

Minutes of the SVC Days 2006 Workshop “The Organizational Route”
Prof. Dr. Dieter Euler, Christian Hohnbaum

The basic question of the workshop is “How to prepare the support centers for the end of funding?” The majority of participants run a support centre that was set up in the SVP programme and thus the basic question was considered to be highly relevant for the group.

Prof. Dr. Euler marked the start of the workshop with an overview over international case studies on e-learning support centers that were carried out by the SCIL. The careful analysis of these case studies resulted in a matrix of 7 activities and 6 dimensions that is given below.

#	Activity	Dimensions / Object					
		A Strategy	B Pedagogy	C Technology	D Organisation	E Culture	F Economics
1	Counseling						
2	Competence Development						
3	Concept Development/ Production/ Implementation						
4	Project Management						
5	Brokerage						
6	Quality Assurance						
7	Communication/ Information						

Anything missing? No, but maybe brokerage is too ambitious.

The first task given to the participants was to check whether the matrix is complete and adding missing items. When discussion the results of this task in the plenary some participants outlined that it was not actually something missing but the activity 5 “Brokerage” was dispensable. Even though it was a goal of the SVP programme to foster the brokerage of content it got clear very quickly during the projects that this goal cannot be reached.

Why? The re-use of content is not normal behavior for a university teacher. It requires a huge mental change that can not be achieved by the support centers as they are. This is in line with experiences made at European level: all big initiatives for content repositories or content re-use / exchange broke down without results.

But there is successful re-use and exchange going on in the field of learning designs in at least one project in the SVP. This project does not offer content for sharing but sequences of pedagogical activities.

Also a point not captured by the matrix was mentioned as important: the support centers need strategic input from their home universities. They need a mission statement from the university side outlined what is expected from the support center. In order to work effectively and efficiently the head of the support centers need a written statement what their university wants from them. As well they need a clear more-than-one-year budget line in order to be able to decide for a core business.

What is our core business? Face-to-face counseling

Another task is to prioritize the matrix for the participants own support centre. Every support center manager should think which of these activities his or her support center can perform and should concentrate on.

This turned out to be a difficult task for the heads of the support centers: for sure all these 42 tasks are important but to decide for a kind of core business is absolutely necessary.

The table below shows the results of one group. It does not claim to be representative for the other groups.

		Dimensions / Object					
#	Activity	A Strategy	B Pedagogy	C Technology	D Organisation	E Culture	F Economics
1	Counselling		1		2		
2	Competence Development				2	1	
3	Concept Development / Production / Implementation	2	1				
4	Project Management				2		1
5	Brokerage						
6	Quality Assurance	1	2				
7	Communication / Information				2	1	

What was clearly stated in the plenary by several people is the need for face-to-face counseling. Besides this it proved to be helpful for teachers that they can download “How-to”-resources outlining the process of content editing, lesson planning and quality control. A portal to turn to was advised: www.teaching.org

What can be outsourced? Quality assurance, strategy counseling, brokerage

Another question was posed to the participants: Which activities can be outsourced by the support centers?

Unanimously accepted was the outsourcing of the technology issues to the SWITCH. Participants regard the job done by SWITCH with favor and highly appreciate it.

Other options for outsourcing were the quality assurance, the strategy counseling, and the brokerage.

How should a National Support Center Network be like?

A national support center network could serve the need for up-to-date information on projects going on, literature reviews, and new technological and pedagogical developments.

It could provide the brokerage-aspect that cannot be provided by a single support center. It could maintain a repository for learning objects

A national support center network should leave the hosting task with SWITCH.

It should provide meeting opportunities for the heads of the support centers and foster the exchange of experiences and the development of cooperation.

Its organizational format should fit nicely with our country itself: The participants would love to join the federated support centers of Switzerland.

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