Chapter 9
Cultivating Recognition:
A Classic Grounded Theory of E-Learning Providers Working in East Africa

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ABSTRACT

The E-learning provision in East Africa including Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda is rapid gaining its way. E-learning providers are all groups tasked with e-learning activities including design, delivery, implementation and others. The e-learning providers are surrounded by issues and challenges (main concerns). The purposed of this study was to identify and examine the main concern amongst e-learning providers in East Africa (Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda). In this study the Classic Grounded Theory Research Methodology was used in order to identify the main concern of e-learning providers. In the course of repeated encounters with e-learning providers, this study found the concept of Cultivating Recognition to emerge as the main concern or core variable amongst these e-learning providers. The core variable within the Classic Grounded Theory research methodology is the main entity that accounts for most of the variation in the data. The core variable of the theory, the basic social psychological process of Cultivating Recognition is characterized by Legitimizing and Credentializing. The process of legitimizing involves convincing the e-learning stakeholders that the e-learning programs and projects will be delivered in a timely, valid and sustainable manner. Legitimizing process is achieved through Collaborating (reciprocal and asymmetric), Referral Networking and Strategic alliancing. Credentializing aims to enhance the stakeholders' belief in the e-learning providers' competence prior to the provision of the e-learning programs and projects. While Credentializing is achieved through Endorsementizing, Result Orienting and Prioritizing Duties, Result Orienting itself is achieved through Visualizing, Professionalizing, Focalizing and Role Delineating. This study will help e-learning providers and other groups to cultivate recognition and pave a way for their success in implementation of e-learning.

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INTRODUCTION

In a contemporary setting, in the 21st century, it is unlikely that there is a sector in East Africa, including the education sector, which functions without integrating Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into its operations. There is increased use of ICT in every aspect of the economy in East Africa (Sife, et al. 2007). It does not take an ICT specialist to see that there is on-going ICT use and development in East Africa. ICT use is concentrated more in urban areas than in rural areas due to the availability of supporting infrastructure, such as electricity and ICT expertise (Ndume et al. 2008). Sife et al. (2007) argue that, due to lack of infrastructure (electricity, internet access, bandwidth and others), the use of ICTs in rural areas is yet to reach a level which compares with that in urban areas. There are on-going debates about the use of ICTs in various sectors, not excluding the education sector, and including conferences and other forums. The education sector has witnessed rapid growth in the use of ICTs in comparison with other sectors such as agriculture (Sife et al. 2007). The use of ICTs in teaching and learning opens new vistas to education and its accessibility (Galagan, 2000). Netland (2007) argues that ICTs have become a potent force in transforming social, economic, educational, and political life both globally and in East Africa and other developing regions. ICTs provide an opportunity for educational institutions to harness and use technology to complement and support the teaching and learning process. E-learning is a popular known term used to refer the use of these ICTs to support teaching and learning (Wentling, et al, 2000; Khan, 2005; Galagan, 2000). Wentling et al. (2000:5) defined e-learning as:

The acquisition and use of knowledge distributed and facilitated primarily by electronic means. This form of learning currently depends on networks and computers but will likely evolve into systems consisting of a variety of channels (e.g. Wireless, satellite), and technologies (e.g. Cellular phones,etc.) as they are developed and adopted. E-learning can take the form of courses as well as modules and smaller learning objects. E-learning may incorporate synchronous or asynchronous access and may be distributed geographically with varied limits of time. (Wentling et al., 2000:5).

E-learning facilitates both learner engagement and the engaging of experiences (Uys, 2004; Meyen, 2000; 2002). Meyen (2002) demonstrate how e-learning helps to overcome the traditional barriers to education delivery. These barriers include lack of physical infrastructure, lack of qualified teaching staff, absence of adequate education budgets, and the failure of traditional pedagogy and curricula. East African countries are characterised by these barriers (Ndume et al, 2008). The failure of the government's efforts in building physical classrooms has created an opportunity for innovative education delivery via e-learning (Yieke, 2005).The implementation of e-learning in East African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is taking place despite the various constraints. Chacha (2009:4) argues for the importance of ICTs in education:

There is a need to tap the potential of ICTs to enhance data collection and analysis, and to strengthen management systems in educational institutions; to improve access to education by remote and disadvantaged communities; to support initial and continuing professional development of teachers; and to provide opportunities to communicate across classrooms and cultures.

Alavi and Leidner (2001) argues that e-learning's importance will grow right across the educational spectrum from primary to higher education institutions (HEIs). This prediction has been borne out in