

Edu World 2016
7th International Conference

**VIRTUAL CLASSROOM AND COACHING - UNEXPECTEDLY
GOOD COMBINATION**

Mariya Aleksandrova Ivanova (a), & Aneta Benkova Dimitrova (b)*

* Corresponding author

(a) New Bulgarian University, Business Administration Department, Sofia, Bulgaria, maivanova@nbu.bg, +359887290543
(b) New Bulgarian University, Business Administration Department, Sofia, Bulgaria, nettka@abv.bg, +359889195000

Abstract

Traditional teaching methods and technologies for higher education not meet the expectations of the students and the needs of business. The paper presents the results of a study of the feasibility of innovative methods of learning and teaching in the field of management. The study aims to establish the scope of a combination of methods to achieve the expected level of competence of the students and their role in the transformation of knowledge and skills. Object of the study are students of master's programs at NBU, Bulgaria. The key figures are the students with their knowledge and skills that corresponding with standards and competency map. Differences to the purposes of the master's program provides to students possibility of individual program planning. Following this approach, the student could receive better learning and personal development. Shared a two-year experience, taking into account the impact on the emotional state of the students and the effect on the achievement of learning objectives, through a virtual classroom application and the coaching approach. Are defined the factors for the change in the methodology and the philosophy of the creative class and problem based learning; the cycle and the elements of the learning process; an environment for work in virtual teams and how to assess your team's performance. A new learning model provides a solution for innovating learning and practical focus.

© 2017 Published by Future Academy www.FutureAcademy.org.uk

Keywords: Innovative methods of learning, virtual classroom, coaching. .

1. Introduction

Globalization and Digitalization lead to the huge organizational changes. International competition; unwieldy markets; high pace of development of information and production technologies; demographic changes (growing unemployment and related social problems, aging and impoverished population, modification values and an increased level of awareness) are key factors for organizational development. Organizations move from mass to flexible production; the traditional corporate model based on vertical integration and hierarchical functional control of linear and hardware systems to network organizations and flat structures.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

New management tools are created, such as Balanced Score Card, Total Quality Management, Business excellence est. The leaders become the most important asset. An often repeated, powerful statement by Henry Ford (as cited in Grover, 2009) reads, "You can take my factories and burn up my buildings, but give me my people and I'll build the business right back again". The leader's role evolved to deal with rising levels of ambiguity and pressures to perform in an increasingly global context. Top managers were asked to be both strategic decision makers and masters of the "soft" skills required to effectively manage people (Sherman & Freas, 2004). During times of intense economic downturns, executives and business leaders are being subjected to a lot of stress. Worse, as the crisis intensifies, some business leaders lose sight of strategic goals because they are mired in micro managing their enterprises. To succeed in today's cut-throat competition, one needs to deliver immediate results as well as long-term performance. Leaders are expected to relentlessly and continually improve their skills, enhance their knowledge and be a perfectionist. A person with leadership qualities is the backbone of any organization and is responsible for its sustained success. Experts have always been particular about the importance of leaders at all levels in an organization.

There is still no paradigm for the university of the 21st century. The education use methods of the 19th century to learn next generation. The standard education does not meet the needs of business and economics.

2. The Factors for the Change in the Learning Methodology

The higher education (HE) points the challenge of applying the possibilities of ICT in order to achieve high quality of education and implement practices and wide sense of openness and collaboration between members of educational networks, knowledge exchange, technology transfer, training materials creation and sharing experience in learning and science researches. Developing new training process, reducing distance between trainees and trainers, using electronically tools and virtual classrooms, HE provides high-quality of the education by social and economic networks.

New technologies expand access to HE, by training innovation and tools. The transformation of information to knowledge via iterative learning methods is a basic. One of the manifestations of modern technology in the HE is distance learning. From the use of traditional services to obtain textbooks and assignments, proceed to TV educational programs to e-learning and m-learning (mobile learning). Web 2.0 - based learning set of technologies "A set of technologies designed to integrate together transformed mass participation in value emerging results" (Dawson, 2006).

The creation of Web-based disciplines, allowing exchange of ideas and practices as well as joint research by virtual teams. Conferences can be monitored online by students from different regions to provide access to space in the electronic publications and discussions (with the copyright protection). These forms of training do not require the presence of the student and the teacher in a certain time in a certain hall or university.

Contemporary learning technics transform the role of trainer. New skills and information are related to interpersonal relationships. The traditional way of studying by reading and reproducing is replaced by case study, problem solving and analysis. Traditional books are replaced by internet resources, e-books and learning platforms. Discussions are widely performed. Collective training and experience exchange give the best to the students by facilitating.

In the mid 1850's the word "coach" was used in Oxford University in the context of a person who helped prepare students for exams connection, obviously recalling the multi-tasking skills associated with controlling the team of the horse-drawn stagecoach or carriage. Historically the evolution of coaching has been influenced and elaborated by many other fields of study including those of personal development, adult education, psychology sports, clinical, developmental, organizational, social and industrial and other organizational or leadership theories and practices. But the earliest form of such coaching as we know it today was called "developmental counseling" (Flory, 1965). The International Coach Federation (<http://coachfederation.org/credential/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=2206>) states that coaching is about "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential." Trainers should motivate co-working of students. According to Dr. Kenneth Randall (as cited in Davis, 2015), director of executive talent at Banner Health, "coaching can truly unleash a leader's hidden potential". Coaching is one of many approaches or types of interventions that can be used to promote leadership development. The coaching objective is to maximize the students' effectiveness and his contribution to the organization. The students and coach then agree upon specific results that best reflect the learning objectives. Successful coaching links a business focus with human processes by closely aligning the students' development with critical business needs. A strong indicator of successful coaching outcomes is the trust and relationship quality existing between the students and coach (Underhill et al., 2007).

3. NBU Good Practice

In this report we present the experience of the NBU as an example of good practice as summarize the possibilities of application of modern educational technologies.

Five years ago in the NBU was started project "Development of e-learning" as a next step of the projects "Developing web-based training" and "Building an electronic library" (Ivanova, 2015a). Efforts made and the experience of the teachers shared the opinion: use an e-learning platform and it is Moodle. To improve the state of e-learning are filled following tasks and activities: have regulation and standards of e-learning, applied research of training models, digital books and materials; Presenting of training tools in electronic modules is done via slide show presentations, demonstrations and videos. Publications in electronic modules represent audio and video content. Discussions, forums and chat provide a possibility for all sides communication. Development of educational films. Connect Moodle's electronic resources in the library (references, periodicals, books, theses, articles, parts of books, etc.). Continuous study is based on practice and goals based programs. Introduction of video consultations and exams. Introduction of electronic tests for ongoing evaluation. Exchange of electronic resources with other educational institutions.

Web-based learning platform is an only technical tool for up-to-date learning process. A team of the lecturers from Business Administration Department of NBU has been provoked for 3-step survey. As a first step, the leadership a style of the managers in Bulgarian organizations has been investigates. As a second step, there was done a study of factors blocking creativity and innovation in organizations and study the models of competence of the modern leader (Bancheva&Ivanova, 2012 г.). Change management process expects learning environments providing specifics. This environment involves problem-based learning. (Ivanova, 2015b). As a final step, the research team analyzed the applicability of

innovative training methods in one of the areas of higher education - management. It was found that the most appropriate methods of learning stimulating creativity and innovation are: discussions to share ideas and exchange experiences; techniques for simulations of possible situations and risk-taking; discussions about a lot of problems; innovative practices; real cases of companies; role games; brainstorming; techniques for working in a virtual team (Bancheva et al., 2013).

4. Research Methodology

The above circumstances provoked the authors of this paper to investigate the innovative learning methods focused on the ICT (virtual classroom) and coaching. Those methods are applied in order to achieve expected level of competences of the students and knowledge and skills transformation. The lecturers observe the student's reactions and behavior via active learning methods and coaching have been used in the training process. The positives of the combination between active coaching and non-traditional learning platform to the learning process have been defined.

The study was undertaken with 85 students from the master programs in Business administration department at NBU. These students have some experience and work in the different companies in Bulgaria – Aroma AD; Bumar AD; Bulbank; Arthur Andersen OOD; Eurobank AD; CTC Holding Group; MIG Group; Kaven-Iradis OOD; Regley Bulgaria; Plena Bulgaria OOD; Consult Team EAD; Lukoil; Promed; Schneider Electric, etc.

Moodle was used (<https://e-edu.nbu.bg/?redirect=0>), as an online learning platform. In particular, it was applied virtual classroom BigBlueButtonBN, which provides communication between teacher and students. Participants collaborate on a task in real time, via video link with webcams, screen sharing, visualizing files (presentations, pdf, video files, audio files, flash animations, etc.); recording session and sharing Moodle for later review or analysis.

Two different coaching approaches – non-directive and directive – have been applied. Non-directive coaching is coaching where the coach simply asks student questions to allow to find their own solutions. A non-directive coach will certainly not offer student advice and rarely even give suggestions, although through skillful questioning they will help student to see his situation from a different perspective, gain clarity, uncover options, challenge inconsistencies and hold student accountable to his actions. The great benefit of non-directive coaching is the student tasks full ownership of his own solutions rather than “doing what someone has been told to do”. Through this approach student will feel a sense of empowerment to make changes in his life and have his confidence boosted. Directive coaching on the other hand is where the coach offers the student solutions, tools and techniques for moving forward. However, the danger is that the solution may not be appropriate for student situation and consequently may not feel fully committed to the solution provided. At monthly sessions, the coach and students reviewed progress and revised the action plan, if necessary.

A survey form has been developed and presented to the student. The survey was administered by email. All participants submitted their final email survey. The issues addressed: the targets areas for improvement that the coaching was supposed to address, the extent to which the coaching was perceived to have accomplished its objectives, any subsequent impacts of the students improvements on their ability to achieve their performance objectives (and how the target areas for the coaching were related to

achieving the performance objectives), whether in the absence of coaching the performance improvements would have occurred anyway.

5. Results of Survey –Interpretation

The data collection planning allowed the program with coaching approach to be evaluated at 4 levels: *Reaction, Learning, Application, and Impact*. ROI is not a part of the current study.

Reactions to the coaching sessions were more than positive. Comments received included these: “This program was very timely and practical.”, “My coach was very professional.” etc. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = unacceptable and 5 = exceptional), the average rating of five items was 4.2. The table 1 shows the items listed and their ratings.

Table 1. Students reaction to coaching.

Evaluation	Rating (%)
Relevance of coaching	4.5
Importance of coaching	4.3
Value of coaching	3.8
Effectiveness of coach	4.0
Recommendation to others	4.3

Learning. As with any process, the students indicated enhancement of skills and knowledge in certain areas. These are examples of feedback given from the them: “I gained much insight into my problems with my team.”; “This is exactly what I needed to get on track. Seeing a different prospective made all the difference for me”. There are seven items with inputs from the students reflecting the outcome of the learning that had occurred during the coaching involvement (tab. 2).

Table 2. Learning from coaching.

Measures	Rating (%)
Understanding strengths and weaknesses	3.6
Translating feedback into action plans	3.7
Involving team members in projects and goals	4.1
Communicating effectively	4.4
Collaborating with colleagues	4.0
Improving personal effectiveness	4.1
Enhancing leadership skills	4.0

Application. Implementation of the action plan is the essential prerequisite for the success of the coaching process. 85 percent of the students reported completion of plans. Students provided input on questions about changes in behavior from the use of skills. Here are some comments they offered on the questionnaires: “One of the biggest assets of having a coach was the ability to have someone who is on your level where you can bounce ideas off and explore personal and business strategies before making any decisions”, “My coach made help instill strong leadership skills and reflect back to me my strengths and weaknesses when it came to communication and organization“, "One of the major advantage of having a coach is having someone to create a neutral space so you can weigh out all your options and decide which direction to move in". The response rates for questionnaires were 72 %. The tab. 3 shows a

listing of the skills and the rating, using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 was “no change in the skill” and 5 was “exceptional increase”.

Table 3. Application of coaching.

Measures	Rating (%)
Translating feedback into action plans	4.0
Involving team members in projects and goals	4.2
Communicating effectively with the team	4.3
Collaborating more with the group and others	3.9
Applying effective leadership skills	4.1

With any process, there are barriers and enablers to success. The students were asked to indicate the specific barriers (obstacles) to the use of what was learned in the coaching sessions. They stated that barriers were almost insignificant, and rarely present. The enablers were confirmed to have a strong impact in overcoming the barriers. The tab. 4 indicates the defined barriers and enablers by the students.

Table 4. Barriers and enablers of the coaching process

Barriers	Rating	Enablers
Not enough time	0.6	Coach
Too much or too little	1.2	Coach
Not relevant	0.3	Action Plan
Not effective when using	0.8	Structure of Coaching
The skill		Business Impact Program
Manager didn't support it	1.1	Support of Management

Impact. Some individuals indicated intangibles when they listed the comments. Also, the action plan contained a place for comments and intangibles. The intangible benefits identified through these data sources included: built clarity of vision, purpose and direction; achieved professional and personal goals more effectively and fast; developed new ways of looking at challenges and opportunities lead to greater awareness and improved decision making; enhanced leadership capability, discovered unknown skills and talents; increased confidence, motivation, personal/job satisfaction; better relationships, in work and at home; improved work/life balance; lower stress levels; increased energy and enthusiasm.

6. Discussion

Surveyed audience of students expected practical applied knowledge rather than encyclopedic expected models and management tools to solve optimal organizational issues. So in short summary we have to appreciate that there are some key components in terms of developing creative talent and leadership. The first is to use well-established, cognitive models that provide strategies and tools and really give students tangible strategies that they can use. Train students to be more creative themselves and even more -- teach them to think out of the box. Develop the educational environment supporting students to develop their skills in complex situations where there are no correct or incorrect solutions. The learning platform Moodle and virtual classroom BigBlueButton support the learning process and digital competence development. Through this medium passes from hierarchical structures based courses to students centered on networks; by students as consumers of knowledge to students as "producing" knowledge; Distribution of information to a horizontal models of sharing knowledge of Learning

Management systems (LMS) to personal learning space (PLEs); stimulate the exchange, sharing and producing knowledge and artifacts of students; stimulate the creation of a personal portfolio.

Strengths of the virtual classroom: WEB based–no need for a special software to be installed , OS independent, real-time co-working, automatically archiving, easy content management, Limitations: The number of participants and volume of the documents, control over the discussion by the teacher. Main disadvantages: there depending on the Internet connection.

7. Conclusions

The proposed combination of innovative approaches and training methods are aimed at higher efficiency of the learning process. They are implemented in the model of training that is entirely oriented towards students in accordance with their needs and expectations, and support their development to achieve competence in the field of innovation management, meeting the European standards and values. The model includes educational philosophy of the program strategy for learning and development process of teaching, learning methods and assessment methods, elements of the educational process, web-based platform for learning and communication. Coaching is more geared towards monitoring and improving how the knowledge learned in training is used – in other words, it deals more with performance assessment and management. Certainly there's coaching involved in training and there's training involved in coaching. The process of training starts with understanding the new concept (through theory and discussion) and then progresses to a stage where the trainees are able to practice the skill in a simulated environment. Training and coaching can work very well when used together. One classic obstacle encountered in business training is the difficulty of transferring skills and enthusiasm from the training room to the workplace. Coaching is an excellent way of helping people apply what they learn from a course to their work. There is no such a thing as a framework for delivering coaching, since many factors should be taken under consideration. There may be no single best practice for any given coaching process. A process design that works well for experienced, well-trained coaches may be inappropriate for less experienced users. Each executive coaching programme is different, but may include some of the following: Initial meeting to agree the broad scope and desired outcomes: an action plan developed collaboratively by the students and coach; other activities can include review of learning materials and continuous feedback; progress review/evaluation with the coach of the improvements made. A change of the behavior and thinking of the students based on realistic feedback. The proposed model for learning is related to the new paradigm of the training development.

References

- Bancheva, E., &Ivanova, M. (2012). Gender differences in Leadership styles of mature students. In J.Ostrouch – Kamiriska (Eds.),Ch.Fontanini (Eds.) &Sh.Gaynard(Eds.),*Considering gender in adult learning and in academia: (in)visible act*(pp. 133 – 150). Wroslaw:WydawnictwoNaukowe
- Bancheva, E., Ivanova, M.&Pogarliiev, A. (2013). Adult Education and Transformative Learning.In B. K apflinger(Eds.),N. Lichte(Eds.), E. Haberzeth (Eds.)& C.Kulmus(Eds.),*Changing Configurations of Adult Education in Transitional Times*(pp. 257 - 273),Berlin: Humboldt-Universit at
- Davis, S. (2015). *The value of a career coach*. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/value-career-coach-steven-davis>

- Dawson, R. (2006). *WEB 2.0 Framework - Trends in the Living Networks*. Retrieved from http://www.rossdawsonblog.com/Web2_Framework.pdf
- Flory, D. (1965). *Managers for tomorrow*. New York: New American Library
- Grover, A. (2009). *Business in competitive environment – can HR make a difference?* Retrieved from <http://sperc.us/business-in-competitive-environment-can-hr-make-a-difference/#more-1397>
- Ivanova, M. (2015a). *Innovative technologies for vocational training and learning – challenges and practices in Bulgaria*. Retrieved from <http://voctelconference.eu/dr-mariya-aleksandrova-ivanova-innovative-technologies-for-vocational-training-and-learning-challenges-and-practices-in-bulgaria-voctel-2015/>
- Ivanova, M., (2015b). Innovative approaches to teaching in graduate programs in management at NBU. In T. Georgieva (Eds.), *Innovative strategies for competitive business* (pp. 458-468). Botevgrad: IBS Press.
- Sherman, S., & Freas, A. (2004). *The Wild West of executive coaching*. Harvard Business Review, 82(11), 82-90.
- Underhill, B., McNally, K., & Koriath, J.J. (2007). *Executive coaching for results: The definitive guide to developing organizational leaders*. San Francisco: CA: Berrett-Koehler