‘FALLING BEHIND’: A GROUNDED THEORY OF UNCRITICAL DECISION MAKING

By

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of candidate

_____

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how selected Australian universities evaluated and adopted various learning management systems in their teaching and learning programs, given claims of uncritical evaluation, problems and cautions in the Australian (1998: 13; Brabazon, 2002; Yetton, Forster, Hewson, Hughes, Johnston, Nightingale, Page-Hanify, Vitale and Wills, 1997) and North American (Berg, 2002; Noble, 1998b) higher education literatures. Ironically, universities charge large amounts of money teaching their students to develop competence in critical analysis, yet some studies have claimed that they were deficient in critically analysing their own decisions (Brabazon, 2002; Yetton et al., 1997). This important question has received little attention in the higher education literature, despite the high visibility and costs of these decisions. Although limited theoretical explanations have been proposed by various researchers, such as Yetton et al. (1997) and Brabazon (2002), these matters have not been the subject of published empirical research to date.

A grounded theory methodological framework, validated by the insights of institutional theory, was employed throughout to promote broader sociological explanations than other studies constrained by functionalist theoretical frameworks (Yetton et al., 1997). Qualitative case studies utilising semi-structured interviews and document analysis were conducted at three Australian universities. The findings of this analysis were written up in three case study narratives and an analytic cross-case analysis. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis at the field level were undertaken as an additional source of data to verify emergent grounded theory.

A grounded theory of uncritical decision making (Figure 57) was ultimately developed in response to this study's research problem. The core category around which this model was developed ('falling behind') appeared in all three cases, in interviews with experts from the Australian higher education sector, and was also found in both the Australian and overseas higher education literatures. This grounded theory also represents a minor contribution to the institutional theory literature as a new institutional change process model which links the activities of key individuals with broader field developments, and integrates the constructive and reproductive assumptions of old and new institutional theory.