Chapter 10
Homogenization through Social Integration

CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

This chapter produces a socio-cultural critique of the ‘social integration’ workplace e-learning scenario to homogenize the workforce through organizational communications; workplace design and organizational development; recruitment, rewards, and retention; and, learning and knowledge management. Workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training, as a result of the normalization of skills and competencies and the commodification of knowledges, becomes progressively more homogenized. This leads to an increasingly socially integrated workplace. The socio-cultural impacts are understood through the homogenization of the modes and media of workplace e-learning.

An exploratory case study considers some of the socially integrationist repercussions of this homogenizing trend in workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training. The modes of learning are becoming more homogenized through policies, value chains, and business processes. The media of learning are becoming more homogenized through workplace e-learning artefactual foci. Socio-cultural insensitivity from workplace e-learning, in this scenario, comes from the basic, unquestioned assumption that workers are essentially socially flawed and culturally inferior; accountable for overcoming their socio-cultural flaws and inferiorities; and, need to be homogenized by workplace e-learning, through communications, design, recruitment, and learning, to meet the expectations of the infallible and commodified workplace.

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Homogenization through Social Integration

Social integration by workplace e-learning happens through the application of homogenizing modes and media towards organizational communications; workplace design and organizational development; recruitment and retention; and, learning and knowledge-building, to socially integrate the workforce for a knowledge-based workplace. Social integration, as an analytical metaphor for workplace e-learning, also reveals and exposes some of the unseen, conformist, and persuasive, outcomes that inexorably lead towards pedagogies of workforce alienation and contingency.

BACKGROUND

Elaborate Workplaces and Complex Workforces

Workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training is borne of an intricate milieu. Globalization, technological innovation, and the knowledge-based economy, all are demanding workplaces transform. Workplace transformation is resulting in work, and workplace learning, that are becoming more normalized with an idealized sense of workers as ‘knowledge workers’. Workplace e-learning epistemology, ontology, and pedagogy, all are universalized in outlook and favour European and Western ways of knowing and learning motivated by technologic and economic goals.

What of the global and diverse workers now entering the workplace? Are workplaces and workforces synonymous? A socio-culturally sensitive standpoint says ‘no’. The workforce is becoming more socially and culturally divergent. The undeniable demographic realities are that the major supply of labour in the future will be non-European and non-Western by descent. With repeated regularity, workers carry a multitude of talents often resulting in underemployment. The global workforce, outside of Europe and the West, may not be so susceptible to faith in the commodification of knowledges.

As the contexts people work at (workplace forms) and the spaces people work in (organizational structure) transform, work (rules and roles) is also changing in some very fundamental ways (convergence and informationalization). Some identifiable linkages between contexts, spaces, work, learning, technologies, and people must be made known that then establish a basis for an on-going discussion on a diverse workforce and workplace e-learning. What is the impact of the normalization of work on the global workforce and workplace e-learning? More importantly, what is the impact of workplace e-learning on the normalization of work?

Both the capacity for innovation and flexibility in customer responsiveness undergird the normalization of work, concurrently and in tandem. Nevertheless, to state that the values such as flexibility in customer responsiveness and capacity for innovation lead to the change in work is insufficient when addressing the issue of workplace e-learning. Are these values that every society instils in their cultures? Ultimately, this reveals that the normalization of work, workplace e-learning, and workplace adult education and training, are all more closely tied to the realities of the normalization imperatives than the realities of the workforce.

MAIN FOCUS

Exploratory Case Study

This exploratory case study (Yin, 2008) reflects on questions around the normalization of the rules and roles of work; learning, skills, and competencies; and, their collective homogenizing impacts for workplace e-learning. As a point of entry, this exploration takes a more socio-cultural perspective when discussing workplace e-learning by looking at semiotics, linguistics, and new media. For Kress