Chapter L
Online Collaborative Integration and Recommendations for Future Research

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ABSTRACT

The concluding chapter offers the editors' insights into the book chapters' combined contribution. Using the editors' Collaborative Integration Paradigm, they examine types of collaborations described, the electronic technologies used, and the kinds of research and theories discussed by contributing authors. They consider commonalities in electronic collaboration across sectors and the significance of inter-organizational or intra-organizational structure. The editors recommend future research as well as theory-building needed to advance the field.

INTRODUCTION

This *Handbook of Research on Electronic Collaboration and Organizational Synergy* examines electronic collaboration in three sectors: business, education, and the public sector. In each sector, contributors consider collaboration within organizations and across organizational boundaries.

Electronic collaboration requires new ways of thinking that may challenge previous ways of working and motivate change. Contributors to this book, who represent a broad range of fields,

note a shift away from the old methods of one-way knowledge transfer toward collaborative models where experts become active participants and facilitators in knowledge creation.

The topic of collaboration in a connected world is complex and means different things to different chapters' authors. The research examines new approaches to problem solving and new ways to meaningfully engage participants who collaborate in various settings. The chapters in this book examine a wide range of subject matter. Contributions range from fresh voices of new researchers to evolved perspectives of experienced scholars. They used a wide range of research methods. Taken together, their work provides a snapshot of emerging interdisciplinary practice and scholarship.

To better convey the significance of these contributions, the editors systematically analyzed chapters of this book. The editors looked at the kinds of collaborations described, the electronic technologies used, and the kinds of research and theories discussed by contributing authors. They considered commonalities in electronic collaboration across sectors and the significance of inter-organizational or intra-organizational structure. Lenses used for this analysis included the editors' *Collaborative Integration Paradigm* (Salmons & Wilson, 2008).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES, METHODS AND THEORIES

This Handbook of Research draws on diverse methodologies and theories. Here is a brief summary of general theoretical and methodological traditions represented in this book. Many of the studies fall into more than one of the categories listed below, particularly when the studies were interdisciplinary.

Theories

Theories inform both the choice and implementation of methods. Sometimes they are explicitly stated in the studies, and other times implied by the strategies and outcomes of the research. Some theories that guide this book's authors are briefly described here.

Constructivist theories guide most of the chapters in the Education section and many Social Sector entries. Constructivism is regarded as both an epistomological view and an instructional method. A core notion of constructivism is that individuals live in the world of their subjective experiences—a world where they construct their own meanings. Constructivism is usually presented in contrast to positivism: the belief that reality exists independent of our own perceptions and that it follows objective natural laws.

According to constructivist theory in education, learners take responsibility for constructing meanings and the instructor takes an active role as guide. Constructivist researchers explore the different ways that subjects construct their own meanings, even in relation to the same phenomenon (Gray, 2004; Patton, 2002; Schutt, 2006; Stake, 1995). Some authors refer to constructionist rather than constructivist theories, emphasizing particular constructions of the subject which are external to an individual; rather these constructions are shared creating new, tangible knowledge (Papert, 1990).

Social constructivist theories point to the value of interaction and negotiation among learners who construct new meanings together (Bruner, 1966; Dillenbourg, Baker, Blaye, & O'Malley, 1999; Hennessy & Murphy, 1999). Social constructivists look at ways collaborative interactions catalyze cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987). *Social learning theories* focus on ways people learn in a social context by observing others, imitating others, and modeling behaviors for others. According to this theory, environmental

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