



## Editorial

### The Season for Zweckrationalität Technical Reform

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We are pleased to announce for further circulation that the Journal will publish a Special Issue in 2012 on the technical reforms for ODL that we are now seeing in Asia. The Special Issue will focus on some of the political, financial and other management reforms that universities in particular are implementing for various reasons. The aim here is for universities to share the underlying rationale and methods being used for reform, and what challenges are being tackled and what opportunities enjoyed. University presidents and the executive officers have understandably little experience of this current crisis. The whole concept of an institution, first put together for the mass industrialization after the steam engine was invented, is now under review. Some universities are solid and attract expensive conferences and museum visitors as usual, while others are being forced to merge or shutdown. In East Asia the population itself can no longer support the present number of universities and some will be forced to close. What strategies are being considered for improving and evolving in this current era? Are these strategies contextual to local regions or are they relevant to faraway contexts? These are some of the questions that will be answered next year. The theme for this present Issue is the technical reforms that we are seeing in many major universities. After this cycle, we should expect to see a return to improving our quality assurance in

practice. Quality assurance and other value-added services follow on after the cycle of technical reorganization (Kawachi, 2011). These cycles were first predicted by Otto Peters (1983 p110) about thirty years ago just after the initial establishment of the leading institution – the UK Open University, and the IGNOU in India. At that time Peters predicted that, after the initial zweckrationalität of the mass production of distance education materials and delivery as seen in the early years of both the UKOU and IGNOU, there would be a movement to wertrationalität, seen in the early-1990s, of value-added services such as tutor support, media choice and learner-to-learner interactivities.

These then in a second iteration in turn became subject to accountability in a natural cycle to zweckrationalität again, first identified in practice by Kawachi, (2002). This was seen in the late-1990s with global expansion of online distance education. Online communication was largely through textual interactions that are high-content and low-context with academic disinterest and objectivity (and without the personal and subjectivity incurred in face-to-face interaction). However in 2001, with established global online programmes reaching a world-wide diversity of students, there became the new need now to bring in their new perspectives in realisation to serve the ethnic cultural diversity and various changing wants of the

students. All the while providing this added value but without using faces (Blake, 2000). Individualised tutor support was marketed as the latest wertrationalität value-added service in online distance education.

Around 2005 we saw the emergence of consortia – of online distance education being provided by universities in consort with industry and corporate for-profit enterprises. This technical reorganisation of zweckrationalität worked for only five years. During 2003-2008 many universities were having to merge – either whole departments are being subsumed or three or more universities are uniting to save money while hoping to maintain their promised provision of quality to their student consumer/customers. Those five years of zweckrationalität incurred merges, technical re-orientation in the marketplace, and much aggressive jockeying for the shrinking number of students willing to pay for the mammoth providers. In the States four of the largest and leading for-profit providers are under federal investigation for marketing malpractice. As an outcome, online distance providers are trying hard to re-brand themselves as quality providers in 2008-2012 wertrationalität.

Not all regions are at the same stage of development. We see that China is currently in 2010-2015 now undergoing the technical rationality zweckrationalität of reorganising its own online distance education. We can expect after this that China will be looking at re-branding and marketing of its quality as a world-class online provider.

In the present Issue, we have Papers from different countries on their technical rationality zweckrationalität of reorganizing themselves. Universities in other regions will no doubt be looking to see what similarities and what lessons can be learnt from others.

The first Paper is from Pakistan, in which Jumani reports how to improve the writing by students. This is followed by another Paper from McQuaide on improving the technical skills of teachers in rural regions. In China particularly there are great differences in cultures and in opportunities between the most advanced regions in the eastern parts and the less developed western

regions. To what extent can we use ICTs to reach the rural teachers is the topic here and how well does distance education fare compared with face-to-face upgrading of teachers. In her Paper Shiling McQuaide looks not only at improving the competence of teachers in their subject content areas, but also in how well their ICTs technical skills are improved. With China being such a vast country there are many different teacher development programmes underway with each suited to its own context. A key finding in her Paper is that rural teachers are worried how to improve their ICTs use inside their lessons. Teachers often go away on a training course, say to Hong Kong, and yet on their return to their rural schools do not yet know how to apply these newly acquired skills. University and school leadership and local change-agents are needed to help overcome this challenge. A similar Paper comes next – this time not for teacher training, but training of agricultural extension workers in Indonesia by Huda. In this Paper, Huda correctly identifies the need to increase the interactivities in the training courses. It has been found elsewhere that improving the content of a course is one thing, but the most important aspect is to introduce and add more interactivity between the course materials and the student. This is well underlined by Papert's constructionism (Harel & Papert, 1991) – that has interactions as the carrier and essence of knowledge – as opposed to the older constructivism that has knowledge in books.

Reforming the technical infrastructure for distance education in the Philippines is the subject of the next Paper by Quimbo. For the Philippines it was found that most users (teachers and students) only had access to computers at work or in the school. This is still in great contrast to the situation in Britain where 70% of secondary school students have access at home – highlighting the digital divide is yet to be resolved. Technical aspects of course include the financial costs, and the next Paper is by Akhtar and Munshi who look at the costs of teacher training in Pakistan. The next Paper reports the technical market approach used in Iran, by Ghaffari.

The current crisis is leading to some universities being closed and others are merging. Some universities are currently looking at sharing courses – and this is certainly happening in East Asia. How can distance education institutions collaborate to merge resources and offer a same course? The Paper next by Srinivasan & Dorothy look at how transnational collaboration was employed successfully to produce and deliver a German-language course. Lessons here can easily be seen that could help inform other universities to merge their language courses – particularly since languages have a fairly clear and common aim to develop the same set of skills in their students.

Lastly here in this Issue, we have an excellent Paper by Jamandre who looks at the University of the Philippines Open University in a case study.

The AJDE with mixed feelings reports that our senior Editor Sanjaya Mishra who has worked for the Commonwealth of Learning centre in India CEMCA for many years has now moved up onto UNESCO. Sanjaya has been with the Journal since its inception and we are sad to lose him, while at the same time offer him all our unlimited support in his success and career with UNESCO. We are therefore actively looking for someone suitably qualified to fill his position on the Editorial Board. We continue to attract a superb expert Editorial Board, without whose continued support we wouldn't survive. And we remain indebted to them for their support - not merely for our sakes as individuals, but the researchers who can get published in the AJDE owe a lot to the solid support from the Editorial Advisory Board.

We continue to attract quality Papers from all over Asia and the rest of the world. And we succeed without being tied to an institution as a funded in-house journal. It is a quite remarkable achievement – as opposed to shopping around for indexers – that Indexing services are urging us to sign up with them, so we thank our contributing Authors.

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