Editorial
Developing innovation in e-learning: lessons to be learned

Maggie McPherson

The guest editor is currently a lecturer within the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield. Email: m.a.mcpherson@sheffield.ac.uk

Despite good intentions and considerable effort, many e-learning projects do not live up to the hopes of those involved in them. Yet, although a great deal of literature is available regarding the design, development, and implementation of e-learning, there seems to be a singular lack of information with regard to the reasons for e-learning projects that have not been so successful. It is entirely possible that the reasons for problems might well have similarities to those identified in the project management literature (McPherson & Ramli, 2004): unclear project scope, inadequate knowledge and skills, ambitious timeline, inadequate contingency plans, etc. However, in terms of e-learning, without firm evidence, this is mere speculation.

According to May (1998), most failed projects are never studied, and it is thought that this is also true of e-learning projects that have not gone according to plan. May asserts that few organisations and researchers want to waste more time or money collecting and analysing additional data. This is also true of academics who are not specifically engaged in e-learning research. Furthermore, data thus collected are often massaged or hidden in order to protect careers or reputations. Thus, the same mistakes are made repeatedly, wasting time, effort, and money. Garvin (1993), as cited by Paton and McCalman (2000), insists that successes and failures must be reviewed, systematically assessed, and recorded in an open and accessible form. For example, Garvin commends the Post-Project Appraisal Unit at British Petroleum, responsible for writing project case studies, as an example of learning from the past and recognising the value of productive failure when contrasted with unproductive success.

Interestingly, the model of learning cycle for information systems projects, as proposed by Ewusi-Mensah (1997) in Figure 1, may well enable reflection and permit learning from past mistakes. Other less costly methods to capture learning may include enlisting researchers to report e-learning implementation problems in order to help bring fresh perspective to an institutional e-learning strategy. The first paper in this issue sets a benchmark to providing such evidence.

The authors in this issue are commended for engaging in a constructive and frank debate about problems encountered in the design, development and delivery of e-learning. It is hoped that this Special Issue of BJET will go some way towards highlighting the lessons to be learned from other researchers’ experiences.
Maggie McPherson  
Guest Editor, BJET

References

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