Learning Format Innovation - A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

This study engages in the identified research gap of a conceptual framework to systematically develop learning format innovation projects. The so-called "Learning Format Innovation" (short: LFI) approach provides a structured five-phase model that serves as a conceptual guide for the development of any type of new learning format.

LFI starts with the analysis of the enacted learning approach followed by the conceptualisation of the intended new learning format. Then the intended format becomes translated into concrete touch point experiences along the main constituents. In phase four the materialization into the new learning format takes place. During the final phase the effectiveness and resonance of the evolving new format is evaluated and necessary adaptations are identified. A case study of the transition of an established "semi-active" learning approach into a new "blended immersive AI supported" learning format is prototypically used to illustrate the application of the designed approach.

Keywords: learning format innovation, enacted and intended learning format, touch-point experiences, materialization, blended immersive AI supported learning.

1. Introduction

Although a great number of studies show the benefits of active learning over the conventional ways, traditional teaching methods still dominate the classroom. The overall outcome of the traditional approach is that only a small percentage of students have all the attributes needed to learn effectively and successfully in this lecture format. In contrast the active approach engages more students in the learning process and is more effective in constructing and synthesizing concepts (Kovarik, Robinson, and Wenzel, 2022).

For almost two decades, educators have been advocating for transformative innovation (Karyne, Afzal, and Crawford, 2021; Sasson et al. 2021) in higher education that incorporate new versions

of active learning, today and in the future appropriately supported by artificial intelligence approaches (Holmes & Tuomi, 2022).

Still a systematic approach which guides instructors from a thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the established, often more "instructor-led " learning approaches towards highly active 'student-centered' AI integrating learning formats, seems missing.

The current research aims at filling that gap by designing and testing a conceptual framework that helps instructors together with other relevant system partners to identify and translate an intended learning format into multiple coherent touch-point experiences in order to generate effective learning results and positive resonance among affected learners and recruiting responsibles (Botschen and Muelbacher, 2019; Court, Elzinga, and Mulder, S., 2009).

The development of the LFI framework applies the design science research approach proposed by Hevner et al. (2004), whereby an innovative, purposeful artifact for a special problem domain is created. The authors test the usefulness of the framework in an innovative project whereby a rather semi-active learning approach of two courses in retail management becomes transferred into a blended immersive learning format supported by AI tools.

The following section outlines some theoretical principles that ground our conceptual framework based on relevant literature in the field of organizational brand identity development and touch-point experiences. In section 3 the authors develop the conceptual framework followed by its application in an innovative learning case in section 4. The paper finishes in section 5 and section 6 with a discussion of theoretical and educational implications of the research, limitations and summarizing conclusions.

2. Learning Format and Touchpoint Experiences

In order to more precisely clarify the rather vague term of a learning approach the authors introduce the construct of the learning format. The latter is derived from the retailing discipline, where a retail format is the offline or online "store package" that the retailer presents to the shopper and where the vendor interacts along pre-determined touch-points with the customer (Enders, and Tawfik, 2000). Beside its look and layout, it includes elements of the retail mix such as assortment, pricing, promotion and so forth (Drexel,1981; Messinger and Chakravarthi, 1997; Levy and Weitz, 2008). In general, a retail format is a combination of different levels of retail services such as information, accessibility, assortment, ambience, and delivery speed (Gauri et al., 2021; Botschen and Wegerer, 2017). Hence, the authors specify a learning format as the offline or online "learning package" along their main constituents that instructors present to students and where instructors interact at pre-determined touch-points with the learners (Enders, and Tawfik, 2000). Beside the particular learning space, touch point experiences (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009) include methods of lecturing, assignments, guest-

speakers, excursions, application of AI tools, project work, feedback mechanisms, celebrations etc.

3. The conceptual LFI framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework "Learning Format Innovation" (LFI) as a continuous circular process consisting of five phases derived from our retail format innovation approach (Botschen & Wegerer, 2017).
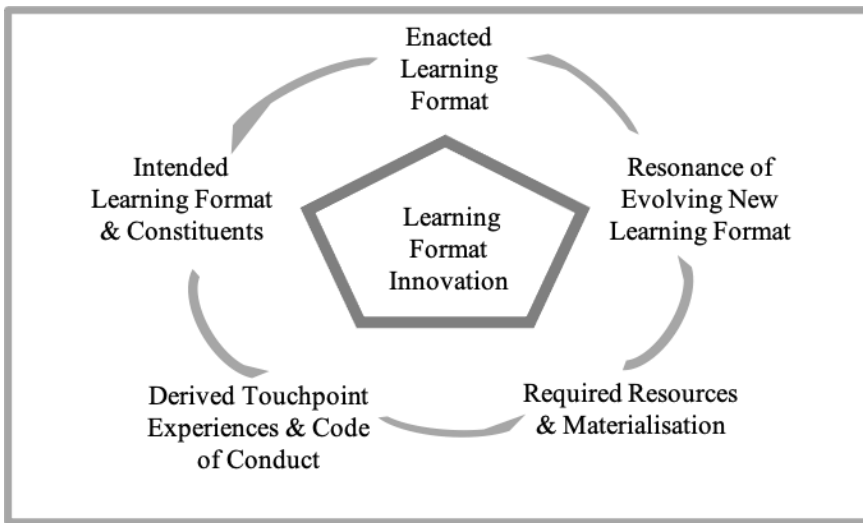

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of LFI

The five phases of the LFI framework are defined as:

a) *Enacted Learning Format* – Identification of positive and negative patterns of resonance behind the established learning format, expressed from the perspectives of affected students and alumnis, involved lecturers, potential recruiters and entrepreneurs plus studies concerning the same or similar learning approaches.

b) *Intended Learning Format, Constituents & Principles* – Development of the guiding strategic frame for the new intended learning format consisting of the driving core competence and attracting value fields, expressed in active learning dimensions, derived constituents and their guiding core principles.

c) *Touchpoint experiences* - The transformation of the intended learning format and their main constituents into the most effective learning touchpoint experiences for students

and instructors which shape and determine all elements, typically content and style, assignments and applications.

d) *Code of Conduct and Materialisation* - Aligning insructor's, employee's and student's behaviors, organizational processes and structures in order to materialize the intended touchpoint experiences of the new learning format.

e) *Effectiveness and Resonance of Evolving New Learning Format* – The learning results and resonance of affected participants are continuously monitored and the degree of achievement of specified touchpoint experiences is controlled. Necessary modifications and improvements become constantly implemented.

How these five basic elements interconnect in detail and what processes are at work, is described along our prototypical case "From a Semi-active Learning Approach to a Blended Immersive-AI supported Learning Format".

4. Prototypical Case Study – From a semi-active learning towards a blended immersive learning AI supported format

4.1. Phase 1: Analyzing the status quo of the enacted learning approach

The Covid driven 2020/2021 digital online-move inspired us to question and redesign our established teaching and learning approach of two retail management courses in the third year of the bachelor of science study. Hence, we decided to perform an analysis of the main drivers of positive and negative resonance from the perspective of different stakeholders, namely affected students and alumnis, involved lecturers, potential recruiters and entrepreneurs. Therefor we conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with convenient samples of the five stakeholder segments. For the interviews we applied a semistructured interview guide. Stories and anecdotes of contact point experiences created a deeper understanding of underlying patterns of positive, negative or missing resonance. Table 1 illustrates the main positive (left side of Table 1) and negative (right side of Table 1) resonance drivers across the five target groups for the basic and advanced course.

In summary we observed a deficit of practical applications which all interviewes observed. The lecturing style and exams mode seemed to have little impact on enduring learning effectiveness. A balanced use of online- and offline learning appears to be appropriate.

Table 1: Positive and negative drivers of resonance by target groups

Real live project work with companies	Too little feedback during the phases
Guest-speakers & excursions give deep insights into practical requirements	Separated between the two courses
The BOID Approach, holistically guiding all functions and activities in retail companies	Too little practical application
Presentating and facilitating by student groups	Entrance and final exams, which focus on repetitive instead of applied knowledge
Mixture of on- and offline plus block events	Monoton teaching environment, to much online is demanding and boring as well
Good accessibilty and support of lecturers	Too much frontal lecturing and too little integration of AI tools – smart phone, chat.gpt
	Little personal interaction between all students

4.2. Phase 2: Intended learning format & constituents

Based on the analysis of the enacted learning format, the future learnig format became developed. Our semi-active learning approach in the two courses of retail management was transferred into a blended immersive learning format (Alonso, F., 2005; Thorne, K. 2003; Bersin, J. (2004) supported by AI tools and techniques (Zawacki-Richter et al.,2019). The two courses were integrated concerning guests, excursions and project work. Approximately fifty percent of the two courses will be online and fifty percent presence in class.

4.3. Phase 3: Translating the new learning format into multisensory touchpoint experiences along the main constituents

In this phase the intended blended immersive learning approach became translated into multisensory touchpoint experiences along the main constituents (Reynolds, Howard, Cuthbertson and Hristov, 2007; Botschen, Combe and Thelen, 2014; Botschen et. al, 2016).

Examples of important constituents that embody touchpoint experiences of the new learning format are given below:

Location and schedule – To disrupt the monotony of the lecture hall at the university students experienced different locations during several excursions, presentations at a coffee house of a lecturer, starting and final session at the project ordering company and project coachings online. The integrated two courses were organized into ten block events per semester consisting of an introduction, organisation and briefing session, followed by four block sessions with four guests, four online meetings with four company excursions, and a final block event for presenting project results, and enjoying culinary and celebrations.

Lectures – The rather frontal lectures were transformed into student sessions, where teams had to prepare, present and reflect with their colleagues three prespecified course topics. For one

session every team had to prepare a video clip which was uploaded and accessible on YouTube. The responsible lecturers coached the teams in the preparation phase and added important content after the teams presentations in class. To activate discussions and critical reflections students received for every sensemaking comment a "golden coin".

Project – The semester company project, typically consisting of an analysis phase followed by proposals for solving the identified problema, became processed by team members of both courses. Theoretical approaches and conceptual tools werde directly applied during the project work.

Guest-speakers and excursions - Four guests gave inspiring insights into their company work, strategically and operatively, ideally linked to the sessions particular content. Four companies were explored by all students during excursions.

Assignments - The entrance and final exam were substituted by a learning journal where students had to reflect all sessions, guest talks and excursions, the applied project work and were asked to provide an open ended overall course evaluation.

4.4. Phase 4: Materializing the new learning format

In phase 4 selected intended touch point experiences of the new retail format were materialized through the processes and behavioral principles - the code of conduct - for achieving and reproducing the intended touchpoint experiences. Ideally any modification and optimization of structure, processes or behaviour are driven by the intended touch point results of the particular constituent and not the other way around. In our case the new format was implemented during the summer and winter semester 2023.

4.5. Phase 5: Resonance, learnings and implications

The move from our instructor led semi-active learning approach into a more student driven, blended immersive learning format created strong positive resonance from students, involved lecturers and affected practitcioners. Students particularily appreciated the applied and practice oriented approach, the new assignments where they got the role of lecturers and moderators, as well as joint work of basic and advanced course members for the company projects. The integrative usage of smart phones worked out well, the application of chat.gpt versions needs to be improved in coming courses.

In summary the application of the newly developed LFI approach seems to be worthwile to be tested in other course modifications. Ours is just the first trial and needs to be proved in other contexts.

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