Collaborative E-business Planning: Developing An Enterprise Learning Tool For Information Management And Information Systems Curricula

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an evaluation of a collaborative e-business planning assignment implemented on two e-business and e-commerce modules: an undergraduate Information Management in the Digital Economy module and a postgraduate E-Business and E-Commerce module. The modules were delivered to students of information management and information systems. The paper outlines the general design of the modules, and a specific assessment in the form of a collaborative e-business planning assignment is presented. An evaluation of this assignment is presented, based on the findings of a survey instrument distributed to the students at the end of the module. Data were collected on students’ domain knowledge and transferable skills acquired as a result of undertaking the task. Analysis of the data suggests that the task was an effective learning tool for the students in acquiring domain knowledge and transferable skills appropriate to learning about, and for the practice of, e-business and e-commerce. Differences in the type and level of transferable skills acquired by undergraduates and postgraduates are identified. The implications of these findings for further face-to-face and Web-based education in e-business and e-commerce are addressed.

Keywords: e-business; e-commerce; entrepreneurship; enterprise skills, music industry

INTRODUCTION

Compared to other aspects of education in information studies, little attention has been paid to the development of curricula that prepare information management and information systems students to work in the e-business and e-commerce sector.1 This paper presents results from a collaborative e-business planning assignment implemented on two e-business and e-commerce modules: an undergraduate Information Management in the Digital Economy module and a postgraduate E-Business and E-Commerce module. The initiative was part of a teaching and learning development project called Managing Innovation in the Digital Economy (http://www.wrce.org.uk/elbidshef.htm), funded by the White Rose Centre for Enterprise (WRCE) (http://www.wrce.org.uk/). One of the anticipated outcomes of WRCE projects is the development of transferable learning materials that can be
Managing Innovation in the Digital Economy project focused on the implementation of a collaborative e-business planning assignment on an E-Business and E-Commerce module at the postgraduate level. In particular, the impact that individual differences can have on students’ acquisition of domain knowledge and transferable skills on the assignment was studied (Foster & Lin, 2003; Lin & Foster, 2002). The purposes of the current paper are (a) to evaluate the implementation of the same collaborative e-business planning assignment on an undergraduate Information Management in the Digital Economy module, (b) to compare the findings on the undergraduate module with those on the postgraduate E-Business and E-Commerce module, and (c) to identify the implications of the findings for future education in e-business and e-commerce. The paper is organized into the following sections: introduction, method, results, and conclusion. The remainder of this introductory section provides the background to the current study, including brief descriptions of the modules, and the rationale for incorporating the collaborative e-business planning assignment.

E-Business and E-Commerce—Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Currie (2000) identified 10 key challenges in the development of Internet commerce: market/business sector, products/services, value chain, innovation and technology, customer focus, role of government, managerial issues, administrative/hierarchical structure, cost/performance, and risk/reward. The current paper focuses on the issue of innovation/technology and how a collaborative e-business planning assignment can prepare students to acquire not only the domain knowledge but also the transferable skills they need to engage in innovation and entrepreneurship. As Castells (2001) stated: “In an e-economy based on knowledge, information, and intangibles…innovation is the primordial function.” Given Castells’ statement, the management of innovation and the ability to manage the innovation process become key skills for those engaging in a digital economy, where goods are increasingly produced and consumed with the aid of information and communications technology. Hills, Schrader, and Lumpkin (1999) identified five stages to the entrepreneurial innovation process: preparation, incubation, insight, evaluation, and elaboration. We propose that each stage of the entrepreneurial process involves the application of domain knowledge of e-business and e-commerce, but that each stage also requires the application of particular transferable skills. Table 1 illustrates.

Reflection on unsuccessful e-business and e-commerce initiatives during the 2000–2001 dot-com boom demonstrated that many e-business ventures failed because of a lack of business planning and a proper grounding in traditional business planning techniques (see, for example, http://www.businessplanningarchive.org). We consider that such skills are necessary for those attempting e-business and e-commerce startups and those attempting to innovate and implement e-commerce within existing organizations. We define enterprise learning as the acquisition not only of the domain knowledge but also the transferable skills relevant to the practice of innovation and entrepreneurship, irrespective of the particular product or organizational context.
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