Managerial Issues in Open and Distance Education Organizations in Transition: A Need for Systematic Approach

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INTRODUCTION

In educational institutions, as in other organizations in contemporary society, traditional purposes and modes of operation are being challenged and changed. In the process of such change, the people who define and constitute institutions are caught up in a transition between eras, a situation that can lead to confusion, alienation, anger, and in some cases, apathy. It can also have the effect of excitement and challenge, sparking creativity and the development of innovative approaches and strategies (Inglis *et al.*, 1999:16). Accordingly, some of the most widely addressed issues in the literature related to education in recent years have been *change* and *transformation*. There seems to be a growing consensus among academics, business people, administrators, and policy makers on the existence of key underlying changes that have been affecting many aspects of higher education in recent decades. Nevertheless, the responses towards how to cope with the changes differ widely, depending on varying perceptions of the impacts, scope, or direction of the changes, and on managerial, financial, legal and visionary capabilities of the institutions.

Due to the confluence of technological advancements and globalization, ODE institutions, and particularly the now traditional 'open universities' operating in developing countries, also are exposed to challenges on many fronts. Traditionally, they have operated with print plus correspondence provision and sometimes audiovisual supplementary resources. Their clientele has tended to be the non-matriculated school leaver or the 'second chance' learner. The quality and status of their courses has sometimes been called into question and their provision has usually been regional or national rather than international.

The emergence of new Internet based learning environments, the increased interest of the traditional face-to-face higher education institutions in ODE, the emergence of private providers and inter-institutional and inter-sector consortia that rely on network-based distance education present challenges to the single-mode ODE institutions, and engender serious concerns regarding the management of these institutions in a highly uncertain and competitive environment. The changes taking place also represent new opportunities for those institutions that can foresee them.

Traditional ODE institutions today feel obliged to deliver online programs, develop strategies to address the increased competition, become innovative in creating and delivering new courses and programs, and find new markets. To do this calls for extensive managerial, organizational, technological, cultural, and financial review and reform.

Most of the research in the ODE literature discusses organizational change and the issue of transition in a piecemeal manner, missing the interconnectedness of the key issues. In different contexts, this research emphasizes the necessity of change; lists the reasons for change and some of the critical issues in the transition to online delivery of programs; makes

suggestions on policies and strategies; cites different measures, problems associated with the transition efforts and examples of successful implementations based mostly on trial and error. Yet, much of the research lacks a broad framework that accurately addresses the full aspect of transition in ODE institutions. While local contexts and circumstances have a significant influence on particular institutions and may limit the number of alternatives available, ODE leaders and practitioners need to have a clearer and broader perspective for effective decision-making.

This paper aims to contribute to better understanding of the issues to be addressed during the transition process in order to realize a more effective and more competitive ODE organization. Its purpose is not to review the literature on organizational change, but rather to ensure that all of the major aspects of the organizational domains (e.g., leadership and management, organizational structure, strategic planning, policy-making, procedures, practices and support systems are taken into account systematically.

ODE INSTITUTIONS AND CHANGE

Flexibility rather than bureaucracy was emphasized in organizations during the 1990s. Organizational and managerial change advocates declared the need for the "post-bureaucratic organization" (Jaffe, 2001:156). Characterized by a transition from a "control-based" organization to a "commitment-based" organization, the new paradigm placed far greater emphasis on the "consumer", "customer" or "client" − in the higher education context, the student or other "stakeholders" such as employers - greater flexibility and responsiveness in structures and systems, and greater transparency in information flow and decision making. It was also stressed that such processes needed to reach down to the lowest levels, that decentralized teams and work units needed to be made accountable for specific products, services, or customers; and that management needed to be participative and teamwork more the norm. This new organizational paradigm was seen as well suited to the rapidly changing conditions (Cummings and Worley, 2001:500).

ODE takes many different forms and has many diverse applications around the world. In some institutions, namely the open universities, ODE is system-wide and all embracing. In bi-modal institutions, offering both face-to-face and distance learning it operates as part of the parent institutions, sometimes centrally and sometimes marginally. Then there are the new types of technology-based university-business consortia and for-profit or corporate providers of open learning that do not fit into the traditional ODE typology. Thus, there can be no unique or distinctive set of change related policies and procedures that are applicable to all kinds of ODE institution. Each and every institution has to consider its own organizational and environmental circumstances. The only common denominator is that, regardless of organizational forms and context, all of the traditional ODE institutions face similar kinds of competition that comes mainly from newly emerging and in some cases global ODE providers.

To adapt to environmental changes, many institutions embark on generic change programs that are considered to be expedient, politically engaging or popular at the time, even if there is little or no empirical evidence that they are effective.

Some examples during the past two decades include downsizing, delayering, reorganization, total quality management, reengineering, self-managed teams, outsourcing, and forming partnerships, approaches that have been developed initially in the business world and then adopted or adapted within the higher education setting. A common mistake that organizations make is implementing a generic change program without a careful diagnosis of the problems confronting the organization. A generic program is not likely to solve an organization's problems by itself, and may make them worse (Beer et al., 1990).

Latchem and Hanna (2001:41) stress that all of the resources and capabilities of an educational or training system or institution should be so designed as to enable the system or institution to work as one. Otherwise, any attempts to introduce open learning into new contexts or to expand small-scale trials into ongoing applications will flounder and fail.

Change processes have to address multiple points of inertia and resistance and have to be systemic rather than piecemeal. They necessitate clearly articulated and commonly accepted learner-centered teaching goals and values, the direct matching of these goals and values to policies, procedures and resources, and clearly identified performance indicators and lines of accountability.

IMPERATIVES FOR CHANGE

Before initiating major changes, leaders need to be clear about the nature of the problems and the objectives of their particular change programs. The first step is to determine the reasons that impel the organization toward change. The organizational diagnosis can be conducted by the top management team, by outside consultants, or by a task force composed of representatives of the various key stakeholders in the organization (Yukl, 2002:278). Such a diagnosis is needed to establish the ways in which the context and circumstances differ. The following suggest major imperatives for change within the context of ODE:

- ➤ *Changed relationships between government and public higher education institutions*: According to Farnham (1999:4-5), higher education is shifting from an elite, introspective, stable system that was traditionally producer-led to a mass, open, unstable one that is increasingly being driven by the sometimes contradictory needs of its 'customers' or 'clients' - governments, employers and students. Universities should reevaluate their missions and responsibilities parallel to these developments in order to understand the nature and expectations of the contemporary university.

- ➤ *Increased competition among organizations that provide distance education for market share and resources:* Whether or not they have traditionally been involved in ODE, most higher education institutions have now started offering online courses. Even though the quality of some of these courses may be questionable, competition between the various types of education providers is expected to increase significantly. Peterson and his colleagues (1997:6) observe that government regulation or deregulation and the trend toward globalization of products and services enforce greater competition.

- ➤ *Rapid increases in the number and variety of educational products (e.g. hardware and software) and new educational technologies*: Technical tools and services change so rapidly that the traditionally slow organizational processes of universities find it hard to keep up. The hardware and software solutions available are changing and proliferating so fast that the universities cannot hope to fund purchases of the latest products (Reid, 1999:19). This is particularly problematic for institutions in developing nations, not only in terms of providing the technology and infrastructure for management, development and delivery within the institutions but for the all-important outreach and student support services in disadvantaged or remote areas. This makes the management of technology in universities difficult. New departments or new support staff may be needed to engage in technology related activities such as evaluation, selection, operation, maintenance of hardware and software, and personnel training.

- ➤ *Emergence of new types of technology-based national, international and global educational providers*: Witnessing successful applications of Web-based education in addressing differing needs of various learner groups (ranging from first-year or

'second chance' learning to ongoing professional training), the number and types of education providers have increased and diversified to include, e.g., competence-based universities, corporate universities, virtual universities and university and university-industry consortia. Now, the competition for students or resources is not simply between higher education institutions; but providers and partnerships that operate more like businesses in the education marketplace.

➢ *Unfamiliar, untested global markets and new customer group*: The Internet allows multimedia programs and courses to be available globally, permitting temporarily and geographically dispersed institutions to offer a hybrid mix of innovative distant independent educational opportunities. Institutions throughout the world offer "learning objects", courses and whole programs online through the Internet and with various other ICT learner support. Yet, these efforts have associated risks and challenge that result from lack of or limited information on local learners and markets.

➢ *Emergence of new learning paradigms*: There are various learning theories, and online courses can be designed according to specific learning theories those themselves have developed with the advancements in ICTs. Several advantages of online learning environments such as rich and diversified multimedia support, enhanced interaction among learners and between learners and tutors and easy updates of course content make possible the application of new learning models of learning (constructivism, collaborative learning, just-in-time, just-for-now and just-for-me learning and so on.

ORGANIZATIONAL DOMAINS AND THEIR CHANGE RELATED IMPLICATIONS

The table below suggests the relevant organizational domains and their policy implications with regard to transitional issues. Each individual domain will be discussed in detail.

Table 1:
Organizational Domains and Their Change Related Implications

Domains	Implications
Leadership and Management	Leading change; transformational and servant type leadership; sound management practices; management under uncertainty.
Organization Structure	Flexible organization structure; organizational changes congruent with online delivery; redesigning processes and procedures; decision-making process; teamwork; communication process.
Strategy	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis; adaptation to uncertain environment; market analysis; developing competitive strategies; interorganizational linkages.
Technology	Evaluating learning technologies; infrastructure planning; upgrading IT infrastructure for online delivery; developing policies, standards, and guidelines; cost-benefit analysis; management of technology; training personnel;
Human Resources	Recruitment, staff development, buying in or contracting out; motivation; employee empowerment; reward systems.
Culture	Changing and managing culture; culture as a competitive advantage;

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management issues take the first priority as higher education and ODE have been experiencing dramatic environmental and organizational changes. Like other education providers, ODE institutions need to transform themselves radically and ODE leaders should be capable of leading this transformation. Dhanarajan (2001:66) notes that distance education requires sound leadership and management, and "untested leadership" may harm efforts for change. It is often the case, particularly in developing countries, that those entrusted with running the institutions of higher learning perceive their role as more managerial and administrative rather than as concerned with leadership for academic and educational development. Leaders with a capacity to manage the rapid rate of change must be found and empowered. Ackoff (1999:283-5) writes that *leadership* requires an ability to bring the will of followers into consonance with that of the leader so they follow him or her voluntarily, with enthusiasm and dedication. Transformational leaders are characterized by the ability to bring about change, innovation, and entrepreneurship. In the postmodern paradigm, *servant* type leadership is also emphasized, as managers serve employees who in turn serve customers (Daft, 2001:16, 354).

Organizational transformation implies radical changes in how members perceive, think, and behave at work. These changes go far beyond making the existing organization better or fine-tuning the status quo. They are concerned with fundamentally altering the organizational assumptions about how the organization functions and how it relates to the environment. Changing these assumptions entails significant shifts in the organization's philosophy and values and in the numerous structures and organizational arrangements that shape members' behaviors (Cummings and Worley, 2001:499). In many institutions in developed and developing countries alike, teaching staff do not see themselves as change agents but as providing continuity in education, and do not see themselves operating in an "extended role" encompassing reflective practice, adopting new methodologies and technologies, or being the "guide on the side rather than the sage on the stage".

The responsibilities of ODE leaders have become ever more demanding due to the complexities and uncertainties of the higher education environment. They need to achieve the following critical objectives simultaneously:

- ➢ transform their organizations into more flexible systems that are more responsive to constant change;
- ➢ enhance the level of competitiveness of their organization;
- ➢ enable their institutions to embrace online delivery options.

These tasks need to be carried out mostly through teamwork. This calls for far greater consultation, collaboration and openness than exists in many traditional higher education institutions and a great understanding of the external environmental dynamics, as well as the internal structures and processes of the organization. Yukl (2002:288) discusses the role of senior management in the change process:

> *The essential role of top management is to formulate an integrating vision and general strategy, build a coalition of supporters who endorse the strategy, then guide and coordinate the process by which the strategy will be implemented. Instead of specifying detailed guidelines for change at all levels of the organization, it is much better to encourage middle and lower-level managers to transform their own units in a way that is consistent with the vision and strategy. Top management should provide encouragement, support, and necessary resources to facilitate change, but should not try to dictate how to do it.*

Leaders cannot be knowledgeable or perfect in every aspect. Latchem and Hanna (2001:61) observe that it is impossible for governmental or institutional leaders to have the instincts, skills, sensitivities, judgmental capacities, and technical knowledge to be on top of every agenda in ODE. They must therefore seek out the most knowledgeable professionals within or beyond their system or institution. They must also be capable of achieving an accommodation between new ideas and recommendations and existing subcultures so that these new insights can be translated into good practice.

Organization Structure

There are four important attributes that are characteristic of all organizations: division of labor, basis for departmentalization, size of departments, and delegation of authority. Leaders and managers need to review existing structures and ensure that they are commensurate with the changing vision and working well. The leaders and managers also need to take into account job design factors, individual departmental differences, task competences, technology, environmental uncertainty, strategy, and the individual characteristics of their sub-managers (Gibson *et al.*, 2000:325). Today's organizations that operate in a chaotic environment need flexible and decentralized structures that emphasize horizontal cooperation (Daft, 2001:16).

The concept of ODE is changing because distance education is evolving in a networked world (Oblinger, 2001:9). The online environment, with its requirement for integrated systems, has dramatically increased collaboration among divisions, notably the library, academic administration, student services, information technology and learning services (Calvert, 2001:16). Jaffe (2001:156) asserts that if an organization is committed to teamwork and cross-functional interaction, as is the case with ODE, people cannot be physically separated but must be provided with a physical layout and space that allows and encourages interaction and exchange. In fact, congruence in thinking, physical access and shared commitment and respect for others' knowledge and skills may be of greater importance that organizational structure. Too many institutions address the issue of structure before addressing these all-important human factors.

Extensive adaptation is needed in transforming traditional ODE institutions into online providers. Such work may entail establishing new units, new communication relationships, new personnel, and new forms of training for faculty and other staff. Bi-modal institutions may face additional challenges in the transition because they have to adopt and utilize online delivery alongside their existing delivery mechanisms (face-to-face or print- or multimedia-based). This may require extra effort to overcome the differences in accomplishing tasks, communications and teamwork.

It is important to remember that the learning outcomes, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of using the Internet in ODE activities will be only as good as the underlying content, methodologies, delivery and other aspects of the corresponding implementation (Trindade, *et. al.*, 2000:15).

Strategy

Strategy can be defined as explicit choices about markets, offerings, technology, and distinctive competence. Leaders and managers have to decide what products and services to offer to which markets and how to distinguish their organization from other organizations in ways that will provide a sustainable competitive advantage. Once this is done, long-term strategic objectives must be refined into a set of internally consistent short-term objectives and supporting strategies (Nadler and Tushman, 1997:30).

The perceived profitability of e-learning has attracted many new publicly-funded and for-profit providers into the field of distance education. To deal with this competition, ODE leaders should explore and consider the appropriate strategic options open to them -

nationally and globally. Vertical integration, cost, leadership, product differentiation, and forming alliances are among the strategies currently emphasized in the organizational literature.

Tapsall (2001:42) suggests that if distance education is to fulfill a meaningful function in the university of the 21st century, its proponents and practitioners must first decide whether they primarily service distance needs or disadvantaged students, or whether they facilitate 'instant' education and training for those looking for flexible learning opportunities. Inglis *et al.* (1999:16), stress that in the transition process, an early step should be to conduct an opportunity or market analysis to determine the nature of the market opportunities, the size of the market, and the needs of the learners.

One of the realities is that the entire world has become an educational and training market place due to the developments in ICT. The Internet enables educational providers to reach the most remote parts of the world that have computer networks. Hence, organizational strategies, planning activities, and market studies should assume a global point of view, and proactively address threats and opportunities in the global market, the needs, characteristics, and cultural, social, economic differences among prospective students, and the case for and form of a more truly internationalized curriculum.

The ODE literature emphasizes collaboration with other education providers or business firms, such as strategic alliances and partnerships. Oblinger (2001: 12-3) claims that the services provided by ODE institutions (e.g. curriculum development, content development, assessment and advising) can be disaggregated into various components, and these services contracted out, as is commonly done in manufacturing and IT industries. Similarly, there can be a division of labor between the academic institutions, responsible for the knowledge, content, pedagogy and educational delivery, and corporate partners, responsible for the marketing, technology and profitability of the enterprise. As Oblinger observes, integrating and managing relationships with a host of external providers complicates the management of the operation even while providing greater flexibility and strategic reach.

Some ODE institutions and faculty worry about establishing partnership with business firms. Dhanarajan (2001:65-6) succinctly articulates this fear as the following:

> *"The alienation of the larger academic community is a distinct possibility. The economic community is sadly beginning to see the 'new' distance education as a partnership between big business and university administration, driven mostly by business interests. The community fears a loss of academic freedom, jobs, erosion of intellectual property rights, and quality. There is a need to win the support of the community as part of good practice".*

Similarly, Jarman and Blacburn (1997:330) argue that university-corporate linkages will result in universities adopting short-term thinking, and thereby restrict academics' abilities to engage in thoroughgoing, in-depth and sustained research efforts that result in important intellectual developments.

Technology

Learning technologies will have both a weaker and stronger influence on the quality of university teaching and learning outcomes. The weaker and more immediate influence will be technology enhancing current teaching practices by providing increased access to knowledge and information sources, improved presentation quality and increased opportunities for interaction. In this regard, technology is an *add-on* and reinforces existing delivery methods and outcomes. The stronger influence of technology is that it will improve the quality of learning outcomes (i.e. developing critical thinkers) and encourage far more

faculty to adopt approaches to teaching and learning congruent with such outcomes (Garrison and Anderson, 2000:25).

At the institutional level, the introduction of new technologies for online delivery has the capacity to bring about changes that resist compartmentalization; in effect, new information technologies transform institutional culture. This means that the changes in the area of information technology require analysis and planning for implementation in areas that reach beyond the technical realm. Indeed, such changes involve:

> *systems* issues (i.e. the technical and human infrastructure required and the institution's capacity to provide it);
> *producer* issues (i.e. the ways in which knowledge can be constructed in online learning environments);
> *user* issues (i.e. the ease of access to, and connections between, online materials, in addition to the quality of those materials) (Reid, 1999:19).

Today, most higher education institutions want to become involved with e-learning. Unfortunately, not all give careful attention to its pedagogical implications. Also, according to Dhanarajan (2001:64), just having the newest technologies cannot solve all of the problems of educational deprivation around the world. The real problems are access to the technology, lack of skills to use the technology for teaching and learning, and the cost of buying and renewing technologies. Besides a lack of human capabilities to use these technologies, the inability of many governments in the developing world to build the necessary physical infrastructure means that enthusiasm and rhetoric are unmatched by commitment and reality. Moreover, the costs associated with online delivery need careful consideration because they may very well push up the cost of distance education (Rumble, 2001:224).

The advantages of technological innovation cannot be taken for granted. Many of such educational innovations are not systematically evaluated or are evaluated and reported on by people with a stake in the innovation, and the findings therefore questionable. Indeed, most analyses of learning technologies indicate no significant difference in learning outcomes where new technologies are employed (Inglis *et al.*, 1999:20).

The use of ICT in university teaching must have a specific purpose, must chart a definite path to realize a specific goal, and must use a cognitively sound justification within a defined context. The issue is not that of hardware and software. It also encompasses access, equity, appropriateness, value added to learning, competence in faculty and technical support staff, cost effectiveness and cost benefit, the creation of new learning environments, and consideration of the social and cultural milieu in which the technology is put to work (Jegede, 2000:48-49).

Human Resources

ODE calls for the development of many new capabilities and requires multiple specialists to collaborate in developing learning infrastructures, systems and programs. It is therefore vitally important to invest in developing staff's knowledge and skills at all levels to help them deal with the changed roles, functions and responsibilities that go along with these changes. It is also important to establish high professional criteria for recruitment, policies and procedures for enhancing teaching quality, standard-based performance assessment, resources and advanced accreditation for ongoing staff development, and incentives and career paths for good instructors (Latchem and Hanna, 2001:48).

Current staff development rarely adequately supports faculty members required to create self-instructional materials. The range of skills required to function in a multimedia environment is even more demanding. Institutions are quite enthusiastic about investing in

new equipment, software programs and connections, but very unrealistic when it comes to investing to training. (Dhanarajan, 2001:65).

In the postmodern discourse, organization members are often empowered to make decisions once reserved for managers, and emphasis on a clear and powerful vision or mission helps to ensure that decisions are made to achieve the organization's overriding purpose (Daft, 2001:16).

The employment of digital technologies for the provision of educational and training programs requires expertise, some of which is very new. Moreover, the range of expertise that education and training providers need in order to support these new media is continually changing as technologies develop and software is updated. This expertise can be acquired by recruitment, staff development, or buying-in or contracting-out (Inglis *et al.*, 1999:85). The convergence of technologies obviously means that a shift will be necessary in instructors' profiles and roles. They will become mediators between students and their access to information provided by various resources (Trindade *et. al.*, 2000:6).

Culture

Culture can be instrumental in underpinning or undermining a flexible, responsive organization. Schein defines culture as:

> *"A pattern of basic assumptions -invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with the problems of external adaptation and internal integration- that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems." (Gibson et al., 2000:30)*

Leaders and managers need to change or recreate an organizational culture that can serve their goals. Unfortunately, there is a limited amount of research on cultural change in ODE and higher education in general to guide them. The difficulty in creating a culture is made even more complex when attempting to bring about a significant cultural change (Gibson *et al.*, 2000:34-5). Moreover, it is much more difficult to change culture in mature organizations. One of the reasons for this is that many of the underlying beliefs and assumptions shared by people in an organization are implicit, unconscious and yet constantly reinforced. Cultural assumptions are also difficult to change when they justify the past and are a matter of professional and personal pride. Drastic changes are unlikely unless there is a major crisis threatening the survival of the organization (Yukl, 2002:283).

ODE managers need to identify the dominant culture in their organization and attempt to affect or manage it in a systematic way in line with organizational goals. McNay (1995:105-6) suggests that there are four cultures in the academic environment: *collegium*, *bureaucracy*, *corporation*, and *enterprise*. All four co-exist in most universities, but with different balances among them. These differences depend on a range of factors including, traditions, mission, leadership and external pressures. The role of the management differs in the four cultures. In the *collegium* model, the keyword is freedom. This model defines organizational expectations: institutional freedom from external controls, mainly by the government, and academic autonomy. This tends to be the overriding culture in traditional higher education institutions. In the *bureaucracy* model, found in developed and developing countries alike, regulation becomes important. It may be a good model for maintenance in stability, but not for rapid change. In the *corporation* model, power is emphasized; this is a culture for crisis, not continuity. In the *enterprise* culture, the keyword is "client". Key decisions should be located close to the client, within a well-defined general policy framework, and the good of the client should be the dominant criterion for decision-making. This is the model that many higher education and ODE institutions are now being urged to

adopt. It represents a major shift from the collegium or bureaucratic models and carries with it the danger of education becoming contaminated by purely commercial values.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

For successful transition, ODE leaders and managers should consider several factors. First, universities are unique organizations with special characteristics such as division of power between faculty and administration in all governance structures and processes, a lack of agreement and ambiguity of institutional goals, fragmentation and disintegration of different groups and the lack strategic direction and consensus (Sporn, 1999:35).

Secondly, the environment and organizational status of ODE institutions will determine the level of autonomy they can exert in their change efforts. Public institutions tend to be restricted by legal, managerial or financial factors more than private institutions. Similarly, ODE institutions or centres may need to seek the consent of their parent organizations if they are part of a larger organization (e.g. strategic alliances, consortia, dual-mode universities, etc). Government policies towards education and educational institutions, leadership and managerial capabilities of the ODE management team, the culture within the organization will be influential in the decision-making process.

Thirdly, there is the issue of resistance to change. Different parts of organizations will respond to environmental changes in different ways. Core units which actually deliver programs, primarily the academic units in a higher education setting, may be the most resistant to change and most anxious to return to their own standard procedures and adherence to routine. Buffer units, primarily senior administration, which shield the core from the environment and help, or force, the core to adapt when necessary will ask about what they are doing and why. They will attempt to cope with change via top-down planning (Loon, 2001:296). Many professors dislike the idea of stronger management, marketing, efficiency, and financial controls as well as institutional strategies that tend to confine the kind of academic growth. In addition, many scholars are more loyal to their disciplines and professional peers than their particular institutions (Peterson, *et. al.*, 1997:6). This means that is often far less easy to call for or assume "loyalty" than in the corporate world.

Fourthly, to evaluate the feasibility of various strategies for accomplishing major change in the organization, a leader must understand the political processes, the distribution of power, and the identity of people whose support is necessary to make the change happen. Moreover, before beginning a major change effort, it is useful to identify likely supporters and opponents. Successful change in an organization requires cooperative efforts by people who have the power to facilitate or block change. It is essential to build a coalition of supporters inside and outside the organization (Yukl, 2002:289).

The cost factor may limit the implementation of some of the prospective change initiatives. Considering most of the higher education institutions have to function with limited financial resources, a careful cost-benefit analysis is crucial to identify the change programs that will be undertaken.

Management and organizational theory, especially organizational change literature, has great potential for university administrators in dealing with change related issues and challenges associated with turbulent environment. However, incautious and inappropriate utilization of the concepts and approaches of the business world can cause some contradictions. Copying or importing concepts used in business contexts will be risky because of the unique characteristics of higher education organizations. Also, in the current dramatically changed economic climate with all of its corporate scandals, there may well be healthy skepticism of some of the teachings of the latter-day corporate "gurus". The appropriateness and feasibility of each concept and application must be examined thoroughly before applying them in ODE

context. This particularly applies in institutions in countries that have not yet fully embraced other the cultural manifestations and organizational practices that characterize "western approaches". There is still great need for an ODE literature that covers transitional issues and examples of successful practices and that will provide a sound source of knowledge on which ODE leaders can base their judgments and decisions.

CONCLUSION

Leaders of ODE institutions may hold many concerns for the future of their institutions with the impact of technological and global change. The increased demand for greater and more equitable access, lifelong learning and rapid developments in ICT are leading many traditional universities to become involved with online delivery and the market is attracting many new technology-oriented alliances and corporate providers. The difference between traditional universities and distance education institutions has become blurred as support traditionally only available on campus is now available to the off-campus student through the Internet and ICT-based study centres and the classroom learning opened to the vast knowledge and information base of the Web. Even though the current situation may look more parlous for some of the traditional ODE institutions and centres, there are enormous opportunities with the increased global reach and new learning environments such as e-learning. To take advantage of these opportunities, ODE leaders need to prepare their organizations for change in the new competitive environment.

If ODE leaders are to successfully transform their organizations, they need to have a clear and systemic approach. Before initiating any change program, they should have a clear idea of organizational capabilities.   Leaders must ask the following key questions. What are strengths and weaknesses of the organization? What are the opportunities and threats in the environment? Then, they need a vision of the direction of the change efforts. Next, they should focus on leadership and management, organization structure, strategy, technology, human resources, and organizational culture and determine individual policy implications of these organizational aspects before implementation of specific change programs. The outcomes of the change efforts should be measured and corrective actions should be taken if there is any deviation between the intended and real outcomes. Then, ODE management communicates the reformulated mission, strategy, and policies among organization members. The final step is to institutionalize successful change initiatives in order to make them a permanent part of the organization.

For a successful implementation of the change programs, ODE leaders should keep in mind that higher education institutions have unique characteristics with certain internal and external constraints. They should expect certain level of resistance to change efforts and need to know how to deal with the resistance. In addition, they should consider the trade-off associated with the planned change programs, and take advantage of the ODE literature, management and organization theory, and organizational change theory.

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