

# Learning Innovations and Learning Quality: Relations, Interdependences, and Future

Christian M. Stracke

University of Duisburg-Essen, Information Systems for Production and Operations  
Management,

Institute for Computer Science and Business Information Systems,  
45141 Essen, Germany

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[Christian.Stracke@icb.uni-due.de](mailto:Christian.Stracke@icb.uni-due.de)

**Abstract:** Learning innovation and learning quality are very often addressed separately and solely. But in fact they are interdependent and have to be reflected both for achieving the best learning quality: This article discusses how to achieve the best appropriate learning quality as the core objective in learning, education and training by combining the three dimensions learning history, learning innovations and learning standards. Only their mix can ensure to meet the learners' needs and to provide the best and appropriate learning opportunities and learning quality fitting to the given situation and for a long-term and sustainable improvement across all sectors in learning, education and training, all communities, educational and training systems and societies in Europe and worldwide.

**Keywords:** Learning quality, learning innovations, learning history, learning standards, quality development, education and training systems, digital age

Learning innovations and learning quality are important and reflected topics for a very long time from the beginning of discussions and theories about learning processes: In Europe, Plato's Allegory of the Cave is one of the earliest examples. Their debate continued during the introduction of the first universities in the Middle Age and of the school systems in the 18th century. During the last years and the upcoming so called "digital age", many discussions took place in particular due to the two main changes covering all sectors, branches and levels of the society:

1. Globalisation and
2. worldwide internet establishment

These two factors are leading to global markets, worldwide networking, communication and competition, as well as to the digitalisation of services and systems with the introduction of internet-based services, hardware and software within all parts of our lives.

The European Union has identified the challenges and opportunities by these global changes and published several communications and framework for the future European society and its learning, education and training: Based on the Lisbon Declaration, the vision of the Information Society called i2020 and the established Bologna Process (European Commission 2005), the European Commission and Council have reviewed and analysed the impact of the globalisation, the internet and the information technologies in general leading to current new communications and policies: The Digital Age for Europe, EUROPE 2020 and Education and Training 2020 are reflecting these movements with special emphasis on the potentials for the European citizens and communities (European Commission 2010a and 2010b, European Council 2009).

In the international discussions about the future learning, education and training from theory, research and politics but also from press, individuals and social communities, the main focus is currently on the technological innovations and their opportunities. Theories and experts are claiming brand new and extraordinary chances, sometimes promising new learning eras and paradigmas. Even the arrival of fundamental new ways of learning are promised under the label of learning 2.0 / 3.0 in analogy to the terms web 2.0 / 3.0.

It seems that learning innovations are the only path and road map for a better future education and training: The underlying (and often hidden) argument is that through them we are earning many new chances to learn, without them not fitting we are not fitting to the changing times of globalisation and worldwide internet as well as to the new digital generation, the so labelled "digital natives". We call this discussion the (learning) innovation strand.

On the other hand, there is a long-term discussion with huge tradition (since the beginning of our culture) about the learning quality covering a broad range of topics like quality of learning design, objectives, materials, input as well as learning processes, outcomes and the achieved knowledge, skills and built competences. Many theories were developed in the past dealing directly or

implicitly with the question how to ensure or to improve the learning quality. We call this debate the (learning) history strand even if some of the topics like quality management for education and training are less than 100 years old.

Surprisingly, both discussion strands, the new innovation and the old history, are not interconnected and not reflecting each other. It seems that the supporters of learning innovations do not want to refer to theories of the past and that the authors of learning history do not want to recognise global changes vice versa. That leads us to an important question that requires urgently attention and an answer in our changing times: What is the relation between learning innovations and learning quality?

Our answer is based on three hypotheses of the current learning situation:

1. Learning history should not and cannot be ignored.
2. Learning innovations are mainly technology-driven.
3. Learning is not completely changing.

First of all, it has to be stated clearly that the worldwide changes by globalisation and internet for all through world wide web and social media and communities do not justify to withdraw or ignore all theories from the past. They are resulting from many discussions across societies, cultures and centuries leading to learning experiments, evaluations, failures as well as successes and finally to the improvement of both, the learning opportunities as well as the learning theories themselves. Modern innovation theories ignoring this treasure of expertise from the history are losing a well-proven underground for basing their argumentation (even if contradictory) that is providing a huge variety of different concepts (e.g. cf. for extremes the theories of cognitive development by Piaget (1953) and the systems theories by Luhmann (1995 and 1998) and Maturana/Varela (1992)). Moreover they cannot convince by such ignorance because without definition of their relation to the historical strand they claim to jump out of nothing (see figure 2 below) and start from the scratch (what is evidently not the case).

Second, the currently claimed learning innovations based on the effects of new internet opportunities, services and social media are only dealing with technological changes and chances: Of course we can realize diverse learning scenarios and (digital) communities, services and systems today that were not available several years ago (like social communities, MOOCs, blogging). But these technological inventions and changes are offering only new options and pre-