Chapter 6

The Importance of Distance Education Experts in the Organizational Development Process of Distance Education Institutions:
A Theoretical Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of new technologies has forced all nations to adopt new perspectives regarding the intense competition process. Educational institutions are expected to compete in such a state that it has become paramount for these institutions to manage this paradigm shift. With newly developing areas of expertise, management of distance education institutions is rapidly becoming a process in need of delicate attention. As such, this chapter studies the need for new perspectives and approaches in this process of change regarding distance education institutions and their organizational development process. The matter of expertise in this field is discussed, along with the qualities of distance education experts and their role in the organizational development induced by this paradigm shift. Lastly, recommendations for future research and applications are made regarding the process of change itself, in both institutional and educational capacities and regarding individuals in this field, specifically experts guiding this change.

INTRODUCTION

In the knowledge society, the knowledge economy represents an increasingly important reality for the whole world. The reason for this lies in how knowledge has become imperative in global competition and development as a strategic determinant. Therefore all nations are giving top priority to competing as a knowledge society in their economic and social development policies. In

order to create high-value products in terms of the knowledge economy, it carries utmost importance to improve research and development processes along with the development of technology based professional development activities (Dahlman, Routti & Ylä-Anttila, 2007; Jessop, 2012).

Educational policies are defined by the basic principles that guide all the decisions, steps and applications put forth in achieving the goals of either an educational system in general, or those of an educational organization within that system (Balcı, 2010, p.50). For the educational policies of nations to achieve their goals, all educational systems are supposed to make use of certain strategic resources. In addition to financial and physical resources, the most valuable resource for educational systems is human resources. Measures taken to ensure that the human resources available have been trained in accordance with the requirements of this age allows for highly qualified human resources, which also carries great importance for nations to achieve their national goals (Şişman & Taşdemir, 2008).

The potential of educational organizations to be able to internalize the process of change within the information society is related to how much it has embraced and put into practice, continuous learning or the culture of organizational learning. One of the most important reasons for this is that in learning organizations individuals feel themselves to be more ready for change, rather than being resistant to it. The managers of educational organizations, who are positioned within the focus of the process of social change and who are expected to direct this process, are able to use the strength of the culture of organizational learning within the process of organizational change, as the people who are acting as the leaders of learning organizations, within this context (Çelik, 2009).

All organizations have a great need for organizational development experts within the process of organizational development. Organizational development experts are in particular qualified in areas such as the nurturing of the human resources held by the organization, the management of any disputes which may occur within the organization, the consultancy process and communication between groups within the organization, during the process of change (Dunphy, Griffiths & Benn, 2007, p.315).

In recent years, higher education institutions have been making efforts to develop a new perspective in management and leadership processes, in order to be able to perform the responsibilities expected of them by the community, in an efficient manner. In order for higher education institutions to be able to reach the targets they have determined for the future, they also need – from time to time – to take strategic decisions concerning the change of their organizational structure, or restructuring. Without doubt, this process also emphasizes the requirement of effective leadership for the process of transformation within higher education institutions (Cleveland-Innes & Sangrà, 2010).

In the historical development process, distance education has become a process whose importance is increasing together with the influence of the three fundamental variables which have surfaced since the industrial revolution. These variables meet the various social needs of individuals within the process of change, the new developments occurring in information and communications technologies and the fact of social change, as well as those of educational institutions, in a fast and practical way and carry an expectation that the adaptation competences of individuals to the process of change increase. Newly developed technologies have, on their own, a characteristic which triggers the process of change. Therefore, newly developed technologies also make a significant contribution to the shaping of the organizational structures of distance education organizations (Miller, 2010, p.26).

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