Chapter 12

Artifacts of Expansive Learning in Designing a Web–Based Performance Assessment System:
Institutional Effects of the Emergent Evaluative State of Educational Leadership Preparation in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Recent evidence of the adoption of technologically mediated systems of knowledge management as part of the trend to accountability in the Institutions of Higher Education around the world has been widely disseminated in World Bank and UNESCO reports, and the effects of assessment driven accountability on preparation programs extensively debated in scholarly communities. Less scholarly attention has been paid to the institutional effects of the technology enhanced performance assessment evidentiary demands on university programs undergoing review by national accrediting bodies. The lack of scholarly attention is addressed by presenting a case study examining the institutional dynamics of accreditation review experienced by faculty in one department that offered graduate programs leading to certification for education leaders. Drawing from institutional analysis (Scott, 2008a, 2008b) a conceptual framework is established in a discussion of conditions of enactment of the regulative, normative and cognitive facets of the institutional dynamics evident in the implementation ecology of accountability systems. The case study analysis outlines four phases of development of the essential elements of a web-based assessment system, and describes the questions raised by faculty about performance evidence, the assessment of that evidence, and the nature of measures of program outcome effectiveness. Classic theories of organizations fail to fully explain the concerns and questions that were raised by faculty. In contrast, Engeström's (1999, 2001, 2008) theory of expansive learning grounded in Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) provides insights into faculty responses to questions raised by the criteria for program

review established by the accrediting body. Artifacts of expansive learning evident in the development of a performance assessment system can be viewed as reflecting institutionalization of regulative, normative, and cognitive dimensions of the emergent evaluative state of leadership preparation around the world. Implications are suggested for understanding the development of information technology (IT) enhanced knowledge management systems (KMS).

INTRODUCTION

In the context of recent global economic volatility, many institutions of higher education (IHE) around the world are adapting to two significant trends of the past decade: 1) a turn to regulation and accountability (King, 2007, Shin & Harmon, 2009), and 2) technology-based socioeconomic and institutional changes (Dolata, 2009, Hage & Meuus, 2006). These two trends have had particular import for IHE that contribute to the preparation of professionals by offering programs of study leading to certification to meet the standards set by external accrediting bodies.

The first of these trends, the turn to regulation was evident over a decade ago. In an article documenting the changing face of accountability in higher education internationally that was leading to a new focus on monitoring and assessing institutional performance, Alexander (2000) observed

A new economic motivation is driving states to redefine relationships by pressuring institutions to become more accountable, more efficient, and more productive in the use of publicly generated resources. Earlier attempts by states to measure institutional efficiency and performance have generally been met with passive resistance or benign neglect in academic circles. Although this trend still prevails, an increasing number of educational leaders are now exhibiting awareness that the status quo is no longer a viable option for higher education. (p. 411)

As the millennium approached the accountability movement inundating many Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations at that time was "premised on the perception that traditional measures of institutional performance and effectiveness such as peer review and market choice" were not sufficient indicators of institutional value (p. 414). This shift had its roots in the previous decade when governments in OECD nations across the globe became interested in performance funding and budgeting for higher education (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Burke & Serban, 1997; El-Khawas & Massey, 1996; Jongbloed & Koelman, 1996; Layzell, 1998; Peters, 1992; Piper & Issacs, 1992).

By 2000, researchers had begun to study the impact of the systems for the assessment of quality in higher education that had been established in nations around the world (Brennan & Shah, 2000). This research focused on rewards/incentives, policies/structures and cultures of institutions. For example in a study of quality assurance systems in IHE in 14 OECD countries, Brennan and Shah found that although "changing institutional policies and structures is a complex process", there was evidence of institutional changes impacting "structures and policies which were *fundamental* to the life and organisation of the institution, i.e. changing the balance of power and organisational values" (p. 340). Specifically they found evidence of a

shift in the distribution of power within higher education. This shift has favoured the institutional level at the expense of the basic unit. It has

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