

## Foreword

There are cycles of valued-added services followed by technical improvements that characterize e-learning and online distance education (Kawachi, 2002). The present book stands witness to the fervors globally of the current stage of technical rationality characterized by a focus on enrollments, reorganization into consortia and market positioning, followed by the value-added services of social networking and ubiquitous online distance education.

These cycles were first predicted by Otto Peters (1983 p110) about thirty years ago just after the initial establishment of the leading institution – the UK Open University, and the IGNOU in India. At that time Peters predicted that, after the initial zweckrationalität of the mass production of distance education materials and delivery as seen in the early years of both the UKOU and IGNOU, there would be a movement to wertrationalität, seen in the early-1990s, of value-added services such as tutor support, media choice and learner-to-learner interactivities.

These in a second iteration in turn became subject to accountability in a natural cycle to zweckrationalität again. This was seen in the late-1990s with global expansion of online distance education. Online communication was largely through textual interactions that are high-content and low-context with academic disinterest and objectivity (and without the personal and subjectivity incurred in face-to-face interaction). However in 2001, with established global online programmes reaching a world-wide diversity of students, there became the new need now to bring in their new perspectives in realization to serve the ethnic cultural diversity and various changing wants and needs of the students. All the while providing this added value but without using faces (Blake, 2000). Individualized tutor support was marketed as the latest wertrationalität value-added service in online distance education.

Around 2005 we saw the emergence of consortia-of online distance education being provided by universities in consort with industry and corporate for-profit enterprises. This technical reorganization of zweckrationalität worked for only five years. During 2003-2008 many universities were having to merge-either whole departments are being subsumed or three or more universities are uniting to save money while hoping to maintain their promised provision of quality to their student consumer/customers. Those five years of zweckrationalität incurred merges, technical re-orientation in the marketplace, and much aggressive jockeying for the shrinking number of students willing to pay for the mammoth providers. In the States four of the largest and leading for-profit providers are under federal investigation for marketing malpractice. As an outcome online distance providers are trying hard to re-brand themselves as quality providers in 2008-2012 wertrationalität. The role of marketing is well and truly in the spotlight. The past two years and most probably the next two or three years of wertrationalität are being characterized by consortia adopting rival social networking software and application (social apps) offering mobile and ubiquitous value-added services to students.

The present book covers the past decade of the technical rationality zweckrationalität of acquisitions and mergers, and the following value-adding wertrationalität of mobile and ubiquitous online distance education.

Not all regions are at the same stage of development. We see that China is currently 2010-2015 undergoing the technical rationality zweckrationalität of reorganizing its own online distance education. We can expect after this (involving re-positioning of specific appointed provincial open universities as nationwide centers of excellence serving as hub specialists), that China will be looking at re-branding and marketing of its quality as a world-class online provider. As such, the present book should be invaluable-not only to those trying to understand the past ten years-but also to those who are charged with reorganizing and re-marketing for the future.

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