Chapter IV

Toward Technological Bloat and Academic Technocracy:
The Information Age and Higher Education

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Abstract

While the strategic goals of Knowledge Management might seem new to the academy, higher education has been central to the growing Knowledge Economy and the Information Age for some time. As electronic communications and information systems have been widely adopted in colleges and universities, little scholarship has reflected upon the organizational and social changes that these technologies bring to the academic workplace. This chapter provides the theoretical groundwork

for understanding three key transformations in higher education: the digital restructuring of academic labor; the use of technology as basis for efficiency arguments; and the unintended consequences of IT accretion, which we call "technological bloat." As a consequence of these transformations, a new organizational structure may be emerging in higher education.

Introduction

The 1990s and the early 21ˢᵗ century have seen the rise of a new capitalist production cycle called the New Economy (Carnoy, Castells, Cohen, & Cardoso, 1993). The New Economy is a product of the Information Age, a period marked by rapid ascendance of the importance of knowledge and access to information (Rifkin, 2000). This chapter explores the impact of one aspect of the Information Age: the increased use of computers and computer-mediated communication in higher education institutions.

The exploration begins with a discussion of the increasing pressures experienced by higher education in the Information Age and then moves to a description of the ways in which the conceptual framework known as *academic capitalism* can be useful for understanding the context within which higher education is acting and reacting to change. Next, the theory of *technocracy* is identified, discussed, and related to higher education and the use of information technology. The chapter then turns to a discussion of the implementation and efficacy of information technology in higher education, specifically in the field of student affairs. The discussion addresses the extent to which expressed budgetary and service goals are met by the implementation of new technologies and the potential for *technological bloat* as an unintended outcome. The chapter concludes with the suggestion that the predominant organizational structure of higher education may be shifting to that of an academic technocracy as a result of the impact of higher education's focus on computing and computer-mediated communication. Suggestions for future research are also offered.

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