

Rethinking Pedagogy in Higher Education Amid Turbulent Times

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∞ Global challenges (labour market expectations, digital technology, the massing of higher education) are constantly changing the way higher education is managed. Responses to change can be planned. Responses from higher education stakeholders can be interesting and instructive for other institutions, as these examples can be incorporated into their own responses. The purpose of the study is to present the top-down pedagogical reform process that started in 2019 at the University of Public Service in Budapest. Although initiated by the university's educational strategy, its implementation depends on the teachers who have actively created innovative pedagogical spaces that ensure sustainability. These innovative spaces include training sessions for teachers, workshops, thematic discussions on teaching methodology, methodological publications, research and the annual Innovative Department Award. The stages of the process and the results and challenges of each stage were documented using a case study method. The description helps to illustrate how a process of pedagogical reform, with which the university leadership's goal is rapid, systemic change affecting the work of hundreds of teachers, can be developed and sustained on the basis of commitment from teachers and institutional determination.

Keywords: higher education, pedagogical changes, institutional development

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Ponovni razmislek o pedagogiki v visokem šolstvu v turbulentnih časih

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≈ Globalni izzivi (pričakovanja trga dela, digitalna tehnologija, množičnost visokega šolstva) nenehno spreminjajo način upravljanja visokega šolstva. Odzivi na spremembe so lahko načrtovani. Odzivi visokošolskih deležnikov so lahko zanimivi in poučni za druge institucije, saj lahko te primere vključijo v svoje odzive. Namen študije je predstaviti proces pedagoške reforme od zgoraj navzdol, ki se je začel leta 2019 na Nacionalni univerzi za javne službe v Budimpešti. Čeprav se je proces reforme začel na podlagi izobraževalne strategije univerze, je njegovo izvajanje odvisno od učiteljev, ki so aktivno ustvarjali inovativne pedagoške prostore, ki zagotavljajo trajnost. Ti inovativni prostori vključujejo: usposabljanja za učitelje, delavnice, tematske razprave o metodologiji poučevanja, metodološke publikacije, raziskave in letno nagrado za inovativni oddelek. Faze procesa ter rezultati in izzivi vsake faze so bili dokumentirani z metodo študije primera. Opis pomaga ponazoriti, kako je mogoče proces pedagoške reforme, pri kateri je cilj vodstva univerze hitra sistemska sprememba, ki vpliva na delo več sto učiteljev, razviti in vzdrževati na podlagi predanosti visokošolskih učiteljev in institucionalne odločnosti.

Ključne besede: visoko šolstvo, pedagoške spremembe, institucionalni razvoj

Introduction

Labour market expectations, advances in digital technology and learning theories, and the growth in student numbers are forcing higher education institutions and their teachers to develop progressive organisational responses (Ferri et al., 2020; Halász, 2009; Kemelgor et al., 2000; Kezar et al., 2018, Niemi 2021; Ramírez-Hurtado et al., 2021).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, instead of the planned, comfortable implementation of the educational strategy, lecturers had to switch overnight to the use of online platforms and were forced to try out new teaching methods for which they were not prepared (Al-Naabi et al., 2021; Benenson et al., 2022). This experience made higher education stakeholders aware that the methodological development of academic teaching staff in line with European trends, as well as the creation of an institutional atmosphere that facilitates teachers' professional development, the collection and synergy of good practices, and the support of training and research, cannot be postponed any longer (Budevici & Puiiu, 2020).

The objective of the present study is to illustrate the results that can be attributed to the activity of teachers in implementing an educational strategy that prescribes a reform process. The stages of the process and the outcomes and challenges of each stage were documented using a case study method, applying Kotter's (1996) eight-step model. Several examples of the application of Kotter's model in a higher education context can be found in the international literature (Calegari et al., 2015; Kang et al., 2020; Edge et al., 2022).

The case study begins with a general description of the context in which pedagogical change has taken place, outlining the reasons for the need for change, which has prompted methodological redesign not only in public service institutions, but also in higher education institutions in general. The methodology of the case study is then discussed. Finally, we summarise our experience and the lessons learned from the process described in the case study, including a list of obstacles to change.

Turbulent Times in Higher Education

Increasingly global trends such as globalisation, advances in information technology and leadership innovation (Cummings & Worley, 2015) are transforming the labour market, including the lives of those working in the civil service. These circumstances are pushing organisations and government actors to respond ever more quickly and to make sustainable operational changes. Civil servants are required to be able to manage the challenges of the twenty-first

century. Training institutions and lecturers in these institutions have a shared responsibility to use teaching methods that bring future civil servants closer to solving problems in the workplace.

The economic environment, funding, student and labour market expectations, technology and societal changes (e.g., student diversity) had already made higher education increasingly challenging before the pandemic (Edge et al., 2022). Changes at the organisational level have therefore not spared higher education (Budavici-Puiu, 2020; Kemelgor et al., 2000; Milutinović et al., 2023; Zgaga, 2021), such as the increasing impact of digitisation or the growth in student numbers (Sarda et al., 2023).

With the growth in student numbers and student diversity, it is increasingly challenging to maintain academic standards (Evans et al., 2021) and to provide the same methodology and the same quality of training to students in parallel groups (Sarda et al., 2023). Traditional lectures based on limited interaction might seem more comfortable, but an interactive environment leads to deeper, more effective learning. This encourages pedagogical innovations and standardisation by higher education actors at the international, national, institutional and faculty level (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Silvia, 2012). Top-down incentive systems are becoming more common (Sarda et al., 2023), but the required changes often face obstacles (Rubaii, 2016).

An Innovative Response in Public Service Training

Nowadays, the question of how to teach public service and how to prepare students for the challenges of twenty-first century governance is becoming increasingly important (Elliott et al., 2023; O'Neill, 2022; Rubaii, 2016). The public service faces increasingly complex challenges, which require a paradigm shift in the classroom (Alford & Brock, 2014; Benenson et al., 2022; Brock & Alford, 2015). In civil service training, the questions of what to teach and how to teach it have perhaps never been more topical, while the teachers' hesitation is understandable, as they had to change suddenly and respond quickly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Change is not always viewed favourably by academics working in university structures that often reflect traditional Weberian governance structures (Rubaii, 2016).

The University Context

The process of change detailed in the present case study was conducted at the University of Public Service (UPS) in Budapest, which is a unique higher

education institution by international standards. Compared, for example, with the fragmented UK civil service training system (Elliott et al., 2023), the UPS offers a combination of law enforcement and military officer training, training for domestic and international public administration professionals, and training for water engineers, all with a strong inter-professional focus. Preserving the traditions of its predecessor institutions, the UPS commenced operation on 1 January 2012 as a hub of higher education for civil service professionals, in the hope of closer cooperation in education and research, and more efficient operation. In 2017, the Faculty of Water Management, which is also a predecessor institution, joined the university. The university currently has four faculties – Political Science and International Studies, Military and Defence Studies, Law and Order, and Water Sciences – and four doctoral schools, as well as a well-developed university infrastructure and campuses. In addition to teaching, particular attention is paid to research, and the university has several research centres. According to the statistics for autumn 2021, it has a total of 6,182 students and 824 teachers, 184 of whom are not full-time employees but are involved on a contractual basis.

The university published its strategic report, in light of the changes in its environment, in its Institutional Development Plan 2020–2025, which includes an education strategy aimed at a paradigm shift in pedagogy (teaching methodology, teaching). The Creative Learning Programme (hereafter: CLP, Programme) is a key element of the Education Strategy, which was developed in several steps and is currently under the leadership of the Vice-Rector for Education. The implementation of the CLP is guided by a concept and strategy approved by the university's leadership. The Action Plan, which is linked to the Strategy, sets out the actions to be taken to achieve the pedagogical paradigm shift over a four-year period. On the background of the strategies implemented, the following research questions have been formulated:

RQ1: Are the steps and outcomes of a top-down change management process consistent with Kotter's eight-step model?

RQ2: Is it possible to link outcomes to each step in the process?

Method

The research questions were addressed using a case study, which is a widespread and increasingly popular qualitative method (Breshlin & Buchanan, 2008; Csabai, 2018; Garson, 2002) with independent research relevance, focusing on the transition between theory and practice. As a research method, it belongs to the group of field research as a form of data collection (Babbie,

1989). The case study method is nowadays used in several disciplines, such as law, medicine, political sciences and pedagogy. A case study is an empirical examination of contextually specific cases (Stake, 1995). It is therefore important that the researcher using a case study is aware that, despite a strong theoretical framework, the same case study may have different messages for readers. While the findings presented in a case study are not to be generalised (Harland, 2014), many different cases often cover the same ground and convey similar messages.

A case study presents a real-life situation, providing information about a case that has happened in journalistic detail. Readers can put themselves in the shoes of the people involved in the case, reflecting on and analysing what happened, even drawing their own lessons. By its very nature, a case study is a descriptive and exploratory scientific method for identifying and situating a phenomenon in the literature (Breshlin & Buchanan, 2008).

Participants and Materials Used in the Research

The materials and information used in the present research were collected between May 2019 and May 2023, from the formulation of the problem, through the collection of information, to a detailed description of the steps and history of the reform process. All of the documents generated during the change process were collected in order to study the process. One set of data consisted of the institutional documents that generated the change process, i.e., strategic materials (Institutional Development Plan, Creative Learning Programme Strategy, Action Plan, Creative Learning Programme Concept) and the results of statistics, statements and surveys produced by the coordination unit. The documentation included minutes of meetings, reminders and various descriptions of events on the website of the institution under review. Minutes were taken of all of the meetings concerning the launch and running of the programme, and these documents were made available to the authors of the study. In January 2021, each department of the university delegated a lecturer to small group workshops, during which groups of 10–12 people shared good practices and formulated their needs for the programme. The process of change was also well documented on the programme's website, where documents on the organisational transformation (descriptions of departments, tasks) and website news on individual programme elements and events (workshop descriptions, introductory workshops of Innovative Department Award-winning departments, conference reports) were posted.

In the research, the results of the programme were evaluated not only based on the documents, but also through feedback from the participants and

trainers. The participants' views were gathered through an online feedback questionnaire, while face-to-face and online structured interviews were conducted with the trainers who delivered the workshops. In 2022, 82 responses were received from 127 participants, representing a 64% response rate. In 2023, the total number of participants was 172, of which 79 completed the questionnaire, representing a 46% response rate, while 80% of the trainers sent feedback on the workshops they had held.

Instruments

The data collection tools were documents that allowed the documentation and internal evaluation of the change process. These documents were evaluated and the information and facts contained in them were incorporated into the steps of the case study model. For data collection, materials uploaded on the website describing the functioning of the programme were available (introduction to the organisation, project presentation, concept, strategy, descriptions of workshops, descriptions of good practices). In addition, feedback questionnaires were used for data collection. After each workshop, a questionnaire with the same content was administered to the workshop participants, asking them about the usefulness and effectiveness of the training. Participants rated the training on a 4-point scale (where 1 was the worst and 4 the best) and a 7-point scale (where 1 was the worst and 7 the best, allowing for a more differential rating), according to the following questions: How useful was the training? Could you use what you learned in your field? To what extent did you develop your teaching skills? What teaching methodological ideas and suggestions did you consider important? In what other areas do you think you need methodological improvement? The results of the questionnaires were reported and included in the case study. Interviews were conducted with the trainers who delivered the training courses and workshops (individual and group structured interviews). The data collection tools were thus elements of the internal documentation produced during the programme and shared on the website. In addition, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews.

Research Design

The main focus of the research was the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the top-down pedagogical paradigm shift. The research followed the process of change from the moment the programme was launched and measured its success. In the first phase of the research, the strategic documents

needed to launch the programme were examined and evaluated. The research followed the implementation of the programme and the first results step by step. During the research, the implementation of the steps of the Kotter model were examined, which required a certain time lag, as its success could only be assessed retrospectively. The research examined the achievement of the objectives set out in the concept and the strategy, which was relevant not only from the researcher's point of view, but also from the point of view of the client (the management of the institution). This meant that all of the events that occurred during the change process were evaluated and the documents relating to them were examined and analysed. The assessment and analysis examined the fulfilment and effectiveness of the project elements set out in the programme concept. The research was closed on a provisional basis, evaluating partial results, as the process of change is still ongoing. The concept defined a four-year time-frame for the implementation of the programme, ending in December 2024.

Results

In presenting the results of the pedagogical reform process, we will highlight the steps that can be found in Kotter's model, which illustrate that a top-down strategy can only be successful through the activism of community members in creating innovative spaces. The changes can be described according to a number of models (Goodman, 1982; Cummings & Worley, 2015). The case is described using Kotter's (1996) eight-step model, which is one of the best-known and most frequently cited and applied models (Wentworth & Behson, 2020). According to Kotter, the change process consists of several successive steps, which are not interchangeable and take a considerable amount of time. In any step, a critical error can be made that causes unforeseeable damage to the change process. The implementation of these steps is a prerequisite for the success of the change process. The first step in the change model is to create a sense of urgency, followed by the development of strong coalitions. The third and fourth steps are to create and communicate a vision. The fifth step is to empower others to act on the vision. This is followed by planning and implementing short-term successes, and, in step seven, consolidating improvements and creating more change. Finally, the last step is to institutionalise new approaches (Kotter, 1996).

The results of the research are presented based on the eight steps of the Kotter model, showing the recommendations made in each step and how they are met.

Establishing a Sense of Urgency. In May 2019, an Education Reform Workshop was set up at the university to prepare the ground for a comprehensive

modernisation of the content and methodology of training programmes. The workshop was attended by the Vice-Deans, ten faculty members of the Faculty of Political Sciences, representatives of the student council and external experts. As a result of joint reflection, a strategic concept with visions and proposals for the modernisation of the content and methodology of the teaching portfolio was developed. Following the preparatory work, the university's Institutional Development Plan 2020–2025 aimed at a paradigm shift in pedagogy (teaching, teaching methodology). The plans for change were therefore included in the document that defines the university's operations. Through the Reform Workshop and its members, discussions and debates on pedagogical change were initiated at the university.

Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition. The change management team was appointed in several steps. As a first step, the Vice-Rector for Development, who is responsible for the implementation of the CLP, set up a team of experts composed of university and faculty-level delegates at senior management level (Vice-Deans of Education) and other experts (Quality Commissioner, Student Council, methodological experts). As of February 2020, the supervision of the CLP was entrusted to the Vice-Rector for Education, who, as in the past, sought to involve stakeholders. The initial organisational structure was replaced by two departments, a Working Group and a Research Workshop. The Working Group was composed of delegates from each faculty and the Student Council, thus ensuring the involvement and influence of each department. The main task of the Working Group was to develop the CLP strategy and to implement the identified objectives as a project stream. The implementation started under difficult circumstances, as the formation of the Task Force and the whole planning period, except for a few months, coincided with the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, which tested the personal contacts, the organisation and implementation of the programmes, and the achievement of the short-term objectives. The Task Force had a staff of five. The team prepared and organised the programmes, acted as a contact point for participants, and produced analyses and reports on the programmes for the Task Force and the Research Workshop. In spring 2022, a new department was created within the Rector's Office, called the Creative Learning Office (CLO), which, alongside the previous teams, is responsible for the day-to-day coordination and implementation of the Programme.

Creating a Vision. The CLP's own strategy had to be aligned with the institution's previous strategy. The university's strategy sets out four directions for the university: the Education Strategy, the Research and Development Strategy, Strengthening Community (Organisational) Performance, and the Individual

Performance Principle. The Education Strategy is the flagship programme of the CLP, which the strategy document describes as a pedagogical turn that sees the essence of education as “the effective development and assessment of student capabilities, the mentoring of individual learning pathways, and the cultivation of active, creative professional communities based on personalities” (IFT, 2020, 35). The objectives set out are also very specific to the educational arena: the ideal of community learning–creation–individual development; the ideal of the teacher leading collaborative learning and mentoring individual creative work; and small group training rather than mass teaching. The achievement of all three objectives strongly presupposes teacher activity involvement.

Communicating the Vision. According to Kotter’s model, the change process should involve all members of the organisation, and it is necessary to discuss the vision of change with the agents of change and the organisational teams. The essential elements of communication are external and internal communication. The internal public should be given the opportunity to discuss the changes and learn about the results achieved in the meantime. This is done through regular online conferences and workshops. There were two conferences and three workshops in 2021; one conference and two workshops as well as two Professional Training Days were held in 2022; while one Professional Training Day, one conference, one workshop and a number of other events took place in 2023. In addition, leaders (heads of department and senior university leaders) participated in several workshops to discuss strategy and future goals. External publicity (participation in Hungarian and international conferences and regular publication activities) provides an insight into the educational work of the university, thus increasing the visibility and image of the institution at home and abroad. In addition, communication is regularly provided in written form in newsletters through internal university media channels, while the university community can also learn about the events of the Programme through the university TV on YouTube. The Programme has a dedicated interface within the university’s website for sharing information and communicating results.

Empowering Others to Act on the Vision. In 2021, the Education Network was established (with delegates from each faculty) and training for the Network’s faculty members was launched. In 2022, an Advisory Network was also established, with faculty delegates to support the transformation work at the university and in their own faculties. The Creative Learning Programme, as described above, is the engine of transformation, but no single unit is sufficient to fully implement change. To be eligible for the 2021 Innovative Department Award, the department had to demonstrate its training activities, teaching methodology innovations and innovative efforts to other teachers. These

training sessions, presentations and workshops are a very good platform for joint activities and the involvement of individual departments.

Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins. The project, which is laying the foundations for a paradigm shift in pedagogical teaching methods, was launched in January 2021. The first year was very successful in terms of programmes implemented and results achieved. The organisation and delivery of the first university-wide and mobilising programmes, and the publication of the results of these programmes, were carried out at an exemplary pace. The first public result was the collection of good practices from the university, which were then used in various fora. These good practices provide insights into the individual teaching activities and experiences of lecturers and serve as a model for other lecturers. Both conferences were followed by workshops, the first of which was attended by members of the Teacher Network, who shared their departmental experiences and needs, while thirteen good practices were presented by invited teachers at the second workshop. A stand-alone workshop in November 2021 presented the results of 2021 and invited external speakers to share their own teaching experiences. In the autumn of 2021, a sub-programme called the Service Basket was successfully launched, offering a range of training courses to help university lecturers to learn innovative, creative teaching methods and develop their skills. The content of the Service Basket is constantly being developed and expanded with the addition of new good practices, and any faculty member of the university can offer a 'product' to this basket (Méhes & Korpics, 2022). A total of 18 departments have applied for the Innovative Department Award so far. The aim of the competition is to evaluate and encourage those departments and teachers who use creative methods and practices in their teaching. The prize is awarded each academic year by a dedicated panel. As an indication of the complexity of the programme, the departments that win the Innovative Department Award participate in the expansion of the content of the Service Basket by organising their own programmes, training courses and workshops. In the first year, a glossary was created to support the development of the glossary of vocabulary articles that have been brought within the scope of the Programme. In addition, two university research projects have been launched under the Programme and will be accompanied by further research (research on digital competences, research on teaching competences, focus group studies of teachers and students).

Consolidating Improvements and Producing Still More Change. Successful programmes from the first year will continue to be advertised. The university leadership strongly supports CLP and is committed to the paradigm shift. This is evidenced by the establishment, after a two-year preparatory period, of

a department tasked with providing pedagogical and educational support to the reform process, the ongoing organisation and coordination of programmes, and the monitoring of changes in educational methodology through action research and communicating results. The Research Workshop is currently conducting a number of research projects, the results of which will help to sustain the programme. The strong organisational hierarchy, which is also associated with the training portfolio, is seen as an advantage in terms of perseverance and determination. In addition to strong leadership support, the interviews with and feedback from teachers indicates that they consider the training and events organised by the CLP to be very useful and important. The number of lecturers participating in the workshops and training sessions organised in parallel regularly exceeds one hundred. The Office for the Organisation of Innovative Spaces (CLO) has become a member of the Hungarian Network of ICT Centres, and several publications (Bajnok & Korpics, 2023; Hegedűs & Fekete, 2023) and conference presentations show the developments and results of the university. In addition, in autumn 2023, the Handbook on Methodology was published (Korpics et al., 2023), which helps teachers by offering a detailed presentation of several interactive, innovative methodologies. Mentoring has started at several levels and is planned to continue in 2024. In response to the needs of the teaching staff, the Service Basket offer is continuously being developed (Korpics & Méhes, 2022). Every year, the university's teaching staff can participate in the Professional Training Days programme, and from spring 2023, there have been training courses for specific groups of professions or departments. A related new initiative will target training for administrative staff. The university community will be informed of methodological events via a monthly newsletter, which will support the dissemination of the Programme.

Institutionalising New Approaches. The last step is the real challenge for an organisation, as the task is nothing less than to achieve further change and embed new solutions in the organisation. The development process has defined a four-year project period, during which progress will be made according to the action plan prepared for the strategy. As the process of change and development is ongoing, we have doubts and hopes rather than concrete results for the last step. A paradigm shift in pedagogy can only be achieved if the majority of educators are committed to change as a result of the operation of the innovative spaces listed above.

Discussion

Higher education institutions, like other organisations, undergo constant changes (Halász, 2009; Kemelgor et al., 2000; Kezar et al., 2018). The advent of digital education from 2019 to 2021 accelerated this process in an immediate and urgent manner, deviating from the usual comfortable steps. Despite the difficulties, this period underscored the need for a comprehensive paradigm shift in higher education institutions. This shift entails focusing on the methodological development of educators and support for the change process through training, good practices and research (Budevici & Puiu, 2020). Initiating change requires not only top-down commitment, but also the dedication of the educator community (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Preparing young individuals for public service demands a revised methodology, recognising that new challenges necessitate innovative approaches (Alford & Brock, 2014; Brock & Alford, 2015).

In the era of globalisation, public service education must introduce new methodologies to enhance preparedness for a career in public service facing complex challenges (Elliott et al., 2023; O'Neill, 2022; Rubaii, 2016). The response to the intricate challenges of the public service sector should commence during university preparation, requiring a paradigm shift in both methodology and preparation (Benenson et al., 2022; O'Leary, 2002). This, in turn, necessitates active partnerships between universities, intensifying research and the presentation of research results in the field of higher education pedagogy. In response to global challenges and labour market demands, the higher education institution that is the focus of the present case study launched its Creative Learning Programme. The study presents the first three years of the Programme's implementation, utilising Kotter's eight-step change management model as a framework (Kotter, 1996), which is widely recognised and used in higher education (Wentworth & Behson, 2020). The presentation of the process may interest other higher education institutions for two reasons. Firstly, it highlights the applicability of the top-down strategy according to Kotter's model, emphasising that any omission at each step can jeopardise the success of the change process. Secondly, it offers valuable insights into how a teaching community responds to this type of change, emphasising the active contribution required for feasibility. Reviewing the eight steps of the model and aligning the entire change process within them, the university processes presented can be considered successful. The Programme has achieved several milestones and successes, with potential for further planning and development. From an organisational perspective, the establishment of an Office under the Deputy Rector for Education has been

a triumph. The Office is part of the Methodological Centres network, facilitating the sharing of good practices and development results among various departments responsible for methodological development in Hungarian higher education institutions. The Centres meet two or three times a year to share good practices and development results (publications, methodological manuals, methodologies). From a human resources standpoint, it is noteworthy that experts at all levels of the university contribute to the Programme through teaching and advisory roles. The top-down process enjoys support from various community members within their respective departments.

Kotter's research (2012) suggests that 70% of organisational changes fail, while only 10% are successful. The main failure is often attributed to insufficiently communicating the need for change to employees. Based on the eight-step model, the changes and actions taken so far can be deemed successful, but challenges remain in achieving a full paradigm shift. Step 8, indicating the consolidation of change in organisational culture, is considered the most significant challenge, as its assessment requires a longer-term perspective. If opponents and resisters to change can be won over, and if a compelling case is made for the importance of grassroots networking and departmental commitment, the Programme can achieve success. The stages of the change management process described in the present case study have yielded various results, the long-term impact of which cannot yet be measured. Achieving the objectives outlined in the university's strategic documents is a prolonged process requiring the commitment of the entire staff.

Conclusion

At the university under study, a pre-pandemic plan aimed at a paradigm shift in pedagogy and methodology. Examining the various stages of this shift through the lens of the Kotter model reveals that the driving force behind the change is the Chief Learning Officer (CLO) and Creative Learning Programme (CLP), along with the teachers and researchers associated with it. These dedicated individuals work persistently to support and create innovative spaces, aligning their efforts to achieve a shared vision (Kezar et al., 2018).

While a top-down education strategy endorsed by institutional leaders envisions a pedagogical reform impacting hundreds of teachers system-wide, the reality of change often originates from a more focused circle. Typically, it begins with educators who embrace change, are passionate about education, and take proactive steps to learn and implement new methods while re-evaluating familiar practices. These initiatives foster meetings and collaborations

across various departments and faculties, allowing for a more comprehensive exchange of ideas.

One of the significant milestones in this process occurred in June 2023, when the competency-based formulation of the Training and Output Requirements for the university's courses was completed. This framework served as the basis for the revision of all of the training programmes scheduled for autumn 2023. The criteria for programme revision were developed in accordance with the guidelines of the European Higher Education Area. These guidelines emphasise the development of learning outcomes, the learning process and student learning, promoting collaborative learning, individual learning pathways and a shift in the role of the lecturer. The curriculum redesign places a strong emphasis on competence development, proposing a streamlined but higher-credit course structure per semester. This approach aims to eliminate overlaps and redundancies, ideally aligning the levels of training and complying with the principles outlined in the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) of 2015. Additionally, the reform underscores a robust alignment with the labour market, emphasising the importance of practical education. In essence, the ongoing paradigm shift, fuelled by collaborative efforts and a commitment to innovation, positions the university to not only meet the evolving needs of education, but also to proactively shape the future of learning and competency development in higher education.

While we have striven for maximum objectivity in presenting the process, it is important to recognise that no single perspective can fully encapsulate reality (Csabai, 2018). One of the authors of the present paper serves as the head of the Creative Learning Office, playing a pivotal role in implementing the startup plans. The other author actively contributes to shaping and participating in the educational reform process, as well as undertaking further research on the transformation journey. In articulating this paper, we have attributed meanings to the various stages of the process and events that unfolded. Recognising the inherent subjectivity, further research, utilising mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative), has the potential to refine the results presented in this paper.

Disclosure Statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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