Website context: ePioneers home → Mentoring

ePioneers mentoring process model

Towards a process model for e-practices

The proposed process model for e-learning practices emerged from the ePioneer Initiative in the School of Education. The Initiative had a strategic aim embedded in e-learning change management within the wider University and contribute to its institutional e-learning Strategy. (Rogers (2003)) points out that the diffusion of innovations theories provides an ideal framework to explain how new ideas and technologies are spread and adopted in a community. Nichols (2007) explains that the ultimate aim of e-learning diffusion is the implementation of e-learning that is sustainable and suitable within a given institutional context. Carlopio (1998) notes that the implementation of change is not a linear process and progresses in stages over a period of time. Furthermore, the commitment from stakeholders is achieved through shared decision-making, common vision, collaboration and the establishment of support structures. This is essentially the aim of the proposed model i.e. the provision of tool to support the diffusion of e-learning through a shared and negotiated vision. The model is an evolving example of e-learning diffusion implementation albeit in its early stages.

The proposed model is based on a mentoring approach to supporting e-learning practices. Mentoring is a complex construct open to wide interpretation in diverse educational contexts Bova and Phillips (1981) , Bryne (1991), Ehrich (1995) , Darling (1984) . In the ePioneer context, the mentor's role is described and constructed by the ePioneers in different ways. Examples include "critical friend", "advisor", "sounding-board." These attributes resonate with Poulsen's (2007) notion of mentor based on comparisons between mentoring practices in the USA and the UK. The US model is based on a mentor as a career sponsor and door opener; whereas in the UK the role is one of guide, counsellor and coach. Klasen and Clutterbuck (2001) argue that a mentor's role is to support the transition for enhancement for personal or career and development.

The approach advocated in our model is based on the mentor providing support, advice and guidance in the use of technologies. Hence, adding an additional dimension to the so-called "traditional" approach of mentoring.

The overview of existing e-learning models conducted by Mayes and de Freitas (2004) outlined e-learning approaches in relation to pedagogical perspectives: instructional systems design, constructivist and communities of practice. The Centre for Studies in Advanced Learning Technology (CSALT) networked learning model Goodyear (2000) based on such constructivist and communities of practice principles, is aimed at tutors in higher education, providing a pedagogical framework and overview of broader issues around networked learning. Although the CSALT model distinguishes between the tasks designed by the tutor and the activities carried out by the learner, it is sensitive to organisational context and asserts its importance in higher educational settings. This model endorses the context of our proposed model with its focus on real-world practices and the general ethos of social and organisational change with the introduction of new technology to learning environments.

Our proposed process mentoring model emerged from the initial phase of the Initiative which aimed to establish the role of the mentor within the co-construction of the e-

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learning community. This role was examined from the point of view of both the ePioneer and the mentors assigned to specific projects. As each project was unique, it was important to explore different approaches and mentor-ePioneer relationships as they developed within each project.

Table 1 outlines the players and processes involved in the formation of the process model. The players are all those involved in the process; the phases are identified as two stages within the process of developing roles which contributed to changes in e-Practices. Phase One focuses on the implementation of the ePioneer projects and their development. In addition, it focuses on the formation of the e-learning community of practice1 developing through the initiative and concentrates on the role of the mentor in the process. Phase Two of the initiative aims to develop the mentoring approach through the emerging process mentoring model.

Table 1 Process of construction of e-learning community

Players
- Change agents (e-strategy group)
- Mentors (early adopters)
- Pioneers
- Monitors
- Researchers
- Non-participants

Phase One Processes
- Identification of change agent
- Needs analysis
- Formulation of aims/outcomes
- Funding
- Identification of mentors
- Mentor training
- Engagement of pioneers
- Articulation of small group projects

Phase Two Processes
- Communication
- Monitoring and supporting projects
- Researching process
- Celebrating work in progress
- Evaluating outcomes

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[1] Informal, self-organized, network of peers with diverse skills and experience in an area of practice or profession. Such groups are held together by the members' desire to help others (by sharing information) and the need to advance their own knowledge (by learning from others). Also called community of interest.

"communities of practice." AnswerNotes. Answers Corporation, 2006. *Answers.com* 21 Oct. 2007. http://www.answers.com/topic/communities-of-practice

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Model Description

The overall framework of the model connects main challenges within the outer circle, namely: leadership; contextualisation; project duration; and ownership of change (Figure 1).The outer circle provides the conditions for the mentoring processes and project activities within the inner circle. The inner circle denotes the processes that facilitate this change through the e-learning projects supported by the mentor.

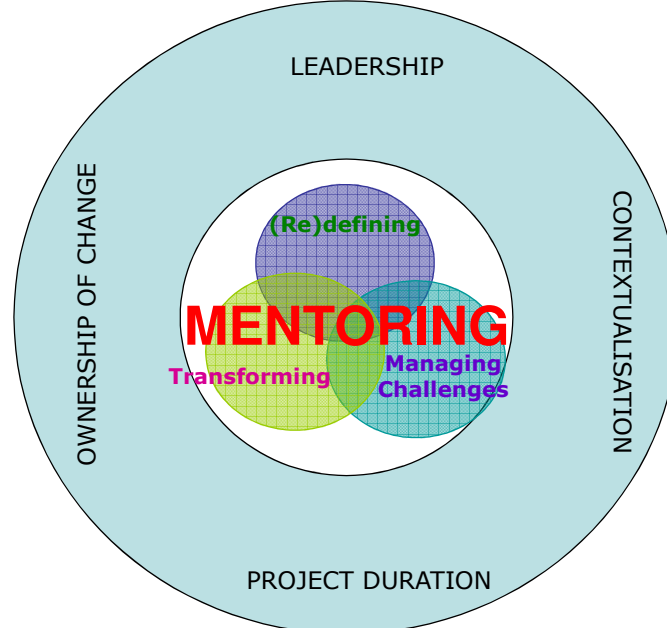**Emergent Process Mentoring Model for Organisational Change in e-Practices**

Figure 1 - Managing challenges for mentoring processes

Outer Circle Processes – Managing the Challenges
Conditions for change

The outer circle describes the challenges for change identified through the establishment of the players and setting the conditions for the projects to proceed.

Leadership
The Leadership approach in the model is two-fold: a bottom-up aspect to specify the nature of appropriate change and develop and implement it; and a top-down approach to create the conditions to enable meaningful and appropriate change to occur. In this context the former consists of technical, administrative and academic staff proposing projects using e-learning to enhance the student learning experience through their own work practices. The latter are the identified change agents i.e. school managers, early adopters and identified mentors together with the support of senior management and/or school managers that consider the needs of the school with e-learning developments. This approach resonates with Elton (1999) who advocates that change needs to have both a bottom up and a top down approach, where the former uses its power to facilitate the work; and the latter shares the knowledge which prospers under suitable working conditions. Hegarty et al. (2005) argue that timely and appropriate staff development within a supportive and strategic institutional culture is very influential in the adoption of e-learning. Our model provides the conditions for e-learning approaches to be developed through the projects identified by the ePioneers for development.

Contextualisation
The context is embedded in the School plan or similar, where in our case e-learning was a recognised target. A needs analysis performed within the School or department provides tangible outcomes to form the basis of e-learning planning and developments in specific contexts.

Project duration
The duration of the project needs careful monitoring and support. The ePioneer initiative set an initial duration of two years based on the funding bid. However, the longer term aim is to make e-learning part of the mainstream function of the School and meet the aims outlined in the School Plan (2005-2009). These conditions will therefore be providing the basis for e-learning activities to continue to be developed within normal working practices in the School beyond the duration of this particular initiative.

It is vital that the momentum of the project is maintained through regular contact of the players involved. This may be achieved through the identification of a coordinator to monitor and encourage participants and help to maintain the balance between project and individual core working practices. Regular reporting through team and School meetings also helps to maintain the momentum and foster the notion of developing e-learning communities of practice.

Ownership of change
This stage focuses on processes which facilitate and encourage the ePioneer to take ownership of their project and become less reliant on mentor input. Indicators of this stage are factors such as project integration into normal working practices, take-up of professional development opportunities and when ePioneers are confident to embrace other e-learning opportunities as they occur.

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Inner Circle
Processes for change

The inner circle depicts the process outcomes of meeting the challenges defined in the outer circle based on the ePioneer-mentor relationship. Figure 2 outlines how the ePioneer-mentor relationship evolves through the process and considers their contribution towards overall project ownership by the ePioneers.

Emergent Process Mentoring Model for Organisational Change in e-Practices

Figure 2 - Outcomes meeting challenges for mentoring processes

(Re)defining Mentor-ePioneer roles
The needs of the project and the skills required to support it are identified, Mentors with relevant skills and expertise are matched with the ePioneers. Mentors and ePioneers renegotiate their roles and skills based on the evolving needs of the project as it develops. This developing relationship provides the basis for mutual support through the process of the development of the project through its duration.

Challenges
Managing the challenges through the developmental stages of the Initiative is variable. The most significant challenge identified is time pressures and constraints of core work demands. This impacts on maintaining the momentum within the project but is boosted by the support provided by the mentor and camaraderie developing within the ePioneer community. Momentum is also maintained through the continual support of the project coordinator.
Financial incentive providing ePioneer defined support is also a motivating factor to maintain momentum, although in many cases not a significant mitigating factor. Community support is a much stronger motivator.

Transformation
The transformation stage sets the conditions for the ownership of change in the outer circle. It is within this stage that the role of the mentor is of lesser significance within the

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process. Outcomes within this stage see how the projects can be further integrated within normal working practices. There is evidence of further collegiality within the e-learning community, within the project and also within the School as there is evidence of more e-learning expertise cascaded to colleagues. In addition, confidence developed through the project process is identified through personal and professional development opportunities pursued by the ePioneers.

Development Opportunities

This emergent mentoring model provides the opportunity for further enhancement and development of e-learning practices using a mentoring approach.

1. Evaluation of the model in other contexts to further establish conditions and processes for change.
2. Dissemination of the model to the wider University
3. Work with SEDU to develop suitable training approaches
4. Monitoring the diffusion of e-learning through the model adoption.

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