

Innovation Management and Tuning the Entrepreneurial Process

Hans ZWAGA

Professor Hans ZWAGA interviewed by Ioan Matei PURCĂREA

Abstract

Professor Hans ZWAGA is Senior Lecturer in Marketing, Management and Internationalization, Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences, Finland and Visiting Senior Lecturer (Netherlands, France, Austria, Norway, Russian-Federation, and Romania), being deeply involved in cluster development especially cross-border, and having special research interests in Competency development in Entrepreneurship Education, Cluster theory, Knowledge and Innovation Management and Futurology. He has a strong involvement in Competency-Based Education Curriculum Designing and Competency Measurement. In February-March 2014 he held two Courses (*Design Factory - Developing Innovation*, and *Start-up Garage: Tuning the Entrepreneurial Process*) at the Romanian-American University.

Key words: Learning by Design, Innovation Management, Entrepreneurial Process, Social Interaction

JEL Classification: L26, M13

IMP/HMM: Mr. ZWAGA, I would like to ask you about your prior experience, teaching and classroom experience, work history, research interests, professional goals, professional activities and associations, your attitudes and beliefs, and your opinions on professional issues. And this because you made a very favorable impression on our students from the very beginning, being an excellent communicator and proving advance knowledge about the topic and even your enthusiasm in the topic. Your visual materials and notes, your clarity of explanation and your approach to instruction, confirmed that you master your pacing, volume, emphasis, and fluency, making the courses relevant and appealing to the students.

When did you know you wanted to become a Professor? What made you choose an academic career?

Hans ZWAGA: The choice of becoming a professor probably came when I noticed that I had some strong communication skills. I have been involved in sports, in student activities management. In these activities and actions I could make a team work perfectly because I could convince people of my views.

That was actually not a choice. It was more the result of a process that brought me to higher challenges. I started in 1974 as a teacher of social sciences at higher secondary education. Later on, in 1985, I wanted to become a teacher in vocational education. I felt that in this type of education I could better in combining theory and practice. In that period I started to teach in English. My Vocational College was the first school in Europe to introduce a full program in Business. In 1998 I became a part-time lecturer at the University of Applied Sciences in Eindhoven. In 2002 I migrated to Keminmaa, Finland where I became a full lecturer at the Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences.

IMP/HMM: Who are the individuals who have had a profound influence on your career?

Hans ZWAGA: Let me think for a moment. There are many people who have been in my life that have helped me to change rapidly. However, there are “some animals more equal than others”

I will start with my language teachers who made me aware of the value of language. It is essential for understanding good communication, communication structures and culture in the general sense. My professor in private law who taught me to think critically and taught me the value of perception. I owe a lot to my professor in neuro-physiology who made me aware of systems-thinking. He influenced strongly the understanding of the brain as “a living computer” and its role in learning. My rector of the Vocational College had confidence in my teaching competencies. He allowed me to teach in English. Finally, I want to mention my professor in educational psychology and PhD supervisor. He let me experiment with all sorts of pedagogical thoughts until I found my format.

IMP/HMM: Did your prior jobs contribute to your professional skills and attitude?

Hans ZWAGA: I have been in education all my life. The university that I visited started already in 1970 with practice as a part of the curriculum (court-cases for law and research project for psychology). I have worked in consultancy and I have been a company ambassador. These practical experiences have deepened and widened my views on education: “learning-by-design” and “life-long-learning”

IMP/HMM: How was the college that you attended? Please tell us a little bit about your graduate school experience.

Hans ZWAGA: The University I attended was a young University with 3 faculties of economics, sociology and law. It was established in Tilburg, a town in the South of the Netherlands. I started my studies at the Law faculty and later also at the Faculty of Psychology.

Rather conservative I would say now. It was nothing special, although the Law faculty was known as “very liberal”. The faculty of Psychology was very modern. Many foreign professors were appointed. That made following lectures and projects very special. There was no time for “sleeping on the couch”.

IMP/HMM: In what ways do you feel you can lend support to young colleagues?

Hans ZWAGA: I think that many younger colleagues already have good competencies to do their job properly. Many of them have had special training for teaching their subjects.

My vision on education starts with having a future orientation towards what students should be able to perform. This process takes at least 3 years. Very often studies will take longer.

Most curricula in contrast are based on theories from or in the past or in the present at best.

“Learning by design” is a different process than traditional classes. The objective of this process is to educate students to the future and combine the future perspective with knowledge, skills and attitudes needed. I.e. the use of social media in education is already changing the nature of learning now. Technological progress, rapid changing markets, innovative organizational formats (virtual organization, the co-creator company, and the center-less organization) means that current knowledge, skills and attitudes are only of relative importance.

My support could be:

- to train younger colleagues to learn the competencies of “learning by design”
- to build confidence in the competencies of scenario-planning in education
- to learn how to run design classes (self-confidence)
- what building a future orientation in education means in practice
- how to build a double-tracking learning
- trans-disciplinary learning

IMP/HMM: Please tell us something about your discussions and social interactions with your young colleagues, about the level of compatibility and sharing similar interests and values.

Hans ZWAGA: Being interviewed for this Journal, the best example that I have describes a workshop that I have facilitated with 10 younger colleagues of Romanian-American University in September 2013 in Tornio, Finland. The objective of the workshop was to build a “brand-new” Master curriculum. Beforehand it must be understood that Romanian and Finnish educational systems differ significantly. It took 2 days before the colleagues “got” the message of the workshop. Albeit cultural differences (different countries but also different faculties) the team did the job excellently.

My discussions and social interactions with younger colleagues cover many fields. In my opinion, the key competences in working with people are “open-mindedness” and willingness to take another perspective”. Compatibility is merely a matter of absorption, finding the correct translation, putting the result at work and retention. Actually, the four steps described above (dynamic capabilities) characterize the successful universities and make them distinctively different from others.

The younger colleagues I have met in RAU share many similar interests. And I do believe that there is a solid understanding and appreciation of each other’s values.

IMP/HMM: What is the best thing about being a Professor?

Hans ZWAGA: My job!!

IMP/HMM: You have good research results. How do you manage the time and resources on each project apart from teaching responsibilities?

Hans ZWAGA: I don't keep them apart in the sense of content. The advantage is that projects and teaching cross-fertilize each other. So, I gain time and resources.

IMP/HMM: You are involved in teaching and research. What are your research goals in the coming years?

Hans ZWAGA: My PhD, finally!!

IMP/HMM: As we know, cooperation and teamwork can lead to very interesting outcomes in education. Within this framework, is there a potential for development of the relations with the Romanian-American University?

Hans ZWAGA: I am an optimist. My slogan is: When you never shoot you always miss! Very simple answer to the question: there is always a way for the prepared mind!!

IMP/HMM: Thank you very much.



Professor Hans ZWAGA interviewed by Ioan Matei PURCĂREA (from right to left)