



Introduction to Organization, Leadership, and Change in ODDE: The Critical Importance of Institutional Leadership

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Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of the 11 other chapters in Section III of the Handbook which address issues of Organisation, Leadership and Change. It pays particular attention to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on perceptions of ODDE, noting both the benefits of the greatly enhanced international interest in on-line learning and the negative perceptions associated with its misuse during the sudden demand for emergency remote teaching in conventional educational institutions. It envisions a blurring of distinctions between conventional and ODDE institutions with consequent opportunities for the latter. While these issues are pursued through various perspectives in the Section III chapters, there is a unifying theme of the critical importance of institutional leadership throughout and a concomitant focus on how leadership has to change in a rapidly evolving international context. The chapter envisions a bright future for ODDE but only if

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critical issues of institutional leadership are addressed and if those leading conventional institutions are made aware of the research and experience emanating from the established ODDE sector.

Keywords

Covid-19 · Multifocal leadership · Emergency remote teaching (ERT) · ODDE research · Institutional culture · Iron triangle · Trust · Change

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically raised the profile of online learning around the world with both positive and negative implications for ODDE. In requiring sudden pivots from face-to-face to online learning at all levels of education worldwide, the pandemic has contributed to a blurring of the distinctions between the two and put tremendous pressures on institutional leaders to respond in new and creative ways.

While the initial intention in Section III was to focus on “organization, leadership, and change” primarily in the ODDE sector, these developments have raised broader questions for all forms of higher education. Central to these is the pandemic’s impact on perceptions of online and distance learning and the notion that new organizational models will necessarily emerge as it is unlikely that there will simply be a reversion to the status quo postpandemic for most conventional or ODDE-based institutions.

The importance of developing collective approaches to leadership runs throughout these chapters and highlights a widespread need for a complete rethinking of the roles and responsibilities of institutional leaders and how they are selected and assessed.

The Organization of Section III

While the book editors suggested a preliminary list of topics, chapter authors were given considerable leeway to interpret them. The section editor selected the initial authors, some of whom engaged colleagues to assist them. The result was a deliberate mix of long-established leaders in the field, leading practitioners and emerging writers.

There was a conscious effort to represent different parts of the world in author selection while acknowledging a preponderance of writers based in Canada. Other nations represented are Germany, Ireland, South Africa, India, Australia, and New Zealand, although, as is typical in ODDE, most writers have experience in more than one national context. There was also a deliberate effort to gain developing country perspectives on three areas of research usually dominated by western writers – leadership, open and virtual schooling, and strategic planning.

Authors were encouraged to write from a global perspective but also to use their own local experiences to blend theory with practice. Unless otherwise stipulated, the discussion focuses on higher education although two of the chapters (Daniel* and Jha & Ghatak*) explicitly address issues of open schooling in primary and secondary education (references to Section III authors are identified by the author's name followed by * to distinguish these from external sources which are cited in the usual way).

This chapter addresses key issues of leadership and change that emanate from the 11 authors in Section III and offers some personal perspectives on their implications for the future of ODDE.

The Impact of the Pandemic on ODDE

The Covid-19 pandemic has forcibly introduced online education to faculty and students in conventional (campus-based) universities to a dramatically unprecedented degree. Of particular interest is the impact of this phenomenon on how ODDE is perceived by faculty and students in these institutions and what impact this may have on its future. Tynan, Bossu, and Leitch* found Covid-19 to be incredibly disruptive to faculty and their approaches to teaching and learning, with many left unprepared and forced to pivot quickly to cope.

At the outset, it is important to be clear on definitions of key terms and concepts (Nichols*). This has been a long-standing challenge in ODDE research especially with the onset of online learning in both classroom and distance settings. For example, the move in conventional institutions has usually been to synchronous online classes (e.g., on Zoom), simply replicating the classroom experience, whereas traditional distance education has most often been about asynchronous student experiences catering to nontraditional, especially adult, learners.

It is important to recognize a clear difference between “emergency remote teaching” (ERT) and “online education” (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020). The former describes how campus-based universities, colleges, and schools the world over adapted very quickly in response to forced campus closures at the onset of the pandemic. Students suddenly were forced to learn online at home from professors or teachers who were scrambling to cope without the sort of institutional structures, instructional design, student support services, and ongoing training that characterizes ODDE institutions, the *raison d'être* of which is to cater to the needs and concerns of remote students. For Nichols*, ERT has demonstrated what happens when the so-called distance education is suddenly used without preparation or understanding of its basics to the detriment not only of program quality but also to the reputation of ODDE in conventional settings.

This distinction is particularly important in understanding the subsequent views of online learning held by faculty and students with limited experience in that mode. While many students appreciated the flexibility this model provided, undergraduates in particular resented the relative isolation and lack of community compared to the social aspects of on-campus life they had previously experienced or anticipated. However,

while a 2020 American-Canadian survey found that 58% of the students found their online experience not worth tuition costs, almost 50% of the respondents wanted some aspects of online learning carried forward once campuses reopened (Top Hat, 2022).

The student and faculty experience was particularly challenging during the first year of the pandemic (2020–2021). Courses were not necessarily designed for remote delivery, faculty felt overworked and unsupported, and many students felt deprived of some of the key social elements of a successful university experience; 2021–2022 course offerings were significantly better as universities adjusted to the new realities, providing more professional development and technological support to faculty and as students became more comfortable with their experience of distance education. However, the overall provision still fell significantly short of many faculty and student expectations.

The latter conclusion is supported by research across the globe. The pandemic has offered an almost unique replication of personal experience regardless of country. For example, early research studies in Jordan (Almahasees, Mohsen, & Amin, 2021), Poland (Bączek, Zagańczyk-Bączek, Szpringer, Jaroszyński, & Woźakowska-Kapłon, 2021) and Indonesia (Nasution & Ahmad, 2020) all concluded that, despite identified advantages to online provision, students and faculty preferred classroom-based learning. Writing in the American context, Busteed suggests that “Although most students desire a return to in-person learning, the majority also want to continue having the option to take classes online” (Busteed, 2021, paragraph 4), affirming the permanence of online learning options in conventional institutions.

Further, Paul (2014) found clear examples of conventional university faculty, newcomers to online learning, developing their own research, writing, and practice without any apparent knowledge of or consultation with the established ODDE literature. The future of ODDE thus depends on concerted campaigns to promote the research results and experiences of practitioners in the field so that online learning is better understood and not tainted by the relatively poor results of ERT.

The challenges are greatest in developing countries. As Jha and Ghatak* have shown for primary and secondary schools in India, the pandemic-driven lockdowns had a devastating impact on student persistence as both teachers and students were woefully unprepared for the demands of online education. Indeed, the forced move to online education actually exacerbated existing inequalities in educational access, especially given the unavailability of communications devices or even a place to study among so many impoverished students. The authors suggest several paths to a better future for education in India, recognizing that, despite its well-established ODDE systems, India has a long way to go to extend true opportunity to the disadvantaged.

The Need for Change in Our Post-secondary Institutions

The challenges raised by the pandemic are not new but have simply amplified existing trends and concerns about higher education around the world. Among the most important issues identified by the authors:

- The costs of higher education, with governments the world over cutting budgets and leaving institutions to find their own economies (Hülsmann*)
- Pressures for institutional diversification to provide more equitable opportunities for access and success to all, regardless of race, gender, economic, or social standing (Jha & Ghatak*)
- Pressures for graduates to be well prepared for occupational success in the knowledge economy (Bates*).
- Grappling with the challenges of addressing all three components of the iron triangle of educational provision – cost, access, and quality (Daniel, 2016; Daniel*; Glennie & Paul*).

The pandemic has not been the only crisis directly affecting our postsecondary institutions. The Me-Too and Black Lives Matter movements combined with universal concerns about climate change have complicated expectations for higher education as has an increasingly polarized political environment in many countries that threatens to undermine public trust in government and, by extension, all public institutional leaders.

Much is written about the need for “transformative” change in our postsecondary institutions but Nichols* suggests this term is overused and that much of the achieved or envisioned change does little to alter predominant institutional structures and processes. Resistance to change is as common in ODDE institutions as it is in more conventional universities.

As Brown* emphasizes, higher education is “entangled with a complex constellation of change forces” (p. 1) and such change is difficult, requiring knowledgeable leaders with unique skill sets and, often, courage. He decries over-simplification of such concepts as digital versus face-to-face education or teacher-centered versus student-centered learning, emphasizing that these are not binary notions, but complex concepts requiring “multifocal” leadership.

Lessons Learned from ODDE Experiences of the Past Five Decades

ODDE has evolved with technology and the democratization of higher education to the point that it has much to offer colleges and universities of any kind. As the chapters in this section demonstrate, efforts to improve ODDE offerings over the past decades have yielded considerable knowledge about what works for distance learning at all levels of education.

Central to this challenge is the need to break through the iron triangle of accessibility, cost, and quality, especially through new technologies. Weakness in any of the three will undermine an institution’s success, but ODDE offers the flexibility that can help leaders find ways to maintain or increase accessibility without compromising either cost or quality (Daniel, 2016; Daniel*, Glennie & Paul*).

Accessibility

The openness and flexibility offered by ODDE institutions has done much to extend accessibility to higher education in all countries, notably to previously disadvantaged learners and to working adults. While the global pent-up demand for college and university places has made it the easiest of the iron triangle components to address, accessibility cannot be taken for granted, especially given the negative impact of ERT experiences in many jurisdictions.

Marketing

Unfortunate ERT experiences have underlined the importance of publicizing and marketing the effectiveness of well-crafted ODDE programs, not only to the general public but to conventional university faculty and researchers so that they learn to appreciate such vital components of distance learning as course design and student support.

Jean-Louis* notes the persistence of public misperceptions of ODDE even after 50 years of distance education – that face-to-face is de facto better, that ODDE is for self-starting individuals who don't need student support, that online is easier with fewer resources so it must be cheaper and that it is easier to cheat online so quality must be lower. These are best addressed by consistent, effective, and evidence-based communications which place a premium on creative ways of getting the message across. Jean-Louis* offers a number of suggestions as to how this can be done.

Cost

The piece of the iron triangle most often out of institutional control is revenue, especially for those most dependent upon government funding in an era when cuts are frequent and often deep. Glib notions that ODDE is cheaper have been seriously challenged in many jurisdictions. As Daniel* demonstrates, this usually requires an institution to ensure enrolments (and completion rates) on a sufficiently large scale to take advantage of the cost benefits and efficiencies of ODDE.

While expanding enrolments and effective use of technology are key strategies for gaining cost efficiency, they usually require significant short-term investments and delayed benefits which can really test the fiscal stability of a given institution. This draws attention to the role and perspectives of governments and various funding agencies, an issue addressed in a provocative way by Hülsmann* who shows how Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) can work, driven by examples of a huge influx of government spending during the pandemic. MMT allows governments to see education increasingly as an investment and, ultimately, as a profit center.

Quality

Both accessibility and costs will be undermined if ODDE institutions are perceived to provide an inferior student experience compared to conventional institutions. This is perhaps the greatest ongoing challenge to ODDE, exacerbated by negative perceptions of ERT spilling over to online learning in general and also by a history of low completion rates in many jurisdictions. Many of the chapters in Section III include suggestions as to how ODDE quality can be improved and assured.

For example, Brown* urges reformers to recognize that digital education is not a single uniform entity and to avoid a “one provision fits all” approach. Instead, course offerings and delivery methods and even entire institutions should be customized to meet the needs of specific groups of learners.

Jha and Ghatak* note that open schools and open universities are not for everyone because younger people may not be ready to handle the degree of independence required. And Daniel* and Glennie and Paul* among others reaffirm the critical importance of careful course design and effective support services for the success of students studying at a distance.

Professional Development

Professional development of teachers and faculty is central to effective online teaching. Jha and Ghatak* relate increases in transactional distance between teacher and student to the relative lack of effective teacher training for online learning.

Writing about professional development in higher education, Tynan, Bossu, and Leitch* base their conclusions on scrutiny of a number of major research papers, emphasizing the importance of institutional context and related educational policies and teaching and learning strategies. Based on a couple of case studies, they offer eight recommendations for more effective professional development that is personalized and self-paced and accommodates individual learning styles. They conclude that just-in-time professional development opportunities enhance program participation and effectiveness. They also see a silver lining in the pandemic crisis in that previously indifferent faculty members, struggling to cope with the new realities, are increasingly welcoming professional development opportunities.

Strategic Planning

After a brief review of the literature on the strengths and pitfalls of strategic planning, Glennie and Paul* explore some of its practical challenges. The theories are strongly put to the test in a domain like South Africa where completion rates have been historically low. The authors underline the importance of defining and living up to open learning principles and diversifying to meet the needs of different groups of learners. They advocate a thoughtful and creative approach that emphasizes vision and strategy, especially for the long term, over more rigid and less effective planning exercises.

Partnerships

Brown* emphasizes the importance of strategic partnerships stemming from his experiences at Dublin City University. Porter and Perris* distinguish among three kinds of educational partnership – propositional, cooperative, and mutual service. They go into considerable detail to show how international partnerships in ODDE, notably through the Commonwealth of Learning, and nonprofit organizations like eCampus Ontario and BC Campus in Canada, advance the collaborative use of educational technology and digital learning environments. There are many effective models, but each partnership is unique, contextual, and subject to change.

Innovation

Governments over the world struggle to find ways to encourage and benefit from innovation. This has been the lifeblood of ODDE (Bates*) which has had to change often with the advent of each new learning technology and also to reduce per-student costs through economies of scale (e.g., large open universities, MOOCs).

Experience has shown how difficult this challenge is for governments and institutions alike. As institutions grow in size, they tend to become more hierarchical and bureaucratic, thus discouraging rather than encouraging innovation. And after making huge investments in a given technology, it is harder to change quickly in response to new needs and new technologies.

Bates* emphasizes focusing on learning needs rather than the technologies themselves and to distinguish between sustaining and disruptive technologies. He sees innovation as seriously under-researched in ODDE literature and points to the need to overcome what he terms its destructive myths: that it is difficult, that it just happens, that it happens in a vacuum, that only creative geniuses can innovate, and that it is always good. He suggests major strategies to overcome barriers to innovation and to support innovative teaching and learning.

Implications for Government and Institutional Leadership

The true test of leadership is the ability to change in the face of crisis and Covid-19 has been the perfect example of this challenge (Makoe*). The pandemic has raised issues that have seriously challenged government and institutional leaders, forced to take action and then often to pivot to a contrary one with very little notice. One of the most unfortunate outcomes of this in many sectors has been an undermining of trust in leaders.

Canada is an interesting case study because of its federal-provincial model which attempts to balance central national concerns with more local provincial priorities. Given that provinces have exclusive jurisdiction over most of education and health care, the net result during the pandemic has been a considerable variety of responses across the country, with provincial premiers changing positions frequently, spawning considerable confusion, and disillusionment with government among much of the

populace. This, in turn, has resulted in much more political polarity than previously and an undermining of trust in leaders at all levels of society.

Similarly, the pandemic has forced academic leaders to pivot quickly from on-campus to online and back, often without the time or inclination to consult widely with faculty or give sufficient notice to students. While such authority might have been accepted initially in a time of crisis, there is already evidence that it will not be as easily accepted in the longer term. For example, a number of Canadian faculty associations have expressed concern that more autocratic approaches during the pandemic will become permanent, with related negative implications for future campus labor relations (Liddle, 2022).

Trust is a key requirement for effective leadership (Glennie and Paul*, Makoe*) and, as Brown* has shown, embedding digital education at the heart of an institution requires collaborative and multifaceted leadership no longer so reliant on a single CEO. This emphasizes the importance of trust both up and down an institutional hierarchy.

Leaders in developing countries have additional burdens to bear, given the ongoing need to confront outdated colonial forms of governance and decision-making. Makoe* is interested in the personality traits of leaders best able to deal with the weights of the past, the push of the present, and the pull of the future in forging a stronger higher education system for South and sub-Saharan Africa. She envisions a new class of leaders who are resilient and willing to take risks and to meet challenges in unconventional ways. This analysis rings true for wealthier nations as well.

Bates* also cites leadership as a crucial issue for fostering innovation. He suggests that diffused leadership is usually more effective than charismatic or hierarchical approaches and leaders must be prepared sometimes to confront the prevailing organizational culture. They need to think holistically while encouraging lower-level problem solving in developing institutional strategies for e-learning.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Higher education is facing unprecedented pressures for change at a time when institutional leadership is more precarious than ever.

Do the developments addressed in Section III possibly lead to more convergence between ODDE and conventional institutions or will they continue to develop quite separately with their own silos of research and practice? Will we see the development of new kinds of teaching institutions or a postpandemic reversion to the status quo? It will be fascinating to track differing reactions to these questions across national boundaries and by type of institution.

For Nichols*, conventional education is based on assumptions around educational practice that are incompatible with ODDE. For this reason, efforts to mainly layer educational technology over conventional practice do not usually result in much real change. What's more, adding online learning to standard face-to-face classroom teaching has mainly increased costs, placed greater burdens on faculty

members, and provided an inconsistent approach to learning for the students. In contrast, ODDE can provide much more flexibility to meet the needs of individual student learners (Daniel, 2016).

Nichols* sees the transformation to new kinds of teaching institutions involving challenging and difficult redesign (educational operating model), redefinition (teaching roles), reengineering (processes), and realigning (practices under a new model of teaching and learning). All of these will require skilled, sensitive, and dedicated leadership.

In a world-wide climate of uncertainty, it is risky to predict developments in any field, including higher education. However, the following outcomes appear most likely from the writings of the Section III authors:

1. The opportunity, indeed the necessity, to forge responsive postsecondary institutions requires farsighted individuals with in-depth knowledge of all the vital components of teaching and learning for the twenty-first century. The new institutional leader will not only require the usual requisite knowledge, skills, and character, but the ability to share authority widely in building effective leadership teams and the courage and conviction to challenge even the most embedded characteristics of an institution's culture.
2. The iron triangle of accessibility, cost, and quality requires an ability to meet the challenges of all three, regardless of type of institution.
3. Through the global explosion of online learning, the pandemic has offered an unprecedented opportunity to the ODDE sector to practice and promote what has been learned from 50-plus years of research and experience in ways that both ensure higher levels of student success and offer important guidelines for institutional development.
4. Postpandemic, there will be a reversion to the status quo in the most prestigious research-intensive and teaching universities which will continue to thrive based on established reputations. But, in the long term, the most successful institutions of any type will be those that significantly challenge every aspect of their operating culture, including learning from both the successes and shortcomings of ODDE.
5. Notwithstanding negative perceptions emanating from the poor experience of many from pandemic-driven ERT, ODDE-based institutions have benefited from the pivot to online learning and will play an increasingly prominent role in the future of higher education.
6. There are important trends in many institutions to hybrid or blended approaches but, to the extent that they assume conventional operating models with no cultural change, these may constrain the potential reach toward accessible, cost-effective, flexible, open, and scalable education (Nichols*).

Notwithstanding all the challenges and uncertainties cited above, the next decade offers huge opportunities not only for the promotion, application, and refinement of ODDE, but for its impact on teaching and learning in conventional institutions as well. If publications like this one encourage the requisite reconsiderations of all

facets of educational provision, the catalyst role of the pandemic may ultimately be seen as silver lining to what has otherwise been a devastating world-wide tragedy.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Academic Professional Development to Support Mixed Modalities](#)
- ▶ [Institutional Partnerships and Collaborations in Online Learning](#)
- ▶ [Leading in Changing Times: Building a Transformative Culture](#)
- ▶ [Managing Innovation in Teaching in ODDE](#)
- ▶ [Marketing Online and Distance Learning](#)
- ▶ [ODDE and Debts: Taking Account of Macroeconomics](#)
- ▶ [ODDE Strategic Positioning in the Post-COVID-19 Era: A Case Study from South Africa](#)
- ▶ [Open Schools in Developing Countries: Virtual and Open or Distant and Closed?](#)
- ▶ [Resilient Leadership in Time of Crisis in Distance Education Institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa](#)
- ▶ [Running Distance Education at Scale: Open Universities, Open Schools, and MOOCs](#)
- ▶ [Transforming Conventional Education through ODDE](#)

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