Chapter 9
Operationalization from Dehumanizing Ideologies

CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

This chapter raises a socio-cultural critique of the ‘dehumanizing ideologies’ workplace e-learning scenario. Dehumanizing ideologies operationalize the workforce in the workplace through strategic priorities, value chains, and business processes. The workplace e-learning scenario of dehumanizing ideologies precipitates around the instantiation of three concepts: information and communication technologies (ICTs), knowledge, and commodification.

An exploratory case study looks at Human Capital Theory. The basic assumptions on economics, knowledge, and people which permeate and sustain this socio-economic view are questioned. These pursuits result in a dichotomous worker (when people are considered as capital and, as such, separable from their knowledges). Unquestioned, socio-cultural assumptions and consequences now facing and evaluating the workforce also become known as are the pedagogical outcomes of a workplace e-learning that is interpreted by human capital theory and its concomitant ideologies. Socio-cultural insensitivity from workplace e-learning, in this scenario, comes from the basic, unquestioned assumption that workers are essentially socially flawed and culturally inferior; accountable for overcoming their socio-cultural flaws and inferiorities; and, need to be operationalized by workplace e-learning, through strategic priorities, value chains, and business processes, to meet the expectations of the infallible and commodified workplace.

The recurring confluence of commerce, technology, and government, all now become visible as they ideologically mould global, knowledge-based economic policies which in turn influence local knowledge management practices and apparatuses. Organizations that wish to participate in global, knowledge-based economies readily comply. Workplace e-learning now becomes another ideological instrument for the ideological pursuits of commodified knowledges from an operationalized and dehumanized subject within 21st century organizations.

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BACKGROUND

Commodification of Knowledges

Knowledge as ‘Artefact’

The proliferation of ICTs provides for a plethora of opportunities to devise unique knowledge management repositories within organizations where knowledge can be materialized, stored, retrieved, shared, and transferred. Once materialized, commodification becomes easier. Some examples of such artifacts for the management of knowledge within organizations include bulletin boards, wikis, and blogs; corporate intranets; and, knowledge centres and information hubs.

Each form of ICT-enabled knowledge management provides different insights into better understanding the connection between people, knowledge, technology, economics, governance, and innovation. The primacy of the commodification of knowledges underwrites each of these technologies as they are applied in organizations for knowledge management purposes. At the same time the unspoken expectations and assumptions that these apparatuses and their deployment places on the workforce now also become visible.

Bulletin Boards, Blogs, and Wikis

The purpose of bulletin boards, wikis, and blogs often culminates in the ad hoc dissemination and transfer of information generated by and for the workforce through social and informal networks (Clyde, 2005; Friesen & Hopkins, 2008; Kaiser, Müller-Seitz, Lopes, & Pina e Cunha, 2007; Rapley, 1997; Schoneboom, 2007). Each of these artifacts is often widely accessible to the workforce. Topics often remain unrestricted so long as they remain legal (although sometimes this point is also debatable).

Some advantages became immediately apparent. Bulletin boards, wikis, and blogs, all evolve over time and become a part of organizational culture. Relationships quickly blossom as a result of the informality of topics and structure. Based on these relationships, business problems do sometimes get resolved as a result of unrestricted communications, resulting in potential savings. Due to the clustering of responses around certain issues and the use of common linguistic lexicons and communicative registers, the executive ranks are also privy to unique insights into subcultures growing at the organization’s grassroots, both positive and negative.

There remains a conspicuous lack of formality, however. The connection between solutions presented, and actual savings resulting, is thus made indirect and opaque on the front lines. When interpersonal communications are framed as social and informal, a sizable chasm remains between the point where the interaction occurs and exactly when that knowledge is subsequently acted upon for knowledge management and material economic gains. More often solutions take the form of insights that assist in localized work performance as opposed to large scale technological innovation (Kaiser et al., 2007). This leads to further debates about how to define worker productivity within such ‘informal’ knowledge management practices? There are substantial costs (legal, operational, and opportunity costs) associated with such technologies that serve more as social networks than as processes that are work-related, on-going, and for the management of knowledge.

The use of bulletin boards, wikis, and blogs in workplace settings for knowledge management has other noticeable drawbacks. Sometimes disgruntled employees continue blogging outside of their organization’s purview and express more dissatisfied opinions (Schoneboom, 2007). In certain cases this leads to legal action and termination. All this carries disincentives for workers to use these technologies, for fear of retaliation. Organizations are thus faced with a constant tension: encouraging informal spaces for spontaneous creativity for their workers to grow and contribute to organizational, intellectual, and brand capital;