Redefining Close Quarters: Discussing transitioning business academics from traditional to blended delivery

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The partnership between designers and subject matter experts creates an ill-structured problem whereby the marrying of design skills with discipline knowledge are not always seamlessly combined. The meaning of definitions and by association interpretations can become blurred in this partnership and understanding the different perspectives contributing to the activity can assist in guiding design activities. Each participant in the partnership has a contextual journey that is guided by their own perspectives, discipline specific experiences as knowledge and interpretation of such and this can result in a unique experience for this problem-solving activity of design. This panel allows academics to share their own interpretations of the process as a way to alert all participants to the blurred understandings that occur in design processes.

Keywords: design partnerships, lived-experiences, experiences to support problem solving

Introduction

Transitioning from face to face delivery to a blended delivery format can be out of necessity or general interest (Allen, Seaman, & Garrett, 2007). The necessity of moving from one delivery method to another is typically based on organizational needs. The needs can include the diversification of offerings to address retention and/or to address the act of engaging both learners and instructors in the learning process (Bonk & Graham, 2012; Boyle, Bradley, & Chalk, 2003; Graff, 2008). Whatever the reason for the transition, the process of an academic making that transition themselves when they are the subject matter experts for a specific discipline requires a combination of intrinsic motivation with guided assistance. Documenting and by extension, discussing the different learning phases in this transition is seen as key knowledge to academics in the learning community - and for this panel specifically in a business learning community.

The role of technology

Understanding the role that technology plays by mediating the learning process within the environment also highlights the need for activating unknown knowledge to facilitate the transition (Van de Wiel, Szegedi, & Weggeman, 2004). Educational designers and developers provide this necessary support to academics by creating an almost ***just-in-time-like*** learning support (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013; Brandenburg & Ellinger, 2003; Cole, Fischer, & Saltzman, 1997). This support is manifested through the use of context-dependent cognitive skills and expertise to create a solution that is iterative and mission-focused (Jonassen, 2008). It is with this contextualized-support combined with the academic's motivation that progress towards the transition can be made.

Panel Discussion

This panel of academics will discuss the process of transitioning from delivering for face to face to preparing to deliver in a blended mode using their own lived-experiences (Cervero & Wilson, 2006). This autobiographical method allows each presenter to share whilst self-reflecting on their thoughts, behaviours and ultimately their own actions, with the view that this information would assist educational designers to find the right language and methods to guide academics through similar processes. The uniqueness of each academic's experience as well as the contextual nature of the academic's faculty and by association, the overall institution, creates for a number of factors that can influence how the process is executed by the designer as well as how the final design is received.

The panel discussion is not so much of a discussion on what is right or what is wrong, but more along the lines of what are the interpretations of the discussions, what were the motivating factors for the transition undertaken,

what are the belief systems going into the design activities and most importantly what does the process look like from various hats participating in the process?

The Panel will discuss their individual perceptions on questions that are not explicitly asked during design consultations. These may include but are not restricted to:
1. How long does it take to convert your course to blended?
2. Why should I blend?
3. What are the workload implications?
4. Will it save me work/time?
5. Will it reduce my teaching hours?
6. How will it benefit students?

Along with these are assumptions such as "…All I need is help with the blended part, I already know how to teach?" and "Students don't want to come in class so if I blend I'll address all of their needs" or "If I blend my course, students will come and my satisfaction scores will go up".

The questions/assumptions above may seem simplistic but include numerous definitions and with it differing interpretations to discipline specific academics. As [learning] designers, guiding the process hearing these assumptions and interpretations through this panel can help us align our practices and guidance towards a more successful approach, thus acting as lessons learned for general practice.

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