THE TECHNOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF DISRUPTIVE EDUCATION AT UNED

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The future of universities is uncertain to put it mildly. Analysts argue that over the next 10 to 20 years up to 50% of universities will end up in bankruptcy or just be forced to close. If this is the case for traditional or face-to-face (henceforth F2F) universities then it is arguably more so for distance-learning universities, since they not only face the challenges of a changing educational marketplace but also ever stronger competition from their F2F counterparts offering online services. So the question needs to be asked about how the former can address this problem.

At UNED we have always applied *dogfooding* to our educational model. We are fast approaching our 50th anniversary, and what we have learnt over the decades is the value of applying the results of the research of our academics on the methodological and technological bases of ODE/ODL to our educational services, and as such, to our core business model. The authors argue, based upon what they perceive in their working context, that the competitive advantage that distance universities have over F2F ones is precisely the intrinsic value of the innovative long-tail of contributions that can come from our staff who are on the bleeding-edge of the distance educational process. This provides us with a unique opportunity not only to participate in the change, but more specifically, take a leading role in it! However, it is not always easy incorporating these results.

Technology is clearly a facilitator here, it is the wheels on the bus, the glue in the model and the verb in the sentence. Without it, our fundamental capacity to provide *disruptive educational services*, and at the same time remain agile and be able to adapt to a constantly changing educational context, without affecting the integrity of our service infrastructure, would be seriously limited. If new revenue streams do not appear as a result of what we are doing, then we should question its value. A key feature here is the changing relationship of students to education, and therefore our institution, moving from one-time degree seekers to committed life-long learners, as the need arises. Some corporations are even beginning to question the value of university degrees as opposed to shorter more focussed courses.

What we have learnt at UNED over the years is that technological support for new methodological ODE/ODL contexts can never be selected/developed for its individual intrinsic value but as part of an overall institutional strategy that potentiates the long-tail of institutional member participation, be it from lecturers, tutors, or support staff. If this cannot

be guaranteed, then we run the risk of today's solution becoming tomorrow's problem. The irony for most institutions is that innovation in their educational services has little or no effect on their business model. A case will be made here for the technological foundations of disruptive education using examples from UNED.