Chapter 19
Applying STREAMS to the Management of Organizational Change in Distance Education

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ABSTRACT

Strategic Resource for Educational and Management Success (STREAMS) was developed during a series of developmental projects over a fifteen-year period. It has grown out of the dual influences of commercial and education strategic planning practices. It was intended to make the complex task of strategic planning simpler so that non-professionals could use it as a guide to manage the process, involve stakeholders, follow its logically progressing path, and rely on it as a template for the completed and published product. In this chapter, STREAMS is suggested as an important tool for managing organizational change in distance education providers.

INTRODUCTION

Distance Education (DE) is an avenue of teaching and learning that continues to evolve. Previous definitions and descriptions of DE are not necessarily accurate in the current environment. Changing technology is ushering in a new era of student access from remote parts of the globe. Indeed, globalization is also making previously excluded markets available to DE providers. The new environment is highly competitive, rapidly changing and bristling with many new players competing for a growing number of students. New ways of combining on- and off-campus learning are also becoming more prevalent. Despite the greater opportunities for their participation in the global marketplace, how well DE providers can continue to adapt will greatly affect not only their relevance—and subsequently their market share—but also their longevity in that marketplace.

The ability to adjust and adapt quickly may be key factors in determining DE providers' future success and even viability. To build in adaptability,

DE providers need to formulate and adjust their strategy in a dynamic loop involving those at the service end of their organization, such as specialists, students as key stakeholders and management. However, there seem to be no models currently in existence to assist DE providers with a mechanism to manage this process of strategic planning in management at a time of change at a rate not previously experienced within the sector. This chapter introduces Strategic Resource for Educational and Management Success (STREAMS) as a user-friendly model designed to guide the process of strategic planning. It is as much a process as a final product and is intended to promote inclusivity of all stakeholders in the process.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance Education (DE) is an avenue of teaching and learning which evolved in its earliest iteration (correspondence study) in order to provide possibilities for those who could not enter academe via the traditional pathways. However, over the years, DE wore the mantle of the 'poor cousin' in terms of educational experience. As Gunawardena and McIsaac (2004, pp. 356–357) write:

Correspondence study, which was designed to provide educational opportunities for those who were not among the elite and who could not afford full time residence at an educational institution, was looked down on as inferior education. Many... correspondence courses were viewed as simply poor excuses for the real thing.

However, during the past few decades, especially, distance education as a field in its own right has witnessed rapid changes in the transition from predominately a print-based correspondence form of teaching to an environment inclusive of e-learning and/or multimodal practices (Willems, 2005). As such, the former delineation between distance (off-campus) and on-campus learning is becoming blurred, with hybrid possibilities lying between. According to a survey of online learning in the United States, Allen and Seaman (2010, p. 6) report that enrolments in online courses are growing at the rate of 21 percent per annum in that country compared to the general enrolment growth rate of 2 percent. These extraordinary growth statistics indicate that distance education is no longer a peripheral activity to the primacy of on-campus learning in the context of higher education. Rather, DE is fast becoming the 'main game'. This, in turn, has key implications for DE providers in terms of strategic planning for change management.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic planning has been accepted as a vital process for organizations to undertake in recent decades. Strategic planning is described by Hill and Jones (1998) as a strategy that is the result of a rational planning process undertaken by top management of (an) organization. Recent practice in strategic planning has seen a decentralization of the process from top management to include mid-level and service level members of an organization. The work of Mintzenberg (1990) has contributed to the further merging of strategic planning and strategic management practices. The research of Bonn and Christodolou (1996) has shown the changes that have occurred in Australia in recent times.

Many organizations attempt a strategic planning process for implementing change but become derailed by the complexities of the problems that are uncovered during the process. Strategic planning processes, however, should help maintain a clear focus on the direction and celebrate key milestones along the way. All too often, a determined executive team will drive a strategic planning process to fulfil performance expectations of their roles and promote specific courses of action while ignoring the values of including

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