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Computer-Supported Cooperative Education and Development in Southern Africa

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PANEL 21

COMPUTER-SUPPORTED COOPERATIVE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Panel Chair: Dewald Roode, University of Pretoria

Panelists: Carina de Villers, University of South Africa
Madelise Grobler, University of Pretoria
Jonathan Miller, University of Cape Town
Mayuri Odedra-Straub, Odedra-Straub Research and Consultancy
Jackie Phahlamohlaka, Department of Strategic Planning, KanGwane

In addition to all the political upheavals, South Africa is still encumbered by educational problems which cannot easily be addressed only by means of the traditional remedies of spending more money, building more schools and training more teachers. Bold and imaginative solutions, such as the proper and coordinated use of information technology, should be considered as complementary strategies.

The intervention of information technology in the total educational and training arena, infusing both the formal and non-formal fields through the use of computer supported cooperative education (CSCE) and training in the Southern African sub-continent, will be described and analyzed. In particular, the panelists will discuss the non-technical groundwork which our preliminary experience has shown to be necessary to ensure the success of this type of intervention. The focus, therefore, is on the cultural context within which cooperative education is introduced, and not on the technology for CSCE. While the socio-economic benefits which could accrue could go a long way toward addressing the deeply rooted problems of the region, it is undoubtedly true that certain ethical issues cannot be ignored. Thus, there should be no "utopian" approach, believing that the simple act of infusing enough information technology into the economy of a developing country will necessarily be beneficial to all concerned. The panel will offer solutions to the ethical dilemma of using First World technology to address the problems of the Third World without, as Boland (1987) has put it, "imposing an order on the world of another."

A number of case studies will be discussed to describe the pilot projects in which CSCE is currently being implemented with a view of achieving not only educational and training objectives, but also specific socio-economic objectives. In particular, attention will be paid to the extent to which CSCE fosters positive relations among learners across ethnic boundaries and, thus, how CSCE is successful in addressing the multi-cultural diversity of the Southern African education and training field.

Finally, the panel will debate the lessons which follow from these particular experiences and which are of interest to the IS community at large. One such aspect concerns the relevant success achieved in the development of people, which, as Odedra, et al. (1993) have pointed out, is what development is all about. This has pertinent implications for First World information system practitioners, who normally (and mostly unwittingly) take it for granted that the user is a "developed" person, who will "therefore" be relatively unaffected by the information technology they introduce. The African experience serves as an eye opener to the contribution that information systems could make in a society that has a complex ethnic and cultural diversity and an enormous, urgent need to increase the well-being of the individual and, through that, of society.

References

Boland, R. J. "The In-formation of Information Systems." In R. J. Boland and R. Hirschheim (Editors), *Critical Issues in Information Systems Research.* New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1987, pp. 363-379.

Odedra, M.; Lawrie, M.; Bennett, M.; and Goodman, S. "Sub-Saharan Africa: A Technological Desert." *Communications of the ACM*, Volume 36, Number 2, 1993, pp. 25-29.

Directions for Data Quality Research. Stu Madnick will provide an overall assessment of data quality as a research discipline, its impact on organizations, and critical research issues that need to be addressed in the short- and long-term. He will also discuss how data quality as an issue relates to other research problems in information systems.