Chapter XVI

The Cultural Adaptation Process (CAP) Model: Designing E-Learning for Another Culture

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Abstract

At the conclusion of the study, The Cross-Cultural Dimensions of Globalized E-Learning (Edmundson, 2004), the cultural adaptation process (CAP) model was introduced as a proposed guideline for evaluating existing e-learning courses and for matching them to the cultural profiles of targeted learners. In theory, the model could facilitate the development of culturally-adapted and accessible e-learning courses, which in turn provide opportunities for all learners to achieve equitable learning outcomes. In this chapter, the author illustrates, with a hypothetical example, how to use the CAP model. As a result of this mock exercise, modifications to the model are recommended. However, the CAP model would benefit from further exploration, use, and development by researchers and practitioners in the field.

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Introduction

Research is an iterative process, whereby concepts from one study are applied and tested, then validated, modified, or discarded. In the study, The Cross-Cultural Dimensions of Globalized E-Learning (Edmundson, 2004), the researcher was interested in determining if and how cultural differences might affect learning outcomes when members of a non-Western culture were given an online training course designed in a Western culture. Learning outcomes were defined by Henderson (1996) as any results that reflect the acquisition of skills and knowledge, such as the effectiveness of instructional techniques and students’ perceptions or attitudes. The purpose of the study was to ascertain if learners from both cultures could achieve equitable learning outcomes, under the premise that e-learning should be designed to meet the needs of learners from different cultures. The CAP model is based on a synthesis of findings from that study integrated with findings about culture and cultural dimensions from studies in education and industrial anthropology. However, the practicality of the model has yet to be tested, validated, or modified. Therefore, in this chapter, the author first explains the concepts behind the CAP model and then guides readers through a detailed mock example of how to use it. In conclusion, as a result of completing this practical example, improvements to the CAP model are recommended. This chapter is not meant to be a reiteration of the original study (Edmundson, 2004) but, instead, is an attempt to put a proposed “e-learning adaptation” tool into practical use.

The Cultural Adaptation Process (CAP) Model

How the CAP Model Was Created

In simple terms, the model (Figure 1) is intended to guide the user through two analyses: identifying certain characteristics of an existing e-learning course, and determining if those characteristics matched the cultural profiles of the targeted learners. If not, what might need to be done, if anything, in order to adapt the course to the needs of those learners? The model provides a matrix in which, from left to right, the course complexity is considered, and from top to bottom, in which the potential steps to adapting an e-learning course for a targeted culture are progressively presented. In addition, the attributes from Level 1 to Level 4 range over a continuum, in a manner similar to the cultural dimensions described in the literature. Industrial anthropologists have defined cultural dimensions and categories of characteristics across which cultures can be compared and contrasted such as how members of a culture communicate, perceive times, accord social status, or perceive themselves in relation to the environment.
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