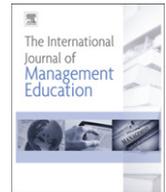




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The International Journal of Management Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijme



Multiple roles of student and instructor in university teaching and learning processes



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 August 2012
Received in revised form 7 January 2013
Accepted 15 March 2013

Keywords:

University
Teaching
Learning
Process
Student
Customer

ABSTRACT

This paper examines six key university teaching and learning processes using Checkland's CATWOE mnemonic and the SIPOC model from lean operations theory. The analysis shows that students play a number of different roles in these processes: as customer, actor, supplier, raw material and end product. The analysis also shows that instructors play a number of different roles in these self-same processes: as supplier, actor and customer. The paper concludes that viewing students as customers is overly simplistic. The paper suggests that students, instructors and support staff must accept that students play a multiplicity of roles, sometimes simultaneously, in university teaching and learning processes. The paper suggests that awareness among instructors of the different processes taking place and of the roles that students and instructors themselves play in those processes will improve the ability of universities to carry out their teaching and learning mission.

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This paper carries out a detailed analysis of university teaching and learning processes and explores the various roles that students play in these processes, including the role of customer. Six key university teaching and learning processes are proposed and analyzed under the input–process–output systems paradigm. The paper follows a line of research that takes a process or systems view of the work of educational institutions (Flannery & Pragman, 2010; Porter & Córdoba, 2009; Sasse, Schwering, & Dochterman, 2008; Stepanovich, 2009; Walker & Ainsworth, 2001; Weller, 1998). The paper uses two specific systems analysis tools: the CATWOE mnemonic from soft systems theory (Checkland, 1985a) and the SIPOC model from the quality and lean operations literature (Pyzdek, 2003).

The paper follows a small number of broad assumptions about learning in general and universities in particular. It takes as its starting point that the primary mission of most universities is to carry out research into phenomena of interest and to disseminate the knowledge gained from this research by various means, primarily through teaching and publication. The first assumption therefore is that universities exist in order to codify knowledge and transmit it from one generation to the next in order that society moves forward (or at least does not lose knowledge). Secondly, it is assumed that universities transmit knowledge largely by means of prescribed, designed, formal degree programs comprising specified courses rather than through individual research, on the job training, apprenticeship, self-teaching, or ad-hoc learning (however note that higher-level learning is typically carried out through individual or team-based research). Thirdly it is assumed that a series of meetings, over some specified time period, takes place between instructor and student in order to engage student learning during a course. Fourthly, it is assumed that not all knowledge transfer can take place in class meetings and students must therefore invest additional time in study. Fifthly, it is assumed that student work is assessed and graded in order to verify the extent of student learning. These broad assumptions provide the underpinning for the teaching and learning processes analyzed in this paper.

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The paper makes two main contributions: firstly, it identifies and separates out several key teaching and learning processes and examines in detail the transformation that takes place during the process. The paper then identifies the various roles that students and instructors take on during each process; the identification of these roles and their implications for teaching and learning provides the second contribution of the paper.

The paper is laid out as follows. Section one briefly reviews the literature on learning paradigms and metaphors for students. In section two the analysis approach is presented and the process analysis techniques are introduced. Section three examines in detail six key university teaching and learning transformation processes. Section four presents a discussion of the implications of the process analysis for faculty and students.

1. Student metaphors and learning paradigms

This paper was prompted by a debate on the topic of ‘student as customer’ that took place a number of years ago in the university in which the author works. Unsurprisingly the debate became heated with strong arguments being made for and against. A similar debate is taking place in the academic literature with many authors recommending that academics view their students as customers and be responsive to their needs (Bridges, 1999; McCollough & Gremler, 1999; Obermiller & Atwood, 2011; Wallace, 1999). While the student-as-customer view has usefully placed emphasis on the student, a number of drawbacks to this view have also been presented, for example: class meetings may become popularity contests, education may become entertainment, grades may become inflated (Acevedo, 2011; Bailey, 2000; Ferris, 2002; Franz, 1998; Gross & Hogler, 2005). These concerns have resulted in a number of alternative metaphors for students being put forward. Franz (1998) views students as fitness trainees, to be directed and motivated by an instructor. Armstrong (2003) and Bailey (2000) view students as clients with whom academics should maintain a professional relationship. Ferris (2002, 2003) and Gillespie and Parry (2009) suggest a junior-partner or employee metaphor. Mintzberg and Gosling (2011) view students as participants in the educational process. In contrast to the above papers where students are typically allocated a single role, this paper suggests that students take on a multiplicity of roles in teaching and learning processes, often simultaneously. The paper also suggests that instructors likewise play a multiplicity of roles. It is this multiplicity and simultaneity of roles played by the two primary actors that makes teaching and learning processes particularly complex.

The debate on the role of student in the learning process dovetails with discussion in the literature on the nature of teaching and learning itself. Approaches to teaching and learning in management education are in transition (Gallos, 2008) and in need of reform (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). The traditional teacher-centric view of teaching and learning sees the instructor as the fount of knowledge, disseminating that knowledge through formal lectures. This view is gradually being replaced by a more student-centric approach to teaching and learning (Berggren & Söderlund, 2011; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2011) where students are actively encouraged by instructors to become more involved in class meetings, for example by discussing case studies, making presentations based on their own analysis, engaging in active commentary and criticism, reflecting on their own practice or completing learning journals. At the limit students co-create their own knowledge leading to a new learning paradigm where knowledge claims are viewed as social constructions (Bedeian, 2004) and that business education itself is a social construction (Antunes & Thomas, 2007). Although there exist a number of different learning paradigms the series of teaching and learning processes put forward in this paper exist independently of the learning paradigm. For example, class meetings will take place whether they are teacher or student centric and whether knowledge is transferred or co-produced. The learning paradigm will of course have a major impact on how the class meeting process is carried out in practice.

2. Process analysis

Viewing the work of an organization as a series of processes has become a paradigm in the business discipline since Michael Porter first put forward his concept of the value chain (Porter, 1985:ch.2). Other authors from the management literature have built on this theme: Michael Hammer (1990) suggested the need to examine and reengineer the large-scale business processes inherent in organizations. The quality and lean literatures have long taken the view that all work is a process (Crosby, 1979; Imai, 1986; Womack, Jones, & Roos, 1991). In the field of economics Nelson and Winter (1982) identified routines as the fundamental unit of business organizations and the basis for their evolutionary theory of the firm. An activity based approach is also evident in the marketing discipline where the ‘service blueprint’ concept demonstrated the usefulness of visualizing a service as a process (Shostack, 1982). This paper draws on this substantial literature of process-based thinking in its analysis of teaching and learning processes.

Inherent in the process view is the customer as receiver of the output of the transformation: that is, the ‘next operation as customer’ (Bhote, 1992). However, the concept of customer is neither simple nor straight-forward (Bryland & Curry, 2001:392), and particularly so in a university context. Customers may be internal or external to the organization; customers may be multiple when a process results in several different outputs, each going to a different customer; there may also be confusion between those who receive a service and those who pay for it with either or both or none being referred to as customer. Checkland (1985a) defines the customer as the receiver of the output of the process. He recognizes that this ‘customer’ is not necessarily the one who pays for the service, and may not even want or require it. He adds that it may be useful to view the customer as the *victim* or *beneficiary* of the service and gives the example of a prisoner as victim (or beneficiary) of the prison service: he receives the service but does not pay for it and probably does not desire it. This paper adopts Checkland’s view of the customer as beneficiary of the output of a process.

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