

THE DISRUPTIVE POWER OF ONLINE EDUCATION

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THE DISRUPTIVE POWER OF ONLINE EDUCATION: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, RESPONSES

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Introduction: The Disruptive Power of Online Education: Challenges, Opportunities, Responses

Andreas Altmann, Bernd Ebersberger, Claudia Mössenlechner and Desiree Wieser

By the end of this decade, more than half of the world's population will be digitally connected (Kraft & Jung, 2016). The internet and technology are changing social norms and societal structures as well as corporate values (Holladay, 2017) bringing about transformations that are hard to discern in their overall global impact at this point in time (McAfee & Brynjolfsson, 2015).

Worldwide, the higher education sector is seriously being disrupted through the effect technological innovations have on markets and the way they work (Christensen & Eyring, 2011). Traditional, on-site education is enhanced, supplemented or even replaced by teaching and learning in the digital space. As digital technologies are spreading rapidly, higher education institutions must embrace these developments to meet the needs of their learners (Delich, 2005), who are deeply embedded in the digital world, and to adapt their programmes to increase the impact regarding the curriculum taught, in terms of teaching formats and design and in relation to the overall impact of their business model.

Additionally, competition in the educational market is growing in that new third-party competitors like EduTech companies and online educational providers have entered the market. Even twenty years ago, information technology and competition in higher education have been described using the metaphor of dancing with the devil (Katz, 1999). The situation has certainly not improved, as these new competitors operate in more independent and profit-oriented frameworks that are not necessarily primarily addressing the higher education market but are attractive for exactly that market.

In higher education, we observe disruption through, what Christensen and Eyring (2011) call, online universities. These online universities challenge

traditional universities that adopt a Harvard model of teaching, research and outreach. Subsequently, we see traditional universities respond on two levels: First, on a programme/product level with programmes including some elements of online education or online formats. And second, we observe a change triggered by shifting the teaching environment to the digital space, which calls for a different balance of teaching interventions and pedagogy.

In an attempt to address these challenges, universities identify and use different windows of opportunities by applying their expertise in research and teaching, by adjusting their systems and organisational structures, by adapting their products and services and by truly putting their learners in the centre of the frameworks they operate in.

This book explores how higher education institutions across the globe respond to and address the necessary changes in regard to both programme design and pedagogy. It offers a view on upcoming challenges as well as giving an insight into ways how institutions deal with online education in practice.

1.1. Online Programmes and Programme Design

Regina Obexer opens the discussion and explores the topic of eLearning and online programme development by describing and discussing the ‘whole-of-programme approach’ regarding the design and implementation of an online degree programme.

Yusuf M. Sidani then looks at Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) by describing a joint project between a traditional university in the Middle East and a MOOC provider as a new form of partnership. When presenting his case study, the author also presents a framework to operate in (LOGIC – LEADS – LEARNing) during such endeavours in order to address the issues and needs of key partners and stakeholders involved and make the project a successful one.

Lynette J. Ryals, Ruth Bender and Toby Thompson focus on online programme design in the context of executive education programmes, a ‘competitive landscape’ that finds itself on a completely different territory than for-credit university programmes or, for example, providers of MOOCs. First, the authors look at collaborative course design involving the client and then look at the impact technology-enhanced learning has on course design, delivery and evaluation in customised settings. The authors conclude with some observations of what they call ‘considerable institutional disruptions’ as far as the expectations concerning the business models for higher education are concerned.

Charles Krusekopf, by embracing the internationalisation of online learning, introduces a case study on a blended double-degree Business Master’s programme. Thereby he highlights the insufficient attention that has been paid to how online learning and internationalisation can be combined to enfold mutually supportive powers, and provides suggestions on how such powers can be exploited efficiently.

I.2. Changing Classroom Dynamics in the Digital Teaching Space

As key educational services, i.e. teaching, change, not only the nature and the design of higher education programmes are affected, but also classroom dynamics and teaching activities as such. Roles of faculty change through the use of technology. In their chapter, Kathy Bishop, Catherine Etmanski and M. Beth Page claim that student engagement is the vital element for student learning also in an online environment and when teaching adults. Hands-on and drawing on their own teaching experience, the authors creatively present and literally show a diverse range of student-centred activities and scenarios they use to build online communities as a base for student engagement. By way of example; i.e. by using dialogue scripts, they discuss the teaching principles they apply, at the same time giving the reader an insightful impression of teaching moves that intentionally disrupt the role of the teacher and create space for student engagement and community building.

A strong student community and space for student engagement is the ideal ground for social-collaborative learning. Anja P. Schmitz and Jan Foelsing argue that personalised and social-collaborative learning processes enabled through Social Collaboration Platforms, used as primary learning environment, hold the potential for dealing with the challenges faced by traditional universities and their business models. The authors introduce a case study of a total reconceptualisation of a Bachelor's course in leadership that is enhanced by social collaboration elements and supported by a technological learning environment. On the basis of the illustrated case, they show how a redesign of traditional teaching settings that considers the expectations of the new student generation becomes possible, and develop a flexible framework that captures how learners can be prepared for the new demands in the business world, profiting from sustainable communities of practice and how this will open up new business models for universities.

Collaborative learning approaches might also help to overcome social isolation phenomena, an often cited as a hurdle for students in online education. This is an aspect co-editor Desiree Wieser and Jürgen-Matthias Seeler focus on in their chapter. They see the merits of collaborative learning in the fact that student collaboration is a major factor in overcoming what they call a 'key disadvantage' in online education, namely geographical distance. In a practical case analysis, they outline an example of the implementation of a blended online programme that has been designed using a mix of teaching and learning formats.

The question of geographical distance and possible social isolation effects in teacher training and development is addressed by Paul Berg, Kathryn Cruz, Thomas Duening and Susan Schoenberg when they describe an innovative concept based on a competency-based, bilingual online programme for teacher certification in rural Alaska. The proposed project is a perfect example of how teaching in the online space can help overcome geosocial and cultural divides and significantly increase both the educational and societal impact.

In her chapter, Eva Malisius shows that video technology and digital storytelling can be used without compromising academic rigour and as a way to

assess students in graduate-level courses. At the same time, her chapter is a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion on assessment methods for the twenty-first century, and prove for the impact the use of technology in itself can have on students and the generic skills they develop through online programmes.

Ronald Deckert, Felix Heymann and Maren Metz look at the game- and simulation-based learning and the impact especially serious games can have for the development of social and management competencies in students. While the field of digital serious games and simulations for learning is still very young, the authors contribute a valuable discussion to this book by looking at some of the major concepts in the field and matching competency tables for management students with the possibilities game- and simulation-based learning offers.

The ongoing rapid development of information technologies and new media will further and distinctively change higher education programme design as well as the teaching and learning environments of the future. We hope that the chapters of the book will both inform and inspire teaching professionals and leaders, managers and administrators; in other words, all those involved in strategic decision-making and the design and implementation of online educational offers in higher education.

Together, the chapters of this book provide a base for discussion that needs to be led to further develop or establish online learning in an organisation. It is our hope that *The Disruptive Power of Online Education: Challenges, Opportunities, Responses* will help to spark, inspire and inform these discussions in a positive way.

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PART I
ONLINE PROGRAMMES AND
PROGRAMME DESIGN

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Chapter 1

Scaling Online Learning: The Case for a Programme-level Approach

Regina Obexer

Abstract

Whilst online and blended learning approaches are now widely used by many higher education institutions, the extent and depth of eLearning implementation often depend more on the efforts of enthusiastic individual lecturers rather than effective institution-wide strategies. Innovation is thus frequently restricted to local settings and the enrichment of existing educational approaches rather than radically questioning current paradigms and creating new ways of delivering education. In recent years, there has been more urgency in calling for a deeper re-thinking of how higher education can be made more flexible, scalable and individualised not only at the level of courses but in a systemic and strategic way. This article describes a strategic approach to implementing blended learning at Management Center Innsbruck in Austria. I argue that the whole-of-programme approach taken in this case is an effective way to strategically introduce sustainable and scalable blended learning, and thus not only respond to but actively shape the disruption brought about by online education.

Keywords: Online learning models; programme development; sustainable innovation; scalability; systems approach; eLearning implementation

1.1. Introduction

After nearly three decades of innovation and gradually increasing use, online and blended learning approaches have entered the mainstream, and some argue that the mere concept of eLearning will be obsolete in the near future as there will be no learning without technology (Cavanagh, 2012). However, the extent of eLearning implementation both in terms of breadth and depth varies

significantly across the higher education landscape. Countries with a long tradition of distance education (Australia, Canada, USA) and highly developed technological infrastructure have embraced eLearning as the next step in providing educational opportunities to those not able to participate in traditional learning programmes, and to enhance and expand learning for all students (Brooks & Pomerantz, 2017; Gunn & Herrick, 2012). The UK, given its cultural closeness to those nations, has developed equally advanced eLearning strategies (Walker, Voce, & Jenkins, 2016). Nations with significant unmet needs in education, such as India, China, countries in Africa and South America, are looking to eLearning as the means that will provide their people with the education they seek (Murphy, Farley, Dyson, & Jones, 2017; Pulist, 2013; Rivers, Rivers, & Hazell, 2015), and some are already leapfrogging in terms of the development of new and efficient technologies and methods to fill those unmet needs (Biswas & Hazra, 2016; Ng'ambi, Brown, Bozalek, Gachago, & Wood, 2016).

In Germany and Austria, however, things seem to be taking a slower pace, despite significant investment in eLearning initiatives both at national and at European Union level over the past two decades (Bratengeyer et al., 2016; EACEA, 2014. e-teaching.org, 2017; Gaebel, Kupriyanova, Morais, & Colucci, 2014). The reasons for this lag are multi-layered, and it would go beyond the scope of this paper to discuss them. Instead, what is presented here are two forward-looking propositions: the first is that the current status and pace of digitisation does not suffice anymore in the face of economic, technological and social developments, and the second is that eLearning development and implementation at the programme level is an effective approach for Higher Education institutions to fast-track eLearning adoption, make it more sustainable, and create a better experience for stakeholders. A case study of Management Center Innsbruck, where such an approach was implemented, illustrates the programme-level approach as a practical example.

1.2. Setting the Scene: Where Are We?

During an initial period in the late 1990s, eLearning projects and initiatives were supported by significant government funding across the developed world. Projects mainly involved the implementation of various eLearning technologies (with a strong focus on Learning Management Systems) as well as specific, often course based eLearning content and tool developments (Euler & Seufert, 2011). After the various project funding sources had dried up in the early years of the new millennium, it proved to be challenging for many institutions to continue the innovations and achievements of these early projects, and to embed the changed practices into everyday teaching and learning in a systemic way. Most universities in Austria, for example, have now implemented an institution-wide Learning Management System and sometimes a handful of other centrally supported tools and systems that enable various eLearning activities (Bratengeyer et al., 2016). Generally, there is some degree of support for teaching staff, mostly in the form of technical support (including basic training) and to a varying