Distance e-learning experience in the Republic of Kazakhstan (by the example of the Shakarim State University of Semey)

Experiencia e-learning a distancia en la República de Kazajstán (ejemplo: Universidad Estatal Shakarim de Semey)

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Contents

ABSTRACT:

This paper analyzes the introduction of distance learning in the universities of Kazakhstan based on the example of the Shakarim State University of Semey, considers the experience of using this technology in the universities of the US, Europe, Australia and Russia as well as examines a number of studies, which define distance learning as a regular stage in the historical development of education. The paper also analyzes the ways to increase the effectiveness of the educational process by using the educational system "Moodle" within the framework of the Shakarim State University of Semey. Moodle, being a content management system or a courses management system, is specifically designed to create quality online courses by teachers and provide a wide range of opportunities for students. According to the authors, motivational-value, program-targeted, informational-activity, communicative, control-evaluation and technological components of this system aimed at the formation and development of the

RESUMEN:

Este trabajo analiza la introducción del aprendizaje a distancia en las universidades de Kazajstán basándose en el ejemplo de la Universidad Estatal Shakarim de Semey, considera la experiencia de utilizar esta tecnología en las universidades de los Estados Unidos, Europa, Australia y Rusia así como examina una serie de estudios, que definen el aprendizaje a distancia como una etapa regular en el desarrollo histórico de la educación. El trabajo también analiza las formas de aumentar la efectividad del proceso educativo utilizando el sistema educativo "Moodle" en el marco de la Universidad Estatal Shakarim de Semey. Moodle, siendo un sistema de gestión de contenidos o un sistema de gestión de cursos, está específicamente diseñado para crear cursos en línea de calidad por parte de los profesores y proporcionar una amplia gama de oportunidades para los estudiantes. Según los autores, el valor motivacional, el programa objetivo, la actividad informativa, la comunicación, el control y la evaluación

necessary general cultural and professional competencies create wide opportunities to improve the quality of knowledge and train highly qualified specialists, who correspond to the requirements of modern society. The authors believe that the competent organization of distance learning will enable the Kazakhstani educational system to rise to a qualitatively new level now and in the near future.

Keywords e-learning, society, education, distance learning technologies, Moodle system, educational content

y los componentes tecnológicos de este sistema tienen como objetivo la formación y el desarrollo de la necesaria cultura general y las competencias profesionales crean amplias oportunidades para mejorar la calidad del conocimiento y capacitar a especialistas altamente cualificados, que corresponden a los requerimientos de la sociedad moderna. Los autores creen que la organización competente de la enseñanza a distancia permitirá al sistema educativo de Kazajistán elevarse a un nivel cualitativamente nuevo ahora y en un futuro próximo.

Palabras clave: e-learning, sociedad, educación, tecnologías de aprendizaje a distancia, sistema Moodle, contenidos educativos

1. Introducción

Challenges faced by modern civilization lead to an understanding that all of them are concentrated, first of all, in the individual himself. In this regard, mankind increasingly began to draw attention to education that can lead society out of a protracted crisis and correlate the values and goals of the individual with the values and goals of the entire society. Currently, one can state with full certainty that for the last 10 years the definition of "education" has radically changed. There is a rethinking of this concept, its role in society, meaning and function. There are new educational technologies, a special place among which is occupied by distance learning technologies.

Currently, the introduction of distance learning technologies in the educational process has increasing importance throughout the world and in Kazakhstan, in particular. This testifies to the reform and improvement of the Kazakhstani educational system, its modification to conform with international requirements and integration into the international educational space.

The development of computer technology makes it possible to freely do what was not imaginable in the recent past. A huge advantage of modern telecommunications is that it is possible to provide anyone with access to information databases almost all over the world. Only this alone opens great prospects in the field of education.

One of the main objectives of education is the adequate, flexible and effective provision of knowledge in accordance with the specific needs of different categories of learners. It is necessary that the various requests of students regarding the time, place and frequency of contacts with teachers be met, and the most modern and effective technologies be used. Therefore, the presented materials actualize the topic of this study.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the development of distance learning as a new form of education and to identify its problems and prospects, based on the example of the educational process in the Shakarim State University of Semey. In accordance with the purpose, the following research objectives are set:

- to give an overview of the existing problems of the development of distance learning in Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and the countries of near and far abroad;

- to conduct an analysis of the introduction of distance learning in the Shakarim State University of Semey.

The paper uses theoretical level methods to solve the research objectives such as comparative analysis and systematization as well as empirical methods such as observation, description, comparison, questionnaire survey, interview, testing and experiment.

The scientific novelty of the paper consists in the implementation of the analysis of distance learning in the system of higher education in the Republic of Kazakhstan based on the example of the Shakarim State University of Semey; identification of the merits and demerits of using the Moodle distance learning platform in the educational process; development of recommendations for working with the Moodle educational system.

A literature review showed that the problems of distance learning are being studied quite actively in the works of foreign researchers.

Otto Peters, one of the founders and former rector of FernUniversitaet in Hagen (Germany), defines distance education as a product of the industrial era and shows it as a natural stage in the historical development of education. He believes that the essence of distance education consists in the fact that an elite, hierarchical education, based on personal communication in a small group and tied to a specific place and time, is replaced by a democratic, mass audience-oriented education, which is free from space-time restrictions of distance learning (DL). He argues that anyone who is currently professionally engaged in education must recognize that there are two completely different forms of learning: traditional, based on interpersonal communication, and industrialized, based on technical and industrial forms of communication (Peters, 1998).

According to M. Moore, the existence of distance between subjects of education is a positive factor contributing to the development of students' independency, their autonomy, necessary for the successful implementation of the goals set, while the lack of students' autonomy (independency) can have a negative impact on the procedure for acquiring knowledge. Distance, changing the structure of learning, requires special personal qualities and work skills from its participants that allow them to act independently of each other (Moore, 1973).

Based on the statement of M. Moore, B. Holmberg understood education as a purely individual activity of the student, in the context of which the physical presence of the teacher is not a prerequisite for the successful implementation of educational activities (Holmberg, 1983).

According to D. Keegan, distance education, as opposed to traditional, is initially devoid of a communicative environment, providing the successful educational process for both teachers and students. Traditional audience interaction as well as the natural integration of teaching and learning processes can be restored with the help of modern communication technologies (Keegan, 1993).

Many works of Western researchers study the effectiveness of various educational technologies in terms of economic benefits and real achievements of students in the field of knowledge. As a rule, they are distinguished only by geography, educational level, classroom composition, and project implementation degree (Farhad and Shearer, 1994). Of course, all these and other works of foreign researchers contribute to the development of distance learning.

Therefore, foreign researchers note that the potential of computer-based distance learning can be most successfully used in the study of courses, including discussion, intense mental activity, problem solving, and collective activities. In general, specialists consider distance learning to be effective with the proper organization of this training and its presentation.

The sphere of distance learning was studied by many Russian researchers. According to V. Dmitrieva, V. Prokofiev and P. Samoilenko, distance learning is a combination of intramural and extramural forms of education in the best possible way – the possibility of training under the guidance of qualified teachers of well-known universities in the places of learners' permanent residence (Dmitrieva et al., 1994). The essence of distance learning is that the learner, possessing a certain data bank (a package of information-development modules or modules units), the target program of actions (an individual curriculum), an individual training strategy and methodological guidance for achieving the goal set, can relatively independently or completely independently work on the program offered or chosen, according to the principle "do thyself".

Gospodarik Yu.P. believes that the current model of distance learning is rather a kind of extramural education, only with the use of computer telecommunications. In this model, distance learning courses are a set of lectures sent to the user in portions or entirely for independent learning. After receiving the learning materials, the user (student, entrant) works with them at home, at the workplace or in a special computer class. This takes into account the individual style of activity, ability and needs of the user, who can study the learning courses in

any sequence, faster or slower. (Gospodarik, 2000).

According to Polat E.S., computer telecommunications provide effective feedback, which is envisaged both in the organization of educational materials, and in communication with the teacher who conducts the course. Distance learning is especially relevant for Russia with its vast territories and the concentration of scientific centers in major cities (Polat, 2001).

Researcher Tarasenko O.S. is sure that distance learning reveals the creative potential, character and talent of the individual (Tarasenko, 2010).

Distance learning makes it possible to implement the principles underlying distance education: the first is "education for all", the right of everyone to begin to study and get secondary or higher education without entrance tests; the second – learning with minimal contact with the teacher, when the emphasis is made on independent work. The quality and structure of training courses as well as the quality of teaching in distance education, are often much better than in traditional education, according to Pokushalova L.V. (2009).

Aleksandrova I. believes that an important reason for applying for distance learning is the possibility to study at a convenient time and in a convenient place for the learner. At the same time, the learning period has no limitations and can be interrupted depending on the learner's desire and financial capabilities (Aleksandrova, 1996).

However, there are a number of problems associated with the self-development of personality in the context of distance education such as:

- the insufficient clarity in understanding the essence of the psychological and pedagogical phenomenon of "the self-development of personality in distance education";
- the incomplete development of mechanisms for its formation and development;
- the absence of criteria for assessing the levels of its formation at various stages of the learner's socialization;
- the crudity of psychological and pedagogical conditions and means of the self-development of personality in the system of the person-oriented educational process;
- the absence of concepts and mechanisms for the systematic implementation of the above-mentioned conditions and means.

The mechanism of self-education is activated by the contradiction between the formed, active cognitive interest and the level of personality development that is insufficient to satisfy this interest. In such learning conditions, it is important to follow the direction of the development of learners' personal qualities and to make sure of the purposefulness of the self-development of their personality.

In addition, as pointed out by L.N. Ruliene, one of the essential shortcomings of distance learning is "artificial communication". Electronic resources cannot replace live communication. Real human interaction presupposes verbal and non-verbal forms of speech, colored by emotional-psychological features of perception. Learning is impossible without live communication, but it can be more effective if communication tools are diversified, and the means of delivery and processing of educational information are optimized. Infocommunication technologies help to optimize the learning process, freeing teachers from routine operations to develop and maintain training materials, simplifying the control procedure and other processes that can be automated (Ruliene, 2011).

Kazakhstani researchers Zh. Karaev and E. Balafanov (Karaev and Balafanov, 1998) define distance learning as a new type of education characterized by the polyfunctionality of educational services, the specificity of teaching methods, and a high degree of activation of subjects of the educational process.

N.T. Danaev, D.Zh. Ahmed-Zaki, M.E. Mansurova and A.Yu. Pyrkova believe that "the implementation of distance education in the educational process necessitates the need to develop new methodologies for the design of training courses that would provide a target level of service quality, on the one hand, and a target level of production profitability, on the other" (Danaev et al., 2014, p. 6).

2. Features of distance education abroad: from the experience of implementation

Modern information technologies are turning into a powerful learning tool that can be successfully implemented in the distance educational system. Distance education is currently one of the most progressive innovative technologies in educational systems around the world.

Consider the introduction and use of distance learning abroad.

In many countries of the world, distance education is widely used in the system of higher education; therefore, the number of universities that effectively use distance learning technologies is growing. They are most widely used in such countries as the US, the UK, France, Spain, China, Germany, etc. For example, over 20,000 students study annually at the Open University in Milton Keynes (the UK), over 50,000 students – at FernUniversitaet in Hagen (Germany), over 68,000 students are engaged in the distance learning system in INTEC-College in Cape Town (South Africa) (Distance learning…, 2002).

The popularity of distance learning technologies in developed countries is characterized by the use of distance education in many universities. In the US, more than 60% of universities apply distance learning technologies (The Open University).

In Spain, university distance education has been functioning effectively for 30 years. Since 1970, distance learning has begun to develop intensively throughout Europe. Open universities based on distance education were also widespread. Currently in the UK, there are more than 50% of educational programs for obtaining a master's degree in management with the use of distance learning technologies. The leading organization in this field is the Open University Business School in the UK (The Open University).

According to UNESCO, one of the most advanced countries in terms of the widespread introduction of information technology and distance learning in higher education is Australia. The Australian territorial information network and specially developed program provided active participation of both teachers and students in various international projects. This program is an initiative of local universities to introduce the Internet to universities. Especially valuable is the fact that the program teaches not only user skills, but also methods of the efficient use of Internet resources and services in teaching practice, which largely stimulated the widespread use of Internet technologies by both teachers and students (Distance learning in Australia..).

An analysis of the introduction of distance education abroad shows that many countries are creating a powerful technical base for the further development of this form of education. It includes, first of all, developing personal computers, electronic textbooks and computer networks. The development of a communication network and the emergence of servers on the Internet made it possible to continue the spread of new distance learning technologies and the equipment of modern universities with personal computers abroad.

In the US, the UK, Australia, Canada and Germany, the development of the Internet has created conditions for the organization of distance education networks. This process is experiencing a real boom today. The most advanced distance education projects are implemented on the basis or with the support of the largest computer companies – IBM, Apple, DEC, Sun, Novel, Microsoft, etc.

Surveys conducted in the US showed that more than 60% of the population would like to be educated remotely.

A survey of employees of foreign companies using e-learning showed that:

- 87% prefer to study during working hours;
- 52% prefer to study at their workplace rather than in a special class;
- 84% want to re-learn in an electronic form (Materials of the International Scientific and Practical Conference…, 2009).

Modern PCs, the Internet, electronic textbooks and information and communication technologies have been widely used for the last 5 years as the most important basis for the development of informatization in Russia.

In the mid-1990s, within the framework of Moscow Institute of Electronic Engineering, in cooperation with New York University, there was organized a distance training of a group of students majoring in Computer Science and Computer Engineering, obtaining a master's degree in Computer Science (Sklyarenko, 2013).

International achievements in the field of distance education have also been successfully used in other Russian universities.

3. Distance education in the Republic of Kazakhstan: from the experience of use

Currently, in the Republic of Kazakhstan, more than one million people are ready for distance learning, according to experts. What is so attractive about distance education? First of all, it is flexibility. Students engaged in distance learning, as a rule, do not attend regular classes in the form of lectures and seminars, but work in a convenient place at a convenient time and at a convenient pace. Everyone can study as much as he or she personally needs to master the subject and obtain the necessary credits for the chosen courses. It is the biggest advantage for people who cannot or do not want to change their usual lifestyle.

An undisputed advantage is the modular principle, which is the basis for distance learning. Each separate course creates a holistic view of a particular subject area. This allows a curriculum meeting the student's individual needs to be formed from a set of independent module courses.

The wide-scale introduction of highly effective distance learning technologies in the Republic of Kazakhstan sets an urgent task, whose solution includes necessary prerequisites. This is evidenced by the following facts: currently, the literate population of this country is 99.5%. In terms of this indicator, Kazakhstan ranks 14th among 177 countries of the world. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in the course of the international monitoring "Overcoming Inequality: Why Governance Matters", Kazakhstan ranked 1st among 129 countries in the Education for All Development Index with respect to such indicators as primary adjusted net enrolment, adult literacy rate, gender-specific EFA index (GEI), and survival rate to grade 5. According to the Human Development Index, Kazakhstan has advanced from 93rd to 73rd in 12 years (Experience in implementing distance education…). Undoubtedly, these facts prove that the country's population, in general, is prepared for the introduction of new educational technologies based on modern achievements of scientific and technological progress, primarily information and telecommunication technologies.

For the Republic of Kazakhstan, the introduction of high-quality distance learning technologies and open education is also the solution of an important social problem. Kazakhstan is known to have a vast territory, which, with a relatively small population, causes its low density throughout the country. A significant part of the population lives in villages and settlements, remote from cities, regional and district centers. There are settlements with small schools. There are also those with primary schools only. With the advent of small peasant farms and livestock farms on remote pastures, family groups are formed in which children do not have the opportunity to attend school. In such cases, providing the population with at least a compulsory general secondary education becomes a difficult problem. In addition, there are people with disabilities who are also experiencing difficulties in obtaining education. These are significant social problems, which have an element of violation of the constitutional rights of certain categories of citizens and their discrimination based on the place of residence and physical health.

Realizing this, the government is seeking opportunities and taking all measures to solve these problems. At the same time, the introduction of distance learning technologies is considered a

priority. In recent years, large-scale works have been launched in Kazakhstan to introduce the technologies of electronic, virtual education. They are carried out in several relatively independent directions: the introduction of distance learning technologies, a testing system, the creation of internal local networks, websites, the provision of Internet access. Many open universities in Europe, the US and Russia are recruiting specialists in the Republic of Kazakhstan and training them through their own virtual universities. Hundreds of Kazakhstani people have received and are receiving education remotely at these universities, including, in training programs at two universities simultaneously. Currently, a number of Kazakh leading universities are working in this direction: Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, K. Satpayev Kazakh National Research Technical University, D. Serikbayev East Kazakhstan State Technical University, Karaganda State Technical University, M. Auezov South Kazakhstan State University, S. Seifullin Kazakh Agro Technical University, Karaganda Economic University of Kazpotrebsouz, T. Ryskulov Kazakh Economic University, Turan University, M. Kozybayev North Kazakhstan State University, Kazakh-Russian University, Miras University.

In the 2009-2010 academic year, the Center for Distance Learning began to operate at the Shakarim State University of Semey.

To teach students distance learning technologies, the Center uses the educational portal Moodle. Researchers came to the conclusion that with respect to most criteria the best among the open platforms is the Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) system. Moodle, being a content management system or a courses management system, is specifically designed to create quality online courses by teachers (Büchner, 2016). The Moodle system was originally oriented towards university education. Currently, this platform is used in 214 countries and in more than 78 languages.

The Moodle educational system provides the following opportunities:

- use of training materials in the form of text files, images, presentations, audio and video files in the course;

- organization of the knowledge control system in the form of surveys, tests, assignments, lectures, seminars;

- multiple repetition of the material studied;

- independent management of the knowledge control system;

- constant monitoring of students' actions;

- confidentiality of training;

- organization of interactive communication with students through forums, work with a glossary, in wiki, in databases.

In the Moodle environment, the following components are distinguished:

- motivational-value, which contributes to the strengthening of the motivational foundations of educational activity and the formation of a value attitude to cognitive activity, as well as raises the level of learners' responsibility for the result of educational activity;

- program-targeted, which provides information to students about the goals and objectives, structure, content and deadlines of work, supplies information on possible cognitive strategies and introduces work programs on the discipline and schedules of the educational process;

- informational-activity, which ensures the implementation of the content component in the form of a system of independent works aimed at the formation and development of the necessary general cultural and professional competencies;

- communicative, which provides communication between all participants of the educational process;

- control-evaluation, which provides the organization of control and self-control over the progress of work, the collection of data on the intensity of students' work, the provision of

statistical data on the results of educational and cognitive activities, the rise of the level of learners' reflection, the formation of students' readiness to conduct self-assessment and self-control;

- technological, which provides technical support for the organization of academic work. The comprehensive use of communication is one of the main valuable features of the Moodle system. The system supports the exchange of files of any formats both between the teacher and the student, and between students themselves. The distribution service makes it possible to quickly inform all course participants or individual groups about current events. The forum provides an opportunity to organize an educational discussion of problems, while the discussion can be conducted in groups. Messages in the forum can contain files of any formats. There is a function for evaluating messages – by both teachers and students. The chat makes it possible to organize an educational discussion of problems in real time. Such services as "Messaging" and "Commentary" are intended for individual communication of the teacher and the student: reviewing of works, discussion of individual educational problems.

The Moodle system provides an opportunity to assess the work of students in such elements of the course as Task, Forum, Wiki, Glossary, etc., and assessment can also take place on arbitrary scales created by the teacher. There is an opportunity to evaluate Wiki articles, glossary, and answers on the forum by other participants of the course. All ratings can be viewed on the course assessment page, which has many settings for the type of display and grouping of ratings. The Moodle learning management system supports several types of questions in test tasks (multiple choice, verification of compliance, true/false, short answers, essays, etc.). This system provides many functions that facilitate the processing of tests. One can set the scale of assessment, when the teacher adjusts test tasks after passing the test by students, there is a mechanism for the semi-automatic recounting of results. The system contains advanced tools for the statistical analysis of test results and, what is very important, the complexity of individual test questions for students (Hillar, 2013).

The quality of distance learning depends on the effectiveness of the materials used (training courses) and the skill of teachers involved in this process. Table 1 shows the interest of distance education in university specialties.

Table 1. Share of distance learning in university specialties

2010-2011		2011-2012		2012-2013		2013-2014		2014-2015		2015-2016	
Total number	DL	Total number	DL	Total number	DL	Total number	DL	Total number	DL	Total number	DL
44	4 (13%)	45	6 (13%)	45	36 (80%)	69	44 (47%)	65	48 (74%)	65	49 (75%)

In April 2016, German SES experts Gerd Homberg and Horst Langer were invited to the Center for Distance Learning on the initiative of the rector of the Shakarim State University of Semey, prof. M.G. Eskendirova in order to improve the quality filling of educational content. They conducted a training seminar with university teachers to develop methodological competences of working with the Moodle educational platform and technical skills in applying electronic learning tools for blended learning.

The aim of the training seminar was to continue supporting the Moodle educational system, further develop teacher's skills in the effective use of new programs for content filling and promote the systematization of their knowledge and skills in the field of e-learning.

Teachers became familiar with new teaching opportunities of the Moodle system. The most successful part in the seminar was the creation of own video lectures (an attachment to the content of animations), the application of Mind map, Hot.potatoes, www.xmind.net, Andacity, Infanview. Teachers were also acquainted with the didactic principles of development of the Moodle course on the use of blended learning.

At the university, distance learning technologies are also used for the training of intramural students studying on an exchange program in the Republic of Kazakhstan, Russia, America, Europe, Turkey, and South Korea.

Currently, the number of students enrolled in distance education at the Shakarim State University of Semey is annually increasing (Table 2).

Table 2. Contingent of students enrolled in distance education at the Shakarim State University of Semey for the period 2011-2016

Academic years	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Contingent of students	114	423	470	506	641	1166

The advantages of distance learning technologies are as follows:

1. Learning at an individual pace – the speed of learning is determined by the student, depending on his or her personal circumstances and needs.

2. Freedom and flexibility – the student can choose any of the numerous courses of study and independently plan the time, place and duration of classes.

3. Accessibility – independence from the geographical and temporal position of educational institution allows the student not to limit himself or herself in educational needs.

4. Mobility – the effective implementation of feedback between the teacher and the student is one of the basic requirements and grounds for the successful learning process.

5. Technological effectiveness – the use of the latest information and telecommunication technologies in the educational process.

6. Social equality – equal opportunities for education regardless of the place of residence, health status, elitism and material security.

7. Creativity – comfortable conditions for the learner's creative self-expression.

Distance education contributes to the implementation of the two basic principles of modern education – "education for all" and "education through life". However, one should remember that this technology requires the careful development and preparation of materials at a very high level and a deliberate approach, since it is qualified education that gives basic values for man in the age of information technology.

4. Conclusions

Summarizing the results of the study, we can say that the development of distance education in Shakarima State University of Semey is actively advancing and is already giving its results. The approbation of the distance course was successful enough, which means that there is hope for its application to a wide audience of users. The development of the distance learning system can significantly expand the opportunities and increase the competitiveness of the domestic market of educational services. It will also provide an opportunity to increase access to the formation of various social groups and categories of the population, create prerequisites for accelerating the development of all strategically important spheres of society and facilitate the full entry of Kazakhstan into the global information space, maintaining high-quality human capital.

In addition, we consider the development of the distance learning system in the context of the creation of a single national scientific and educational information space. This will enable the Kazakhstani educational system to join the system of European educational and scientific computer networks and information resources and will make the construction of the distance learning system in the state more efficient and less costly in terms of the use of human, material and financial resources.

Therefore, the formation of personality is the most important universal human problem of our time.

This fact is becoming more and more evident in the 21st century – the time of informatization and computerization of the entire social life. The academic community of the Kazakhstani educational system has recognized that the most important and promising direction of the educational system development is the wide introduction of distance learning methods based on the use of modern pedagogical, perspective information and telecommunication technologies.

Distance learning can and must take its place in the educational system, since it, when competently organized, can provide quality education that meets the requirements of modern society and the immediate future.

The findings of the study do not pretend to solve all the problems related to the organization of distance education, because these problems are complex and multifaceted. Further research in this area may be devoted to a more detailed study of the possibility of a transition to the distance learning network technology based on the use of the Internet as a new communication environment.

Thus, no matter in which country or state distance learning is implemented and used, one can say that information technologies create wide opportunities to improve the quality of knowledge and train modern specialists. It is evident that high results cannot be obtained without their intensive introduction into the learning process. The educational policy of each institution should be adequate for the country's high goals. The educational system should fulfill its historical mission – be not only at the cutting edge, but also become an active participant in the new economy.

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