Chapter 5.10

Is E-Learning Used for Enhancing Administration or Learning?
On the Implications of Organisational Culture

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ABSTRACT

The transition from learning on campus to e-learning presents many challenges. One of the key challenges is the organisational culture, which may enhance or hinder e-learning implementation. In this chapter, we describe how the organisational culture shapes e-learning use at universities. We compare a School of Business and a School of Health Sciences. It is argued that strategies for e-learning have played a key role in shaping the organisational culture, which in turn shapes how e-learning is being used. The School of Business regarded efficient administration as the key driver while the School of Health Sciences regarded collaborative learning as the key driver for e-learning. We introduce the concepts of administration-centered and learning-centered e-learning culture to pinpoint the difference identified. A challenge is to develop an e-learning culture that values both how e-learning can be used to enhance administration and learning.

INTRODUCTION

E-learning, which we define as learning and teaching facilitated online through network technologies (Garrison & Andersen, 2003), has been increasingly adopted to support higher education. The transition to e-learning presents new challenges as expectations and roles of staff

and students evolve (Bennett & Lockyer, 2004). Implementation of e-learning environments is a complex phenomenon, comprising many influencing factors. Keller (2007) found that organisational factors, more than student attitudes or technological factors, explained differences in success in e-learning implementation. Newton (2003) suggests that the most prominent e-learning barriers are: 1) increased time commitment; 2) lack of extrinsic incentives and rewards; 3) lack of strategic planning and vision; 4) lack of support; and 5) philosophical, epistemological and social objections. Notably, these barriers are mainly organisational, rather than being due to negative student attitudes or failure of technology. This finding is in accordance with earlier studies claiming that e-learning implementation should not be viewed as a technological phenomenon, but as a process with cultural consequences (Cech & Bures, 2004), which includes negotiation between different organisational cultures (Demetriadis et al., 2003).

The aim of this chapter is to analyse how the e-learning culture shapes e-learning use and development. In doing this, the chapter is of primary interest for those who manage e-learning, which includes the development of policies and strategies. More specifically, we compare and aim to explain why two schools are characterised by different e-learning cultures, which value different uses of e-learning. For this purpose, the results from a larger study at two schools, a School of Business and a School of Health Sciences, are compared. First, we present a review of current literature. Then, we present the underlying research method and the results of the study. This is followed by a discussion, where two very different types of e-learning culture are identified, and how these cultures shape the use and development of e-learning. Then, we suggest implications for practice, i.e., suggestions on how a supportive e-learning culture can be built. Finally, we discuss future trends and put forth our main conclusions.

BACKGROUND

Organisational culture is defined in various ways in the literature. Alvesson (2002) defines it "as collectively shared forms of for example, ideas and cognition, as symbols and meanings, as values and ideologies, as rules and norms, as emotions and expressiveness, as the collective unconscious, as behavior patterns, structures and practices, etc." (p. 3). Watson et al. (1994) provide a complementary definition and say that organisational culture is "the beliefs, values, norms, mores, myths, and structural elements of a given organisation, tribe, or society". It consists of shared, commonly held and relatively stable beliefs and norms that influence behavior, actions taken and decisions made (Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Williams et al., 1993). The norms inherent in the organisational culture influence the behavioural and cognitive development that the organisation can accomplish. Hence, the organisational culture can become a severe obstacle in implementation of information technology. Leidner and Kayworth (2006) have categorised different types of conflicts that could emerge between values of the organisational culture and the implementation of information technology in an organisation; among them *system conflict* and *contribution conflict*. System conflict is a conflict that surfaces when the values implicit in a specific information technology contradict the values held by the users. For example, technologies of e-learning implemented in an organisational culture embracing campus education could cause a system conflict. Contribution conflicts refer to the disagreement between users' general values and how they perceive the contribution of information technology in their work. One example of a contribution conflict is that teachers may perceive e-learning as useful for university administration, but not for enhancing the quality of learning.

In order to decide to accept or reject e-learning technology, individuals go through an *adoption process*. Adoption is defined as "a decision to

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