can be theoretically grounded, but has not been investigated so far for eLearning innovation in higher education [Erpenbeck, Heyse 1999, p. 214-215; North, Reinhard 2003, pp. 1375 ff.; Weinert 1999, p.11]. The institutional challenge of universities is to create and to manage this interrelation between the individual and organisational level of competence development.

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