Chapter XII

Measuring the Effectiveness of Training to Improve Electronic Information Literacy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter uses a case study approach to highlight issues surrounding the provision of government agency sponsored programs aimed at increasing Electronic Information Literacy (EIL), as a basic requirement for community engagement in an electronically enabled world. The Skills.net program was designed to increase EIL skills by providing “free or low cost access to training in online services and the Internet for those in the community who are least likely to have access” in Victoria, Australia. This study found that whilst the Skills.net program did increase EIL, it did not adequately address the accepted training needs of the participants nor did it adequately adhere to known guidelines for success in information literacy enhancement. This experience provides further evidence of lessons being learned from many
government agency imposed programs which do not provide adequate outcomes for regional areas as they grapple with the impact of being increasingly marginalized in an electronically enabled age.

INTRODUCTION

The global economy is currently undergoing a transformation in which information is a major producer of wealth. There is a growing importance for individuals to be able to access and interpret information from a variety of sources (Kling, 1996). If a people are not able to access and adequately interpret a variety of information they can be faced with what is being termed ‘information poverty’. Information poverty can not only be brought about by reduced access, but also by over-reliance on mass generated information from oligopolies within a narrow cultural base and by low skill/interest in interpreting available information. Fundamental issues for effective democracy in an electronically enabled age include effective access to information from a variety of sources, the ability to interpret information and the capacity to respond to the issues this raises in terms of governance, personal wealth, health, security, education and service provision. There are many interrelated factors that contribute to information poverty, including governance, public policy, access, language, culture, poor or single language literacy skills, lack of recognized need, habituated behaviour, socio-economic circumstance, education, technology access skill and psychographic profile.

As the impact of uneven access and utilization of electronically enabled communication processes becomes more evident, both within and across nation states, governments and global agencies are striving to address the issue of electronic information poverty (Fahey, 1999). In an attempt to reduce this new age poverty, many nations have pledged to develop a global information infrastructure to enable universal access to telecommunications. This has involved infrastructure and training programs both within developed countries by government agencies and in developing countries by external funding agencies. Further, the United Nations (UN) through its subsidiaries has implemented many programs aimed at addressing the economic, cultural and social issues that uneven adoption of Information Communications Technologies (ICT) starkly brings into focus. These include the necessity of having to deal with mixed cultural understanding and the increasing visibility of inequitable wealth distribution that ICT facilitates.

That this is an important issue is underpinned by the United Nation’s sponsored World Summits on the Information Society in Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005.¹ There is increasing recognition with global agencies that the provision of ICT infrastructure by itself will not address the major problems that beset

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