Carpe Diem for Transformation:
Case Study from University of Stellenbosch

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Abstract

The Carpe Diem Learning Design Methodology (Carpe Diem) has been beneficially and extensively adopted in many universities throughout the world. The methodology enables fast and effective collaboration between academics, professional staff and other stakeholders for re/design of modules or new/refreshed programmes, in the service of improvements and future-proofing for students' learning. This paper briefly outlines the approach including visioning the future for graduates, authentic assessment, threshold concepts, the 5-stage model, e-tivities, storyboarding and action planning.

Some universities are now seeing Carpe Diem as a key enabler in their strategic drive to transform educational provision on a large-scale in their institutions, in addition to progressive and collaborative learning design. We explore the application of Carpe Diem in a major educational transformation programme at Stellenbosch University (SU) in South Africa, where the intent included innovation, creativity and addressing students' changing needs. We summarise some key outcomes of a Carpe Diem intervention as a catalyst for Stellenbosch's educational transformation. Our action research demonstrated that the impact of an original one-week collaborative Carpe Diem experience, covering all faculties and ten major degree programmes, was sustained over the following 12 months. It created acceptance and strong interest across the campus in transforming learning and proved a fitting catalyst for Stellenbosch's programme renewal initiatives.

We offer a summary of recommendations for those who wish to move beyond valuable learning design, to enable key catalysts and create watersheds to scale-up and extend strategic renewal efforts.

Keywords. Carpe Diem learning design, institutional transformation, future-proofing students' learning, pedagogy, renewal.

Introduction: About Carpe Diem

The methodology is called 'Carpe Diem'—meaning 'seize the day'. Carpe Diem Learning Design was established in the year 2000 as an initiative using agile project development to design innovative student-centred courses, deploying well researched pedagogical processes (Salmon, 2011, Salmon & Wright, 2014) and productively incorporating new technologies. It became clear that the collaborative processes engaged academic and professional staff in new, supportive and more acceptable ways, providing them with a vehicle to work together and opened their eyes to new teaching possibilities (Vlachopoulos, 2018). It also actively and successfully promotes teamwork, especially between academics, technologists and librarians (Sputore et al., 2016, Oakley, 2016). The methodology was extensively researched and then extended through a (UK) Higher Education Academy funded project from 2005 (Armellini et al., 2009) and has since continued to be adopted by many institutions and countries for MOOCs, online and blended learning (Usher, et al., 2018).

There are two types of Carpe Diem methods - one offering 'programme design', for whole degrees through future visioning, threshold concepts and authentic assessment (Villarroel, et al. 2017). The other tackles 'module design' including detailed storyboarding (Salmon & Wright, 2014) and prototyping of online activities

(e-tivities) (Salmon, 2013). Both are suitable for the refresh and redesign of courses (from campus to blend or online), as well as future proofing new developments. Both deploy Carpe Diem principles of:

- Scaffolding and student-centredness (Salmon, 2011);
- Cross-professional and disciplinary collaboration, development and feedback (Salmon & Wright 2014);
- 'Start with the end in mind' i.e. future visions and missions, then creating a design brief for student outcomes and explicit value (Salmon, 2019);
- Visual and systems thinking, including storyboarding for pedagogical processes and curriculum structures (Lewrick, et al, 2018);
- Well researched evidence-led pedagogical processes including authentic assessment (Villarroel et al. 2017) and threshold concepts (Land et. al, 2017, Currie, 2017, Timmermans & Meyer, 2017) and the 5-stage model, e-tivities and active online learning (Salmon, 2013);
- Fast, agile and action based, including rapid prototyping (Dilan & Aydin, 2019).

There are extensive openly available video resources and handbooks to be found at www.gillysalmon.com/carpe-diem.

Carpe Diem for institutional transformation

In institutions where Carpe Diems have been undertaken at scale, the approach has proven to be suitable for all disciplines and levels of learning. In addition, Carpe Diem ensures that the academic-lead is constantly respected as the knowledge owner; hence wider acceptability and indeed motivation can be observed, making a contribution to acceptable transformation and renewal efforts; ultimately opening doors for the university to achieve wider reshaping for the future (Posselt, et al, 2019). In addition, Carpe Diem has a demonstrated impact on the quality of students' learning and their outcomes. For example, Carpe Diem was extensively deployed at the University of Western Australia over 3 years (more than 300 teaching units and modules were designed or redesigned) resulting in collaborative transformation and an upturn in student satisfaction and experience ratings, hence directly demonstrating positive transformation impact (Oakley, 2016).

Case Study: Stellenbosch's transformation

In 2017, the Vice-Rector (Learning and Teaching) at Stellenbosch University (SU) in South Africa started a strategic programme renewal process to enable all ten faculties to increase their use of ICT-enabled, innovative, future-focused, integrated and inclusive pedagogies. This strategy emphasized review and renewal of academic programmes for achievement along those lines.

SU needed to consider implementation methodologies that had evidence of achieving learning transformation. It also needed to simultaneously reflect the sensitivities of the South African context and wished to ensure that control and accountability were kept with the programme and module leaders.

Following research, SU chose the Carpe Diem Learning Design methodology. In addition to the pedagogical benefits, SU was interested in the framework of Carpe Diem which is based on a 'resource' definition of strategic change (Salaman & Asch, 2003), focusing on development of capability through collaborative effort, identifying the institution's core capabilities and existing strengths i.e. what it is good at, what makes it special, what can it do well and differently.

The Carpe Diem week

In May 2017, SU provided a week-long Carpe Diem experience to its staff. Each of the ten faculties at SU nominated one academic programme for renewal. The workshop was set up in a large off-campus venue, near the University. Each faculty group had their own tables, wall space and resources to work as a team in so-called "pods".

Day One (Monday) was used by the facilitator to brief the support, technological and leadership staff who would assist the faculty teams for the rest of the week. Day Two (Tuesday) was the 'Programme level day',

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while Days Three and Four (Wednesday-Thursday) was for working at modules level. Day Five (Friday) was for feedback, further discussion by the SU leadership team, research, evaluation and action planning.

Over one hundred staff attended one or more sessions during the week. There was a high level of commitment, participation, engagement and retention of interest from the participants. The energy level remained high and sustained throughout the workshops.

At the end of Day Two, each pod had collaboratively created a 'rich picture', (Berg & Pooley, 2013). This image was largely graphical and symbolic with limited wording and often quite artistically - each one depicting the future graduates and new aspirational missions for their respective programmes. The pods then proceeded to create curriculum and mode-of-learning storyboards, planning pacing and scaffolding of the learning processes (over several years), agreements on the allocation of course credits, threshold concepts and authentic assessment commentaries, detailed task-based action plans and 'Footprints to the Future' (i.e. messages and reminders to the modules designers).

In addition, opportunities for sharing amongst the pods were created, when the faculty teams provided feedback to each other, which ultimately contributed to increased collaboration across the institution. This enhanced partnership effort is one of the key drivers for programme renewal to become more fully embedded within the institution.

During Day Three and half of Day Four, the Module Carpe Diem process was fully deployed. It resulted in the re-design of 15 modules across the 10 programmes. Participants used storyboards to align their new 'design briefs' with Stellenbosch's learning-centred principles. These storyboards included calendars with agreed course calendar locations for face-to-face learning and teaching (including lab work and placements), electronic resources and interactions, frequent and effective feedback and the allocation of assessments. The teams learnt more about and applied the 5 stage model (Salmon, 2011) and included e-tivities (Salmon, 2013). Participants in the module pods visibly enjoyed the development and prototyping of online interactive activities (e-tivities) and having the opportunity to trial each other's prototypes and developments in real time.

Day Five included the action planning to evaluate, involve and sustain impacts through discussions with management and other stakeholders. This feedback was included in the conceptualisation of an evaluation study of the intervention and its impact submitted for ethics approval for research at SU. This mixed mode study continued over a period of one year (Mullarkey & Hevner, 2018). Survey results (one month and 12 months after the event) and interviews with stakeholders (six months after the event) were triangulated for rigour, understanding, interpretation and confidence (Flick 2017).

Outcomes from action research

Survey results: June 2017

One month after the Carpe Diem workshops, a survey was distributed to all participants of the May 2017 workshops. 54 delegates completed the survey of which 47 had attended all three days (the programme day and the two module days).

Survey questions asked about the value of the workshops for both module and programme renewal. Ten of the participants indicated that Carpe Diem workshops were "indispensable" for module renewal and 16 participants indicated that they were "indispensable" for programme renewal. The majority of the participants believed that the workshops were meaningful for both module and programme renewal.

Participants identified aspects that were particularly useful for them:
- The Carpe Diem method is easy to use, flexible and enables rapid planning by academics who typically have limited time to engage in programme and module renewal, and the approach can easily be adapted within a specific context.
- The visual mapping method enabled them to have 'the end in mind' whilst also 'working backward from outcomes to pedagogical design', to create more coherence within modules and programmes.

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- Dedicated time and structured sessions within a creative space to reflect on their programme renewal design and take current and future design into account.
- Carpe Diem provided a framework to see the 'bigger picture'. They could also create a 'roadmap' with milestones for both module and programme renewal.
- The facilitator's guidance and skills.
- The collegial sharing with colleagues from their own and other faculties creating synergies and learning from each other, accompanied by the appreciation of the institutional nature of the programme renewal initiative. This created a sense of common purpose, whereas previously, programme design was often seen as an isolated 'administrative' process.
- The focus on 'threshold concepts', which were used extensively during the workshops, and also as motivator to influence colleagues around programme renewal, who had not had the benefit of the workshops.

Some of the less positive feedback included:
- Some participants noted the fast pace of the workshop, which was difficult to maintain when working with large numbers in the teams.
- Some participants did not enjoy the hands-on activities.
- Some participants felt that shorter sessions would have been preferable.
- One faculty felt that it was less suitable for them because their programme was complicated and difficult to pull apart in this way.
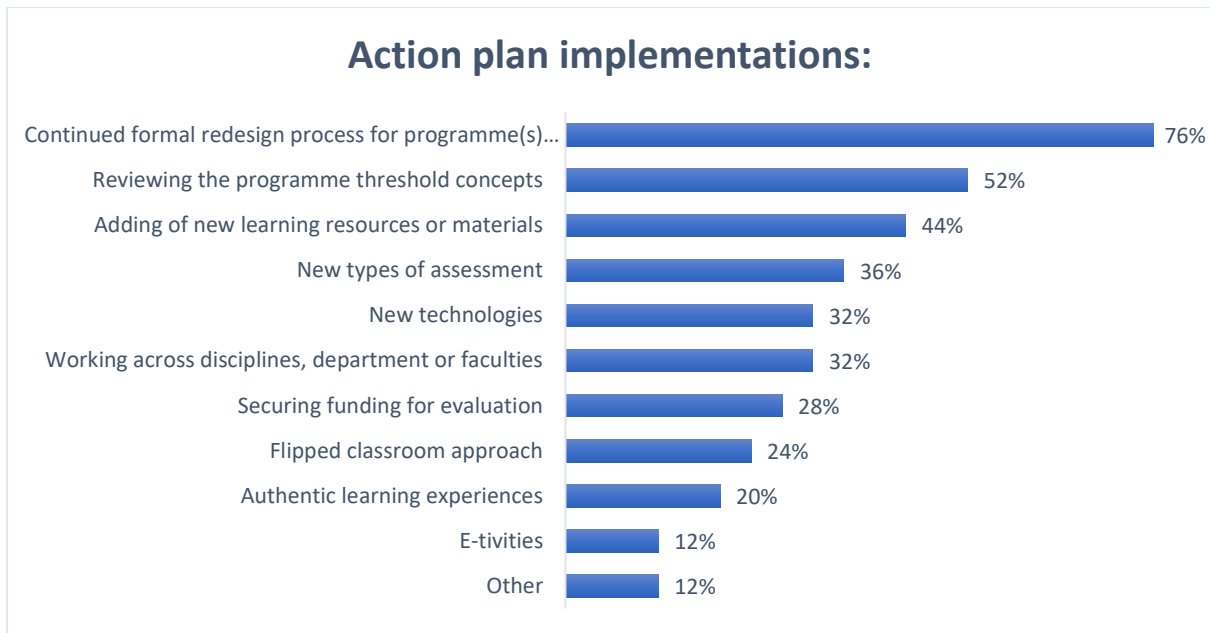
Six months after the event

One of the researchers undertook a semi -structured interview with Dr Antoinette van der Merwe, Senior Director: Learning and Teaching Enhancement at Stellenbosch University, 6 months after the Carpe Diem week. The most important issues that emerged included:
- Most of the participants were energised by the Carpe Diem intervention and greater cohesion between staff had resulted in shared agreements for the way forward.
- It was difficult for some of them, where the most radical changes were suggested, to convince and engage other colleagues who did not attend the workshops.
- To sustain the outcomes of the intervention, the Vice-Deans' Forum for Teaching and Learning now meets once a term to discuss programme renewal initiatives.
- Funding has been secured which allows for the buy-out time of lecturers, and to undertake further planning workshops and research.

Survey after 12 months

To determine the more lasting impact of the intervention, a survey was sent out 12 months after the workshops to 76 participants who attended all or some of the three days. 25 participants, from all faculties but one, completed the survey.

The majority of the respondents (76%) had deployed their action plans drawn up during the Carpe Diem workshops to continue with programme renewal in their respective faculties (Figure 1). Three elements that received the most attention were programme-level threshold concepts (52%), adding new learning resources (44%) and new types of assessment (36%).

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Action plan implementations:

Element	Percentage
Continued formal redesign process for programme(s)...	76%
Reviewing the programme threshold concepts	52%
Adding of new learning resources or materials	44%
New types of assessment	36%
New technologies	32%
Working across disciplines, department or faculties	32%
Securing funding for evaluation	28%
Flipped classroom approach	24%
Authentic learning experiences	20%
E-tivities	12%
Other	12%

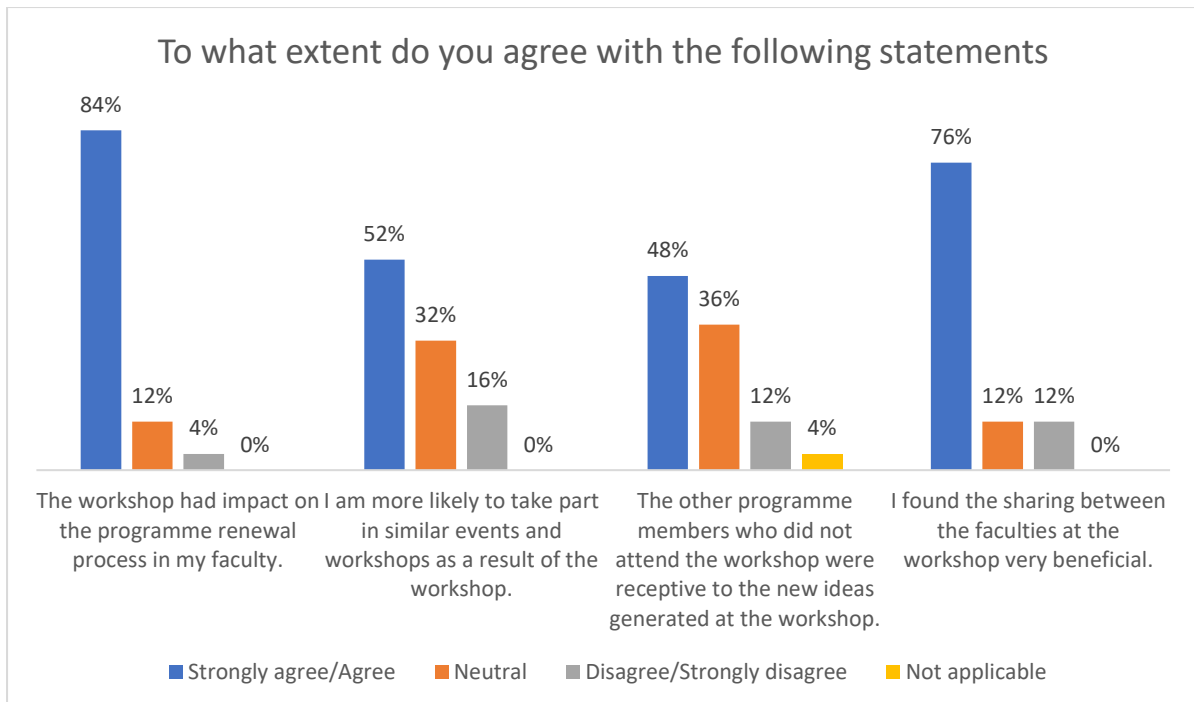**Figure 1: Elements implemented from the Action Plan created in the Carpe Diem workshops**

When asked why the participants did not implement all aspects of their action plans, participants cited time constraints, that some programmes are still in the planning and development stages or that other elements of their action plans will be addressed at a later stage.

It is clear from Figure 2, that the intervention did have the intended catalyst as impact could be seen one year after the workshop and much work was ongoing, both in terms of the programme renewal process as well as the sharing between faculties. The majority of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the following two statements:
- The workshop had an impact on the programme renewal process in my faculty (84%).
- I found the sharing between the faculties at the workshop very beneficial (76%).

There was a somewhat lack of engagement and acceptance of programme team members who did not attend the workshops, that became evident during the feedback at this point. This was also confirmed by the survey results with only about half of the respondents (48%) indicating that those who did not attend the workshop were receptive to the new ideas generated at the workshop.

Two further aspects support the enduring influence of the Carpe Diem experience. First 68% of the respondents indicated that they still use the skills that they acquired during the workshop. Second, 80% of the respondents indicated that the workshop changed their view on module and programme design; it clarified and gave structure as to how to go about starting the redesign process. These skills and the framework will continue to stand them well for other programmes and modules.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements

	Strongly agree/Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly disagree	Not applicable
The workshop had impact on the programme renewal process in my faculty.	84%	12%	4%	0%
I am more likely to take part in similar events and workshops as a result of the workshop.	52%	32%	16%	0%
The other programme members who did not attend the workshop were receptive to the new ideas generated at the workshop.	48%	36%	12%	4%
I found the sharing between the faculties at the workshop very beneficial.	76%	12%	12%	0%

Figure 2: Statements on the Carpe Diem after 12 months

Transformation to date

SU planned the Carpe Diem as a catalyst, not only to improve learning design but also within a comprehensive programme renewal process. It was envisaged as a 'Watershed' moment that would have a lasting constructive impact.

It is clear from the various feedback and ongoing actions after the workshop that it did indeed have this effect: Carpe Diem was confirmed as an appropriate methodology for learning design in the South African context; it provided the necessary and practical framework, but also allowed for contextualisation of specific knowledge areas and the environment. Many participants provided feedback that it was "indispensable" in this regard, despite initial concerns that the facilitator was not South African and possibly not sensitized to South African issues. At the time, this concern was addressed through detailed discussions before the intervention between Prof Salmon and SU representatives.

- It promoted collaboration across various faculties, departments and disciplines which is still sustained through regular workshops, supported by opportunities to receive funding for programme renewal work.
- Carpe Diem visibly contributed to the SU transformation agenda in terms of new teaching and learning approaches and aligned to the strategic intent to be innovative, future-focused and inclusive. This is sustained through a strong commitment from senior management and dedicated resources for programme renewal.
- There was an increased use of 'e-tivities' after the workshops, which aligns with SU's intent to offer more blended learning opportunities for students.
- Many of the faculties report that they still refer back to the 'rich pictures' containing visualizations of the 'graduates' of the future and the threshold concepts they would need during their programme design activities.

We conclude that the workshops were a catalyst which gave the holistic programme renewal project great momentum. As can be seen from the feedback from the participants, the impact went beyond the learning design to also include cross-faculty collaboration and community building around educational transformation. The participants also became aware of the institutional nature of the programme renewal initiative and realized that they were not alone in their programme renewal efforts, and that there is strong institutional support for their initiatives. Carpe Diem provided them with the frameworks to engage in programme renewal activities in a structured way.

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Recommendations

Based on the SU experience, some recommendations for other higher education institutions who want to initiate a similar transformation include:

- Clearly communicate and demonstrate the strategic intent and senior leadership support for the initiative and include representatives from all faculties in the first big event to promote whole-institution collaboration and engagement.
- Brief participants before the workshops so they can prepare, without overburdening them, and share the potential value of and outcomes intended for the workshops.
- Start at the academic *programme* level and then proceed to the *module* level Carpe Diem workshops, to allow academics to first visualize the ideal programme graduate before working on the module detail.
- During the module workshops introduce academics to simple frameworks and quick ways of prototyping.
- During the workshops, ensure that there is ample opportunity for sharing and discussions amongst colleagues of the same faculty, but also across the faculties.
- Ensure that each faculty leaves the workshops with plans containing follow-up actions and activities for which they take ownership and responsibility.
- As soon as possible, include a workshop within the faculties for participants who did not attend the full Carpe Diem intervention event to introduce them to the frameworks used and to obtain their engagement in the action plans generated at the workshops.
- Formulate a plan to ensure regular follow-up, continuous engagement, support and funding to sustain the momentum and impact of the workshops.
- Consider some action research to enable and value their plans at the point they are delivered to students.

Summary and conclusions

As we move to even more challenges in terms for meeting relevance in concepts and modes of learning for students for the future, combining visioning, systems thinking, creativity and collaboration with design approaches continues to be a key requirement and our best hope for accelerating transformation of higher education (Lewrick et al 2018, Salmon, in press 2019).

If a face-to-face and large-scale intervention such as Carpe Diem is planned, it is worthwhile getting as many people as possible involved in the short sharp 'seizing the day' activities. The benefits are a sense of changing their minds about what is possible and great possibilities for new relationships and collaborations across the schools, faculties and whole institution through the shared vocabulary and the visual take-aways. This impact goes well beyond outcomes usually experienced in regular professional development activities.

Clearly, to enable sustainability, effort needs to continue to be put into implementation and support over a long period of time - probably much longer than our initial action research has continued. In addition to ensuring engagement from academics and overall 'raising the bar' for their potential for pedagogical understanding and design work on their teaching, the next stage should be to explore the impact on student learning.

Carpe Diem for Transformation; Stellenbosch. Salmon, van der Merwe, Schoonwinkel. 2019.

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