

DEVELOPING AN INSTITUTIONAL ONLINE STRATEGY: LESSONS FROM THE EDGE

In a recent report “University of the Future – a thousand year old industry on the cusp of profound change” Ernst & Young concluded that “the higher education sector is undergoing a fundamental transformation in terms of its role in society, mode of operation, and economic structure and value”. The report identified a number of drivers of change including the democratisation of knowledge and access, the contestability of markets and funding and digital technologies and concluded that Universities might evolve in three main ways: “streamlined status quo”, “niche dominators” or “transformers”.

Currently there is a wave moving through higher education communities suggesting that MOOCs in particular will be ‘game changers’ and major ‘disruptors’ for future higher education learning. Whether MOOCs turn out to be a fad or not they are just one of the indicators that universities will need to change, and change markedly, in the future.

Similarly technologies are changing rapidly and so is their use in higher education teaching and learning. No longer is the appropriate use of technology in teaching seen as ‘optional’ but is core to all good teaching and learning practice. Moreover the use of different technologies now allows institutions to engage different cohorts of students in different ways, places and time.

In determining the way forward many Universities are grappling with the same questions:

- are MOOCs a trend or a fad – what is their business model?
- what is the role of open educational resources?
- what does the student want – online or blended learning?
- what will attract students to coming on campus?
- how does online learning affect the campus master plan?
- what business models are appropriate for online learning?
- what should be the relationship with external partners?
- how will academic work change in the future?
- how can academic staff be supported through these changes?
- how important is the relationship between pedagogy, space and technology?

From an institutional perspective coming to grips with the answers to these questions is an important part of developing an institutional online strategy. Critical to these discussions is the area of leadership and how best to harness the right leadership capabilities across large and diverse institutional structures.

So how do you go about it?

Through this presentation and drawing on the leadership literature Margaret and Paul will reflect on their approach to the development of an institution wide approach to online education and in the process share some of the lessons learned in developing the strategy.

Some of these lessons include:

1. The importance of developing a shared understanding of online learning,
2. Identifying the critical elements that need to be considered in an online strategy,
3. Engaging the University community at all levels in the discussion,
4. Assessing the institution's capability to prosecute the strategy, and
5. Harnessing the right leadership and capability to move the strategy forward.

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