Chapter VII

Examples of Distance Learning Evaluation and Implementation

OVERVIEW

This chapter presents three fictitious case studies of organizations facing decisions to convert one or several courses to distance learning. As you read through the cases, you will be presented with the issues that many real organizations face when trying to decide whether, and to what extent distance learning should be implemented in their organization. Two of the cases presented depict commercial organizations, and the third represents an higher education institution.

Each case presents background information on the organization, major stakeholders, and the current state of distance learning initiatives within the organization. Each case focuses on a different aspect of the analysis for distance learning. The first case covers the strategic analysis, the second presents a course conversion analysis, and the third presents an infrastructure analysis. Together, these should walk the reader through several analysis issues faced in real world situations.

CASE STUDY I: STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

Optima University

Background

Optima is a large urban private university with graduate and undergraduate colleges in arts & sciences, business, law, medicine,
nursing, engineering, and communications. It is well-funded and well-positioned as one of the top institutions in the country. Its history of growth is similar to that of other public and private universities in the U.S. after World War II. The history of growth in U.S. institutions of higher learning is in part responsible for their current challenges to find new ways to serve their stakeholders while increasing their non-government funded revenues. Distance learning technologies represent one of the solutions to this challenge of broadening the base of learners.

The GI bill enabled millions of Americans who could not otherwise have afforded a college education to obtain one. Universities were then able to use the revenues from increased enrollments to fund capital investments in buildings, and to increase their faculty and staff. That, in turn, fueled the graduate and professional school enrollments. Returning servicemen and women from WWII also accomplished something else— they returned to normalcy after more than a decade that had seen the last few years of the Great Depression followed by the hardships of a world war. They began families in unprecedented numbers, causing the “Baby Boom” generation of individuals born between 1946 and the middle of the next decade.

The Baby Boomers entered college in the mid-60’s, at a time when institutions of higher education were flush with revenue from the post-war growth and expansion. By the mid-70’s this growth began to slow down. First, the population bulge of Baby Boomers were beyond the traditional “college age” of 18 to 22 years old. Second, American families had grown steadily smaller, leaving a smaller pool from which to draw the traditional student. By the late 90’s applications and enrollments to the nation’s top universities started rising again. This time, it is attributed to the sustained economic “boom” of the 90’s, and the desire of Americans to get the best education possible for their children. However, despite this mini-boom, the reality is that the rising costs of higher education (over $30,000 per year for top schools) have far outpaced the increasing interest in these top schools.

**Current Programs at Optima University**

In response to the changing demographics in this country, institutions of higher learning like Optima University had to be entrepreneurial and highly responsive to the needs of their stakeholder community—students, faculty, staff, and alumni—in order to
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