Chapter 6
Reflections on Management and Connection at a Distance:
An Administrator's View

Hilda R. Glazer
Capella University, USA

ABSTRACT

The experience of one individual as an administrator in virtual for-profits universities is presented. The chapter shares experiences over 25 years, which parallels the changes in technology and the growth of the virtual for-profit universities. Particular emphasis is placed on the administrative positions. The impact of being and managing faculty at a distance is discussed. Particular attention is paid to faculty development, course and faulty evaluation, and connecting with faculty at a distance, as well as how being at a distance impacts connection to the university and engagement with other faculty and learners.

INTRODUCTION

The development of technology since the 1990's has changed the way that we work in the academic environments. My career and career opportunities were impacted by technology directly. My work and the way that I conducted it changed as technology changed. The innovations in the virtual for-profit universities in response to available technology and the growth of the universities impacted me directly. In 1993, the year before I stated at a virtual for-profit university, there were a number of significant changes in technology (Ball, 2007):

- 1993 was a pivotal year in technology development. America Online and CompuServe connected their proprietary e-mail systems to the Internet, beginning the large-scale adoption of Internet e-mail as a global standard.
- As an example, MPINet, the first online discussion group for meeting professionals, was created as a forum on CompuServe. The formation committee met in December 1993 and the service came online the following month. It grew to more than 2,500 members before closing in 1997—for most of the members this was their first experience with e-mail.
- At the beginning of 1993, the World Wide Web had a total of 130 sites— growing to billions of uniquely addressable pages today.

These changes made possible email and listservs, which were critical to moving distance learning from correspondence to computer-based virtual learning. The early innovations at the virtual for-profit universities maximized these developments. This resulted in other changes for learners and faculty. Adult learners were introduced to the idea of any time, any place learning. The ideal of a dispersed learning model, the self-designed timetable (within limits) for completing masters' and doctoral degrees, and basically an open admissions policy provided an opportunity for working adults to work toward obtaining a graduate degree; learning came to the student rather than the student coming to campus (Stein et al., 2010). Another change was the use of primarily part-time faculty.

The experiences in this chapter can be viewed through the lens of Uncertainty Management Theory, which is a communications theory. Much of the communication with faculty and learners focused on anxiety and uncertainty. I tried to understand the intent and to use mindfulness to manage and reduce anxiety and uncertainty, which fits the theory. (Uncertainty Management Theory, 2018).

BACKGROUND

Throughout my early academic career, one of the things that was important was the connections that I made on campus and the interactions that I had with both faculty and students. I remember in my first adjunct positions right after completing my degree, I came and went and was not considered a part of the department in any significant way. The only feedback was the end of course evaluations. Later, as a fulltime tenure track faculty member at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas in the late 1980's and 90's, faculty meetings both at the department and the school level were a significant part of faculty activities. Engaging with students and other faculty was almost effortless. There were the informal conversations in the hall. Students just showed up at my office or made appointments. I had a dean who

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