

Chapter 14

Constructing a Working Life–Oriented Model for Online Course Modernization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Working life should be more actively integrated in higher education as a partner in education design. The e-Learning of the Future project (2009–2012, ERDF) meets work-oriented online education development challenges through working life mentoring that utilizes social media. In the project's operational model, educational technology experts design and develop teaching in online courses collaboratively with higher education instructors and working life experts. This chapter examines how development of the model was initiated and what problems and challenges emerged. The study will help to establish directions on including working life in online education development through a virtual media laboratory. The model's use in updating online courses to produce authentic content appears promising. The following critical factors, however, can be found when implementing the model: 1) structuring of the modernization process, 2) supervision of an online interaction process between modernizers/actors, and 3) finding a meaningful role in the process for the working life mentors.

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BACKGROUND: ONLINE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITIES IN SHARING OF EXPERTISE – COOPERATION BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORKING LIFE

The ability to meet changing skill needs and continuously develop the knowledge-based society has become a competitive edge not only in business but also in Higher Education (HE). The demands on change management and problem solving skills that arise from greater competition and continuous change have increased the need for different online learning and development communities. These communities are needed between individuals and across organizational and sector boundaries (Lewis & Allan, 2005). Recent technological and social developments in online settings have the potential to support lifelong learning in new ways. Online collaborative spaces, platforms, and communities can support both informal and formal learning in many ways through various forms of participation. Communities can encourage their members to participate and learn within a sociable, openly-managed, and developing culture (Ala-Mutka, 2010).

Educational solutions implemented in online learning environments and through diverse technologies can be considered meaningful means to support professional growth and working life-oriented learning culture that is independent of time and place constraints (Kleimola & Maunula, 2010; Bonk, Kim, & Zeng, 2006). New openings and operational models are required for online education working life linkages in HE (cf. Boulton-Lewis, Pillay, & Wilss, 2006). In Finland, the evaluation of online education in Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) conducted by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (Leppisaari, Ihanainen, Nevgi, Taskila, Tuominen, & Saari, 2008) found that while working life linkages are utilized in *learning content*, workplaces are not active partners in a collaborative planning of education. Working life should be included from the beginning stages of online implementation *planning* if content is to meet the demands of authentic online education and working life skills (Leppisaari, et al., 2008). Studies on HE's work linkages (Zacheus, 2009) indicate employer representatives and teachers consider the presence of working life in education planning and mutual networking to be inadequate.

Innovative forums that function as a community's memory and articulate tacit knowledge are needed as supports for interaction (Salonen, 2010). Social media have increased opportunities to convey, communicate, share knowledge and implement online learning communities that support formal and informal learning (Lewis & Allan, 2005; Ala-Mutka, 2010). Studies, however, show that the new affordances of information networks and e-tools have not yet been discovered in the promotion of HE's working life linkages. In this article mentoring that utilizes social media is seen as a new opportunity and means to modernize online education and sup-

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