

Common elements for re-orienting higher education institutions in various countries toward lifelong learning: Research and implications for practice

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Abstract: This research study focused on the question: What common elements will need to be considered to help higher education institutions in various countries shift toward a lifelong learning focus? Research is presented on the background and experiences of various institutions in this regard, developing a policy statement on elements of this re-orientation as a product of a worldwide conference, and ultimately constructing “measurable performance indicators” [MPI] for the seven elements — overarching frameworks, strategic partnerships and linkages, research, teaching and learning processes, administration policies and mechanisms, decision support systems, and, student support systems and services. Research and implications for practice within various organizations and countries are also included.

Higher education institutions around the world in the 21st century are being faced with serving the educational and learning needs of a non-traditional population [older than the traditional college age of 18-22]. This new population requires different approaches for fulfilling their educational desires. They come into the higher education setting on a part time basis, study and take courses for a period of time, and then drop out for a while, returning later seeking to ‘pick up’ their course of study again where they were when they were previously enrolled. Research on how institutions may be able to address this situation is needed.

Research Design

This research study focused on the question: What common elements will need to be considered to help higher education institutions in various countries shift toward a lifelong learning focus? Some Adult Educators at the University of Missouri – St. Louis (UMSL) were involved in researching the background of this topic on the North American Continent and the Northern Hemisphere. Other Adult Educators at The University of The Western Cape [UWC], Cape Town, South Africa were involved in researching the background of this topic on the African Continent and the Southern Hemisphere.

This information was shared as one backdrop for a worldwide conference on the topic of “Lifelong Learning, Higher Education and Active Citizenship” held in Cape Town in October, 2000. There were 95 Adult Educators from 19 countries at the conference. This was also a follow-up and continuation of the work begun at the UNESCO Fifth International Conference on Adult Education in Hamburg, Germany, 1997, continued at the University of Mumbai, India in 1998, and the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in Paris in 1998.

These gatherings of adult educators resulted in the formulation of the Cape Town Statement on Characteristic Elements of a Lifelong Learning Higher Education Institution. They named six major elements. The next step in the process saw the two schools from South Africa and The University of Missouri, changing those six elements to seven major elements, and developing measurable performance indicators for the practice lifelong learning in higher education institutions.

This coming together of adult educators resulted in the formulation of the Cape Town Statement on Characteristic Elements of a Lifelong Learning Higher Education Institution, The six [and ultimately seven elements included: [1] Overarching Frameworks, [2] Strategic Partnerships, [3] Research, [4] Teaching and Learning Processes, [5] Administration Policies and Mechanisms, [6] Decision Support Systems, and, [7] Student Support Systems and Services.

Next, a five member team from The University of Missouri [UM] went to Cape Town to work with personnel from The University of The Western Cape [UWC] in May, 2001. The aim and task of this meeting was to address the issue of moving a higher education institution from a traditional orientation toward a lifelong learning orientation. This information also applies to the educational function of other institutions as well.

I. Life Long Learning Definition

A master concept or principle regarded as the continuous and never complete development, changes, and adaptation in human consciousness that occur partly through deliberate action but even more as a result of the business of living, where learning may be intentional or unintentional that includes acquiring greater understanding of other people and the world at large, based on five pillars of learning: learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to change.

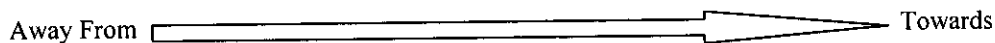
The first section of this paper reflects mainly the findings that came from the Northern Hemisphere and focuses on the six elements mentioned above.

The second section focuses on the merging of the Northern and Southern Hemisphere findings which resulted in producing a copy of The Cape Town Statement, the definitions of the six elements, an explanation of the details within each of the elements, and a listing of the 95 conference participants [who contributed toward developing The Cape Town Statement], and the 19 countries from which they came.

Characteristics of Highly Effective Adult Learning Programs are clearly delineated by a major piece of research (Billington, 2000; Henschke, 2000). It was as though this research snapped multiple pictures of a barely visible phenomenon from various angles, and when developed, all pictures revealed the same clear image. Results revealed that adults can and do experience significant personal growth at midlife. However, adult students grew significantly only in one type of learning environment; they tended not to grow or to regress in another type. What was the difference? The seven key factors found in learning programs that stimulated adult development are:

1. An environment where students feel safe and supported, where individuals needs and uniqueness are honored, and where abilities and life achievements are acknowledged and respected.
2. An environment that fosters intellectual freedom and encourages experimentation and creativity.
3. An environment where faculty treats adult students as peers-accepted and respected as intelligent experienced adults, whose opinions are listened to, honored, and appreciated. Such faculty members often comment that they learn as much from their students as the student learn from them.
4. Self-directed learning, where students take responsibility for their own learning. They work with faculty to design individual learning programs which address what each person needs and wants to learn in order to function optimally in their profession.
5. Pacing or intellectual challenge. Optimal pacing is challenging people just beyond their present level of ability. If challenged too far beyond, people give up. If challenged to little, they become bored and learn little. Pacing can be compared to playing tennis with a slightly better player; your game tends to improve. But if the other player is far better and it's impossible to return a ball, you give up overwhelmed. If the other player is less experienced and can't return one of your balls, you learn little. Those adults who reported experiencing high levels of intellectual stimulation – to the point of feeling discomfort—grew more.
6. Active involvement in learning, as opposed to passively listening to lectures. Where students and instructors interact and dialogue, where students try out new ideas in the workplace, and where exercises and experiences are used to bolster facts and theory, adults grow more.
7. Regular feedback mechanisms for students to tell faculty what works best for them and what they want and need to learn—and faculty who hear and make changes based on student input.

Changing faculty roles with the focus moving according to the following paradigm (:Lemkuhle, 2000; Henschke, 2000):



The Instructional Paradigm

The Learning Paradigm

Learning Theory

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Knowledge existing 'out there' > Knowledge coming in 'chunks' & 'bits' delivered by instructors > Learning as cumulative and linear > Fits the 'storehouse of knowledge' metaphor > Learning as teacher-centered > Learning as teacher controlled > 'Live' teacher, 'live' students required | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Knowledge existing in each person's mind & being shaped by individual experience > Knowledge being constructed, created, and internalized > Learning as a nesting & interacting of frameworks > Fits the 'learning how to ride a bicycle' metaphor > Learning as student-centered > Learning as the students' responsibility > 'Proactive' learner required with teaching resources |
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accessible

- > The classroom and learning are competitive and individualistic
- > Learning environments and learning are cooperative, collaborative & supportive
- > Talent and ability are rare
- > Talent and ability are abundant

Productivity/Funding

- > Definition of productivity as instructing the unlearned
- > Definition of productivity as helping adults learn
- > Cost per hour of instruction per student
- > Cost per unit of learning per student
- > Funding for hours of instruction
- > Funding for learning outcomes

Nature of Roles

- >Faculty as authoritarian experts
- >Faculty as models exemplifying lifelong learning
- >Faculty as primarily lecturers
- >Faculty as primarily designers & implementers of adult learning techniques & environments
- >Faculty and students acting independently and in isolation
- >Faculty and students working in teams with each other and with other staff
- >Teachers classifying and sorting students
- >Teachers helping develop every student's competencies and talents
- >Staff serving/supporting faculty and the process of instruction
- >All staff as educators who help produce student learning and success
- >Any expert can teach
- >Empowering learning through challenging and complex means
- >Line governance; independent actors
- >Shared governance, teamwork

The third section provides an explanation of how and why the six elements became seven elements, a complete chart of the items within each element, a chart checklist to keep track of progress on each item, and the original with an addendum of bibliographical references from which much of the material was drawn.

The fourth section addresses some updates and follow-through that various institutions have done regarding implementing the characteristics of a lifelong learning re-orientation and their “measurable performance indicators” into higher education and other institutions.

The fifth section adds another indicator system of lifelong learning literacy. This is taken from a perspective in Taiwan. However, it is narrowly focused on the learner and does not include what an educational institution may need to do to be supportive in the process of helping the learner maintain a lifelong learning orientation.

The seven major characteristic lifelong learning elements of a higher education institution that were formulated are as follows. 1. Overarching Frameworks – provide the context that facilitates operation as a lifelong learning institution. 2. Strategic Partnerships and Linkages – for collaborative relationships internationally, with other institutions nationally, and with other groups in society. 3. Research – includes working across disciplines, institutions, investigating what kinds of institutional adjustments need to be made to help the institution better serve lifelong learners. 4. Teaching and Learning Processes – Educators will need to move their teaching and learning processes away from the ‘instructional paradigm’ toward the ‘learning paradigm’. 5. Administration Policies and Mechanisms – service to learners is the top priority of the administration. 6. Decision Support Systems – provide within the institution and community an atmosphere that is people-centered, caring, warm, informal, intimate and trusting. 7. Student Support Systems and Services – provides learner-friendliness, convenient schedules, and in various ways encourages independent learning. It is well to note that moving educational institutions toward serving the practical learning needs of all lifelong learners, is a lifelong endeavor that will continue for many years. Developing the 78 Measurable Performance Indicators [MPI] for the seven Characteristic Elements of a Lifelong Learning Orientation for Higher Education Institutions, was what made the ‘rubber meet the road’ in applying this research to the practice of a higher education institution. Numerous institutions, educational and otherwise have adopted those MPIs in moving the educational operation into reality

The Measurable Performance Indicators

One of the major trends in LLL focuses on Performance Indicators (PI) that requires the characteristic elements to be measurable and concrete in action. It is well to note that moving educational institutions toward serving the needs of all lifelong learners is a lifelong endeavor that will continue for many years. The discussions between the UM Team and the UWC Personnel modified the original six (6) “Characteristic Elements” into seven (7). The seventh one that was added to the original six was “Decision Support Systems. A few accompanying “Measurable Performance Indicators” [MPI] are indicated in the list that follows. The complete MPI Instrument is available from the author by request from the following e-mail: henschkej@missouri.edu

- (1) Overarching Frameworks — provide the context that facilitates operation as a lifelong learning institution. This would mean that all stakeholders relating to the institution have a financial policy and implementation plan, the legal framework, and the cultural/social sensitivity as a foundation to operating the institution for serving lifelong learners.
- (2) Strategic Partnerships & Linkages — form collaborative relationships internationally, with other institutions nationally, and with other groups in society. The indicators needed will focus on increasing the institution wide

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