

TLIC PAPER

Research-Based Practice on the Implementation of a Brand Building Program in Higher Education: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The context of the paper is, on the one hand, growing trend of portfolio-based competency development in higher education, especially focusing on assessing students' progression, promoting self-evaluation, reflective thinking, career planning, self-directed and collaborative learning strategies [1], [7], [17], [19]. Under the umbrella of portfolio-based higher education, brand building programs play important role in this process [5]. On the other hand, brand building programs can develop self-management skills at individual and system levels as well. At individual level, brand building promotes students in higher education to develop competencies, which are based on the labor market needs in order to reduce the skill gap and promote reskilling. At the organizational level, the paper focusing on the process from hierarchy to professional community. The first purpose of the paper is to introduce some results of the implementation of a 4-year MyBrand Program, especially focusing on the supporting system of the implementation. MyBrand Program in Budapest Metropolitan University is a career-focused education initiative that focuses on practice-oriented education and the skills needed in the workplace promoting the successful future careers of students and successful placement in the labor market in the world of work. MyBrand program is linked to the University's new, "creative university" identity. This paper introduces some parts of the program implementation: MyBrand portfolio workshops and trainings, Teachers' Day and Club, mentoring program, basic competence matrix, MyBrand teaching handbook, METU Learn curricula, Online Knowledge Hub. The support system being developed is based on qualitative research on implementation of MyBrand Program, namely content analysis and 14 in-depth interviews. The second purpose of the paper is to give practical examples and students' feedback of career planning at the course of Innovative learning technology skills in becoming an engineer at Óbuda University. At the conclusion part, I summarize on the results and experience of implementation of brand building program and the experience of career planning, tutoring and self-management in practice.

KEYWORDS

portfolio-based higher education, brand building, MyBrand program implementation, career planning

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1 CONTEXT

The original, medieval conception of a university, *universitas*, Latin ‘for the whole’ as a corporation of masters and students. In this sense, one of the biggest challenges of the universities, how they are transformed from a former hierarchical organization into a highly professional learning community. Accordingly, the lecture analyses the changing knowledge and learning landscape in higher education, with a particular focus on the transformative potential of tacit knowledge in order to promote lifelong and life-wide learning. I present the different levels of transformation, from innovation in curriculum design, teaching and learning methodology and assessment – through a changed knowledge and learning landscape – to the level of organizational culture. The common point is the above-mentioned innovative ‘triangle’ is brand building. Why is brand building a common multiple point in this process from design to assessment at the individual and organizational levels?

Firstly, there are much more complex processes at play behind the changing roles of universities in the 21st century. Increasing international competition under the umbrella the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world are handling the changes at higher education [14], [16]. The VUCA-world is fundamentally changing our skill-set with obvious implications for the mindset and approach of higher education. More simply, competency-based higher education comes to the fore. In more details, personalization, outcome-based approach, competency standards and ‘innovator’s mindset’ come to the front. According to George Couros, the ‘innovator’s mindset can be defined as the belief that the abilities, intelligence, and talents are developed so that they lead to the creation of new and better ideas’ [6].

Interestingly, the skill to innovate is on the list of Top 10 Skills of 2025, see analytical thinking and innovation with overlapping to creativity, originality and initiative. Basically, The Future of Jobs Report 2020 aims to give a skill-set in the next five years. One of the report’s key findings is:

‘Skills gaps continue to be high as in demand skills across jobs change in the next five years. The top skills and skill groups which employers see as rising in prominence in the lead up to 2025 include groups such as critical thinking and analysis as well as problem-solving, and skills in self-management such as active learning, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility’ [23]. Kate Whiting described the top 10 skills that would best support lifelong learning and future work in 2025 [22]. Over the next 5 years, what can be expected to come to the fore are the skills of analytical thinking and innovation, active learning and learning strategies, complex problem solving, critical thinking and analysis, creativity, originality and initiative, leadership and social impact, technology use, monitoring and control, technology design and programming, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility, thinking, problem solving, and conceptualization [22].

One of the challenging statements of the study is that 50% of employees would need to replace their skill set by 2025 [22]. In this context, reskilling, upskilling and skill gap are the key concepts of the course.

‘Reskilling is the process of teaching an employee new skills to improve proficiency in their current job or move into an advanced position.’¹

‘Upskilling is the process of elevating existing skills to the next level. Typically, upskilling occurs along a set career path, giving employees clear opportunities for advancement as they level up their skills.’²

¹ <https://www.techtarget.com/searchhrsoftware/definition/reskilling>

² <https://www.betterworks.com/magazine/upskilling-definition-and-examples/>

'A skills gap is the difference between an employee's current abilities and the skillset best suited for their job.'³

'Skills in self-management such as active learning, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility' deserve special attention for our topic. Self-management has strong consistency with brand building. The good news is self-management and brand building can be learned.

'Self-management is your ability to regulate your behaviors, thoughts, and emotions in a productive way. This means excelling in both personal and professional responsibilities for the benefit of yourself and your team.'⁴ Staying at the individual level, developing self-management skills (time management, self-motivation, stress management, adaptability, decision making, goal alignment and personal development) with the above-mentioned skills in self-management are more complex personal structure, which is the fundamental skill set for brand building. It requires self-awareness, relevant and valid Self-Picture and multiple self-evaluation. In simple terms, you need to know yourself.⁵ In my view, easy to say, harder to do. In addition, education (public and higher) cannot promote and develop innovator's mindset, self-management skills and brand building. And one of the most effective tools has been under our noses for a long time.

No doubt, on the one hand, portfolio-based skill development and assessment has enormous impact in this process from students' and teachers' from this point of view as well. On the other hand, from students' point, portfolio assessment is a hot topic nowadays in higher education. In my view, this is not a 'miracle weapon', in addition, there is much debate, both theoretical and practical dimension. The concept and vision of portfolio has several and different meanings. But this article focuses on implementation, so avoiding the trap of collecting relevant definitions of portfolio, we are turning to the pragmatic approach. Wil Meeus and Peter Van Petegem in their seminal study on our topic have identified four different modes of implementation for portfolio in higher education [15].

'1) In admissions to higher education: for the assessment of competencies acquired elsewhere by students applying for admission. 2) During the higher education course: for the supervision and assessment of the initial competencies of the student. 3) On entrance into the profession: for use in connection with job applications. 4) As part of professional life: for ongoing professional development, on the job' [15].

From the view of this paper, the 4th mode deserves special attention. According to Meeus and Van Petegem:

'The assessment of the quality of the work of the professional concerned by means of portfolios as part of a process of ongoing professional development provides a way of ensuring an adequate reflection of the individuality of the professional and the complexity of the working environment in which professionals habitually operate' [15].

This definition seems to focus on reflective thinking, but in the context of self-management and brand building it is much more complex than that.

As Dysthe, Engelsen, Lima state [7]:

- Discuss what kind of portfolio concept and practice will best reflect the overarching goals of the study programme.
- Consider how students' meta-cognitive and/or critical reflection on course contents can enhance the quality of the portfolios, and whether a reflective letter is useful or not.

³ <https://www.valamis.com/hub/skills-gap>

⁴ <https://asana.com/resources/self-management>

⁵ <https://asana.com/resources/self-management>

- Discuss criteria for good feedback within the faculty and make the students familiar with crucial elements of good feedback practices and offer them training at different levels.
- Develop explicit criteria and scoring guides as means to achieving higher reliability and more transparency in the grading process [7].

As you see, there are different types of reflections under the umbrella of reflective thinking. In the above-mentioned context, reflective thinking is related metacognitive and critical reflections; continuous collaborative feedback and accountability.

Rijdt, Tiquet, Dochy and Devolder concluded in their relevant research findings, ‘teachers want to have a clearer view of their own teaching, an improvement in their reflection on their own professional practices, a rethinking of the effectiveness of their own educational skills, etc. due to the use of a teaching portfolio’ [19].

From, students’ point of view, the portfolio-based assessment in the context of self-management and brand building is starting with questioning and sharing aims and expectations. In my view, questioning is a significant part of self-management skills, one of the central element of brand building. Questioning is based on open questions (Why?, How?), which are related to critical thinking, dilemmas and curiosity. Qualitative questioning is the prerequisite for a realistic self-image and self-evaluation. Brand building program prioritizes career portfolio, in which the structuralization principle for each portfolio element is the competence standards set by the labour market. The competence standards are based on the TOP 10 skills 2025 [22]. It is worth noting, however, that the career portfolio has many similarities with the learning portfolio, especially in terms of the different reflections with growing demand for personalized learning, mentoring and tutoring, which is fundamentally changing the design, methodology and assessment culture of higher education in a first approach. In a second approach, however, the above student needs from the learner’s point of view emphasize self-regulated learning, varied and conscious learning strategies, reflective thinking and, last but not least, continuous feedback. This process is a significant part of diagnostic and formative assessment in higher education, From the student’s perspective, diagnostic assessment is based on a realistic self-image and qualitative self-assessment. However, this diagnostic assessment, in addition to its pedagogical and personal development aspects, also has a significant role in career development. Parallel to this diagnostic process, formative assessment is gaining ground in higher education.

Black & Wiliam [2] provide a commonly used definition of formative assessment as: ‘encompassing all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged.’

Basically the function and impact of formative assessment in enhancing student learning and effective teaching in higher education as well. But according Gauntlett some authors emphasize the coherence between formative assessment and employability [25], employability skills [4] and lifelong learning [3], [9]. As Yorke stated: ‘Formative assessment is a concept that is more complex than it might appear at first sight’ [24].

In line with the international trends mentioned above, Budapest Metropolitan University’s strategy gives a high priority to the career portfolio, also known as the MyBrand programme. The programme is in fact a systemic innovation that has a progressive impact on the culture of design, development and evaluation within the university at individual, group and organizational levels. There will be a focus on

competency-based curriculum planning that emphasizes learning outcomes, project and portfolio-based, cooperative learning, diagnostic and formative assessment.

Under the umbrella of the concept on portfolio-based education, brand building programs play important roles in this process from marketing and brand management points at the institutional level [5], [10]. At the individual level, brand building is related to the carrier portfolio. Career portfolio is “a new way to think... about the professional future in order to navigate our ever-changing world of work with purpose, clarity, and flexibility” [20]. The importance of creating career portfolio has two reasons. Firstly, because career portfolio is a collection of the evidences on your progression, talents, attitudes, project products and learning outcomes. Secondly, career portfolio is a marketing tool offering employers a preview of your performance as a potential employee. No doubt, career portfolio is an important tool to the students and teachers as well in higher education. At the organizational level, developing self-management skills and making career portfolio can promote the higher education institutions becoming professional learning community. Handling the above-mentioned changes on skillset and answering the challenges of the VUCA-world. It is clear that the structure of hierarchical higher education must also change. From the corporative view, learning organizations are based on five learning principles: personal mastery, mental models, team learning, building shared vision and system thinking [21]. From the higher educational view, new concept of learning, knowledge, collaboration and feedback culture is playing important role into this organizational change. Constructive learning, procedural and tacit knowledge, project-based processes and continuous, collaborative feedback come to the front. No doubt, learning communities focus on student learning creating the supporting system on learning and learner-centered curricula, project- and problem-based learning methodology and formative assessment. The mission and vision of these universities contains strategy on lifelong learning, self-management and career portfolio. The next step is developing professional learning communities, which ‘creates ongoing conversations, encourages participation, and sharing of educators’ learning’ [12]. In my view, one of the key elements to maintain the culture of brand building and using career portfolio is ongoing collaborative communication and discussion among the students and the teachers in order to focus on progression, quality of reflection and feedback.

2 PRACTICE

MyBrand is a career-focused educational initiative of the Budapest Metropolitan University (METU), which helps students to succeed in the world of work through practice-oriented education and the development of competencies required in the labour market. In Budapest Metropolitan University because of VUCA-world and international competition (see above) MyBrand program implemented 4 years ago. MyBrand program is linked to the University renewed, “creative university” identity. Among the studies and research mentioned above, the following works have had a particularly strong influence on the concept of MyBrand [5], [7], [10].

During the implementation process, we are working on the definition of MyBrand:

The MyBrand approach, which focuses on the professional and personal self-improvement, conscious competence development and brand-building of the students.

Now this pilot program has the final phase, so we have a lot of experience and data about the impact of the program and the effectiveness of the implementation.

MyBrand program is based on branding and career portfolio in order to handle the changes, adapt changing labour market needs reducing skill gap and promoting reskilling and upskilling. Competency development comes to the front promoting lifelong learning and transforming knowledge into practice. Basically, growing needs and importance of tacit and procedural knowledge is related to revision of the concept of knowledge and learning. The concept of learning is based on social-constructivist approach promoting individual and collaborative learning strategies. MyBrand program is a continuous personal and professional development across METU, career and life. MyBrand is a student-centered methodology and mindset to learning and teaching. A collaborative approach to student and teacher' roles, where learning is an experience supported by innovative learning and teaching tools. The student will be able to build and present a career portfolio of professional and personal competences, which are based on self-awareness, and a personal brand. The central idea of MyBrand is to help students understand and shape why, what and how they learn, and to help them understand how they can use what they learn. The learning and teaching strategies and methodologies are based on practice-oriented, project-based approach, working with real-life problems on the philosophy on learning by doing. In this way, the students develop competencies that enable them to act independently, to form their own opinions developing reflective and critical thinking. Learning takes place through the student's activities and projects. The teacher supports and provides the conditions for this learning process. Students will also be able to assess their own learning progression, summarize, and present their competencies in a career portfolio. Career portfolio is more than just a collection of works, projects and products produced in the courses of higher education. It includes both the progress made in terms of competencies and the learning path followed, which are based on labour market needs. This is how the career portfolio becomes the basis of the personal brand, a tool to present it to the others.

In other words, this is the learning- and learner-centered strategy, teachers support the inspiring learning path that helps students build their brand. MyBrand is a learning journey, which has a lot of inspiring stops. The journey started with Start MyBrand with some trainings and workshops, which are based on development self-management, self-knowledge and self-evaluation. At the beginning of the first year, the Start MyBrand training prepares students to collect portfolio elements and helps them to adopt the 7Habits mindset, thus helping them to develop a market approach [13]. The next phase is MyBrand-based education and collection of career portfolio items. In MyBrand, practical, progressive, student-centered teaching methods (e.g. problem-based teaching, project-based learning, cooperative learning) are emphasized. Then MyBrand portfolio workshop is coming at the second phase of the collection. Next step is work practice, then MyBrand final exam, where the students need to present their career portfolios. On the base of the final exam result, finding a job with the help of METUJOBS portal. METUJOBS portal is a complex digital platform that allows you to record and present the elements of your MyBrand portfolio (ePortfolio) during your job search.

Basically, this learning journey has two sides, on and off campus activities. On campus activities, which are related to the professional study for instance subject areas, trainings, language courses, professional practice at the potential working place. On campus activities, which are not related to the professional study, for instance career advisory system, shadow program, talented competitions, Erasmus-programs, events, fellowships, workshops. Off campus activities for example studies (trainings, language courses, qualifications), work (permanent, student, volunteer), self-knowledge (tests, trainings, self-development). No doubt, the concept of

MyBrand is significant to the VUCA-world, but the critical point is not a strategy but the implementation. The implementation strategy is based on Fullan's Managing change process model.

INITIATION is the first phase of the change process. In most cases, those facilitating and leading change pay close attention to launching the innovation because they recognize that how well something begins affects how it ends. Yet launching an initiative is only the beginning. While initiation deserves considerable emphasis, leaders plan for all three phases simultaneously. In planning for change, leaders engage educators responsible for implementing the change by addressing how the innovation will affect both educators and students.

IMPLEMENTATION is the second phase of the change process. Once the vision of institutionalization is clear and consistent, leaders concentrate on what is needed to put the innovation into practice by planning for and supporting implementation.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION occurs when the innovation becomes routine practice in its frequency, consistency, accuracy, and results. Members of the organization use the change at least at the routine level of use and have resolved major issues related to its implementation, such as resources, time, materials, and so on.⁶

Obviously, that the pilot phase of the implantation on MyBrand program is at the initiation phase with some "children's disease". On the basis of the results of 14 in-depth interviews, in order to turn to the next phases (implementation, institutionalization) we need to focus on the systematic supporting system on the basis of the experience of pilot phase. The interviews focused on the concept of MyBrand program, its design and teaching practices, portfolio elements and problems. One interviewer said the following about the concept of MyBrand: What is MyBrand?

- It provided practical education instead of the traditional university model.
- Focus: developing skills and attitudes.
- Personal development is also important – e.g. self-learning, self-reflection.
- Understanding the purpose of the lesson ("start with why") is also emphasized in MyBrand.

Another interviewee said the following about MyBrand:

- Start MyBrand helps you to understand how what you learn in different lessons fits together, why this is important
- The "elements" from education are consciously collected
 - ergo: more aware students
- This includes self-assessment and peer review

The next interviewee turning to this question: What does the MyBrand implementation mean?

- It is a busy bar where there is no fictional content, but content is filled in together with the students. The aim is to create and to do it together. The project does not have to be perfect, but it should reflect the classroom and be innovative and critical. The project may not be part of your portfolio, but it can be. This is good because, while you can do these things on your own, you learn to work in a team. There is a values/skills exploration discussion at the beginning.

⁶ https://www.slideshare.net/sha_men17/fullan-change-model

Regarding design and teaching practices, some teachers emphasized:

- A coherent, transparent thematic system in the new curricula
 - important for the organization (planning) of education
 - it is also important for students to know in advance what lessons they are taking
- Provides a transparent competence system
 - good accountability of the teacher for the achievement of the outputs
 - transparent accountability for students
- The emergence of soft skills: also important in the market

The problems highlighted by the teachers are: management does not understand, lack of common understanding on campus, there should be innovation rather than imitation and there should be a mandatory continuing education system for lecturers (credits).

Following the analysis of the interviews, four training sessions on a common understanding of the MyBrand programme were held at the university, using the World Café and cooperative learning methods to help trainers to speak a common language and to learn about each other's good practices in design, development and evaluation. At the organizational level, the experiences of the pilot implementation were discussed, and as a result, the development of a supporting system for the implementation started. Some parts of the program implementation: MyBrand portfolio workshops and trainings, Teachers' Day and Club, mentoring program, basic competence matrix, MyBrand teaching handbook, METU Learn curricula, Online Knowledge Hub. The critical point is mutual understanding of the concept and importance on MyBrand program in order to discuss about it with the same language. The next critical point is changing the teachers' mindset turning to the revisionalize knowledge and learning focusing on tacit and procedural knowledge, innovative learning and teaching strategies.

Career planning at the course of Innovative learning technology skills in becoming an engineer at Óbuda University has two pillars. First pillar is career planning, second pillar is learning diagnostic assessment. This paper focuses of the practical elements of career planning. At the contextual part of career planning, the students define some key concepts using mindmap and place mat, for instance VUCA-world, skill gap, reskilling and upskilling. Then information processing comes, where the students collect some skills from the market requirements e.g. analyzing some reports from the world of work and future trends. Regarding the VUCA-world (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) is a rapidly changing, unpredictable, complex, and uncertain realm [8].

The next step is making comparative charts on working, learning and career portfolio. After the typology of portfolios, we are focusing on the motivation and time management. First and foremost, intrinsic motivation, the desire for autonomy, professionalism and a sense of purpose [18]. The structure of career planning has four parts: CAREER GOALS; CAREER PLANNING PREPARATION; ACTION STEPS FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT and SUMMARY. At the part of Career goals, the students need to answer these questions: Where am I now? What have I achieved so far? What of my childhood dreams have I achieved? Do I still have aspirations that need to be fulfilled? What would be the cost of realizing my desires? What is important to me? What really motivates me? What are my options? What resources do I have? How do I see myself in 5 years? At the part of Career preparation, the students are focusing on personalized SWOT analysis: What are your main strengths and weaknesses?

How do you see your opportunities and threats in terms of career planning? Then turning to the skills they have and skills to develop (see TOP 10 skills 2025). At the second part of career plan, the students need to define what success means to you under the umbrella of the question: How do you reach your goals/dreams? At the third part of career planning task, the students prioritize action steps with potential deadlines, e.g., trainings, networking, projects, work etc. Finally, the students need to summarize their career plan in order to stress some dilemmas, questions and potential scenarios. Some students' feedback at the end of the course:

'I finally got the motivation I needed to think about my future plans and understood the labour market context.'

'I learned some useful things; I was particularly pleased to be able to use many of the exercises in the future when I will be creating my own personal portfolio.'

'The biggest positive of the course is that I was given several useful tools to assess myself, what my strengths are and where I need to improve.'

3 CONCLUSION

Self-management and career planning is a relatively new initiative at the university, the practical implementation of the different elements of the program are still very different. The effective implementation has two pillars. First pillar is creating supporting system of the institutionalization of the program. Supporting system has four elements: research, development and innovation; workshops and trainings to the students and the teachers; organizational development to the professional learning community and multiple communications. Second pillar is the systematic view of the program from individual to the organizational level. The process of creating career portfolio has not finished at the end of the higher education years. At Budapest Metropolitan University and Óbuda University, the students not only collect items for their career portfolio or career plan, but also develop their competencies for lifelong learning, market needs, and change their mindset. Students learn about their progression using metacognitive skills and assess individual progress with the mentoring and tutoring system from the teachers and the university strategy. They will learn how perform in different situations, what roles are comfortable in, what makes stand out, what their strengths might be in the labour market. They gain insight into how they learn and what kind of methods support their competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes). In this way, students will acquire a self-reflective and collaborative learning attitude that will continue to develop their career and personal brand. To summarize, self-management and career planning is a continuous innovation, the evidence of the changing university in higher education.

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