Challenges of Change Management in E-Learning

Parviz Partow-Navid
California State University, Los Angeles, USA

Ludwig Slusky
California State University, Los Angeles, USA

INTRODUCTION

Higher Education, usually very slow in adopting changes, has become, in recent years, more receptive to them due to such external factors as expansion of the Internet, emergence of a new student body, and continued decline in government subsidies (Forlkers, 2005). E-learning is defined as the transmission of knowledge whereby the instructor and/or the student participate in the learning process from different places and/or different times (Henry, 2001). Many organizations have adopted e-learning with a hope to make learning process faster and better (Roshan, 2002, Needham & Thomas, 2005). However, recent studies have revealed that about 85% of students participating in e-learning and distance education fall short of completing their program. Low completion leads to low retention, which leads to low performance (Land, 2002). The problem, exacerbated by rapid changes in Information Technology, affects both the universities and the students. The university faculty attempts to deal with these radical technological and managerial changes by scaling instructions down to merely an automated text lectures with primary focus on the delivery of instructional materials ignoring other students' needs. For students, e-learning may result in a limited experience coupled with little-known technologies for which they need extra guidance and ongoing support. The fundamental challenge is how to employ this new technology to provide students with the help they need when they need it (Gordon, 2003; Roberts, April, 2001; Sherbon, November, 2005).

In reality, however, higher education institutions are often ill prepared for pro-active management of changes and are resorting to re-active, defensive responses to the IT changes focusing on the situational, procedural objectives rather than on the strategic educational goals (Austin, December, 2003). Introducing e-learn-ing involves a shift in culture and requires a change in management (Faden, November 13, 2000). Resistance to e-learning technology and methods originates mainly from a fear of risk. This chapter discusses how to overcome this resistance.

BACKGROUND: CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Change is the driving force of progress, but peoples' reactions to change are often irrational and defensive. Thus, change management is an essential part of business evolution and advancement. According to Fred Nickols (2004), change management should focus on the following three issues:

1. The task of managing change is internal but usually triggered by external factors. Changes prompted by implementation of e-learning practices must be anticipated in advance. However, universities often do not have any *planned responses*.

2. E-learning is a highly specialized customer-oriented business, which requires methodological support; one important aspect of such support is to have a *planned change management*.

3. A body of knowledge needs to have content and process. It is one thing, for instance, to introduce e-learning courses for professional advancement or continuing education in a corporate center or at a Continuing Education division. It is quite another thing to introduce a linked set of e-learning courses with pre-requisites in an online university. It is, yet again, a different one to introduce a blended e-learning and traditional curriculum with pre-requisite courses being either online or traditional type.

Generally, the scope of organizational change may vary from organization-wide to a narrow departmental or group level. Examples of organization-wide changes include modification of the organization's mission, restructuring of the operations, and introduction of new technologies and programs. E-learning should be viewed as an *organization-wide transformation*.

Usually the most significant changes in the way a higher education institution operates are motivated by factors such as substantial cuts or infusion of funding, technological innovations, actions by competitors, and need for dramatic increases in services.

Change in curriculum will inevitably demand from the faculty a different style of instruction. Faculty training will be needed to overcome a lack of technical skills. Student services must be expanded to support e-learning as an experience equivalent to the on-campus courses. Due to e-learning's heavy dependency on technology, organized IT training and support for students are extremely important. Off-loading such support from the university IT help-desk to instructors is a major deterrent for those instructors who consider teaching online classes. The issues of copyright of one's work and fair use of published materials that belong to others are challenging to online instructors, and may require updating of university policies and procedures. Above all, a change in the organizational culture is required for the implementation of e-learning. The all-too-familiar attributes of this process include a systematic approach to planning of organizational changes, faculty involvement, learning and adaptation to the new technologies, and shift of resources.

Organization-wide changes frequently are in opposition to the values and practices that the faculty members are accustomed to. That is why much of organizational change literature discusses the changes needed in the culture of the organization, including changes in the members' values and beliefs, and in the way, they enact these values and beliefs (McNamara, 2004).

Strategic Overview

Strategic overview starts from the e-learning vision and mission statements and is further shaped by up-and-coming technologies.

Many of IT-driven changes have been already affecting day-to-day operations of educational institutions, but there is still a widespread lack of realization among administrative ranks of how comprehensive the imminent technological shifts and strategic challenges are. Strategic planning, which shows mapping technology trends into various online educational processes will help better understanding of this technological transformation in e-learning (Canton, 2003).

The higher education mega trends affecting e-learning are as follows (Butler, 2003; Forlkers, 2005):

1. Fundamental switch towards anywhere, any time, transparent computing based on global networks will make highly interactive courses of the future more convenient and entertaining than in-class courses. Online universities with their flexible online degrees have already created global competition for students.
2. Rising tuition coupled with declining federal aid make the e-learning option more viable and appealing for brick-and-mortar universities.
3. The need for lifelong learning and re-education will add a new older student population at a majority of universities. These adult students, the fastest growing educational demographic group, live off campus, have full-time jobs, prefer part-time studies, and demand more time and location flexibility. They regard online course as an open market commodity.
4. Corporations and entrepreneurs compete with universities in reaping profit from professional education by offering speed to graduation with fewer on-the-job lost hours.
5. Rising need for new knowledge and skills of 21st century (powerful computers, networks, biotech, nanotechnology, etc.) will create the highest yield opportunities for universities in educational market. The impact of e-learning in this area has not been fully addressed yet.
6. E-learning tools and methods are indispensable even if used only in support infrastructure. Every higher education institution has already evolved into an e-business: communicating, servicing, and supporting courses on the Web.
7. Real time agility, how fast a university can embrace leading-edge technology, will determine the efficiency, speed, and cost-effectiveness of its operations. Management of these changes will be critical for the 21st century universities.

The evolution in the perception of university administration about how to optimally apply technology to

Related Content

Assessing Impact of ICT Intercultural Work

Angela Rickard, Alma R.C. Grace, Roger S.P. Austinand Jane M. Smyth (2014). *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education (pp. 1-18).*

www.irma-international.org/article/assessing-impact-of-ict-intercultural-work/117273

A Literature Review of Indexing and Searching Techniques Implementation in Educational Search Engines

Kamal El Guemmatand Sara Ouahabi (2018). *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education (pp. 72-83).*

www.irma-international.org/article/a-literature-review-of-indexing-and-searching-techniques-implementation-in-educational-search-engines/200989

Availability and Utilization of Classroom Computers Across Urban and Rural Schools in Southwestern Nigeria

Sam. E. O. Aduwa-Ogiegbaenand Ede O.S. Iyamu (2011). *Online Courses and ICT in Education: Emerging Practices and Applications (pp. 189-202).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/availability-utilization-classroom-computers-across/50184

The ART (Activities, Resources, Technological Supports) in On-Site and Online Learning, and Students' Perceptions of Acquisition of Thinking and Team-Building Skills

Jennifer D.E. Thomasand Danielle Morin (2012). *Intelligent Learning Systems and Advancements in Computer-Aided Instruction: Emerging Studies (pp. 287-304).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/art-activities-resources-technological-supports/61975

The Application of Web and Educational Technologies in Supporting Web-Enabled Self-Regulated Learning in Different Computing Course Orientations

Chia-Wen Tsaiand Pei-Di Shen (2011). *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education (pp. 70-79).*

www.irma-international.org/article/application-web-educational-technologies-supporting/49711