Chapter 15
Leadership Issues Concerning Instructional Technology

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ABSTRACT

The exponential development of technology has brought people boundless possibilities. But, at the same time, technology also imposes great pressure on people because they need to learn and remain updated about the various technologies in their lives. The field of instructional technology has always been exceptionally thrilled about novel technologies or the innovative use of traditional technologies. This enthusiasm places leaders of instructional technology in a very challenging position. Besides dealing with regular leadership issues, technology leaders also need to face technology-related roadblocks and issues. In this chapter, both general and technological issues of instructional technology leadership are introduced. Following these issues, the authors of this chapter also discuss strategies for dealing with these issues and offer suggestions for effective instructional technology leadership.

INTRODUCTION

With great development and use of technology in education, instructional technology (IT) has played an ever increasingly important role in the educational system. Considering the impressive features of technology and great potential effectiveness of technology usage, industry and educational institutes have placed great emphasis on the technology per se by purchasing expensive and high-scale technologies. However, research suggests that the manner in which technology is implemented is more important than its intrinsic characteristics (Cuban, 1986; Nachmias, Mioduser, & Forkosh-Baruch, 2008; Saettler, 1990). Therefore, leadership in IT, which guides and determines the manner of technology integration, is of significant importance for the success of a systematic instructional process.

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According to Athos and Coffey (1968), a great leader will be able to influence his/her followers to achieve certain objectives in a given situation. Being in a leadership position and being a leader are two different things. Having the leadership position does not always make a good leader. A good leader must be honest, decent, envisioning, and do what is right for the good of the whole. Steiner (1972) stated that leaders’ presence or behaviors could strongly influence groups’ activities or products and their suggestions, commands, or examples are regularly accepted and followed by other group members. The best leaders dig deep and touch their followers emotionally. One of the most asked questions seems to be why. Children and adults alike ask this question many times over their lifetimes. The great leaders can answer that question for those that follow through communication, teamwork, collaboration, deed, and decision.

Leadership in the context of IT has placed educational leaders in a different position considering the general procedure to adopt technology, prepare the implementation of the technology plan, and evaluate the whole technology integration results. As Kearsley and Lynch (1994) argue, leadership in the domain of educational technology is different in various ways from leadership in general and the skills underlying technology leadership need to be identified. So, what makes a good IT leader and what issues exist that the leader may face? This chapter offers a good basis for what to expect of the technology leader.

There are many issues such as budgets, assessing the needs, distribution of resources, overall healthiness of the department such as smooth communication among members, employee attitudes and morale, production levels, efficiency, overall organization of the department, placing employees in the right positions to best match their skill sets, professional development of self and staff, communication, and other issues that a leader must deal with on a daily basis. Issues or problems faced by IT leaders are similar to those encountered by other business leaders. But, those issues and roadblocks for IT leaders are invariably more pronounced considering the complexities related to technology such as technology trade-off consideration (Ethier & Markusen, 1996), faculty’s technology skills (Tabata & Johnsrud, 2008), and other related issues.

Concepts of leadership and its related pedagogical theories have always caused confusion to IT leaders. Multigenerational workers may pose potential problems such as technology experience and willingness to try new strategies and technologies. Other roadblocks for leaders may also stem from resources and funding. Creating relationships with the community is also of vital importance for effective leaders. Another great issue becoming more important every day is the professional development of both IT leaders and faculty members. Facing with a wide range of issues in their IT planning and implementation, IT leaders should also consider adopting and following strategies in their careers.

This chapter will first discuss possible roadblocks and issues in IT leadership, and then the authors will introduce potential strategies for effective leadership that help leaders develop a harmonious, effective, and productive environment for both students and faculty members.

**IT LEADERSHIP ROADBLOCKS AND ISSUES**

Roadblocks are types of obstructions that prevent passage to where one wants to go. Possible roadblocks and issues in the instructional technology leadership may also hinder the successful implementation of a well-conceived technology plan, lead to a waste of resources and technology, or even result in a tragic failure. Instructional technology leaders should be aware of the possible roadblocks and issues in their careers and equip themselves with knowledge and skills in avoiding those issues. The types of roadblocks and issues an IT