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LEARNING & TEACHING FORUM PAPER

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Proposal

Title: Study programme development – Building a bridge between tradition and innovation - An unusual approach

Abstract (maximum of 150 words): Study programme development is one of the most challenging processes at universities since all faculty is involved. And in our experience, the redesign of already existing programmes seems to be even more difficult: Whereas innovative forces want to pick up new trends (e.g. digitalisation or other new teaching concepts) more conservative forces emphasises on values and refer to existing experience. Both positions are important and contextually right. Thus, the presented format provides a gradual framework to bridge the gap between both sides in an interactive and creative process. Both sides are invited to negotiate the best possible result by using an unusual approach for university discussions, the benefit analysis method known e.g. from economics. After the negotiating activity, it should be obvious that a change of perspective is also helpful, if not necessary, to create a new or updated study programme. The practiced approach helps as well to recognise which limits for study programme development remain when visionary ideas are measured against reality.

Key words (up to five): study programme development, negotiation, change of perspective

Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? No

Text of paper (maximum of 3000 words, excluding references):

Idea of the „Bridge Building“-Approach

Teaching, curriculum development and fostering teaching innovation should be based on the participation of all relevant stakeholders, mutual respect, professional reflection and a focus on the learning objectives (Fung, 2017, Lippold 2005, p.9, Fritsch/Lippold 2019). With this in mind, development or redesign of study programmes are amongst the most challenging processes at universities since all faculty is involved. Whereas innovative forces want to pick up new trends (e.g. digitalisation or alternative teaching concepts like problem based learning, flipped classroom, peer teaching) traditional representatives emphasise on values and refer to existing experience with current concepts. In the negotiation process between these opposing parties, both sides are often not open enough to the arguments of the other side or reject the alternative solution immediately without knowing it in detail. Sometimes, this leads to the situation when no mediation seems to be possible between the opposing parties or it can only be done by harming some of the faculty members.

To cope with these conflicts, we developed an approach to build a bridge between the opposing parties by using and adapting a rational planning method, the benefit analysis method, from the economic sciences.

Our approach provides a gradual framework for an interactive and creative process where both “parties” are invited to negotiate the best possible result in order to prepare and to provide a more objective perspective on the final decision for or against a study programme concept.

Benefit analysis is a planning and decision tool that is originally developed in the economic sciences, but is now also used in other contexts. It belongs to the rational planning methods. Nevertheless, there is at least one smaller empirical study from the field of spatial planning (Diller/Oberding 2018) which attributes a comparable communicative and creative potential to it as, for example, the World Cafe method. It follows a given procedure and consists of seven procedural steps according to Kühnapfel (2019).

In order to use this method in the development of study programmes, the method and its procedural steps had to be adapted. This was done by strengthening the significance of one sub-step and adding two further sub-steps to the original concept.

The adjustments are highlighted in italics below:

Adapted benefit analysis:

1. Identify the decision-making problem
2. *Agreement on communication rules*
3. Collect and discuss about 10-20 decision-making criteria
4. Determine the weight of each of the decision-making criteria
5. Define the grading scale for the evaluation of the decision-making criteria
6. *“Sell” the study programme concept to the other party in the form of a pitch*
7. Discuss and evaluate the study programme concepts on the basis of the decision-making criteria
8. Calculate the score
9. Decide on the resulting score, which study programme concept is to be implemented or whether a mixed model is a suitable option

We added a new step 2, the agreement of communication rules. We consider this step to be particularly important, since even a fact-oriented discussion between opposing parties might be emotional. Step 6 is new as well. It aims to give the two opposing parties the opportunity to present their concept with all the advantages to the other party. As a result, the following criteria-based discussion can be conducted in a more informed manner. The form of a pitch was chosen because the presentation should be short and reduced to the essentials and not anticipate or include a discussion. Its aim is to convince the other party.

Compared to the original concept step 9 was modified. In the classical benefit analysis, the result is a final decision for only one concept. This is also possible in the development or redesign of a study programme. However, it can also be useful here not to decide for or against a complete concept, but to agree on a compromise concept.

Break-Out Session Outline: Simulation of the “Bridge Building” Approach

The Break-Out Session had two major goals: (I) presenting and simulating the “Bridge Building” approach and (II) providing a technique for negotiation settings in the study programme development in form of a role play. In simulating the approach, two aspects were of particular interest to us: whether the approach is

usable in a university setting and whether it can be a suitable method to prepare or to provide a more objective perspective on decisions for or against a new/revised study programme concept.

In conducting the described approach in all its process steps in the study programme development, there is more time needed than the time available for the 90-minute Break-Out Session within the Learning & Teaching Forum. Especially the collection of the decision-making criteria with the help of written references and/or the advice of experts within the university - such as the Quality Management Departments and the Centers for Learning and Teaching/Educational Development - require a lot of time. Therefore, only the newly to the original approach added process steps were simulated with the workshop participants. This should help to decide whether the chosen approach is suitable for the use in an university setting.

Based on this, we defined two learning objectives for the participants of the Break-Out Session: (I) Participants will have experienced an interactive format as an element in the study programme development process, and (II) they will have experienced a method for building a bridge between traditional and innovative forces.

Taking this as a guideline, the detailed outline of the workshop was structured in the following manner:

After a warming-up, the idea of the “Bridge Building” approach was outlined briefly as described and explained above.

Since there was not enough time for a collection of the decision-making criteria during the workshop, the participants received a short input which references they can use to collect criteria and which other experts at the university could be helpful.

After these two short inputs, the participant activating part of the session started, which deals with the testing of steps 6 and 7 in the “Bridge Building” approach for their practicability in the university setting.

Since it was an important goal of the session that the participants develop experience-based new insights into dealing with difficult situations in the study programme development, we chose the role play approach as a method *for experience-based insights*. This playful approach enables emotional reactions and promotes empathy and identification (Yardley-Matwiejczuk, 1997). If participants do not know each other, a low-threshold approach should be used that enables all participants to participate. This can be achieved, for example, when facilitators do not observe the participants in the role play. However, individual courageous and enthusiastic participants can determine by themselves the degree of their own exposure.

The role-playing game consisted of two parts: in work phase I (=step 6), the participants were randomly divided into two groups of roughly the same size. The size of each group should not exceed 10 persons, the ideal group consists of 5-7 participants. Both groups received a course concept for a master's degree in “Higher Education Management”. The concepts were marked either as “traditional” or “innovative” and were consistent in the learning outcome, the credit points to be achieved, the choice of modules and the use of QM data for the course development. Differences were found in the variation of teaching and examination formats. The concept marked “innovative” also included an internship phase. The aim was that participants should be identified with their group concepts (innovative/traditional). They were asked to work out the strengths of the concept for a “pitch”. Each speaker in the group presented this concept in a 5-minute pitch.

In work phase II (=step 6) the groups were mixed. A roughly equal number of "traditionalists" and "innovationalists" should be represented at each table. After work phase I, which initially strengthens the own group, work phase II should enable bridging the gap between the opposing parties.

To start with the criteria-based discussion and evaluation of the two different concepts, the participants received a worksheet with the criteria and their weight (=step 4), which was fixed in advance due to time constraints. The worksheet additionally provided space for the formulation of a grading (1 to 6, scale was previously defined, Step 5) and calculation of the total scores. Before, the procedure and calculation were briefly presented.

The task in the second phase of the work was to test both competing study programme concepts based on the given criteria and to agree on scores. For this purpose, the participants were given additional communication rules that should support the process. The aim in this simulation was not in particular to find a result (decision for a concept or a compromise). The participants should get to know a fact-oriented instrument and to learn that it can cause de-emotionalization and facilitates compromises.

The Break-Out Session ended with a short feedback round on the approach and the workshop design.

Summary

Since the number of participants at the 2020 European Learning and Teaching Forum was larger than expected, we had to work in four subgroups instead of the planned two. The participants highly engaged themselves in the simulation and the role play, and they showed a lot of interest and commitment. Feedback given proved that the workshop met its goals.

The provided approach to the (re-)design processes of study programmes in higher education institutions proved successful. By exploring an adapted benefit analysis as a rational planning method the negotiation between the opposing stakeholders could be enhanced. The method was seen by the participants as useful for the university setting. Especially the agreement on criteria for decision-making was considered to be beneficial. Furthermore, the participants mentioned that the discussion of possible decision-making criteria is sensitive, as the chosen criteria have a great influence on the decision-making process.

Hence, we can conclude that the presented format is a successful approach to improve the study programme development as one of the most challenging processes at the university.

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