# ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 15, 25 MAY 2010

AN OVERVIEW OF THIS WEEK'S COMMUNIQUÉ

1. *Iconoclastic thinking*
2. *Feedback on an ODL Convenors' meeting held on 24 May*
3. *The role of the regions in the implementation of ODL*
4. *ODL repository and blog*
5. *Pedagogical affordances of technology*

1   ICONOCLASTIC THINKING

The book by Gregory Berns (2010), "Iconoclast. A neuroscientist reveals how to think differently" provides interesting points for reflection on innovation – on personal level, and for our purposes, regarding innovation on organisational level. Berns (2010: 7-8) proposes that iconoclasts see things differently from other people and embrace novelty. An iconoclast also does not allow fear of uncertainty and fear of public ridicule inhibit their thinking (2010:8). And lastly, Berns (2010:9) proposes that iconoclasts have the ability to sell their ideas to other people, and therefore the third characteristic of iconoclasts is their *social intelligence*. Towards the end of the book, Berns (2010:184) reflects on the attributes of innovation and he lists the following: First, the innovation must offer "an *advantage* of existing products or ideas". Secondly, innovation, "although potentially novel, most still be *compatible* with existing vale systems and social norms". The third attribute Berns mentions is the fact that "the *complexity* of the innovation will determine the rate at which it is adopted by other people. The more complex the innovation is, the lower the rate of adoption". The fourth attribute is whether innovations are "*triable*. This allows potential users to try out the idea without much cost to themselves". The fifth and last attribute Berns mentions is that "innovation must be visible to other people".
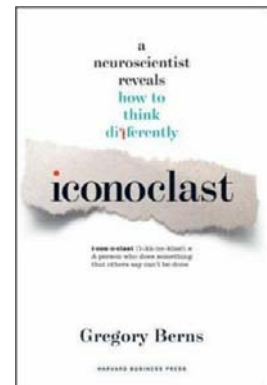
Thinking about the different recommendations of the ODL Task teams which will serve before the Senate meeting of 2 June, I realised that in many respects, the whole ODL implementation project requires us to see things differently, not fear the unknown and be able to hold paradox, and lastly, the success of the ODL implementation will depend on our ability to communicate the envisaged changes successfully. The chances that the different recommendations will be successful, once implemented, depend on their value proposition (the advantages they offer) and on how compatible and straightforward the recommendations are. The implementation should allow departments and individuals to try the recommendations out in a safe environment and, as Berns mentions, the innovations should be visible to the whole of the institution.

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2   FEEDBACK ON AN ODL CONVENORS' MEETING HELD ON 24 MAY

The ODL Task team convenors met on Monday afternoon, 24 May. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the way forward for the different ODL Task teams in order to ensure consensus on the next steps and time-frames as well as to ensure optimum synergy and integration of the different initiatives.

The way forward and time-frames were discussed including the outstanding issues on the ODL implementation plan:

- *Point 5 in the ODL Plan:* Finalisation of ROAP (eg, pre-admission counselling, foundation courses, extended programmes, academic literacy skills facilitation, and orientation to studying at a distance).
- *Point 18 in the ODL Plan:* The appropriate systems be identified and defined in the ODL policy. Once systems identified it be referred to specific portfolios to determine the extent to which the existing system is able to support ODL
- *Point 20 in the ODL Plan:* Define the nature and purpose of the regional infrastructure in terms of ODL pedagogy
- *Point 21 in the ODL Plan:* STLSC assumes responsibility for developing an ODL pedagogy at Unisa

The meeting decided that **ODL Task team 1** would continue with its mandate till completed. The Deputy Registrar, Prof Divya Singh will also liaise with members of **ODL Task team 3: Assessment** to finalise the recommendations approved by the STLSC of 10 May. **ODL Task team 2: Higher Certificate** has completed its mandate, and once its recommendations are approved by Senate, the ODL coordinator will call together all interested colleges and departments for exploring the possibilities and potential collaboration to develop a number of Higher Certificates. **ODL Task team 3: Assessment** has completed their mandate and will assist the Deputy Registrar with developing quality standards and processes for the proposed alternative assessments. **ODL Task team 4: Student support** will continue after the approval of their recommendations by Senate. **ODL Task team 5: Technology enhanced teaching, learning and student support** will meet, if necessary, but the Executive Director: IT (acting), Mr Deon van der Merwe will take full responsibility for the implementation of the recommendations. **ODL Task team 6: Student success and retention** will continue as planned.

The responsible individuals and ODL Task teams will provide a progress report at the STLSC meeting of 23 August (agenda closes 10 August) and will submit recommendations to the STLSC meeting of 20 September (agenda closes 6 September). Prof Mare expressed her appreciation for the work done by the ODL Task team convenors and the different teams. The reports which will serve before Senate on 2 June testify to the rigour, commitment and enthusiasm of the teams.

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3   THE ROLE OF THE REGIONS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ODL

Point 20 in the ODL Implementation Plan foresees the re-definition of "the nature and purpose of the regional infrastructure in terms of ODL pedagogy". The functions and structures of the regional centres are integral to the successful implementation of ODL at Unisa. It is however important to note that the functions and structures of the regional offices should *be in response* to the broader conceptualisation of ODL at Unisa. Up to now the different ODL Task teams explored key aspects of ODL at Unisa in broad and conceptual terms. Once these broad and conceptual recommendations are approved by Senate, the different ODL task teams should move towards fine-tuning their conceptual models towards implementation. And at this stage, the implications for all stakeholders at Unisa, whether academic, administrative and support, or professional, will have to be worked out in more detail. There is not one of the stakeholders that are more important than another. *All of us* are at the "coalface of implementation" – albeit in different capacities and contexts.

Although the different ODL Task teams were as representative as possible, it was almost impossible for all representatives to attend all the meetings. This is particularly true of the regions. It was just not possible to fly up representatives from the regions for the each of the meetings of the different task teams. Most of the task teams tried to communicate as extensively and regularly as possible with the different representatives.

It is however important to commit ourselves once again to inclusivity and transparency. As the different task teams will reconvene in the near future to move towards the implementation of their conceptual frameworks, it is essential that we will *not* talk about anyone who will be affected by what we propose without doing our utmost best to include them in the conversations. Allowing the regions to feel involved and to take part in the next part of the ODL implementation will be a huge challenge. I would like to commit the different ODL Task teams to seriously investigate the possibility to not exclude anyone from the next round of deliberations. It is not only about not excluding anyone, but to harness all of the potential of all stakeholders towards growing Unisa to be a world-class ODL institution in the service of humanity.

4   ODL REPOSITORY AND BLOG

All the ODL task team reports, the overview of the recommendations of the STLSC and other ODL documents are available on the Unisa Library's Institutional Repository at http://uir.unisa.ac.za/dspace/handle/10500/3072. The repository is updated on a regular basis and if you register on the repository, you will get notifications of any new uploads.

You are also most welcome to comment on this (and previous) ODL Communiqués on the Unisa Staff website. On the right hand side of the Unisa Staff website, you will see a section titled "Important links" under which you must then click on "Blogs". On the blog page, you will notice two links namely "E-connect" and "Open Distance Learning". If you follow the latter you will be able to read and comment on the ODL Communiqués.

5   PEDAGOGICAL AFFORDANCES OF TECHNOLOGY

The Institute for Open & Distance Learning (IODL) *presents* the 3rd Occasional Lecture Series 2010, *Unpacking the affordances of technology for e-learning,* presented by Professor Som Naidu, Charles Sturt University, Australia. The event will take place on 27 May, from 10:00-12:10 in the Senate Hall on the Pretoria campus.

There will also be a very instructive workshop at 14:00 in the Kopanong Chambers, TvW10-25 focusing on the topic: *Research, Scholarship and Publishing in Technology Enhanced Learning.*

Please **RSVP** at your earliest convenience as the workshop has limited seating and lunch will be served after the lecture. parsocs@unisa.ac.za

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