

University of 5th age (U5) is a small non-profit institution that offers graduate and undergraduate level programs. Fifteen years ago, a new dean launched a distance education program. This program, a Master's degree for experienced teachers (MT) is a hybrid program that uses videotapes, study guides, and email as a form of communication. For a face-to-face component, one week of on campus summer session is offered. MT was launched in collaboration with for-profit corporate partner. The corporate partner was responsible for production of videotapes, marketing, storage, distribution, and recruitment whereas U5 was responsible for course development, hiring faculty and conducting distance courses. The U5 and the partner firm shared the profit. Recently, the partner firm announced an end of agreement with U5, leaving U5 and its MT program in panic mode. A committee consists of six faculty and staff (DETC) is assigned to develop a strategic plan and solution for this problem, as well as a future developmental plan for DE courses.

### **The Most Salient Features of the Situation**

MT is a very successful program for experienced teachers at U5. With about 750 degree students, MT is the largest academic program at U5. Ever since its launch, about 15 years ago, MT is generating profit for U5, by contributing \$500,000 per year. U5 is able to generate this revenue in collaboration with a for-profit corporate firm. This partner firm is responsible for marketing and producing video based instructional material. U5 also offers individual video courses as continuing education credits for teachers. The same partner firm markets the video courses, for about 500 students, generating \$150,000 per year for U5. As a combined result of both programs, MT and video courses, the partner firm generate substantial profit for U5.

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Distance education courses at U5 are the most profit generating courses. School's profit margins are under threat as the partner firm has announced the withdrawal from the contract. When the courses were launched some 15 years ago, a thorough plan was not made. The department also offers a program called Certificate of Advanced Graduate study in Educational Leadership (CAGS). This program is not very successful and barely breaks even each year. A good planning with latest technologies is essential for a successful DE program.

### **Strengths and Weakness**

The MT program is a high profit-generating program for U5. For the past fifteen years, the program is generating more than \$500,000. The student population has been steady for the last 15 years. The partner firm is in charge of marketing, recruiting and producing video-based material. U5 employs a small administrative staff on campus and one full time senior faculty to manage the course syllabus. Fifty adjunct faculty members teach exclusively online and do not come on campus very often. This saves the faculty space, material, electrical costs. The upfront costs on campus are very less hence; the program is very profitable to school.

The program was launched 15 years ago with some experimental strategies. Over the years, the program proved to be successful. With the partner firm, it also generated a substantial profit margin to school. However, the program was not planned carefully. It was launched as another academic program, which uses videotapes and self-study material. The only Internet communication was via email. The dean at that time was supportive of online program but did not have a keen interest in developing it thoroughly.

A careful planning is required for a successful DE program. Apart from faculty and staff, a team of instructional designers, program directors, technical coordinators, technical designers, system administrators is essential.

### **Development of Strategy**

To create any major change, a foolproof plan is essential. Kotter describes an eight-step strategy to implement a major change (Kotter, p. 21). Although all the steps that he describes are essential for a change to happen, U5 should implement first four basic steps.

### **Urgency**

According to Kotter, sense of urgency arises when there is a crisis. As the partner firm has already announced the withdrawal from the partnership with U5, this is a crisis for U5. For all these years, DE programs were generating income for U5, but the same programs were lacking a proper planning. Now U5 must take this “opportunity” to plan an expandable DE model.

### **Guiding coalition**

U5 has arranged a team of six people (DETC) to overlook the problem. The team consists of faculty and staff. However, these people are just experienced employees at U5. None of them has expertise in the field. To solve a crisis as such, a bigger team of experts from the field should be put in place. The team members should not only have expertise in current distance education trends, but should also be able to generate a solid plan.

### **Developing a Vision and a Strategy**

A good vision gives clarity of direction, avoids unnecessary projects, and utilizes available resources (Kotter, 1996). The DETC team should create a good vision plan for DE courses at U5. A new approach is essential towards the existing DE courses by considering use of latest technology and media, redesigning course syllabi and teaching techniques.

### **Communicating the change vision**

It is very important to spread the vision amongst the organization. Even though the new president at U5 and DETC members come up with a good vision as far as DE courses go, it is essential to spread it across the school.

### **The Plan**

The DETC has been given initial six weeks to come up with a preliminary proposal. The time can be phased out as follows. After the initial 6 weeks, a team of experts, which includes instructional designers, online curriculum designer, technical support, system administrator, and librarian, should design a new strategy for MT. By summer, the new course design should be implemented and tested and be running fully online.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
U5 creates a DETC team, which includes faculty and staff members. The faculty should be from the concerned departments and should have some online teaching					

experience. A faculty member from CAGS would benefit the committee.			
	The DETC team, the President and the stakeholders should have a planning meeting. The group discusses the vision and the future strategy.		
	The research phase The DETC committee analyzes the current program. The committee also studies U5's fully online program CAGS in detail. After a thorough study, the panel comes up with the strengths and suggestions for the MT program.		
		For future strategic planning, the team suggests hiring experts like Instructional designers, DE course developers, software designers etc.	

### Proposed Leadership Style

Hersey and Blanchard describe four types of leadership styles based on maturity level of a person or a group (Gates, 1976). The maturity levels are classified from low to high where M1 represents low maturity level and M4 is the highest maturity level. People in M1 group have the lowest maturity to perform any task. M1 group lacks the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence levels. As the maturity level increases, people in higher groups show more confidence and knowledge and are able to carry out a task independently. Hence, people in M1 group can be called as good learners, M2 and M3 as good followers and M4 as independent followers (Graeff, 1983).

Based on the maturity level, Hersey and Blanchard proposed different styles of leadership. S1 is for the lowest maturity level, M1, where the leader tells the followers exactly what and how to do. S2 is for M2 group where the leaders give directions to the followers. In S3 leadership, which is geared towards M3 group, leaders take a back seat and let the followers participate actively. For the highest maturity level M4, the proposed style is S4 where the followers carry out the leaders act as a guide and the task independently.

The recommended leadership style in this scenario would be S2 and S3 types. In these particular styles, leaders show high relationships with the followers and the tasks vary from low to high. DETC is consists of group of people from U5. Since this group belongs to the same institution, people are familiar with each other and hence it is easy for the leader to have a good relationship with them. The amount of work is going to vary from high to low. For the past 15 years, U5 has successfully conducted MT program with its corporate partner. Therefore, the basic infrastructure and the course outlines are in place. A total new approach is required to analyze, design and develop a new program. This in turn will need a major amount of work and hence, good leadership skills are essential at this stage.

### **Stakeholders' Reaction**

The MT program has been running successfully for the past fifteen years and has proved to be the biggest profit maker for U5. The board of trustees' reaction can be negative at first as U5 is about to lose the major income source. However, they will be supportive of making MT successful and up and running again. The new president is supportive of online programs. She

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will ensure that DETC get all the help needed to come up with a solid plan. The new model will most likely include latest technologies and majority of learning online component for flexibility and convenience for the students. The fifty adjunct instructors and the senior full-time faculty will have to adapt a major change in teaching styles.

### **Next steps**

DETC will submit the initial proposal. The corporate partner has given a time limit to end the partnership with U5. A good leadership is required to expedite the process of launching a new MT program. The president and the board of trustees and management should provide all the help required to launch new MT program successfully. U5 is a small private school. Therefore, the management should find a new corporate partner to take care of administrative needs and for profit generating purposes. The program directors should assure the prospective MT students as well as the adjunct faculty about success of new MT program.

### **Conclusion**

U5 is about to lose its corporate partner that generates the largest income for the institution. MT program, which has been running successfully for the past 15 years is about to face some obstacles. U5 should take this as an opportunity to develop a more concrete and adaptable fully online MT program. MT has been conducted using video cassettes and self-study material only. The makeover will allow MT to incorporate latest technology and media.

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