Abstract

Ethical Drivers of the Implementation of Instructional Technology

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Paper Submitted for Review and Presented at
Teaching Online In Higher Education Conference
Indiana-Purdue University at Fort Wayne
November 18, 2004

The purpose of this paper is to depict a model of the ethical drivers of the implementation of instructional technology. The model is meant to be a starting point for institutions as they initiate, update or implement instructional technology. A major assumption underlying the paper is that a consideration of ethics is lacking in the planning process for instructional technology. Instructional technology is defined as the intentional use of hardware, software, and "net-ware" to communicate and foster discourse related to the content of a discipline. A brief case history is used as a basis for explicating a taxonomy of ethical drivers of the implementation of instructional technology. The taxonomy depicts three levels of ethical drivers: service to the individual good, service to the institutional good and the commitment to the universal good as interrelated in an organizing heuristic. Nested within these three levels are a series of dichotomies which represent "decision points" for institutions and individuals: whether to base implementation on "high" ethics or "low" ethics. Specific questions are presented based on the taxonomy that institutions can utilize to assess the "ethical environment" and to foster improvement in that environment. It is concluded that without such a framework, the ethical environment is said to be more responsive to personal agendas, institutional image or superficial considerations in the implementation of instructional technology. A ***Taxonomy of Ethical Drivers of the Implementation of Instructional Technology*©** appears at the end of the paper.

Ethical Drivers of the Implementation of Online Instruction

To limit an analysis of the politics of on-line instruction to a single article or presentation is an impossible task. The purpose of this article is a modest one: to depict a model of the ethical drivers that operate in the implementation of online instruction. The model is in no way meant to be comprehensive. There is no attempt within this article to provide a comprehensive definition of ethics. It is a starting point for considering the role of ethics in the implementation of online instruction.

In order to provide a contextual base for the models of ethical drivers of online instruction, a brief case analysis is presented of such implementation at a small college classified

as “comprehensive” by its regional accreditation body. Specific individuals and locations have been modified to preserve the confidentiality of individuals involved. First, the general concepts and assumptions underlying the model are presented, including the definition of online instruction. Second, a brief history of the events at a comprehensive Midwestern college is presented as a basis for analysis of ethical drivers. Third, a taxonomy of the ethical drivers of instructional technology and is depicted. Fourth, a set of key questions based on the taxonomy of ethical drivers is presented which can be used to assess the drivers operating within any institutional context. Finally, conclusions and implications of ethical drivers are discussed represented by the taxonomy as they apply to all institutions of higher learning.

General Concepts

For the purposes of this paper, instructional technology is defined as the intentional use of hardware, software and/or netware to communicate and foster discourse related to the content of a discipline. Online instruction is defined here as any attempt to communicate about the content of a discipline over an electronic network or to convey information about a discipline. Online instruction encompasses distance learning and the use of instructional technology within traditional synchronous and asynchronous instructional formats. It is assumed that “on-line instruction” is qualitatively different than modes of instructional technology that existed in the previous generation of higher education instruction.

For those who have been in the academy for more than a decade, memories of dusty and unused overhead projectors still linger. Early on, many in the academy simply ignored instructional technology much like instructional technology and online instruction have been resisted in the early stages of development.

A skepticism has been prevalent in the academy with respect to instructional technology that is not necessarily evident anywhere else:

Of course, the important question to be asked of any proposal for reform of existing instructional technology is whether student learning is facilitated more under the "new" than under the "old." Concerning this question there is little research evidence to show superiority of the "new" over the "old." This does not prove that the "old" is best , but it does require caution in extending innovative instructional technologies beyond the situations for which they were designed (p. 419).

Throughout the remainder of this paper, it will be seen that both caution and institutional or political self interest with regard to the implementation of instructional technology can result from and contribute to a less than optimum ethical institutional environment. In the following section, the contexts are described in which these and other attitudes evolved at what is called "Entrepreneurial College." It is these contexts which provide a basis for considering the ethical drivers of online instruction.

A Brief Case History of Instructional Technology at Entrepreneurial College

In the early 1980's and into the 1990's, Entrepreneurial College found itself in direct competition with a rapidly growing local community college branch. Presumably, the community college enrollment grew because, previously, the local college had not or could not serve that "market." In some ways, the competition temporarily energized EC. In other ways, it nearly brought about its demise in a clash of competitive institutional and leadership egos.

In an attempt to collaborate on some programs, administration and faculty at EC accepted community college students into their general education courses. In return, the community college agreed not to offer general education courses, at least temporarily. In reality, EC was

quietly buying up all of the residences in a neighborhood-busting effort to surround the community college so that it could not expand its physical plant. And the community college was quietly gearing up to offer general education courses to siphon off enrollment from EC and increase its profit margin. Much of the income from the local branch which was controlled by a mother campus some 40 miles away was funneled into marketing against EC. Over the decade, hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars were spent on marketing the community college to a community which, of course, was already aware of the existence of both institutions. The competition and increasing enmity split the community and antagonized some factions of the local business community.

In what was to be a crushing blow to the community college, EC began to heavily discount its tuition for regional students in order to compete against the community college. Students were encouraged to believe that they could complete the entire four years at the discounted rate at EC. In reality, regional students who transferred from the community college to EC were suddenly faced with expensive private tuition in their third and fourth years. EC successfully increased its enrollment but dramatically reduced its "profit" margin. Direct and indirect costs rose proportionately coupled with a dramatically increased debt load incurred by the purchase by EC of properties surrounding the campus.

The nexus of the competition became evident in the emergence of two "technology education entities"-one at each institution. Both taxpayer and local foundation dollars were expended on duplicate facilities. Resources for both facilities were stretched thin. The state supported center eventually drove the EC technology center out of business-a result which surprised no one in the local business community. Overshadowing this competition was the onrush of new developments in technology, largely ignored into the late 1990's by EC

leadership. The waste of resources directed toward the inter-institutional competition depleted the coffers of EC and restricted its ability to implement new technologies.

In another indication of problematic nature of instructional technology, EC had earlier received a large multi-year grant after submitting a token proposal in partnership with a local school district. The purpose was to install a joint teleconferencing link between the school and the EC, the school located some 3 miles from EC. No purpose was ever established for implementation of such a project. The project failed but not until over $100,000 was expended for equipment that was never used. A great deal of publicity and fanfare accompanied the implementation of the project which later failed because there was no logical content to be broadcast and no purpose established for the equipment. The connection "went dark" when the regional utility began charging for a connection that was never used. Shortly after, the internet quickly supplanted video conferencing.

EC, sinking ever deeper in debt, was bringing in more students but increasing the head count cost for educating its student population. The crowning blow was the purchase of a local retirement complex in proximity to the community college, ostensibly to keep it out of the hands of the community college. EC evidenced no pressing need for space given its ownership of some 80 mostly empty houses. In order to fund the purchase, EC would have had to double its enrollment in the ensuing five years. Common sense should have prevailed but did not. Regional demographics and figures from the National Center for Educational Statistics made it clear that there simply would not be the numbers of students available to recruit. Rumors flew through the community that the college eventually defaulted on its payments. These were initially denied by college officials but the facts leaked to the local news media. EC's bond rating dropped significantly.

History will record that it was not the economics of the instructional technology or online instruction that made long term issues of online instruction resolvable. Rather, the resolvability of online instruction, instructional technology and information technology lay in the lack and application of ethical principles. To understand how the lack of understanding of ethical principles made effective implementation of online instruction problematic, a description of the ethical "drivers" of institutional behavior is provided in the next section. In the final section, a set of questions is presented that should frame how institutions, or more accurately, the individuals within those institutions plan and implement instructional technology and online instruction.

The following discussion of the ethical drivers of online instruction is based on three critical assumptions. First, the effective functioning of any element of the superstructure is dependent on the effective functioning of all of its other elements-hardware, software, net-ware, knowledge-ware (documentation) and service (installation, training and help desk functions). Second, the primary purpose of information technology must be understood as a means of connecting people to people and people to information *without the need for a mediator*. Third, the success of online instruction is as dependent on the ethical environment as it is on the technological components of online instruction. In the following discussion, for example, one of the drivers of unethical behavior is the need for some individuals in the academy to actually diminish the potential power of information technology (online instruction) in order to enhance their own political status.

The Taxonomy of Ethical Drivers of Online Instruction, Information Technology

The taxonomy described in comprises three levels: behavior at the first level is driven by motives to serve the individual "good;" behavior at the second level is based on a desire to

serve the institutional "good"; and, behavior at the third level is based on desire to serve a universal "good." Nested within each of these levels are specific dichotomies. Each of these dichotomies describes positive and negative parameters, one side which describes "high" ethical behavior and the other "low" ethical behavior.

Level 1.00 Serving the individual good. Serving the individual good requires an understanding and empathy for significant others within the institution. Working toward the **good** of all individuals stems from a selflessness advancing the ideas of others, their **growth** and their ability to provide **service** others. On the other side of the dichotomies, personal **agendas** can work against the individual good when **personal agendas** promote **personal images** with the aim of producing a **personal legacy.** Such dichotomies exist in all individuals and, by default, in all institutions.

For example, in the descriptions above, the faculty member who removed the dustcover to his computer only when the department head was around had a personal agenda which he promoted to others in order to protect his own view of the faculty role, hoping to leave a legacy of independence from the use of technology. Unfortunately, he did not consider how he could serve others (1.00) by improving his own knowledge of the technology. He did not consider the institutional good (2.00) and certainly not the universal good (3.00) had he committed himself to the effective use of information technology, modeling its uses to the graduates of his program-graduates who could carry such knowledge beyond the boundaries of the academy.

The negative side of the dichotomies was unleashed in the "low" ethical environment evident in the deployment and sustenance of online instruction at Entrepreneurial College. Two key macro-events indicate the power of "low" ethics. In the first, certain key senior administrators served only their **personal agendas** by failing to learn and model the appropriate

uses of technology. By cultivating a false **personal image** of "personal touch," they sought to create a questionable **personal legacy** which they attempted to make themselves appear as concerned, approachable senior administrators. In reality, the almost nonuse of the most basic communication tools made them increasingly inaccessible.

A more insidious example is seen in the case of one senior administrator who had been working behind the scenes against deployment and implementation of information technology; the development of an online "campus" that was faculty driven. Early in the process, before he joined the senior administrative staff, he was heard to state "I don't believe in online education and I will never teach an online course." As a faculty member, he never attended a single meeting of the distance learning training or development meetings that were attended by a third of the faculty who rapidly grew supportive but made statements behind closed doors to senior administrative that faculty were not involved. He never made his concerns known to those who were on the front lines of deployment. While the true motives can almost never be proven beyond a reasonable doubt, it appears by his lack of attention to newer technologies inherent in online technology, he was almost entirely focused on **personal agenda, image and legacy.**

When he became a senior administrator, he hired an outside consultant to come in and "fix" the infrastructure in his image focusing on outmoded technologies and dismantling a web based infrastructure with the features of the newer online instructional technology that had received two national awards, recognition as one of the most 25 most wired campuses in the U.S. The unintended end result was a drop in an enrollment in online courses and a dismantling of the online component.

During the same time period, Entrepreneurial College sank deeper into financial trouble. Its bonding rating dropped significantly and it was reported that the college was unable to keep

up with its payments on empty houses and other loans. The "low" ethical environment brought about financial decline.

Level 2.00 Serving the Institutional Good. Working toward the institutional **good** is mission driven and the collective behaviors on the high side are based on actions that are collegial, openly debated and serve the mission. The actions are selfless with regard to individuals ***but are based on consideration of the individual good.*** Likewise, actions that are driven by institutional **growth,** in stature, quality or long term stability are on the high ethical side. Actions that improve the institution's ability to **serve** its constituency and/or community are considered the highest ethical behavior in this category.

An example of how Entrepreneurial College had drifted to the low ethical side can be seen its preoccupation with besting the branch of the local community college-in particular, its ability to provide online and technology support for the community. Throughout the conflict between the two institutions, Entrepreneurial College focused almost entirely on its **institutional agenda** which was the continuous increase of its student base in the region, no matter what the cost economically or ethically. EC took actions to further its **institutional image** as the affordable service provider in the region against insurmountable odds-state subsidized low cost community college education. Preoccupation with its **institutional legacy** led EC to assume insurmountable debt in purchasing all surrounding properties in an attempt to drive the community college out and force it to sell out to EC, upkeep of an expensive but little used community technology entity.

The flashpoint of the destructive competition was the creation of the two community education and technology centers. In particular, EC sought out a community grant to support a community education and technology center, an enterprise outside of the mission of the

institution. The community college utilized state subsidies to create duplicate services including a computer laboratory and other facilities. Neither facility received heavy usage. Discontinuity in online instruction was the result. When businesses needed services, they were placed in an awkward position of having to choose between the two institutions.

3.0 Serving the Common Good. Every college is host to a unique institutional culture. That culture results from the interplay of traditions and a collective institutional ethos. While that ethos can change, it is unlikely to change rapidly. Each institution comprises both high and low ethics as described in the taxonomy. To the degree that the inhabitants of the institution work toward the **universal good ,** or the welfare of those beyond the institution is the degree to which the institution can serve the common good. In contrast, the degree to which the institution protects its own prerogatives, is the degree to which the institution functions on the low ethical side **(political agenda/advantage).**

To the degree that the inhabitants of the institution consider the permanent **state of universal good** is the degree to which the institution functions on the high ethical side. In contrast, the degree to which the institution continually struggles to maintain its **political power (perpetual),** is the degree to which the institution operates on the low ethical side of the dichotomy. In reality, no institution can survive without considering political agendas and wielding political power. But no institution can flourish if only its own political agendas and its own political power are the bases for actions and decisions.[1]

In the above case description, both EC and the local community college attempted to convince various political entities of the purity of their respective motives in providing technology and online instruction. However, the action of each made it clear that political

[1] The president of one the institutions, when presented with a revised mission statement by the institutional strategic planning committee, crossed out the word "ethical" as it described the institution, stating "What does this mean? That we are not ethical?" The word was later restored.

agendas and political power were the ethical drivers of the actions of both institutions. Substantial funding was squandered by both institutions in marketing, tuition discounting and other competitive strategies-funding that should have gone into quality programs.

Ethical Questions in the Implementation of Online Programs, Instruction

The case description above and the taxonomy give rise to a small set of questions that should drive implementation of online instruction and can be utilized to assess the ethical environment of implementation of instructional technology. The questions are presented here parallel to the taxonomy of the ethical drivers of online instruction presented above:

1.00 How does the implementation of the online instruction serve the individual good?

1.1 To what degree is the deployment of online instruction based on the consideration of learning and to what degree is that implementation based on personal agendas, desires, and stereotyped views of online instruction?

1.2 To what degree is the implementation of online academic programs based on an understanding of how students learn and to what extent is the lack of online programming based on personal conceptions of instruction?

1.3 To what degree is the evaluation of online academic programming reflect its impact on the learning process?

2.00 How does the implementation of online instruction further the mission of the institution?

2.1 To what extent is the implementation of online instruction reflect a long term commitment to the improvement of the institution and to what extent is such implementation a temporary fix to some identified problem?

2.2a To what extent is the creation of online academic programs a commitment to the improving the quality of offerings and to what extent is the implementation an improve the image of the institution (as a technology savvy institution)?

2.2b To what extent is the implementation of online instruction an attempt to better serve its students, the community and to what extent is such implementation designed create a personal or institutional legacy (garner personal recognition or credit)?

3.00 To what extent is online instruction seen within the institution as serving the common good beyond the institution and to what extent is online instruction a tool to gain a political or financial edge?

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this paper was to depict a model of the interrelationships of the interrelationships of the ethical drivers of online instruction. An abbreviated case description of a small Midwestern college indicates that the implementation of online instruction does not occur in an ethical vacuum. Illustrations from the case descriptions illuminated a taxonomy of ethical drivers of online instruction. Three levels of ethical behavior were described, including **serving the individual good, serving the institutional good** and **serving the common good.** Within those categories are described dichotomies, one side of the dichotomies describing high ethical behavior and the other describing low ethical behavior. The dichotomies can be considered "institutional decision" points-choices made at the institutional level which drive the implementation of instructional technology. A related set of questions based on the taxonomy was presented. It is suggested that these questions should be applied in the planning and implementation processes for online instruction.

It is suggested that any institution of higher learning can utilize the taxonomy of ethical drivers of instructional technology as part of its planning process in the implementation and deployment of instructional technology. Unless actions and plans can be responsive, in general, to these questions, the ethical environment is said to be idiosyncratic, responsive to personal, political or institutional whim. In such an environment, the potential impact of instructional technology is diminished.

A translation summary of the words of Max Weber, a sociologist in the past century states that "…the task of the teacher is to serve the students with his knowledge and scientific experience and not imprint upon them his personal political views." (Gerth and Mills, 1946). To paraphrase Weber, *the task of an institution is to serve the students with its knowledge and collective scientific experience and not impose upon them its idiosyncratic and political agendas nor the personal or political agendas of its overseers.* The taxonomy of ethical drivers of instructional technology may be one step toward that end with respect to the implementation of instructional technology.

References

Gerth, H.H. and C. Wright Mills (Translated and edited), from Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, pp. 129-156, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946.

Good, Harry G. and James D. Teller, A History of American Education, Macmillan and Company, New York, p. 419.

A Taxonomy of Ethical Drivers of the Implementation of Instructional Technology©

Ethical drivers occur as a set of staged decision points whereby participants exhibit high or low ethical behaviors in the implementation of instructional technology.

1.0 Serving the individual good

- **1.1 Individual good v. personal agenda**
- **1.2 Individual growth v. personal image**

2.0 Serving the institutional/professional good

- **2.1 Enhancing learning through knowledge of instructional technology v. sustaining personal biases re: instructional technology**
- **2.2. Institutional improvement through instructional technology v. utilizing instructional technology for institutional image**

3.0 Serving the common good

- **3.1 Enhancing the impact of instructional technology on all learners v. enhancing programs, practices for political gain**
- **3.2 Enhancing the impact of instructional technology for community/societal needs v. enhancing issues for political power**