

Leadership and Distance Education

Yaa Afriyie Donyina

University of Maryland University College

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This essay is divided into two parts: Part A, a list of five qualities of an effective distance education leader and Part B: three crucial issues affecting distance education organizations. The five approaches that embody an effective leader are the following: cultural awareness, interpersonal skills, charisma, computer skills and management skills. The three crucial issues that a distance education leader needs to know to guide the organization are communication, organizational politics and women and leadership. This essay will explain how various leaders have dealt with these challenges, and how trends, politics, events and developments affect distance education leaders.

Part A: Five Qualities of D.E Leader

An effective distance education leader needs to have cultural awareness. Diverse leaders have a different race, ethnicity and culture than their followers. A leader needs to value the cultural backgrounds of the employees because American society is multicultural with people from various countries. Success is determined by a leader's ability to show leadership in different cultural settings (Javidan et al., 2006). G.L.O.B.E. is used has nine cultural dimensions to compare various cultures such as performance orientation, assertiveness, future orientation, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender equalitarianism, power distance and uncertainty (Javidan et al., 2006). Diverse work groups are better at problem solving, creativity and decision-making than groups from the same culture (Ayoko & Hartel, 2006). An effective leader can adapt his or her leadership style to the culture of the followers.

An effective education leader needs to have strong interpersonal skills. Psychology is a science that focuses on the motivation and learning of individual employees (Stanley, 2012). Organizational behavior promotes the humane treatment of employees which makes them more productive (Schein,

1996). Leaders should know the personal details of their workers such as their names, family background, strengths and weaknesses. There should be a set of norms in the organization that encourages the employees to complete their work on the job (Richardson, 1999). A good leader should have a high level of cooperativeness and puts the needs of other people before his or her own. Leaders need to compromise by finding a middle ground between both sides (Ayoko & Hartel, 2006). Along with having interpersonal skills, it is important for a distance education leader to have charisma.

Charisma is a personal quality that gives a person influence over a large group of people. Charisma is when a leader emerges with a radical vision that offers a solution to the crisis (Yukl, 2013). Followers should be convinced that they can trust their leader to make good decision on their behalf. Kotter (2012) states that arrogant managers overestimate their performance, do not listen and learn slowly. A leader needs to be a timely, accountable and a representative of the organization. A leader should prevent the Abilene paradox from happening during communication. The Abilene Paradox is when an organization does the opposite action from what they intend to achieve (Harvey, 1974). An effective leader needs to have charisma and management skills.

An effective distance education leader needs to understand management theories. A manager's job is completing a variety of activities with people who are inside and outside the organization (Carroll & Gillen, 1987). The eight managerial functions, called PRINCESS, are planning, representing, investigating, negotiating, coordinating, evaluating, supervising and staffing (Carroll & Gillen, 1987). The Fayol functions of a manager are planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating and controlling (Carroll & Gillen, 1987). The manager is responsible for the organization and needs to exercise care when using the resources. Most of a manager's work is mental and observable behaviors such as talking to clients. Along with having good management skills, a distance education leader needs to have good computer skills.

A distance education leader needs to have computer or technical skills. Computer skills include the ability to use the internet and virtual teams. Virtual teams are when the members are in different locations and they work together through the Internet (Malhotra, Majchzak & Rosen, 2007). There are several qualities of a virtual team such as: establish trust through technology, ensure diversity is understood, manage virtual work-life cycle (meeting), monitor team progress, enhance visibility of virtual members and enable individual members of the virtual team to benefit (Malhotra et al., 2007).

Part B: Three Crucial Issues of D.E. Leader

The first issue that affects distance education leaders is organizational politics. Politics is an important topic for a course on leadership. It is important for leaders to not ignore politics because a leader needs to have networks to have power. Organizations are groups of people who work together toward a common goal in the mutual interest of everyone. Networks allow leaders to get more support, identify key issues and find resistance (Butcher & Clarke, 2003). Leaders need internal networks because organisations are complex and they need to form relationships.

The second issue that affects distance education leaders is the importance of communication. Communication in the distance education organization is influenced by the type of work environment. It is important for a leader to improve communication by creating a supportive environment. A supportive environment is defined as having the following qualities: descriptive, problem solving, spontaneity, equality, empathy and provisionalism. In contrast, a defensive environment will lead to communication problems between the leader and the followers. A defensive environment is evaluative, controlling, strategy, superiority, neutrality and certainty. It is important for a leader to create a supportive environment because there will be more teamwork, respect and equality between the leader and his followers.

The third issue that affects distance education leaders is women and leadership. There is a lack of female leaders in society, for example, there are 190 heads of state and only nine of them are women. Women are less likely to stay in the workforce and ask for promotions once they decide to have children (Sandberg, 2010). Power is the ability to mobilize people and having the resources to get things done (Kanter, 1981). There is a need to look beyond the traditional male model of leaders who are single-minded, one-sided and aggressive (Kanter, 1981). Women and racial minorities need to be encouraged to take leadership roles in distance education organizations. Women are more likely to underestimate their abilities and negotiate their salary (Sandberg, 2010).

The fourth issue that affects distance education leaders is sources of power. The six types of power of a distance education leaders are Informational, Reward, Coercion, Legitimate, Expertise and Referent (Ravens, 2008). Informational Power is when a supervisor explains to the subordinate how the job should be done differently with persuasive reasons. Reward Power is the ability of supervisor to offer a positive incentive if the employee complies such as raise in pay. Coercive Power is when the supervisor brings about change by threatening the employee with negative consequences such as demotion. Legitimate Power is from the employee accepting the supervisor's right to require the changed behavior and the employee's obligation to comply. Expert Power results from the subordinate's belief that the supervisor has more knowledge about the behavior that is needed. Referent Power is from the subordinate identifying with the supervisor or seeing that person as a role model.

How leaders have dealt with challenges:

Distance education leaders have dealt with organizational politics by creating networks in their organization. It is a mistake for a manager to ignore politics because organizations are political. Leaders and managers who do not have networks are not able to stand up for what is correct. Managers need

to create opportunities to build their network in their organization through meeting new people. Managers should also have relationships with people from various cultural backgrounds.

Leaders in distance education organizations can solve the issue of communication. Followers are an important part of the relationship between a leader and the followers. The traditional definition of followers are people who have less power, influence and authority than their leaders (Baker, 2007). Communication can be improved when it includes supportive leadership. Supportive leadership is defined as friendly interactions and genuine concern for the followers' well-being (Hickman, 2010). A good leader encourages the employees to take risks, make decisions and give their opinion. Leaders should act as a mediator when disagreements occur between the followers. A good leader is also an effective listener who listens to the needs of the people.

Leaders in distance education need to deal with the issue of women and leadership. Leaders should try to make the organization inclusive. Women are less likely to stay in the workforce once they want to have children. Leaders can encourage women's rights in the workforce such as equal pay and flexible work hours. Distance education can provide more opportunities for women by providing opportunities to female entrepreneurs. Leaders can create networks for women through mentorship programs. The leaders can also encourage women empowerment by celebrating the achievements of female distance education leaders.

Leaders in the distance education field need to solve the issue of power. Leaders need to have power to stand up for what they believe is correct (Butcher & Clarke, 2013). The hierarchy of an organization needs to be more equal; therefore, leaders should not micromanage their employees. Power can become bad when a leader puts his or her interests above the interests of the organization. Good leaders know how to treat everyone in the organization equally without having any bias.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this essay discussed the five qualities of a distance education leader and the four crucial issues that affect distance education organizations. The five qualities that embody an effective distance education leader are cultural awareness, interpersonal skills, charisma, computer skills and management skills. The important issues that are affecting distance education leaders are politics, communication, women and leadership and power. I learned about the relationship between management and leadership. I have a better understanding of the various management theories and how to apply them in the workforce. I enjoyed learning about the various trends that affect leadership in distance education institutions. My favorite topics during this course were cultural awareness, women leaders and ethics.

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