Preface

A SOCIO-CULTURAL DIVIDE IN WORKPLACE E-LEARNING

Motivations

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus — and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself...

(Obama, 2009)

Yes, this is a book about workplace e-learning. Then why this quote from the inaugural address of President Obama? The reason for this opening quote points to the motivation for this book. The driving force behind this book is to encourage the research and study of workplace e-learning in a more holistic and emancipatory way; to encourage another direction in the research and study of workplace e-learning towards the social and cultural.

By workplace e-learning, this book looks to Honey’s (2001) definition, that “e-learning is the process of learning from information that is delivered electronically….It leaves us, the learners, to identify relevant information, convert it into something meaningful and apply it appropriately.” Workplace adult education and training, for this book, means the formal and informal activities that workers undergo at work resulting in individual, social, mental, or embodied growth associated with work (Fenwick, 2001). The role of this book, then, is not so much about how to design reusable content, or about developing new applications, nor is it about how to implement more efficient technological platforms. This is a book about using socio-culturally based research in the study of technology, learning, and workers, for the purposes of a better workplace adult education and training from workplace e-learning.

What is meant by ‘better’? Three words stand out from Honey’s (2001) definition in this regard: ‘relevant’; ‘meaningful’; and ‘apply’. The best outcome from this effort is to provide workers with a workplace e-learning that: (a) conveys relevant information to them; (b) enables workers to translate this information into something meaningful for them; and, (c) allows this information to be applied properly...by them.
The Social and Cultural Matter

The words of President Obama provide for much thought and insight. If the social and cultural can no longer be ignored in the workings of society at large, as the above quote purports, then the social and cultural cannot continue to be ignored in the education and training of the adult citizens of this society, wherever that education and training happens. If the social and cultural are so profoundly important for economic recovery, environmental protection, and world peace, then can they not also be of concern for the seemingly mundane workplace? If workplace e-learning is increasingly the conduit for education and learning relied upon by a global cohort of adult learners to better their chances for citizenship, belonging, economic gain, and personal growth, then the social and cultural do have a promising part to play in workplace adult education and training from workplace e-learning.

The reach of information and communication technologies (ICTs), on the other hand, in generating information and catalyzing change is phenomenal and relentless. The world today is a micro-chip snared in a ‘virtual’ web of fibre-optic threads. ICTs influence everything from global trade, to medical breakthroughs, to art and architecture, to even children’s and youth’s perceptions of their minds and bodies. Is it any mystery then that the technological almost always garners greater attention than the social and cultural, even when considering workplaces and learning? Nevertheless, as the excitement once attributed to the turn of the century fades, and society looks to the 21st century, the growing area of concern increasingly looks to the issue of technological progress without first grasping the purpose, the means, and the consequences of such decisions on people and our future. Here again, the social and cultural matter.

True, the pace of progress in technology leaves seemingly little time for ruminations on ethics and social and cultural impacts. For, if technological progress on nature and environmental degradation continue to capture headlines, and as boundaries between private life and public surveillance around the internet continue to be battled out in the courts, do the technologies in the workplace deserve any less attention? In the face of such ‘grand’ questions, where does the seemingly innocuous and routine term of ‘workplace e-learning’ fit in?

As technology, learning, and work mix and mingle together in new ways and on a daily basis, the social and cultural matter more so. Socio-cultural impacts in the workplace from workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training are prevalent and very real. To overlook this, or perhaps even downplay it to some extent, does not negate its importance or relevance. The fact that this question is not asked more often, especially in a workplace increasingly characterized by diversity, and a global cohort of adult learners ‘shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth’ also supports the motivation for this book.

In order for the responsive and innovative energy of the 21st century workplace to be more justly and democratically harnessed through workplace e-learning, the information of the information age must be put into perspective, socially, culturally and ethically. In a world that is becoming progressively smaller, where fewer resources—be they, for example, environmental, financial, or educational—are available to all, can society continue to ignore people of ‘different’ knowledges or the diversity of experiences they offer? Similarly, in considering the intersection of technology, learning, and work, can decision-makers continue to overlook the cultural and socialization needs of an increasingly diverse cohort of workers? The challenge in looking at such socio-cultural impacts of workplace e-learning is in finding means and methods that assist with this imperative.
Socio-Cultural Divides: A Personal Anecdote

Though it was almost 15 years go, I can still remember the twinge of nervousness I felt as I began my first computer-based training (CBT) whilst working as a Project Management Consultant for a pre-eminent Canadian Law Firm (hereafter ‘the firm’). My role was to assist Senior Partners identify, and procure, an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. This also included being part of a project team. This team of organizational experts was assigned by Senior Partners to assist me to design and develop effective online training solutions for the lawyers and other administrative staff at the firm who would be using this new ERP system.

This CBT was titled ‘Effective Facilitation Skills’ (hereafter ‘the course’). I was also informed by the Senior Partners that all new employees of the firm, both lawyers and administrative staff, were required to undergo the course when they joined the firm. This was done to promote better working relations at the firm, both internally and externally, as well as develop a more client-oriented focus within employees. My undergoing this CBT would, I was advised, provide me with a better appreciation for what the lawyers and administrative staff experienced through their CBT; what the Senior Partners would be expecting from me and the ERP team as a future training model for the ERP; and, that such an experience would also contribute directly to my own professional development.

Undertaking CBT at this point was not necessarily a new thing for me as I had already been exposed to this concept of ‘e-learning’ and online education several times. I can readily recall receiving a steady stream of pamphlets and brochures by post about pursuing online graduate degrees from prominent foreign universities whilst continuing to ‘live and work from home’. The prospect of being able to accomplish, for example, a Masters of Business Administration or Masters of Information Management degree online from a foreign university, whilst living and working from home in Canada, seemed very enticing. So, by the time I began to encounter workplace e-learning, I was already quite open to and curious about training that was electronically mediated. The course, however, was slightly different than enrolling in a formal university. The course was CD-ROM-based and, as such, not ‘at a distance’. The course was also not tied to further accreditation towards any degree or professional certification.

I began my training as instructed. The course was mainly text-based and the content was topically organized into several sections. Each section was clearly separated from the next and began with the all too familiar phrase, ‘By the end of this section, you will be able to...’. There were also multiple choice quizzes at the end of each section for assessment purposes. Each section had to be completed before moving onto the next section. No section could be bypassed until quizzes were completed successfully, which was determined by scoring a minimum number of correct answers.

As I proceeded through each section, however, I couldn’t help but feel a growing sense of discomfort. Personally, I found the course to be very generic. The course positioned issues from a primarily male and privileged standpoint. The course also presumed users were full-time employees, spoke English as their first language, and management orientated. Rarely did the course provide specific examples related to Canadian law and/or legal administration practices. For example, though the course required a minimum number of correct answers for learners to proceed from one section to the next, there was no differentiation between which questions lawyers needed to answer correctly and which answers administrative staff had to get right in order to proceed to the next section. This implies that the course starts from the premise that ‘successful facilitation’ is the same for both lawyers and administrative staff.

My unease prompted me to dig deeper into the impressions this course may have left with other employees. I decided to validate (or invalidate) my trepidation by conducting an informal survey of both lawyers and administrative staff to get their opinions and perspectives on the course. Though the course was intended for new employees, I made sure to ask employees of various levels of seniority and tenure
within the firm. I also did my best to include employees of different ages, races, and genders. I saw this exercise as important because any information and opinions gleaned would be invaluable towards the designing of the training interventions for the new ERP system.

There were three primary outcomes for employees who actually started the course: (a) those that completed the course and retained some of their learning; (b) those who never completed the course, but still retained some of their learning; and, (c) those who completed the course, but did not retain any learning. I also suspect that there were a certain proportion of lawyers and administrative staff that never even started the course, but I never came across anyone willing to admit as such during my investigations. As the law firm did not track any statistics on rates of course completions or successful quiz scores, collecting anything more than self-selected, anecdotal evidence was not feasible.

These responses were not entirely unexpected. What I did underestimate was the amount of frustration and anguish conveyed to me as both lawyers and administrative staff shared with me their experiences of using this software and their hope that the ERP training would not replicate this scenario. “It is not so much the idea of computer-based training that frustrates,” shared one junior lawyer, “as the fear that the senior partners endorse this learning and it has little to do with the kind of law I am expected to practice!” Similar sentiments were expressed to me by administrative staff: “The exercises and quizzes were all based on the Canadian point of view and from the professional ranks. Sometimes, senior lawyers say the meanest things to me. As an East-Indian woman who has immigrated to Canada, I cannot expect any amount of facilitation training to make things any easier for me when dealing with a powerful man like a Canadian-born, Senior Partner!”

As I reflected on the feedback I had received from employees, what came to light was something quite useful. What irked and alienated most of the employees, both lawyer and administrative staff, was the lack of social and cultural affinity this course held for them. To some extent, I felt the same way. There were very strong and interconnected assumptions about the workers undertaking the course that undergirded this particular workplace e-learning experience.

The course was built around specific conceptions about the learner and how learning should take place. These assumptions involved universal approaches to learning by all learners; consistency and homogeneity of the technology available to all learners; and, a uniform, normalized set of educational values and goals for all learners. The content and structure of the course implied that effective facilitation was independent of age, race, first spoken language, or gender; facilitation situations were alike for lawyers and administrative staff; facilitation practices covered in the course were applicable to most workplace scenarios and not limited to a Canadian law practice; facilitation was the appropriate response to define all interactions between internal personnel, and, between internal personnel and external clients; facilitation methods were aligned with a client-centred focus; and, both the lawyers and administrative staff had the requisite time and seniority to start, persist, and successfully complete the entire course.

The subtext of these assumptions, however, presents a very different picture. The paradigm that emerges from the confluence of these assumptions implies that those certain learners who already understood the ‘concept’ of facilitation in those terms, whose circumstances emulated such facilitation, and who already saw interpersonal interactions in those ways, were ‘meant to’ succeed. Those who valued and comprehended interpersonal interactions differently, or whose circumstances hindered the apprehension of such facilitation, or who could not change their circumstances to accommodate the applicability of such facilitation scenarios, would not succeed. An old adage comes to mind here: ‘you’ve either won or lost the game, even before you step onto the court.’
PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE BOOK

The objective of this book is to develop and present the ‘Workplace E-learning Socio-cultural Sensitivity Taxonomy’ (hereafter ‘socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy’) to further the socio-cultural research and study of workplace e-learning. This socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy starts with the social and cultural as the central premise, as an alternate standpoint from the technological artefactual, when considering workplace e-learning. Such socio-culturally sensitive research may then serve as valid source of inspiration and wisdom for increasing the socio-cultural sensitivity of workplace e-learning as one means to a better workplace adult education and training from workplace e-learning.

This may sound like a tautological (circular) argument, but it is not. The socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy when applied to workplace e-learning research and study, is intended to: (a) provide context and impetus for urgency around the socio-cultural research and study of workplace e-learning; (b) reveal dominant paradigms currently shaping workplace historicity that also shape workplace e-learning within organizations; (c) recommend socio-cultural perspectives for socio-culturally driven research and study of workplace e-learning; and, (d) draw out critical workplace e-learning scenarios that highlight the less obvious, socio-cultural impacts on the worker, and their workplace adult education and training, of not redressing the socio-cultural insensitivities inherent in current workplace e-learning within organizations.

Though the comments above were anecdotal, they do signal a reality in the workplace that continues to be more prevalent and widespread today when looking at workplace e-learning. This same situation still persists (O’Connor, 2006, June). Many adult learners today continue to have similar experiences as those described above with respect to their encounters with workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training. Arguments in favour of workplace e-learning, such as cost savings; time and resource efficiency; educational technology enhancements; shorter business cycles; global competition; a wider array of online courses; and, a growing number of online course providers, remain prevalent. However, these favourable arguments are more frequently confronted by worker unease and resistance; limitations to worldwide web access at work and at home; lack of relevant courses for workers; and, insufficient understanding, on the part of both workers and organizations, of what worker performance means and looks like (Schweizer, 2004) in the age of lifelong e-learning.

The (mis)perception is that workplace e-learning is ‘a sure thing’ and that it is the workers who lack commitment or ability. Such a perception reduces workforce satisfaction and productivity, and undermines any workplace e-learning interventions. As will be discussed in this book, there are key cultural paradigms, socio-cultural perspectives, and critical workplace e-learning scenarios, that may all be brought to bear on this supposed infallibility of the technological artefacts (of workplace e-learning) and their socio-cultural impacts on workers and their workplace adult education and training.

To redress this perception, this book advocates for a change in thinking about workplace e-learning from an artefact to an idea, as the jumping point for the socio-culturally driven critique of workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training. This involves the generating of alternate discourses on the research and study of workplace e-learning by shifting the research and study of workplace e-learning more towards the social and cultural, and lessening the dominance of the technological artefactual. Such research and study begins by asking socio-culturally sensitive questions that are currently not asked when it comes to the research and study of workplace e-learning. This additionally implies attending to the social and cultural much earlier in the value chain when it comes to decisions about research and study, such as aspects of needs’ assessment, design, deployment, and evaluation.

Another important message from this book involves a cautioning of complete adherence to just the technological artefactual dominance of workplace e-learning research and study. Technological artefactual approaches to workplace e-learning research and study are no longer enough. E-learning in the
workplace needs to be seen as *more* than just hardware and software. For example, counting the number of online courses, or estimating the time saved for training from workplace e-learning, are not enough to ensure learning. Technological artefactual approaches to research and study of workplace e-learning may work well for gauging technological prowess, but they add limited insight when it comes to the ethical, social, and cultural aspects of adult learning from workplace adult education and training. Such measures may indicate more efficient workplace adult educational technologies, but that is not learning.

When the focus remains on the technological artefacts, then cultural presumptions and social assumptions are already enacted. Any recognition of social change or social responsibility has already been replaced by the compulsion towards perfecting the technology, resulting in decisions that drive universalized education and normative learning in the workplace. A universalized education assumes that workers approach workplace adult education and training from workplace e-learning similarly and will pursue online courses using a set approach and style. Normative learning, too, happens through presumptions that the requisite workplace adult education and training needs of the workforce are being sufficiently dictated and aptly fulfilled by workplace e-learning. By this point ‘you’ve already lost the game’…and your audience.

This book advocates the need for changes to workplace e-learning, and proposes one means to bring change about through socio-culturally based research and study. A new, socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy for workplace e-learning in the workplace is presented that maps out a promising, socio-culturally driven research agenda on workplace e-learning (Remtulla, 2007, 2009). This alternate, socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy thinks about doing research and study for workplace e-learning using a critical and emancipatory lens. Such approaches give voice to learning, learners, and the socio-cultural complexities of epistemology, ontology, and pedagogy.

All this may ultimately lead to the development of alternate approaches and methodologies for doing socio-culturally based critical and emancipatory research on more ethical and affective practices of doing workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training. Again, the best outcome hoped for from this effort is to provide workers with a workplace e-learning that: (a) conveys relevant information to them; (b) enables workers to translate this information into something meaningful for them; and, (c) allows this information to be applied properly…by them.

**ANTICIPATED BENEFITS**

**Influencing Workplace E-Learning**

At this time, few (if any) books or edited collections take this ideational approach to workplace e-learning research and study. Workplace e-learning as a socially and culturally negotiated and perpetuated phenomenon remains uncommon, as does the availability of taxonomies that further analyze this idea critically, paradigmatically, and perspectivally. This book suggests a nascent, socio-culturally driven research agenda on studying workplace e-learning and introduces its socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy as a means to map out new positions for workplace e-learning research and study in this regard.

**Industry Trends and Foci of Work**

This book examines workplace e-learning in terms of the workplace e-learning industry trends, strategies, and foci of work that are currently observable. Looking in tandem at the transnational trends of globalization, technological innovation, and the knowledge-based economy better gauges how these
policies influence workplace adult education and training from workplace e-learning. Analyzing the ideologies of current policy directions of supranational bodies like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank (WB) explains how such ideologies conform and constrict workplace e-learning practices to technologic, bureaucratic, and economic goals through human capitalism despite the dissimilar learning needs and challenges of a global, multicultural, and diverse workforce. Knowing these connections between industry strategies and foci of work enables further influences and possibilities for social change.

A Diverse and Global Cohort of Adult Learners

Future trends point to greater transformations in the global workforce, including an aging population in Europe and the West; greater immigration to Europe and the West; larger youth populations from Asia and the global south; the changing roles of women in societies from around the world; greater diversity, pluralism, and multilingualism; the presence of workers with differing ability; and, a greater presence of in/visible minorities (Remtulla, 2007). Each of these trends infers the necessity for new ways of doing workplace e-learning. Only looking at workplace e-learning as hardware and software, or in terms of costs and profits, ignores completely the social and cultural intricacy that contextualizes workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training. Workplace e-learning, as a topic of research and study, is simply not being fully engaged for the benefit of society.

This book is intended to address the social and cultural complexities of a globalized cohort of adult learners experiencing workplace e-learning, whether at home, school, or in the workplace. As performance in the workplace becomes more precarious, and as the dollars of investment continue to mount in workplace adult education and training from workplace e-learning, calls for research and studies that position workplace e-learning outside of a restrictive paradigm will increase. When looked at as an idea, and not solely as an artefact, new directions for workplace e-learning research and study may be revealed that hitherto have been overlooked.

Approaching workplace e-learning from a different trajectory, this book proceeds from talking about both the dominant and subaltern points of view on technology and learning, and the contingent and alienating effects that dominant discourses have on the decomposition; justification; rationalization; operationalization; and, homogenization of the workforce. This includes an exploration of the concepts of ‘workplace transformation’ and ‘workforce change’ and their implications for workplace e-learning. This same workforce that is gradually more globalized, multicultural, and diverse; and, where the actual jobs that people are being asked to do are also in flux and being regularly relocated, renegotiated and transformed, often outside of the control of the employees themselves. Understanding transnational trends, socio-culturally, lends insight into the question of why such a workplace e-learning practice, as structured by the paradigm of the technological artefact, is increasingly ineffectual for workplace adult education needs for a changing workforce.

Ethics, Change, and Responsibilities

This book points to a conversation that will factor more prominently into the future. The technological artefactual research and study of workplace e-learning, structured by social construction and human capital paradigms, result in workplace e-learning becoming institutionalized; ideological; and, instrumental. As such, emancipatory, democratic, and agentive approaches in the writing of this book elaborate on the constructivist turn in distance education as well as social integration. Only paying heed to European and Westernized ways of looking at technology, learning, and work are universalizing workforce education
and normalizing workforce learning through a one-size-fits-all approach to workplace e-learning that has ethical implications leading to questionable consequences.

This book seeks to influence and inspire greater ethical and critical discourses on workplace e-learning and society by expanding social and cultural thinking on this emerging field, across the disciplines, and from various philosophical standpoints. The context, impetus, paradigms, perspectives, and critical scenarios formulating the socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy in this book reveal the perceptions of this powerful idea that is garnering the attention of so much intellectual, socio-cultural, political, pedagogical, financial, and technological investment.

What makes this book different is that, here, social change as ‘context’, and social responsibility as ‘impetus’, are central themes throughout this book. Social change in society does influence workplace e-learning outcomes through workplace transformations and workforce changes. Approaching the socio-culturally based research and study of workplace e-learning in this way is a bona fide social responsibility on the part of workplaces towards their workforces.

Discussions are laid out around social change and social responsibility and their appreciation for the ideational and sensate; and, their relevance for the study of workplace e-learning given a workplace increasingly characterized by a multi-faceted and multi-skilled workforce. The differences between paradigms and perspectives, and how they relate to the (re)shaping of the perception of workplace e-learning from a sensate artefact to the conception of workplace e-learning as an idea, are also highlighted. The need is clear of this new direction in studying workplace e-learning given the changing contexts at work. Such approaches discuss workplace e-learning locally and in context of the economic, political, social, and technological trends now taking place globally that shape, and continuously reshaping, this modality of workplace education and training.

Throughout this book, seminal ethical, critical, and cultural thinkers that have commented on the socio-cultural milieu of society, education, technology, and culture are referenced. Their thinking and perspectives are applied to the topic of workplace e-learning to expound on how such alternate perspectives change the idea of workplace e-learning. The implications these new ideas of workplace e-learning have for knowledge through research and study on epistemology, ontology, and pedagogy are also elaborated. These are the critical, cultural, and emancipatory perspectives that lay the foundations for a new, socio-cultural taxonomy of research and study into workplace e-learning.

**SCHOLARLY AIMS**

**Research Methods and Approaches**

A primary contribution of this book, then, is the presentation and validation of seminal socio-cultural theories that are not widely applied to workplace e-learning, but should be. The socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy forwarded in this book proposes an alternate means for understanding—a paradigmatic shift—towards the new and critical application of socio-cultural theories and paradigms to research and study of workplace e-learning. Exploratory case studies (Yin, 2008) have been developed to augment theoretical and methodological significance.

This book is about why unasked and taken for granted assumptions about workers and presumptions about organizations in the design/build phase of workplace e-learning need to be asked well before such phases ever begin. The socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy of this book presents one approach on what questions need to asked and why they are of importance for a more relevant, meaningful, and applicable workplace adult education and training from workplace e-learning.
Theoretical Perspectives and Paradigms

Despite a growing, global cohort of learners that is socially and culturally heterogeneous, if the dominant point of view for research and study on practice of workplace e-learning remains on technological artefacts (i.e. hardware and software), then any inquiry into workplace e-learning may be satisfied as long as the technology and economics perform well. The epistemological, ontological, and pedagogical criticisms of workplace e-learning may go unnoticed simply because the current paradigms shaping workplace e-learning discourses do not allow for such criticisms to emerge.

Thus, if the economics and techniques perform well, then why does the socio-cultural matter? The reality is that throwing more money and technology at a workplace performance problem is only going to produce a certain amount of gain before diminishing returns begin to take effect. That’s where workers enter into the analysis. On the contrary, if the focus in the future continues towards a greater appreciation of the juxtaposition of workers, technology, and learning, and not just the economics and mechanics, then much remains to be researched and studied. This makes the socio-culturally based research and study of workplace e-learning ever more relevant and closes the growing ‘socio-cultural divide’ between research and practice of workplace adult education and training in the era of lifelong learning and workplace e-learning (Salas et al., 2002).

An additional contribution by this book comes from its encouraging of new ways of thinking about socio-culturally based research and study on workplace e-learning as an idea and not just artefact. To enable this paradigmatic reformation of workplace e-learning from technological artefact to socio-cultural idea, the perceptual to the conceptual, and between the sensate and ideational, this book addresses socio-cultural perspectives and reveals critical scenarios relevant for the socio-cultural research and study of workplace e-learning. Theoretical and perspectival analysis of workplace e-learning as a socially and culturally negotiated ‘idea’ in the workplace, presents novel social and cultural implications for research and study on epistemology, ontology, and pedagogy. Definitions for primary concepts such as context, impetus, e-learning, paradigm, perspective, artefact, and idea are renegotiated. All this is significant for researchers in the academy as well as scholar-practitioners in fields (Keefer & Stone, 2009; Kormanik & Shindell, 2009) as varied as instructional design, training, and human resources information systems.

Of course, an exhaustive validation and exegesis of the social theories introduced here, in terms of their philosophical origins, is well outside the scope of this book and will not accomplish this task. The socio-cultural theories, perspectives, and critiques, included in this socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy are better deemed as pragmatic foray to apply socio-cultural theory (in particular) to workplace e-learning (in general). They represent a viable alternative to the prevailing, technological artefactual approaches comprising workplace e-learning research and study today.

The Social Science Disciplines

Furthermore, this book supports three broad contributions towards the disciplines of technology and society, information studies, management studies, and tertiary and continuing education. Firstly, this book addresses the need to broaden research and study on workplace e-learning in these disciplines by calling for more research on workplace e-learning from a socio-cultural perspective. A socio-cultural critique remains imperative in these disciplines as the complexity of workplace adult education and training multiplies exponentially on a global scale and the social and cultural begin to play out more prominently through a growing, global cohort of learners that is socially and culturally heterogeneous.

A further contribution of this book stems from the introduction of seminal social theory and critical and cultural perspectives on epistemology, ontology, and pedagogy, for the topic of adult learning from
workplace e-learning. Such theory may enrich current research and study in disciplines such as Information Studies and Management Studies that may not be otherwise exposed to educational, social, or cultural theory. The growing prominence within these disciplines such discourses as Corporate Social Responsibility, Information Ethics, Critical Management Studies, as well as Critical Information Studies, are already indicative of the increasing recognition of the need for more ethically and socio-culturally driven thinking in these disciplines as presented in this book.

This publication may also fit various post-secondary curricula in several ways. Since the focus is on theory, paradigms, and perspectives, courses that deal with research methods, philosophies of science, technology and society, culture, sociology, philosophy, and even distance education and curriculum studies, may all find this book relevant. Furthermore, the numbers of post-secondary courses across the Social Sciences about Social Theory and Cultural Studies are also on the rise, thus further extrapolating the relevance of this book.

PROSPECTIVE AUDIENCE

Adult Learners

An expanding, diverse constituency of learners makes the prospective audience for this book diverse and widespread. This rapidly increasing, global population of adult learners from around the world, who comprise the pool from which workers, students, and citizens are drawn, are demanding and anticipating e-learning experiences that have a positive influence on performance (Remtulla, 2007). The focal point here is on workplace e-learning given an ethically complex, socially diverse, and culturally rich, global cohort of adult learners. What is becoming imminently apparent is the scarcity of a socio-cultural standpoint on workplace e-learning and the escalating urgency for thinking on how this will all play out through the burgeoning dominance of workplace e-learning whether in formal, non-formal, or informal adult educational contexts.

Academic and Practitioner Researchers

This book is intended to assist academic researchers and scholar-practitioners fill this gaping void in the socio-culturally based research and study of workplace e-learning. As such, this book is also of relevance to those within workplace, government, community-university partnerships, and industry, who take on the task of doing research on workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training. This includes academic researchers as well as scholar-practitioners (Moats & McLean, 2009; Short & Shindell, 2009) who wish to research and study the socio-cultural impacts of workplace e-learning and consider the perspectives of epistemology, ontology, and pedagogy.

Those interested in the research and study of workplace e-learning may not want to center exclusively on hardware and software (for which there are already a multitude of publications). Such interests may require something different on how to regard the ‘idea’ of workplace e-learning. Such research and study is more attracted by the juxtaposition of people, technology, and learning in the workplace, and what this all means for the practice of workplace e-learning in terms of workplace adult education and training and the workforce.
Policy Makers

This book is geared towards decision-makers and policy makers who deal with primary and/or secondary research findings for workplace adult education and training. Policy developments concerning research and study about workplace e-learning and the workforce often must go well beyond hardware, software, costs, and efficiencies. Both policy research and evaluation that seeks new perspectives on workplace adult education and training may find this book insightful.

Are the policies, investment decisions, and/or research agendas, the same for workplace e-learning when it is thought of as ‘artefact’ as opposed to an ‘idea’? This book presents a fresh look at workplace e-learning as an ‘idea’--a perspective that is socially and culturally negotiated and perpetuated--may be of great interest to such a prospective audience. This important question has not been asked for workplace e-learning.

This socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy is intended to assist all such efforts to understand the diversity of the workplace in terms of the coming together of workers, learning, technology, and culture. Policy makers in government, decision-makers in industry, and instructional designers and instructing practitioners in the workplace may all find this book helpful for these purposes.

ORGANIZATION

Chapter Summaries

This socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy when applied to workplace e-learning research and study is intended to: (a) provide context and impetus for urgency around the socio-cultural research and study of workplace e-learning; (b) reveal dominant paradigms currently shaping workplace historicity that also reshape workplace e-learning within organizations; (c) recommend socio-cultural perspectives for research and study of workplace e-learning; and, (d) draw out critical workplace e-learning scenarios that highlight the socio-cultural impacts of not redressing the socio-cultural insensitivities inherent in current workplace e-learning (that continue to persist as a result of the dominance of technological artefactual approaches to workplace e-learning).

Section 1: Workplace E-Learning in the Global Age

‘Section 1’ frames this book by presenting the ‘Workplace E-learning Socio-cultural Sensitivity Taxonomy’. The socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy comprises four elements: (a) ‘social change’ as context and ‘social responsibility’ as impetus for socio-culturally based research and study of workplace e-learning; (b) ‘normative learning’ as one outcome of workplace e-learning due to technological artefactual approaches; (c) ‘universalized education’ as another outcome of workplace e-learning from technological artefactual approaches; and, (d) ‘socio-cultural insensitivity’ towards the global workforce from the normalized and educationally universalized workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training. The chapters in Section One bring the social and cultural to foreground, alongside the technological artefactual, when workplace adult education and training is mentioned in organizations through workplace e-learning. The social change currently anticipated and experienced in society and the social responsibility that accompanies such change are discussed in relation to the workplace. The
organizationally normalizing and educationally universalizing trends that imbue workplace e-learning in the absence of such a framing are also revealed. All of these elements combine to form a taxonomy for the socio-cultural research and study of workplace e-learning.

Table 1 provides chapter summaries from Section 1 of the book.

Section 2: Dominant Cultural Paradigms in the Workplace

‘Section 2’ applies frameworks derived from the socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy to workplace historicity. In so doing, this approach problematizes dominant paradigms that currently reshape workplace e-learning and reveal heretofore unasked questions about the socio-cultural consequences of technological artefactual approaches to workplace e-learning research and study. Each chapter demonstrates, through literature review, how the practice of workplace e-learning is structured by dominant paradigms that perceive workplace e-learning and adult learning as a sensate artefact; as primarily hardware and software. Each chapter also draws out how such paradigms structure workplace e-learning and erect strong boundaries around practices of workplace adult education and training from workplace e-learning.

Table 2 includes chapter summaries from Section 2 of the book.

Section 3: Socio-Cultural Perspectives and Their Implications

‘Section 3’ focuses on the socio-cultural impacts of not considering the socio-cultural approaches to research and study of workplace e-learning. Here, frameworks derived from the socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy on workplace e-learning are applied to draw out of the implications that arise when socio-cultural perspectives are taken into account in the research and study of workplace e-learning.

Several socio-cultural perspectives are presented along with critical workplace e-learning scenarios. This is done to illustrate the implications for the workforce and their workplace adult education and training, of paradigmatically frozen, technological artefactual approaches to workplace e-learning. This also allows socio-culturally sensitive research and study of workplace e-learning to identify and properly approach the less obvious implications that result from global workforce learning and training needs going unanswered. In some cases, such needs are completely ignored or dealt with in socio-culturally offensive ways by current technological artefactual approaches to workplace e-learning.

Table 3 contains chapter summaries from Section Three of the book.
Section 1 sets the stage for a socio-culturally informed research and study of workplace e-learning. Too often, workplace e-learning is treated like a finite and definitive implement. This perception excludes the global, diverse workers and their needs and intentions. A socio-cultural understanding of the workplace, workplace adult education and training, and workplace e-learning, serves as a stark reminder that learning does and cannot happen in a vacuum and that the learning experiences and expectations of workers are as diverse and complex as the workforce itself. By introducing social change as context and social responsibility as impetus, as well as highlighting normative learning and universalized education as worrisome traits, an informed, socio-culturally sensitive ‘redressing’ of socio-cultural insensitivity can now begin.

The socio-culturally based research and study on workplace e-learning from Section One are likely to be oriented towards issues of governance and policy development and evaluation. This includes all policy research and study on workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training, whether at organizational, industrial, or regional levels. Research and study of this type works towards policy interventions with respect to social change, social responsibility, and/or socio-cultural insensitivities in workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training. Each policy intervention supports research and study in the interests of ethics, criticality, and social justice, that also moves towards the remedy of organizationally normalizing or educationally universalized workplace e-learning interventions for workplace adult education and training.

Section 1 is best read before Section 2 or Section 3 in the beginning stages of socio-cultural research and study of workplace e-learning using the socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy.

Figure 1 illustrates this suggested approach for Section One.
Figure 1. Section One provides a macro view of the socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy and its four elements: (a) social change and social responsibility; (b) normative learning; (c) universalized education; and, (d) socio-cultural insensitivity

Figure 2. Section Two reveals dominant paradigms currently shaping workplace historicity that also reshape workplace e-learning within organizations. Section Three recommends socio-cultural perspectives and also draws out critical workplace e-learning scenarios that highlight the socio-cultural impacts for workers of not redressing the socio-cultural insensitivities inherent in current workplace e-learning
Section Two involves the application of frameworks derived from this socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy to destabilize workplaces that are paradigmatically ‘frozen’ in terms of their decision-making (Hammond, Keeney, & Raiffa, 2006). Such organizations are bound and unable, or unwilling, to change with respect to their workers. Such organizations cannot conceive of approaches to workplace e-learning that include workers. This renders such organizations ill-prepared to effectively manage workplace adult education and training for a global cohort of workers.

Dominant cultural paradigms reshape workplace e-learning in certain ways within organizations. Such organizations persist in approaching workplace e-learning as a sensate, technological artefact despite the growing evidence to the contrary of the limitations of these paradigms on worker performance, productivity, and satisfaction. By bringing to light unasked assumptions that are quite literally built into the decision-making process and approaches, this socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy aims for a socio-culturally driven research agenda for organizational change and transformation.

The socio-culturally based research and study on workplace e-learning that transpire from Section Two are likely to be more oriented towards theory and methods meant to challenge technological artefactual approaches to workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training. This is done by evolving agentive, participatory, and democratic research approaches and methodologies through the socio-culturally based research and study of workplace e-learning. Research and study of this type works towards the development of critical, emancipatory, and action oriented theoretical paradigms and perspectives regarding the workplace in society; work and cultural studies; as well as, organizational learning, workforce change, and workplace transformation.

Section Three provides frameworks that combine socio-cultural perspectives with critical workplace e-learning scenarios to highlight the needs of the workers who now come into view as fundamental to any conversations involving workplace e-learning. The socio-culturally based research and study of workplace e-learning from Section Three are likely to be more pragmatic and locally-oriented and related to organizational implementations of workplace e-learning interventions. This will inform the socio-cultural research and study of workplace e-learning within organizations facing the challenges of workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training for a global cohort of adult learners.

Section Two and Section Three proceed from the ideas and concepts introduced in Chapter Four from Section One (‘Redressing’ Socio-cultural Insensitivity). Once Section One is completed, Parts Two and Three do not necessarily have to be read in sequential order. Each Part may be pursued independently and based on areas of interest.

Figure 2 illustrates these suggested approaches for Section Two and Section Three.

**CONCLUSION**

This book is more about the ‘what if’ and ‘why’ of workplace e-learning as groundwork for more relevant, meaningful, and applicable workplace adult education and training from workplace e-learning. Workers and their needs must have bearing in workplace e-learning and workplace adult education and training. When considering workplace e-learning and workers, the social and cultural matter. In a future that sees (our collective) humanity confront many challenges, and where workplace adult education and training from workplace e-learning becomes increasingly central to adults’ lifelong learning, the socio and cultural matter more so. This argument consistently undergirds this book.

This book develops and discusses a socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy for the socio-culturally based research and study of workplace e-learning. Such socio-culturally sensitized research may then serve as valid impetus for the interventions of workplace e-learning that is based on such socio-culturally fo-
cused research and study. By starting from the premise that workplace e-learning is an ‘idea’ shaped and moulded by the social demands of its users and the cultural needs of their generation, the workers needs now emerge with the aid of this socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy. What the socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy aims to understand is why learning that happens at intersection of workers, technology, culture, and the workplace, may be more influenced by what people feel and what they believe and value, than the number of online courses then enrol in or the bandwidth of their internet connection.

Incidentally, I did complete the CBT course. I have not forgotten these experiences. Perhaps some of the most significant realizations I keep with me from my earlier experiences with workplace e-learning is that the procurement and roll-out phases of workplace e-learning implementations are far too late in the value chain for socio-cultural change to make a difference and benefit workplace adult education and training within organizations. Once the online courses are set with a technological artefactual priority, normative learning and universalized education are inevitable. Bridging the socio-cultural divide in workplace e-learning must occur well before decisions are made regarding hardware and software, and by more socially just, conscientious, intentional, and pre-emptive means.

REFERENCES


