

HEInnovate webinar - May 7TH 2020, 17:00 (CEST)

Transformational Learning and the Future of Entrepreneurial HEIs

During the Covid-19 crisis, we have been made to realise more than ever that our future may be different from our present. This is called 'disruption.' How does one learn how to engage with disruption?

Klaus Sailer (Munich University) and Wolfgang Stark (Duisburg-Essen University) led a conversation with Otto Scharmer (MIT) on what the future university system may look like, given the current societal challenges. Otto explored the future of learning and how this can be reinvented to provide a better equipment for new challenges ahead.

Michael Spencer, Managing Director of Sound Strategies, contributed to this online space with an introduction on what we can learn from music as our common language and with a musical interlude that was in itself a lesson in immediacy, flexibility and resilience.

In his published work with Kathrin Käufer, Otto Scharmer presented the topic of the urgency of transformational learning twenty years ago. Otto described an Innovation approach called Theory U, showing how transformation can be designed in such a way that innovators can actively shape the future by expanding their understanding of needs, through outer exchange and inner transformation. He explained what in his view should happen today to prepare all HEIs stakeholders for the future that is emerging, rather than for an idea of future that is a continuation of the present situation.

Otto highlighted three main aspects of a future university system, which entailed turning HEIs into truly entrepreneurial learning places, with a mission to re-design our planet.

The first pivotal point addressed the need for the HEIs (including the governance of HEIs) to take on board current and future societal challenges through focussing the outer learning on Sustainable Development Goals.

The second transformational step was about the ability (and willingness) to connect with our inner learning. If we built our awareness of where we turn our attention to and what we concentrate our energy on, then we could develop the ability to listen to what it is that wants to emerge. Giving more importance to time spent to learn about oneself may be the key transformational feature of HEI.

The third important point made revolved around what is there already in HEIs on which they can build to begin the transformation. The currently disconnected and small pockets of deep learning present both within HEIs and in other sectors of society could be developed further and connected into a network, to share experiences of transformational learning internationally and a hub, to work together on projects that will foster entrepreneurial learning.

This webinar was followed by over 150 participants who were very active in posing questions. Participants had the opportunity to discuss these issues in small break out rooms of 4-5 people, during which the discussion was about sharing the present experience of lockdown and suggestions on what can be done to unlock a rapid shift towards entrepreneurial universities.

Among the wider questions asked during the webinar, a few were selected below to represent the deep engagement of the participants with the topic discussed:

- What are the new skills needed from leaders in the new digital economy and in a post-Covid-19 world? How can universities prepare students to be these new leaders?

- In this time of transformation, both digitally and in our values system, how feasible is it to shift the strong focus of direct funding and university governance from on economic benefits towards broader-societal benefits, i.e. towards UN SDGs?
- Could the universities be leaders in re-setting of values and value-systems?
- Students are very responsive and have few problems in adapting to new ways of learning. However there are challenges to overcome, one of which is building the relationship between the educator and the learner without the benefit of a physical presence (body language for example). Another is, for example, the way in which we are organising work, education and our home lives away from the university. Going forward how do we build on the current experiences (positive and negative) to create the new norm?
- Acquiring tacit knowledge is an important part of our education experience, how can we ensure that tacit knowledge is also acquired through virtual online teaching and learning?

Some of these questions could be addressed in future webinars. In any case we are looking forward to receive your thoughts and ideas ... info@heinnovate.eu