

# Strategic Leadership in Instructional Design:

## Applying the Principles of Instructional Design through the Lens of Strategic Leadership to Distance Education

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**DE:** Distance education

**SL:** Strategic learning

**ID:** Instructional design

**ISD:** Instructional design systems

### INTRODUCTION

*Technological innovation, long a hallmark of academic research, may now be changing the very way that universities teach and students learn. For academic institutions, charged with equipping graduates to compete in today's knowledge economy, the possibilities are great. (The Economist, 2008, p. 4)*

The technology revolution has had a significant impact on education, and will continue to be a major influence in both the public and private sector (The Economist, 2008). The future of higher education lies in delivering robust and interactive online instruction. The realization of a successful online program will depend heavily on the vision of leadership within the institution (Wang & Berger, 2010). In addition, the rapid advancement of telecommunication technologies, along with an increased demand for distance education, has increased the need for design methods that can deliver content on a global scale (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Sadykova & Dautermann, 2009).

Although distance education can be traced back to at least as early as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when Isaac Pitman introduced the first correspondence course (Hall, 2013); the real DE revolution may have started with the advent of the information age. Sometimes called the digital age, this rapid period of technology growth may have sprung from several sources including the birth of the internet in 1969, the 1973 introduction of the Motorola mobile phone, or the launch of IBM's first PC in 1981 (Hudson, 2016). All of these technologies helped bring about a shift from industrialization to digitalization (Hudson, 2016). The proliferation of computer technology, digital record-keeping and digital communication revolutionized industry and marked the early stages of the digital/information age, and laid the groundwork for the digital age revolution that was to come (Hudson, 2016).

The process of a knowledge based economy, combined with globalization and nationalization, has a direct effect on higher education (Altbach et al., 2009). The growth of post-secondary DE creates major leadership challenges, as educational organizations struggle to deal with quality standards and sustainability in their curricular offerings (Eaton, 2001). A 2011 report from Pew Research that surveyed

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1,055 two-year and four-year college presidents from private, public, and for-profit colleges found that only 51% of those surveyed thought online courses offered equal value as those taught in the classroom (Parker, Lenhart, & Moore, 2011).

Dr. Börje Holmberg, became Professor of distance education methodology in 1976 and “Director of the Institute for Distance Education Research at the Fern Universität in Hagen, Germany,” and is a seminal author on the topic of distance education (Saba, 2014, para. 2). Once considered a non-traditional educational delivery method, distance education is becoming increasingly accepted at institutions of higher education as a valid teaching tool. DE was called “correspondence education until 1982 when UNESCO-affiliated International Council for Correspondence Education, changed its name to the International Council for Distance Education” (Holmberg, 2003). Distance education (DE), for the purposes of this chapter, will be defined as any instruction where student and instructor do not share a physical location (Wahlstrom, Williams, & Shea, 2003).

As technologies become more effective educational tools, distance education is likely to continue to be a persistent trend in education. Students of today are digital natives, and many are choosing distance education courses because they are comfortable with the technology based learning environment (Harris and Martin, 2012). As a result, many institutions are offering distance education courses; which has increased the necessity for an effective online delivery format (Krishan & Bhattacharya, 2007; Parrish & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2010; Sadykova & Dautermann, 2009).

## BACKGROUND

For 1000 years institutions of higher education have been the main conduit for learning and knowledge attainment (Duderstadt, 2003). Post-secondary institutions are at a crossroads as technology developments create an environment that makes DE a more viable option for diverse student populations (Drew et al., 2015). A 2012 fact sheet by the National Center for Education Statistics reporting on public, 4-year degree granting institutions indicates that 12.5% of the 21,147,055 students attending Title IV institutions reported being enrolled exclusively in DE courses, and 74.2% were registered for at least one DE course (National Center for Statistics, 2012). Private, for-profit colleges reported the highest percentage of students enrolled in DE courses (42.6%), and students taking graduate courses were twice as likely to be taking courses exclusively online as undergraduate students (22% and 11% respectively); (National Center for Statistics, 2012). By the year 2020, half of all students will be taking distance education courses (Siegel, 2011).

The expansion of distance education into all levels of higher education from community college to Ivy League universities has led to a virtual online learning revolution. Massive open online courses (MOOCs) are available through a large percentage of colleges, and many programs of study are taught fully online (Adair, et al., 2014). Typically industry has focused their concerns on quality issues related to DE delivery (Claus, 2009), where the human component may be lost within the parameters of the delivery method. The rapid growth of DE and concurrent delivery systems in higher education has led to a necessity for leadership methods that increase effective curricular delivery in online classes (Hill, 2012).

The DE classroom differs from onsite learning on many levels (Wichita State University, 2011). DE online is completely different from correspondence courses which offer little to no effective feedback (Wichita State University, 2011). Modern DE courses combine multiple visual and audial technologies that provide opportunities for discussion, collaboration, and immediate response; however, in a DE classroom there may be limited face-to-face interaction, discussion, and collaboration due to physical

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