Leadership Abstract

Course: TSP1820-Leadership in Community Colleges

Prepared by: Irene A. Laurie

On: April 14, 1999

For: Dr. R. Giroux and Dr. C. Pascal

In partial completion of the degree EdD

At: OISE/ University of Toronto

Leadership Abstract

April 1999

Leading Transformation in Learning Technologies

Irene A. Laurie

Jumping the Gap

Although change theory shows continuous movement from innovators to early adopters to early followers, experience with adoption of technology frequently belies this continuity. Often, the discontinuity between early adopters and early followers is never bridged before the next technological innovation comes along, thus leaving the majority further and further behind.

The hazards of ignoring technology at any level in colleges have been well documented. Leaders have been threatened and warned that if they ignore technology, they risk: the take over of education by the private sector, loss of market, and graduating underprepared students. Many of them have passed on the dire warnings to their staff. However, until the leaders themselves jump the e-literacy gap, the majority of college staff will not follow.

Leaders need to recognize what prevents them from adopting technology and find a solution. Then they need to put into play a well thought out plan for leading the majority to follow suit. As professional educators, they need to rigorously follow learning models to make sure that the entire campus is capable of using technology appropriately to enhance teaching and learning.

What Holds Leaders Back

Many leaders advocate a variety of technologies, often to the dismay of the staff who are responsible for the implementation into the curriculum. This has created some headaches that have created a “cyberphobia hangover.”. One vice-chancellor was heard to say after adopting Interactive Television that it would, in most cases, be cheaper to put the faculty member into a limousine and drive them to the distant site. Many times, leaders seem frantic to keep up with innovations at other colleges, not realizing the variety of factors that need to be considered for each individual case. A technology administrator said firmly that at his college, they allowed the president only to discuss one technology per meeting at gatherings of college presidents.

College leaders need to experience the technology that they advocate so that they can judge if the technology will advance teaching and learning within the culture of their particular college. However, many leaders have yet to use even the most ubiquitous of the new technologies. In a recent commercial, statistics were cited that 11% of teenagers had

never surfed the Internet; ca. 34% of CEO's had never been to cyberspace.

Often many of the leaders have assistants to crunch numbers, enter documents, even print and respond to email for them, if they use email. This perceived lack of personal need for computer technology has created unusual conversations with leaders advocating, but using the terminology and the concepts incorrectly. An example of this is asking for WWW sites to be printed out for them. While this is appropriate for some information, in many cases it disables one of the most potent tools of the Web, hypertext links.

With the challenges of competition, accountability, and fiscal constraints, many leaders do not make the time for e-literacy. All though they are aware of the need for technological expertise to keep their graduates competitive in the work place, often they do not connect this need to their own roles. Past attempts at using computers in the bad old days of DOS likely left scars. They would find that the speedier learning curve with Windows could heal these scars, if given a chance.

Walking the Tech Talk

The leader, after completing their literacy training, which should include experiencing at least one online lesson, will be able to:

- use proper "Netiquette" when online (NO SHOUTING)
- send and receive email with attached documents that contain tables or figures
- use a variety of search engines effectively
- send any interesting links they find on the Web via email
- participate in online discussion forums
- participate in chat rooms
- share and retrieve shared files from their local area net.

A one or two-day session, depending on previous skills, plus practice over a few weeks should be sufficient to reach this level.

Setting the Pace

Once leaders are prepared to set the pace, few staff will dare hold back. Communicating widely with email, sending attachments, sending links, and placing files in shared folders will set the expectations for their staff. Leaders should be prepared for some surprises as they find out how many people need hardware or software upgrades to keep up.

Every leader should have a laptop and take it everywhere. (Using it is optional, but recommended.) Adding a projector and a good presentation program to the laptop will raise the bar for others in the college.

Setting up a college-wide staff discussion list will change the communication patterns and technical literacy in the college. Just as email is a motivator for college students to learn

computer skills, keeping up with the latest cross-college chatter can prove motivating for many staff. There will be storm fronts and frustrations at times as people are learning the new culture, but these are necessary growing pains.

A Model for the Followers

Just as for students, a learning model will help the early adopters to keep up the pace. The model below can be altered for each specific college climate, but the elements should be retained.

- Awareness

  Staff need to be informed of the challenges facing colleges and the large role that technology has in meeting these challenges. The college-wide discussion list can serve as a forum to send out salient questions or articles dealing with technology (or other) issues as they come up. Several areas need to be communicated persuasively. Daily, more data is becoming available on the benefits of several of the learning technologies for students and faculty. Issues of global educational demand indicate the need for innovative technical solutions. Sir John Daniel of the Open University states in his book on mega-universities that opening one university per week would not keep pace with the needs of a world population in which 50% are less than 20 years old. He sees that the security of humankind could well depend on education and training providing the values and ethics that are necessary to responsible citizenship. Add to that the benefits of keeping skills current in an uncertain world, then the staff will have several ways to justify their time commitment.

  Staff also need to know what minimum level of skill is expected of them. A quiz or survey can be sent out to measure the current literacy, sent in anonymously if necessary. Just the act of sending out the quiz will raise people's awareness. A certificate can be offered to staff who attain a specified level, or who upgrade to that level.

- Motivation

  Open discussion of the issues will create awareness, but not necessarily motivation.
  Perception
  Staff who have heard horror stories, which tend to travel faster and longer than tales of success, may believe that attaining computer skills is still difficult and time consuming. They need to be told that the ease of use has been increasing dramatically each year. With some of the new computer packages, faculty that are mouse-broken in a Windows environment, for example, can have class email, a web presence, discussion forums and instant chat rooms in 10 minutes. Add to that some of the new templates to create web pages, and they can be ready to post

lecture notes in another 10 minutes. Once they achieve success with this, they will be motivated to see what else they can do with the tools.

Cognitive dissonance

Both the dissemination and discussion of information can foster new attitudes toward learning technologies. College leaders sending email attachments can engender raised expectations. Together this will create some discomfort in staff. When their actions do not match their newly acquired values, the cognitive dissonance can provide the energy to remediate their skills.

- Accessibility of Learning

  Now that the staff are lining up for professional development in technology, workshops will be provided-right? Yes and no. Some staff will want traditional workshops and face-to-face courses, but the leaders must go beyond that to see that training for staff effectively models all the principles that they are espousing for student learning: flexibility of time, place, role and learning style needs. Technology training needs to be provided using independent study options, like See-Do stations that have a computer, television, and VCR together to allow staff to watch training videos and practice at the same time. Providing computer based training and online training will allow faculty to experience these methods before they use them.

  Since staff schedules and time are challenging, support needs to be provided ad hoc in both a support lab and in faculty offices. A comfortable, inviting support centre with all the latest tools and most importantly, friendly, knowledgeable staff is essential.

- Reinforcers

  The majority will be more motivated to use learning technologies if they perceive that the early adopters received some degree of recognition. A yearly showcase of faculty using technology at the college will give some faculty a goal to work towards as well as raising general awareness. Supporting presentations at conferences, publishing efforts in newsletters, web pages or on the college wide discussion list can have the same effects.

- Support

  As with students, the attributions that staff make for any success or failure can critically affect their willingness to keep on. The importance of tactful, caring, support technicians cannot be over-emphasized. These technicians need to be able to solve technical problems, let the staff save face when they make errors, and go the extra mile to make sure that frustrated faculty keep on trying.

- The Power Decree

  Several years ago when seatbelt laws were enacted in many places, government faced the challenge of asking police officers, most of whom refused to wear

seatbelts, to enforce the laws. Through a process of investigating their beliefs, re-educating and insisting that police officers wear seatbelts, government administrators were able to re-calibrate the norm. Officers now routinely uphold the law and drivers routinely wear seatbelts. Experts in the field attribute the success less to re-education and more to the effects of enforced behaviour on attitudes.

People tend to shift their attitudes to coincide with their behaviour when they cannot get away with changing their behaviour. This makes a good case for requiring that every course in every program have a minimum of a class discussion list, Web posted lecture notes, and email submitted assignments, as has been done at some institutes. According to theory, when this is required of staff, they will adjust their attitude and begin to argue for the behaviour. Time will tell if reality matches the theory.

Perpetual Learning

Leaders that have ensured their own personal literacy, set high expectations for their staff either through direction or decree, and provided high quality support for the appropriate use of learning technologies might want to pat themselves on the back. Fair enough. However, it does not stop there.

Leaders have to commit to perpetual learning. Using screen savers that connect to education channels on the Web, membership in newsletters and discussion lists that have push, not pull communication (the information comes to you, unlike Web sites that you must actively visit), and using just-in-time, online learning software must become a routine part of their life.

A visit to Microsoft’s web site shows that Microsoft has the instructions for creating online training businesses. Several of the companies that they recommend to assist with learning online have set up shop and are offering their own training. They have the technical recipe in place---all they do is add a content expert and stir. Some have connections to the University of Phoenix so that their clients can get degree credit. A visit to Microsoft's research pages show that they are working very hard at raising the bar from text to stored and real time audio and video. Anyone who remembers Ivan Illich’s vision of education as being independent of universities and colleges, as being communities of learners gathering in ad hoc or planned meetings to discuss and learn will recognize the power of technology to overcome many of the barriers to this vision.

Leaders need to understand the implications of Microsoft's research, Web-TV, and other impending technologies well enough to assess critically if these need to be adopted or ignored at their college. Throwing all the new technologies into the shopping cart is too costly in both dollars and the diffusion of efforts. For leaders that want their colleges to stay in the mainstream, perpetual learning about technology is not an option.

For more information, please contact;

Irene Laurie
Director, Educational Technology
Sault College
Telephone: (705) 759-2554 ext. 610
E-mail: **irene.laurie@saultc.on.ca**