

Running head: LEADERSHIP AT CITRUS COLLEGE

Leadership at Citrus College and the use of Audio Files

Ed 7212

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Abstract

This paper is a discussion of the best practices of an effective leader for an online academic program including a literature review for ED 7212 and current publications. It also discusses the use of audio files for online programs and how they can help support transformative leadership.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Brief History of Distance Education.....	5
Analysis of ED 7212 Literature	7
Analysis of Current Literature for Leadership and Audio Files.....	14
Podcasting and Audio Files.....	18
Applications to the Citrus College Distance Education Program	21
Conclusion	26
Resources.....	28

Introduction

Distance education is not a new form of education. For as long as formal education has existed some form of learning from a distance has been utilized. To be considered a successful distance education program there are many requirements. Arguably the most important is strong leadership. Ultimately it is the leader who is responsible for the success or failure of an online program. Certainly there are outside forces at work such as limited technology, budget issues, and learner disinterest, but chances are a program's success or failure can be traced to how the leader behaves, models, and governs. Does this mean faculty, students, and staff have no responsibilities? It does not, but by creating and promoting an environment that allows students, faculty, and staff to achieve their goals, a leader is successful. Individuals may fail, but with strong transformative leadership the program will thrive.

What makes a strong leader? There are many ideas as set forth within the current literature including a clear vision, strong communication skills, strategies for faculty success, and strategies for course success. This paper focuses the discussion of the best practices for successful leaders as shown in current literature as well the course texts for ED 7212 at Capella University. It is also a discussion of a

newer strategy for course success, audio files, and their application to this author's distance education program and leadership needs.

Brief History of Distance Education

Correspondence refers to education that takes place through documents exchanged between teacher and learner. It began to be utilized in earnest in the late 1800's. "The first official recognition of education by correspondence came from 1883 to 1891 by Chautauqua College of Liberal Arts. This college was authorized by the state of New York to grant academic degrees to students who successfully completed work at the summer institutes and by correspondence during the academic year" (Nasseh, 1997, p. 1). Correspondence does not require active interaction between learners and has very little interaction between teacher and student other than the grading of the written materials.

With the advent of technology many distance classes began to use television, film, and radio as a medium of instruction. The first method of technology used in any serious form was the moving picture, "instructional media were introduced into many extension programs by 1920 in the form of slides and motion pictures just as they were in the classroom." (Jeffries, n.d., p. 1). After World War II television became the instructional media of choice. Canned courses could be offered to any student with a television and/or VCR. With the

advent of personal computers and the internet in the late 1970's and early 1980's distance education made the shift to online instruction and away from correspondence courses. Online instruction allows for more communication between student and teacher as well as between the students themselves.

Online instruction has undergone many changes since its implementation into mainstream education. Numerous universities and colleges use online instruction today as a key resource for education with an eye on giving students a valid education without the restrictions of the traditional classroom. However "throughout its life, distance education has been frowned upon as "watered down education", by those who said that learning was not possible without any person to person contact." (Fowler and McCall, 2000). While the intent of education is the same, be it traditional or online, online education has special requirements. Beginning in the 1990's web based instruction replaced most of the correspondence forms of education. The advantages of web based or online instruction are numerous, but most importantly include the ability for students and professors to communicate in a manner similar to the traditional classroom. Online instruction does have potential disadvantages as well. "Despite the promises and obvious advantages to distance learning, there are problems that need to be resolved. These

problems include the quality of instruction, hidden costs, misuse of technology, and the attitudes of instructors, students, and administrators." (Valentine, 2002, p. 1). In order for online instruction to be successful it must overcome these obstacles, this requires a strong vision backed up and led by strong academic leadership and administration.

Analysis of ED 7212 Literature

There have been many books and articles published regarding leadership styles. What form of leader you are, and what works best for a particular group can often rely on what the program is all about. Distance education programs have needs in common with other academic programs, but the online component creates unique characteristic requirements especially in today's world of ever changing technologies and differing learning styles.

Awareness of Leadership Skills

According to Cashman (1998) "leadership is authentic self-expression that creates value (p. 20). The implications of this statement are that any individual involved in a distance education program can be a leader regardless of their position at the academic institution. "Anyone who is authentically self-expressing and creating value is leading" (Cashman, 1998, p. 20). This is an important realization as many distance education programs are pieced together

by determined faculty rather than official programs that exist within the school. However to be truly successful programs need to be led by an official leader, be they elected or appointed, faculty or administrators. There are critical skills that leaders need to possess in order to be respected and capable. Cashman (1998) tells us it is important to be introspective of one's own leadership abilities. Only with inward journeys can individuals create authentic leadership skills. The inward journal lists seven pathways instead of specific step by step plans on how to run a distance education program. The pathways include such ideas as authentic listening skills, authentic self expression, centering of the individual, and leading as a complete person. In order to be a successful leader of a thriving distance education program a leader needs to know their own skills and traits so they can present the most honest version of their personality and the leadership skills will emerge.

Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership is considered one of the best forms of leadership for online education programs. "The transformational role in distance education is the most important as these leaders help stakeholders understand that new methods of teaching could no longer be adopted by just a few brave instructors" (Beaudoin as quoted in Shelton & Saltsman, 2005, p. 11). Transformative leadership is one

where leaders empower their employees to be a valuable part of the team. Transformative leaders trust the people they work with, assign duties as needed, and are willing to take risks to encourage out of the box thinking. In other words a transformative leader is one that is open to change, willing to say when they are wrong, empower workers to do their best, and are willing to listen and embrace the ideas of others. For online learning the leaders must trust their faculty and vice versa. The leaders must know their faculty are capable of providing an environment for learners that is open, accessible, easy to use, and uses authentic assessment. If the leader micromanages they are showing they cannot possibly trust the faculty to accomplish assigned tasks. Probably the most important component of transformative leadership is that of taking risks. Online education was a risk when it began. Leaders in key academic and business settings saw the potential of online education and were willing to take a risk to introduce it to their learners. The use of audio files to promote learning is considered a risk by some in the field of online learning. It is not a radical idea, but it often faces a prejudice. Many question the need for audio files, after all online education is web driven, and the web is primarily a text based format. Others also question the technology needed for audio files. Despite its ease of use and free software components audio files are often seen as a complicated

endeavor that will take away from the meager resources often budgeted for online programs. A true transformative leader trusts his or her faculty members and lets them experiment with newer technologies knowing they have the learners at heart. A successful leader will also model the strategies of audio files in their own communication styles, leading by example to show reluctant faculty members that new technology is not so intimidating.

Vision

Another critical leadership component is one of vision. Leaders need to have a clear idea of where the program is going and where it has been. The vision needs to be one that focuses on the learners and their needs. It is not a personal agenda driven by one person. "The communication of expectations, desires, and goals to members of the organization is what enables dreams to become reality" (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005, p. 13). Leaders share their ideas, and in turn receive ideas from their faculty, staff, and most importantly the learners. Shelton & Saltsman (2005) list several forms of leadership models to create a vision statement or strategic plan. They do not promote a specific model but do share with the audience that any leader needs to have a clear understanding of the history of the institution, as well as the courage to share a proactive vision. "The process of building upon the institution's vision, core values, and mission statement provides

direct support for the development of specific goals and objectives, defining the program scope, strategies, policies, and action plans based on a comprehensive needs assessment" (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005, p. 15). Vision statements are not static documents. Many programs began with no vision statement and are having to create one after the start of their programs. Many programs began with a vision, but as the program grew, it outgrew its vision. Dynamic vision statements are ones that are revisited often. Leaders listen to their learners and their faculty and staff to know when something is working, and when something becomes antiquated. The use of audio files in an online program is part of a proactive vision statement. It is promoting new forms of learning and exploring alternative technologies.

Faculty Training

It is important for leaders to pick and choose particular faculty for the online learning environment. Teaching online is not the same as teaching in the classroom, and many older faculty members have no experience with any form of online learning. Leaders need to not only chose the correct faculty, but create an infrastructure that promotes and offers training. "Because of the speed in which online education is evolving, online education staff members are dependent on regular training. (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005, p. 46). Selection

factors can include the most academically prepared faculty (critical for any form of teaching), openness to technology, the ability to learn and adapt, and faculty who are clear leaders in their own right. Leaders who want successful programs know they must rely on faculty and designers to create practical forms of the vision statement. The training to create these people is not a one time presentation, it is ongoing and dynamic. As technology changes so does the skill level of the learners. Faculty need to keep up with their learners and the best way to accomplish this is through leadership driven faculty training. The use of audio files in online courses is just one example of a new technology requirement that needs demonstration to be successfully applied.

Technology and Online Programs

“Dependence upon technology is one of the greatest risks facing online education” (Shelton & Saltsman, 2005, p. 117). Learners and teachers must have consistent access to the required technology, without it they are denied the ability to interact and succeed in the online environment. The leader’s job is not to deal with the minutia of maintaining the software, hardware, and course management systems. Instead their job is to create the infrastructure that supports those systems. Budgeting is critical. While it does not seem on the surface that the IT person is important, if the server crashes and they

are the only ones who can fix it, their role becomes crucial. Leaders must trust their IT people just as they trust their faculty members. They need to listen when the technology gurus explain how something works and why it is necessary. It is the leader's job to defend the technology components and the jobs of those that service the technology. Without hardware and software an audio file is not possible, nor is even the simplest form of online learning.

Advertisement and Marketing of an Online Program

Many educators are reluctant to promote their institutions. Often academics believe learners will seek them out because they want to learn. Lack of promotion can be a problem. Education is a commodity and Americans are living in a capitalistic society. A savvy administrator recognizes this and is willing to promote and advertise an online learning program. This requires a specific long term plan that can be folded under the umbrella of the vision statement. Marketing does not mean the program offers less than other programs, nor does it make it academically unsound. What marketing does is illustrate to the learner that an academic institution has their best interests at heart and is willing to offer students what they need to succeed. The use of audio files in online education can be used as a great marketing tool. More and more programs are exploring the idea of audio and video along with static text based websites. A proactive

leader explores new and exciting technology and promotes them so learners are aware of the advantages of one program over another.

Analysis of Current Literature for Leadership and Audio Files

Countless publications exist regarding online programs. Many educators have expressed their opinions, and done much research helping to determine what makes a successful online program. Newer research is focused on the specific needs of learners and how programs can help the students achieve those needs.

The main weakness of many distance education programs is their commitment to only one type of medium (Moore, n.d., p. 1). Most online programs today offer online education in a text based format. While this is a great medium for visual based learners it may not work as well for auditory or kinesthetic based learners. Clark (2003) tells us learners retain information at a greater rate if they are presented the content in competing mediums. If the content is presented in visual format only, such as text and pictures, it can often confuse a learner and even regress the learning. But if the content is offered in a text/picture format as well as audio format deeper learning is possible. For example one "approach is adding graphics and audio to PowerPoint slides that summarize the main points of the lesson, to accommodate visual and auditory learners" (Mupinga, Nora, & Yaw, 2006, p. 186).

For online programs “the goal is to recreate the classroom environment on the remote computer and, possibly, enrich the lecture material with additional material” (Hayes and Harvel, 1999). Audio files enrich the lecture material making it more similar to a traditional on-ground classroom. Audio files are familiar but at the same time they allow the websites to go beyond the traditional instructivist classroom into a more constructivist classroom. An instructivist classroom is one that focuses on lecturing to students while they sit and absorb the material. There is little interaction, and the learners have little to no opportunities to apply the content/materials to the experiences of their own lives. A constructivist classroom is opposite of this notion and promotes instead a classroom of authentic learning through participation. The learners are no longer passively absorbing materials, they are instead taking charge of their own learning by applying the content to their own lives. (Instructivist versus Constructivist, n.d.).

Online courses tend to lend themselves to a more constructivist environment. There can be potential issues especially if the learners are new to the content, new to higher education, or new to online courses. Some facilitators can be so interested in letting learners take charge of their own learning they fail to see when the learners are struggling and need a helping hand. Audio files can be a good support

system for the times when students are struggling. "The objectives of a Virtual Classroom are to improve access to advanced educational experiences by allowing students and instructors to participate in remote learning communities using personal computers at home or at work; and to improve the quality and effectiveness of education by using the computer to support a collaborative learning process" (Turoff, 1995, p. 245). If the objective is to improve a learners' situation then facilitators need to take every opportunity to create avenues of learning.

Interaction is a critical element to any successful online program. Turoff (1995) tells us "the process of transferring knowledge from an instructor to the students is one of the student learning how the instructor thinks about and solves problems, within the application domain, and incorporating that process into the student's own cognitive processes. To accomplish this mental process, problem solving and task execution must be shared among the students and the instructor" (p. 247). Sharing requires interaction which can take many forms. One is learner-content interaction, "it is the process of intellectually interacting with content that results in changes in the learner's understanding, the learner's perspective, or the cognitive structures of the learner's mind" (Moore, n.d.). The second form of interaction is learner-instructor, and the third learner-learner.

Learner-content interaction is common for all forms of education, but in order for online education to be a true constructivist environment it requires learner-instructor interaction and learner-learner interaction. According to Moore (n.d.) learners are vulnerable when applying the content. The facilitator and the learner's peers need to be there to help guide the learner as they dig their way through the material and attempt to have it make sense in their lives. Interaction is the way to accomplish that support. This can be done with text based conversations only, but sometimes the best way to know you are not alone in an online classroom is to hear another's voice, be it learner or facilitator. "One major resistance to distance learning is that no one wants to learn from a computer. The more human a presentation appears, the more information students tend to retain, and the longer they appear interested in the material" (Cravotta, 2003, p. 61).

Learners who choose online education tend toward a specific personality type. They tend to be more independent, self motivating, and willing to participate in a constructivist environment even if they cannot define what a constructivist environment might be. They are also becoming more knowledgeable about what they require from an online program and an online facilitator. "The top three expectations of the online students were communication with the professor, instructor feedback, and challenging online courses. The online

students also expressed a need for additional reference material” (Mupinga, Nora, & Yaw, 2006, p. 186). Additional reference material can be provided by web links and the supplemental online textbook materials, but again this is in a text only format most usually. The facilitator can add audio files again supporting more than one learning style along with the learners’ desire for additional materials.

Administrators hold a key role in the success or failure of online programs. Most schools today see a need for online education but are often challenged to create a model that works for all constituent groups. “There’s a perception on the part of those who work in the trenches of distance education — the IT people, the instructional designers, and the faculty who teach the courses — that their needs and viewpoints are not necessarily taken into account as the administration makes the decisions that will affect their work” (Distance Education Report, 2006, p. 4). It is important that administrators realize the critical elements of a successful online program such as interaction, and a constructivist environment offered through a variety of mediums.

Podcasting and Audio Files

A wealth of information is already available regarding distance education and effective communication, however peer reviewed articles on podcasting are rare as this is an emerging technology.

As this paper is focusing on the use of audio files to support online learning it is important to define podcasting and audio files and put them into context. "Podcasting is the creation of digital audio files that may be downloaded to any portable MP3 player and listened to at the student's convenience. Though it is a misnomer to call it "podcasting," indicating the need for an iPod, the process of creating and publishing digital audio files via the Internet for an automatic download to an MP3 player has great potential as an educational tool and method" (Cravotta, 2003, p. 61). Podcasting is a concept that comes from the marriage of digital audio players and RSS (really simple syndication) technologies. Digital audio players' original intent was to play music files stored in the MP3 format, on hard drives, or on flash memory. RSS is a protocol used by Web Sites to deliver information to the subscribed user. Aggregators are software tools that periodically read the subscribed systems and download the information to systems such as digital audio players. Podcasting moves beyond audio music files and allows individuals to record any audio. Individuals can register for specific audio files that aggregators will automatically download every time the individual logs onto their computer. Online instructors can create audio files for their online students to download.

Online instructors need not get that complicated however. They can instead record audio files using free software packages such as Audacity, and link those files to their websites saving learners the need to download the files. It is important to determine the learner's needs however since many may wish to download the audio files to their MP3 players so they can take the lectures with them making the content truly portable.

The main issue of a podcasting instructional design is not overcoming the technology; it is illustrating to professors how useful podcasting of audio files can be in an online classroom. Duke University, a leader in podcasting, states several reasons why podcasting is an effective technology including improving learning, supporting collaborative learning, providing richer experiences, supporting undergraduate research through the use of recording interviews with subject experts, and reducing time for course management by making the process simpler for professors. Duke uses podcasting in both online classes and traditional classes with high technology content. The experiment at Duke has just begun but reports a few problems such as seamless transition for students, but state overall it has been a success by increasing the students' understanding.

Application to the Citrus College Distance Education Program

Citrus College is a community college in southern California serving approximately 12,000 students per semester. The online program began in 1996 with three instructors and three courses. Today there are many full and adjunct faculty teaching online, and the school offers over sixty courses per semester.

The program is overseen by a part time faculty coordinator, a manager, and an instructional dean. The leadership of this program has gone through many evolutions and there are several clear issues which are stunting the growth and success of the online program.

Leadership Roles

Citrus College's online program is ultimately the responsibility of the instructional dean. The current dean is an amiable person who desires to make his faculty happy and content. However in the opinion of this author the dean, and ultimately the program, lacks vision. The dean would like the input of his faculty but has a tendency toward micro management of the program. He is not seen as a transformative leader who wants the program to grow. He is cautious and unwilling to take chances with the program. When faculty members approach him with innovations he cautions against them, or alternately tells the faculty he will consider it and get back to them, but never returns to the conversation. This is not to say the dean is a

bad person, the intent of this paper is not to label people but instead show the dean is not the appropriate leader for the position. If transformative leadership is a key resource for online programs it is important the dean be replaced or undergo a reflective change.

Since the dean is seen as having limitations as a leader the online faculty members are capable of being their own leaders. According to Cashman (1998) "Anyone who is authentically self-expressing and creating value is leading" (p. 20). This does not mean they are willing to do so however. Many faculty have a desire to see the program succeed, but have no ability to recognize how that can happen. They do not realize their own power to affect change in their world. Still other faculty members have no desire to affect change. They are comfortable with how their courses are run, and do not recognize the importance of interaction between the facilitator and learner or learner to learner. They see any change as more work and while this ultimately short changes the learners they do not seem to appreciate the dangers of passing a correspondence course off as an online course. With few exceptions many of the online faculty also lack the ability to lead in a transformative manner.

Another issue with Citrus College is the lack of vision for the online program. As stated earlier in the paper a vision is of critical importance. Citrus College is in the position of having to create a

vision statement after the program has been constructed. This is done all the time and is not inappropriate. Citrus College does have an updated mission statement and it does include a passage regarding the use of technology. There are also a set of best practices that were researched and discussed through the Academic Senate, which then passed into board policy. It may be more appropriate to state that Citrus College has parts of a vision statement, but that those parts are kept separate from each other and there is no active push to enforce the best practices or wishes of the vision statement.

There is also no official practical training for faculty. The program employs the course management system BlackBoard™, but the online faculty members are not given permission to utilize all of the system components. The reasoning of the dean and manager seems to be the lack of training. This is confusing reasoning since the school employs two part time web specialists whose job descriptions include training as a component. The web specialists are allowed to answer questions for the faculty, and spend some one on one time with them, but they are not allowed to train faculty on a large scale. The leaders of the program are asking faculty to teach online, they give them access to online tools, but they fail to train them in the use of the tools in any practical manner. The majority of the faculty is

self-taught and prefers not to use BlackBoard™ since it is not supported with in house training.

Faculty members are also not allowed to participate in the marketing of the online program. They are perhaps the best source of information for how the courses are run, but they are never asked to participate in back to school nights for the local high schools, or other forms of student advertising.

This information does not mean there are not positive aspects to the online education program for Citrus College. There are many dedicated faculty who have a great desire to see the program succeed for the sake of their students. They are committed to leading by example, and participate in transformative leadership on a daily basis. They seek out their students and interview them in order to determine what the learners wish to see in a program. They attend conferences for online learning on their own time, and share their knowledge with their fellow faculty. They also constantly lobby the official leaders of the program asking for new technologies, new hardware, and training. In addition the college has recently hired a new vice president of instruction who has taken a keen interest in the online program. She has a great desire to see the program follow the best practices as defined in current literature. She also wants the program to grow by taking chances a sign of transformative leadership. It is this author's

hope she will see the good in the program at Citrus College, while recognizing the challenges and set forth a culture of change, trust, and a willingness to embrace online education in its entirety.

Audio Files

One of the ways Citrus College can improve its online program is to include the idea of audio files. Audio files need not be for just content in specific classes. They can also be used for faculty training or general program information for learners. Audio files or podcasting or both are not new technologies, but the applications of the technologies are what are important.

The training for faculty would be minimal. Most online faculty members already know how to download, open, and manipulate software packages. The software needed for audio files comes in very simple forms, for example a program called Audacity.

The hardware is also minimal. All the faculty member needs is a decent microphone/headphone set. The cost of the sets is very little and a few sets can even be shared between professors.

The audio files themselves are easy to insert into the existing CMS BlackBoard™ or the websites of the non BlackBoard™ using faculty.

The use of audio files is not a dramatic change for an online program. It is not considered radical, and is an easy thing to do. It

does not require much additional hardware or expensive software. What it does do is show the program at Citrus College that there is room to grow and improve. It is a way to show the leaders of the program that thinking outside of the box is a good idea. It is also a way to show learners in the program that the leaders do think of them and consider their needs. It is a way to update the program while promoting deeper learning.

Conclusion

Leadership is a tricky concept. What kind of leader a program needs really depends on what the program is attempting to create. Academic online learning needs a flexible leader that is willing to listen to all constituent groups such as learners, faculty members, and staff members. The leader must be willing to embrace technology and make important decisions regarding budgeting and marketing. Most importantly they need to lead by example. What they require of the individuals in their program they must require of themselves.

Citrus College is in a precarious position currently. The online program began with the best of intentions, grew very rapidly, and was at one time seen as a leader in online learning in the state of California. Today the program is seen as a stagnant program that is not as good as it once was. The faculty and staff do not respect the immediate leaders, and not all are capable of leading by example

themselves. It is important that Citrus College realize the danger the online program is in and promote change. Change needs to take place in the immediate leaders of the program as well as the format of the courses. The use of audio files is a small step in the needed change, but it is the idea of this author that a successful small step of change will lead to greater areas of change bringing the program back to its former glory.

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