Chapter 16
Leadership for Learning: Innovating with Technology

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ABSTRACT

To address current pressures in higher education of viability and sustainability, while also being ambitious and relevant require well placed leadership, technology, and information. The prudent use of technology by competitors can threaten the uptake of high quality education at a non-innovative institute. This is the era of the transforming university through the innovative application of leadership and technology. Expanding avenues for distance education and online learning may help to activate knowledge and skills needed in an epoch of globalization. Impediments facing administrators, educators, and peer-to-peer relations along with opportunities and strategies for employing leadership and ICTs are examined for their impact on learning and culture. Recommendations to enhance accessibility, connectivity, and ingenuity are included.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a central factor required for enhancing learning environments with innovative use of technology, through visionary and ethical policies, clairvoyant decisions, and timely action. Leadership effects culture and culture effects teaching and learning (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2010; Baylor and Ritchie, 2002). “Technology and globalization are forcing higher education institutions to transform themselves” (Ulukan, 2005, p.75). Information and communications technologies (ICT) is a significant global force that has and will continue to impact teaching and learning, science and scholarship (Altbach et al.). In a paper investigating technological factors, teacher skill and morale along with student learning, the authors state that “technology’s effect on content
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acquisition was also predicted by the strength of leadership” (Anderson & Dexter, 2005, p. 54).

In higher education, leadership, technology, and information assume functions of even greater import when facing questions of viability and sustainability. Ulukan (2005) found that private and public organizations face extensive transformations often labeled as “volatile, uncertain, dynamic, or complex” (p.77, emphasis in original). With titles like, “Differentiate…or perish”, “Hard-up uni forced to ask for a $3.5 million cash life line”, and “Universities in crisis”, leaders and administrators as well as forward thinking faculty, staff and students might be thinking about alternatives to the status quo in higher education. “Disruptive technologies” are at work in introducing significant on-campus transformations and threatening online competition in delivering high quality and accessible higher education (Eyring & Christensen, 2001).

Thus learning and leading in 2011 and beyond necessitate the marked expansion of a repertoire of knowledge and skills. Higher education faces many challenges: diversifying student populations, growing competition, and rapidly expanding technology. Accessibility and understandability of information too are issues of growing concern. Poole (2005) concurs with Ulukan (2005) that this is the era of the transforming university. These times demand complex, chaotic transformative processes and diverse sources of innovation. Through this inquiry I review the literature for insights on the potential for transformative leadership through innovative use of technology. Leadership is considered here in three areas: administrative leadership, teaching and training, as well as student and peer-to-peer teaching and learning.

BACKGROUND

Over more than two decades, advances in and utilization of technology, have required the recalibration of organizational assets, beliefs and behaviors, as well as ways of connecting and communicating (Anderson and Dexter, 2005). A 1995 paper on models of learning argued for research examining the educational uses of the Internet and the World Wide Web (Leidner & Jarvenpaa, 1995). By 2011 the use of the World Wide Web has become so pervasive, business, education, and government have come to infuse global links into everyday parlance. Early renditions of computer mediated learning meant that students were required to read extensively online yet they were insufficiently engaged with dynamic and satisfying approaches to learning (Hanna, 2003). While technology has become infused throughout higher education, for learners and leaders to maximize opportunities from technology further adaptations and innovations become essential.

Technological Advances

Technology offers many opportunities for higher education to pursue some of its grandest visions. In a collection of essays in Issues in Higher Education, Beaudoin (2005) argues that “…there can be few areas of engagement where leaders can make a more significant contribution to the future well-being of the world community than in the expanding distance education arena” (p.165). Increasing access to education through distance education and online and technology mediated learning holds the potential of activating beliefs and attitudes along with knowledge and skills needed for this epoch of globalization and interconnectedness. Senge and colleagues (1999) guide leaders to proactively articulate a philosophy and practice within a culture that builds upon Drucker’s “discipline of innovation”. Opportunities for opening up the learning pace, space, and place increase with innovative use of multiple forms of technology (Altbach et al., 2010; Race, 1999). Investments in technology, tools, and training are essential for the successful integration of the breadth and depth of possibility resting in