Chapter V

Combining Technology, Theory and Practice: A Finnish Experience

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ABSTRACT

Offering a valid educational experience at remote locations having few academic resources has always been a problem, financially and logistically. Yet, previous models and attempts at distance learning came up short in a number of areas. Now the Internet has opened up new possibilities. The authors were given the task of teaching an undergraduate course in Strategic Management in a remote Finnish location without many needed library resources. Their experiences led serendipitously to an approach combining a few strategic models, the Internet, and student presentations to allay fears the authors had about academic soundness in previous models. This chapter gives details of how the design of the course, which

could not have been taught adequately without the Internet, has led to a fascinating approach for using the Internet in a traditional classroom as well as in remote areas.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In most countries in the world, higher education has been hit with a quadruple threat. These are:

1. a lack of what many see as adequate funding for faculty and ancillary support people;
2. a lack of adequate funding to keep the information technology infrastructure up to date (or even close) to that available to business organizations;
3. a lack of adequate funding and knowledge of the capabilities of the omnipresent Internet, as concerns the educational process; and
4. the inexorable encroachment of "distance education" (however defined) along with the concomitant questions on quality of offerings.

While higher-level policymakers are trying to address the four threats above, the educational process must go on, with the participants making the best use of the tools available at the time. This is a practical and personal example of preserving a quality educational experience, utilizing tools from ancient (the Socratic method) to contemporary (the Internet).

Not long ago, one of the authors was asked to teach a basic management course in a rural Finnish location. The course was based on traditional readings and experiential exercises as may be found in many Fundamentals of Management courses. It went well. The students learned but there was no involvement and the professor was exhausted at the end of the day. It was extremely difficult to keep the students attentive. While teaching this very traditional course, the professor discovered that the school had several computer labs with Internet access. Partly because this was an extremely rural environment, many of the school's students spent hours on the Internet and several had already adventured into e-commerce. The professor was asked if he could return in July to teach a capstone course in Strategic Management. While initially hesitant, because he did not feel the school had the resources for teaching a capstone strategy course, he reluctantly agreed.

Upon his return to the U.S., the two authors worked together to develop a course utilizing the Internet that would achieve results similar in rigor and outcome to U.S. strategy courses and would at the same time keep the students

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