



Call for papers for the Special paper collection: Digital learning and education in a project society

1. Introduction

With the pandemic, the adoption of digital means in education and learning is no longer an option, it is a necessity. Obvious to all in the past year was the technical push that learning has taken in an institutional setting. Some already had broad experience with online tools and techniques, others have had to learn very quickly - whether they wanted to or not. But digital education and learning, we are convinced, is more than just the skillful application of tools and procedures. This shift to digital education and learning opens the space for a paradigm shift. In the backdrop of the sharing and knowledge economy, digital education and learning could not be more apt, and timely. Some cultures distinguish between learning a skill and being educated in life. In the first case learning technologies are essential to achieve the desirable outcomes. But in the second, the role of ethics, human interaction whilst learning and the development of critical thought and learning as a life journey become critical. Whether this shift will benefit or harm the students, their teachers, other education and learning stakeholders and society more broadly, depends on a series of pivotal points – decisions that will influence the ontology (nature) and epistemology (knowledge) of digital education and learning in a project society (Lundin et al., 2015).

2. Identity, roles and new requirements

Digitization in teaching and learning does not only mean the introduction of new technical approaches, but also a change in the self-understanding of teachers and learners as well as a change in the culture of the hosting organization. This change requires educators to not only be pedagogically competent, but also have digital competencies. What are digital pedagogical competencies (Muñoz Carril et al., 2013)? On the one hand some stress the capacity to implement online, blended and distance teaching and learning; to develop and to deliver high quality inclusive digital education. It may also include the development and use of high-quality digital content, such as innovative online resources and tools that address the learning needs of students (Hiltz and Turoff, 2005). Others go beyond these competencies and call for a role change from a hierarchical teacher-student relationship to a partnership-based coach-coachee-relationship (Ammenwerth, 2017). Tasks shift; once there were well planned schedules and roles, now teachers are expected to react on the spot, be flexible *in situ* and to interact more individually with pupils. Scholars are now being urged to put in place a more open and inclusive approach to working with students:

- This involves not just a change in procedures, but also a mind-shift towards a more agile teaching/learning approach - how can that be accomplished (Berge, 2008)?

- Does the widespread access to material, such as videos for self-study and flipped classrooms, set the teacher free to engage in more intense in-class discussions of topics, cases, and role-plays? Or does the availability of such materials – often better than one can provide individually – replace teachers in the long run (Trucano, 2015)? How can students (customers) be effectively involved in further development of modern teaching?
- Increasingly, students are more experienced with new tools and techniques, and teachers are not the sole source of knowledge and owner of pedagogies (Scott, 2004). How are practices of relationship in the classroom shifting?

Role-shift seems to be necessary also on the learner's side (Little, 1995). Papers cover how online learning creates stress for the autonomy of learners (Torres Martín et al., 2021): autonomy in time and space, enabled by self-study material, and also autonomy regarding content. The goal is no longer completeness and learning a canon of knowledge, but the ability to acquire new content in a critical and reflexive way (Lamb and Reinders, 2010). Online-learning creates time and space for autonomous learning. But what gets lost as all students sit on their virtual island – although virtually connected?

- How do students, practitioners and teachers learn to handle self-responsibility? Are they prepared to self-organize their learning journey?
- Can the intensity and authenticity of in-class discussion be maintained online? How can we build trust and open discussion without personal encounter?
- How do we integrate those who had just commenced their studies and had no opportunity to build the levels of trust with their peers and were the most challenged when responding to this change?
- Can an online hangout replace the warmth one finds in a class or on campus?

3. Project competencies in/for a digital society

Project management is – on the one hand – a set of highly standardized management methods worldwide. On the other hand, project management involves the daily management and cooperation with a team under very specific local conditions (Hodgson and Paton, 2016; Söderlund, 2005).

- Is the notion of project management and relevant competencies changing in the face of the VUCA world (Nachbagauer and Schirl-Boeck, 2019)? What competencies do we need for a digital (project) world?

- Do digital competencies replace or enrich traditional competencies in learning and education (European Commission, 2019)? Are certain aspects of our education better suited to delivery via digital means? Are there other aspects that are prohibited by the digital revolution (Project Management Institute, 2018)?
- Which elements of the "art of project management" can be reproduced well online, and which need to be tried out and experienced by students themselves?
- Can we expect more standardized project management methods for "project management technicians" through online programs which are more easily accessible worldwide, and could this lead to a rebirth of the "project management craft" in local communities of practice?
- Can we learn soft skills, which have been considered so important for project success in recent decades, digitally (Azim et al., 2010)? Does the content of soft and interactive skills change when combined with digital skills?
- Gamification and serious games (Freitas, 2018), understanding by Design (UBD) (Wiggins and McTighe, 2000) and similar approaches, seem to be booming in project management training – is this just hype or a new approach to intertwine project management techniques with soft and interactive skills? How can we integrate augmented reality and artificial intelligence into learning processes (Elmqaddem, 2019)?

4. Social and institutional inequalities

The current COVID-19 crisis has greatly accelerated the need for modernization and digital transformation of education and training systems. Education and training organizations face the challenges presented by the recent sudden shift to online and distance learning, including supporting teachers to develop digital competencies and safeguarding the inclusive nature of learning opportunities (Sparks, 2020). Often enough, there is a wide gap between student requirements, teaching needs, technical possibilities, and organizational readiness. Traditional organizations are under-equipped, both technically and conceptually, and slow paced.

- What impact does digital education have on the future of higher education? How can students (customers) be effectively involved in further development of modern teaching?
- Other institutions have begun to build modern learning and teaching centers for digital use only on a million Euro basis. Is the divide between well-off large universities and institutions close to industry and smaller, peripheral organizations with less money widening?
- Does secondary and tertiary education need to feature more prominently in project management teaching and learning? Can digital help overcome differences in these educational levels?
- Is the shift toward (free) online material an opportunity for smaller and distant organizations to provide the best of both worlds: up-to-date teaching content and proximity to local conditions and working in small local groups?
- In addition to a large financial outlay, this also means a massive demand for train-the-trainer programs and newly developed method sets. Who, in existing institutions, carries the burden of change: who wins and who loses?

In reaction to the COVID-19 crisis and to make education and training systems fit for the digital age the European Union has launched the Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027) aimed at high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe (European Commission, 2020). Digitization allows reach and helps address social inequalities that see students, who are not able to afford expensive education, be able to study in institutions in different countries. In addition, it is easier than ever to participate in events worldwide and to interact directly with outstanding people in the field of study.

- Can digitization in education help build a worldwide community of project management for the betterment of society?
- Some argue that digital approaches are changing the face of discrimination: while spatial barriers are diminished, economic and educational backgrounds become more important. Does digital create new inequalities that we have not experienced up to this point?
- How accessible is digital education to groups in our society who do not have a computer or are not computer literate? How do connectivity issues affect students?

5. New stakeholders and institutional change

Traditionally, higher education took place at universities, business schools and universities of applied sciences. In the field of applied professions, such as project management, non-formal training paths, such as vocational and job-related training offered by consultant firms, is offered in cooperation with formal training institutions or professional organizations. In-company further training, which is set up in large organizations as bespoke training pathways, and individual further training activities, are preeminent in the field. Digitization is accelerating the penetration by new players into traditional education markets and as a result, we see an online education industry that does not involve academics (Ball, 2012):

- Is the gatekeeper function of the knowledge of academia and professional organizations eroding?
- What values drive the old and new actors in the field? How are deep seated academic values influenced by new competitors?
- Is the primary aim of these new actors and organizations financially as opposed to educationally driven?

Large education groups, often originating from publishing houses, are increasingly offering their own learning platforms, using MOOCs and other forms of distance learning for large audiences, in addition to using material for partners from the traditional academic sector (Dodson et al., 2015; Žur, 2020).

- Who benefits from the characteristics of digital markets that allow (didactic) goods to be duplicated and offered at almost no cost (markets of un-scarcity), and the ability of modular content to be customized and delivered easily and even digitally?

Digitization is said to shift the equilibrium of programmed academic offerings to be more individualized (Al-Mahmood, 2020). That might open new perspectives on continuous life-long learning education from an episodic nature to an ongoing life affair, across boundaries to include new concepts, ideas, methods, and tools from a wide range of stakeholders. Nowadays, small companies can set up and supply online teaching.

- How is learning in the workplace transforming?
- Even more so, anyone with the appropriate access can assemble their own curriculum from the diverse online offerings – but who controls quality and intellectual property rights?

6. Public versus private knowledge goods and legal aspects

Processes of digitization touch on the status of educational assets and legal aspects. While traditional educational materials - although never uncontroversial - were mostly produced and used locally, digitization now allows potentially global accessibility to information and data and easy connectivity via (social) media. On the one hand, this makes it more difficult to control the dissemination of intellectual property; on the other hand, it is precisely the large educational corporations that benefit from this accessibility. They have the greatest interest in exploiting materials privately, particularly in project management. Knowledge is often

developed in public or publicly funded educational and research institutions; accordingly, a strong movement towards the public free availability of materials useful for teaching - from textbooks to cases to visual aids - has developed in recent years.

- What are the implications for intellectual property and copyright issues in digital learning and education?
- What is public and private knowledge, and what is the difference between market models and academic tradition?
- What is the role of Creative Commons license, open access publishing, open source, and how is funding managed if it is public or private, especially when driven by oligopolistic publishing houses?

In digital learning and education, data protection and data privacy issues are playing an increasingly important role. Data protection directly affects students and teachers: their data is collected, processed and stored in a variety of networked systems. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that students' data - and thus their opinions and attitudes - do not fall into wrong hands and influence their careers. At the same time, educational organizations face different data protection philosophies and regulations around the world.

- Who should have access and insight into assessments, what is private, what is of public interest? How can sensitive private data be effectively protected from misuse?
- What measures must be taken to ensure that the university remains a protected space for free thinking?
- What are the implications of safety, data protection and data privacy issues in digital learning and education? How to cope with various regulations from a practical point of view?
- What criteria must be applied to the selection and use of software tools to ensure privacy and protection?

7. Educating for a better (project) society

Finally, we see education beyond learning as one of the key catalysts which will enable society and humanity as a whole to address Grand Challenges, such as climate change, rising and ongoing geo-political tensions, social inequalities and injustices which characterize project societies.

- When existing boundaries between nations, philosophies, religions and professions become increasingly diluted, does the shift to digital learning and education give rise to new boundaries and, if so, what are these?
- What are the opportunities that arise from working internationally, cross-sectors and interdisciplinarity, and how does digital learning and education enable or restrict our collective responses to future challenges?
- What are the realities and anticipated positions (Swift, 2008) that we can imagine and help create to alleviate the project society from the social injustices and inequalities that contribute to Grand Challenges? Or are we heading towards creating a new set of dystopias which will see us detaching even more from ourselves, each other, and work?
- As digital means shifting the boundaries of our work, does a digital learning and education agenda allow or prevent us from organizing around values (Inglehart, 2016) and towards creating a better, more equitable world?

8. Requirements: theory and methods

This call for papers invites authors to submit papers that consider various aspects of digital learning and education in a project society. The special collection encourages papers from various sectors, countries, and research fields, in project management and related disciplines.

Both organizing for a project society and project management are an

applied discipline and thus, we are expecting applied approaches that view teaching and education performance management in novel and different ways. While we welcome conventional research design, we also encourage authors to go beyond traditional designs such as case studies and surveys.

We invite authors to submit empirical (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, action research) and conceptual studies, including review papers, that both feed the theoretical discourse and offer practical implications to the professionals leading digitization projects in training and education institutions (such as universities and schools), as well as papers advancing our knowledge on digital teaching and learning to develop a project society. Make the contribution to enhancing the Project Society explicit in your paper.

We expect that the submitted paper will go far beyond the presentation of instruments and tools. Even though we value the reflection of the own experiences as a starting point, we demand a strong theory and a strong theoretical underpinning. Such theoretical underpinnings could be sought from neighboring sciences such as philosophy, pedagogies, psychology, or sociology, or from across levels of analysis such as the institutional, network, organizational, team, practice, or actor levels.

Potential topics include, but are not restricted to.

- Identity, roles and new requirements
- Project competencies in/for a digital society
- Social and institutional inequalities
- New stakeholders and institutional change
- Public vs private knowledge goods and legal aspects
- Educating for a better (project) society

9. Process and key dates

We welcome paper submissions **throughout 2021**. Please be aware that Project Leadership and Society is an open access journal and thus a publication fee may apply. We are pleased to inform you that this journal has waived the APC (Article Publishing Charge) until **31st March 2021**. This will be applicable for any submissions received before this date, which are accepted for publication after peer review. For submissions after 31st March, please check the journal website.

Please submit your paper via the journal website, <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/project-leadership-and-society/>. When submitting your paper please choose "Digital education and learning" from the drop down menu.

For any inquiries and discussion of potential topics you may contact the guest editors directly (andreas.nachbagauer@fh-vie.ac.at; efrosyn.i.konstantinou@ucl.ac.uk).

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