The Leadership Roles of Distance Learning Administrators (DLAs) in Increasing Educational Value and Quality Perceptions

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Abstract

This paper examines the leadership roles of distance learning administrators (DLAs) in light of the demand and need for value and quality in educational distance learning programs and schools. The author explores the development of distance learning using available and emerging technologies in relation to increased demand for education, training, skills, and certification in the global school economy of the 21st century. The paper brings to light the challenge that the value and quality debate poses as competition among colleges and universities increases and the labor market demands more talented knowledge workers in a space where competition affects professional prospects and graduate success. After examining the development and problems and challenges of distance education, the author looks at the critical leadership roles of DLAs using ideals of leadership effectiveness as communicated by a survey of the literature. Using Mintzberg's theory of informational, interpersonal, and decisional managerial roles and activities, the author identifies the activities across which distance learning administrators could display exemplary leadership functions through sharing their vision, modeling the way, challenging the process, enabling others to act and encouraging and motivating the development and delivery of value and quality teaching and learning practices to capitalize on core and distinct competencies to build lasting competitive advantage.

Introduction

Despite the numerous and volatile changes we have undergone as a society and civilization, education still remains the most powerful force for individual and collective transformation. Change dominates our world and education is a major vehicle for initiating, managing, and sustaining or stabilizing our environments affected by change. It is through educational value that we develop the understanding and knowledge to effectively craft strategies for leading change (Kotter, 1996). Change exhibits itself as both a planned and unplanned phenomenon (Burke, 2002), and the many factors fueling the change process originate from uncontrollable factors and our attempts to create, improve, and manage progress as individuals and society. Most profound among the factors propelling change, is the impact of technology to modify values and cultures, but more so, the structure and pedagogical approaches or the teaching and learning processes we use to transmit the ideals, norms, and practices we embrace from one generation, era, and place to the next.

Humankind's inclination toward both inner mental-conscious and external exploration has pushed both mind and body toward a more universal perspective and broader view of things. This is especially true in a world becoming increasingly globalized in every sense of the word. This inclination toward a broader worldview, and the need for greater and more knowledge to facilitate survival amidst competition and change, has led to increased demand for education by people and nations in all corners across the globe. In turn, this need and the availability and use of information and communication systems made available through constantly increasing technologies have facilitated the increased use of CML to support teaching and learning, especially via distance educational opportunities.

CML refers to learning that occurs when an individual interactively learns (formally or informally, synchronously or asynchronously) about material via computer means where the learning materials and

pedagogy are developed to take advantage of the available technologies (The Journal of Educators Online [JEO], (2010). CML includes distance, online, electronic, virtual, distributed, blended and mobile learning. Many online classrooms use a variety of technological tools and strategies. Distance learning is a common and most popular form of CLM and around which major educational programs, corporations, and institutions are built today. Most distance learning institutions make use of a virtual learning environment (VLE). A VLE is "a virtual learning environment (VLE) is a set of teaching and learning tools designed to enhance a student's learning experience by including computers and the Internet in the learning process" (TechTarget.com, 2008, p. 1). Dillenbourg (2000) defines a VLE as "a designed information space" (p. 3). Some examples of VLEs that facilitate teaching and learning in distance education programs and courses include Blackboard, WebCT, Lotus LearningSpace, Moodle, and COSE, with more and better being developed every day to improve value and quality of the teaching and leaning interactions in distance learning institutions and programs.

Distance Education in the Global Economy

We are living in a school economy, asserts McFarlane (2010a), and as, such everyone is seeking some form of training and education to improve skills and prospects for employment. Furthermore, education is now more essential for people to realize their dreams and survive, especially in a global society where education is no longer an option, but a must to enter the highly competitive labor market. Distance learning has become a major force by which individuals all over the world are acquiring the necessary training, skills, and education required to enter the job market. This has led to an unprecedented growth in all aspects of the distance learning industry, from the number and types of schools to the variety of technology and programs being offered. This teaching and learning modality makes time and space the regulating variables between teachers and students located anywhere, yet interacting through powerful and speedy information and communication technology systems and processors.

Distance learning is an educational situation where the instructor and the students are separated by time, location, or both, and it can be either synchronous (real-time, instructor-led event in which all participants are virtually "in class" at the same time) or asynchronous (interaction between instructors and students occurs intermittently with a time delay) using a variety of distribution methods including technology (Freeman, 2010). Distance education makes use of technology in full or in part to facilitate the teaching and learning process. Traditionally, distance education took place using postal mail to deliver books, examinations, and other instructions to students in the form of homeschooling. Today, the term homeschooling is still used to some degree to define some form of distance education because students are able to acquire an education in the comfort of their homes. However, technology is being used to its maximum today by distance learning institutions to facilitate teaching and learning, unlike in the past where there were still limitations and the factor of "presence" was even less defined (McFarlane, 2011).

Distance education does not have to make use of technology to distribute learning and this is evident when we look back at the history of the early pioneers of 21st century distance education, including institutions such as the International Correspondence Schools (ICS) and Lifetime Career Schools (LCS) which provided secondary and vocational programs and training, and California Pacific University which was an early initiator in the provision of advanced degree programs, as well as several others which made use of postal mail for decades before the birth of online education and virtual schools (McFarlane, 2011). The virtual landscape for distance education is still rapidly changing with new technological tools and human innovation.

Distance learning has changed dramatically since the 1990s to become a dominant part of the landscape of the higher education global industry of the 21st century. Today we have mega-distance learning corporations, colleges, and universities operating on all continents and offering training, continuing education, and academic degree programs in various fields. As such, many distance learning institutions have emerged to become major players in education, some becoming complements, alternatives, and even replacements to the traditional or on-campus programs and schools or educational formats. Teaching and learning modes where teachers and students or educators and learners are separated by time, distance, and location have become the most convenient and fastest, "easiest" ways to meet the growing demands for degrees, education, certification, and training. Distance learning opportunities respond effectively to the demands of individuals in the fast-paced globally competitive world of the 21st

century. In this environment, administrators, teachers, and learners must attend to multiple tasks and responsibilities in personal and professional lives while providing and pursuing education. Despite the great convenience and benefits of distance learning opportunities, there are problems and challenges that DLAs must face in leading units, departments, and institutions offering distance education (McFarlane, 2011). The ability of distance learning administrators to effectively address these problems and challenges will significantly shape the future of online or virtual distance education.

Distance Learning Challenges and Problems

Similar to traditional educational administrators, DLAs or leaders must meet a variety of problems and challenges in ensuring the effective and efficient operation of distance learning schools. Valentine (2002) has identified five major problems and challenges to distance learning that administrators must deal with: quality of instruction, costs effectiveness, misuse of technology, role of technicians, and problems with equipment. One of the greatest and most complex of the problems and challenges faced by distance learning administrators is that of quality assurance in terms of the value and quality of distance learning programs. This mainly stems from the long-standing debate regarding traditional versus distance education programs and schools. The key problems-challenges among these five factors seem to be the quality of instruction, misuse of technology, and costs effectiveness, and distance learning administrators can follow several recommendations in order to deal effectively with these issues

Table 1: How DLAs Can Effectively Address Three Key Problems-Challenges

Key Problems-Challenges	Potential Solutions
Quality of Instruction	Develop and maintain rigorous quality assurance programs. Engage in research and planning for institutional effectiveness (research that focuses on service quality, instructional quality, students' perceptions of services, etc). Develop up-to-date and comparable curriculum and programs through benchmarking (emulate the best practices and market drivers in the distance education industry). Seek, obtain, and maintain approval by private or governmental quality assurance agencies – accreditation and appropriate professional and state licensure for your institution and its programs. Become part of professional and academic bodies and agencies in program and industry fields, for example: DETC, USDLA, EDLA, among others. Train and empower faculty and staff to effectively use technology and apply the highest service protocols in responding to and assist students. Apply the SERVQUAL indices (Service Quality indices - RATER (Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles Empathy, and Responsiveness - Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1990) to measure and improve service effectiveness across the board. Lead to build competitive advantage by focusing on what your institution or distance learning department does best rather than seeking to outdo competitors – foster development of core and distinct competencies.
Misuse of Technology	Develop and enforce a ***Code of Usage*** for technology for staff, faculty, and students. Insist on training instructors to use distance learning technology regardless of prior experience and have regularly scheduled training programs (Valentine, 2002). Hire creative and well-informed instructors (Greenberg, 1998) who are able to effective use technology while motivating students to learn. Implement sanctions for misuse of technology by staff, faculty, and students. Recognize the limit of technology and train instructors or faculty in "technology socialization" as a key factor in communication, feedback, responsiveness, and progress.
	Determine the real costs versus desired costs of human capital and

Cost Effectiveness	technology for program operational efficiency. Select the most costs effective software. Cost effective does not mean cheap, but refers to the ability of a software program to proficiently achieve teaching-learning interaction goals overtime while delivering quality without increasing costs in other areas. Make effective use of the virtual medium – technology and electronic library and materials to reduce costs for students, faculty, and institution – examples of such costs are textbook costs, costs of equipment, training and subscription costs. Seek to reduce costs associated with training technicians and instructors. Do not strive to model traditional or brick-and-mortar institutions in their structures and approaches as this will eliminate the natural cost advantages associated distance and virtual environments.

There are several other problems and challenges, including technology adaption and usage, provision of scholarship and remedial academic services, developing effective service protocol, addressing faculty and student issues that arise in the teaching-learning process, dealing with issues of accreditation and student placement, finance, among several other issues. All of these factors invariably affect what Valentine (2002) describes as "quality of instruction" (p. 1).

DLAs can best ensure quality of instruction by having the right people – instructional and technology experts, right technology, quality and well-designed and organized curriculum, appropriate materials – textbooks and other media sources. Accreditation and approval that focus on assessment and evaluation by external parties including private and state agencies usually guarantee some significant levels of quality. Thus, effective DLAs should be aware of this and make curriculum planning and quality assurance important factors. This is where a responsibility over institutional planning and effectiveness comes into play. Despite the virtual side of distance learning, administrators still need to carry out the managerial role of controlling and monitoring for standards, whether that standard is in reference to programs, curriculum, or instructors. They need to work hard, not only in obtaining, but also maintaining relevant state and agency approval for programs. This requires DLAs to keep abreast of new developments in the fields. This can be accomplished by being members of distance learning organizations and agencies such as the Distance Education and Training Council (DETC), United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA), European Distance Learning Association (EDLA), among others. Additionally, effective DLAs will view themselves as part of a global trend in education and seek to be actively visible and participating subscribers and members in conferences in the industry, and read and subscribe to academic and professional journals and magazines. Training and education are also important in dealing with these problems and challenges as DLAs further their knowledge of distance learning technologies and their leadership skills.

The quality issue has long plagued distance learning as a dominant factor for critiques. The issue of value and quality is especially important today when so many individuals are still questioning the value and quality of distance education programs and where schools, colleges, and universities are fighting aggressively in a contracting and overpopulated school economy to maintain their competitive edge. This is especially challenging as the nation and many educational stakeholders and policymakers call for higher standards to propel the nation to the forefront of the education arms race (Ladner, LeFevre, & Lips, 2010). According to Valentine (2002) "Much of the quality of instruction depends on the attitude of the administration and the instructor" (p. 1). Administrators are the first key to quality of instruction in distance learning settings because they are the leaders who are expected to set core standards; standards governing curriculum and instructors, as well as students' performance. Thus, distance learning administrators have an *instructional quality function* in which they should determine the factors that build and contribute to the quality and growth of instruction. In addition to these problems, Ham (2003) identifies several problems common to colleges and universities that also impact distance learning: rapid increases in tuition costs that outpace the growth of the economy and students' abilities to pay for a college education, the challenge of facing a new customer group consisting of older more consumer-savvy students, and competition from other colleges and universities, including enrollment issues.

In proving themselves to be exemplary leaders who are able to meet the challenge of 21st century leadership, DLAs must now model the way for educational value and quality that enables faculty and

students to meet their goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). This requires effective delivery of skills and training using appropriate technology and pedagogical approaches (Entz, 2006). As effective leaders, DLAs are expected to design, implement, and maintain both value and quality in distance teaching and learning programs. The call for higher standards and quality from various stakeholders and demands for increased accountability from educational leaders and institutions stemming from the need for and attempt at educational reform (McFarlane, 2010b; Hale, 1999) have also added pressure to DLAs to create value and quality at both the beginning and end-stage of instructional programs. Moreover, the competitive market for educational credentials, students' satisfaction, continuous governmental regulation and monitoring, criticisms from education watchdogs, increased number of institutions offering distance learning programs, accreditation diversity, competition and employment prospects relative to perceived degree value and quality - are demanding more and more from distance learning institutions and programs in terms of value and quality. Distance learning programs must be managed and led effectively by administrators with broad knowledge and understanding of the education industry and these regulating variables.

The need to develop and maintain competitive advantage is another factor which demands that DLAs must focus on value and quality in educational service provision. According to Investopedia (2010), competitive advantage refers to an advantage that a firm has over its competitors. Competitive advantage allows firms to generate greater sales or margins and/or retain more customers than their competitors. Different types of competitive advantages exist. These include the firm's cost structure, product offerings, distribution network and customer support, among others. In a distance learning unit or institution there are many factors from which competitive advantage could potentially arise and administrators must be aware of these factors and how to effectively capitalize upon the strengths of each to create opportunities for their institutions. For example, competitive advantage in a distance learning institution could potentially arise from program structure, cost or tuition – typically lower costs than competitors, quality of program in terms of contents and structure, value of program in terms of how well others perceive its value, quality and qualifications of faculty, technology used and applied such as the type of VLE, program duration and completion time, program delivery methods and success in job search assistance or placement, among other factors. DLAs must strive to identify and build competitive advantage around any of these factors that prove to be core or distinct competencies for their units, departments, or institutions. Core competencies are the combination of pooled knowledge and technical capacities that allow a business to be competitive in the marketplace (de Kluyver & Pearce II, 2009; Alexander, 2010). Theoretically, a core competency should allow a company to expand into new end markets as well as provide a significant benefit to customers. It should also be hard for competitors to replicate (Investopedia, 2010, p. 1). Alexander (2010) defines distinct competencies as capabilities or attributes that make your company clearly superior to your competitors in things that customers care about. Based on Alexander's distinction between core and distinct competencies, he argues that core competencies are good, but distinct competencies are better since, "The key to marketplace uniqueness is not core competencies but distinct competencies" (p. 1). Thus, DLAs must seek to develop, build and capitalize chiefly on distinct competencies to develop competitive advantage in the growing and mature distant learning market. DLAs must remember that not only absolute distance educational institutions are strong and active players in this market, but that there are also traditional colleges and universities with extremely strong distance learning arms supported by their years and even centuries of robust educational reputations.

Educational Value and Quality Perceptions in Distance Learning

Both value and quality can act as factors of core and distinct competencies depending on how effectively and efficiently their coordinating variables are managed in the distance learning setting (McFarlane, 2011). Value in education is defined from both economic and marketing standpoints and refers to the extent to which a good or service is perceived by its customers to meet their needs or wants, measured by customers' willingness to pay for it. Thus, value from this perspective depends more on customers' perceptions of the worth of the service than on its intrinsic value (BusinessDictionary.com, 2010, p. 1). Economically, value describes the worth of all the benefits and rights arising from ownership of and interaction with of a good or service. As such, there are two types of economic value: (i) the utility of a good or service, and (ii) the power of a good or service to command other goods, services, or money, in voluntary exchange (BusinessDictionary.com, 2010). Quality is either a subjective or objective measure of the value of goods or services. When it comes to education or distance learning, subjective quality is

what we are concerned about. Subjectively, quality describes the attributes, characteristics, or properties of a thing or phenomenon that can be observed and interpreted, and may be approximated (quantified) but cannot be measured, such as beauty, feel, flavor, taste, etc (BusinessDictionary.com, 2010). Educational value and quality matters, especially in a society where increasing competition and decreasing available opportunities are forcing employers and other institutions to discriminate in the types of talents and degrees they select in terms of perceived value and quality when it comes to competencies of knowledge workers.

According to McFarlane (2008a), "the knowledge worker is a product of education, technological marvel, and modern development in organizational practices and theories" (p. 1). DLAs must bear this in mind as they lead the effort to develop and delivery value and quality in education using technology and current organizational strategies and policies. Johnson and Weinstein (2004) define value and quality in terms of the design and delivery of customer value, and in the case of distance learning, customers are students and employer organizations where students become hired or seek jobs with their distance learning skills, certifications, degrees, and education. Customer satisfaction variables are especially important in higher educational settings where distance learning is prevalent. This view is supported by Maguad (2007) and McFarlane (2008b) who argue that customer satisfaction is probably the most important element in managing quality in higher education. McFarlane (2008b) argues, "Students have and do foster great expectations of the institutions meeting their needs. These expectations expressed in the forms of needs, wants, desires, opinions, etc, translate into interpretation of what defines quality, value, effectiveness, and all the variables of customer satisfaction" (p. 1).

Perceived value and quality are determined and affected by individuals' experiences, levels of satisfaction, psychological and mental states, the totality of experience concerning a service or product, image, price and those same characteristics in substitutes or alternatives and customer value (Johnson & Weinstein, 2004; Zeithaml; 2000; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990; 1996; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry, 1985; 1986). In addition to the foregone factors, efficacy perceptions affect the perceived value and quality in educational settings (McFarlane, 2010b; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; Rowland, 2008) based on faculty self-efficacy and the impact on students' learning and achievement (Houchard, 2005). While both value and quality are relative terms, there are certain basic expectations concerning value and quality that programs and institutions must meet. This is especially the case in the higher education industry where accreditation has become a basic requirement for institutions offering distance learning opportunities. Accreditation is the fundamental criterion for asserting minimum value and quality through quality assurance integrity as decided by an external agency or commission. In today's education market accreditation is undertaken by mainly private agencies, especially in the United States where three major types of accreditation prevail in terms of geographic scope: regional, national, and international-global, with regional accreditation being the most desirable. Accreditation refers to "the recognition that an institution maintains standards requisite for its graduates to gain admission to other reputable institutions of higher learning or to achieve credentials for professional practice" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). DLAs should ensure that programs are adequately approved by State licensing agencies and accredited by appropriate bodies where required and necessary to legitimize and improve program structures, content and perceived value and quality.

Distance learning programs and institutions are accredited by a wide variety of agencies today as part of the quest to increase perceived value and quality. While the Distance Education and Training Council (DETC) is the most respected and well-known accrediting body when it comes to distance education exclusively, the six regional bodies recognized by the United States Department of Education, as well as other national private accrediting bodies are acceptable and sufficient to promote ideas of value and quality for their members. There are several national accrediting bodies besides the DETC, but the DETC is the most recognized non-regional accrediting body by the United States Department of Education. This gives it wide credence in distance education and learning programs even across the globe. Distance learning programs and institutions do not have to be accredited by DETC if they are already accredited by another national, or any of the six regional bodies or agencies; which are the most powerful accrediting agencies in the United States and across the globe. There are some specialized agencies with strong reputations for program value and quality as well, including the AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), IACBE (International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education), and Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), among others (Cavico, Mujtaba, & McFarlane, 2010).

Since accreditation is fundamental, administrators of distance learning institutions and programs must strive to design, develop, implement, promote and foster value and quality in their teaching and learning, training and educational offerings. Curriculums should be built to capitalize on value and quality creation. There are several misconceptions, beliefs, and criticisms of distance learning institutions and programs that administrators must attempt to overcome as obstacles to recognition and progress through value and quality initiatives and strategies. Some of the misconceptions and criticisms regarding distance learning include: (i) beliefs and perceptions that distance schools and programs are less effective than traditional on-campus education; (ii) arguments that graduates of distance learning programs are less prepared, less intelligent, and less capable than students or graduates of on-campus programs; (iii) beliefs that most distance schools and programs are unaccredited diploma mills; (iv) beliefs and perceptions that distance learning degrees and programs are less challenging; (v) beliefs and criticisms that distance learning programs have inferior and less structure and contents compared to traditional, on-campus programs; and (vi) beliefs that quality is sacrificed in distance learning programs through focus and emphasis placed on speed and convenience, as well as decreased admissions criteria to some distance learning programs and schools. According to Gabriel (2010), the educational value of online courses has been debated for years, based on a large but uneven body of research, and the above beliefs and misconceptions are part of the problem when it comes to defining value and quality in distance learning. Given these challenges, DLAs and colleges and universities must become extremely concerned with the value and quality of education and services they offer to their students (Ham, 2003; McFarlane, 2008b).

The Solution: Effective Administrator Leadership

Researchers agree that there is a lack of effective leadership at all levels of organizations and society, and that effective leadership is central to organizational success (Zekeri, 2004; Brown & McLenighan, 2005; Davis, 2007; Covey, 1990). There is ever a great need for truly effective administrators in our education system. Educational institutions are hampered by ineffective leadership, and from K-12 to universities, in both public and private education systems, the lack of effective leadership has been regarded as one of the most fundamental problem of modern education (McFarlane, 2010b; Johnston, 2000). McFarlane (2010b) states that there is need for more effective leadership practices – exemplary leadership in educational settings, typical of the five leadership practices of modeling the way, challenging the process, enabling others to act, inspiring shared vision, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). The success of any organization is an outcome of dynamic and effective leadership (Sharma & Dakhane, 1998) and distance learning organizations are characteristically, inherently dynamic because they must learn and adapt swiftly to the globally competitive environment where technology development and transformation affect their program structures and capabilities.

According to Williams (1998) effective leadership entails several assertions: accepting the responsibility and fact that leadership is not stress-free, creating a learning organization to avoid obsolescence, recognizing that there is no substitute for getting the job done, not becoming overcommitted, establishing very close relationships with followers and partners, being humble about one's competence and importance, learning how to apply and use power effectively without controlling followers, practicing open communication, being honest, learning and knowing about the influence of organizational politics, practicing unilateral integrity, being a team player, asking questions and being a good listener, making future strategic plans, and being optimistic about one's abilities to succeed when charting certain course. Effective DLAs are those who are very aware of these factors, especially within the structures of organizational relationships and systems that create and deliver learning modules to learners or students. In order to facilitate all these responsibilities and functions identified by Williams (1998), DLAs must be innovators, brokers, producers, directors, coordinators, monitors, facilitators, and mentors (Kayworth & Leidner, 2001).

Distance learning requires dedication on the part of administrators who must work with and cooperate with many individuals, especially their pool of staff and faculty to ensure that teaching and learning, and all student services are effectively and efficiently developed, planned, and delivered. As such, effective DLAs spend time honing the skills of collaboration, cooperation and relationship building, and strive to live beyond organizational norms and still manage to succeed (Martin, 2006). DLA leaders must understand the external environment and adapt rapidly to change and competition. There are two specific groups of individuals that DLAs must effectively lead and provide opportunities for to develop value and

quality in programs. These are the faculty and the students, which are the vital links in the teaching-learning process.

Faculty Leadership Responsibilities

DLAs must lead faculty to achieve established program goals and objectives by providing access to training in the use of technology, development of pedagogy, increased interaction with students, coordination with faculty development staff and administrator, and continued education and training to sharpen skills in teaching. DLAs must provide faculty members with definitions concerning standards, value, and quality. Some practical methods that DLAs can use in developing faculty skills and effectiveness include:

   a. assisting faculties in the use and application of technologies in the teaching process,
   b. developing a faculty newsletter which provides tips and guidelines as well as up-to-date knowledge and information on distance learning,
   c. creating a faculty research and writing department or center that oversees faculty publications in professional and peer-reviewed journals,
   d. attendance and participation in conferences, and
   e. developing high collaborative efforts between and among faculty, staff, and administrator to create common value and agreement.

DLAs must ensure that their staff and faculty are qualified both academically and professionally, and that these professionals are keen on delivering only quality instructions and high customer value.

Student Leadership Responsibilities

DLAs should focus their strategic planning efforts on outcomes. This means focusing on results for students. In doing so, they will naturally develop what McFarlane (2008b) calls a "customer-centric perspective" of the organization and the value and quality it must create and deliver to meet the needs of its customers and accomplish it mission and meet its vision. Realizing that universities and other institutions of higher education have to compete with each other to attract high quality students and academic staff at the international level, and that competition is no longer limited within national borders, as education and training have become a global business sector, education marketing is developing more standards akin to consumer goods marketing (Melewar and Akel, 2005). As a result, leaders in the field know that focusing on students is the key to success. This awareness on the part of DLAs must lead them to create student-friendly programs and environments; virtual and perceived customer service environments, where student satisfaction is a high priority as they concentrate on delivery of value and quality to students. DLAs can create and develop value and quality for students by:

   a. having Student Appreciation Day,
   b. offering scholarships for exceptional academic performance,
   c. awarding and recognizing students for outstanding academic work
   d. providing quality assignments,
   e. developing students' newsletter and publishing students' success stories and testimonies in the newsletter, preferably electronic newsletter, and
   f. providing opportunities for students to become members of honor societies and other professional and academic organizations.

DLAs must realize that distance learning programs do not limit student services offerings, and thus, can also arrange for internships and work opportunities for students.

Conclusion and Recommendations: Embracing Leadership Roles

DLAs must embrace their managerial-leadership roles that are informational, interpersonal, and decisional (Mintzberg, 1973). They manage people, systems, and processes and should take a true systems thinking approach in the distance learning. Mintzberg's model is further broken down into ten leadership responsibilities or functions with activities that DLAs can effectively apply to their duties and

responsibilities (*Table 2*). DLAs must deal effectively with information by being monitors, disseminators and spokespersons by effectively managing the flow and transfer of information to produce knowledge and ideas that effectively communicate rules, policies, and expectations. They must be able to motivate their staff and faculty members and lead organizational activities and programs as figureheads, leaders, and liaisons. Effective DLAs plan effectively in order to improve teaching and learning by preparing schedule, budget, setting priorities, and acquiring and distributing resources as needed by faculty and staff to respond to students' needs. They must also resolve any conflicts that arise between faculty and staff, as well as students or among educational and value-quality stakeholders. Effective DLAs are happy to represent their schools and programs at conferences, through media and community contact, and they identify new opportunities and projects for growth and success that will positively impact all members of the organization in their capacities as entrepreneurs, disturbance handlers, resource allocators, and negotiators.

Effective DLAs will understand and apply the guidelines of exemplary leadership as they seek to inspire a shared vision within the organization, unit or department. They must model the way by being examples of effective leaders and managers, and challenge others to think and work hard. They must enable others to act through empowerment and participatory leadership, and encourage faculty and staff to take a servant leadership approach to teaching and caring for students who are the ultimate customers and reason for being (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). Effective DLAs understand that the environment in which they lead is a rapidly changing one demanding continuous learning and adaptation. They see the need for managing and dealing with change, and through flexibility, share their leadership responsibilities and rewards.

Table 2: Distance Learning Administrators' Mintzbergian Roles

Leadership Roles	Managerial Responsibilities	Activities
Informational	*Monitor*	Seek and receive information, scan paper and reports, maintain interpersonal contacts with various businesses and partners
	Disseminator	Forward information to others, send memos, make phone calls
	Spokesperson	Represent the organization to outsiders in speeches and reports
Interpersonal	*Figurehead*	Perform ceremonial and symbolic duties, receive visitors such as accreditation agents
	Leader	Direct and motivate subordinates, train, advise and influence faculty and staff
	Liaison	Maintain information links in and beyond the organization
Decisional	*Entrepreneur*	Initiate new projects, spot opportunities, identify areas of business development
	Disturbance handler	Take corrective actions during crises, resolve conflicts among staff, adapt to external changes
	Resource allocator	Decide who get resources, schedule, budget, set priorities and acquire resources
	Negotiator	Represent department during negotiations with unions, suppliers, and generally defend interests.

Source: Adapted from London Management Centre (2010), *Mintzberg Ten Management Roles*.

DLAs should develop their leadership roles and strengthen influence to positively impact faculty and staff attitudes in accomplishing goals and objectives by understanding the obstacles they face and the environment in which they operate, and most of all, their customers or students. There are four important factors DLAs can integrate into their approach to effectively managing distance learning teams of faculty and staff: (i) promote a high levels of trust: as leaders DLAs must place trust in team members knowledge, and make commitment, motivation, and abilities an important part of their leadership strategy; (ii) foster an atmosphere with clear communication: as a leader, the distance learning administrator must foster clear communication since often distance can act as a communication barrier; (iii) exhibit strong leadership: the distance learning administrator as a leader must be very strong in directive and assistive behavioral qualities, and must have expert knowledge; and (d) must acquire and distribute to faculty and staff appropriate levels of technology. In order to become an effective leader of distance learning teams and programs, DLAs must become experts on technology, emerging trends in technology, technology usage, and must make technology an extension of leadership qualities (Bergiel, Bergiel, and Balsmeier, 2008).

Running an effective and successful distance learning program or institution requires having an established culture of value and quality; one which focuses on maximum input and maximum outcome for all individuals involved, especially those on the receiving ends; students and employees. Having good organizational culture with strong team citizenship behavior can bring a distance learning school or program a long way (Spector, 2010). Team citizenship behavior describes behaviors that exhibit good citizenship within team or among members working in a team and consists of the following behaviors among others: (a) altruism, (b) civic virtue, (c) conscientiousness, (d) courtesy, (e) teamwork, and (f) team mindedness (Pearce & Herbik, 2004). DLAs need to remember that they are not just managing technology and structures or systems, but are leading and managing people who have needs and wants, and that students nowadays require the highest levels of service because they always have many options in a global school economy where value and quality matter.

The informational, interpersonal, and decisional roles of DLAs place them in a position to affect quality and value at all levels of distance learning programs and institutions. By focusing on, and viewing their responsibilities as first and foremost, *quality and value leaders*, they are able to understand their roles as information providers, interpersonal managers, and decision makers. The information they receive, process, and disseminate; the types of organizational social relationships they foster and develop – *distance learning relationship management*; and the decisions they make, both tactical-operational and strategic, will affect quality perceptions and program as well as organizational goals.

DLAs in their roles contribute to quality and value by performing three major managerial roles (Mintzberg, 1973), and 12 important leadership functions identified by the author of this paper. These leadership functions are outlined in *Table 3* below. As the environment in which distance learning programs and schools operate changes, DLAs must become more responsive and responsible leaders who are able to apply innovative strategies and rapidly adapt and use information to capture new opportunities, deal with threats from competition, and improve performance. Effective distance learning leadership will become more critical to the success of schools and colleges as this teaching and learning modality continues to increase and meet the educational demands of millions in the 21st century.

Table 3: Three Managerial Roles and 12 Leadership Functions of Distance Learning Administrators (DLAs).

Informational Roles
Technology leader: select and assisting in determining technology platforms, costs, application, and developing rules for effectively and ethically using technology. *Information organizer*: organize information in ways meaningful to the organization and information users. *Information disseminator*: distribute information to the correct personnel and departments where needed to perform tasks. *Information Processor*: process or utilize information as needed to understand issues and challenges and make the right decisions.
Interpersonal
Relationship manager: manage the relationship among staff, faculty, and students *Team and Group leader*: lead staff and faculty – instructional and technology, to achieve program goals and deliver top quality student services, effective teaching, and *Partnership developer*: develop partnerships with businesses and agencies to positively affect marketability, quality, and services provision and expansion, as well as competitiveness. *Motivator*: provide motivation for staff, faculty, and students and lead in ways that encourage the distance learning team to strive for excellence.
Decisional
Innovator: identify and develop new projects, programs, and methods for increasing program and service quality for instructors and students. *Change leader and manager*: initiate, indentify, respond to and lead change in the distance learning and online environment by keeping abreast of emerging technology, policies, and demands. *Regulator*: regulate policies and determine protocols for meeting existing program and institutional goals *Decider*: make all relevant decisions by using correct information and soliciting participation from employees when relevant.

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