

## **“Manning the barricades”: Managing organisational boundaries for effective e-learning**

### Abstract

How do organisational structural and cultural factors act as impediments to new or innovative education and training developments, such as e-learning? What are the barriers and are they the same for all organisations? Furthermore can, or should, they be mitigated against or managed.

The most obvious barriers are structural. These are sanctioned forms that delineate organisational workgroups and entities and which are inextricably meshed with the policies, processes and practices that scaffold teaching and learning activity. Structural dimensions can generally be managed or guided towards a common mission, goal or endpoint. The more pervasive elements, however, are cultural and include issues pertaining to the environment, role and identity. At times the sociocultural dimensions Vygotsky (1986) which relate to change are revealed in overt human behaviours, but often they emerge as more subtle manifestations, which are both difficult to identify and to manage in organisational settings. Strategies that rely on influence, rather than control, can be more appropriate in the latter case.

The majority of the challenging issues, the delaying or even obstructionist behaviours, occurs at the boundaries of a system between the ‘known’ and the ‘unknown’ (Kurtz and Snowden 2003). Commonly these issues and behaviours are interpreted as barriers, and much of the organisational effort is directed towards overcoming these barriers or barricades.

This paper will explore various aspects of boundary behaviour which occur at the margins – with particular reference to structural, process and human factors – drawing on theories and models of change as well as practical examples. The paper will explore a number of the key issues and strategies to manage effectively these boundary activities and transitions.

### **Keywords:**

organisational change, e-learning, boundary, complex adaptive systems

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