

Change Creation for Online Learning and Technology

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BACKGROUND FOR ONLINE LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY

Status in Education

Online learning and technology offer tremendous opportunities for increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of education. They have been integrated into most areas of education. However, such technology introductions, as Zemsky & Massy (2004) and Young (2004) relate, have done surprisingly little toward significantly enhancing the quality and productivity of our learning programs. Why? Among the several reasons, three stand out.

- **Preoccupation with the technology itself:** the propensity for people to become overly enamored with the technology for its own sake as opposed to learning how to use it as powerful tool to improve the quality and productivity of the learning programs, especially online learning.
- **Cultural paralysis:** a lack of adequate cultural change: the strong, traditional academic culture is one of the most rigid and powerful cultures in society, often preventing leadership from nurturing an environment that encourages and rewards creative change, taking sensible risks, new learning system creativity, and change-adaptability.
- **Technology mostly applied to the old learning systems:** old learning systems are ingrained in the educational culture, successful relative to existing standards and optimized in effectiveness (i.e., reached their upper limit of productivity) (Branson, 1998). Consequently,

applying new online learning and technology to old learning systems provides little increase in learning quality and productivity. For substantial gains, new, more effective learning systems using online learning and technology must be created.

Failure of Learning Change Efforts

Efforts to develop more effective learning systems in education, in reality, are major change efforts and must be effectively treated as such to be successful. A critical question is: Why do most of our significant learning and organizational change efforts involving online learning and technology seem to fail or be only partially successful? Educational leaders and faculty often avoid this question because it is natural to fear the answer. Bolman and Deal (1999) found that two-thirds of all organizational change efforts fail to meet their goals. But what is the answer? Typically, leaders and faculty would find the following.

- They had not fundamentally reframed their own thinking relative to major change involving online learning and technology. For example, effective leaders must be capable of reframing their own thinking and the thinking of those they guide, enabling them to see that significant change is not only imperative but also achievable. Reframing often requires that old goals and cherished means must be changed and must be created based on data, not just fantasies. A new framing is demanded, a different teleology (i.e., dealing with different purpose or meaning that directs what we do toward a definite end for individuals, the organization,

and our shared society) that redirects the focus from the technology per se to the major creative change purposes and processes and to the desired learning system, with the end being to improve learning quality and productivity.

- They had implemented a strategic planning approach that is incomplete and inadequate for the massive, holistic, systemic change that is required. What is required is a Mega-level planning process (Kaufman, 2000; Kaufman & Lick, 2000) with the principal beneficiary being society.
- They had failed to prepare their organization for the important transformations that major change and the significant introduction of on-line learning and technology require. For instance, before people will seriously commit to being an important part of a major change, especially one involving technology, they must understand the essence of the change and technology, appreciate why these are so important to the organization and internal and external stakeholders, and accept, both intellectually and emotionally, the implications of the change and technology for themselves personally and for their operation.
- They had not provided and implemented a detailed, structured, disciplined transition plan, including modified incentives, for identifying and then completing the major change—a plan that would transition people, processes, and technology, and most importantly, the culture from the old paradigm to the new one.

An excerpt from a statement of the American Association of University Professors (1999) provides an overview:

The world of higher learning is in the midst of accelerating and sometimes turbulent change. . . [M]odes of communication are profoundly affecting the work of faculty members: they are reshaping the processes of teaching and learning, redefining the roles and authority of faculty members in organizing and overseeing the curriculum, and altering the bases for evaluating student—and faculty—performance. The implications . . . extend [to] major facets of higher education, deeply influencing its organization, governance and finances.

However, how do those in education usually respond to this dynamic, ubiquitous change? They, consciously or by default, resist, ignore, or sidestep the realities and impact of change, all losing and self-defeating responses. They often turn to change management, especially when technology is involved, in the hope that once a change is upon them, they can manage or control the change and its effects—a reactive approach to change.

To increase the potential for success, instead of an organization being just reactive, such as to the introduction of online learning and technology, the leadership must become *proactive* and define and then “join” the desired change, embrace it as a partner, and use it creatively to advance the organization’s and society’s goals. This is where change creation comes in.

OVERVIEW OF CHANGE CREATION

Change

Change has always existed. The difference is that for today and tomorrow, the intensity (i.e., speed, magnitude, and momentum) of change, in almost everything, is so much greater. The introduction of online learning and technology only complicates this picture further. Perhaps Conner (1993) explains best: “Never before has so much changed so fast and with such dramatic implications for the world” (p. 3).

Definition of Change Creation

With dramatic and omnipresent change being the order of the day, particularly with online learning and technology, it becomes harder than ever to predict the future. To deal with tomorrow, management guru Peter Drucker (1985) provides a simple yet powerful answer: since you can’t predict the future, you must *create* it; that is, organizations must exploit change, along with online learning and technology, and *create* the future that serves organizations and society best. To do this, an institution and its people must become effective leaders and practitioners of

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