Towards a Multimodal Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy at a South African University

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the imperatives posed by the development of modern ICT on the teaching, learning and assessment strategy of a higher education institution. These include several strategies in different key areas that need to be put in place. Key qualities of mind, drawing on both analytical and emotional abilities in people who are star performers in a fast-paced ICT environment are discussed.

Many reasons can be cited for the imperatives posed by the development of modern ICT. We discuss only three identified by Morrison and Oblinger (n.d.) as driving forces: Technology itself, diversity of students and learning.

At the Rand Afrikaans University the dynamic interaction between these driving forces led to the development of an integrated multimodal teaching and learning strategy (which aims to integrate different educational technologies while presenting a course). This strategy also aims to guide, promote and support student learning. Learning is seen as the active construction of personal knowledge by the student, taking into account the learners’ needs and characteristics.

These changes can only successfully be implemented when the people that should lead the change display visionary leadership with specific characteristics and implementing the following crucial steps while transforming the learning environment: Mobilise commitment to change, Develop a shared vision, Foster competence to implement an enthusiasm to move, Spread the change without pushing too much from the top, Institutionalise change through policies and structures, Monitor and adjust in response to problems and Position the change project to maximize success.

Leaders foster change, while managers do maintenance work. Leaders create the future, while managers sustain the present. The function implicit in this belief is constructive or adaptive change. Leadership can achieve this through establishing direction, aligning motivating and inspiring people.

The real challenge of change leadership lies in the ability of leaders to build organisations that are continuously renewing themselves – learning organisations. New leadership skills for learning organisations include building a shared vision, surfacing and testing mental models, encouraging team learning and practising systems thinking (Senge, 1990 in Dar-El, 2000). In order to drive and develop this kind of learning organisation, the people involved in these processes should display the following characteristics (Moss-Kanter, 2001): Curiosity and imagination, are adept at communication with others, be cosmopolitans who are able to understand and create bridges of thought, grasp complexity, are sensitive to the range of human needs as well as to the messages conveyed by actions that create organisational cultures, work with other people as resources rather than as subordinates and lead through the power of their ideas and the strength of their voices more than through the authority of formal positions.