The socio-economic dimensions of ICT-driven educational change

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Drawing on a three-year project involving 20 secondary schools throughout Europe, this paper analyzes the socioeconomic factors that determine the success or failure of introducing information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure to schools. While many papers have been written on this topic, this paper definitely benefits from a large project, and is a must read for current or future project managers in the area.

The "School+ Platform" was funded by the 5th Framework Programme of the European Commission, and brought together four universities, five secondary schools, and one small or medium-sized enterprise (SME). Their goal was to "combine educational innovation with today's technical realities" by "creating a culture of pedagogical and technological change within schools." This includes the design, development, and testing of a learning management system called "School+ Microcosmos." During the third project year, the project was extended to another 15 secondary schools. Using this background, the authors draw conclusions about the socioeconomic success factors of ICT integration in education.

The first part of the paper analyzes economic factors on different levels, such as hardware and software costs for schools, and the costs for Internet access for the educational institutions as well as for the families at home. The second part summarizes the key factors for success and failure. Along several main aspects, such as educational change, sustainability, and technological literacy, central indicators for evaluation are generalized, which help with obtaining a basic understanding of the sociological factors of ICT introduction in schools.

If you are currently organizing a similar undertaking, you might find it helpful to read about their problems. I was involved in ICT integration projects in the past, and the paper reminded me of the tremendous number of small but important pitfalls that can make the implementation of the best ideas become a nightmare. As a result, I recommend this paper to anybody involved in future ICT-driven education projects. A minor issue with the paper is that the reported data is from 2005, and some observations will become more and more obsolete.

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