

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AS A DRIVER OF CONTINUOUS CHANGE MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT IN ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Globalization processes have brought significant changes in society in general, on the market, in economy, and especially in academic institutions. The changes taking place through the Bologna process continually present new challenges to Croatian academic institutions. Programs such as Erasmus, Socrates, and others permanently support learning and research, as well as improvements in teaching in order to achieve higher levels of knowledge and competitiveness for teachers, researchers, and students. The trends in higher education show an increase in the following demands towards academic institutions:

- to organize higher education in the context of lifelong learning,
- to internationalize the education process and research,
- to cooperate and create an interactive partnership between university and business,
- to reorganize knowledge,
- to provide mobility and flexibility for “knowledge-producing” jobs,
- to continuously promote new knowledge and new expectations.

Knowledge based on an economic, i.e. business premise is marked by information production, transfer and dissemination – for universities in general, as well as for individual processes in academic institutions. The conclusion of different European (academic) commissions is that more should be invested in modernization and quality of university and other higher education teaching. The aim is to create a direct impact on the quality of education, to better implement new positive trends in university development, as well as to provide better facilities and equipment for all students, teachers and researchers.

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1. Introduction

Significant changes in the society in general, i.e. on the market, in the world economy and national economies have significantly contributed to and have continuous impact on demands for changes in education in general, and particularly in higher education. The omnipresent globalization influences the

time and volume of these changes. Numerous projects have been established for better and more successful organization of academic education, with more or less success, and they contributed to the ultimate appearance of the prominent “Bologna Process”, accepted by most of the European academic institutions and European universities.

Changes that are accepted by academic institutions may be formal and/or structural, or they can refer only to:

- Redefinition of the past events in an academic institution,
- Structural changes in organization of higher education today,
- Planning and programming future interventions in higher education organization and structure.

Changes may refer to the content of business operations of an academic institution, but also to the environment in which it is active as well as to the academic institution itself:

- In terms of national legislation,
- In terms of academic staff demands – professors and lecturers;
- In terms of demands of the current and future students, beneficiaries of academic education programmes.

Very often changes do not only depend on those who really work in academic education system. Most often these changes have resulted from the broader social context imposed to a certain extent to the wider academia. These changes have not had any significant influence either on change of organization structure or radical change of education content for years. However, adoption and implementation of the „Bologna Process“ project bring radical changes to organization of classes, education content, time flow and teaching on the most of the European academic institutions and universities. „Knowledge and education are the most important resources of Europe, which is poor in raw materials, and those who invest in education, they invest in future “¹

What follows the implementation of new development guidelines for academic teaching also necessarily brings facing with diversity in former organization of academic education as well. Diversity management is a term that has been more or less successfully analyzed, considered and evaluated for long time, and during implementation of new organizational interventions in academia it is necessary to take the diversities that exist on certain European universities into consideration, and to overcome by diversity management, more or less successfully, the conflicts that might arise from these diversities.

¹ Liessmann, K. P. (2008). Teorija neobrazovanosti. Zablude društva znanja, Naklada Jesenski i Turk, p. 7 (*Theory of Uneducation. Delusions of the Knowledge Society*)

2. Intellectual capital – foundation for development of academic institutions

The role and significance of intellectual capital has been constantly growing during the last decades. Attachment to intellectual capital and implementation of practices can be observed starting from economy, over research institutions and up to academic institutions. Knowledge management has become a skill, i.e. a course taught and studied on most of the European and world universities. However, not only academic institutions, but also economy, public sector, entrepreneurship, and state administration, to a large extent – all of them want, strive to learn and should know: how to manage knowledge, how to possess „a sufficient amount“ of intellectual capital, how to acquire knowledge and how to transfer it. Ever more academic institutions become places of knowledge “production” and dissemination, i.e. transfer of new knowledge. How to organize knowledge transfer and how to start the national innovative system are the questions that European academia has been dealing with for many years. Predecessors to the Bologna process were:

- Sorbonne Joint Declaration 1998
- Bologna Declaration 1999
- Lisbon Agenda of March (Lisbon Council, 2000)
- Prague Declaration 2001

All the efforts for transparency of knowledge production, transfer and implementation, and involvement of certain national academic systems have had a goal to raise these national systems to a higher level, to include individual national knowledge systems in the European level. In this changed context of creation, production, transfer and implementation of knowledge, all academic institutions and research institutes must go through a very important transformational metamorphosis. In such changed conditions of organization and knowledge management, more and more attention is given to the quality of educational and research systems, their flexibility and readiness for fast adoption and implementation of upcoming changes. It is especially important for academic institutions to maintain constant transparency of the change process, possibility of process evaluation and ability of competition in relation to new implementations and innovations in the academic education and knowledge society system.

The “Sorbonne Joint Declaration” is a document by which basics of building and harmonization of European higher education system have been established. The Declaration was signed by 4 ministries of science, education and culture (France, Italy, Great Britain and Germany). The Declaration states that for the union of Europe not only euro, banks and economy are important, but also knowledge as well as building of intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of Europe as a continent. These four countries, signatories of the “Sorbonne Joint Declaration”, have the longest academic – university tradition. Universities were born in Europe more than three centuries ago. During the past

centuries, scientists, professors as well as students “circulated” freely, they acquired and transferred knowledge, communicated within a university and were linked to other universities. Knowledge and information dissemination (although without globalization, electronic and digital information, without the Internet) was at the very high level.

We are witnessing large changes in education, work conditions, and diversification of personal careers in higher education, necessity of life-long learning and impact of new information forms and new technological possibilities on improvement of scientific and research work; both of professors and students. New opening of Europe for changes, positive in the sense of applying new knowledge and new technical and technological conditions of studying and the teaching process contribute to elimination of barriers and to building of new organization structures in academic education. International recognition of challenging (attractive) potentials of own systems directly influence development of relationships in the process of education and learning, mobility of students and professors as well. The result should be reflected in ever better and more successful cooperation within academic institutions (universities), between academic institutions, both within a country and even more at the European level. In its theses, the “Sorbonne Joint Declaration” proposes more originality and flexibility for the unique European academic education and information dissemination system by introducing and implementing ECTS scheme and one-term teaching. Evaluation of teaching and participants in the form of ECTS points gives initial choice and provides continuous education on different European universities. The readiness to implement particular unifications provides the opportunity for students to enter the academic world at any time of their professional life, regardless of the academic environment in which they have studied so far. Undergraduate levels would have different programmes, involving demands for the multidisciplinary of the studies, development of knowledge and skills in foreign languages, and willingness to learn and use new information technologies. International acknowledgement of the first level and recognition of qualification is important for success of these propositions at international, i.e. European level. Graduate study would provide the main choice between shorter and longer doctor degree studies, with possibility of transfer from one to another. Both graduate studies would include possibilities for research and independent research work as well. Both undergraduate and graduate studies offer the opportunity for students to study during one term on some European university, according to their own wish and choice. At the same time the opportunity is also provided for teaching staff, professors, to work on European universities (for countries – EU members). The European Universities Rector Conference has given a stimulus and support to implementation of the “Sorbonne Joint Declaration”. The convention, acknowledgement of higher

education qualifications in European academic circles received its statement and confirmation on the conference in Lisbon in 2000.

Two years following the signing of the Bologna declaration and three years after the Sorbonne Declaration, European ministries of higher education presented a programme (2001) at the conference in Prague. The Declaration in Prague was signed by 32 participants of the conference. The conference in Prague has brought a whole range of directives and priorities for implementation of the Bologna process. Foundations for development of higher education have been determined. Implementation of the declaration is in the process, and it is developing according to the adopted guidelines and recommendations of the Bologna process signatories.

The following was agreed according to the Prague Declaration:

- „Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles
- Establishment of a system of credits
- Promotion of mobility
- Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance
- Promotion of the European dimension in higher education“²

The European University Association, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the National Unions of Students in Europe and the Council of Europe continue cooperation and coordination on building of a unique system of European education at all levels.

3. Knowledge society – Bologna Declaration

All European universities, being the centres for intellectual capital development, bring into legacy different starting points, rich history and tradition of academic education. Richness in diversity, high professional level of academic education, high domination of national orientations bring a range of advantages, but they also put numerous hindrances to process unification according to the Bologna Declaration. European academic institutions and universities have different education profiles at their base, whose jurisdiction ranges from public to private funds, both in teaching staff profile and student population. Changes proposed by the Bologna process, globalization, intensive internationalization, and spreading of knowledge society, implementation of new forms of information and information technology, new pathways and communications put an obligation in front of all education institutions to adopt new achievements in their own educational cycle. Although application and

² Prema: Prague Declaration, Towards the European Higher Education Area; Communiqué of meeting of European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, Prague, May 19th 2001., str. 1-3. <http://www.europeam.org/content/view/60/65> 23.2.2009.

implementation of reforms of the new European academic education system is continuously being monitored in a critical and analytical way, changes are still inevitable. According to one of the conventions³, European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture provide certain components and conclusions of the current phase of the Bologna process implementation:

- “Holistic Bologna”⁴ – represents a process that involves relationships within the system and the integral process as such, for example, links between creating a Bachelor/Master degree structure, scoring system and accumulation system institutions, up to the opening of a life-long perspective. The figure in which an experimental learning cycle is represented brings in relation a certain former experience toward the concept of the new on one side; and current experiments according to the conclusion arising from that. “Accommodative knowledge” and “Convergent knowledge” are taken into account on one side, against “Divergent Knowledge” and “Assimilative Knowledge”. Transformation via Extension and via Intention brings to certain conclusions relevant for determining the development guidelines.

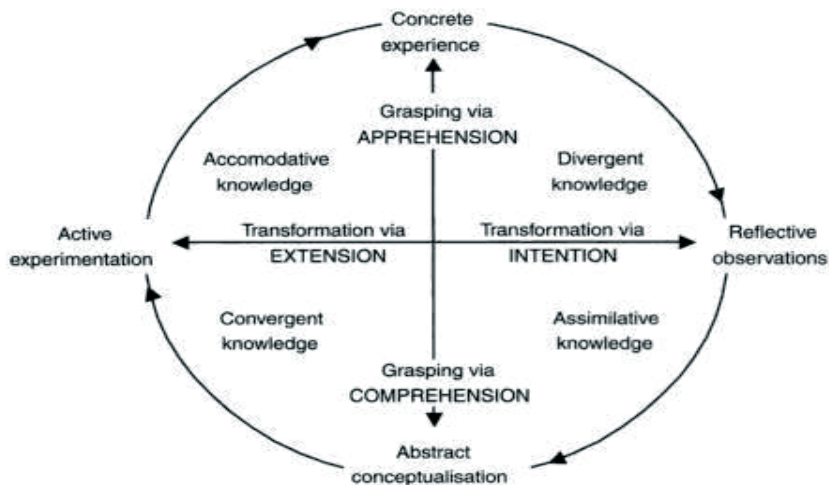


Figure 1: Kolb's Experimental Learning Cycle⁵

³ Trends in learning structures in European Higher Education III, Bologna four years after: Steps towards sustainable reform of higher education in Europe (2003), European Commission, EUA Graz Convention, pp. 15-17.

⁴ Idem, pp. 15-17.

⁵ McPherson, M., & Nunes, B. M. (2004): Developing Innovation in Online Learning, An Action Research Framework, Routledge, str. 15

- Analysis of the Bologna process (“Systemic Bologna”), in terms of guidelines and programmes involves the overall, systematic implementation of the Bologna process. Integration of all elements in one unit should result in implementation not only in the area of learning and education, but it also includes administrative and infrastructural business functions, and all institutions of that process’s financing. The reform of European higher education cannot be successfully implemented without mutual efficient and effective linking of all elements in the process into one unit.

- Ambivalence of the Bologna process (“Ambivalent Bologna”) in practice means two reform lines and potential conflicts or disagreements that arise during the implementation programme:

- Firstly, in the specific qualities of the programmes that exist in certain national systems; in relation to global competitiveness. It is very important to continuously promote transparency in the structure of organization, but also to promote transparency in the cooperation of European partners, respecting funds as well as students and researchers, i.e. professors. Such a transparent programme requires higher concentration of excellence and more competition centres as well as clearer outline of excellence strength. The implementation process actively includes all strictness in the treatment of individual weaknesses of particular system units. Process weaknesses should be urgently removed from European academic education, and ever better results and growing competitiveness of higher education should be continuously achieved.

- Secondly, ambivalence of the Bologna process should also reflect in the social circumstances of implementation, taking into account the “stressfulness” in communication and cooperation of Bologna partners. Building of a new unique European higher education starts from solidarity among the equal and different partners, flexibility of approach, care about certain people and certain content.

- Promotion and improvement of the Bologna process (“Furthering Bologna”⁶) –significantly contributes to positive acceptance and implementation of established goals of higher education according to the determined rules of “Bologna”. The programme for promotion of “Bologna” questions and analyzes the reality of the goals set in development of European higher education. Not one point of view or a point important for creating and continuous development of European higher education should be omitted. What is also undisputable is the constant finding of new professors as well as raising the quality of teaching staff, i.e. professors. Without a good and professional engagement and diligence

⁶ Idem, str. 15-17

of teachers, i.e. professors, there will be no positive results in the Bologna process. “The spirit of times deals with this problem under the title ‘education ethics’”⁷. The problems of ethics in the knowledge transfer as well as the question of human knowledge management are issues requiring discussion within the Bologna process implementation and a clearer definition.

4. Conclusion

The European University Association, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the National Unions of Students in Europe and the Council of Europe continue cooperation and coordination on building of a unique system of European education at all levels.

Erasmus, Socrates and other programmes in the framework of “old Europe” bring innovations and demand radical changes in academic education.

All programmes respect redefinition of the past events in an academic institution, as well as structural changes in organization of higher education today, and influence the planning and programming of future interventions in organization and structure of higher education.

Knowledge based on economic premises bears basic characteristics of production, transfer and dissemination of information, both for universities in general and for all individual processes in academic institutions. The conclusion of various European (academic) committees is that more investment should be made into modernization and quality of teaching at universities, in academic institutions, in order to directly influence the quality of education and provide better implementation of new positive trends of university development, but also to provide better equipment for all professors, scientists and students at universities. Transparency of the process, structural convergence in diversity of national education systems, programme mobility, cultural and linguistic diversity, and transferability of knowledge evaluation of both students and professors of various academic institutions – all of these are challenges, limitations, but also possible and achievable advantages in implementation of the Bologna process and better management of intellectual capital in Europe.

⁷ Liesman, P. K. (2008), Idem, str. 64

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