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Learning and Teaching

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What Really Matters In Operations Management Learning and Teaching

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the issues around the design and delivery of an Operations Management module in an MSc. in Business Information Technology.

The course was designed to illustrate experientially what really matters for Operations Managers in the 21st century, and learning through the use of electronic support systems including the internet, intranet and online learning.

Essentially the delivery has been re-engineered so that the students, two groups of 64 postgraduates are at the centre of the process and deliver most of the lectures. The course extends over 10 weeks.

Key to the process was setting the right learning environment for the students to take responsibility for learning.

Over 70% of the course was delivered by the students working in *randomly* chosen groups of five on 10 main topic areas. *Operations Management* 3rd ed. Slack et al (2000), was used as the base text source. Their remit was to cover the basic theories of their particular topic area and to provide examples of current best practice. Marks were only given for content (not presentation). These materials were posted later on the intranet. The groups were able to seek advice on content beforehand from the lecturer. They had a support group to give feedback on their presentation performance and content and a week after delivery to produce a reflective report on their presentation.

One group had to manage a strategic alliance with another class (MSc in Business and Management) to deliver a day out in local organisations (e.g. Hampden Park Stadium) to explore the operating systems for the 90 + people in the community.

In addition each individual produced an assignment on a syllabus topic which was posted on the intranet as a resource for all.

60% of the class getting a combined mark of over 68% for assessments including examinations, gives an indication of the success of this approach. Surveys of its strengths and weaknesses from the learner's perspective, will also be included in the paper.

Product/service process design was based on the following ideas and concepts: Learning must be faster than the rate of change - Revans R (1998); learning from mistakes; action learning; concurrent development of people and systems - Lei et al (1999); maximising the use of learners as a resource and valuing the differences between them - Bothams J (1984), Kline N (1999); the use of IT to support learning; networking and strategic alliances; taking responsibility for

one's own learning.

Bothams J (1984) *Why is it that learners get a deeper level of learning when they interact with each other?* MA Dissertation - MA in Management Learning, Lancaster University.

Kline N (1999) *Time to Think*, Ward Lock.

Lei D, Slocum J, Pitts R (1999) *Designing Organisations for Competitive Advantage: The power of Unlearning and Learning*, Organisational Dynamics, Winter, p24.

Revans R (1998) *The ABC of Action Learning*, (2nd ed), London: Lemos and Crane.

Slack, N. et al. (2000) *Operations Management*. 3rd ed. Prentice Hall.