An Integrative View of Knowledge Sharing Impact on E-Learning Quality: A Model for Higher Education Institutes

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ABSTRACT

The era in which learning was limited to a special class of people has long since reached its end. Rapid changes in information technology, which affect all aspects of modern life, make continuous learning an inevitable requirement of prosperity and development. Knowledge sharing plays a significant role in the process of learning. E-learning is the latest process of knowledge sharing in which people intentionally share what they have learned and receive the latest knowledge from the provider of e-learning. In this regard, knowledge sharing has a major impact on e-learning quality as the sharing of knowledge comprises the core process of e-learning. In this paper, the authors propose utilizing influential knowledge sharing indicators for e-learning quality assessment that can provide an informative basis for further studies on quality measurement of e-learning processes.

Keywords: e-Learning Quality, Higher Education, Knowledge Sharing, Measurement Factors, Quality Assessment

INTRODUCTION

In today’s increasingly technological environment, organizations need to keep their related field of knowledge up to date. Even people with extensive knowledge should be trained how to use it. This can be achieved by various conventional and modern methods of learning and transferring new knowledge. Learning should be seen as a continuous process, not as an isolated one-off event. In the range of learning methods from traditional to electronic, the methods which approach the learning process in an electronic format tend to be easier to adapt and adjust to the knowledge-based requirements of contemporary organizations, especially educational establishments which pursue the
goal of transferring knowledge of the highest
good quality in the most appropriate way.

LITERATURE REVIEW

No single agreed definition of e-learning can be found among scholars (Allen & Seaman, 2007; An et al., 2009; Chen, 2008; Lee & Lee, 2008; Mitchell & Honore, 2007; Singh et al., 2004; Smith & Kurthen, 2006; Vernadakis et al., 2011), but “it generally refers to internet based forms of learning, rather than face to face interaction and where traditional methods of learning are supported by online resources” (McKenzie & Murray, 2010, p. 17). Nowadays online instruction is widely adopted in universities (Huang et al., 2011) and in many institutions (Chen, 2008) which want to keep their staff up to date, mainly because of the rapid increase in internet use (Chen, 2008; Huang et al., 2011).

The notion of e-learning is not new; during the past decade many advantages have been identified and documented by different researchers. According to McKenzie and Murray (2010) there are various reasons for using e-learning, including anonymity. They argue that since people have the opportunity to withhold their real names in online communication, “this nature of the technology used in e-learning may actually facilitate the identity shift that underpins learning” (p. 18). This finding seems to be reasonable, especially given that certain subjects are taboo in some societies or forbidden by some governments. E-learning increases motivation by allowing instructors to communicate information in a more engaging fashion (Wang, 2003) and by exploiting technology and personalizing information (Mohammadi et al., 2011). It also fosters self-paced learning whereby students can learn at their own speed (Mohammadi et al., 2011; Wang, 2003; Zhang et al., 2004). Table 1 reviews the advantages of e-learning.

According to Longworth and Davies (1996), “in this age of globalization, knowledge acquisition has become the critical means for gaining competitive advantage, and as such learning has become a crucial element of knowledge acquisition, application and creation” (as cited in Lee, 2006, p. 517).

“Knowledge is accrued by integrating information, experience, and theory” (Chang & Chuang, 2011, p. 10). Traditional non-digital sources of knowledge, such as hard-copy reports, necessitate manual methods of retrieval of the information contained therein which “are labor-intensive and the results of the work cannot easily be shared, stored, re-used, and managed” (Dreher & Dreher, 2011, p. 33). But since the advent of computers and rapid development of information technology, knowledge can be shared and delivered via technology-driven or structured processes (Chang & Chuang, 2011).

Effective and efficient training of the members of an organization improve their ability to cope with the challenges which new technology brings. These people, for example university staff and students, are the main intellectual resource, or human capital, of an organization. The process of training and keeping them up to date consumes a large portion of monetary and non-monetary resources of any organization. Should a person decide to leave, in most cases there is no mechanism to retain the developed capabilities and knowledge for the institution. Losing a professor, an instructor, or a student creates a gap between the resource usage rate and the given outcome; put simply, it means losing an important part of the organization’s resources and capability necessary to compete.

What concepts can assist higher education institutions to alleviate the negative side-effects of such problems? In our opinion, knowledge sharing is one of the key answers to this question. From the point of view of the individual, “Knowledge sharing enables people in virtual communities to access relevant knowledge (explicit or tacit) from broader scope of resources. The performance in such environments is fundamentally based on how effectively the explicit and tacit knowledge can be shared.
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