Adding Value: Open Online Learning and the MBA

Rachel Fitzgerald[1], Maggie Anderson[1] and Ross Thompson[2]
[1]University of Northampton, Northampton, UK
[2]Oxford Brookes University
Rachel.Fitzgerald@northampton.ac.uk
Maggie.Anderson@northampton.ac.uk
rossthompson@brookes.ac.uk

Abstract: Evidence suggests that MOOCs are being used as a strategic tool to explore alternative models of course delivery (Allen & Seaman, 2013) and this paper shares insight into an example of such innovation for Business School Education. Gateway MBA draws on examples of open learning worldwide to create a MOOC to extend the MBA distance learning programme for Northampton Business School. The Gateway MOOC offers open online access to MBA education to develop recruitment to the MBA internationally and to raise the profile of the university. While there are risks in this strategy, the Gateway project team see potential to introduce and market the MBA to a global audience through open online learning, raising the university brand profile and expanding the eLearning horizons of those involved in the project and beyond.This paper will consider recurring themes in the literature in the context of the design and delivery of the Gateway MBA. It is clear that reconciling MOOC values and aims with educational quality and learner satisfaction standards is problematic so this paper considers how we develop and embed innovations in the areas of technology and academic cultural practices in order to meet this challenge. Finally we will consider the issues and challenges in the use of the Carpe Diem (Salmon et al, 2013) as a model for the design and delivery of a MOOC and will offer further considerations for sustainability.

Keywords: MOOC, open practice, peer collaboration, disruptive technologies, MBA, online curriculum design

1. Background

> *"Smart Universities will embrace MOOCs … to advance innovations in teaching and learning, and expand markets for education." (Nutbeam, 2013)*

A Business School should act as a gateway to technical and social innovation for managers of the future (Starkey et al, 2004). Offering open education provides an interesting opportunity for Business Schools to explore new business models while contributing to innovative practice. Northampton Business School at the University of Northampton identified a financially viable opportunity to explore the rise in open learning for innovation and develop new business opportunity. The result is the Gateway MBA, a free open MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) conversion of the introductory module of the MBA Programme.

The MBA is a global degree, that is relatively homogenous worldwide, (Mintzberg, 2004). Because of the global recognition of the degree, an International Business School will almost always offer an MBA programme of study, and the University of Northampton is no different; students can study an MBA full time, part time and distance (online) learning. The question for the Northampton Business School is how to make the Distance Learning MBA stand out in a crowd, to add value and encourage students from a global market to choose the Northampton Online MBA over others. Gateway MBA offers potential students an opportunity to try MBA study for free with accreditation if students decide to continue their studies.

The rationale is that MOOCs are a form of open learning that generate attention and have global reach, (Ernst & Young, 2012). There is also evidence that MOOCs have the potential to attract new students while acting as a brand extension for their providers (Yuan and Powell, 2014). While the concept of open online learning is not new, university online delivery is often found to be content driven - facilitative, sometimes participative but rarely collaborative, a design that has emerged in the original disruptive model of the cMOOC. The Gateway MOOC is an example of an adaption of peer assisted learning and connectivity(Bayne and Ross (2014). Using the Carpe Diem Curriculum Design approach (Salmon et al, 2013), the Gateway MOOC was designed around peer led discussion inspired by TEDx style topic introductions. The module, behind the Gateway Project is Critical Issues in Business. Redesigning this module into open online study raised a number of issues regarding open online learning design. What the literature identified is that the design needed to consider motivation

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and peer engagement, understanding of academic study skills, limited access to resources and retention issues in addition to the learning development.

Core to design was the need to ensure that MOOC participants could connect with each other and with academics and industry experts that are connected with the school. It was decided to run the MOOC over fixed time instances (not to leave the module continually open) to encourage a number of participants to connect at the same time. This adds value to the experience as it enables participants to connect with peers from anywhere in the world to discuss issues and facilitates peer support for learning.

Another core area to address was enabling success. Students interested in studying in an online environment often underestimate the level of reading and participation required for success. Occasionally, managers enrol onto the programme with vast management experience but without recent academic experience, and find their study skills are not quite ready for the challenge. Gateway gives those who are interested in MBA study, insight into the actual demands of postgraduate study. Offering a module from the MBA in an open environment allows participants and potential students an opportunity to test the water, see what is involved at this level of study and to identify any weaknesses and address them before continuing.

Developing this MOOC through the Carpe Diem model (Salmon et al, 2013) offered the academic staff involved a fresh approach to digital curriculum design, and incorporated the peer design storyboard process with other professionals from the university such as academic study skills staff, IPR experts and technology enhanced learning professionals. Learning to design without access to common resources, embedding academic skills into learning activities, re-evaluating formative assessment within the module and addressing copyright and IPR issues brought specific issues to the project team while offering a real insight to the experience of the online student, particularly in open education.

Finally, this MOOC awards an opportunity to raise the profile of transnational education and promote programmes at the university on a global scale. This opportunity for brand promotion means that quality is paramount and marketing critical to engage potential learners. Offering open education appears to offer an innovative way to share practice with potential education with others such as franchise and distance education, and to reach new student groups that may not have the resources for studying at MBA, (Christensen et al, 2013)This paper reviews current thinking and key challenges within MOOC development and based on this understanding, offers insight into the process of design for open online, with a review of how the initial run of the MOOC has addressed some of the key issues in MOOC development and design.

2. Literature review

Given the relative nascence of the core concept, it is perhaps not surprising to note a concomitant paucity of past published work identifiable in this domain. With this in mind, the review has adopted a holistic and eclectic search approach and in common with much research conducted to date in the area (for example, Bayne and Ross, 2014; Gaebel, 2013 and Yuan and Powell, 2014) draws upon sources from academe, professional journals and industry reports. It also incorporates research on a geographically unrestricted basis.. The review proceeds as follows: firstly, the concept of the MOOC is explored and its historical development traced; secondly, the business models employed in their operation are discussed; thirdly, the key challenges facing the operationalising of MOOCs and key lessons learned (where available) from existing MOOC programmes are considered.

3. Definitional issues and historical development

Definitional consensus appears to be lacking in the study of MOOCS (O'Prey, 2013; Papparo, 2012) and it is clear that development is still in the embryonic stages. However it is widely accepted that, on an operational level, MOCCs usually exhibit the following core features: open access, free to enter, are credit less and offer asynchronous learning (O'Prey, 2013; Papparo, 2012). However there is evidence that even these accepted identifiers are subject to violation. For example, a number of US based institutions are trailing credit-bearing MOOCs (Bayne and Ross, 2014, O'Prey, 2013) and some platform providers are now charging for programmes. Furthermore, the boundaries of MOOC activities are still fluid. Whilst the traditional definitional conception centres on a novel and bespoke open programme, there is some suggestion that educational practitioners maybe be fusing some MOOC mechanics with traditional programmes thus creating hybrid or semi-MOOC offerings (Boyatt et al, 2014) This has led loosely to a bipartite classification of MOOCs: The xMOOC which

retains much of the style and delivery stance of a traditional programme with a clear emphasis upon knowledge transfer and the more radical cMOOC, which places much more emphasis upon participant connectivism (Downes, 2005; Yuan and Powell, 2014),, andagogy (Salmon, 2003) and peer assisted learning (Rodriguez, 2013; Stacey, 2014).

It is possible to conceive of the cMOOC being the most pure incarnation and the xMOOC as the beginning of the marketization of the MOOC with an emphasis upon scale, objectivity and a more didactic ethos (Daniel, 2012; Stacey, 2014).

It is however dangerous to assume that the xMOOC v cMOOC classification is emblematic of clarity and stability in MOOC development. Indeed, more recent research suggests that even this bipartite classification system may be too simplistic as providers of MOOCs continue to experiment with different approaches including: the student – teacher interface; class sizes and levels of interaction (Bayne and Ross, 2014). This inherent taxonomic dynamism and operational ground shifting thus argues for MOOCs not to be defined on an operational basis but on philosophical grounds where there is more clarity and consistency regarding the precepts.

Philosophically, MOOCs may be considered exponents of Connectivism Theory (Downes, 2007). This position envisages learning in an environment that is not linear but clustered thus necessitating the learner to orchestrate their own educational trajectories in an autonomous manner using interactions with their peers as supports (Downes, 2009). Connectivism therefore extols the virtues of choice, autonomy, interactivity, connectedness, diversity (amongst learner groups); (Downes, 2009; Kop and Hill, 2008).

This philosophy and the growth of MOOCs can be traced backed to Bagely's seminal views on interactivity in education (Bagely, 1911). However the enabling role of informational technology (IT) as a catalyst for operationalising Bagely's beliefs cannot be ignored or underestimated; accordingly MOOCs can be conceptualised as part of the ongoing digitisation of education which has included innovations such as online assessment (Singh et al, 2012) and algorithmic assessment designs (Piech et al, 2013). An early and influential adopter of IT led open education was the MIT open courseware unveiled in 2001 which may well have acted as a catalyst to MOOC development (Byerly, 2012) as might the promotion of peer based learning (andagogy) by academics such as Roberston (12008) and Salmon (2003). Further IT enablement can be observed in the areas of global broadband diffusion (O'Prey, 2013) and the increased spending on global education technology which increased from $204m in 2008 to $900m in 2012 (O'Prey, 2013).

The first notable MOOC is widely considered to be the open programme based at the University of Manitoba launched by Downes and Siemons in 2008 (Mackness et al, 2010). From these beginnings MOOC expansion has been significance with 43% of US based universities either having or developing MOOCs as at the end of 2013 (Stine, 2013). To some commentators this growth represents a veritable tsunami of change to educational delivery (Thun, 2012) perhaps encapsulated mostly vividly by the New York Times who declared 2012 to be the year of the MOOC (Stine, 2013). To other authorities, a more circumspect position has been taken, for example, Youngberg (2013) who suggests that it is premature to assess the value and contribution of MOOCs at this nascent stage of their development.

4. Business models

It is generally accepted that MOOCs in their current incarnation are not satisfactorily financially viable (Matkin, 2013; Nowrot and Doucet, 2011). This is hardly a surprising observation. MOOCs, in common with may e-enabled business concepts have to grapple with a core business conundrum: how to be financially sustainable whilst still provide free (or at reduced priced) and open services? (Daniel, 2012). The question is therefore raised as to what is the business purpose of a MOOC? According to Byerly (2012) there are two chief orientations taken. Firstly, a strategy may be adopted along not for profit (nfp) lines and the focus of the MOOC presents as being purely philanthropic, for example, opening up learning to disenfranchised groups or hard to reach educational markets (O'Prey, 2013). Secondly, the focus may indeed be on profitability and there is some evidence to suggest platform providers are experimenting with ways of monetising MOOCs. Initiatives attempted so far include: payment for courses (in direct violation to one of the commonly held principles of MOOC design), licensing of materials, and placement opportunities for participants and selling participant personal data (Matkin, 2013; Stine, 2013). MOOC platform development has therefore tended to

followed one of these paths: the Coursera, Futurelearn and Edx platforms have followed the nfp route whilst the Udacity variant has sought to be profitable from its inception (Baggerley, 2013).

MOOCs have perhaps most successfully been used to identify and harness the potential for new student segments and brand extensions (Yuan and Powell, 2014). Research by Christensen et al (2013) indicates that Universities have had some success at extending their reach into new student segments most notably: overseas students from the developing world, students born overseas and the unemployed (Christensen et al, 2013).

There are therefore a number of issues for would be MOOC providers to consider.

It is clear that financial sustainability is far from secure and addressing it may indeed may indeed detract from the core defining principles of the MOOC. This may limit the range of Universities able to successfully engage with the core concept. Well financed and established brands such as Harvard or MIT may be able to follow the nfp pathway via an act of corporate social responsibility (CSR) although, there are also likely to be spill over benefits (towards the marketing of other branded products) and so the MOOC may also become a product loss leader in the institution's portfolio. Smaller and less opulent institutions, even those who are attracted to the CSR benefits associated with MOOCs, may however find the sustainability and costing question marks too risky and this fact combined with other challenges, may actually act as a disincentive to engage with MOOCs.

It is also apparent that in order to harvest the developmental opportunities presented by new educational segments, providers will have to deploy new marketing initiatives particularly in the areas of social media marketing and pre and post MOOC consumer evaluations (Hollands and Tirthali, 2014).

5. Challenges and lessons learned from existing MOOCs

Research into MOOC delivery has revealed a number of pedagogic and strategic challenges in the areas of: completion rates, academic quality, fit with conventional offerings and disruption.

To date, unsatisfactory MOCC completion rates remain an omnipresent problem that bedevil the majority of programmes. MOOC completion and retention rates tend to average c10% (Clow, 2013; Jordan, 2013; Kolowitich, 2010; Stine, 2013) and are therefore a primary concern). More detailed analysis reveals a significant steep decrease in continuation occurs immediately after registration which suggest many applicants maybe be doing no more than fishing for information or following a herd instinct in enrolling (Kolowitich, 2013) and then losing interest thereafter; in part, this is understandable in the light of the considerable media hype regarding MOOCs since 2012. Nawrot and Doucet, (2012) have identified a number of reasons for drop-outs including: poor time management, loss of impetus, difficult subject matter, hidden costs such as having to buy textbooks and perceived uninspiring study materials.

There is some evidence however, for example, (Milligan et al, 2012) that attrition rates are less poor amongst those MOOC students who have previously engaged in a MOOC suggesting that there are student confidence issues to overcome and that network effects might encourage completion (Milligan et al, 2012). This advises MOOC designers to consider helping learners learn how to participate and study in MOOC format as a preamble and perquisite to commencing disciplinary study.

More research is therefore vital in order to fully comprehend how these worrying statistics and explanations for drop-outs apply in the various MOOC contexts and how educators may help learners to assimilate to the MOOC format. Unfortunately however, the inherent diversity and heterogeneity of MOOC participant populations will clearly make it difficult to deconstruct and delineate all of the key demographic, social and economic variables impacting MOOC classes. Similarly, the relative paucity of research conducted on a cross-contextual basis provides few steers regarding contextual trends and therefore argues for an increase in case study research studies in order to help promote more effective meta-analyses from aggregated data returns in the future.

Despite these limitations, it is possible to identify a number of design pointers or tips from the literature that might improve continuation rates. Firstly, it is evident that MOOC delivery favours a bite-sized format that checks complexity blockages and maintains participant interest (Adamopopulous, 2013; Papparo, 2012). Secondly, attention needs to be dedicated towards incentivising and promoting attendance and participation. The use of discussion forums and other online backspaces have been positively associated with retention

(Coetzee et al, 2008). Reward systems such as badges (Cross, 2012) and Peer Rating Awards (Cross, 2012) have also been explored and more experimentation with and research on these interventions is needed.

Serious concerns have also been articulated around academic quality issues and the need for oversight of MOOC standards (Morris, 2013). . It has been observed (Papparo, 2012; Youngberg, 2013) that academic misconduct may be rife in the MOOC arena and indeed the expressed desire for peer collaboration may invite this via joint-working and collusion on assessment tasks(Daniel, 2012). There have been further apprehensions voiced regarding assessment. The use of standardised computer generated grading systems may not sit well in more subjective and discursive subjects in the arts and social sciences that require a greater degree of individual judgement (Papparro, 2012). Similarly, the intrinsic one size fits all philosophy, for example, with respect to grading criteria and required participant outputs may make it hard for star pupils to shine and be recognised which might limit the potential for MOOCs to gain recognition by employers and therefore compete with more traditional programmes (Youngberg, 2013). Papparo (2012) has recognised all of these impediments and suggested that more intelligent software needs to be developed, for example in the areas of peer marking reliability and cheating detection, that simultaneously retains the open and peer driven nature of the MOOC and also provides a degree of quality assurance.

A further concern centres on the open nature of the MOOC. It may, as has been observed by Baggerley (2013), promote a degree of waywardness, unhealthy digression and mob-rule amongst the participants thus greatly increasing the risk that learning outcomes and content cannot be adequately covered in the programmes. This is yet another example of the central philosophy of the MOOC potentially working against itself and raises the question of the agency and structure debate (Bandura, 1977) with respect to the respective roles of instructors (as guides and enforcers) and participants within MOOCs. It maybe that totally open and lawless programmes need to be rebalanced and a degree of structure and legislation installed in order to safeguard academic standards and quality (Mackness et al, 2010, Morris, 2013).

Much research on MOOCs has addressed the issue of learner satisfaction with programmes. Distillation of the research base suggests that there are two main areas of disquiet.

Firstly, studies have oft indicated a degree of dissatisfaction with the level of academic support offered within MOOCs (Mackness et al, 2010). This of course is to be expected given the mass nature of the MOOC format and the highly diminished staff-student ratios that result. The key dilemma facing all MOOC providers is therefore how to engineer a MOOC offering that manages to develop a degree of intimacy, individualisation and personal touch within a mass and virtual classroom (Cross, 2012; Papparo, 2012).

Secondly, some work has indicated that individual learner needs have not been met in the MOOC environment (Mackness et al, 2010). Once again we can identify another example of the values and philosophy of the MOOC, in this case diversity, working in a negative way. Given the heterogeneous nature of the mass participant population it is unsurprising that al individual needs and aspirations can be significantly accommodated and instead, the one size fits all outcome is presented, which may generate only a mediocre learner experience.

MOOCs have frequently been assigned the mantra of a disruptive technology (Matkin, 2013); specifically, it is suggested that they threaten the status quo of traditional teaching dogma (Armstrong, 2012; Stine, 2013) and offer a seemingly overly radical advancement of teaching delivery (Youngberg, 2013). Of particular concern is the research body that is developing regarding actual and potential staff alienation as regards MOOCs (Matkin, 2013); the most notable instance of this occurred at San Jose State University where academics refused to deliver philosophy MOOCs claiming that they diminished the role of the academic and compromised learner experience (Matkin, 2013). It is possible that concerns of this nature are rooted in a lingering fear that MOOCs might in some way reframe or even supplant traditional delivery models with the concomitant loss of revenues (Youngberg, 2012) although there is little evidence, to date, that this is happening (Christensen et al, 2014). It is however plausible that MOOCs could be effectively and economically deployed to replace some of the standard parts of traditional programmes (Hollands and Tirthali, 2014).

These fears paint a ‘drone’ warfare analogy that might be taking place in education; in the military frontline fighting troops are currently being augmented by the use of mechanical drone devices and in parallel, educationalists are seeing part of their roles being undertaken by digital platforms as is the case with MOOCs. Future MOOCs developers therefore need to be sensitive to these tensions and Institutions may need to

embed counter measures to manage the concomitant technological and cultural changes that ensue. It has, for example, been suggested by Papparo (2012) that working patterns need to be revised in the MOOC environment and that traditional academic input should now take place up-front in the content design stage whilst MOOC instruction (the second part of the process) may favour non-traditional educationalists who have a skillset anchored in learning technology and multimedia (Daniel, 2012; Yuan and Powell, 2014). . MOOCs therefore may threaten the sustainability of traditional academic roles and require Institutions to reconsider and refine the role profiles and person specifications of the various academic contributors.

6. Conclusion

It is immediately apparent that the study of MOOC development is located firmly within the introduction stage of its product lifecycle. As such it is clearly risky to ascribe too much reliability towards the research findings that have been published to date. It is therefore injudicious to look to the literature for definitive guidance or blueprints when formulating the design of a new MOOC. Future MOOC development therefore has to be regarded as a high risk venture until a sufficient stock of knowledge is harvested that provides reliable guidance on the key success factors.

Despite these limitations, a number of recurring themes have been identified in the emerging literature.

Firstly, Brand is a key feature of MOOCs and may thus help explain the commendable uptake of MOOCs since 2008. It is probably not a coincidence that the key platform providers are backed by Institutions such as Harvard, MIT and Stanford and that the first open courseware initiative, the effective forerunner of the MOOC, was launched by MIT.

Secondly, MOOCs have the seeds to sow their own destruction. Their defining philosophy grounded in mass education, peer collaboration and diversity has also led to pedagogical challenges in the areas of cheating, lawlessness and unmet leaner needs. It is clear that reconciling MOOC values and aims with educational quality and learner satisfaction standards is proving problematic and a callout is made to Institutions to develop and embed innovations in the areas of technology and academic cultural practices in order to meet the challenge.

Thirdly, MOOCs are potentially highly disruptive and present challenges to Institutions to overcome issues connected to staffing tensions and role alterations; relationships with traditional academic products; acceptability to external stakeholders such as employers and public perception.

Fourthly, MOOCs may indeed prove to be a passing trend and their initial popularity explained by marketing intensity and a resulting herd mentality. In order to prevent the bubble from bursting, platform providers need to develop innovations designed to imbue MOOCs with a degree of mass customisation and tackle the problem of completion rates that are currently highly unsatisfactory. If however MOOC development does start to fade, it is unlikely that the endeavour will have been in vain. MOOC applications, research and debates have forced providers to reconsidering teaching and learning strategies in general (Yuan and Powell, 2014) which can only be beneficial in the broader context of education.

7. The gateway project

Retention issues have emerged as a real problem for MOOC developments. The project team chose to base the MOOC on an existing module, Critical Issues, which is the introductory module on the MBA programme. The rationale for choosing this particular module was twofold; firstly the module introduces key, current business issues, secondly the module incorporates elements of required post graduate study skills and personal development skills. Therefore it was envisaged that this module would appeal broadly to business students on a global level and would offer a “taster” of post graduate study and insight to an MBA programme. Participants who wish to continue will be able to register on a university short course to complete a reflective piece of assessment, accredited for the MBA. This would allow participants to receive credit for their MOOC learning and continue on with the MBA (subject to normal admission requirements). The opportunity to undertake this module ‘for free’ and then undertake a piece of assessment to accredit learning on the module for the full MBA was seen to be a real incentive for retention and completion of the MOOC .

As there were already pre-determined learning outcomes and some online material for the module, the focus for the team was to maximise engagement through open curriculum design, assessment and accessibility. The project team consisted of three academic members of staff, a learning technologist, a librarian and an e-learning specialist with design input from the study skills staff and current MBA students. As a MOOC could grow exponentially, the design of the learning needed to support scalability therefore the curriculum design of the MOOC module was facilitated using a CAIeRO process, a model based on the Carpe Diem model, underpinned by the research of Gilly Salmon and Alejandro Armellini, (Salmon, 2013). This particular model of curriculum design supports the institutional capacity and can foster scalable pedagogical intervention (Salmon et al, 2008).

The first stage of this process required the team to determine overall MOOC aims. The project team agreed that aim was: "to provide participants with an experience of studying on an MBA level programme through the introduction of key pervasive issues in business. This module will encourage participants to think critically and to form evidence based arguments". The CAIeRO process promotes diversity in module teams, the inclusion of academics, professional support staff and students enables a range of different viewpoints, ideas and opinions. "Good teaching means seeing learning through the learners eyes" (Ramsden, 1998), the "student voice" can bring valid and valuable perspectives to learning and teaching practice and this project is an example of this in practice. The first project team design meeting had a range of input from three current MBA students who had recently undertaken this module and could provide the value of the 'student voice', (Stoncel & Mayes, 2012).

The next stage in the process was to create a storyboard using a set of pre-determined criteria cards which deliberately restricts choice to nine overarching statements which determine the look and feel of the module. Those chosen being: Student Choice, Guided Learning pathway, Active Discovery, Innovative (for the team/faculty), Enquiry based, Reflective, Collaborative, Applied and Peer supported. This gave the project team a clear focus for the design of learning activities throughout and enabled technical staff to be clear about the design requirements.

There were a number of issues in MOOC design that emerged. The Project Team agreed a format of using expert speakers to introduce key concepts (in TEDx style) for each of the critical business issues. Ensuring that the videos were copyright free and that the university held the intellectual property rights took time and needed supporting technical expertise. The key concepts were then supported by reading material but within a MOOC there are access issues; participants would not be students of the university so could not access libraries or other resources – so identifying, creating or acquiring suitable supporting resources was time consuming. Using Blackboard Coursesites as an open learning platform, the project team worked on developing eTivities. Based on MOOC research, the learning activities are designed to be specific and bite-size with opportunities to test understanding, as this has been established as a method to maintain participant interest (Adamopopulous, 2013; Papparo, 2012). Reflective activity from participants is also a key feature through the use of supervised discussion forums as this addresses the need for peer engagement and retention. The Project Team considered the 'appropriateness' of e-tivities based on the former nine statements. Concepts and reflective eTivities include quizzes, discussion forums and formative tests. Throughout the design process, the learning technologist worked closely with academic staff to create appropriate eTivities for the purpose of the activity.

8. Participation and activity

The MOOC went live in Autumn 2014 and through the collaborative curriculum design approach, MOOC participants had the opportunity to engage with learning activities which had embedded study skills and opportunities for peer interaction and access to a network of Business Expertise .Participants who wished to complete the MOOC and go no further could receive a certificate of attendance. Embedded into the Gateway MBA MOOC eTivities were core personal and academic skills, through this it was expected that participants would develop understanding of issues related to academic quality and integrity. By allowing participants to engage with an assessed activity in order to 'progress' to the MBA, the team were able to measure the extent of issues in this area. The initial run of this MOOC module was undertaken as an action research project, future research will consider the success of the approach on retention, learning quality and impact on staff development.

The MOOC ran in September 2014 for ten weeks with academic support and guidance provided for participants. How long a MOOC should run for is still a matter of discussion but this was seen as most aligned

to the original version of the Critical Issues in Business module. The participants were given academic support to promote participation and subsequent retention and support required by the academic member of staff varied. At the point of entry to the MOOC thirty one contributors registered their interest and tracking software allowed the team to see that the majority of the participants were browsing the material in a relatively random fashion. The participants were from various geographical locations and varied backgrounds which were revealed via an "introduce yourself" online activity.

The academic member of staff responded individually to each of the participants with a welcome message and a prompt to take part in the first series of activities, this was not too time consuming due to the small numbers involved. Thirteen of the 31 participants actively took part in the first series of e-tivities and posted responses to questions and activities set by the team. Participants also actively responded to each other's ideas and opinions and the discussion was quite lively , again the academic member of staff posted a response to each thread prompting further discussion and then encouraging the participants to move on to the next topic and series of activities. At the final point of activity for the first topic four participants were actively engaging, two of these participants were local to the area, one was from India and one from Africa, all of the active participants at this stage were female

The active group of four continued to engage throughout the next series of activities and took part in all of the prompted e-tivities and discussions. There was evidence of, cross cultural exchange and discussion of the wider literature and business implications of the topics presented. Throughout these stages the academic continued to respond to each thread and to encourage participation from the group in moving on to the next stage. Toward the end of the guided online activities participants were invited to consider if they would like to engage in the MBA programme and redirected to information and guidance on the MBA course. At this point three of the participants asked direct questions to the academic member of staff regarding costings, timings and admissions criteria for the full MBA programme. This level of interaction is considered to crucial to successful learning , however is not scalable for large numbers, Laurillard (2014)highlights this in a recent article stating that we cannot think of education as a mass consumer business, rather it is a personal client industry. Laurillard (2014) further reflects that learning requires tailored guidance, which is simply not scalable or manageable in terms of personal interaction from academic and or support staff. The issue of scalability and participant support continues to be of concern to the wider team and the realisation that if participant numbers grow significantly then this will need to be considered in terms of course design, support and the probable financial impact of supported learning.

Q 1. What do you think you gained from completing this short course?

"A good understanding of the subjects covered, delivered in a good and varied media environment".

Q2. What do you think could have been improved?

"The issues with regard to technical issues ideally would not have existed; however the ones that I dealt with were relevantly addressed and resolved."

Q3. What made you want to undertake this course?

"Experience, delivery method".

This feedback, although limited to one response, did raise the issue of technical issues such as broken links to external websites and resources. This has prompted the MOOC design and delivery team to undertake regular checks to external links and resources.

One member requested to take the assignment for the MOOC and to transfer on to the MBA programme; this participant was local to the area and already knew the university well. This Project was supported by internal Learning Innovation funding, but the key technical staff involved were critical to the development of this MOOC, without the funding support to enable them to work on the project for large periods of time, it remains to be seen whether this project could have got off the ground as academic staff are not yet knowledgeable enough to design and deliver collaborative activities online. The financial outlay has to be a key consideration if a MOOC is delivered for marketing programmes and or and the purpose of fee paying student attraction and retention. In a Times Higher commentary, one academic from the University of Edinburgh indicated that each MOOC cost approximately £30,000 from development to delivery (Times Higher Education, 2013). That said, the process of development throughout this project has enhanced academic understanding of online learning design and overall technical ability has improved.

9. Opportunities

It is also apparent that in order to harvest the developmental opportunities presented by new educational segments, providers will have to deploy new marketing initiatives particularly in the areas of social media marketing and pre and post MOOC consumer evaluations (Hollands and Tirthali, 2014).

The planning, design and collaborative process did allow for idea sharing and understanding learning from different viewpoints and it was agreed that the CAIeRO/Carpe Diem model proposed by Salmon et al (2013) was effective in developing comprehensive learning activities but while some activities will be piloted, the feedback from initial participants will be crucial to ongoing learning design.

The MOOC is due to run again in February 2015 and has been advertised using alumni networks and the central university website. So far 125 individuals have registered their interest and the team will continue to engage with the process and monitor the strengths and weaknesses of the MOOC as the course progresses by tracking interaction and gaining valuable participant feedback.

The sustainability of this module will also be an area for reflection, if successful then some participants will enrol onto the MBA and from a financial perspective the project is worthwhile but even if participants do not translate into actual university students the impact of the course design on staff development and future learning design is both beneficial yet currently intangible but one thing is for sure staying still is not an option for the future.

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