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Chapter V

Web-Based Education in the 21st Century: A Transnational Perspective

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"The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery."
Mark van Doren

ABSTRACT

As with any emerging educational endeavor, the quality of instruction and content varies widely, as do the goals and motivations of the students. In this chapter, we look at the Web-based distance education strategy for academia from a transnational perspective. The key philosophies and principal characteristics of a transnational organization are discussed, and their lessons for Web-based education are extracted for a transnational model for Web-based education. The parallels between industry and academia are drawn with respect to virtual organizations. The implementation strategies of transnational firms provide some valuable lessons for academia involved with Web-based education, as they strive to achieve higher degrees of coordination with low control dispersed throughout the organization. The five dimensions of a transnational strategy taxonomy are applied to transnational Web-based distance education initiatives. Finally, we take a closer look at some predictions for teaching and learning using Web-based education in higher education as extrapolations of current trends. However, we know that we will also be surprised by new developments, just as the growth of the Internet surprised us all. Commencement ceremonies are the starting point to lifetime learning in the digital/knowledge economy.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is changing the contours of business education. An organization in academia or industry can outperform rivals only if it can establish a difference that it can preserve. The essential problem in organizations today is a failure to distinguish planning, which is about programming, not discovering; from strategizing, which is choosing to perform activities differently than rivals do (Hamel, 1996; Porter, 1996). The significance of a distance learning strategy cannot be overstressed, because the number of people taking undergraduate and graduate courses online will increase from 710,000 last year, or approximately, 4.8% of the nation's 14.6 million higher-education students, to 2.23 million in 2002, accounting for 15% of all higher-education students (International Data Corporation, www.idc.com, 1999).

This chapter is structured as follows: We first review the existing literature for key statistics, trends, and predictions in distance education and Web-based learning environment. Next, we look at the transnational model in Web-based education that can be applied using the global infrastructure of the Internet, followed by some key trends in distance education. Then, we look at the guidelines and elements of a well-designed online course and describe the learning orientation model. Finally, we review the seven predictions for Web-based education and discuss their key implications before concluding the chapter.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS: KEY STATISTICS, TRENDS, AND PREDICTIONS

It seems like there is a revolution taking place in the educational environment today. There is also a change in the design, delivery, and development of the learning process. Distance learning is an arena for change in higher education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), one-third of approximately 5000 two- and four-year postsecondary institutions offered distance education during the 1997–1998 academic year. The NCES also reported that 1.7 million people were enrolled in distance education during the 1997–1998 academic year. Most faculties fear having a distance education facility, because they feel that it is not secure to have class over the Internet. The technology has not really paved the way for distance education learning. The faculties are also not trained well to plug their courses on to new technologies. As we can see in the recent past, there are private firms who design templates and layouts for faculties to use to insert course information and contents. There is a large potential market for Web-based education across the globe, because the Web is accessible by anyone and everyone (Passmore, 2000).

Online, Web-based communication—seen by many as the key technological innovation of the last decade of the twentieth century—has attracted the attention of educators and trainers to the idea of distance education in a way that no earlier technology managed to do. With explosive growth of the technology, knowledge of how to best apply it—in designing and delivering instructional programs and in facilitating learner–instructor and learner–learner interactions—lags far behind. People sometimes think of distance education as technology; however, technology is just the driver. Distance education is a different paradigm of teaching and learning. It is about teacher–learner relationships and learner–learner relationships (Moore, 2000).

NASSCOM estimated that as of March 2002, the number of active Internet subscribers was 1.5 million. However, by 2004–2005, the subscriber base will rise to approximately 8