Learning Technology Management While Teaching Technology Management: A Trial of Distance Learning in Higher Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study presents an evaluation pilot of a technology-enabled service, specifically a distance learning program at a university. The primary intent of the case is to illustrate the management of a trial evaluation of an information technology and the need for explicit criteria considering multiple technical and organizational factors. The secondary purpose of the case is to share the learning specific to the administration and delivery of a distance learning program using various media. The distance learning program was conducted on a trial basis with 16 students in a 13-course, 18-month Master of Science in Technology Management (MSTM) program. Compressed video and Internet-based technologies were used for course delivery, in addition to limited on-site instruction. The case study describes the motivation and progression of the trial, up to the point when a decision had to be made about continuing the program beyond the trial. The experience is considered from multiple perspectives, specifically those of the school administration, faculty, and students. Positive and negative aspects are highlighted to lay the groundwork for analysis at the decision point.

BACKGROUND

Southeast University is a private institution with two main campuses. One is in a major metropolitan area in the southeast, Urbanville. The other is in Regionville, a smaller city approximately 100 miles to the southeast in the state. The Regionville campus serves as the headquarters for the University, housing the Office of the President. In addition to the President's assistants, his staff is comprised of Administrative Officers and Academic Officers (i.e., Deans), most of whom are based on the Regionville campus. The Deans report to the Provost, an Administrative Officer. An organization chart is depicted in Appendix A. Note that the Provost recently retired from the University. In his stead, a Senior Associate Provost from his staff was serving as the Acting Provost, while an executive search was being conducted.

The University is comprised of six schools and a college of Liberal Arts. Not all programs are offered on both campuses, which have very different student bodies. Regionville's student body is more traditional (i.e., full-time students coming from secondary education programs), while Urbanville's students are more nontraditional, "adult" learners, many of whom work full time and attend school part time.

Southeast's School of Business (SSB) operates on both campuses. The Dean of the SSB operates mainly from the Regionville campus, coming to Urbanville for meetings every few weeks. There are two Associate Deans in the SSB, one on each campus, reporting to the Dean. The Associate Dean in Regionville manages the School's budget and the Regionville class schedule. The 14 faculty members in Regionville report directly to the Dean. In Urbanville, the 28 faculty members report to the Associate Dean. In addition to her personnel management responsibilities she also has the oversight duties for all of the academic programs. One of the faculty members serves as an Assistant Dean, primarily to manage the Urbanville class schedules. An organization chart of the SSB is presented in Appendix B.

Besides having distinct organization structures, the SSB culture is very different on the two campuses. The focus in Regionville is on the traditional full-time undergraduate business students, although there is a small Master of Business Administration (MBA) evening program there. In Urbanville, the focus is more on graduate programs with a nontraditional student body. There is no day program for the business students in Urbanville; all of their classes are offered either at night or on the weekends. In addition to the programs offered in Regionville, the SSB-Urbanville also offers an Executive MBA (EMBA) program, a master's degree program in Health Care Management

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