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**MANAGERIAL COMPETENCES IN THE
FIELD OF UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM
FOR VIRTUAL LEARNING
COMMUNITIES**

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Managerial Competences in the Field of University Curriculum for Virtual Learning Communities

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Abstract

Virtual communities are learning environments that facilitate effective learning, in attractive and flexible ways, facilitated by information and communication technologies. If in traditional instruction, teacher training is focused on developing scientific and didactic skills, in the digital curriculum the emphasis is on managerial skills of facilitating learning and networking within virtual communities. Analysis of managerial skills in the field of digital curriculum involves multidimensional analyses with implications in developing effective operational strategies and tools usable by teachers, students and stakeholders. These types of skills are highlighted and assessed through management performances, in the field of strategic and operational curriculum, order to optimize the efficiency of virtual learning communities.

Keywords

university curriculum, managerial competences, virtual learning communities, multidimensional analysis of managerial competence, competences professional profile

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1. Premises for managerial competences development in the field of curriculum

In higher education, the digital curriculum represents curriculum hypostasis outlined in the spirit of the European dimension of education and training, where virtual learning communities are basic organizational structures. The online learning effectiveness, quality of instruction and student performance in the virtual environment are conditioned, on curriculum level, by the managerial skills in the field of university curriculum, of teachers and students.

The theoretical and methodological assumptions of managerial competences in university digital curriculum are distributed in two directions: a) a holistic approach to university curriculum; b) multidimensional approach to managerial competences in the field of curriculum.

University curriculum is "a holistic educational project, tailored to the aims of university education and new paradigms of knowledge and instructional approach situations, indicating: a) structural elements in a relationship of interdependence - aims of varying degrees of generality, contents of academic subjects, but also inter / trans disciplinary ways of training and evaluation; b) procedural elements of design, implementation and evaluation of capitalization and gaining of learning experiences by students, monitored, evaluated and adjusted by the teacher-manager; c) design activity products of university curriculum" (Bunăiașu, 2010).

The multidimensional approach to managerial skills, in the field of curriculum, is a perspective that integrates multiple levels of analysis, which assures the comprehensive nature and operability in curriculum practice:

- The key features of the concept of competence: indirect manifestation; the inseparable nature from subjects' activity and from the context in which is highlighted; dynamic structural elements that are interacting; the constructive and evolutionary nature; metacognitive dimension; manifestation of individual and collective at the same time (Legendre, 2008; Ponea & Sandu, 2009);
- The analysis of the concept of competence, from the viewpoint of three articulated logic: the logic of action in situation, the

curricular logic and learning logic (Jonnaert, Ettayebi, Defi, 2010);

- The essence and defining notes of managerial competence, which are suitable for and in the same time detail the conceptualization degree of the notion of competence. In this respect, the managerial competence in the field of curriculum, is a set of managerial capacities, knowledge and skills, professional values and attitudes, whose functional combination provides the fulfillment of specific managerial functions and roles to high standards of performance in the context of organizational and curricular contexts of specific activities of design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and revision of curriculum;
- The relationship management competences-performance in the field of curriculum, that analyzes the degree of operationalization and competence manifestation level, but also the factors that mediate these variables. In this equation, we identify several primordial factors that facilitate the managerial skills highlighting in the curriculum process: 1) the specialized professional training, pedagogical and managerial; 2) the awareness of self-improvement and the operation with metacognitive strategies of professional development; 3) the situational framework for management skills manifestation, outlined by the elements of culture and organizational climate, by the characteristics of explicit and hidden curriculum, by educational infrastructure.

The expected impact of management skills evidence in the field of university curriculum, at strategic and operational levels, aims at:

- development of strategic projects in the field of curriculum, centered on the new approaches: pedagogical constructivism, the situational approach of training, the student-centered educational strategies, the digital curriculum;
- the development and implementation of curricula, in the spirit of strategic projects, focused on the development of cognitive, methodological competences and professional attitudes, evidenced through the teachers' and policy makers' performance in the management of curriculum, of students in learning and personal development process;

- the proper and flexible application, at the curriculum process level, of managerial functions: provision (prognosis-planning-programming), structural and actional organization, coordination, evaluation and managerial regulation (Iosifescu, 2001, Joița, 2000).

2. The profile of managerial competences in the field of curriculum for university-based virtual learning communities

As we highlighted in previous studies using information and communication technologies (ICT) is one of the most important competences of curriculum managers (Bunăiașu, 2011). By using the computer and internet, together with mobile devices, spatial distance is reduced, making way for a virtual social proximity (Strungă, 2014). Curriculum managers (and all the participants in the educational process) from remote states and communities can communicate via email, forums, virtual learning environments, social networks, websites etc. These phenomenon ‘open new ways for the creation of virtual learning communities (including groups of experts, advisors, professional associations) encouraging the exchange of best practices among teachers but also innovation and educational research’ (Strungă, 2014). ITC relevance opens the perspective for creating new types of European curricula accessible to all those who are interested, especially in the context of computer-assisted instruction (CAI) and of didactic communication as a tool for European integration (Sandu & Caras, 2013; Sandu, 2014; Vlăduțescu, 2014). First, if we look at the progress made by ITC in recent decades, we find that students learn in more flexible ways (e.g., using tablets and smartphones) and closer to their residence (using services web, social networks and online resources). Virtual learning communities are cyber-spaces based on ITC the trainers and trainees interact and participate in collaborative learning activities. According to experts in the field, participating in virtual learning communities has numerous advantages, including: permanent access to information, high educational performance and increased creativity, better developed professional identity (North and Kumta, 2014; Boulay and Van Raalte, 2013).

In order to cope with these challenges, the curriculum managers need to develop a specific set of competences. We can use many models

to build a competences profile, the first one being adapted from one centered on *professional competences* (APEC/DELOITTE Study, 2010):

1. *Curriculum scientific competences:*

- Knowledge of scientific theory in education sciences, particularly in the field of curriculum studies;
- Capacity of using sophisticated IT tools and services like: Web 2.0 applications, learning management systems, virtual learning communities platforms, mobile devices (tablets and smartphones);
- Ability to work in an interdisciplinary online environment;
- Ability to adapt the curriculum to students' educational needs;
- Ability to design the curriculum according to the objectives and aims of the educational institution;
- Ability to evaluate the impact of curriculum over the students' overall performance and satisfaction;
- Ability to get feedback from participants and change the curriculum delivery accordingly;
- Ability to conduct general curriculum surveys.

2. *Team management and organizing skills involved in curriculum management:*

- Ability to work in a team with other professors and colleagues;
- Ability to develop a virtual network;
- Virtual communication skills;
- Language skills;
- Ability to lead, manage and steer teams;
- Awareness of the pertinence of the curriculum research and its impact on the students that are participating to the virtual learning community;
- Ability to link the curriculum with business environment and job market requirements.

3. *Personal aptitudes/interpersonal skills for curriculum managers in online environments:*

- Creativity;
- Open-minded approach;
- Motivation / Involvement;
- Adaptability;
- Ability to self-assess.

A second criterion for identifying managerial competences for the curriculum specific to virtual learning network is by taking into account the phases of the *curriculum development*:

- Curriculum planning: capacity of identifying the issues; ability to form the curriculum development teams; ability to conduct needs assessment and needs analysis;
- Curriculum modelling: ability to select the appropriate content for virtual learning networks; ability to align curriculum objectives with state intended outcomes; ability to design experiential methods in online environments;
- Curriculum implementation: ability to adapt the curriculum to the necessities of students from virtual learning communities; ability to test and revise the curriculum; capacity to recruit and train teachers and professors; ability to create curriculum products;
- Curriculum evaluation: ability for proposing, designing and operating evaluation strategies; ability to report and secure resources needed for virtual learning communities.

A third criterion can take into account the dimension of knowledge management. Starting from a model of *competencies for knowledge management*, we can identify several categories (Competencies for Knowledge Management by Social Care Institute for Excellence):

- Knowledge awareness - ability to demonstrate awareness of the knowledge and information relevant to their role and the value that this brings to the work they do and to their personal development;
- Finding knowledge in virtual environments – ability to understand the range of sources relevant to their work and demonstrates the ability to find and select the knowledge needed for a task using appropriate tools and techniques;
- Keeping knowledge up to date - ability to recognize the importance of current knowledge and demonstrates that they have put in place mechanisms to ensure that they are alerted to current information;
- Contributing to knowledge and information management process - capacity to be aware of their personal responsibility to managing the knowledge and information they create. Ability to

- use the processes, standards and guidelines required to manage knowledge and information in their work place;
- Using knowledge and information for decision making - ability to recognize the risks resulting from using information inappropriately and demonstrates judgment in assessing information and selecting the best information to use;
 - Sharing and contributing to knowledge and information of colleagues in virtual environments - capacity to appreciate the value of sharing knowledge and information appropriately and ability to participates in activities that encourage and facilitate sharing;
 - Learning from experience - ability to reflect on experiences as they work can help develop new insights which can improve their own performance and help others to benefit from their experience;
 - Networking and collaboration - capacity to grow their own knowledge through networking and ability to learn from others within and outside their organization;
 - Communication by using sophisticated ITC - ability to communicate succinctly and effectively;
 - Development of knowledge management competence - capacity to demonstrate responsibility for their continuing development of skills for knowledge and information management in the context of their work.

3. Conclusions

The study of virtual learning communities is one of the most important trends in the process of European integration and the development of a European identity in teacher training. Given the relative diversity of social representation and mental images, the range of managerial competences in the curriculum specific to virtual learning communities depends on the theoretical point of view taken by the expert: from an education sciences angle, knowledge management perspective or from a scientific and professional competences framework, between many others. This relative inconsistency is due to the fact that the study of virtual curriculum is an emerging interdisciplinary field that needs further structuring and organization, especially in the context of professionalization of teacher education. All

these attempts to operationalize the managerial skills in the field of digital curriculum, are highlighting yet again the importance of multidimensional analyses in this area in order to fully take advantage of the interdisciplinary potential opened by the use of virtual learning communities.

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