Chapter 3
The Production of Learning Resources for the Study of Information Technology with Limited Project Management Capacity

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mindset Network is a non-profit organization that develops educational resources in several sectors, including the schooling sector. In 2011, Mindset Learn, the schooling division of Mindset Network, completed a project to plan, design, and produce learning resources for grade 12 Information Technology. The learning resources provided learning support to 5,000 students in the 425 South African schools that offer the subject. Numerous challenges presented themselves during the implementation of the project. Major project management challenges were insufficient project resources and inadequate project management experience. Several content-related challenges included: the need to include two programming languages simultaneously, the diversity of language and demographics in schools, and disparities in facilities and educator competencies. Despite the limitations experienced during the implementation of the project, Mindset Learn concluded and distributed an impressive set of learning resources to IT schools in South Africa. Several lessons for future projects are evident.

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ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Mindset Network as Context

Mindset Network is a South African based non-profit organization. It was founded in 2002 with support from eight founding partners. The founding partners made financial and in-kind contributions to enable Mindset Network to meet the education needs of the South African school and health sectors. The organization continues to be funded by a large number of program, content, government and international partners.

Mindset Network develops and distributes quality and contextually relevant educational resources for use in the schooling, health and vocational sectors. The organization distributes learning resources in various formats, through various technology platforms including broadcast and data cast.

The division that focuses on the distribution of educational resources for schools and students is known as Mindset Learn. Mindset Learn makes educational content available to high school students and educators in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 (equivalent to 9th to 12th grades), distributing learning materials on a mass scale in South Africa and other African countries. Mindset Learn is the custodian and focus of this case study.

The South African Education Context

Mindset Network was established eight years after South Africa's first democratic elections. During the first decade of democracy, South Africa faced numerous challenges in the education system and these were evident at the time of Mindset Network's launch.

The schooling sector had experienced a long history of unequal funding by the previous government and these huge socio-economic differences between communities and schools prevailed after political transition. These differences translated into disparities in school facilities, teacher qualifications, competencies and morale, access to learning resources, learner-teacher ratios and learner achievements. The schooling system also underwent numerous curriculum changes, which the majority of teachers were ill-equipped to implement. School management teams were not suitably skilled to deal with their management roles and with increasing complexities in schools caused largely by issues such as the transition to a diverse, multi-cultural society, the multi-lingual nature of the "new" South African society and large educational backlogs caused by many years of unequal education. These