(Book Review)
Leading the ELearning Transformation of Higher Education: Leadership Strategies for the Next Generation

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Abstract

Leading the eLearning Transformation of Higher Education, edited by Gary E. Miller and Kathleen S. Ives, aims to present a knowledge base for eLearning leaders in a higher education context. The book's fifteen chapters are separate articles by experts in eLearning and educational leadership and aim to provide the reader with perspectives and theoretical ideas on administrating and leading in the ambit of online learning. Part 1 focuses on the question of leadership and strategy. Part 2 focuses on operational aspects for higher education programs that are based on eLearning. Part 3 discusses sustainability and innovation within the higher educational eLearning context. The articles within these separate parts generally stay within the theme, but occasionally touch on other, more loosely related topics. Overall, this book contains some valuable perspectives for those interested in eLearning leadership. While the different articles touch upon some important topics, the book's lack of cohesion is its most notable flaw.

Keywords: *Higher Education, Educational Studies, eLearning, educational leadership*

Introduction

Leading the eLearning Transformation of Higher Education is a compilation of articles edited by Gary E. Miller and Kathleen S. Ives, featuring a foreword by Michael Grahame Moore. This foreword sets the stage for the rest of the content of the book, pointing to how the global pandemic has revealed the dramatic need to update educational models to better fit remote learning modes. Moore notes that Covid serves as a reminder that remote methods are here to stay. Furthermore, in order to succeed, educators will need to make dramatic changes, starting with the realization that traditional, in-person teaching methods do not necessarily transfer to online teaching.

Subsequently, Miller and Ives introduce this second iteration of their volume on eLearning, stating that the rapid changes in modes of distance learning merit an update. Eight chapters from the previous edition have been revised, while seven new chapters have been added. The volume is divided into three different parts. The first part focuses on leadership in higher education in which eLearning is framed as a strategic need for university administrators. The articles in this part also address institutional leadership issues in eLearning, strategic aspects of change, and the role of diversity in eLearning. The second part aims at illustrating some of the most important operational aspects of eLearning organizations. Topics covered in this part include supporting faculty, integrating eLearning into current systems, examining effectiveness and pedagogical considerations, supporting students, engaging students, and examining issues of accessibility. The third part of the book discusses leadership challenges related to sustaining innovation. One of the themes of this part is how to maintain new paradigms after institutional change results in an adaptation to eLearning. The different chapters within the book are written by different authors on differing aspects of the main theme.

Chapter 1, by Gary Miller, provides a more conceptual approach, giving background on how eLearning represents a disruptive change in the higher education sector. The chapter provides a historical perspective, seemingly to support the idea that education has long found itself in a state of constant evolution. For Miller, the eLearning transformation is an inevitable consequence of the information revolution. At the root of this sea change in education is the fact that the accessibility to information has witnessed a drastic increase in recent decades. Miller's goal is to assert that leaders need to understand and adapt to the changes that this learning revolution entails. The second chapter, by Eric Fredericksen, is focused on leadership in the online learning context. He frames online learning as a mainstream and strategic mode of learning, citing his own past studies that identified the emergence of distinct leaders in the modality. In identifying the emergence of leadership and organizational positions in eLearning, Fredericksen appears to assert that such institutional changes are necessary and inevitable. In presenting the data, the goal is to provide organizational and leadership examples that other institutions can follow.

Chapter 3 entitled "Leading Change in the Mainstream: A Strategic Approach," focuses on the idea of eLearning leaders becoming institutional change leaders. At the same time, Miller urges the reader not to think of higher education as a business, but as a unique cultural and social institution, using the argument of "ethical realism" to frame his point. Ultimately, Miller proposes eLearning leaders as ambassadors of change for higher education institutions. Chapter 4, by Ford and Ives, addresses the issue of diversity within eLearning leadership. They provide the context that, by 2050, there will be no ethnic or racial majorities in the US, thus underscoring the importance of embracing diversity in leadership today. The authors' central argument is that creating diverse leadership teams will create equitable and inclusive organizational climates that will benefit higher learning institutions.

The second part begins with Chapter 5, written by Shea and Swan. This chapter attempts to bridge the research gap that associates effective leadership with student achievement and success in an eLearning context. Essentially, Shea and Swan attempt to lead a call to arms for research that specifically examines the leadership-effectiveness connection in eLearning. One of the main topics they discuss is how to evaluate effectiveness in eLearning as well as specific leadership skills that can lead to improved success for eLearning students. Swan and Shea also present Chapter 6, which attempts to provide a framework of essential knowledge for eLearning leaders regarding the key characteristics of online teaching. They argue that it is essential for leaders to familiarize themselves with the unique methodologies, pedagogies, and teaching strategies pertinent to eLearning. At the same time, they advocate for applying constructivist theoretical approaches to eLearning, as well as connectivism. The authors argue that these two pedagogical frameworks lend themselves well to eLearning modes. At the same time, the authors also discuss models such as Andragogy (adult-focused learning) and heutagogy (self-determined learning) as useful models for leaders to be familiar with. Also discussed are instructional design, teacher presence in online learning, the community of inquiry (COI) framework, MOOCs, learning analytics, and quality matters (QM) principles.

Chapter 7 by Ragan et al. and entitled "Supporting Faculty Success in Online Learning," focuses mostly on the topic of supporting faculty in eLearning. The authors discuss several aspects of teacher support in eLearning that higher education leaders need to be aware of. Their list of ten essential competencies for online faculty success provides a solid outline of some of these critical features. In a similar vein, Chapter 8, by Benke et al., discusses how to optimize success and engagement for students. This chapter takes into considerations some of the unique needs of online students that can help to ensure they are engaged in their

work, thus increasing their possibilities of success and completion. Chapter 9, "Moving into the Technology Mainstream, by Andrews et al., jumps into the topic of how eLearning has become an established and increasingly popular mode of higher education learning. This chapter attempts to frame eLearning as an evolution of education in the 21st century. Additionally, some important trends, such as the faculty as guide or student as customer, are examined. Finally, the authors argue for the full integration of technology with institutional goals. Chapter 10, by Rowland and Hermann, makes another jump into the topic of accessibility. While the focus is on digital accessibility, the authors frame the discussion in the larger context of educational equity for students with disabilities. In addition to providing a legal background, some practical steps for implementing complex accessibility policies in eLearning are detailed. The last chapter in this part of the book is "Operational Leadership in a Strategic Context," by Raymond Schroeder. This chapter discusses the concept of operational leadership, which delineates a pragmatic leadership model and applies it to eLearning ecosystems. This operational leader in eLearning leads in innovation, engagement, quality, outreach, and other aspects of administration.

The third part of the book opens with Chapter 12, "Leading a Quality Online Organization," by Mathes and Shelton. The chapter focuses on the idea of maintaining quality in online courses, especially as differentiated from traditional modalities of learning. The authors highlight the important of evaluation, needs identification, stakeholder involvement, course and program quality, leadership, and strategic planning. Mathes and Shelton touch upon the OLC Quality Scorecard as a method of integrated measurement for the quality of distance learning programs. While this is one example of an evaluation measure, the authors underscore the importance of moving towards more evolved measures that keep up with changes in eLearning. Chapter 13, by Benke and Niemiec, is entitled "Leading Beyond the Organization" and discusses how educational leaders in eLearning can go outside of their institutions to gain both strategic perspective and influence. Influencing policy through initiatives, influencing other leaders through professional associations, and other spheres of influence are mentioned as areas where educational leaders can contribute to the evolution of eLearning. In this sense, Benke and Niemiec advocate for leaders that are connected to their peers in the rapidly changing world of technology-based learning. Chapter 14, "Preparing to Lead the eLearning Transformation," by Ives et al., returns to the idea of transformation and change as a central characteristic of eLearning. Curiously, this chapter also presents an introduction to leadership in eLearning and then discusses the generation phases of this learning modality. In addition, the authors discuss demographic shifts as well as implications for leadership in online learning. Challenges to online leadership are discussed from both an institutional and external environmental point of view. The chapter concludes with a discussion of some key professional development needs that are specific to online learning in the institutional context. Chapter 15, entitled "Emerging Leadership Issues," by Elizabeth Ciabocchi, is the result of a virtual roundtable in which several of the authors participated. In it, the participants discuss major changes they have observed in online learning in their careers. Also discussed are questions on the implications of social movements for eLearning, emerging trends in eLearning, the impact of emerging technology on educational leadership, and the greatest challenges that lie ahead in the field.

Overall, this book provides some valuable perspectives from higher education experts who are actively leading the way for raising the bar for eLearning in terms of quality and integration into the educational mainstream. There is little doubt that the voices of these authors speak from positions of vast experience in pioneering initiatives related to emerging forms of online learning. Especially compelling were chapters that provided very concrete guidelines, such as the chapters focusing on diversity and program evaluation. The final chapter had some interesting portions in which authors briefly answered some important and insightful questions about the future of eLearning. At the same time, this book has some significant shortcomings. While there were three parts, each focusing on different general themes, many of the chapters appeared to be disjointed or out of place. The overall sensation was that there is a lack of cohesion amongst the various chapters. While their authors clearly possess depth of knowledge in their field, the format of having unrelated essays constituting chapters made going through them a bit tedious at times, introducing the kind of interruption of momentum that is not found in books that advance in a more logical and cohesive fashion. At the same time, while some chapters might provide some value as references, the generally abstract and in cohesive nature of the book leaves the feeling of a missed opportunity. Had the book been written in a more linear fashion and presented some clear steps on how to up an institution's or leader's game in the area of eLearning, it might have been much more useful

overall. While the book has some solid knowledge in it, it is at times repetitive. It somewhat lacks in readability and practicality and should not be considered a manual for institutional leaders but rather a reflection on issues in eLearning within higher education.

References

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