e-Leadership education and training: views from Denmark on necessary skills for business development and ICT in innovation

09/10/2014 - The chairperson Nils Olaya Fonstad, MIT Center for Information System Research (CISR) in the USA opened the event ‘New Curricula for e-Leadership - Delivering Skills for an innovative and competitive Europe’ in Aarhus referring to ‘digital disruption’ affecting European economies and societies dramatically. By stating that technology itself does not disrupt – it is the use and management of technology that is disrupting - he underlined the importance of an education ecosystem with strong stakeholder interaction to develop and widely spread the skills needed within the workforce to best cope with this and address it properly – which are now called e-leadership skills. Participating representatives from industry, public administration and NGOs from Denmark and neighbouring countries sent clear signals that there is a growing and critical lack of e-leaders in the economy, that is, individuals who are at the same time ICT savvy, business savvy and have the ability and skills to lead multi-disciplinary teams across functional and geographical boundaries. It-Vest representing three Danish universities – supported by the guidelines for curriculum development which have been developed as part of the European Commission e-leadership initiative (www.eskills-guide.eu) - demonstrated how they are going to deliver these through their highly flexible ‘Master in IT’ programme in the future to improve the quality of e-leadership, covering organisation leadership in ICT innovation to deliver business value.

The conference was organised by the European Commission together with it-forum and it-Vest. Around 140 participants attended the regional cluster event.

It was opened by Nils Olaya Fonstad, MIT Center for Information System Research (CISR). He referred to Nicholas Carr’s explosive Harvard Business Review article “IT Doesn’t Matter.” Does IT Matter? In his article published in 2003 the author explains how technological, economic, and competitive forces are combining to transform the role information technology plays in business, with profound implications for IT management and investment as well as strategy and organisation. In analogy to ‘does IT matter?’ the chairman asked the question ‘does e-leadership matter’ which he himself answered with ‘yes, it does’ pointing out that this needs to be orchestrated across innovations in ICT and business. He emphasised that digital disruption is not about ICT, it is about whether you have good leadership and especially e-leadership. E-leaders require agility, i.e. the ability to create solutions incorporating latest IT developments quickly and in addition, they need to be able to orchestrate synergies between these multiple solutions / applications. Even CEOs need to be enabled to ask sensible IT-related questions which today very often does not seem to be the case.

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<th>E-Leadership Skills</th>
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- Management Skills
- Hybrid Market-ICT Skills
- Industry Specific Skills
When speaking about the current technological trends and their implications on e-leadership skills, Marianne Kolding, Vice President at IDC Europe described the e-leadership skills as a mix of skills including those of re-imagining much of what we take for granted, strategic management/collaboration skills, hybrid market-ICT skills which include competences in customer-centred approach and issues, capability to develop new IT-based business opportunities and industry-specific skills, i.e. competences in specific industry business processes and of IT innovation implementation issues. The overview of required e-leadership skills by new technology trend is depicted in the overview above which she presented.

This was followed by Werner B. Korte Director of empirica who provided the definition of what e-leadership skills are and used the metaphor of a ‘three-legged beast’ to describe it vividly. He described an a-leader as a person comfortable with regularly fulfilling tasks in the board room but also in what was described at a recent regional cluster event in Munich as ‘engine room’ and at the same time feeling at ease in both environments. He also provided latest statistical forecasts from the work of empirica for the European Commission on the ICT workforce development showing that management, architecture, and analysis jobs which include a significant portion of e-leaders, are expected to grow by 2020 compared to 2011.

He then pointed to the European e-leadership initiative. The goal of the European Commission's initiative on e-Leadership which started in 2013 is to increase the talent pool of e-leaders for enterprises (CIOs, professionals, business leaders etc.) (www.eskills-guide.eu). It was followed in January 2014 by a complementary initiative on e-leadership targeting start-ups, gazelles, SMEs (entrepreneurs etc.) (www.eskills-lead.eu). Both are closely linked to the promotion of digital entrepreneurship and integrated within the EU long-term e-skills strategy and the efforts made to mobilise Member States and stakeholders (Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs) and raise awareness (e-Skills for Jobs 2014 campaign, http://eskills-week.ec.europa.eu/).


This presentation was followed by Jette Lundin of it-Vest who asked for the establishment of a continuous dialogue between industry demanding e-leadership type individuals and research groups at universities and business schools conducting research in the area of ICT management fighting for visibility and recognition and trying to supply e-leadership competences to the market. This dialogue is needed to get out of the ‘jungle’ of the so far mostly invisible higher and executive education programmes for teaching e-leadership skills. This would help develop more appropriate, visible and transparent e-leadership higher and executive education programmes and help close the gap between demand and supply. The European Commission e-leadership initiative has addressed this gap; dialogue is continuing and the curricula approach which she presented is intended to be implemented on an ongoing and continuous base.

It-Vest had used the e-leadership curriculum development guidelines and successfully applied the Curriculum Profile approach to their Master in IT programme. There was a close match and it helped to identify areas of improvement to become an even stronger e-leadership programme. She recommended that all stakeholders review the existing e-leadership curriculum profiles as a starting point either for their education needs or in scoping their programmes. She found this a very useful tool was impressed about the assessment process and expressed support for its wider use but would also welcome improvements to ensure assessment judgements are not just easy to make but also unambiguous. They concluded that the e-Leadership Curriculum Profile approach looks like an interesting one to carry out the mappings of existing courses and programmes in order to make the offers visible and transparent and further develop and adapt them in a way to help satisfy the demand for these types of skills in industry and provide promising opportunities to students.

Participants who had been students of the ‘Master in IT’ programme developed by it-vest and offered by three Danish universities emphasised its highly flexible nature which allowed them to pick and chose modules and courses to best suit their needs and interests.

In the panel and plenary discussion several points where made. Birgitte Hjelm Paulsen, Senior Consultant at the Municipality of Odense expressed her view that different types of e-leaders are needed to best develop ICT-based services for the delivery of services in the public sector that were formerly delivered either face-to-face or physically. The variety of application areas does not allow for a one-size-fits-all approach. In her view top-level management, politicians, and management at all levels needs to be e-skilled in addition to having strategic management skills to
lead digitalisation. Increasing the responsibility for digitalisation has to be with employees at all levels. This requires highly flexible education courses like the ‘Master in IT’ which she sees as a very promising approach.

Bo Sejer Frandsen, CEO, It-forum stated that Denmark and Europe need these e-leaders now. But he also raised the issue of geographical disparities of their appearance and especially the lack of e-leaders outside university cities and especially higher and executive education programmes for those in SMEs and types of businesses in rural regions.

For Gitte Moldrup, Director of it-vest the starting point to become an e-leader is a very good understanding of the situation in specific areas. She took the example of the finance sector, where IT professionals need to be sitting next to traders to understand the business to then develop best suitable solutions. She made the point that there is the need to build the bridge from both sides, i.e. integrate business competences with IT and the other way round.

Andrea Carugati, Professor at Aarhus University referred to the earlier statement of Bo Sejer Frandsen when speaking about the results of his research and experiences and stating that the need for e-leaders in SMEs differs from the ones in large corporations. He gave different examples from agriculture and the health sector for illustrating this and ended with the provocative statement “e-leadership is not mandatory, neither is survival” to indicate the need and urgency of action to be taken.

Development of an appropriate ‘education ecosystem’ was seen as a key direction for closing the skills gap since interaction with like-minded individuals was seen as essential to keep up with the pace of change.

With the European e-leadership initiative the European Commission now is providing the means for closing the e-leadership skills gap since with the guidelines and Curriculum Profile approach it is enabling a range of educational ecosystem actions to:

- Improve processes of generating educational offers with demand and supply stakeholders
- Encourage programmes based on new course design and content and
- Strengthen communication flows in e-leadership skills development and deployment.

There was unanimous agreement that e-leadership will be a key competence in the future economy and that the European Commission e-leadership initiative has been very timely and started at the right moment (more information: www.eskills-guide.eu). This European initiative aims to develop and recommend specific curriculum profiles for e-leaders (based on the European e-Competence Framework) and outline the knowledge and skills necessary for business leaders to turn into e-leaders.

Feedback from the event
- “Very useful overview and definition of e-leadership”
- “I liked all of it! More examples and ideas how to address e-leadership and solve issues around it would be interesting”
- What did you find particularly useful about this event? “All – great!”

Links to European initiatives and reports on e-leadership and e-skills:

- European e-leadership skills conference 2013: http://www.insead.edu/events/e-leadership-conference/
- European e-Competence Framework (e-CF) website: http://www.ecompetences.eu/
Towards a European Quality label for ICT industry training and certification: http://eskills-quality.eu/home/

E-Skills: the international dimension and the impact of globalisation: http://www.eskills-international.com/

European guidelines and quality labels for Curricula for e-leadership skills: http://eskills-guide.eu/home/

Monitoring and benchmarking e-skills policies and partnerships in Europe: http://eskills-monitor2013.eu/home/

Fostering the ICT Profession in Europe: http://cepis.org/index.jsp?p=827&n=940


Monitoring e-skills demand and supply in Europe: http://www.eskills-monitor.eu/


Photographs

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