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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a blueprint for helping institutions better understand who to partner with, why and how, for the purpose of establishing a learning marketspace. The development of an initial blueprint for the formation and implementation of successful e-partnerships built on relationships is discussed. A set of critical questions is included for use across multiple types of partnerships. Embracing a learning marketspace concept is imperative if we hope to engage learners with the higher education enterprise, if we hope to engage faculty with lifelong learners, and if we hope to increase the quality and quantity of citizen e-learning and achievement.
Partnering in the Learning Marketspace
Linda L. Baer and Ann Hill Duin

As organizations around the world form virtual partnerships as a means to project their learning to global audiences, higher education institutions must find ways to do more than leverage their learning content in the global marketplace by listing their courses at "education marketplace" sites. At the heart of a successful higher education institution is a healthy set of virtual partnerships formed for promoting and sustaining lifelong learning. We believe that there are compelling reasons why new and unique partnerships are needed in higher education. We need to better understanding the competitive advantage that partnerships provide when developed and nurtured appropriately; and in fact, that partnerships will be the predominate form that the delivery of higher education will take in the near future.

This paper offers a blueprint for helping institutions better understand how to partner in order to realize such a marketspace concept. Readers will emerge with increased understanding of the learning marketspace and an action plan for partnering in support of lifelong learners.

Embracing a learning marketspace concept is imperative if we hope to engage learners with the higher education enterprise, if we hope to engage faculty with lifelong learners, and if we hope to increase the quality and quantity of citizen e-learning and achievement.

Twigg, 1994, establishes three basic criteria of a new national learning infrastructure needed if higher education is to meet the challenges of the 21st century

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1 Some of the material included in this paper is based on previous publications. The complete version of the work will be available in Partnering in the Learning Marketspace by Duin, Baer and Starke-Meyerring.
learner. The new infrastructure includes: student-centered curricula, just-in-time learning, and electronic collaboration. “The choice of the word infrastructure is deliberate. It suggests the need for new arrangements—among institutions; among institutions and corporations; among institutions, corporations and public policy makers—to undergird a technology-mediated environment in which the learner can thrive.” http://www.educause.edu/nlii/keydoc/mongraph.html

Twigg challenged us with the following: “It is time to turn our attention to creating something new. It is time to move beyond the walls of our individual colleges and universities to join forces with other institutions, with corporations, and with public policy makers to revitalize American higher education. Together, we can create wealth. Together we can create a national learning infrastructure that will serve the learning needs of our nation as we enter the twenty-first century.” Twigg, 1994,13.

Why in the year 2000 are we still in search of the answers posed by Twigg in 1994? We have not seen the development of a nationally accepted set on instructional materials. We have not seen the development of modularized curriculum that will meet the student learning needs in the just-in-time capacity that they require in this knowledge age. We have not seen the development and integration of the comprehensive assessment of student learning throughout the learning experience. In fact, we see little fundamental “transformation” of the academy, at least within the academy. Instead, tremendous growth has occurred in the private sector.

The call during the early years of the 21st century revolves around how to approach fundamental changes in learning. This is occurring outside the academy faster than within due to the numerous challenges inherent in the higher education culture. The
challenge for higher education institutions is to recognize that if they are to be players in the education business of today there are new rules, new structures and new partners.

Based on our research and involvement in developing inter-institutional virtual partnerships as well as our scholarship on demographics, construction of online learning environments, and e-mentoring, we believe the hallmarks of the successful learning marketspace to be the formation of partnerships between organizations in support of lifelong learning. Unfortunately, however, recent failed partnerships illustrate the lack of understanding and readiness on the part of higher education to embrace partnerships in support of lifelong learners.

What is a learning marketspace?

Duin, Baer, and Starke-Meyerring (in press) define the learning marketspace as "a gateway through which learners, employers, and learning providers are drawn together into a dynamic Internet based marketplace that creates value for learners, enhances economic development, and engages institutions in meeting the needs of 21st century learners." Examples of such learning marketspaces abound; including HungryMinds.com, UNext, Michigan Virtual Automotive College, and Kentucky Virtual University.

When faculty, students, administrators, policy developers, and practicing professionals in industry learn of these partnerships, they ask crucial questions: Why partner to develop a learning marketspace? What are critical components of a learning marketspace portal? How might we assess an institution’s readiness for partnering in the learning marketspace?
Why partner to develop a learning marketspace?

An organization should partner as a means to empower learners and enhance its mission. We offer the following five areas from which your institution might begin a specific discussion about priorities for partnering in the learning marketspace. Keep in mind that these are priorities for partnering in virtual space versus physical place; that any partnership attempting to build a learning marketspace must be aware that it is dealing with a "winner-take-all" environment; and that the hallmarks of the learning marketspace are its emphasis on learner control and relationship building.

1. Cultural shift in learning

Only through partnership can an institution expand educational capacity to the point expected and increasingly demanded by learners. Here goals should be to

- enhance access and the pedagogy of learning; to improve learning regardless of learner location; and

- put the learner in charge, that is, to develop the tools and pedagogy to help the learner make the cultural shift from attending to managing knowledge.

2. Participation in a global economy

A global economy requires educational restructuring. Learners and industries no longer tolerate delay; they expect partnership, access, and response to their needs. Thus, organizations should partner to

- build new economic, intellectual, and social capital to meet the needs of a global economy; and
• provide the opportunity to participate in the global higher education enterprise / economy.

3. Standardization and scalability

Standardization does not mean that everyone does the same thing, nor does it mean that all higher education institutions should look the same. It means that learners, who increasingly take advantage of the multiple opportunities of e-spaces, should no longer be expected to decipher the idiosyncratic system of each individual institution. It means that we partner to minimize capital costs, reduce operating costs, and maximize geographic reach; in other words, we should

• capitalize on the strengths of partners and restructure institutions to take advantage of partnerships; and

• create common, shared infrastructures, for example, a common information technology infrastructure or professional development opportunities.

4. Net-centric niches

An institution's priority for partnership should be less about entrenching one's niche and more about designing and enabling access to aggregated learning opportunities or "net-centric" niches. According to Kelly 1998, "Rich, interactive, and highly flexible in shape, the network economy resembles a biome seething with action, a jungle in fast-forward motion. New niches open up constantly and vanish quickly. Competitors sprout beneath you and then gobble your spot up. One day you are king of the mountain, and the next day there is no mountain at all" (p. 83). Therefore, an institution should avoid clinging to niche areas in the learning marketspace, and instead should

• take advantage of the unlimited dimensions of network spaces;
• study one's assets in relation to a value web instead of a linear value chain; and
• work to bring to market, through partnership, a very different value proposition than is yet available.

5. Human relationships

Partnering in the learning marketspace begins with and is sustained by human relationships. Only through communicating and developing strong relationships can institutions partner to

• respond quickly in meeting the needs of lifelong learners;
• engage learners with the higher education enterprise; and
• share risks while working toward mass customization.

However persuasive the above may be, the majority of institutions largely respond by continuing to pour resources into internal systems rather than collaborating to leverage resources as part of a learning marketspace. Given that one's partners no longer need be determined by geography, this reluctance to partner is even more astounding. Perhaps part of the reluctance stems from a lack of understanding of what a learning marketspace might look like.

What are critical components of a learning marketspace portal?

Learning marketspace portals work to integrate educational offerings from the partnering organizations. As such, these portals may at first appear inferior to traditional institutions because they do not yet deliver the full range of services, such as registration, admissions, community events, learning support services, etc. Developing the full potential of a learning marketspace takes time because its full potential comes only
through relationship building and standardization of processes across the partnering institutions. Since each institution has its unique structure, culture, and traditions, such standardization processes are complex and challenging. To begin, partnering institutions can develop critical components in preparation for the learning marketspace portal. In our opinion, three sets of components are critical to the learning marketspace:

- **Information and Access.** These components focus on providing access to aggregated information about learning and employment resources;

- **Streamlined and Shared Services.** These components focus on common credit transfer, registration, admissions, and other standards and procedures; and

- **Relationship Tools.** These components focus on creating knowledge through learning relationships. We believe these learning relationship components to be the number one priority of the learning marketspace. They consist of e-portfolios, e-mentoring, and e-learning communities.

**Information and Access**

Partnerships should provide seamless access to the career, course, job, and business resources needed by students and practicing professionals. One such project called the Internet System for Education and Employment Knowledge (ISEEK, www.iseek.org) is a model for using technology to enhance and align a learner's career assessment, course choices, and future business opportunities.

This basic tool provides learners, counselors, and employers with a "virtual" advising office for help with needs assessment, institution identification, and financial aid as well as a common catalog for links to courses and class schedule information (potentially from all providers in the partnership). In addition, employers, community
groups, and learners of any age or at any location can post requests regarding their specific learning needs and preferred delivery method (face to face, web, ITV, and so forth), and "matches" are then made between the providers and learners. A partnership thus might pool resources to develop a means to enhance and align career assessment tools, course choices, and future work opportunities.

**Streamlined and Shared Services**

Individual courses / modules, as well as total institutions, are the basic units in the learning marketspace; learners expect our institutions to accept courses from any accredited institution. Thus, the second critical component is the standardization of our credit transfer policies and the development of lifelong learning credit and non-credit banks. Although not yet such a bank, an initiative known as the Course Applicability System (CAS, www.transfer.org) provides one example of a system that is being designed to allow students to input course records and immediately learn where their courses will transfer across partnering institutions and states in the U.S.

To date, participating institutions in Ohio, Arizona, Wisconsin, and Minnesota are partnering on such an initiative to enhance transferability across systems. Institutions in this partnership initiative are building a web application that assists students, advisors, faculty and administrators from two-year colleges and universities to obtain consistent and accurate information about transfer courses and the applicability toward degree completion (http://daraixo1.mcs.muohio.edu/cas/).

**Relationships**

Learning marketspace partnerships must leverage the best content created by the partners and provide a seamless gateway so that learners can access that content from any
number of entry points. Along with the need to streamline services is the pressing human need of encouraging and supporting learning relationships. As research on pedagogy consistently points out, learning relationships are crucial for creating knowledge. In the digital age, when learners need to learn how to take control of their learning process, these learning relationships are simply indispensable. To address this need in the learning marketspace, we propose three basic relationship-building components: e-portfolios, e-mentors, and e-learning communities.

**E-portfolios.** The e-portfolio—a technology that helps learners develop, manage, integrate, and share their information and knowledge with others—is a critical tool of the learning marketspace. We envision this technology to be an online, cross-functional, learner-controlled, personal learning and career development system designed to help learners become responsible and active managers of their knowledge and competencies by putting the control of their learning and career development in their hands. For lack of a better term, we call it e-portfolio, but the descriptors that come closest to capturing it are: a dynamic, integrated, electronic learning management system. A prototype of this concept is currently being developed at the University of Minnesota.

Rather than merely presenting learner information and data as stored at an institution, the e-portfolio focuses on how learners can best use this information to become successful lifelong learners. For example, it allows learners to integrate knowledge, competencies, resources, services, credentials, learner projects, assessment results—anything they need to plan, track, and present their learning and work. An e-portfolio enables learners to create, access, store, and selectively display educational, professional, and personal records, including demonstrations of competencies such as
drawings, photographs, writing and design samples, videos of performances, test results, software code, and credentials. Learners create customized versions of their records and send them in seconds to selected audiences such as course team members, counselors, admissions officers, faculty, employers, and others.

**e-Mentor concept.** As learners begin to control and manage more of their own information and knowledge, institutions will be expected to develop curricula and ways of teaching learners to become active and responsible managers of their own learning, information, and knowledge. Although the e-portfolio represents a technological centerpiece in this process, the technology of the e-portfolio alone is not enough to teach learners how to develop, manage, and share their knowledge. Thus, the e-mentor concept becomes the crucial relationship link between learners and the partnering institutions.

The e-mentor concept focuses on connecting learners with partnering institutions, and more strategically, with e-mentors at these institutions. Associations, businesses, and individuals would indicate the competencies needed and bring their current education, training, and experience in the form of their e-portfolio. The e-mentor helps to identify the gap between what the learner knows and needs to know, and identifies the educational resources available and those needed from a variety of entities (e.g., partnering institutions, corporations, etc.) to meet the learning need. The e-mentor helps the learner to identify the best delivery mode (online, face to face, synchronous, asynchronous), critical content, and e-learning resources that meet the learning need. In short, the e-mentor helps the learner to

- Locate e-learning resources that directly meet the learner's needs;
- Identify learning gaps and locate resources and e-faculty who can help the learner;
• Develop a personal learning plan (e-portfolio);
• Set up an ongoing assessment and achievement plan; and
• Become a responsible and active manager of his/her information and knowledge.

The E-Learning Community. The e-learning community provides yet another important set of relationships and connections for learners in the learning marketspace. Considering the unprecedented pace of change in knowledge, technology, and society, learners need to expand their ways of learning to include learning from peers and colleagues. Increasingly, learners are understood as experts and experts as learners, resulting in learner-experts learning from each other. Consequently, learners need to have opportunities to interact with other learner-experts in the learning marketspace. Only through interaction with other learners in the learning marketspace can new benchmarks for digital age learning develop, such as benchmarks for knowledge management and e-portfolio development.

How might we assess an institution’s readiness for partnering in the learning marketspace?

Our research has lead to the development of a set of readiness criteria, compiled through our ongoing study of inter-institutional partnerships, to help an institution determine readiness for engaging in the learning marketspace. Sharing results from surveying K-12 and collegiate practitioners as well as system level administrators across the U.S., we provide clarity and a concise blueprint for crucial preparation for partnerships.
We determined that the challenge to partner is great. The means to get there begins with an assessment of readiness.

Rosevear (1999), in his comparative case study of eight organizations from higher education, industry, and state governments involved in the development of virtual universities, has developed the following set of questions to assess readiness on the part of inter-institutional partnerships. Again, we have adapted these questions slightly for this context.

- What is the state of the partnering programs' technological infrastructure?
- How prepared are the partnering programs to support virtual learning environments?
- Do they all have equal technological capabilities?
- What is a reasonable prediction for how long it will take before the partnership is operational?
- What are the resources gaps, and how will they be filled?

Based on the experience of developing Minnesota Virtual University, a partnership effort involving 200 institutions, Duin and Baer (2000) add the following criteria for determining readiness for a broad partnership in support of a learning marketspace:

- **Learner and faculty needs.** Are there learning opportunities otherwise denied by existing programs? Are faculty being denied the opportunity to offer their expertise in innovative ways?
• **Leadership committed to the change.** Is there both vertical and horizontal support across the partnering programs? Is there buy-in by the administration, faculty, and staff?

• **E-commerce strategy.** Do the partners have an e-commerce strategy, and does this strategy include an emphasis on lifelong learning?

• **International strategy.** Do the partners have an international strategy, and does this strategy include an emphasis on lifelong learning?

• **Climate to support partnership and change.** Are incentives in place to foster collaboration across the programs?

• **Resources.** Are major resources committed to the initiative? This criterion seems obvious, yet most learning marketspace efforts have failed simply because they, in reality, did not have the monetary resources to build and sustain such an effort.

• **Commitment to learner centered education.** Do the partners foster the development of learner-centered systems? So much has been written about the need for learner-centered systems; however, most programs focus first on what the partnership brings to them rather than on what it should bring to learners.

  Invariably, those engaged in the development of learning marketspace partnerships point to leadership commitment as the single most important criterion for such partnerships. Robinson and Daigle (1999-2000), in their recent analysis of California State University's failed partnership known as the California Educational Technology Initiative (CETI), state that "full executive engagement is an absolute requirement at both the system and campus levels" (p. 26). The reason for the significance of this readiness criterion is the disruptive nature of learning marketspaces,
which means that they cannot be limited to reproducing existing institutional processes and structures, but rather require organizational learning and change. Considering the need for standardization across participating programs alone, the critical need for leadership commitment becomes perhaps more apparent. In other words, develop a partnership only if the administrators in charge are in full support of the partnership.

Drawing on public management theory, Robinson and Daigle present a conceptual framework of institutional readiness for public-private partnership development. Their framework integrates an action context (descriptive-explanatory, normative, assumptive, and instrumental actions); with a developmental sequence, which moves as follows: from vision → commitment → culture → risk → power → adaptability.

We provide a synthesis of their framework in figure 1, creating a series of steps and corresponding set of framing questions as an initial blueprint for programs planning to partner in the learning marketspace. This framework becomes extremely useful when applied to partnerships, particularly those at the meta-level.

Institutions need to approach partnerships with deliberateness and clear rules of engagement. For example, each partner needs to clearly determine the definition of partnering. The literature describes many types of partnerships including those with limited partners, strategic partners, full partners. Each type of partnership has specific implications for the participants. Partnerships need to determine the purpose for which the arrangement is in place with stated outcomes and time parameters.
Partners need to determine the guiding principles that are foundational to the partnership. Examples in the learning marketspace would be focus on learner-centered design; faculty, lifelearner and business involvement at all levels of the initiative; a commitment to leveraging efforts between units involved in the initiative; and a focus on quality, flexibility, efficiency and accountability.

Inherent in the principles are assumptions about what each partner can achieve as they work together. Clear delineation of what each partner is responsible for is critical. Examples include the development of a one-stop portal where all services are available for learners. Expectations may include web registration, tracking of learners for future relevant offerings, credit or non-credit banking features, e-portfolios/e-transcripts/e-mentors for the learner, faculty training for the development of the offerings, and ongoing evaluation and research of lifelong learning.

An agreed upon operations chart must undergird any partnership. For example, how will the operation work? What is the role of a vendor and how and with whom does the vendor interface with the campus?

Readiness for the partnership is based on vision and how the partnership meets the bigger picture. Educational vision often includes serving the greater good or educational service as a part of the social contract. The commitment to the partnership must also have multiple levels of leadership committed to the partnership for the foreseeable future.

We have found that successful partnerships must include the commitment to the fact that collaboration and cooperation are more important than hierarchy and competition. Within this context, the capacity to sustain the risk involved in large-scale
partnering must be delineated. Critical to successful partnerships is the determination of who has the authority. Where does final authority reside and who has decision-making responsibility?

Finally, meta-partnerships will require adaptability. How much are institutions willing to alter the direction, structure, and operations to sustain the partnership? Can institutions of higher education create the environments where adaptability can survive and thrive?

Each of these questions must be addressed in open and frank discussions across the multiple levels of the institution. Each component of the blueprint is critical to the other for sustainability over time. All components together create the network required to sustain and maintain partnerships within the learning marketspace.

**Conclusion**

Partnership formation is a process of discovery and disclosure, and readiness begins with establishing communication, trust and support. If communication and trust are established, and if the partnering institutions are willing to start small and embrace the disruptive potential that the learning marketspace represents change can be sustained. Once the partnership is initiated, a learning marketspace partnership ensures that an institution intends to meet the needs of learners and that the partners intend to inhabit and innovate within both spaces and places. This is where the challenge of higher education meets the reality of the 21st century learning demands and expectations. This is where the greatest dissonance will reside for higher education. But it is also where the most dramatic revolution in learning for all citizens can and must be realized. Embracing the
learning marketspace model brings a metamorphosis to the institution and a rebirth in its understanding of learning.
Figure 1: An Initial Blueprint for Partnering in the Learning Marketspace (Robinson and Daigle)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Questions to address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>What is it (i.e., the partnership)? How will it affect my institution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>What are the guiding, foundational principles?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>What can my institution assume that we can achieve together from this partnership? What will each partner do or be responsible for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations</td>
<td>How will it work? Is it feasible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>What is the greater vision or greater social good?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Are multiple levels committed to it? Are levels of trust and covenants in place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Are collaboration and cooperation more important than hierarchy and competition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>Can we tolerate the financial, legal, academic, and/or experimentation risks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Who has the authority? Where are clear lines drawn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>Are we willing to alter the direction, structure, and operations to support the partnership?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


