elearning-reviews
research on elearning – reviewed for you

Printable Version

| Home | Topics | Index | Authors | Journals | Conferences | Organizations | News | | Reviewers | Editors | About us | Contact |

Overview › Strategy › **Institutional Strategies**

McCredie, Jack (2003)

Does IT matter to higher education?
Educause Review, Vol. 38, No. 6, November/December, pp. 15–22

Google this publication · ScholarGoogle this publication · Export to: BibTeX, Endnote/RIS

Related Topics: Technology: Strategic Issues

Review by: Zellweger, Franziska (2005-01-04)

The paper by Jack McCredie, Chief Information Officer of the University of California, Berkeley, is a response to the statement of Harvard Business School Professor Nicholas G. Carr who provocatively titled his May 2003 article, published in the Harvard Business Review, "IT doesn't matter". Carr's article set off a heated discussion about the strategic importance of IT investment and management. His main proposition is that IT becomes like the telephone an ubiquitous and homogenous technology through which no company will manage to establish a sustainable competitive advantage. Carr advises CIOs to focus IT operations on reliability and cost efficiency and not to lead new trends. McCredie discusses the appropriateness of these statements regarding the context of higher education. After reproducing Carr's main propositions, McCredie contests these in four major points:

- Although cutting edge IT infrastructure will not guarantee a distinctive advantage over competitors, it is an essential criterion upon which students and researchers will chose their school and therefore an indispensable duty for a university willing to remain competitive.
- McCredie also disagrees with Carr's estimation that "the IT buildout is much closer to its end than its beginning" and that, because of this, there is only limited potential left to realize new business models on the basis of IT innovation. As an example McCredie refers to the entertainment industry where the transformation to the internet-based economy hasn't taken place yet.
- Although major changes in how research is done evolved as a consequence of information technology, the teaching and learning dimensions of higher education have yet to be transformed. McCredie states that this change will be fueled by information technology.
- Finally, McCredie takes issue with Carr's inconsiderate language and his statement that IT management should become boring. Even though IT will, in the long run, not count for the strategic reinvention, the meticulous management of costs and risks will be key.

To sum up, McCredie estimates Carr's contribution to have much value for organizations whose business models depend on low-margins, high-volumes, and static environments. However, educational institutions need to thoroughly assess whether an innovator and early adopter strategy or a follow-the-pack approach serves institutional goals best. "Carr is wrong", McCredie concludes, "at least in higher education IT certainly matters."

McCredie's discussion of the strategic importance of IT to higher education is a timely and very important contribution. In a time of budget constraints and after a period of intense experimenting with eLearning, it is important to openly discuss the question whether the results are worth the money invested or not and what is to come. However, McCredie's reflections seem not to be critical enough regarding the role of IT in higher education. It is true that IT and in particular educational technology has initiated changes but it seems that IT is neither the problem nor the solution. Although today IT is fundamental to many aspects of academic life, its main contribution is the initiation of fundamental discussions about the nature of the academic profession, government structures, and the future role of higher education in society in general.

Link to this page: http://www.elearning-reviews.org/publications/258/