Chapter 6
E-Learning Ecosystems Through the Co-Creation of Value From Service Ecosystems

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ABSTRACT

Recently the e-learning community has begun to view the e-learning environment as a self-sustaining ecosystem that provides learners with the tools and surroundings they need to achieve their learning. An e-learning ecosystem is a community where organisms interact with one another and with their physical environment. Every organism has a role to fulfil and there must be a harmonious balance between all aspects of the ecosystem in order for the organisms to flourish and evolve. An e-learning system can be considered as a service system—the application of competences for the benefit of another. What exactly are the characteristics of an e-learning ecosystem and how can e-learning professionals create such an ecosystem that provide values for the different elements of the e-learning ecosystem? This chapter shows the concepts of service ecosystems that can be used to design an effective e-learning ecosystem that will provide value to the different stakeholders involved.

INTRODUCTION

Students today are questioning whether the cost of attending universities will provide them with the knowledge and skills to succeed in the labour market. Similarly, many businesses are wondering if universities can provide students with the skills that will make them better employees and whether graduated students can deliver innovations that can be easily absorbed and applied by business to gain competitive advantage. Some governments are also questioning if it is worth spending more on higher education based on its current impact on economic and social development. In addition, communities are questioning whether universities are creating socially responsible graduates whose knowledge will drive regional innovation and economic growth and whether universities can develop open research outputs that are available to society and facilitate societal benefits.

The question is how we can address the different concerns of the stakeholders? How can the higher education sector be created to meet these concerns and what the role of the university and its stakeholders are in the process?

Many of the technologies that redefine the e-learning ecosystem have only appeared in the last decade. Many organisations have adopted these new technologies before fully understanding them, their capabilities, and how they fit in with the existing system. This results in a disconnected system with redundancies and lack of clarity. Instead of being an ecosystem wherein the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, these different technologies combine in a way that makes each of them less effective.

According to holistic understanding of the modern evolutionary theory, life evolves by a process of diversification through collaboration (Stewart 2014). Therefore universities need to shift their focus from the individual organisations to the collective life. Universities must be transforming and adapting themselves through the decentralisation of the knowledge generation and transmission away from the ivory tower into communities and society at large. Thus, universities need to partner within their ecosystem to facilitate value creation. This means adopting an e-learning ecosystem.

In today's digital world, a web of learning resources surrounds every individual. It is an environment wherein each resource connects to others, creating an overall structure in which all learning takes place. The e-learning ecosystem is the combination of technologies and support resources available to help individuals learn within an environment. It looks like we are moving towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This new revolution focusing on agility and integration of multiple solutions is not just another trend but is here to stay. It is the author believes that this Fourth Industrial Revolution will make a significant change in the way we learn and work. It is good to see that the educational community has embraced the concept of learning ecosystems enthusiastically.

The success of e-learning is dependent on the extent to which it satisfies the needs and addresses the concerns of its key stakeholders. The various stakeholders in e-learning ecosystems interact with one another in a variety of ways. The success of it thus depends on the cooperation of all of those stakeholder groups. Consequently, each stakeholder group has responsibilities towards the other stakeholders to help fulfil their motivations and address their concerns. The stakeholders of an e-learning ecosystem typically includes students, instructors, educational institutions, content providers, technology providers, accreditation body, employers, senior management, subject matter experts, staff, training staff, IT staff, etc.

Each of these stakeholders involved has his or her own individual values and needs.

Future higher education should be a central part of a collaborative ecosystem that drives positive change and comprises not just universities, business, and government, but also social enterprises, community groups and support organisations, schools, as well as society at large. It should be a truly integrated co-creation platform through which all stakeholders can connect to learn, innovate and contribute to the society in a positive way. It is through the joining and integration of the resources everyone brings to the table that value will be co-created and realized for each individual, group and organisation. An e-learning system can be considered as a service system—the application of competences for the benefit of another. What exactly are the characteristics of an e-learning ecosystem and how can e-learning professionals create such an ecosystem that will provide values for the different elements of the e-learning ecosystem?

However, the question how to design effective e-learning ecosystems that would meet the values and needs of the different stakeholders involved is not trivial. It is the author's belief that the concepts of co-creation of value in service ecosystems from service research can provide us the insights to the design of an effective e-learning ecosystem. This paper shows that concepts from service ecosystems can be used to design an effective e-learning ecosystem that will provide values to the different stakeholders

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