

Foreword

The higher education and corporate training landscape has undergone remarkable transformation in the last decade and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future. Even though several changes have occurred in both settings, we can point to two primary changes that are also the focus of this book.

First, in many campuses and corporate offices, the integration of technology in teaching and learning is gaining prominence. Further, there is an increase in online offerings, and the nature of the offerings is gaining in media richness. Some of the core factors responsible for this phenomenon include the rapid developments in computer and communication technology, growing access to these technologies by the general population, pressures to reduce costs of education and training, pressures to increase access to educational opportunities, and for many universities, elearning offers opportunities for expansion to regions hitherto unreachable – thus providing additional revenue streams in the face of declining government support. Elearning also enables many universities and colleges to attract and retain the increasing number of working, non-traditional students. In corporate settings, elearning continues to afford many employees workplace flexibility in knowledge acquisition and professional training development and continuous growth in their careers.

Second, many university campuses and corporate training sessions have become more culturally diverse. Information and communication technologies are in many cases eliminating regional boundaries in learning environments. Elearning, in many instances by design, attracts participation by learners who come from different regions, time zones, profess different faiths, speak different languages, and are characterized by both subtle and apparent differences in cultural beliefs and values. Even within local and culturally homogenous regions, migration and immigration forces are changing the diversity in college classrooms. The shifts in corporate expansion, mergers and acquisitions across borders, and global flow of capital also imply the critical need to offer relevant and appropriate cross-training opportunities and programs for corporate staff and employees.

As sustained as these forces that push for an increase in elearning opportunities in college and corporate settings are, we can only anticipate an increase in the need to address cross-cultural challenges and opportunities in those learning settings. The coverage of cross-cultural online learning is only set to increase. Therefore, it is critical that instructional designers and instructors gain competence in designing and delivering effective online learning experiences across cultures. The nexus of the growth in online learning and the need to develop and facilitate cross-cultural training is the central theme in this book.

Similarly, the chapter contributors invite us to consider cross-cultural online learning with a special focus on adults. Even though different authors approach the topic differently, they are all unified in providing insights on adult cross-cultural online learning in different contexts. This focus has enabled corporate training and higher education settings to be included in the same space, a departure from many

texts, which treat them separately. To that end, an educator, instructional designer, or trainer interested in this topic may benefit from the sharing of perspectives from different delivery contexts.

The strength of this volume also rests in its mix of conceptual and empirical contributions, drawn from different regions of the world, and with different contextualized perspectives on what cultural elements are important in online learning. Thus, this volume is not only timely but also informative for any educators interested in cross-cultural online learning for adults across corporate and higher education settings. At any rate, it should appeal to a very broad and international audience and promote dialogue between educators and instructional designers with diverse interests in adult cross-cultural online learning.

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