

Improvement of Lifelong Learning at the Faculty of Economics, Technical University of Ostrava, by the Implementation of E-learning Educational Program in the Field of Management

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Abstract. The paper describes the implementation of e-learning educational program in the field of Management at the Faculty of Economics, VŠB-Technical University of Ostrava. Furthermore, it describes a form of educational program, its goals and the final target groups for which the program is designed, benefits of this type of education for its graduates, characteristics and organization, study materials and the achieved outcomes. The aim of the paper is not only to inform on the successful improvement of lifelong learning at the Faculty of Economics, VŠB-Technical University of Ostrava, but especially to serve as an inspiration for other interested persons working towards similar ends.

Keywords: lifelong learning, e-learning, education, goal, final target group, educational module, conception, benefit, study material, outcome

1. Introduction

Creation and implementation of e-learning educational program at the Faculty of Economics, VŠB-Technical University of Ostrava, took place within the project of 'Conception of Lifelong Learning in the Field of Management' which was co-financed by the European Social Fund (Operational Program of Human Resources Management) and by the funds of the Czech Republic state budget. The implementation of that project took place in the period from 1.01.2007 to 30.06.2008. The project was focused on the improvement of the level of lifelong learning at the Faculty of Economics, VŠB-Technical University of Ostrava, and on the creation of a new conception of lifelong learning in the field of Management that extended the offer of already existing educational products. [1]

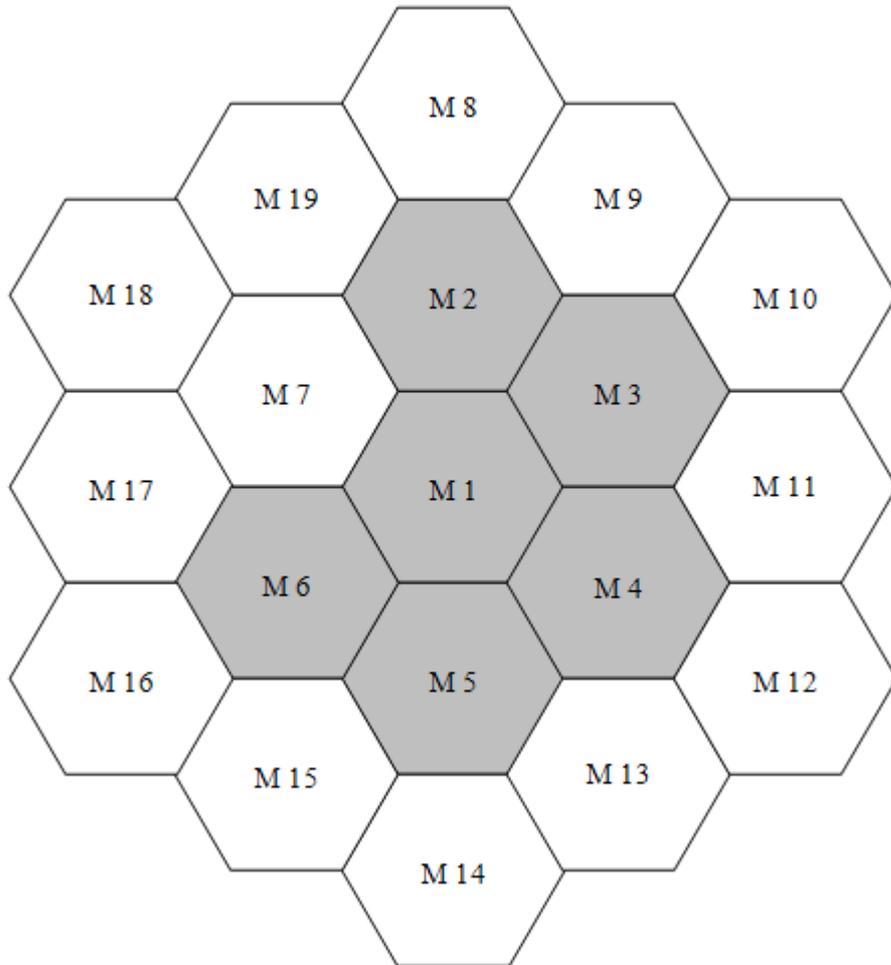
This educational e-learning program was drawn up as an open unit construction system encompassing a number of interconnected educational modules where participants in the course had an option flexibly to choose such a structure of modules that enabled them to create for themselves a course 'made to measure' (see the figure below).

The actual shape of the educational program was based on the identification and specification of educational needs of the final target groups, their interests, knowledge and skills deficits and further obstacles on the way to the extension of possibilities of their placement in organizations and a better use of their abilities or, as the case maybe, the use of their competitiveness on the labor market in the conditions of market economy.

This identification and specification of needs was carried out as a pilot research involving potential participants interested in the suggested kind of education (final target groups). On the basis of the pilot research outcomes, the first original structure of e-learning educational program and its modules had been designed. Consequently, research among a wider spectrum of the final target groups had been performed; the research confirmed the correctness of the designed structure of the program.

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Figure: Educational Program Structure and its Modules



- M 1 Development of Personal Potential
- M 2 Fundamentals of Management
- M 3 Strategic Management of the Organization
- M 4 Management of Changes in the Organization
- M 5 Human Resources Management
- M 6 Operations Management
- M 7 Basic Management Skills
- M 8 Environment of the European Union
- M 9 Effective Communications
- M 10 Performance Management and Motivation of People
- M 11 Quality Management etc.

Legend:



modules processed by the project



perspective considered modules within an integrated concept

Source: own processing

2. The aim of the program

Creation, elaborating, verification and implementation of the original modular e-learning educational program initiated and helped to arouse interest of the final target groups in the efficient way of education contributing to the increase of their competence, relevant to their needs, interests and drawbacks that were identified at the final target groups, and to their potentialities to be further educated at universities.

Another aim of the program was also to contribute to taking over individuals' responsibility for their personal advancement, self-sufficiency, and self-fulfillment in the context of developing civil society, furthermore to the application of equal opportunities policy, social responsibility and business ethics while the sustainable development of the society was respected [2]. The program was to assist in the increase of knowledge ability, a level of education, and the overall awareness of persons within the final target groups. Its role was positively to influence their behavior in the organization and to increase the level of their professionalism.

Among goals of the project there were also reformulation and integration of the present teaching materials focused on the efficient self-reflection of participants in the educational process and on the development of achievements and qualifications serving to the enhancement of their organizational and managerial qualifications into an internally consistent, interconnected, compatible, practically orientated and understandable collection of knowledge and instructions. Interactive study environment was to create a base for further development of educational program [1].

3. The final target groups

The final target groups which the project was aimed at were as follows:

- academic staff at universities, scientific or research staff at institutions which were part of universities, teachers at secondary and grammar schools,
- graduates from universities and institutions of higher learning who wanted to be further educated and to improve their qualification by acquiring professional knowledge which they had not acquired in the way of continual education and for who the form of e-learning education and tutorials was convenient (in that group there were also temporarily unemployed graduates from universities who wanted to strengthen their own competitiveness on the labor market),
- other people interested in further study at university - managers and companies employees, entrepreneurs, persons disadvantaged on the labor market),

If the target group wanted to take part in the designed educational program then it was necessary for its members to achieve at least secondary education completed with a school-leaving examination.

4. Benefits to the target groups

Completing of the e-learning educational program helped its participants from the final target groups to show various possibilities of how to develop their organizational qualifications or competitive skills as an important precondition for their personal prospects and prosperity in the market social-economic environment.

Participants in the educational program gradually acquired a number of knowledge from various thematic spheres. At the same time, with regard to the flexibility and modularity of the program they were allowed to choose the extent and focus of their self-improved activities. Completion of the educational program brought the final target groups the increase of competitiveness on the labor market, which was a contribution to the decrease of unemployment especially of those who had been disadvantaged on the labor market in the environment of market economy.

A formal aspect of graduation from the educational program was obtaining a certificate. This depended on the success of participants in passing the final examination in the module/modules which the course was composed of. The form of the examination was specified by the director of the appropriate module. The study was provided free of charge. [1]

5. Characteristics and organization of education

Participants of e-learning educational program had an option individually to choose one or more modules from the offer and in this way to create their own course so that the choice could meet their concrete conditions and requirements and a learner could make use of all advantages of that type of education to the maximum.

One of the requirements placed on learners to be admitted to e-learning education was at least secondary education completed by a school-leaving examination and also their motivation to study in that untraditional form of instruction. Among technical requirements there was student's access to a computer and the internet; at least minimum practical experience in information technologies was then a necessity. Communication concerning teaching between the e-lecturer/tutor and the learner and mutual communication among students took place in the electronic way (by means of e-mail, chat, e-conferences, discussion forums, virtual classes and the like), most often in the environment of web, in the combination, however, of three tutorials which were to ensure not only a physical contact among learners and e-lecturers/tutors involved in individual modules but also to guarantee the achievement of learning objectives and a successful run of study.

E-learning educational program used a combination of two learning methods (so-called blended learning) which was the method of standard teaching with the method of e-learning teaching.

Standard teaching consisted of three tutorials - introductory, control and final. Those tutorials took place in real time in which all learners including their e-lecturer/tutor were at the same place at the same time, e.g. in a classroom and thus they simultaneously received transmitted experience and they could mutually react.

In the course of e-learning teaching, every learner individually chose his/her pace and the way of receiving information, the kind of discussion with their e-lecturers/tutors as well as with other learners, and the way of knowledge testing so that the schedule of instructions set by a guarantee of the module or, as the case might be, by a lecturer/tutor at particular tutorials could be observed. As a disadvantage appeared the impossibility to react mutually at the same time. The focus of such type of teaching was e-learning educational modules in the electronic shape and learners' teach yourself study.

6. Study and other materials

E-learning education included two basic types of study materials. On-line documents using LCM MOODLE in IS/IT environment of the Faculty of Economics, VŠB-Technical University of Ostrava, served as the first type. In the accessible educational system of the Faculty the students found study materials to the modules, discussion forums, a virtual class with which they communicated the e-tests and diagnostics, control questions and etc. Learning texts on a CD-ROM that served to learners in case they did not have an opportunity to be just connected to the web were the second type of study materials.

Along with the on-line access, a common module called Lifelong Learning in the Field of Management was available for the students. By means of that module topical information on just running modules, a dictionary of the basic concepts of electronic education, a dictionary of the basic concepts used in professional modules, a Czech-English dictionary of most often used concepts, contacts to lecturers/tutors, references to other study literature and related sources and others were delivered. Also a simple guide through LCMS MOODLE environment provided important information. From that common module learners had a chance on-line to enter by them elected special modules (they were also allowed directly to enter specialist modules).

Furthermore, www pages of educational program were made accessible within which the students of individual modules had a possibility to obtain information on all matters concerning the educational program.

7. The state of program implementation

From November 2007 to February 2008, a test operation of two modules was conducted, M5 Human Resources Management, and M4 Management of Changes in Organization. Altogether there were 35 participants who attended and completed the modules. From March 2008 to June 2008 the very professional training of target groups took place within the all offered modules. Altogether 114 participants completed this kind of education some of them obtained a certificate of completing the study in two or even three modules.

The whole project was concluded by a festive colloquium in June 2008.

8. Conclusion

The above-described e-learning educational program has brought a number of new elements into the present portfolio of educational activities provided by the Faculty of Economic, VŠB-Technical University of Ostrava.

It was especially a practically focused modular university educational program distinguished from others by a broad availability and high flexibility and interactivity enabling interested persons from the final target groups to choose a most suitable alternative of their self-improvement according to their own individual needs, interests and requirements.

The educational program was compatible with other educational activities at the university. Its outstanding features were a practical utilization, consistency and a systemic interconnection of individual modules, economy, comprehensibility, and the international comparability. With regard to the e-learning form of the program there was a possibility of learners' distant participation and interaction by means of electronic media, which allowed an equal access to taking part in that kind of study even to persons with limited possibilities of attending school.

Interactivity of the program ensured by a combination of e-learning form together with providing written study texts, tutorials, testing of acquired knowledge, workshops and accompanying publications was the essential innovative element. Educational program took into consideration a possibility of accommodating to learners' requirements.

A modular conception of the program together with on feedback based management of further development on the basis of a close cooperation with learners ensured a high adaptability of educational program to the needs of practice.

Openness of the unit construction educational system allowed its further development offering a possibility of widening the program by other considered modules. The project was based on needs of the final target groups and was outlined in such way so that it could contribute to the increase of knowledge ability, civil, economic and language literacy. [1]

At present the Faculty of Economics, VŠB-Technical University of Ostrava, considers launching a second run of the program extended by modules focused on financial management of organizations and marketing.

The successfulness of the above-described program implementation might become a constant inspiration for other universities that want to achieve higher quality of the offered lifelong learning. The authors of the article will be pleased if this happens and they are ready to answer any question concerning the described program.

9. References

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