

Chapter 112

Leadership in Global Open, Online, and Distance Learning

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ABSTRACT

Global open online, and distance learning call for innovation and new strategies at all levels because of current paradigm shifts and global trends towards increased digitization in all sectors in society. Thus, the educational sector must focus on new trends in executive leadership, shifting paradigms, innovative approaches to distributed leadership, and management practice. The sections in this chapter consider why we have to re-think leadership and why the demands of leadership in global open, online, and distance learning have to innovate, change and be rethought. The main topics elaborated in this chapter are increased digitization and societal issues, global open online and distance learning, and finally leadership in global open online learning arenas. In conclusion, leaders must embrace and be in the forefront in the areas of teaching, research, governance and society for the transitions to personal global open online learning.

INTRODUCTION

Global higher education is more comprehensive and more challenging than ever before because of current paradigm shifts and global trends. Open, online, and distance learning call for innovation and new strategies at all levels. Thus, the educational sector must focus on new trends in executive leadership, shifting paradigms, innovative approaches to distributed leadership, management practice, continuous improvement in quality, and new regional, national, and global partnership models. Leaders should be empowered to examine their leadership approaches and incorporate the input from colleagues to reformulate these approaches.

The major challenges predicted for both the future of higher education and the university of 2020/2030 include the following: globalization, urbanization, changing demographics, economic growth, the knowledge-based economy, the information society with superhighways to information, increased digitization, the labor market, job transfers, and mobility (Latchem, 2016; European Commission, 2013; OECD,

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2007; UNESCO, 2015a; UNESCO-COL, 2016). Several global stakeholders, such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), and the European Commission have called for opening up education to meet today's global demands and challenges and the visions for 2030. UNESCO (2015a) stated that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should provide inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels: early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational training, thus underscoring education for all in addition to universal lifelong learning opportunities. The European Commission's *Opening up Education* initiative emphasizes modernizing education and promoting innovations in teaching and learning through several formats, such as open educational resources (OER), massive open online courses (MOOCs), information and communication technology (ICT), and digital competencies, as well as infrastructure, interoperability, equity, quality, visibility, licensing, and certification (European Commission, 2013). The Commission adopted a new and comprehensive New Skills Agenda for Europe, which focuses on improving the quality and relevance of skills formation, increasing the visibility and comparability of skills and qualifications, as well as improving skills intelligence and information to enable better career choices. The aim of this initiative is to ensure that people develop a broad set of skills early in life in order for Europe to make the most of human capital, which will ultimately boost employability, competitiveness, and growth in Europe. Critical thinking, entrepreneurship, problem solving, and digital competences are just some of the competences enshrined by the New Skills Agenda. These skills have emerged as key in allowing people to attain quality jobs and fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens (European Commission, 2016).

Moreover, there are increased opportunities for personal learning for all through open and free courses offered by prestigious universities, which are available anytime, anywhere, for anyone, and on any device. It is undoubtedly true that technology has transformed the way we live, what we do, and how we, and future generations, will live and think. The current task for higher education is to educate students to solve global problems of tomorrow, and likewise to prepare for jobs that do not yet exist, and as well as to prepare them to be responsible global digital citizens and future leaders. Therefore, access, equity, lifelong and lifewide learning, and quality remain as the main challenges in the task of opening up education around the globe (UNESCO, 2015a). Accordingly, challenged based learning is and should be the key approach for teaching and learning. Consequently, higher education institutions must re-think the concept of quality in education and research. To date, higher education institutions use citation statistics to rank and measure quality, instead of taking into account what the global society perceives as good education and research. The community could care less about citations, but they are interested in research that solves major global societal challenges. If the scientific community met society's expectations of what research should produce by challenging their own—perhaps introverted—way of measuring good research, they might discover other ways of measuring quality. De Millo (2015) argued that the current system of higher education is clearly unsustainable. Colleges and universities are in a financial crisis. Tuition fees rise inexorably. Graduates of reputable schools often fail to learn basic skills, and many cannot find suitable jobs. Meanwhile, student loan default rates have soared, while the elite ivy and near-ivy league schools seem remote and irrelevant. There is also a key tension in education today, first, learning goals are not only established in external settings but also initiated by learners. and second, learning contexts are both guided and self-guided.

In society and in educational settings, digital transformation requires insight into technological opportunities, organizational conditions, and user requirements. Digitization can have positive effects on the world of work, for professionals, organizations, businesses, and third parties. In order for the full

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