

Title: **Developing a community of learning for embedding employer engagement**

Presenter: **Angela Srivastava**
University of Bradford

Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

Gain knowledge and understanding of how learning communities can be used to embed change initiatives, such as employer engagement, within HEIs
Understand some of the ways that other participants engage others or become engaged in employer engagement or similar initiatives
Assess degrees of commonality and transferability of approaches to engage academic in change initiatives

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

Employer engagement is one of the major UK HE challenges for the near future, arising from both inside and outside the academic community (CBI 2008). Practitioners, policy makers and managers within HEIs have been challenged, along with a number of other regional, national and global issues to demonstrate successful, flexible and sustainable ways of engaging new students (DIUS2008, Leitch 2006).

HE staff may feel a little apprehensive about some of the many changes demanded of them, at all levels, across their institutions (Johnson 2001). The perspectives of HE staff, academic, administrative, support, and management, have been subject to so many challenges (Saunders 1999) as a result of government initiatives and funding methodologies that there is no longer a 'constant context' within which to understand their profession – including one of the key current challenges – provision of learning in work place contexts.

As part of the University of Bradford Employer engagement programme – Escalate, a cross university community of practice has been developed to support academic staff in developing employer engagement within their own academic areas and to understand and address the challenges they face. Crucially, this sharing of practice allows academic staff to develop cross-school relationships and activities in a constructive, committed and interested community of practitioners (Wenger 2007).

The aim is to build the employer engagement seminars into an institution wide community of practice that supports academic staff in developing learning, teaching and assessment that is responsive to employers and work-based learners. Every 3 months academic 'champions' lead

a seminar attended by all Employer Engagement staff that aims to provide a forum for reflection and open discussion of issues arising from the process of embedding EE in their own schools. Generic information is included in the EE website and Blackboard and specific issues are taken up by key EE staff and schools for educational development, business development, strategic/management or further evaluation.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

A. A brief handout will be provided to allow participants to follow the issues, contribute to the workshop questions and discussion and to reflect on the session at a later date

B. A presentation will be given of:

A brief literature on Learning communities, communities of practice, learning organisations, organisational change

The University of Bradford Employer engagement programme - Escalate

Escalate Champions community of practice seminars for embedding EE

Broader staff and educational development issues relating to HE change

(15 mins)

C. Participants will be asked to briefly discuss in pairs/threes

1. The effectiveness and transferability of the Escalate approach to developing communities of practice in employer engagement

2. Their common or distinctive experiences of effectively engaging others in change initiatives in their own areas of work.

(10 mins)

D. Pairs will be asked for constructive feedback to the whole group on two/three key ways of encouraging involvement that they feel have been successful (and one example of ways that are less successful)

(10mins)

E. Participants suggestions and examples will be grouped and discussed further by the whole group. In particular the group will gauge the transferability of different ways of involving academic staff in change initiatives.

(10 mins)

45 min for whole session

References

CBI (2008), 'Stepping Higher: Workforce Development through Employer-Higher Education Partnership', CBI, London.

DIUS (2008) 'World Class Skills: Implementation of the Leitch Review in England', HMSO, London

Furedi, F., (2008) 'Flat-pack degrees', <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/apr/22/highereducation.uk3>, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 22nd April 2008

Giroux, H. (1991) 'Reading work education as the practice of theory' IN Simon, R., Dippro, D., and Johnson, D., (2001) , 'The opportunities, benefits and barriers to the introduction of work-based learning in higher education' *Innovations in Education and Training International*, 38 (4) 364-368.

Leitch (2006), 'Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the Global Economy – World Class Skills', HMSO, London.

Rinne, R. and Koivula, J. (2009) 'The dilemmas of the changing university' IN Shattock, M. (ed.) (2009) *Entrepreneurialism in Universities and the knowledge Economy: Diversification and organisational change in European Higher Education*, SRHE/ OU Press

Saunders, D. and Hamilton, D. (1999) 'A twinning model for staff development in higher education' *Innovations in Education and Training*. 36(2) 118-127.

Tynjala, P. , Valimaa, J., Sarja, A. (2003) 'Pedagogic perspectives on the relationship between higher education and working life', *Higher Education* 46, 147-166

Wenger, E (2007) *Communities of practice* A brief introduction. *Communities of practice* www.ewenger.com/theory/.