[Peyvand Ghofrani]
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[Article Critique-Assignment 2]

Van Voorhis and Falkner (2004) have written a nearly perfect description, guide, and overview for realizing a vision and successfully implementing change. Specifically change and modernization of student support services. In 10 short pages, they have managed to describe this process, including various support activities that must be performed to allow such changes to stick. Their writing is remarkable in its openness and efficiency and that it can indeed be trusted by practitioners, administrators, managers, and leaders who may be contemplating going through with modernizing similar services. Their writing is supported, and to some extent enhanced by Kotter's book, *Leading Change* (1996), Larsson and Vinberg's "Leadership Behavior in Successful Organizations: Universal or Situation-Dependent?" (2010), Tipple's "Effective Leadership of Online Adjunct Faculty" (2010), and Burge's book, *Flexible Higher Education* (2007). This critique describes and evaluates each aspect of Van Voorhis and Falkner's work, furnish evidence from the other writings that support and validate the work, and include additional ideas that may enhance the work and allow it to be utilized even more effectively for Distance Education (DE) student support services. Providing better service is essential to organizational and learner success, therefore the ultimate goal here is to provide a multi-dimensional critique and analysis of this important topic.

Van Voorhis and Falkner (2004) begin by explaining that while learners adapt relatively quickly and tend to enjoy using new technology to make their lives easier and to save time, the American higher education system is often slow to change and too bureaucratic. Kotter (1996) describes the American corporate structure similarly. He explains that the majority of training in corporations has guided their brightest personnel to be managers and not leaders, who in turn have prepared to manage existing systems and bureaucracies rather than to lead change and bring forth new, more modern and competitive ways of working. The need for efficiency and better

service does not go away. Kotter (1996) speaks of leading change through the mindset of competing and prospering in a rapidly changing business environment. Voorhis and Falkner (2004) describe rapid change in DE to a specific extent, and explain that with newer technologies and capabilities the well-informed education consumer demands better and easier support service. This is an important point at a time when the private sector has begun and will continue to introduce rapid change in DE through Reusable Learning Objects (Burge, 2007) on a micro level and large DE-only institutions with economies of scale on the macro level.

Van Voorhis and Falkner (2004) continue the theme of change by explaining that student demands for better service has brought forth the need for visionaries and change agents who are responsible for providing the accurate vision for improvement and guiding the educational institution community through that change. Kotter (1996) describes first four stages of creating major change as creating a sense of urgency, putting together a group with enough power to lead the change, developing a vision and strategy with planning, and communicating the vision for change. All of these stages map nearly perfectly to the process that Van Voorhis and Falkner (2004) describe. Students create the sense of urgency by insisting on better ways forward. There are individuals that have influence on the school administration and are also in close contact with students; they have enough power to make change with "communication and engagement" (2004, p. 234). Buy-in from decision-makers is essential in creating the guiding coalition, communicating the vision, implementing strategies and plans, and anchoring completed changes within the day-to-day culture of the institution (Kotter, 1996). This anchoring and continuous update process is described as an essential but sometimes neglected aspect of change (Van Voorhis & Falkner, 2004; Kotter, 1996).

Van Voorhis and Falkner (2004) underscore knowing when there is need for change, and being able to measure that change. They explain that various entities in an educational institution including students, teachers, office staff, and others in the community can help. Asking questions and taking into account different stakeholders' needs can allow the change program to be adequately realized and to measure its success both during and after implementation. Tipple (2010), in his writing on the significant roles of adjunct faculty, explains that as more than half of teachers are adjunct, their opinions in policy making should be considered just as those of the students should be considered. Adjunct faculty can also, with proper support and training, be utilized to communicate changes in learner services or other areas and gain support for those changes. For many students, teachers are the nearest entity with whom they interact during their education, and adjunct faculty outnumber and will continue to increasingly outnumber tenured faculty. Kotter (1996) states that repeatedly, and widely communicating ongoing changes can contribute significantly to the success of changes that are implemented. It would be easy for those who wish to sabotage change efforts, to exaggerate problems in the change process and contribute negatively to it (Van Voorhis & Falkner, 2004; Kotter, 1996).

Van Voorhis and Falkner (2004) describe the successful process of switching from a manual to IT-based student support system, to be collaborative between business analysts, administrative leadership, IT which may be most in tune with newly available tools, auditors, and the persons that will ultimately manage, support, and use the system. Supervisors need to be open to feedback from workers, again because those that use the system most often have the best ideas for improving the system to its maximum potential (2004). Team building, increasing morale, and providing rewards to increase motivation are all practices that are encouraged (2004). Larsson and Vinberg (2010) provide additional best practices in this area. They studied

four companies in Sweden known for their winning strategies, to understand qualities that help

build an optimal working environment that is conducive to effective leadership, and healthy

competition and success. As with the Van Voorhis and Falkner (2010) scenario, the

commonalities are open and collaborative communication structures between supervisors and

employees.   Larsson and Vinberg (2010) stress the following:

- Strategic and visionary leader role

- Proper process for communication and information sharing

- Giving authority and responsibility to workers that is based on trust and moves away from
  micro-management

- A learning culture where feedback both positive and negative are provided constructively

- Cross-functional discussions where leaders seriously listen to and consider workers' ideas

- Simplicity in structure that allows workers to make decisions without elaborate and time-
  consuming meetings

- Supervisors and workers relying on each other and exhibiting their common humanity during
  their work time

- Leaders frequently walking around and dropping by to see how workers are doing both
  professionally and personally

- Leaders that reflect on their own practices and make necessary adjustments and
  improvements

The above are qualities that not only seemingly make sense, but are proven based on research to

give better results in the workplace. These humanistic practices can make any change process,

that are likely to be stressful and challenging for those involved, more enjoyable with better

chances for successful outcomes.

Van Voorhis and Falkner (2004) explain that a campus-wide steering committee that is composed of a variety of stakeholders can also be useful when deciding which projects to do first. Kotter (1996) provides similar prioritization guidance and stresses that generating short-term wins that are visible and centered around projects that are easier to complete or make more sense to implement is good practice. Recognizing those who contribute to the success of the short-term gains may also have a snow-balling, motivating and encouraging effect that gives subsequent, more challenging projects better chances for success (1996). Kotter then asserts that going on to consolidate gains and institutionalizing the path forward via core changes in human resources practices like updated job descriptions and appraisal systems, leads to implementing more substantial changes with fewer internal obstacles to fully realize the change vision (1996). He specifically mentions hiring, promoting, and developing people who can make these implementations (1996). Van Voorhis and Falkner (2004) similarly recommend ongoing training in new and more advanced areas, and empowering employees to utilize their new higher-order skills after computer systems have replaced the more routine tasks they once performed.

Kotter's (1996) final step is anchoring the new practices in the organization's culture and actively promoting and expecting creative practices that are now centered around correspondingly changed thinking and new vision. Van Voorhis and Falkner (2004) describe a very similar process when they insist on ongoing management of content, outreach to potential new students about the new and improved systems, and researching on an ongoing basis what is working well and what needs adjustment. Tipple (2010), Larsson and Vinberg (2010), and Burge (2007) all describe similar practices with focus on continuous improvement and moving forward by way of intellectual curiosity, presentations at conferences and other outreach that promote these changes and gain insights from others, and communication and training that is designed to

encourage creativity among workers and leadership. These practices are the opposite of clinging

to outdated concepts that are no longer useful, because a worker may feel their specific position

and duties may no longer be needed. Burge (2007) confirms that each individual must thrive in

their job and grow, which in turn is good for both the individual and the growth and competitive

stance of the educational institution and its learners. Stagnation leads nowhere.

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