John Sumpter 0:01

Welcome is Thilo Yes, that's how I pronounce it. Yes. pronounced right. Excellent. Well, I'm John. And we were talking earlier today. And we started a really interesting conversation. But before we get into that, do you want to tell us your full name, what your role is, where you come from bit of background would be great.

Thilo Harth 0:31

Yeah, I'm Thilo,. I'm a professor at the Minster, University of Applied Sciences in Germany. We are in university, a university with approximately 15,000 students, and around 300 professors. And we have a lot of different disciplines, from architecture, to design to several disciplines in engineering. And in Business Administration, and the School of Health and all these things, though, we have 13 different departments of faculty. And I'm working in the institution for quality development, our university is very not well known about this, our system of quality management, and our institution is has to deal with all this, these kinds of things, we do the valuation, not only for the lessons for the in the field of teaching and learning, we do all the evaluation for the whole university, how we can can improve our quality and organize the students, all all the kinds of things, what university has to do. And this institution for quality development has one department for evaluation and one department for didactics. I'm an I, the head of the unit of this, of this didactic unit. I'm a professor for technical didactics. I've worked in the field of vocational teacher training. But now I'm working for improvements at our university in the field of teaching and learning. And we have a close relationship to our leaders of the university. Because our university wants to be a kind of a change agent. Our key aspect is compass competence, profiles, current and future competence profiles for our students. Our students shall become change agents, agents for themselves. So we have to look what is the change in the world? What is the change, for example, in the field of digitalization, and how can students deal with this change? And how do they have sustainable competencies? So it's not not so much about technic? It's more about the kind of competencies which we help to improve at university.

John Sumpter 3:25

Right. Okay. Well, that's really, really interesting. Thank you for that Thilo. And I think, hopefully, you will agree that so far that the conference that we're at has been really good. There's been some really good sessions, and I've particularly enjoyed the keynotes and, and something that I picked up from the keynote keynote yesterday, which was the keynote was by Warren Burger, and he was encouraging us to question or to use questioning as a starting point for innovation. And we were talking about that yesterday. And you mentioned and correct me if I'm wrong, please. Do you mentioned something about a workshop of change with leaders? Can you tell me a little bit more about that? Because that sounds really really interesting.

Thilo Harth 4:07

Yeah, we did. The German word of our institution is Vander vac vandal is a word for change. And work is a kind of a workshop, like a mechanical garish or something like that. And, and we want to, to be the change agent for our whole university. And so this conference is a good example I want to get, I want to become new fresh ideas around the world. And I bring these ideas into our university. And then we have the chance to have several further education programs to inform and to teach about new aspects in teaching and learning and to help our our colleagues to to improve their teaching and learning and The initial situation is at all universities around the world to same, you have three groups of professors. One group is they don't like any improvements in teaching and learning, I think the traditional ones, then we have the avant garde, we have the people who are always interested in in new ideas, new techniques, new, new ways, how they can experiment and make experiments experiment, do to be experimental in learning settings, and these kind of things. And in the middle, there are a lot of colleagues there. They are interested in improvements in teaching and learning. But also they are interested in their research, and they have different interests. And sometimes they don't like to talk too much about teaching and learning. Yeah, so and we we want to reach most the the avant garde and the middle group, not so the traditional group, it's hard to deal with, with this colleagues.

John Sumpter 6:12

Well, this is really, really interesting. And what grabbed my attention when you mentioned it, when we spoke yesterday is, as I mentioned to you, one of the things that I do at GSK is run with my colleagues, the digital leaders program. And one of the topics that we talk about with our participants, is what we call skeptics and enthusiasts, those people that you were just describing, then yeah, and we spend a lot of time trying to explore, well, how do we work with because as leaders as digital leaders, how do we work with skeptics? How do we encourage support them and put in kind of frameworks to allow them to move from being skeptical into evangelists and people that want to use technology? And then, but also, I think, almost importantly, is how do we work with those people who are running off into the sunset who are really engaged in technology, but sometimes they're not waiting for everybody else? They're not waiting for the institution, they're just running off? So how do you deal with these two different complete spectrums of people? what's your what's your technique that you've been applying to, to try and help that

Thilo Harth 7:30

you need different approaches? One approach is only small improvements, only small steps use only small steps. The keynote yesterday was about how you can ask beautiful questions. Yeah, it's a small thing. Please think about your your way, how you, you, you question your students. And this small thing can be a door opener for further improvements. Because the skeptics see, it's, it's not painful, it's easy. And you have to chance to to make small or little improvements and then to see how it works. Sometimes it was not better, but it works better mostly. And then you can do the next step and enter into classic people can you reach with a competition of the best ideas we have a competition for the best ideas at our university? Okay, we have a budget 300 300,000 Euro budget each year okay. And then we say you can get a piece a part of this money, yeah, ask for his money and say what is your improvement idea, right in teaching and learning okay. And then there is a bot, an external board and an internal bot with members from other universities and with members from our colleagues from our university and then this bot make the decision this is this project is better and this project is not so good. And then the best projects will be funded. And then they have to chance to do their own improvements. This is a very important thing not Vander vac says, this is a good idea, please do it. We say please look at current and further competence profiles, right. And please give us an answer your answer. What do you want to do to improve your teaching and your learning? Right? And if you have a good idea, please write an application and perhaps you you get some money too. to work with this small project, and then we learn from this project, and then we tell other colleagues in at our university. Hey, there is a very cool project. And perhaps it's also helpful for you. Yeah. So that's just the way how we do it.

John Sumpter 10:20

That's excellent.

John Sumpter 0:01

So yes, you were just telling us kindly about the competitions that you run. And then they apply their improvements afterwards. And it's improvements that they've wanted to put in, they've discovered. So what happens after that to do those successful projects, they the the results get disseminated across the university, and it tries to impact on other on other teachers, other curriculums.

Thilo Harth 0:27

Yeah, we give these colleagues a floor to show what they

have to showcase what they've done to show when you say that, can I just ask when you say a floor? So is this you know, is it a blog? Is it an event? Is it an in person?

It's an event? It's a kind of event? For example, we have one day for teaching and learning in the year? Yeah. The whole staff

John Sumpter 0:57

has allotted development day

Thilo Harth 0:59

development. Day about maybe it's called a day for learning culture. It's a day of learning culture at university. Okay, and then we can a catchy title, but yeah. So and, and it's a currency for professors. You can't give them more money. You can't give them more time, but you can give them fame, fame. Yeah, kind of fame. chance to

John Sumpter 1:37

showcase Yeah, to

Thilo Harth 1:41

go under stage and show me what wonderful things things you are doing. And perhaps, I like this idea so much that I came in contact with you, I come in contact with you. And then I and I learned from you from your ideas, and I adapt this, these ideas for my lessons. And from my kind of,

John Sumpter 2:04

and that sounds really sensible idea. And I'm sure there'll be people in the UK that have done something similar. There's quite often pots of money that people can bid for, for projects I'm interested in, in your role and what you do, do you following on from those events where someone showed what they've done? And then someone becomes interested? Do you work with them? Do you help them to continue that that learning process? This is our job? Yeah. Okay. And

we What are you?

What are your kind of what are the main takeaways people could take learn from you about how you successfully do that?

Thilo Harth 2:42

We have a lot of dissemination channels 111 channel is to make a sample of all the good ideas in a data base at our website. Okay, so you can search for all the former projects, and you can find these ideas in the last 10

John Sumpter 3:05

years. So how many will we'll be talking if you if there are lots and lots of

Thilo Harth 3:11

I think more than more than 200 projects, okay. Mostly, it's better to have small projects, not the big ones. The biggest size is about 60,000 euros. But it's better to have mostly it's better to have only 15,000 euros, okay, to give colleagues some kind of some some some staff, some additional staff to deal with the new

John Sumpter 3:46

because it's time ISN'T IT staff and time to get these things Yeah, on top of the normal day job, and to be able to do these things they need time and money. And that's basically what this gives them.

Thilo Harth 3:57

Yeah, and our, our leaders of the university that and we do so you have to chance to cut your amount of lessons you have to your teaching

John Sumpter 4:12

hours. So you can reduce your kind of teaching hours to give you more space, you give you

Thilo Harth 4:17

more space for this innovation project. And then you can reduce your, your the total number of lessons to you have to repeat you have to give in the semester.

John Sumpter 4:29

So that's a really important point. And particularly trying to get money is something that, you know, you can take money from a bank, and you can give it to your professors. But time is always that thing. That is the hardest thing we're always told, particularly in the UK, and I'm sure it's internationally, no one ever has time to do these things. But so that's a real key ingredient that you said there to success is that those professors they're teaching hours, their research hours, shall we say I'll read jooste giving them space for innovation to actually apply it, which is a really sensible thing to do.

Thilo Harth 5:07

But you're called it to be fame is also important. A lot of professors want to, to have benefits for, for all the things they do. And they want to see how it's a very good thing that you have a new idea for your lessons, or you have a new learning environment, and you experiment with a lot of ideas. This is very, very important for for me and my colleagues.

John Sumpter 5:39

Yeah. So. So it's a combination of that been kind of given the time, call it money, but time, a platform to present their research and their work to kind of uplift their standing. And what else do you think is helps it to be successful these projects

Thilo Harth 6:06

it's not so easy to, to do the all day lessons every every semester. And if you see, the pride is if you see the smiling faces from colleagues who have a new idea, and who have a new learning environment. For example, there is a new Makerspace in, in the Department of Teacher Education. And it's a very cool room. And it's a very cool learning environment. And you see, you see satisfied students and you'll see this teacher who loves his work and who loves the way how it works with the students. And then it's, it's yeah, it's interesting for for all the other colleagues, and, and they say, oh, I want to have such a room to nothing, but this is not not possible. But it is possible to show this there is the room in this department, please use this room, from your faculty. But take the step out of your faculty in toward the Teacher Training Education faculty, yeah, and then please use this room and, and have the same impression.

John Sumpter 7:35

So I mean, that on its own is a really good thing. It's where we often talk about particularly in higher education that happens at further education as well. departments working in silos, you know, they stick to their areas. So this is encouraging, you know, the crossover, the breaking down of those walls and working collaboratively and sharing spaces, which is, which is a really great thing.

Thilo Harth 7:57

Yeah, we have a did this competition has topics and one topic is please avoid silo structures, these collaborate with colleagues from other facilities, from our faculties, and please do interdisciplinary models of teaching and learning. And this is a key aspect to have success in this competition. Yeah,

John Sumpter 8:28

that's that's, that's really interesting. And some really important points that I just like to ask you going off on a slight tangent, slight different direction. And again, we started yesterday to talk about it briefly. But you may have picked up in today's keynote by Natalie Nixon. She talked about encouraging creativity in the hybrid workplace. And we spoke earlier about how the pandemic as it has in the UK, internationally is helped education institutions, it's we all know this is pushed them forward in its use of technology to deliver education. But just thinking about the hybrid work place and thinking about the workplace of today in the future. Do you feel that the work you're doing and some of the topics that we're talking about, will help students more quickly learn in a space that will represent the workplace of the future? More?

Thilo Harth 9:33

Yes and no. Yes, because this COVID environment was a kind of catalyst for involve new technologies into the classroom, and to have new remote modes in the way how we teach and how we learn. And so it So it's, it's more close to the working world than before, because the working world is in a hybrid hybrid environment. And so, the university has to go with this changes and have to deal with this changes and have to provide study program with with us face to face, but also hybrid and also totally remote in a remote mode. But we have learned in this COVID pandemic, to look closer to the learning environments on the campus, what is what is that what we have missed? In the last two years? What is what is this? You've missed our our ordinary

John Sumpter 11:02

interaction

Thilo Harth 11:03

interaction, but what is this in concrete? In what what do you miss? When when I asked you what is you can't go to the campus, you have to work at home and you have to deal with Zoom conference or something like that? What is What are you missing? And so now we we investigate all the places at our university? And we want to find out what are the most impressing places? And and what are the nutso impressing places? And what are the what is the way of teaching and learning at our university, which make our university unique or watch is if if this if your study program come comes to an end. And then you say, you look better you look at this program and you say, Oh, I do my study in Muenster at University of Applied Sciences. And it was pretty cool, because there was a makerspace, or there was a lab, a beautiful lab, and then I had the chance to deal with my to work together with my colleagues and to, to learn new new kinds of things and contents. And, and there is there was a wonderful place to have a coffee break. And we sit there till till midnight, and it was wonderful to discuss in this area. So now we want to find out which places at our university are so exciting, so special, so wonderful. And then we want to give all the staff and all the students in the in the university, the chance to know more about this cool regents disk, this cool rooms, this this beautiful environment, because all of the students have the silo structure then only know their own facility, their own own faculty. And now, we want to have the chance to open the eyes and to show the students look in the Department of Architecture there have a wonderful place where you can sit where you can have Vega you can learn for yourself and and it's it's a quiet place.

John Sumpter 13:47

Can I ask just some basic questions? How do you do that? How do you get that message across to students? It sounds a simple question. But going back to you know, powerful questions yesterday, you know, the simple ones are can be the most powerful and how do you actually tell the students? So is this announcements on the website or you contact them directly rather lectures? How do you get through to them?

Thilo Harth 14:12

It's an important question because it's we used another direction, not we are the agents of for searching of this all this kind of rooms, we said to the students, you are our if you are our source for information, please tell us please show us the places you laugh. Please show us the places which you have missed in the independent and Pandemic pandemic semesters. And then we add this is the first step and the next step is to to inform The whole university what we have what findings we have? Yeah. And then to Yeah, to have the chance to create new new rooms, new kind of learning environments, okay, in this direction. And we have a budget for this because there is a new project in the university, it's about round 3 million euros. And with this approach with this student centered abroad, yeah, we, this was our application, and

John Sumpter 15:49

it's informing the design of the university and what you go on how you build your other rooms?

Thilo Harth 15:55

Yeah. And it's not, it's not the old man like me. Say, Oh, this is a pretty cool learning environment, please, we want to have more from the from this. Now we ask our students, what is the way how you learn as a 2025? old person? Yeah. And what do you like to do? And? And what and? And at? At which time do you do? Do you use this learning environment? Do you need openness of the campus? On the weekends? Do you need openness of the campus in in the evening do you need? Especially we talked about it? Do you need work space outside of the buildings in the surroundings of, of the buildings, okay, in the nature, and so we

John Sumpter 16:51

so the students are directly informing those decisions and how you develop that. And student centered work is incredibly important. So that's fascinating to hear your work around that? And I'm sure there's gonna take a lot from that. I've got one final question to round up, if that's okay for you. And going off on a slightly different tangent again, in the UK, and the research that Jeske where I work does, we, we asked all of higher education, what their top priorities were, for the next six months next year. And digital transformation and digital leadership came out on top. And that had moved up three paces. Three places from I think it was 18 months before. So how higher education institutions transform using digital as the top of the list for the UK? In your experience? Where would you put that? Is it also the top for you? Or is it lower down? Do you feel that? How do you feel that situation looks at your institution?

Thilo Harth 18:04

It's in the in the top list? I don't know if it is on the top position? Yeah. Now we have it's a pity because you have such mega thematic areas in the university. The transformation of digitalization was the top the top priority before COVID. And then with COVID, we there was a little change to sustainable development goals and to deal with such things. The good message is all these mega topics have relations to each other. So if you talk about sustainable development, you have also to talk about digital transformation. And if you talk about copy, you have to talk about digital transformation. So we have a lot of these. And the change a climate climate change is a very big topic.

John Sumpter 19:29

It's a topic that's come up a lot more in the UK and and Jessica, I am has just they've just published a report on sustainability and its importance in the higher education sector. I suppose one final question for you just with regards to digital transformation is something that we have discovered through our own research and working with members across the UK is that although they recognize and say that digital transformation is the most important thing at the moment. Actually, when you start to drill down into what what it means, and particularly if we start to define what is digital leadership, quite often they won't know. So we help them to define that. So my question to you is people that you work with, do you think they know what digital leadership is? What, what makes a digital leader? Or do you think people are still scratching their head, and they're not quite clear on that?

Thilo Harth 20:33

It's different, I think a lot of colleagues know the changes for leadership in this digital area. And they know they have to, to be more agile in process management and some of these kind of things. Yeah. But it's, it's, it's a pity. The curricula are very sustainable. And it's, it's very hard to improve curriculum and to change them models, for example, to have a new model about digital leadership and, and to change a traditional model to have the space in the in the study, particularly

John Sumpter 21:24

if you're working with those those skeptical people that believe in it, getting them to change is hard.

Thilo Harth 21:30

And it's harder in the in the field of engineering departments, they have very sustainable curriculars and they say, a German engineer is a German engineer. But then, now, digital leadership is a new tasks and we need new competencies, we need new skills, but digital leadership means to to work with intercultural and interdisciplinary team and, and to deal with this team by zoom or Bye, bye. Bye. Remote technology. Yeah.

John Sumpter 22:11

Well, that's fun. It's fantastic speaking to you to thank you ever so much, and really appreciate you being on the podcast. So thank you.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai