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Almost everybody in this world realize that education is the gateway to a happy and wealthy life. The higher you are educated the more chances you get for a better job and a better position in society. This kind of common sense organizes a huge responsibility for those who are involved in higher education. With the fast developing economy of Vietnam, higher education should be “state of the art”, student oriented and constantly subject to innovation.

For the last 5 years I had the privilege to work as an advisor on several universities in Vietnam. Traveling around the globe as a consultant higher education for more than 20 years I never worked before in such an inspiring environment where I met so many hard working colleagues and such curious students. I experienced that Vietnam is a country where people know that education is a mean instead of a goal as such. Vietnam also realizes that the enormous economic growth asks for other graduates than before. In respect to that there is a high sense of urgency to innovate higher education.

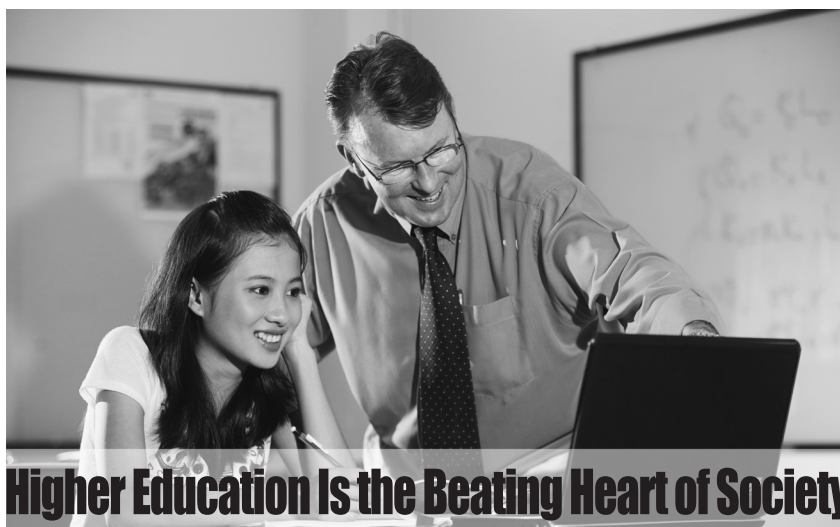
Individual learning

But how can we innovate higher education? Where to start? And how can we work on higher education that really contributes to the further development of the Vietnamese society? First of all we should dare to ask a very simple question: how do people learn?

Many scientists researched this question and we still don't know exactly how the human brain works. After years of academic

research there is one general conclusion: everyone learns in his own way. Everybody has his or her own learning strategy. So while educating young people you have to be aware of the fact that there are a lot of individual differences in how people develop themselves. That means that you have to offer a very wide range of learning environments in which students

should deliver information about the content of the curricula. You develop education from the “outer to the inner” with the stakeholders for whom the “result” of education is supposed to be. In that respect you have to involve the “world of work” in your curriculum development. Starting point to innovate existing curricula or to develop new curricula could be in that respect



Higher Education Is the Beating Heart of Society

can learn. Innovating education therefore is developing those environments and using different didactical methods so students can learn in different ways. Butthere is much more to innovate...

Profession oriented

It's my point of view (and of many others) that higher education should be a part of society and should deliver graduates who “stand with both feet” in that society. For that reason the economic development and the changes at the labour market are the starting point of the innovation of higher education. Vietnam now needs graduates who can “apply” sciences, graduates who learn a profession in order to work outside the walls of the university. So the labor market and the professions

a labor market analyses in which one can do research in order to find what kind of knowledge, skills and attitude is needed for executing certain “most wanted” professions. Describing a profession in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude we call a professional profile. You can start with simple questions: what has an IT-engineer to do, what do we expect from an economist, what does a crop production engineer? Professional profiles should be transferred into an educational profile in which is described what kind of competences (knowledge, skills and attitude) should be learned during the “study career” at the university. Because of the fact that the outside world, the organisations and the professional situations are subject to constantly change, a graduate should be prepared

to show “competent behaviour” in many specific professional situations. So you need to educate a flexible “broad” professional. The IT-engineer should be able to work as an information manager, the crop production engineer should be able to work as a food quality manager and the economist should be able to work as a professional business manager in different kind of companies.

Context

While innovating higher education you should be aware of the fact that students need a context in which they can learn. They have to understand why they have to learn certain topics. A professional profile and the profession itself are such a context in which they can learn and in which they are able to give meaning to their learning. They understand that they need to know certain things and that they should have certain skills in order to be a good professional. Innovating higher education asks for many different “strong learning environments” as a context in order to learn all those competences, which are needed in different professional situations. For that reason a practical placement within a company or other organisation is for instance one of the most important strong learning environments. Students should work independently on an assignment for about half a year. Not only to show their knowledge and skills but also to get acquainted with working in a professional surrounding (context).

Global integration

While developing a professional and educational profile you should think about what kind

of key qualifications you would like to fetch. What kind of more general qualifications are needed in the outside world, what kind of graduates Vietnam needs for the coming years? The society not only needs broad professionals but also creative young managers and graduates who can solve problems in more than one way, analytical people, communicative people who are, after graduation, part of the intellectual advanced guard of the Vietnamese society. That means that those graduates also should take for instance their social responsibility. But there is one key qualification which is even more important: graduates should be able to work in an international environment. Young graduates should be able to travel the world to represent Vietnam as a business partner. Therefore innovating Vietnamese higher education should also mean that you have to develop more international oriented curricula. You have to involve global developments into your educational programs. Students should do their practical placement abroad, working and learning for instance within a foreign company for half a year. Or students should study abroad as part of their educational program of a Vietnamese university. While doing this you have to compare Vietnamese education on a global scale. Does your programs fit into other curricula abroad? Are you educating your students for the same professional profiles? Internationalisation of higher education is one of the main issues all over the world. Globalisation has a huge impact on higher education. Student and staff exchange and international comparison of (the quality) curricula are becoming

more and more important in this world which is becoming smaller and smaller because of the new communication technologies.... UEF

I visited the University of Economics & Finance in June 2010 where we had the opportunity to work with almost 100 students who participated in our Cool City Hunt project, a worldwide research program on trends. I was very happy to see that those students made a substantial addition to our project. They were creative, open minded, communicative and very oriented on the outside world. Furthermore I met some very ambitious staff who were involved in quality care and research & development. Together with the strong connection UEF has with the international business world and their high standard partner institutes in the USA, UEF has an excellent fertile ground for further innovation of its curricula and a good starting point for an international accreditation.

Higher education is the beating heart of society. Vietnam needs that beating heart and all those good educated young people who want to serve their country and would like to represent it abroad. All those who are involved in the process of innovating higher education deliver an important contribution to the bright future of this wonderful nation Vietnam.

I am looking forward to get the opportunity once again to deliver my humble contribution as a consultant Higher Education to Vietnamese Universities. I am looking forward to meet my well-respected colleagues again. It will be a pleasure and an honour. ●