

The Distance Education program at a relatively small, private non-profit university is faced with a large challenge. Their corporate partner, the entity responsible for their marketing and enrollment, much of the content preparation, and student support services for their successful Master's degree in Teaching and Continuing Education for teachers has decided to withdraw from the working relationship. Currently, the university offers undergraduate and graduate level liberal arts/sciences and professional studies programs to 4000 face-to-face students, 750 distance education students that are enrolled in Master's degree program, 500 teachers that take advantage of CE learning, and a small number (100 students) that are enrolled in a relatively unsuccessful and insignificant certificate in graduate studies program. These programs, with their focus on Teaching are the only DE programs that are offered at this time.

Corporate partner will continue to provide marketing and enrollment services for 6 months from now and will continue to support students in all aspects of study for 2 years more. This means the school has 6 months to replace marketing and enrollment services, and 2.5 years to replace all other educational aspects with alternative means. This is indeed a difficult challenge that will require an almost completely different mindset. Fortunately, the University of the 5th Age has several strengths that it could utilize under effective leadership: 1) president is very friendly toward DE; this will provide moral support to this program during its time of transition, 2) a relatively new IT director has been hired who may oversee development of internal IT structures and adequate restructuring of outsourced resources, 3) a new instructional designer has been hired and a new center for teaching and learning is under development, 4) a pool of experienced faculty have already been developing curricula for some time; this group may work with the instructional designer and others to prepare modern instructional content, and 5) the sense of urgency exists with a finite amount of time within which to accomplish

Peyvand Ghofrani
peyvand_ghofrani@yahoo.com
Assignment 2: Case Study

significant changes; a non-compete by the corporate partner does not allow instructional material to be used beyond the transition period.

In addition to Internet marketing and enrollment, content preparation, and student support, the corporate entity has also been responsible for warehousing and distribution of study materials. Since high-speed Internet is readily available to higher education learners, warehousing and distribution of materials is a service that may no longer be necessary. Efficiencies can be produced by making study materials available electronically, for remote printing by students as needed. Videos, and indeed every other type of learning material can also be made available on the electronic learning platform that is accessed via password-controlled student accounts. In addition, modern computer technology allows videos that were previously produced by the corporate partner to be produced in-house inexpensively, with maximum control over content, and with shorter development cycles that allow timeliness of information for student learning. As DE is brought to other departments that currently do not offer DE programs, F2F lectures could be part of videos that are produced for DE learners.

A replacement company may need to be found to handle Internet marketing and recruitment since this service has a shorter deadline until discontinuation, and since a good company that specializes in this area may be a better option than doing it in-house. U5 staff and leadership must work closely with their contractor so that the appropriate image and accurate and timely information is communicated to the public and potential students. Leadership, and representative faculty, staff, and students should take part in formulating the image the university wishes to project to its outside interests and to potential students. Ultimately, how the big change moves forward will have the biggest impact on marketing, but a clear message and specific

Peyvand Ghofrani
peyvand_ghofrani@yahoo.com
Assignment 2: Case Study

marketing tactics should not be underestimated for increasing visibility and for continued growth of U5.

The DE program has been successful so far but has been operating in relative isolation from the rest of the school and has in fact worked much more closely with outside entities instead. Only one full-time DE expert exists at U5. This is a considerable weakness because the DE program is almost separate from the rest of the university and although there is interest about and support for DE from the new university president, making connections within the rest of the university and obtaining their buy-in will take time. Most services including design of curricula, design of course material, maintenance of education platform, student support, etc. can be developed within the university should U5 be able to utilize its considerable internal talent and expertise, with hiring of staff with DE expertise as needed. Currently no other DE programs exist at the U5, although some faculty members utilize instructional technology to augment their classroom courses. This lack of systemic DE presence is another weakness but is also a very important area of growth within the university that deserves consideration for the later stages of change.

Although short-sighted, it is not surprising that DE has made limited inroads within the rest of U5 because DE continues to not be accepted as valuable with chief academic officers in institutions of higher education saying that less than a third of faculty accept and appreciate the value of DE; this percentage has not changed in 6 years and is even lower in private non-profit institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2010). The sense of urgency exists for revamping the specific Master's in Teaching, CE for teachers, and possibly an added undergraduate program for Teaching that may enhance enrollment. As those short-term, and very necessary changes are implemented, they may be leveraged to push for adding DE program at U5 for other academic

areas, thus changing this aspect of U5's culture. DE continues to grow with increases in utilization year after year, with particular increase in utilization during bad economic times (Allen & Seaman, 2010). DE versions of other popular academic programs can be developed with the help of existing F2F faculty working in conjunction with DE instructional designer, IT experts, and faculty that are experienced in teaching online. DE classes can then be taught by adjunct DE faculty in order to reduce cost and maintain flexibility (Tipple, 2010). Building a proper base for DE that allows other programs at U5 to consider DE-centric versions of their courses can give a competitive advantage to U5 and increase its enrollment significantly beyond its 4000 F2F students.

Another strength, and potential area for added value is the week-long face-to-face component of the DE Master's of Teaching program. Even though it is optional, it has had a 20% attendance rate, which would mean that 150 students attend it each year. This program should continue to be maintained/expanded and can act as a first practical link between F2F and DE entities at the university. Creative use of this F2F component may allow F2F faculty to directly interact with distance learners and understand their concerns, thus gaining a better appreciation of online teaching. The opportunity could also be used for instructional design or perhaps formative assessment of content. For example, select lectures and workshops could be video-taped for those unable to attend, or course design initiatives could be part of the F2F program with interactive sessions to gain better insights into the needs of DE learners and adjust content accordingly, in order to develop better courses.

For a restructuring such as this to be successful several strategies must coexist and proceed toward a common goal. 1250 students are in the Master's degree and CE portions of the DE program, compared to 4000 students in the F2F classes offered by the university; this is a

substantial DE proportion. The possibility exists to completely modernize the DE program and internally integrate it throughout U5. In order for that to happen, the commitment on the part of all that can play a role must be total; there can be no room for anything less because resources and time are scarce. Kotter's (1996) eight stages of effective leadership for creating major change can be implemented very effectively in this case. Indeed some of these changes have already been described. The sense of urgency clearly exists, with two options available: abandon the DE program and lose nearly 25% of the university's students, or restructure the program within a limited timeframe and then increase the visibility and value of DE in the institution overall. Allen & Seaman (2010) explain that nearly 80% of institutions of higher education agree that online education is critical to the long-term strategy of their institution. Structurally incorporating DE into as many aspects of U5 as possible is integral to its continued growth and survival.

Instead a guiding coalition begins with a core of 6 persons including myself specifically charged with coming up with a vision and strategic plan, but the coalition must include head of IT, instructional designer, university president, adjunct DE faculty representative(s), influential decision and opinion makers within other departments of the university, representatives of DE students, and input from the corporate partner that will be transitioning out. It is essential that the best ideas are encouraged from each group, and separation from the corporate partner should be as friendly as possible, and with maximum knowledge transfer from the corporate partner. The vision is to build a nearly self-sufficient DE program that can utilize internal resources to design its own learning content, support its students, continue the current DE programs while adding an undergraduate component, and implement future DE programs for other popular academic areas in order to continue growing DE at U5 by attracting additional DE learners.

Being able to implement the changes within the existing Teaching DE programs would be essential short-term wins (Kotter, 1996). Successful execution would demonstrate to the rest of the community that it is possible to have a fully working DE program that is designed internally and meets the needs of a substantial student base. The possibilities for designing DE programs outside of the existing DE population, within the more popular academic programs that may benefit from DE offerings may then become an appealing option for other departments at U5 for increasing their learner base. In time, the culture may change from one in which DE is seen as the far away entity in the guest house, to one that is an integral part of the strategic growth of the university and a sign of its forward-thinking attitude.

Tipple (2010) points out the importance of adjunct faculty to the success of any DE program. Online learning adjunct teachers are highly motivated, and teach because they love doing so and gain an intrinsic satisfaction from it. They teach with lesser payment and with increased isolation compared to their tenured counterparts and are unfortunately too often seen as hired hands and not integral members of a DE program. With more than half of DE faculty being adjunct in general, they are an important factor for successfully transitioning the DE program (2010). It is necessary to attract the best adjunct professors, support and train them, integrate them into the overall DE program and university, properly evaluate and develop them, encourage them to place themselves into faculty and peer networks that allow for informal learning, and allow representatives among them to contribute to institutional policy (2010). All of these tactics mean that adjunct faculty give their best and are utilized in an integrative manner; this is an essential component for creating the major changes at U5.

In summary, none of this change at U5 will be easy. Reactions may range from 'I don't care what happens to that program' to 'it's just too hard' to 'we should just find another

Peyvand Ghofrani
peyvand_ghofrani@yahoo.com
Assignment 2: Case Study

corporate partner to do everything for us' and so on. In order to properly lead this change effort, it is important to remember that humans always do for themselves first, and for everyone else second. It is a reality that unless everyone is able to understand how their work will pay off for them or for the portions of the institution that they feel are relevant for them, they will not help the effort. Larsson & Vinberg (2010) speak about the proper style of leadership that has worked particularly well in successful organizations. The style they describe places a strong emphasis on fundamental relational aspects of leadership that must exist as a base, combined with the more situational structure and change orientated aspects of leadership.

Larson & Vinberg (2010) describe important human and motivating aspects of leadership style that are essential to leading and managing change at U5. Strategic and visionary leader roles, communication and information, responsibility and integrity, a learning culture that gives feedback to all involved, cross-functional conversations so leaders can seriously listen and understand, plainness and simplicity to enhance honesty and make connections to enhance the flow of dialog, humanity and trust so that mental and social well-being may be optimized within the institution during these harder times, walking around to gauge how things are going and gaining feedback from the persons involved, and a reflective leadership style that encourages all leaders to assess themselves honestly and without shame or delusion are all practices that enhance leadership. All of these qualities paint the picture of an organization that is not hung up on image, hiding from realities or mistakes, and allowing dishonest and opportunistic ways of thinking. If everyone at U5 feels that they have more to gain by contributing their best without fear, then the reorganization program has a better chance for success.

Peyvand Ghofrani
peyvand_ghofrani@yahoo.com
Assignment 2: Case Study

References

Allen, I. E. & Seaman, J. (2010). Learning on demand: online education in the United States,

2009. *The Sloan Consortium*. Retrieved on June 25, 2010 from <http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/survey/pdf/learningondemand.pdf>

Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading Change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Larsson, J. & Vinberg, S. (2010). Leadership behavior in successful organizations: universal or situation-dependent? *Total Quality Management*, 21(3), 317-334. Retrieved on June 16, 2010, from Education Research Complete database.

Tipple, R. (2010). Effective leadership of online adjunct faculty. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 13(1), 1-14. Retrieved on June 16, 2010, from journal website.