

Assignment 3 Leadership and Distance Education

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Leadership and Distance Education

Introduction

Many University of Maryland University College (UMUC) programs are offered online. UMUC can set an excellent example for other colleges that still do not have distance education incorporated into their curriculum. For this assignment, we will be distance learning experts from UMUC who are asked to develop an online program for Delaware Technical & Community College (Del Tech).

Del Tech college offers only a couple of classes online but wants to purchase a D2L platform to convert some programs to distance education, especially those programs that are affiliated with and transferable to other universities. At the moment, Del Tech has no infrastructure that can be relocated for distance learning support. Therefore, the provost asked UMUC distance learning experts to develop online courses for fully-online and blended programs. For quite a long time, Delaware Technical & Community College, Del Tech, had not had any online classes at all. However, the college leadership decided to implement some classes that can be transferred to online mode. At first, the college decided to use Blackboard as an online learning management platform. However, the system was not ideal, and everyone was frustrated with it.

One year ago, the college decided to purchase a D2L (Desire 2 Learn) platform and appoint a new Dean of Online Learning. The newly appointed Dean has been the Chair of the Communications Department at UMUC which is a fully-online program. She and her team were asked to take the position and apply concepts of management and leadership in the field of distance education and e-learning at the Communications Department at Delaware Technical &

Community College. The newly appointed Dean of Online Learning will report to the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs. Her job will be to collaborate with the colleagues of Enrollment Management and Advising Services and Student Learning Resources Department.

Background

Delaware Technical and Community (Del Tech) college, founded in 1966, is fully accredited by the Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. It is an open-admission institution of higher education committed to Delawareans, foreign, and out of state students (Delaware Technical & Community College, 2018). The college offers a Communications degree that is heavily oriented on media studies and journalism where the students are supposed to apply clear and practical communications skills during interviews, use critical thinking to solve problems and demonstrate professional and ethical conduct.

The team of distance education experts invited by Del Tech leadership developed and established an online Communications program for the Del Tech neighboring University, UMUC. The new Dean played the leading role in that program; therefore, she already has management and leadership qualities necessary to successfully apply e-learning concepts to the program and help Del Tech instructors and department chairs to transfer face-to-face courses to distance education. The position requires stable leadership traits.

Leadership traits of the new Dean of Online Learning

According to Maccoby (2000), leaders are there to notice talents, coach and motivate. Although leaders should design responsibilities for their subordinates to help them realize their skills, they should be there to support, mentor, and guide (p. 58). Delaware Technical &

Community College is not accustomed to online learning; therefore, it needs a Dean of Online Learning who possesses leadership qualities of a distance education expert as well as an experienced managerial and a leadership style with DE programs. Olga Usova, the Chair of the online Communications program from UMUC was first given an assessment that initially comes from one of the early management contingency models that was developed by Blake and Moulton and called the Management Grid. The grid was designed to identify a person's propensity toward either concern for people or tasks when he or she is in a leadership position. According to the Grid, a person may exhibit one of at least five different management styles which may or may not be appropriate for certain managerial/leadership positions (Blake & Mouton, 1964). The Management Grid can be found in Appendix 1 at the end of this paper.

According to the results of the questionnaire, Usova is an "e" management style, which means that she is concerned for both task outcome and people who work under her. She values the sound and creative decisions that lead to an agreement among others. She is a good listener and always remembers everyone's requests and promises to her subordinates. Besides, when someone has a better idea than she, she tries to listen because a better plan can lead to better results. She can be quite bossy, but she can also change her mind if someone proves her wrong. She does expect conflict, primarily when changes are implemented. She understands that she will have to persuade people to support her because resistance to change is inevitable, and she will have to coordinate support for students and instructors in online and hybrid formats, evaluate full online/blended courses and to establish new partnerships.

Besides based on Westley's and Mintzberg's theory of visionary leadership, Usova exhibits a mix of bricoleur and diviner styles that can be characterized as follows:

- **Bricoleur** – this leadership style is characterized by sagacity, insight, and foresight. It is a product and organization focused on where the process is emergent, interactive, and inductive. It is not an introspective ability to invent or imagine, but preferably an interactive, social ability to understand situations and recognize the essential part of it (Westley & Mintzberg, 1989).
- **Diviner** – characterized by insight, sagacity, and inspiration. It is service focused and can be sudden, incremental, and interactive with the employees being the target group. Its focus is on the process itself rather than on the product because an organizational structure is essential for this style of visionary leadership (Westley & Mintzberg, 1989).

Usova is a former U.S. military Soldier and likes to keep her emotions to herself and use logic most of the time. She places a considerable value into involvement in work and trust. She believes she is more of a leader than a manager, but that is precisely what Del Tech is looking at being a small community college.

Usova possesses a dynamic, entrepreneurial, and strategic-minded leadership style. She is a servant leader who builds strong teams and engages followers and partners in critical decisions and implementation. She recognizes that diversity and open communication is essential for building trust. She will be able to provide a new vision, planning, and oversight of online learning working effectively with her colleagues and partners.

Successful Leadership Skills

The Leadership Skills

A Dean of Online Learning has to be able to lead the vision of others which may include many responsibilities of the day-to-day management of emerging and existing issues. The primary traits needed for this position are strategic thinking and team-building qualities. Every

college can have a political setup where the Dean has to respond to the Presidents and the Vice Presidents of different Departments, collaborate with Student Advising Services and Enrollment Management, work with faculty and other Deans to plan, develop, and coordinate courses.

Although most of the work will include constant collaboration with the teams on campus; it will also include coordination of courses employing distance learning delivery services. T

The first step will include coordination with deans to hire and evaluate new and old instructors. It might require hiring adjunct faculty that have already had experience in teaching full online and hybrid courses. At the same time, the coordination will have to happen between the enrollment, advising, and information technology services to ensure related support for students, instructors, and learning management system. A Dean of Online Learning has to lead the team that will bring together faculty, professional staff, instructional design, IT department, Learning Center, and any other necessary department to ensure a coordinated approach for deployment of content. Therefore, Usova will have to serve as a constant point of contact and support, and be a good politician to help the team and build relations

Working with Decision-Making Groups

From Usova's leadership traits, we identified that she is a bricoleur characterized by sagacity, insight, and foresight. Her introspective ability is not to invent or imagine, but preferably an interactive, social ability to understand situations and recognize the essential parts. (Westley & Mintzberg, 1989). Because her new position asks for working with decision-making groups, she realizes that when they start collaborating, especially newly formed groups, they go through both groups think and Abilene Paradox. Larger groups always require more leadership and management.

Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Rosen (2007) identified the parameters for leading virtual teams. Usova knows that she will have to work on the 5 group member behaviors that best enhance effectiveness and satisfaction):

- **Cohesiveness:** She will have to make sure that every worker understands a project's subject and distributes the workload evenly. Every team member will have to develop trust in each other to know that every person will work on the project promptly. Everyone will also have to agree on the plan and procedures (Malhortra et al., 2007).
- **A standard set of procedures:** To ensure the cohesiveness of the team, Usova will meet with the Chairs of different departments, IT leadership, Vice Presidents, faculty, advising and coordination staff once a week to check on the progress. The meetings will be held face-to-face at Del Tech, or virtually, through the technology the team will agree upon. Everyone will have to decide on the technology and time they will use for conferences. Usova realizes that not everyone will always be able to attend the meetings. That is the main reason the sessions will be held once a week (Malhortra et al., 2007).
- **Ensuring the team diversity is understood and appreciated:** The instructors and, especially, the students of Del Tech are very diverse. Besides the fact that they come from different backgrounds, they often come from different countries. When one takes classes online, there is a chance that there are classmates who come from different countries, workplaces, and diverse backgrounds. At least one-third of Del Tech Communications Department students are foreigners, and they need to be taught the basics of intercultural communication to improve interviewing skills and to boost the effectiveness of necessary communication and language skills. Therefore, the views on various subjects can be entirely different. It is essential that every

member is patient and work on agreeing on the common ground. However, the fact that members are so diverse also brings new ideas to life. Patience, understanding, and appreciation are fundamental characteristics that Usova will have to incorporate into her leadership style (Malhortra et al., 2007).

- **Ensuring the individuals benefit from participation:** Dividing the topics by interest and the courses by professional skills is vital in this case. All the instructors of the Communications Department at Del Tech have Communications degrees. Typically, when a team agrees on a plan for the project, each person already has an idea of what would be of interest to him or her. The instructors will benefit more when they are given a choice on what they want to research and instruct online (Malhortra et al., 2007).
- **Monitor team progress:** This is an important part that Usova will have to work on. Besides weekly meetings with the deans and staff, especially at the beginning of the transfer of the Communications program to distance education, she will have to ensure that her team of experts from UMUC consistently works with Del Tech instructors and advises them on the problems that might arise. However, Usova, as a Dean of Online learning, will also have to ensure that her team gives enough freedom to Del Tech instructors in making their own decisions. An instructor plays the role of a manager and a leader when students need support. Empowering instructors with decision-making when it comes to instructing their courses online is an essential part of developing distance education leaders (Malhortra et al., 2007).

Leadership Dynamics

Kanter (1981) says that power comes from engaging in activities that use discretion or judgment, social pressure, and from organizations and alliances. She states that being powerless

often leads to being overly controlling and demanding even when it is not needed (p. 221). As was mentioned above that empowering peers or co-workers is an integral part of effective leadership and management. However, before the team of experts in distance education from UMUC will start empowering Del Tech instructors to make their own decisions on how they will compose and develop their online courses, some trust will have to be built between the Vice Presidents, Department Chairs, Tech Support, Student Services, and faculty members.

The concepts of trust and distrust are rather psychological and can carry many views. Lewicki, McAllister, and Bias (1998) say that functional coexistence of both trust and distrust can be an essential component of high-performance teams (p. 1016). The feelings of trust and distrust help teams to reach some common ground. Although the atmosphere of trust within an organization or a team helps with solidarity and cohesiveness; the effective group functioning comes from different perspectives and the abilities to listen and know how to lead and to be led (Lewicki et al., 1998).

Lewicki (1998) and his subordinates separated different levels of trust. There is a big difference between the feeling of trust or distrust in personal relationships vs. organizations. And there also can be the feelings of high trust and low distrust, or low trust vs. high distrust, etc. However, they should not be considered as good or bad (p. 1016). A little bit of distrust from the team of experts will help Del Tech instructors with establishing the rules and boundaries on how distance education will be taught at Del Tech. Once everyone is on the same page, the feeling of trust will start to build which will increase motivation. Although, motivation aspect will not happen in a day. The instructors will have to become comfortable with the online format of instructing first (Lewicki et al., 1998).

Change Management

Pietersen emphasizes the FUD Factor (Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt) (p. 33). No one likes change even it is necessary. It is a psychological factor of natural resistance. People get accustomed to the comfort of consistency and security. If not everyone is committed to change, it can lead to dissatisfaction within and a failed embrace. Commitment to change must happen from above to lower levels. Everyone will not be happy; therefore, active management and leadership, maximum participation, and continuous communication, short-term wins and shining example from above are essential because lack of motivation and support from the Dean can lead to active resistance. Thus, Usova will have to eliminate the lack of communication because people like to know what is expected of them. Weekly meetings on Del Tech campus and active participation in program development will help her with reducing resistance to change among the staff.

Ethics

Ethics in each organization must be managed. Management should create an environment where people are likely to behave and follow the rules. The code of ethics is interpreted differently by different people. Giving too much freedom in understanding the code of ethics can lead to damaging results. Therefore, each organization must have a set of rules on the paper, and every employee must know and sign that set of rules and follow it after (Gellerman, 1989). Del Tech already has set college policies in place. The new Dean will have to make sure that everyone is familiar with the policies and follows them. If someone does not support the policies, he or she will be subject to reprimands.

Transformational Leadership and Team Building

For a long time, no one paid attention to Follet's (1868-1933) theories on leadership because no one took into consideration the human aspect of it as much as she did. She said that the happier the people who work for a company, the more they work together in agreement, the better the quality and quantity (p. 7). She looked at management from a leadership side and thought that a suitable, efficient management should consist of cross-functional teamwork, horizontal authority, empowerment, power, and conflict reduction (Phelps et al., 2007)

Del Tech is a small community college in the tourist heart of Delaware. The politics within the school is simple because every instructor, Deans, and Chairs of the Departments know each other and already have their formed circles. Usova, like Follett, will have to look ahead of time and become a transformational leader who focuses on support of others and the organization. For others to follow her, she will have to build feelings of trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect which will require for her to work harder than initially expected.

Conclusion

To be a Dean of Online Learning who is trying to transfer face-to-face courses to the online learning management system is not an easy job. Usova will have to portray strong management skills and leadership trait. She will have to project the ability to work in a team, exercise problem-solving and versed conflict resolution abilities, and maintain strong working relationships across the departments. Her verbal and communication skills with transformational leadership traits and ethical behavior will have to be correct for the community college variety of audiences. Leading culturally diverse collaborative teams in design, technical support projects, technologies for learning management, development, and implementation should all be aimed towards the support of student and her team's success.

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