

Chapter XXIV

Preparing for the Virtual Workplace in the Educational Commons

Gary Hepburn

Acadia University, Canada

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the potential of an educational commons to help schools better prepare students for the virtual workplace. Together with the formation of stronger linkages between schools and the business world, making greater use of resources such as open source software in both school and business would greatly reduce costs and enable students to be better prepared to participate in the virtual workplace. With the virtual workplace's emphasis on online communication technologies as a primary tool for completing day-to-day tasks, schools must acquire the hardware and software as well as explore ways of incorporating these tools into the student learning. To reduce the expense of doing so and to ensure that the environments in which students learn reflect that of the workplace, both organizations should consider using more accessible software and working more closely together. Conceptualizing the ideal learning environment as an educational commons, this chapter will explore open source resources and their potential contribution to education and some of the opportunities as well as the challenges that will be encountered as open source resources are introduced to education and business.

INTRODUCTION

As the workplace becomes increasingly virtual in nature, schools are under pressure to provide their students with new types of experiences and skills. Online communication technologies are vital tools in support of knowledge management functions within organizations. These tools can be very expensive for businesses and are often too expensive for schools to acquire. Schools

can, however, take an alternative approach to the preparation of their students that will make preparation for the virtual workplace possible, while at the same time creating new opportunities for employers. Employers will gain workers that are ready to take their place in virtual workplaces and have an opportunity to consider more efficient and effective tools to support the virtual activities of their organizations.

In order to prepare students for the virtual workplace, public schools and other educational institutions need to become more familiar with some of the opportunities that are emerging as a result of open source projects. Leveraging the potential of the Internet as a collaborative medium, open source development projects are producing software and other resources that have the potential to meet many needs of schools. As educators become aware of open source resources, they will immediately recognize the advantages of low-cost alternatives to many commercial products that schools currently use and find expensive. They will also notice that open source resources lack some of the usage restrictions that characterize commercial resources. The low cost and flexibility of open source products makes them very attractive, but no less important is the way in which these resources align with some core educational values. In this chapter, I illustrate this alignment by exploring the promise that open source resources hold in supporting the ideal of an educational commons. Specifically, I will discuss (1) the concept of an educational commons, (2) open source resources and their potential contribution to education, and (3) some of the opportunities and challenges that will be encountered as open source resources are introduced to education.

THE EDUCATIONAL COMMONS

The online, collaborative environments associated with virtual workplaces are too often perceived as being out of reach for schools. They are looked upon as expensive add-ons that relate marginally to the curriculum being taught. For employers, the expense of the online environments is considered a necessary cost of doing business. A challenge for employers is finding sources of workers who are prepared to work in these environments. In order to ensure a supply of these workers, schools must realize that a new skill set needs to be developed as students are being educated. Employers also

need to understand the importance of supporting schools in their work to prepare workers for the virtual workplace. One serious problem that needs to be addressed is the dependence of employers on expensive technologies that schools cannot afford. One way to do this is to consider the concept of the educational commons as a means of providing rich resources for education and the virtual workplace.

Most of us have at least a passing familiarity with the concept of a commons. According to David Bollier (2003), the term refers to “a wide array of creations of nature and society that we inherit freely, share and hold in trust for future generations.” Well-known examples of commons that exist or have existed include grazing land, the Internet, fresh water supplies, and roadways. Lawrence Lessig (2001) pushes the concept of a commons further in his book, *The Future of Ideas*, as he describes the role of an *innovative commons* in society:

They create the opportunity for individuals to draw upon resources without connections, permission, or access granted by others. They are environments that commit themselves to being open. Individuals and corporations draw upon the value created by this openness. They transform that value into other value, which they then consume privately (p. 85).

The fact that society has always used the value of that which we hold in common to build greater value allows us to see an important reason why maintaining common resources is good for all. Even private enterprises benefit from that fact that we hold some resources in common. To appreciate this point, all we need to do is consider the value of roadways to individual and commercial activities. Recognizing the importance of common resources is neither anti-private nor anti-commercial. Providing some common resources and seeking a reasonable balance between that which is privately owned and that which is held in common benefits society.

9 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/preparing-virtual-workplace-educational-commons/21907

Related Content

Learning in Networks of SMEs: A Case Study in the ICT Industry

Valentina Morandi and Francesca Sgobbi (2013). *Enhancing the Modern Organization through Information Technology Professionals: Research, Studies, and Techniques* (pp. 100-114).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/learning-networks-smes/72523

The Perceptions of Collaborative Technologies Among Virtual Workers

Frankie S. Jones (2008). *Handbook of Research on Virtual Workplaces and the New Nature of Business Practices* (pp. 150-166).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/perceptions-collaborative-technologies-among-virtual/21895

Venture Investing in E-Mail Trust Solutions: The Postiva Case

Stephen J. Andriole (2009). *Technology Due Diligence: Best Practices for Chief Information Officers, Venture Capitalists, and Technology Vendors* (pp. 229-257).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/venture-investing-mail-trust-solutions/30184

Innovation Strategies in SME: Global Perspective

Neeta Baporikar (2014). *Effective Human Resources Management in Small and Medium Enterprises: Global Perspectives* (pp. 315-341).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/innovation-strategies-in-sme/93214

Understanding the Need for Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD)

(2023). *Valuing People and Technology in the Workplace: Ethical Implications and Imperatives for Success* (pp. 170-189).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/understanding-the-need-for-strategic-human-resource-development-shrd/321323