Chapter 13
Effective Educational Leadership in the Digital Age:
An Examination of Professional Qualities and Best Practices

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to develop and promote a realistic understanding of leadership in higher education in a digital learning environment. This is critical to supporting current generations of students also known as digital natives in the digital age. This chapter also discusses the importance of immediacy in educational leaders in education, and its ability to allow both learners and leaders to work together in an environment that promotes teaching and fosters meaningful learning. Leadership challenges discussed include lack of communication between leadership, students, and employees, maintaining quality with diminished resources. Best practices discussed include setting the pace, developing the human capital, and developing the school as an organizational unit and also promote individual responsibility and leadership accountability. Finally, workplace behaviors such as effective leadership behavior and role modeling, interaction between leaders, stakeholders, and the promotion of mutual understanding are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most discussed issues in society today is leadership in the academic field in a digital environment. There is hardly a day that goes by currently without reference to leadership and leading (Hunt, 2004). This view is mainly bolstered by the belief that the success or failure of every community depends mainly on the type and performance its leadership (Pounder, Ogawa & Adams, 1995; Leithwood & Riehl,

2003). According to Storey (2004), there were 136 articles on leadership in 1970-71. This increased to 258 between 1980-81, 1,105 in 1990-91, and leapfrogged to an astounding 10,062 in 2001-2002. Likewise, a research done on the concept of educational leadership between 1988-1995 revealed a total of 121 articles on leadership out of 716 articles (Leithwood & Duke, 1999).

The challenge for academia is to find a viable remedy that counters the greater pressure from society for educational institutions to acquire and retain effective leadership and management if they are to ensure student success in a digital learning environment. As the synergy between global economies grow, governments have recognized that their success depends mainly on well-trained work force. This consensus means retaining dedicated and well-trained teachers, who in turn will depend on effective leadership and management support (Bush, 2007). We believe that this chapter will be part of a growing array of catalysts designed to help alleviate the concerns about leadership preparation and performance in higher education. It can also serve as a reference point for stakeholders as they strive to attract the best leadership brains for academia.

BACKGROUND

Theoretical Perspectives

Presently there is no consensus on the nature of educational leadership and management. The question is; is educational leadership part of the wider branch of management? To answer this question there is the need to take a closer look at the purposes and goals of educational organizations (Bush, 2007). According to Bush (2007), the process of deciding the goals of an organization depends on educational management. For instance, in most educational institutions, the broad aims are decided by the president or chancellor, mostly working in concert with the senior management and in most cases the organization's governing body (Bush, 2007).

The problem educational leaders' face is that school policies are strongly influenced by the twin forces of government and society. In addition, leaders also need to consider the changing nature of teaching and learning in a digital age with the advent of the World Wide Web and the Internet. Thus, schools are often burdened with the problem of working to satisfy external directives rather than determining their goals based on their own assessment of student needs often to safeguard the funding sources (Bush, 2007). The dilemma for educational leadership and management is whether to modify government policy to suite them or follow government directives.

A research on leadership by Heck and Halinger (1999) revealed that an enormous support existed for the accumulation of knowledge by educational leaders and its influence on education. The literature also reveals that leadership remains the main focus in terms of accountability and school reorganization in a digital learning environment (Stewart, 2006). In order to help schools achieve their potential, we need to target committed leaders with the right knowledge and skill sets to tackle the ever increasing and complex demands of academia (Stewart, 2006).

Evidently, there is a belief in business and organizations that the subject of leadership has always been the main driving force that stands at the heart of every community. In addition, the subject of leadership has always been the main focus of the academic field of educational administration. This is especially true as seen in the recent upsurge of centers of excellence in leadership established in every department

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