Blended Networks – P.Collins

Digital communication has remarkably altered our ability to effectively network with family, colleagues and friends and as such is morphing the very “core” or our society as defined by our “blended networks”. A blended network is designated by a combination of online and offline family, friends, and colleagues with whom we maintain relationships. Like any spider-web assembly the more connections that exist equates a stronger construct. The term blended network has two key aspects with one being a blending of traditional and technological communications and the other being a blending of virtual and non-virtual friends.

The earliest origins of a “societal network” came to light within the last hundred years but merely as a metaphorical term. The idea that individuals are developing a blended network began with the advent and incorporation of digital social media constructs.

In order to ensure success, many companies, educational institutions and non-profit/for-profit organizations have had to embrace the virtual world to not only survives but to thrive. Through the incorporation of digital communication and blended network arrangements these groups have been able to cross timetables and geographic boundaries; ensuring they remain competitive for future generations. Especially at the organization level, a blended network allows for “inter” and “intra communication” diversifying collegial supports, providing opportunity for collaboration, and enhancing shared experiences and understanding through digital communication.

This graduated into everyday life with people beginning to rely upon technology to maintain contact with loved ones in an ever more challenging world. Some of these challenges a direct result of immigration and urbanization which enhanced a generational disconnect easily overcome with technologies.

As educators we must continually modernize and examine our practice. There is a hope that the combination of a virtual network with some contemporary practices will bring a transformation in our educational institutions: from teaching organizations to learning organizations. A poignant question for educators is are we holding students back by disallowing cell phone use in class especially in light of the fact that by 2020 it is estimated that the cell phone will replace the personal computer as an individual’s primary means to connect to the internet.

The advantages of blended networks are unparalleled. They can utilize the diverse available social networking tools to collaborate and enable information flow. However, concerns of an enhancement of the generational gap along the digital divide do exist. It could now be more chasimitic, then simple cultural or language barriers that existed historically between grandparents and grandchildren. The very transmission of culture might be stunted, especially in Aboriginal societies where there is still a severe case of technological poverty. Moreover, with Native youth there is a growing concern that online interactions will bring about online social isolation. Because, of their unique social and psychological needs these students potentially have poor exposure to appropriate peer engagement and might over compensate in the online world’s social network leading to disastrous consequences.

Supplementary Readings:

Allen, Scott (2008) The emergence of the relationship economy.

Dulworth, Michael (2008) The connect effect.