PRACTICAL MANAGEMENT EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF E-LEARNING

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Abstract

The paper is aimed to reflect the challenges of the modern management education in the context of digital or e-learning. Based on the results of the sociological research conducted among students of the Ural Federal University and Ural State Law University the authors elaborate on the efficient ways to manage the digital educational system in order to provide both competency-based approach to education and to keep up with the requirements of time and demands of the students. The paper provides data on the peculiarities of digital natives (young people usually born after 2000) that should be taken into account while using online education, names some of the challenges of the e-learning and offers particular solutions to these challenges. The authors also elaborate on the efficient ways to work out managerial skills in the course of online or blended education. As the authors conclude, e-learning gathers pace and should be introduced into the educational process taking into account the peculiarities of the digital natives' generation. However management education requires practical approach to learning which can be reflected through blend learning.

Key words: e-learning, competency-based education, blended education, management education.

JEL Code: I23, I28.

Introduction

Modern world is digitally oriented. More and more processes and functions are now performed either by machines or by technical means. This trend cannot but influence the sphere of education. Modern educational institutions both in primary and high schools introduce e-learning into the educational process. However digital education has some peculiarities that should be taken into account in the course of its application. For example, the core element of modern educational system is competence which includes not only

knowledge on a particular subject but also some practical professional skills as well as the skills of social interaction. The latter can hardly be obtained in the course of e-learning.

The research presented in the paper is aimed to distinguish forms and methods of education that can be used in online learning on the one hand and will be effective in developing necessary managerial competences and skills on the other hand. The paper also views the challenges of the modern educational systems in the context of e-learning.

The key notion of the today's educational systems all over the world is the notion of competence. It is the competence that measures the success of the learning process and should be worked out in the result of learning. R.M. Epstein and E.M. Hundert view competence as "the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and the community being served" (Epstein, Hundert, 2002). The complex character of this notion defines the complex approach to the education that should be also reflected in e-learning. We believe that knowledge requiered for the preparation of management professionals can be obtained through online learning while managerial skills and social competences necessary in management are to be acquired via practical approach in education, practical tasks, project education et cetera.

The matter of competency-based and practical education has been developed in the works of such prominent pedagogues as A. Makarenko, M. Montessori, N. Pirogov and is still in the focus of the scholars attention (Chuenjitwongsa, Oliver, Bullock, 2018; Marin, Concepcion, Vichot, 2018). More and more authors research the peculiarities of certain educational technologies applicable particulary in the management education (Knotts Ulysses, Keys J. Bernard, 1997; Schmuck, 2018; Mason, 1992).

Another key element of the modern education is digital or e-learning which satisfies the growing demands of the labour market and the way of thinking of the youth. As for the market demands, they are constantly growing especially in the IT sector. Managerial positions nowadays also require IT knowledge which develops rapidly and can be preferably obtained via distant education. The way of thinking and processing information by so called "digital natives" or generation Z also requires the shift in the educational technologies and approaches (J.Chris, R.Ramanau, S.Cross, 2010; P.Thompson, 2013). We will further elaborate what these approaches should look like.

Methods

To find out the most efficient approaches to the management education in the context of e-learning we conducted the two-steps research.

First, we established the peculiarities of the digital natives way of thinking, their acilities of working with and processing the information. To reach this aim we asked 2-4-year students (aged 18-25 years old) from two higher education institutions in Yekaterinburg, Russia: Ural Federal University and Ural State Law University, about their preferances in the technologies used at their studies. The questions asked concerned the most preferable way of obtaining information (via text, video, discussion), the ways of processing information, about efficiency of different forms of education (lectures, seminars, project education), the time spent in the Internet and social media, technical equipment used at the classes and its usefulness. 328 respondents participated in the survey (Rezer, Kuznetsova, Symaniuk, 2018).

Second, we researched the competency-based approach to education and the formation of competencies in the course of management education in the Ural Federal University. In the course of this survey 174 students from the Institute of Public Administration and Entrepreneyrship at the Ural Federal Universities were asked to assess the managerial and other skills and competences they acquired during their studing.

Besides these two surveys conducted among the students we applied the comparative analyses methodology to established commonalities and differences in the practical education approach and the competency-based education and to compare different educational technologies and their efficiency (Rezer, Kuznetsova, 2018). The methods of interaction and interviewing were applied inter alia.
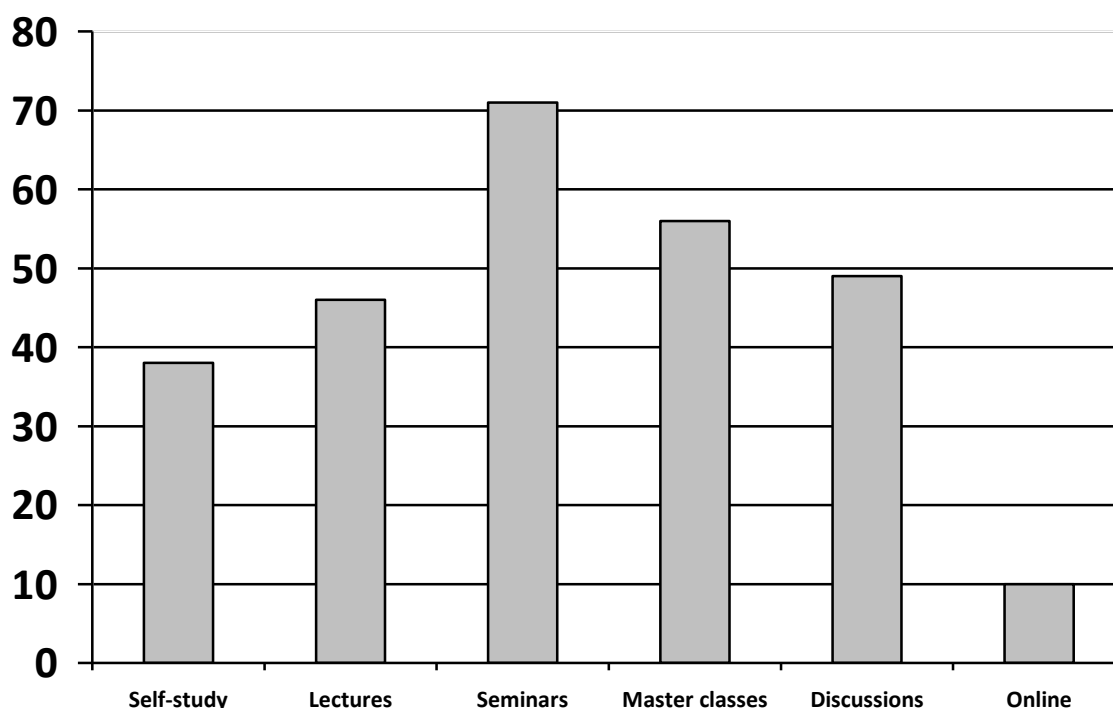
Results

The results of the conducted surveys show that the students have quiet high level of distrust to e-learning. Among the preferable forms of learning online education ranked lowest (see Figure 1). The overwhelming majority of students believe that the most efficient ways to get managerial skills is via practical classes and free discussions (70% for seminars, 57% for other practical classes and 50% for discussions). At the same time the level of those students who are ready for self-study is also quiet high (38%), many of them also prefer lectures as the form of education (47%). These data allows to make a hypothesis that it is not only the way of learning that matters but the quality of the online courses. A lot of students point the dull and monotonous video-lectures, typical test tasks and non-creative approach of the teachers to the

composition of the online courses as the primary reasons for their unwillingness to use them. The students claim they do not fully understand the content of some video-lectures while they do not have the opportunity to ask a quiestion to clarify what is missing.

53% of the respondents state they process information easier when they discuss it with someone and only 10% of the respondent point watching video as the most efficient way to percept the info.

High level of distrust to the e-learning methods require teaching teachers how to make online courses, how to perform in front of the camera and to introduce interactive forms into the e-course (Sohrabi,Vanani, Iraj, 2019).

Fig. 1: Preferable forms of learning

Source: the results of the survey conducted by authors.

Another problem that can be distiguished in this sphere is the motivation of students to use the online course and to end it. The majority of students (almost 50% in total) rank the ability to concentrate from 7 to 8, while only 13% believe they have a 10 score in concentration. Almost 30% rank their concentration ability lower then 6 out of 10. 51% of students also state they are distracted at least 2 times a class to check their social media. These peculiarities of the modern students do not allow them to devote many hours learning online

course by themselves. So second challenge here is to work out the system of motivation either through gamification or by reminders sent to the students' email or social media.

Third challenge is the attendence level for the students in case they learn the discipline partly online. What will motivate the student to attend the class in case all the information for the course is available online? Basically nothing if only offline classes offer something more then mere knowledge. Transition to online learning requires the change in the way of practical classes delivery. The students should practice their skills and apply the knowledge they obtain online at the offline classes. Interactive forms, project education, discussions and debates in the classroom can on the one hand motivate students to come and on the other hand can provide practical skills necessary in their profession (Resnik, 2017).

The abovementioned challenge is very closely related to the issues of practical management education and the abilities of online courses to help students develop their soft managerial skills. The results of the second survey conducted in the course of our research show that 81% of students of Public Administration programme are generally satisfied with the level of skills they acquired at the University. However 55% claim they lack managerial skills and 31% lack organizational skills necessary for the public administration. 76% believe they are not fully capable of working with the documents.

In our view this problem can hardly be solved by means of e-learning. E-learning can be efficient while delivering the knowledge on the particular issues, however it is rather difficult to work out the soft skills of communication, negatiation, presentation, client care necessary for the manager. To cover both knowledge and skills the educational institutions can use blended education where a part of the course can be obtained online, however offline classes with project management, discussions and debates, role plays are included into the programme too. Project education can be of specific use here (Resnik, 2017).

Besides blended education allows (and even requires) strong cooperation between the universities and the employers of the future graduates. In case the employers are interested and fully engaged in the project education they can also participate in the creation of the online courses revelant for their peculiar sphere of operation. Such online courses can include the practical or project part realised ‚on site' together with the representatives of the organisation.

Conclusion

E-learning gathers pace in all spheres of education. Around 70% of academics view e-learing as one of the key components in modern education (Sohrabi,Vanani, Iraj, 2019). Digital education surely has certain advantages that make it more and more attractive for many students all over the world. It helps to cut the expenses (although requires certain investments in the initial phase), cut the staff and working hours and therefore make education more affordable for those who cannot allow paying high fees for the learning.

Besides e-learning let the students adjuct their schedule to their everyday life and get the knowledge any time from any spot of the world. The trends of the digital education development show that sooner or later the educational institutions will be able to tailor the programme to the particular needs, interests and competences of each particular student and his or her future employer.

However at the same time e-learning brings some challenges that at the moment are treated differently in different coutries and educational institutions. First, e-learning is still rather unusual form of education for the majority of the higher schools. The teachers as well as students are not yet used to the format and level of distrust to this form of education is still rather high. To overcome this barrier both teachers and students should learn how to organise and use online course. Teachers should pay more attention to the modern educational technologies used online, should be more attentive to the content they use and the delivery of this content. The peculiarities of the digital natives way of thinking and processing the information should also be taken into account.

Second, in terms of management education the most efficient way to provide necessary managerial skills and competences is via blend learning. Blend learning as a combination of online courses and offline classes can help to reduce the costs for the knowledge-based part of the programme and focus on the skill-based part. The students can get all the necessary theoretical information sitting in front of the screen while the very application of this knowledge and perfecting the skill will take place in the classrom. To make this approach more efficient the future employers can also participate in the online courses development and can be the customers for the projects used in the practical part.

Third, both e-learning and traditional offline learning now face the problem of students' motivation. It takes effort for student to both cover the online course and to attent the classroom. As for the online part it get even more difficult due to the fact that the students should plan their shedule and control their performance themselves. The latest surveys say

that interactive learning as well as the definite purpose increase the motivation to learn significantly (Sohrabi,Vanani, Iraj, 2019). We believe that both these factors can be achieved through project education for managers and active cooperation with future employers. Project education can significantly increase the level of skills necessary for the manager and at the same time can interest young people with the real not theoratical tasks. As for the coopeartion with the eomployers, this will reduce on of the major concerns of the youth which is ,what shall I do with my life after the graducation?'.

Contemporary innovative practices in the education taken together can provide really good increase in the efficiency of higher management education.

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