Streamlining Instructional Design Process with Electronic Communication

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Abstract: Electronic communication tools, especially e-mail, are coming to be used for more than their original communication capabilities. E-mail has been found to contain much knowledge creation and sharing relevant to organizations and groups. This study will highlight the ability to categorize e-mail and other electronic communication tools within the unique cultural context of instructional designers. The researchers propose to evaluate electronic communication tools applied by a team of instructional designers to determine their alignment with knowledge management functions through a qualitative approach. Categorization according to these functions allows for streamlining the instructional design process as well as future reference and retrieval of the information contained within, and creating document management techniques from which current and future instructional designers will benefit.

Designing effective instructional materials is a process often filled with many details and decisions for the individual designer; yet when conducted by a team of designers, the complexities of the process increase to a new level rather than simplify. How do team members organize all the details and create a productive collaborative environment for themselves and each other? How is this handled when each is in a different location and may not be available to converse with others at the same time?

Knowledge management may lead us to some of these answers. Spector (2002) lists four functions where computers aid in the instructional design process. Communication, collaboration, coordination, and management have been identified as the primary ways we organize information for a particular topic or issue, and e-mail was found to be one computer-based system that provided for each of these functions (Spector and Edmonds, 2002). Therefore, this study asks the question: What is the function of electronic communication tools in the instructional design process?

The study will focus on an instructional design process for the development of an instructional module in both asynchronous and synchronous distance educational environments, which is an example of typical collaborative instructional design environment. Four instructional designers of different ages, diverse educational and cultural background, versatile life style and various technological access, were involved in the entire process. Electronic communication tools were applied to build up rapport among the team members as well as facilitating document management. Because of the naturalistic probe into this specific instructional design process, we adopt qualitative approaches to answer the research question. Data collected will include e-mails, interview transcripts, artifacts of different versions of electronic and print instructional documents, and demographic questionnaire. Throughout the study the researchers will analyze the data from both inductive and deductive perspectives. As a result of our findings, present and future instructional designers may learn document management and teamwork techniques when involved in similar collaborative design environments.

The presentation will highlight the qualitative research design in the unique cultural context of instructional design process, the bounding of the research and the role of researchers. A discussion will be conducted on the themes generated through the study and possible transferability in fields related to instructional design and collaborative teamwork.

References

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