Chapter 6
Primacy of Commodified Knowledges

CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

This chapter discusses the cultural paradigm of ‘commodified knowledges’ in the workplace. This cultural paradigm is the second of two paradigms discussed in this book that shape socio-culturally insensitive, technological artefactual approaches to workplace e-learning research and study. Subsequently, this paradigm also socially reshapes workplace e-learning historicity for workplace adult education and training, resulting in socio-cultural impacts on the workforce.

‘The knowledge-based economy’ as a concept of the global age comes from the various schools of thought. Each of the theories forwarded by these schools of thought continues to influence knowledge-based economic policy today, whether in regards to information-based societies; knowledge products; knowledge workers; or, technological innovations. These are the global policies that afford commodified knowledges their priority in the (knowledge-based) workplace.

Organizations specifically concerned with knowledge governance, now invest in practices better known as ‘knowledge management’. Organizational apparatuses such as strategic priorities, value chains, and business processes, all become appropriated towards the materialization and reification of knowledge as an economic commodity for the benefit of the workplace.

‘Business process reengineering’ continues to have impact on the workplace as both a mandate and method for knowledge management towards the commodification of knowledge in the workplace. Workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training now becomes another means for commodified knowledges through continuously reengineered knowledge management apparatuses.

For workplace e-learning, adherence to the belief in the primacy of commodified knowledges...
Primacy of Commodified Knowledges leads to two workplace e-learning scenarios: (a) dehumanizing ideologies (see Chapter 9); and, (b) social integration (see Chapter 10).

BACKGROUND

Schools of Thought

The notion of ‘knowledge-based economy’ has been a part of academic, government, adult education, and workplace enquiry, in one form or another, for more than a century. Over time, four strands of thinking around the concept of knowledge-based economy continue to prevail and define knowledge-based economy research. The cultural paradigm of commodified knowledges, currently reshaping workplace e-learning historicity in organizations, also finds much its impetus from each of these schools of thought.

Information Industries and Societies

The first branch of thinking on the knowledge-based economy is based on the work of Fritz Machlup (1902-1983). Machlup, credited as being one of the first economic thinkers and theorists to perceive knowledge as an economic resource, sees the knowledge-based economy as “information-centered industries whose purpose it is to make an impression, any impression, on the minds of other persons” (Brint, 2001). Machlup’s thinking is linked to more contemporary thinking on the economic importance of knowledge and information for society and is credited for deriving the notion of ‘information society’.

Knowledge Production and Processes

The second branch is based on the work of economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1908-2006). This branch of thinking holds that the knowledge-based economy comprises large corporations and multi-national enterprises in mature industries and focuses on their ability to control and also manage change. This view also encompasses the work of Peter F. Drucker (1906-2005) and other management scholars and consultants in similar vein who promote the perception of the knowledge-based economy as consisting of those industries and workplaces where knowledge is regarded as a direct factor of production.

Galbraith’s and Drucker’s thinking on the knowledge-based economy eventually spawned ‘knowledge management’ as a bone fide, legitimate objective of workplace governance alongside other, more traditional, workplace processes and practices. The study of knowledge management practices and apparatuses comes out of the overall direction of studies of knowledge-based economy conducted under the Galbraith school of thought. Drucker (1959), who actually coined the term ‘knowledge work’, was one of the seminal thinkers in making this connection between global, knowledge-based economic policy and organizational knowledge management (Darr & Warhurst, 2008; Drucker, 1959, 1993; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). In more succinct terms, knowledge management involves the effective deployment by organizations of workers towards knowledge production and products.

Scientific Knowledge, Credentials, Professionalism, and Human Capital

The third branch of thinking on the knowledge-based economy claims a more historic origin through the thinking of Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and the role of scientific thought in economic growth. The knowledge-based economy in this case “is based on analyzing industries that make particular use of scientific and professional knowledge and of highly educated workers… that knowledge transmitted through universities has become an increasingly important engine of economic development” (Brint, 2001). Accordingly, when considering current times, Brint (2001) makes an argument for the third strand of