

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON INTERDISCIPLINARITY – FINDINGS FROM AN INTERDISCIPLINARY TWO-YEAR MASTER PROGRAM

Mirka Kans

Department of Mechanical Engineering, Linnaeus University, Sweden

Åsa Gustafsson

Department of Accounting and Logistics, Linnaeus University, Sweden

ABSTRACT

The business environment has changed significantly during the last decade; globalization and short innovation cycles have become every-day business. These changes have formed new conditions for the companies and organizations: few of the problems encountered can be answered within a single discipline. Hence in order to address contemporary problems, companies and organizations need to have labor and recruit students with interdisciplinary skills. Consequently higher education must correspond to the business world's changing needs by providing interdisciplinary programs. The purpose of possessing interdisciplinary knowledge and skills is to have the ability to understand the origin and nature of related disciplines as well as to relate these to its own discipline. Interdisciplinary skills could be viewed as an intangible type of knowledge that needs to be taught by and learned at the university. By possessing interdisciplinary skills, the labor and students will have a holistic view as compared the view related to one single discipline. The challenge, for the universities, lies in teaching and to ensure that the students possess interdisciplinary knowledge and skills. This paper focuses on students' perceptions of interdisciplinarity and where it is taught and learned in a two-year master program. The purpose is to analyze students' perceptions of learning interdisciplinarity in a two-year master program.

This paper is based on focus groups and personal interviews with students enrolled in the interdisciplinary two-year master program named "Innovation through business, engineering and design" hosted by the Linnaeus University. The two-year master program aims to enroll about 25 students each year from the disciplinary areas of Business, Engineering and Design. The paper concludes that the students perceive interdisciplinarity as challenging and that interdisciplinarity require disciplinary skills and competences as well as personal and interpersonal capabilities. Interdisciplinarity appears first and foremost in team work and communication. Tendencies towards a modification of the disciplines were noticed by the authors, which might lead to new disciplines evolving, such as "innovation design" or "innovation engineering".

KEYWORDS

Interdisciplinarity, Interview study, Ongoing two-year master program in innovation