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Evolutionary Collaborative Partnership Model (ECPM): the East African E-learning Provider's Project-Based Legitimization Strategy

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the lack of legitimacy of e-learning projects including academic certificates through online distance programs. The paper analyses whether the lack of legitimacy that exist among e-learning projects can be eradicated through a sound proposed strategy. The rationale of this study is based on the fact that most scholars claim that various e-learning projects and programs lack legitimization, and the literature related to legitimization issues is limited. From the perspective of e-learning providers working in East Africa, this paper used Classic Grounded Theory. The study developed an Evolutionary Collaborative Partnership Model (ECPM). For legitimization to be achieved, the study revealed that three processes needed to be followed: the identifying and acquiring of collaborating partners, referral networking and strategic alliances. The study identified two types of collaborating partnerships: asymmetrical and reciprocal collaborating . The study discovered five stages in an incremental sequential process in the evolutionary e-learning collaborative partnership model including identification of key drivers, problem setting, direction setting, structuring and outcomes.

Categories and Subject Descriptors: K.3.1. [Computer Uses in Education]

General Terms: Collaborative Learning, Distance Learning

Keywords: e-learning partnership, collaborating partnership, legitimization, classic grounded theory, e-learning provider, Evolutionary Collaborating Partnership Model

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1. INTRODUCTION

E-learning is the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in teaching and learning (Fisser 2001; Khan 2005, 2007; Ndume et al. 2008; Omwenga et al. 2004; Pelliccione 2001; Sife et al. 2007). The implementation of e-learning is advancing and likely to impact all level of education. Clarke (2003) insists that the importance of e-learning will increase across the education spectrum from primary schools to Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in East Africa. E-learning providers are in process of implementing e-learning (Sife et al. 2007). While some blend it with

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traditional teaching and learning practices, others are substituting it for traditional teaching and learning (Kathawala & Wilgen 2004). The implementation of e-learning is spurred by both pedagogical and socioeconomic factors(Govindasamy, 2002). The need for pedagogical improvement in line with teaching and learning drivers the implementation of e-learning (Lee, 2006). The socioeconomic factors include the scarcity of teaching materials, rapid population growth, lack of qualified human resources (experts), lack of physical infrastructure [buildings, etc.], cost effectiveness(Ndume et al. 2008; Pelliccione 2001; Sife et al. 2007). Generally, the adoption of e-learning mainly promoted by the failure of traditional education delivery in many countries. E-learning is considered to be of the utmost importance in combating both pedagogical and socioeconomic factors(Sife et al. 2007). It also gives learners and trainers flexibility in terms of time and space. Regardless of perceived e-learning benefits, and efforts invested in implementing it, still there is low growth rate and even those implemented projects and programs fail (see Table 1) to survive(Gunga & Ricketts 2007; Juhary 2005; Puteh 2008; Selim 2007). Africa Association of Universities (2001) argues that African universities are both unable and ill-prepared to participate in the evolution of ICT for teaching and learning due to lack of legitimacy of its online distance learning certificates. These degrees lack acceptance among employers due to negative perceptions. E-learning lack legitimate among various stakeholders (parents, teachers, sponsors, etc.). The academic gained through online distance education (e-learning) lacks legitimacy(Sife et al. 2007). As Ndume et al.(2008) argue that there exist doubts on the part of stakeholders about the quality and currency of certificates obtained from online courses. Little empirical research has been done to investigate ways in which e-learning legitimization can be achieved.

Institution	Country	Years in Operations	No. of Years in Operation	Total Amount Spent	Types of Initiative	Education Level
UK e-University	UK	2000-2004	4	£50M	Political	University
US Open University	USA	1998-2002	4	\$27M	Institutional	University
Alliance for Lifelong Learning	USA & UK	2000-2006	6	\$12M	Consortium	Further Education
IT Forneb	Norway	1998-2001	3	€M	Political	Further Education
The Scottish Interactive University	UK	2002-2007	5	£2.3M	University	University

Table 1: List of Failed Institutions Sorted by Money Spent

(Source: Keegan et al. (2007))

In order to attempt to solve the lack of legitimization, this paper first shades light on e-learning and its status in East Africa and its economic importance to the region The paper proposes a model to activate and improve the legitimization of e-learning in East Africa, the Evolutionary Collaborative Partnership Model (ECPM).

2. E-LEARNING

E-learning is defined as the use of modern networks, electronic devices, channels (wireless, satellite, etc.), Internet and web technologies in teaching and learning processes, offering the opportunity to learn or teach anywhere, anytime and to include any content. It includes the design, creation, delivery, storage, management and evaluation of educational content, as well as the development of learners and trainers(Tossy, 2012). The use of e-learning can be via CD-ROM, a communication network, or the Internet (Yieke, 2005). E-learning captures a wide range of terms referred to as labels (Albert & Mori, 2001) as shown in table 2 below.

E-learning Label	Acronym
Web Based Learning	WBL
Web Based Instruction	WBI
Web Based Training	WBT
Internet Based Training	IBT

Online Resource Based Learning	ORBL
Advanced Distributed Learning	ADL
Tele-Learning	T-L
Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning	CSCL
Mobile Learning	ML or M-learning
Nomadic Learning	NL

Table 2: List of E-learning Labels

(Source: Tossy, 2012)

E-learning has the potential to facilitate learner engagement (Uys, 2004). Chacha (2009) outlines the need to tap the potential of ICTs to enhance data collection and analysis, and to strengthen management systems in educational institutions; to improve access to education by remote and disadvantaged communities; to support initial and continuing professional development of teachers; and to provide opportunities to communicate across classrooms and cultures. Clarke (2003) in his report to the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) in the United Kingdom (UK) argued that the 21st century education system should: offer flexible provision to a diverse range of learners; support and enable the development of a professional workforce, creating skilled graduates capable of problem solving and creative thinking; empower learners to make choices about how, when and where they learn and with what and whom; give better value for students in supporting their learning in ways best suited to their particular needs and goals, and in timely and cost-effective ways, and support creativity and innovation not only in mainstream research activities, but also in approaches to teaching and the support of learning. Chacha (2009) argues that lack of legitimacy of online degrees, low investment in ICT infrastructure, coupled with the high cost of connectivity and bandwidth, are major problems hindering the effective use of the resources available on the Internet. Most e-learning providers in East Africa are facing these problems, making the integration of ICTS into teaching and learning difficult.

3. CONTRIBUTION OF E-LEARNING IN THE EAST AFRICA ECONOMY

The key to the development, both economy and productivity of East African countries is education (WB, 2002). It is the only way of making Africans access the critical knowledge on economic activities. The use of ICTs in education, will enhance access to knowledge. Therefore, e-learning has benefits to learners, teachers, and organizations. Besides many challenges in its implementation, e-learning still has many benefits (Flinn & Lawrence, 2003). There are many drivers of adopting e-learning. These drivers are also termed as benefits:

- Saves money invested in infrastructure development (such as classrooms, etc.)
- Reduces cost for the development of the workforce, costs of course delivery.
- Enables teachers to acquire necessary skills affordably and fast.
- Enables the learners collaborate and share the limited resources.
- Widens participation and suits all people - the disabled, working and non force.
- Allows individuals to learn from anywhere, anytime and anyplace
- Increase access to and improves quality of education in a relative cost-effective way.
- Creates fair playing field for the high population and the few higher learning institutions.
- Creates flexibility in design and delivery of curriculum content.

In addition, e-learning offers convenience and portability, cost and selection, budget and flexibility, great collaboration, global opportunities and higher retention.

4. CLASSIC GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY

This paper uses Classic Grounded theory methodology (CGTM) by (Glaser & Strauss 1967). It has been further elaborated and refined by (Glaser 1978; Glaser 1992; Glaser 1996; Glaser 1998; Glaser 2001; Glaser 2003; Glaser 2005; Glaser 2006; Glaser 2008; Glaser 2009; Glaser 2011). This theory was chosen for three reasons. Firstly, CGTM claims to deliver the main concerns of e-learning providers in East Africa. Secondly, CGTM fits the nature of the phenomenon being researched (e-learning providers), as it follows (Lowe 1996) description of CGT as being designed to “develop and integrate a set of ideas and hypotheses in an integrated theory that accounts for behaviour in any substantive area”. Thirdly, CGTM provides a flexible set of inductive strategies for collecting and analysing data. Glaser (1992) and Glaser & Strauss (1967) outline the key distinguishing characteristics of the CGTM research methodology as (a) Simultaneous involvement in the data collection and analysis phases of research; (b) Developing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived hypotheses; (c) Constructing middle-range theories to understand and explain behaviour and processes; (d) Memo-writing, that is, analytic notes to explicate and fill out categories; (e) Making comparisons between sets of data, data and concept, and between different concepts; (f) Theoretical sampling, that is sampling for theory construction to check and refine conceptual categories, not for representativeness of a given population; and (g) Delaying the literature review until after the emergence of a core variable.

CGTM is a general inductive research methodology designed to reveal deep seated latent patterns of human behavior and how the main concerns are being continually being resolved (Glaser, 1978). It can be applied to all types of data, both quantitative and qualitative, or the combination thereof as has been outlined by Glaser (1978). CGTM provides researchers with a means to build theory relevant to the particular discipline within which they are conducting their research.

Christiansen (2005:81-84) argues that CGT is an “ontology free and epistemology free methodology”. The ontological assumptions have no place in the use of CGT since it is grounded in data. Glaser (1978:45) explains further that in the CGTM methodology all ontological and epistemological suppositions are irrelevant and are not useful: “... logical conjectures or preconceptions that pre-frame the research, and pre-framing has to be avoided in any CGTM work, in order to keep close to what the data has to say, and to discover and name emergent latent patterns in the data.” The CGT minimizes the influence and potential distorting effect of preconceptions, logical deductions and elaborations and ungrounded assumptions (Glaser, 1978). As a result, a researcher using CGTM is free from both ontological & epistemological assumptions. Glaser (1978:76) argues that “It is only a question of applying a rigorous and systematic method for discovering and explaining these patterns. Thus, **just do it.**” In summary, Glaser (2005:5-6) argues that “the quest for an ontology and epistemology for justifying CGT is not necessary

According to Glaser (1978), CGTM is a multivariate process which happens sequentially, subsequently, simultaneously, serendipitously and in a scheduled manner. It is the systematic generation of theory from data acquired by a rigorous research method (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1992; Glaser, 1996; Glaser, 1998; Glaser, 2006; Glaser 2008; Glaser, 2009; Glaser 2011). In essence grounded theory is an integrated set of conceptual hypothesis, i.e. probability statements about the relationship between concepts. The hypothesis is generated through constant coding and analysing of data. CGTM is a general research method which is not evidence based (Glaser, 1978, 1998). This is because the use of evidentiary data presupposes that a deductive hypothesis based research method is being employed. Thus CGTM is a general research method which is mainly inductive. Glaser explains why it is inappropriate and unproductive to treat CGTM as though it were evidence based on “the credibility of the theory should be won by its integration, relevance and workability, not by illustrations as if it were proof. The theory is an integrated set of hypotheses, not of findings. Proofs are not the point.” (Glaser, 1978)

Stages for Doing Classic GT

Throughout the process of CGTM research, a researcher needs to maintain transparency, through following all CGTM stages and procedures outlined by Glaser (1978), including (1) Generating Theoretical Sensitivity; (2) Theoretical Sampling; (3) Theoretical Memos; (4) Substantive Coding; (5) Theoretical Coding; (6) The Constant Comparison Method; (7) Sorting; and (8) The Emergence of the Core Variable. As detailed in Figure 1, although there are very specific stages through which the CGTM researcher must go, the order of doing them will change according to what emerges from the data. This kind of flexibility in terms of sequence and process is necessary in order to reveal certain deep seated patterns of human behaviour.

Evaluating Classic Grounded Theory Study

Glaser (1978, 1992, and 1998) outline the four main criteria with which to evaluate classic grounded theory study. Firstly, CGT should be '*fit*' - that the concept adequately reflects the data that it purports to express. The categories of the emerged core variable must fit the data used to create the theory (Glaser 1978). Secondly, is '*workability*'-how the core variable accounts for the respondents' continual resolution of their main concern is a key issue. The emergent GT must clearly explain what is happening, and the process of its happening and by so doing should be able to predict future behaviour (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2001). Thirdly, the CGT study should be '*relevance*' - how the emerged core variable has been received by the members of the constituency from which the data was drawn is also pertinent (Glaser, 1998). Fourth, is '*modifiability*', the CGT is considered to be modifiable if it is easy for subsequent CGTM researchers to be aware of what research has been done so far in the area, and to proceed to modify or refine the theory as they collect and code new data (e.g. code new data for emergent fit), without invalidating the theory.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

5.1 Research Population

The data for this study was drawn from e-learning providers working in East Africa. These included higher education institutions (HEIs) staff members, programmers, consultants, and management personnel. Following the Classic Grounded Theory Methodology, the number, scope and range of those being interviewed were determined in an on-going process based on the emergent data

5.2 Data Collection

A total of 24 e-learning provider respondents from Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda were interviewed on several occasions. This meant a total of 101 respondent encounters. Three types of data collection techniques were used. First data was collected through interviews, oral conversations, defined by Payne and Payne (2004) as "*data collection in face-to-face settings*". The most important aspect of these interviews was that they were of short duration, conducted without tape recordings, and were followed immediately by detailed memo writing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). Second; data was collected through unstructured observation, e-learning providers engaged in e-learning activities were observed during their daily activities, and were systematically documented in the course of writing theoretical memos. Thirdly, a review of existing documents related to the e-learning providers such as those dealing with e-learning contexts and trends, performance ratings, program logs, tally sheets, and other existing indicators. Much of this data was sourced from the Ministry of Higher Education, universities and other governmental and non-governmental sources.

5.3 Data Analysis

The CGTM is a general research method which treats everything as data, whether quantitative or qualitative (Glaser, 1992). The following Glaser (1978) CGT Research process was followed; (1) *Theoretical sampling and substantive coding*; (2) *Theoretical coding*; (3) *Theoretical memo writing*; (4) *Constant comparison between and within memos*; (5) *Sorting codes*; (6) *Data saturation*; (7) *Emergence of the core variable*. Although the above is represented in a linear format, in practice the exact sequence varied according to what patterns seemed to be emerging from conversations with respondents (See Figure 1). The reason for this is that GT is a process, not a unit based, approach. The data was simultaneously, subsequently, and sequentially collected, analysed and synthesised.

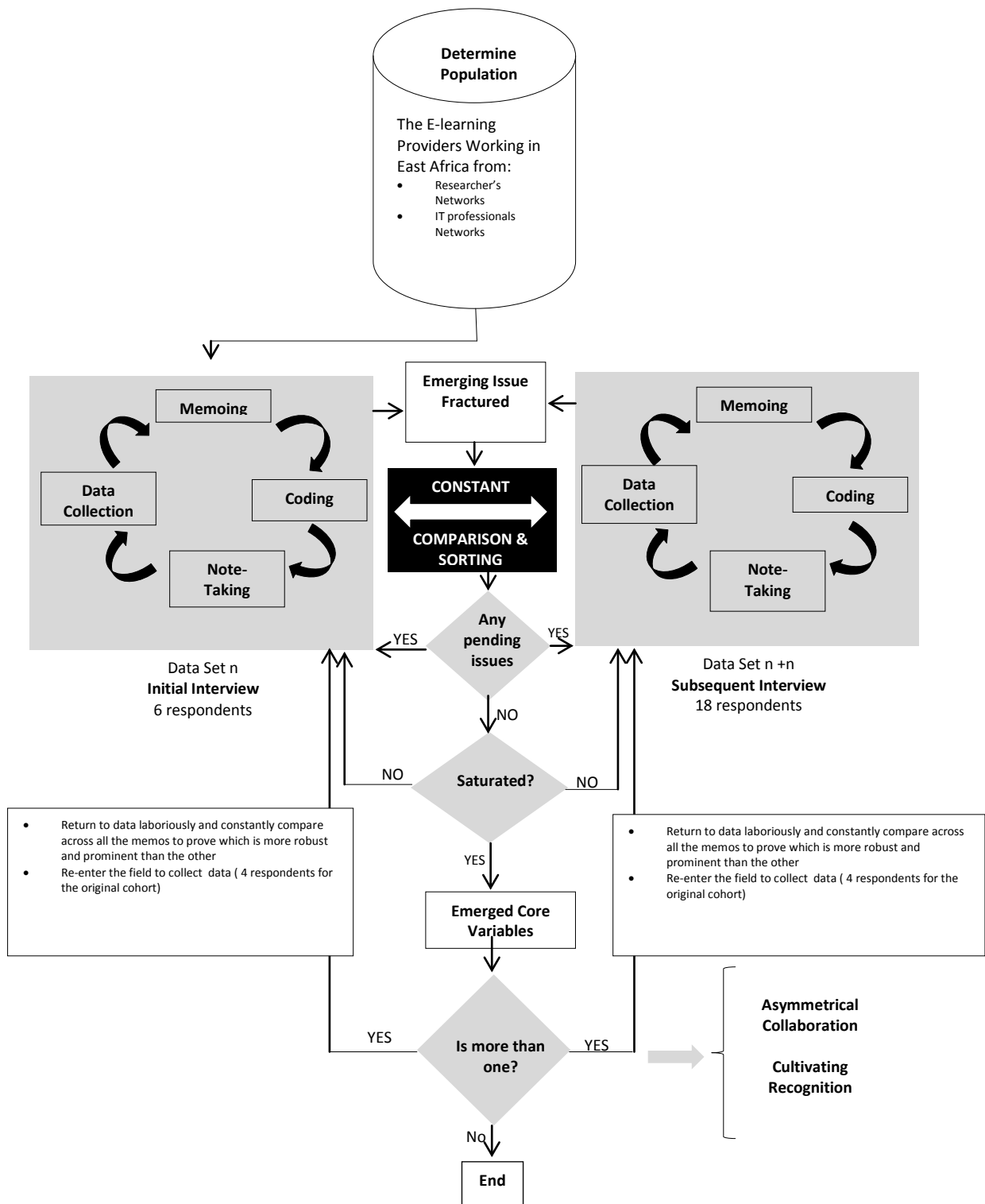


Figure 1: Classic Grounded Theory Data Analysis Framework

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 E-learning providers Legitimizing Strategy

As Figure 2 shows, *legitimizing* was identified to the sub-core variables amongst e-learning providers based in East Africa and who participated in this study (Tossy, 2012). The e-learning providers have continually used *legitimizing* so that e-learning projects can be successfully implemented. *Legitimizing* is defined in this context by e-learning providers as the process of ensuring the project is valid, delivered and sustainable. This is achieved by the accumulation of social credit bestowed on the e-learning providers by their peers and clients. This study defines *Legitimizing* as the process of ensuring the e-learning activities, including planning, designing, delivery, and evaluation take place and that each e-learning as product or deliverable is both valid and sustainable. Thus the validity, in terms of quality and appropriateness for purpose, and the sustainability of the project is ensured and maintained by means of the "Legitimizing" process (see Figure 1), which is an on-going and perpetual process. Thus for e-learning projects to be continuously sought after, e-learning providers need to ensure a project is legitimized by all stakeholders (i.e. client, funder, etc.) and is accorded respect throughout the process. The main symptom of, and reason for, a lack of legitimization is the lack of respect and trust shown to e-learning providers by some of the stakeholders, including funders and clients. A Legitimizing process is undertaken by e-learning providers in order for them to gain the necessary respect from their clients.

The process of *Legitimizing* involves three main activities or processes: *Collaborating partnership, Referral Networking and Strategic Alliancing*. The process begins with the seeking out and setting up of collaborating partnerships. This is a process in which e-learning providers collaborate with other experienced e-learning partners prior to a formal funding submission for their e-learning projects. This collaboration can be either with a partner who has a considerable degree of influence and power (asymmetric collaboration) or with a partner with a similar or equal level of power and influence (reciprocal collaboration). Secondly, the collaborating partners make full use of their existing referral networks so that the potential client or funder is more likely to have confidence in the proposal. Finally, e-learning providers are more successful if they have already entered into formal strategic alliances with other respected partners and these inform, and are integrated into, the proposal document. Successful e-learning providers are able gain more traction in their projects when they are able to simultaneously synchronise several different projects. This is because of the potential for sustainability from one project to another that synchronicity is able deliver. The details of each sub secondary core variable of *Legitimizing* (see Figure 2) are discussed in the following paragraphs.

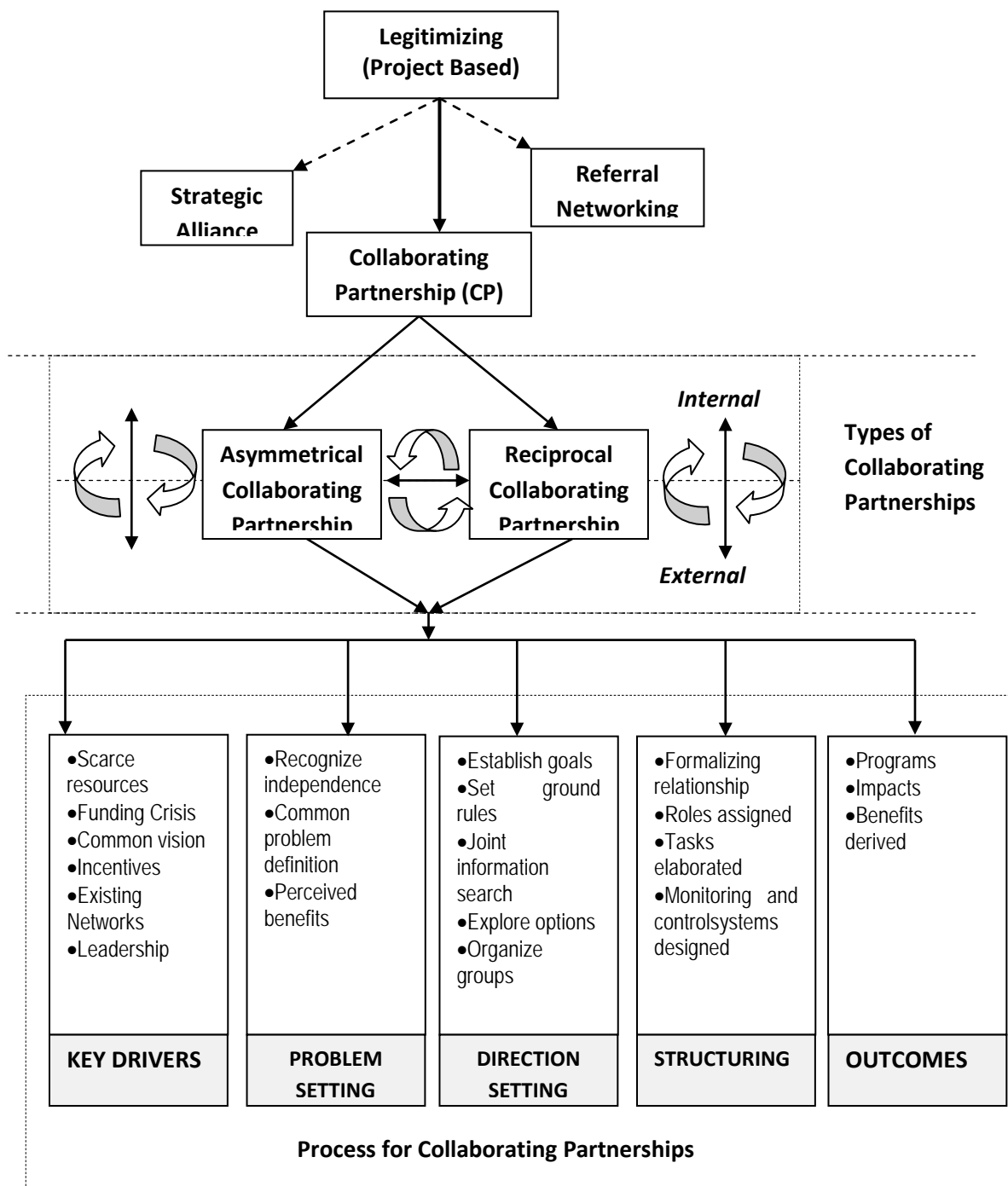


Figure 2: An Evolutionary Model of E-learning Collaborating Partners

While Gray (1995) defined collaborating partnership “as a voluntary pooling of resources (labour, money, information, etc.) by two or more parties to accomplish collaborative goals”, this study adds a further advantageous characteristic to this definition of a Collaborating partnership as a partnership which involves the process of creating business opportunities through the advantages of partnerships. Collaborating partnerships are arrangements devoted to maximising the success of some aspects of e-learning implementation which are, as goals, are held in common among otherwise independent organizations or units. E-learning collaborating partnerships include cooperative marketing initiatives, public-private partnerships and inter-sector partnerships (Gunga & Ricketts 2007; Ndume et al. 2008; Puteh 2008; Selim 2007; Sife et al. 2007; Singh 2003; Uys 2003, 2004). Recent economic, political and social forces have combined to make collaborating partnerships an explicit priority of higher learning institutions in the implementation of e-learning. It has become popular in e-learning implementation to emphasize the importance of forging partnerships

to accomplish collective and organizational goals. As has been mentioned, *Collaborating* partners are of two types: (1) *Asymmetrically Collaborating* partners; and (2) *Reciprocally Collaborating* partners

Asymmetrical collaborating partnership is a concept which explains how the weaker party in the collaboration is able to obtain the benefits that collaboration brings (e.g. funding opportunities, scholarships) whilst skilfully avoiding being dominated by the more powerful partner. *Reciprocal Collaborating partnership* is the process of generating mutual benefit for the parties in the partnership through the sharing of power and status. The power comes from funding opportunities and decision making. The collaborating parties in reciprocal collaboration tend to share power and benefits equally regarding the implementation of the e-learning project. As Figure 2 shows, collaborating partnerships range from situations where e-learning providers (internally- within the organization) or organizations (externally- outside the organization) interact briefly around a common problem to those situations where multiple organizations (externally) are represented in an on-going venture. The partnership may shift from an asymmetrical partnership to a reciprocal partnership and back again over time. It may also shift from internal to external partners or both at the same time. The collaborating partnership may be highly structured, characterized by legally binding agreements between participating organizations. An example of such e-learning partnerships and initiatives could be interactions between academic departments and technology support groups which voluntarily provide services for planning, designing and delivering online learning. Such partnerships aim to increase the quality and access of what they offer (Selin & Chaves 1995; Sife et al. 2007; Sifuna 2007). It has been found that most collaboration between national, regional and international interests are aimed at funding e-learning initiatives. Developed countries are now forging collaborative links with and between international interests for the purpose of expanding e-learning operations beyond their borders.

Several assumptions contribute to and underpin a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamic nature of e-learning collaborating partnerships (Selin & Chaves 1995). First, it is assumed that e-learning implementation operates in a turbulent and constantly changing environment: many economic, social, technological and political forces influence policy and management direction. For example, the rapid change of technology globally is having a profound impact on e-learning implementation and development. However it is also assumed that e-learning projects have the ability to influence and adapt to their environments through strategic planning.

Second, a domain level focus improves the examining of e-learning collaborating partnerships. Most e-learning managers still embrace an organisation set perspective, where their organization is thought to be the focal agency and other organizations and interests are considered to be external "publics". While this perspective may be appropriate for a more predictable environment, successfully navigating a turbulent environment requires that managers adopt a domain level focus which includes "the set of actors (individuals, groups, and/or organizations) that become joined by a common problem or interest". One example of a domain might be the set of actors interested in establishing multi-institutional operations, to position them for funding. Such collaborating partnerships involve many organizational and individual interests that transcend traditional organizational boundaries. Finally, a process-oriented, rather than a cross-sectional approach to the study of e-learning collaborating partnerships can be adopted. The next section on an evolutionary model of e-learning collaborating partnerships (see Figure 1) emphasises collaborating partnership dynamics and views them as dynamic systems of interactions, constantly changing in response to internal and external e-learning implementation forces.

"*Referral Networking*" and *Strategic Alliancing* are the other two activities or processes involved in Legitimising. *Referral Networking* involves stimulating existing contacts and creating new contacts. These connections and networks can be useful for endorsing e-learning projects, thereby increasing and strengthening their legitimacy. *Referral Networking* can be of value to e-learning providers in terms of capturing more opportunities for funding, collaboration, and for increasing the popularity of the online programs. "*Strategic Alliancing*" is a mutually beneficial process for e-learning providers to work together for the purpose of delivery of online courses or for securing funding. *Strategic Alliancing* is a medium to long term process of connecting with other parties in a particular field. This includes matching the strategic objectives of one institution to another or to others. The evolutionary model of e-learning providers is discussed in the next section.

6.1 An Evolutionary E-learning Partnership Model

As illustrated in Figure 2, the evolution of e-learning collaborating partnerships begins in a context of the existence of *key e-learning drivers*. There exists a wide range of these key drivers, or pressures to form partnerships, including scarce resources, common vision, incentives, existing networks, high population growth, lack of enough qualified human resources and lack of physical infrastructure (Gunga & Ricketts 2007; Meyen 2002; Ndume et al. 2008; Selin & Chaves 1995; Sife et al. 2007; Sifuna 2007; Tossy 2012). The collaborating institutions operate within societal environments. These societal environments exert competitive, technological, political, social and economic forces and pressures to increase and strengthen collaborating partnerships (Selin & Chaves 1995). Gunga and Ricketts (2007) argue

that partnerships bring together innovative minds to help overcome the various e-learning challenges. They also avoid dual, or separate, problem solving within the same country and in the same context. From these key drivers, partnerships evolve sequentially through a problem setting, direction-setting and structuring phase. Partnership outcomes and feedback arrows (in Figure 2) emphasise the dynamic and cyclical nature of the evolutionary process of collaborating partnerships.

At the *Problem-setting* stage of the collaborating partnerships, the institutions in such partnerships appreciate the interdependencies existing among them. This is because they realize that the action to take in solving a particular problem, or problems, needs collective efforts among them. It is during this stage that consensus is reached on partnership operations. This will include actions like agreement signing. At this stage, the partners and stakeholders begin to mutually acknowledge the issue, or issues, which bring them together together. Positive perception in terms of the unforeseen benefits will increase the strength of the partnership.

At the *Direction Setting* stage the partners tend to establish goals to achieve the common vision recognized in the problem setting stage. The established goals tend at this stage to be measureable and responsive to the perceived benefits stipulated at the problem setting stage. The partners set ground rules for the operation of the partnership including joint information searches, exploring options and organising sub groups of operations. The direction setting stage is also the stage where partners begin to identify and appreciate a sense of common purpose. The joint information search helps strengthen the future of the partnership.

The *Structuring* stage involves formalising and institutionalising the collaborating partnership and devising a regulatory framework to guide future collective action (Gray 1989, 1995). For the partnership to survive stakeholders' interactions need to be managed in a systematic manner. At this stage, the legal formalisation of the collaborating partnership is developed and put in place. This involves signing various agreements, assigning roles, and finally reaching formal agreements to monitor and assure collective compliance to the goals of the group (Selin & Chaves 1995). At the end of this stage all formal relationships, roles, tasks and monitoring and control systems are in place. Some of the roles are assigned to special committees, such as a procurement committee, online content committee, etc.

It is at the last stage in the process of the collaborating partnership establishing and increasing legitimization, the *Outcome* stage, that the outcomes of the processes are realized. These outcomes may be visible and tangible products of the partnership and may include program modules, offices, and numbers of students registered for the program modules courses materials (Selin & Chaves 1995). For the collaborating partnership to flourish there needs to be communication throughout the collaborating process (illustrated by feedback arrows in Figure 2). As the various forms of feedback continue, the collaborating partnership process becomes cyclical to the benefit of the partners and of the partnership. This means that a continuous process of evaluation and re-evaluation becomes one of the main purposes and characteristics of the partnership, thus constantly improving the quality of deliverables, broadening the scope of the partnership, and admitting more partners into the collaborating partnerships.

7. CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to develop an evolutionary model for a partnership for e-learning providers. This is a dynamic and sustainable model, which will assist e-learning providers in overcoming the lost trust, legitimacy and value of the e-learning awards and degrees. It will also help the successful marketing of e-learning products. This paper discussed and developed an Evolutionary Collaborating Partnership model (ECPM). ECPM is envisaged to be the most effective and sustainable legitimisation strategy for e-learning providers. Any partnership to sustain and nurture itself, requires special facilitative skills at each stage of its establishment and consolidation. These skills range from the management of partners, communication, time, cost and others. In addition constant feedback from clients is necessary for the growth and sustaining of any collaborating partnership and thus extensive efforts and resources need to be invested in e-learning collaborating partnership planning and management. The collaborating partnership is viewed as a process which is influenced by a set of economic, social, political and technological forces. Some of the constraints to collective actions or collaborating partnerships have been listed and include competition, bureaucratic inertia, and geographic and organization fragmentation.

Thus the study recommends that in order to overcome these barriers and to increase the benefit of collaborating partnerships, human resources in the form of committed innovative creative people and those with special facilitative skills are needed. The study is intended as a model for institutions interested in embarking on collaborating partnership processes in e-learning. For purposes of speeding up the use of e-learning, the research recommends that researchers and educational institutions operationalise the proposed model and evaluate it.

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