

EXAMINING BARRIERS TO DISTANCE EDUCATION

Review is an often-overlooked word in the title of this journal. Certainly, *review* includes Karen Murphy's efforts as book review editor and Eric Plotnik's excellent summaries of manuscripts included in the ERIC system. Additionally, Charles Schlosser and I will review interesting articles from other publications. I would like to begin that tradition by reviewing a paper by Zane Berge and Lin Muilenburg that was recently published in the *Distance Learning Administration Annual 2000*. This paper dealt with their research on the barriers to distance education as perceived by managers and administrators. It is an interesting article for several reasons. First, it identifies those barriers as perceived as most important. Second, it also identifies the least important barriers to distance education. Finally, it is a fairly well constructed study that can be generalized and that can be used in decision making.

Berge and Muilenburg first reviewed the literature and identified 64 potential barriers to the implementation of distance education. This list in itself is interesting and could be used for additional research. Next, a survey was developed and a list of several thousand persons involved in distance education, instructional technology, and training was identified. The survey was sent to this large group and over 2500 responses were received. Data were received between June, 1999 and January

2000. Of those responding, 1150 were teachers or trainers, 648 were managers, 167 were administrators in higher education, and the remaining responders were researchers and students.

When the data were analyzed, eleven strongest barriers to distance education were identified. Their rank order is:

1. Increased time commitment.
2. Lack of money to implement distance education programs.
3. Organizational resistance to change.
4. Lack of shared vision for distance education in the organization.
5. Lack of support staff to help course development.
6. Lack of strategic planning for distance education.
7. Slow pace of implementation.
8. Faculty compensation/incentives.
9. Difficulty keeping up with technological changes.
10. Lack of technology-enhanced classrooms, labs or infrastructure.

Additionally, the least important barriers to implementation were identified by Berge and Muilenburg. They were:

54. Competition with on-campus courses.

55. Lack of personal technological expertise.
56. Lack of acceptable use policy.
57. Lack of transferability of credits.
58. Problems with vast distances and time zones.
59. Technology fee.
60. Tuition rate.
61. Local, state or federal regulations.
62. Ethical issues.
63. Existing union contracts.
64. Lack of parental involvement.

Berge and Muilenburg concluded their paper by identifying the need for cultural change within organizations involved or contemplating involvement with distance education. Five of the top barriers related directly to organizational culture.

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2. Lack of shared vision for distance education in the organization.
3. Lack of strategic planning for distance education.
4. Slow pace of implementation.
5. Difficulty keeping up with technological change.

Distance education requires an organization to rethink its philosophy of education and training. Resistance to change is overcome by

developing a shared vision that sets the stage for a strategic plan that dictates the rate of implementation. Everett Rogers, in his landmark work, *Diffusion of Innovations*, has discussed these ideas for years. Innovation, something new, will diffuse through an organization when it is perceived as having a relative advantage, is compatible with existing values and experiences, is not perceived as overly complex, can be tried or experienced first on a limited basis, and has observable impact.

Finally, I would like to thank Gary Anglin from the University of Kentucky for his efforts as guest editor of this issue of the *Quarterly Review*. Guest editors will contribute from time to time, especially when a number of researchers wish to comment on a topic of particular interest to our readers. We feel this adds a needed dimension to the *Quarterly Review*.

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