Chapter III

A University/Community Partnership to Build a K-8 School Network Infrastructure

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This chapter chronologically follows a multi-phased service-learning project. The project involved graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in Information Technology (IT) courses. A network infrastructure, including the physical wiring, was planned, designed, and built for a K-8 elementary school primarily to provide Internet access. A later group also assessed the future of the network.

The self-selected students were members of their chosen team for the relevant semester and may be viewed as part of the larger team for the multi-phased project. The pros, cons, and caveats of this particular service-learning project are assessed and suggestions for similar projects are included.

INTRODUCTION

Companies today are looking for workers, particularly IS workers, who have character or core values and ascribe to corporate values. In fact, EQ, or emotional intelligence, is a testable construct being used by companies in
recruitment (Anonymous, 2001; Foote, 2001; Huy, 1999; Morris, 1999). EQ techniques can guide managers in helping workers deal with problems hindering team performance. Similarly, leadership requires refocusing on core values and principles; over time, this builds character (Badaracco, 1998). Some suggest that all educational institutions need to devote considerable attention to character building (Anonymous, 2001; Foote, 2001). As we prepare our students to be effective, productive business people, how should we as educators instill values and build character in our students? This is a difficult task not simply accomplished by providing a lecture about emotional and ethical topics.

One pedagogy designed to meet this need that is receiving attention in business schools is service-learning. Jacoby (1996a, p. 5) has defined service learning as “…a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development.” She further suggests that service-learning courses integrate community service with the appropriate academic knowledge relevant to the course. The hyphen used in the term symbolizes this integration (Jacoby, 1996a).

Service-learning is particularly important in Information Technology (IT) where the students not only need technical skills and experience, but also a strong ethical foundation due to their potential ability to misuse technology. The legal aspects of technology have not been able to keep pace with rapidly advancing technology; so often IT people are confronted with complex ethical decisions. It has been argued that service-learning represents a “unique pedagogy…that enhances the ability of private-sector managers to be effective stewards of society’s moral authority” (Godfred, p. 364).

Some suggest that the future of service-learning in colleges is tightly linked with K-12 education (Jacoby, 1996b). This linkage is natural due to the growing number of at-risk children, a natural vested interest for college and universities to improve the future student body, and because students will view service-learning as an appropriate college activity if they benefited from it prior to college (Jacoby, 1996b).

Also, one of the major policy concerns in the information age is the emergence of what has been termed the “digital divide.” This “digital divide” is formed by a gap between those who have easy access to technology, particularly the Internet, and those who do not. References are frequently made to the information “haves” and “have nots” in an age where information is equivalent to wealth (Holloway, 2000). The “have nots” are in danger of being left out of the new economy and being marginalized into low-wage jobs (Dunham, 1999). At Comdex, in Spring 2000, then-President Clinton asked the IT community to help close this digital divide or gap for moral reasons and

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