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THE PROCESS OF CREATIVE DESTRUCTION: USING IT TO CRAFT A LEARNING ORGANIZATION IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

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How can business schools prepare students to thrive in the knowledge age? Decades of teaching have trained students to be passive *consumers* of knowledge, yet in the knowledge age, they must also learn how to be active *producers* and *conveyers* of knowledge. How can information technology be used to transform business courses for the purpose of engaging the constructive and collaborative learning behaviors required in knowledge age organizations?

This research-in-progress investigated these questions via directed changes in course design, conduct, culture, and technology. It further explored how new course designs can experientially give students process skills for thriving in network-based learning organizations. The data are drawn from a rich case study of an actual MBA course that attempted to change the learning culture through extensive use of Lotus Notes.

A new experimental course in Electronic Commerce (EC) was conducted at the University of Maryland at College Park. It was team led by professors from both Marketing and IS. The field of EC was particularly suited to a collaborative and constructive learning approach as new technologies and competitive models in this field are constantly changing. In designing a knowledge-constructing course, the faculty anticipated two key challenges: 1) to create a learning and sharing culture for the class that differed from the competitive cultures of many traditional U.S. MBA courses and 2) to engage students in active rather than passive learning behavior. Preliminary class activities to address these concerns included a role playing exercise, development of a class mission, and a whiteboarding exercise to surface students' and faculty's assumptions about how classes are conducted. The faculty then described how many of the traditional class assumptions were antithetical to the process goals of a learning organization. Each student would be expected to actively pursue the mission of developing expertise in EC and conveying that expertise via Lotus Notes to his or her peers. There was no syllabus for the course as the Notes database was the repository for all on-going course planning. Other course design principles included a tenet that all information sharing would be open and that the class would be largely self-organizing in terms of scheduling and coordination via Lotus Notes.

A rich dataset was collected during the conduct of the course. The Notes database has 1,305 documents posted using five different forms (e.g., Main Topic, Response, Website Review, Evaluation, Question). Usage across students varied widely from a high activity level of 76 postings to a low of seven. In addition to the database itself, the students completed a learning styles inventory, an open-ended assessment regarding particular aspects of the course, a standard course evaluation, a midterm, a team project, and received participation grades. The students also individually allocated 1,000 points to the five course participants who each of them believed contributed most to his or her learning. This measure was included to give insight to the relationship, if any, between quantity and quality of database contributions.

The preliminary insights show that the Notes database and course design did help to engage the students in both constructive and collaborative learning behavior. This is readily demonstrated in the database through self-directed collaboration when students shared insights for another student's projects. A second observation from frequent student comments was their struggle with the lack of structure in the course and its departure from familiar course conduct.

The presentation will include a set of course design guidelines for using IT to transform and enable the learning activities required for knowledge age organizations. These principles are drawn from and illustrated by the database documents created during the conduct of the course.