Symposium Proposal

UBUNTU, DISTANCE LEARNING AND VIRTUAL KNOWLEDGE PARKS: PAST EXPERIENCES, FUTURE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Abstract

The panelists will draw from their online distance learning experiences gained in teaching the undergraduate course, "World Business and Economic Issues." The course was first offered in 1999 by a collaboration of five colleges in Massachusetts. More recently, the panelists have shared their experiences at EAMI conferences in Amsterdam (2007), Rio de Janeiro (2009), and Lima (2015). Through interactive presentations using multi-media examples, the panelists will demonstrate a prototype model for distance learning, that incorporates the principles of Ubuntu and virtual knowledge parks. The proposed model has far-reaching implications beyond the classroom, including lessons for businesses, governments, and non-governmental organizations.

SYMPOSIUM PROPOSAL

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Symposium Overview

The panel will present an advanced model of distance learning which grew out of teaching the collaborative distance learning course, "World Business & Economic Issues" first offered in 1999 by a collaboration of five Universities in the State of Massachusetts, USA. In the past, the panelists have shared their experiences at EAMI conferences in Amsterdam (2007), Rio de Janeiro (2009), and more recently, in Lima (2015). Over the years, the panelists have also benefited from other world forums, such as the 2008 UNESCO conference on knowledge parks. Over the years the mission of the course has grown to operationalizing collaborative educational technology beyond instruction to international problem solving. Through interactive presentations using multi-media examples, the panelists will demonstrate how such a model is a prototype for economic development, especially in very low income rural and urban settings. Our course and the development networks we propose incorporate the Ubuntu idea of leadership. Ubuntu can be defined as humaneness – a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness – that individuals and groups display for one another.

The latest generation of our model expands the subject and content to issues facing nations and organizations of the world. The model can be replicated to engage universities and research institutes, individuals and businesses, governments and non-governmental organizations in distributed, issue-driven networks to support local economic development. Basic needs such as food and clean water are still unmet for millions of people and malnutrition and disease have become the incubators of tomorrow's resistant pathogens, not to mention the loss of the armament of antibiotics. Collaboration is therefore imperative for confronting these and other grand challenges facing humankind, and the model offered here is but one way to facilitate this.

Our model can be replicated to engage universities and research institutes, individuals and businesses, governments and non-governmental organizations in distributed, issue-driven networks to support locally focused economic development. Current faculty have been in contact with counterparts in a growing number of countries and regions, including the Middle East, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Central America. As the globalization of business reaches even medium and small businesses, economic and political issues arise and instantly involve multiple countries and regions. Shared knowledge, culture, and capital can moderate the risks that are catastrophic for impoverished families, and entire nations. Collaborative educational technology is the most powerful means of sharing knowledge, coordinating effort, and effecting change.

An initial attempt at developing virtual student working teams occurred when Professor Rogers spent a sabbatical in China several years ago. It wasn't possible yet to accomplish such a project but what the education system and the government of the Peoples Republic of China were doing to get up to speed technologically brought the realization that this would be feasible shortly (a few years). Meanwhile, we as a panel were able to experiment with the idea by using the Collaborative Distance Learning Honors course as a testing ground. The teams we created across the campuses were not only from different regions of the state but actually from different countries as well. The rapid prevalence of cell phones in Chinese cities portends a future spread of notebook computers or equivalent devices to the developing world in the near future.

This collaborative distance-learning course was successfully developed and offered for the first time in the spring semester of 1999 under the auspices of the Commonwealth College of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Massachusetts USA. The course was offered simultaneously at four state institutions, namely, Framingham State College, the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and Westfield State College. Our present proposal develops our prior models to create virtual knowledge parks

(VKPs), which would engage educational institutions, enterprises, students, and employees to bring the latest innovations to the service of customers and communities. Services would be drawn from a global network of sources, and delivered in a flexible system that would include coordination using tablets and software similar to WEBCT and Blackboard, and Eluminate.

Our course began as an interactive, multimedia inquiry into challenges and opportunities facing the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Once a week all participants interacted live from their respective locations through videoconferencing and computers. Honors students from the four campuses and a variety of disciplines joined in project teams with faculty, executives and government officials. Together they addressed vital issues that included: globalization; changing industries; technology; human resources; and the role of government. Final project presentations were made using multimedia communication to the four classes at their campuses. New projects added global issues like human rights, terrorism, and war. As a model for economic development, the course becomes the network supporting virtual knowledge parks.

New, web-based team building techniques will support multidisciplinary, multi-institutional/agency/enterprise/national teams. Given the diversity of backgrounds, teams will address development issues from a multidisciplinary viewpoint. Past student projects addressed:

- Rights and Responsibilities of Multinational Corporations.
- The Future of Petroleum in the World Economy
- Industry Competition in the World Economy
- Implications of the Global Information Explosion
- Terrorism: Trade in Insecurity
- Global Multiculturalism
- Human Rights of Nations

From the success of these multi-campus student/faculty projects, has come the idea of Virtual Knowledge Parks (VKPs) for Development, as a new realization of an organic process of problem solving across the globe. This will be an especially useful tool in the reinforcement of the North-South knowledge exchange, and the location of the 2009 EAM International Conference on Managing in a Global Economy in Rio de Janeiro presents a great opportunity to advance that goal.

Conclusion

The world's problems are not endogenous to any one country or region. Due to the globalization, the world's infrastructural systems – whether they are financial transactions, electricity supply networks, food supply, climatic and weather developments – are interconnected in complex and sophisticated ways. The axiomatic 'butterfly effect,' which suggests that a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil might create a storm in China is more true in today's globalized economy than ever before. The fact that a small event in one region of the world can have enormous implications for the rest of the world justifies the need to develop global knowledge networks for problem solving. Sustainable, locally controlled, global involvement in evolving solutions is essential. This symposium is but one small step in that direction.

Participants Roles

- Professor Mzamo Mangaliso will introduce the panel and give a background and overview of the process of educational/practical collaboration infused with Ubuntu leadership. This will include the recruitment and orientation of advisors, educators, and entrepreneurs.
- Professor Knipes will discuss the theoretical frameworks and collaborative aspects of the VKP/Development model, including entrepreneurial financial/production groups. Existing software for VKP developed at the University of Leeds will be reviewed. Relevant ideas from the 2008 UNESCO conference on Knowledge Parks will be incorporated.
- Professor Pellissier will discuss the role of universities as knowledge hubs for the creation, distribution, sharing, and managing of knowledge. Her discussion will elaborate on the complexities experienced within a comprehensive South African university striving to create and develop knowledge hubs using technology in an increasingly globalizing context.

- Professor Rogers will elaborate on the web-based technology, focusing specifically on the experiences in the use of bulletin boards and chat rooms as a medium for information exchange and decision making.
- Professors Kahn and Ovitsky will discuss the monitoring processes used in the project. They will describe the process of setting up and facilitating the multi-site

advisor/educator/entrepreneur teams and their use of live presentations from remote campuses. Also included here will be the role of faculty and the challenges to expect in the collaborative planning and project evaluation processes.

- <u>Professor Zengie Mangaliso</u> will moderate the panel discussion and act as the facilitator of the interactive part of the panelists with the attendees.