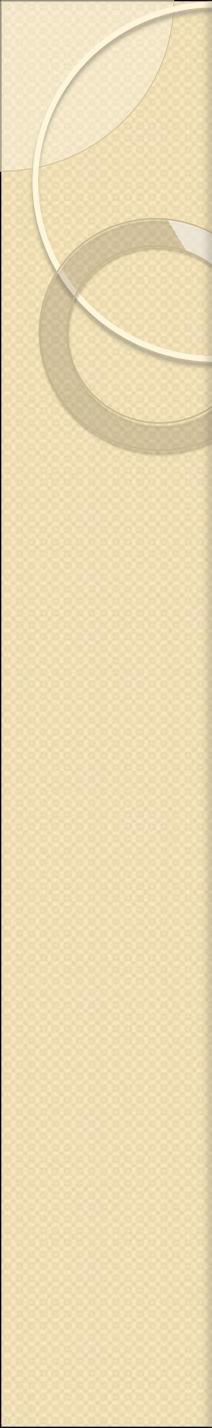# Dominant Discourses in e-learning policies in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in South Africa

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- **About me:**
  - Professor in Information Systems
  - Research foci:
    - Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D)
    - ICT policies
- **About the study:**

  Based on PhD study of Dr. Patricia Chikuni

OUTLINE

1. Why bother and conclusions
2. The context of educational technologies in HIE
3. E-learning contestations
4. Discourse analysis as a method of policy analysis
5. Methodology
6. Findings
7. Conclusions

Why bother?

Practice → Beliefs → Policy → Practice
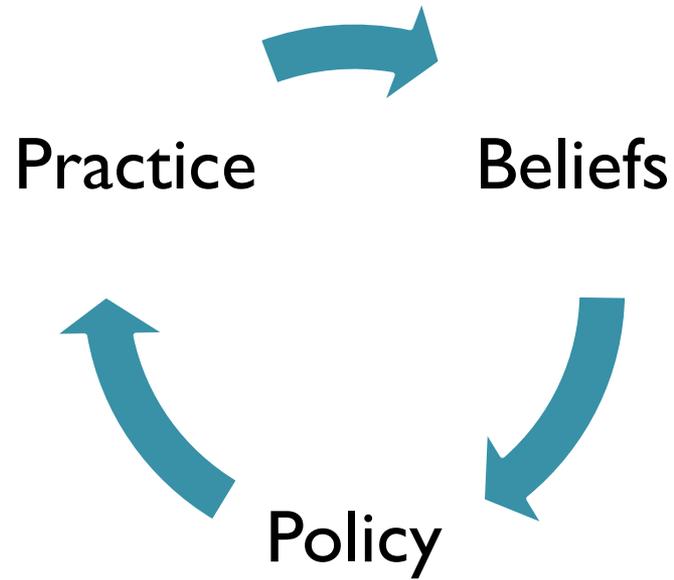
Conclusion

- Most e-learning policies in HIEs are techno-deterministic
- Focusing on the provision of technology and less about pedagogical considerations

Educational Technologies in HEIs

- The changing landscape of teaching and learning with and through technology presents both opportunities and challenges in HEIs.

- In dealing with the challenges, HEIs have come up with plans, strategies, tactics and policies to make sense of the context of teaching and learning with technology.

- The policies reveal values, assumptions, and ideologies on teaching and learning with technologies.

E-learning

- The **e** ('electronic') applies to a wide range of technologies .
- The term 'e-learning' is ambiguous.
- The term is understood from many angles and used with different meanings (Stein, Shephard & Harris, 2011).
- These contestations have implications on how institutions engage with technology for teaching and learning purposes.
- Developing effective policies on e-learning is challenging for most African institutions.

e-learning policy – South Africa

- There is no national policy on the use of ICTs in the Higher Education sector - as is the case in other countries
- The government has been criticised for the absence of the policy (Cross & Adam, 2007; Czerniewicz et al., 2007).
- To develop institutional frameworks and strategies, institutions rely on a series of fragmented statements scattered through policy documents that provide little direction (Czerniewicz et al., 2007:55)

Classification of HEIs in South Africa

- There are 23 state-funded universities
- Programme offerings are based deliberate government policies and historic-economic trajectories.

Government policy	Historic economic trajectories
Comprehensive	Historically advantaged Institutions (HAIs)
Traditional	Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs)
UoTs	Universities of technology

DHET (2014:1) A Policy Framework on Differentiation in the South African Post-School System

Institutional e-learning policies in HEIs in South Africa

Institution	Year	Document
Stellenbosch University	2003	E-campus strategy
University of Pretoria	2003	A telematic learning and education innovation strategy plan
University of Western Cape	2004	An e-learning strategy
University of Limpopo	2004	ICT policy document
University of Cape Town	2004	Educational Technologies policy
University of Witwatersrand	2009	E-learning strategy and tactics
University of Zululand	2009	E-Learning implementation strategy and plan
University of Fort Hare	2009	The promotion of technology-enhanced learning concept paper
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	2011	E-learning policy
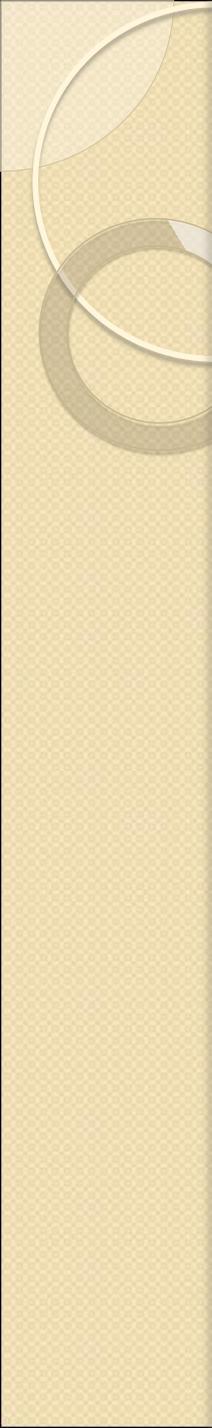
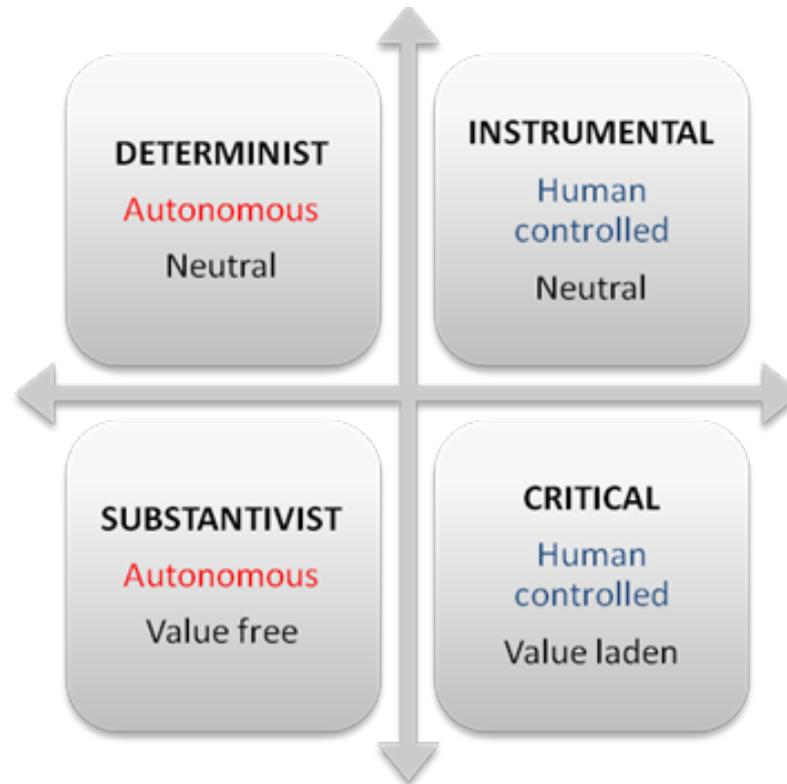# Discourse analysis: a method of policy analysis

Discourse analysis: a method of policy analysis

- Discourse analysis has been deployed as a methodology to understand policy making processes.

- Discourse analysis provides a critical scrutiny of the texts and utterances of policymakers and other key actors.

Discourse analysis: a method of policy analysis

- Foregrounds the ways in which actions are represented in language.

- Is based on the assumption that language is more than the mechanics of communication, it orders social practices and experiences ideology and thus holds impact on actions (Jamison, 2017).

- Discourse and practice share a dialectical relationship where people's actions are rooted in the language they make use of to construct their social world.

Dominant discourses – [Educational] technologies

DETERMINIST
Autonomous
Neutral

INSTRUMENTAL
Human controlled
Neutral

SUBSTANTIVIST
Autonomous
Value free

CRITICAL
Human controlled
Value laden

Deterministic discourses

- From a determinist perspective, a computer is a machine that brings about predictable results in any context.

- Technological determinists have a 'means-end' mentality (Selwyn, 2010:66)

- Determinists look for a technological solution to every educational problem, which limits the understanding of the problem and how to deal with it. Some problems result from poor pedagogy and ill-defined tasks.

- Assumes that when ICTs are introduced into educational contexts and the students are instructed on how to use them, educators will automatically innovate their pedagogical practices (Ornalles al., 2009).

Implications of deterministic discourses

- Technologically determinist view fails to take into consideration the existence of a multitude of factors that condition the curriculum integration of ICTs from a perspective of educational change and innovation.
- It subverts the role of human agency to that of technologies.
- It focuses human minds on how to adapt to technological change, not on how to shape it.
- It minimises human power to control technological development.

Dominant discourses - technology
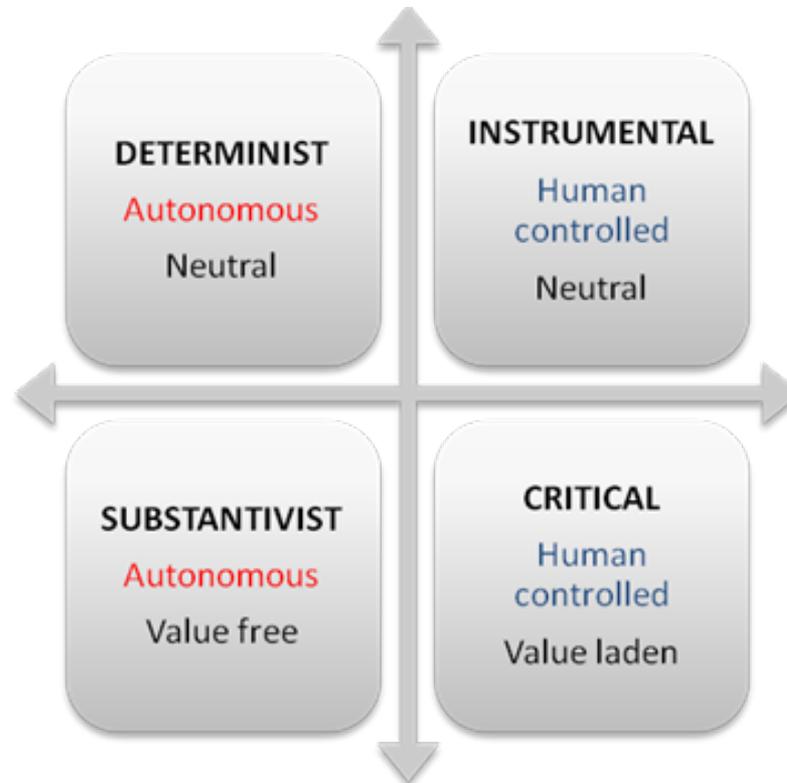
Instrumental discourses

- ICTs are instrumental tools that are simply neutral as their uses define their role, a'uses determinism' (Darlberg, 2004).

- instrumentalists believe that any kind of technology is just a tool that needs a user to use it and define its uses.

Implications on teaching and learning

- There is a temptation to think that the tool can be applied in any context and bring the same results, as long as the user knows how to use it.

- Fails to consider the varieties in the contexts of learning.
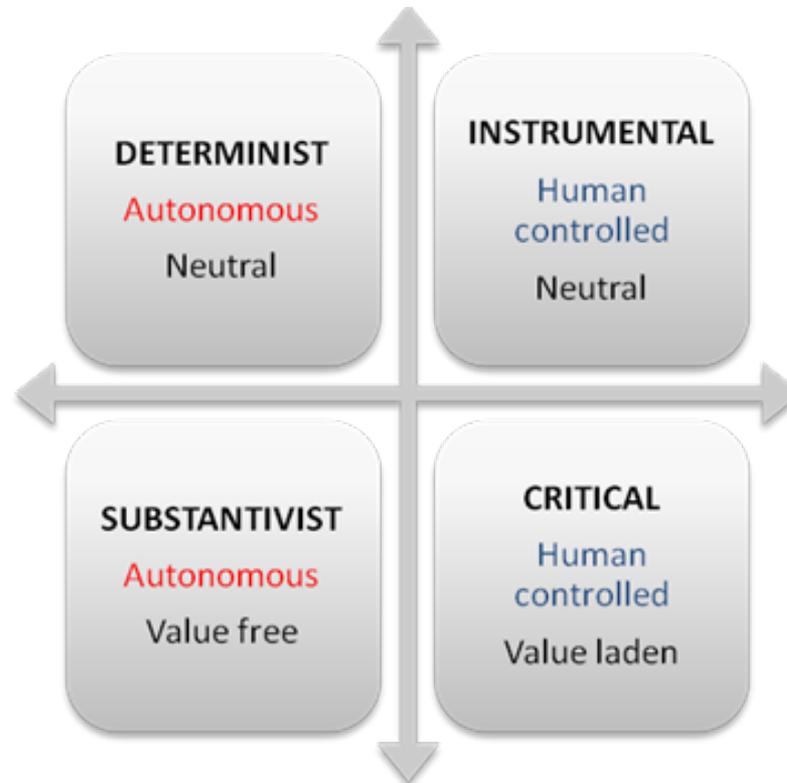
Dominant discourses - technology
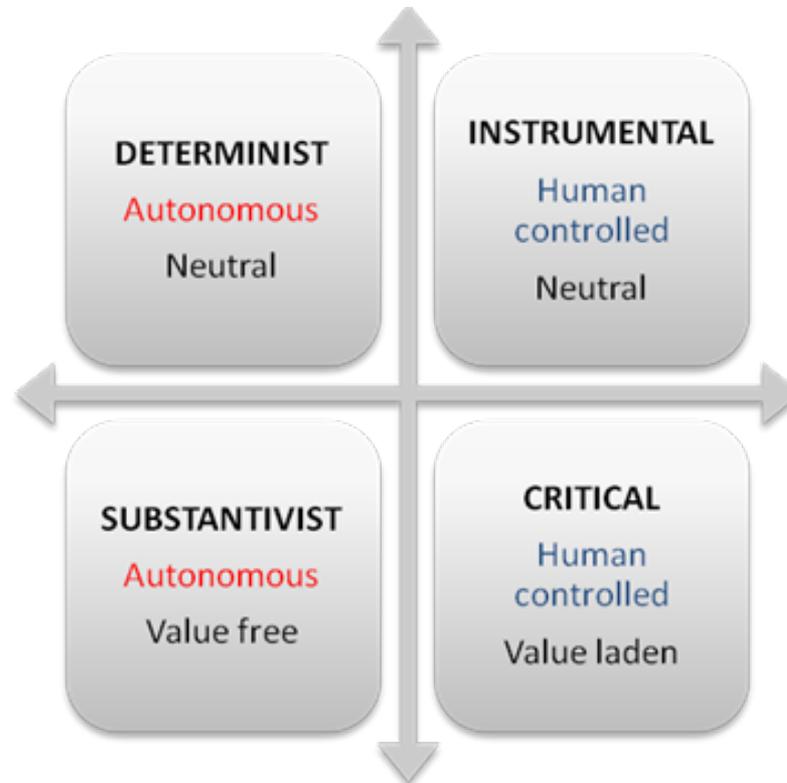
Substantive discourses

- Substantive theorists believe in the unremitting power of technologies to change societies and humans.

- One assumption is that technologies have the power to change us and our societies.

Implications

- This discourse leaves little choice for human agency.

- Substantivists believe that technologies have taken over to the extent that humans have been left as mere objects.

Dominant discourses - technology

DETERMINIST Autonomous Neutral	**INSTRUMENTAL** Human controlled Neutral
SUBSTANTIVIST Autonomous Value free	**CRITICAL** Human controlled Value laden

Critical approach

- The critical approach calls for the problematisation of technology, its assumptions, role, effects and meaning.

- Questions the ways of talking about and justifying e-learning and that obscure a more complicated reality presented by contextual variations (Friesen, 2008:181)

Methodology

- A CDA of e-learning policy texts from three public universities in South Africa. Purposive sampling was used to select the cases.

University	category	Policy document
TechUni	HAI and HDI	University A policy on e-learning
HDIUni	HDI	An e-learning strategy
HAIUni	HAI	Educational Technology (Ed-Tech) policy

- Policies were found online

- Picked the current version of policies (2003, 2004, 2011)

- Selected those with stand-alone policies (not the ones embedded in other policies)

TechUni e-learning policy

- An institutional audit had revealed that staff were frustrated with the ICT infrastructure.

- There was also evidence that most academics at the time were not using the LMS preferring to use other forms of technologies available publicly.

- For this reason the e-learning policy was formulated to encourage academics to use e-learning technologies to promote a multi-modal approach to teaching and learning. After a process of rigorous consultation and feedback from various university committees, involving different stakeholders, spanning a period of two years.

- The policy led to a rift between two centres of power in the university due to its narrow focus on the LMS.

HDIUni e-learning strategy

- The e-learning strategy was aimed at laying the foundation for using technology to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The idea for an institutional e-learning strategy was triggered by the Director of Teaching and Learning Technologies Unit who requested a review all computer literacy interventions.

- The university opted for an e-learning. "A narrow focus on computer literacy in isolation from other aspects of e-learning would lead to a loss of coherence in strategic thinking".

- A working group developed a document which examined the internal and external environment of the university that impact on teaching and learning with technologies, locating the approach within the framework of digital academic literacies.

- The development of the strategy was an incremental process. The university already had an Integrated Information Strategy, which was reviewed to come up with an e-learning strategy.

HAIUni Educational Technologies policy

- Educational Technologies policy was developed by the Multimedia Educational Technologies Group (MEd-Tech Group). The group was a multi-disciplinary research development group mandated to transform the delivery of teaching and learning through educational technology.

- The MEd-Tech Group had been running for 5 or 6 years; funded from an international grant. Towards the end of the grant, the Group proposed a need to establish a Centre for Educational Technologies (CET).

- The absence of a policy was seen as a stumbling block in the establishment of CET.

- A policy would "create an enabling environment for the work of the new centre for educational technology", which would enable the university to harness the potential of educational technologies in teaching and learning.
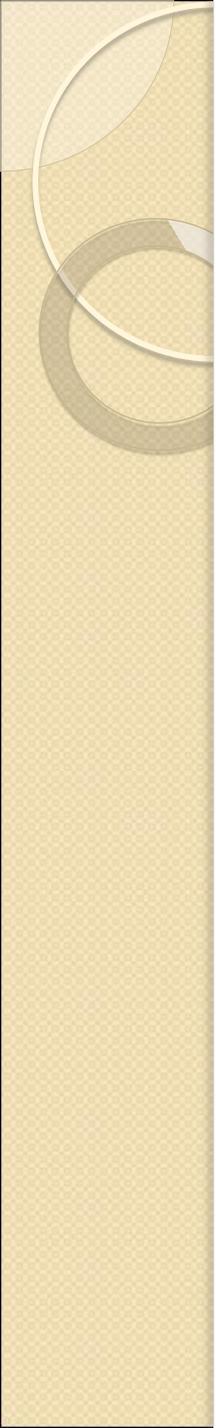
Findings: Discourse

Dominant discourses

- ICTs as value-neutral tools for learning
- Means vs ends rationalisation
- Promoting teacher-centric pedagogies
- Globalisation
- Access to technological infrastructure

ICTs as value neutral tools for learning

- The e-learning policies at TechUni and HDIUni portray ICTs as neutral with certain determined results of teaching and learning.

- The policies repeatedly used words to show the potential of e-learning to 'bring about progress'. Discourses are conveyed in words that stress the importance of progress (e.g. 'development', 'growth', 'improvement' and 'enhancement').

  E-learning must first be seen as part of the <u>transition</u> process of students from secondary education

  Existing staff must be able to <u>develop and enhance</u> their teaching methodologies through the use of e learning.

ICTs as value neutral tools for learning

- TechUni policy has no explanation on how e-learning will foster economic development. A cause and effect relationship is assumed.

- HDIUni e-learning strategy presents ICTs as neutral tools that serve curriculum subjects. Presents ICTs as ideologically neutral tools that support digital literacy skills

    "…Technology will facilitate the transformation of teaching and learning according to a <u>constructivist paradigm</u> leading to active and independent learning".

Means vs ends rationalisation

- ## Technology is treated as an 'end' rather than a 'means to an end'.

  All programmes are required to have a minimum web presence for all academic offerings consisting of, or showing evidence of active use of:

  i. The relevant subject guide posted online

  ii. Effective use of a populated calendar with all key dates for the duration of the offering

  iii. One of the communication tools activated to ensure effective asynchronous communication between the lecturer and student;

  iv. A grade book or other means of giving feedback to the student regarding moderated assessments. (TechUni:1).

Promoting teacher-centric pedagogies

- E-learning policy at TechUni had a narrow focus on feeding the LMS with content.

- Encouraged teacher-centric pedagogies and didactic teaching, marginalising other discourses of collaborative learning.

  =>places pedagogy and the engagement of learners in the background (Hannon & Bretag, 2010).

Globalisation

- Focus on acquiring skills for the knowledge society, education for national economic development and creating citizens who can participate in a global economy (Postman, 1995).

- The irresistible power of globalisation makes it inevitable to adopt e-learning technologies in teaching.

  "E-learning must first be seen as part of the transition process of students from secondary education where some or all have been exposed to the use of technology as part of the Department of Education e-learning policies, to the efficient use of technology in the workplace" (TechUni:3).

The mission statement has the following aim:

Further <u>global </u>perspectives among its staff and students, thereby strengthening intellectual life and contributing to South Africa' s reintegration in the world community;

<u>It is difficult to imagine</u> how <u>global </u>perspectives can be strengthened in the current world without a well-reasoned approach to the use of ICT in teaching and learning. <u>Nothing can</u> overcome national barriers like sound communication practices using the <u>global information highway</u> to supplement face to face encounters.

<u>…</u>

Responding to the challenges and opportunities of <u>globalization</u> will require a sound e-learning strategy at both national and institutional level, and one that recognizes the importance of responding to <u>globalization</u>…..

Access to technological infrastructure

- E-learning strategy at HDIUni =>providing access to technologies facilitate teaching and learning
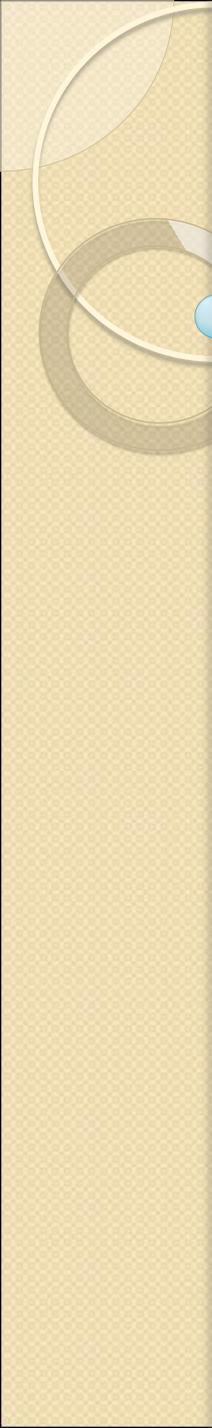
  "Assist educationally disadvantaged students gain <u>access</u> to higher education and succeed in their studies. <u>Access</u> to higher education involves more than merely opening the doors of learning; <u>access</u> requires building strong foundations that lead to digital academic literacies. <u>Access</u> in relation to e-learning has three important components that act as filters; institutional readiness, physical <u>access</u> and epistemological <u>access</u>" (HDIUni:24)

Dominant discourses - technology
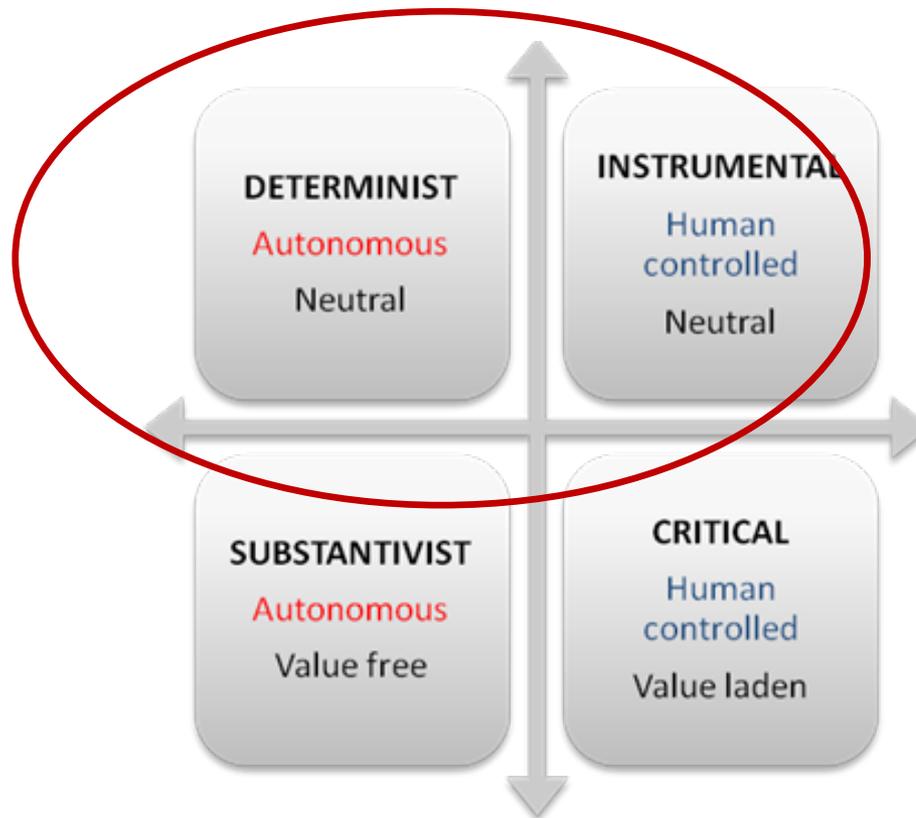
What then?

- Need to revisit the e-learning policies
- Need a more participatory approach to policy formulation
- Involve important stakeholder in policy formulation: learners, lecturers
- Need for more skills in e-learning (or ICT) policy formulation

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