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Online learning has become more popular and has seen an exponential growth in the past few years. It is speculated that students will prefer learning online as opposed to conventional classroom setting (Beaudoin, 2005). As with any organization, distance education also requires strong leadership. In the beginning, this paper describes a situational leadership style proposed by Hersey and Blanchard (Gates, 1976), followed by the strengths and weaknesses of this particular leadership style. The next section describes a hypothetical scenario in an institution that offers distance education courses. The most salient features of this scenario are discussed in the next section. Finally, the leadership styles is applied to this scenario and the best possible solution is concluded at the end.

Leadership Styles

The Situational Leadership Theory

Hersey and Blanchard proposed a leadership style known as Situational Leadership Theory (Blanchard & Hersey, 1970). This theory is based on the maturity level of a person one is leading with. The leader should modify instructions based on the ability of the follower. The leadership has two main managerial behaviors viz task behavior (one-way communication) and relationship behavior (two-way communication) (Gumpert & Hambleton, 1979). Depending on the high and low levels of these behaviors, the leadership styles are further categorized into four subgroups. The leadership levels S1, S2, S3 and S4 are based on the maturity level of the follower, M1, M2, M3 and M4.For the lowest maturity level followers M1, the leaders instruct exactly how to accomplish the given task. At this level, the followers abide by the systematic

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instructions given by the leader. Eventually, the work experience and the knowledge level increases and thus the followers show more maturity. In higher maturity levels, the leader does not give in-depth instructions. At the highest level, minimal leadership is required and the followers complete tasks independently with few instructions.

Flexibility is the most important feature of Situational Leadership. The leadership is based on the needs of individual relations and hence, can be altered from person to person. A study was conducted on the leadership theory and persons with disabilities (Cubero, 2007). In this study, the situational leadership theory was used as a leadership style for the workforce with disabilities. The results of this study are positive and thus this is a good example of how situational leadership is flexible and caters to individual needs.

Transformative Leadership

"Transformative leadership is an ethically based leadership model that integrates a commitment to values and outcomes by optimizing the long-term interests of stakeholders and society and honoring the moral duties owed by the organizations to their stakeholders." (Caldwell et al. p. 176). Transformative leaders seek new changes in their respective organizations. While doing so, transformative leaders strive to bring best out the followers.

<p style="text-align:center">**The Scenario**</p>

Howard Community College (HCC) is based in Columbia, Maryland. About 10,000 in and out of county students attend various on-site and off-site courses at HCC. A number of

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courses are offered in different departments and HCC is prioritizing e-learning. A special division called Teaching and Learning Institute (TLI) handles and coordinates e-learning activities. TLI is responsible for new technology research, development, and implementation, training faculty on new technology, especially learning management system and classroom technology as well as conducting students' surveys. TLI also assists in developing new online and/ or hybrid courses. TLI staff includes a team of instructional designers, technology coordinator, and technical support staff.

HCC has a large number of international student populations, about 3000 students per year. The World Languages (WL) division offers a wide variety of languages from around the world. Currently, WL offers courses in 12 different languages with various course levels for every language. Spanish, Arabic and Chinese are the most popular languages. At present, all the levels for all these languages are offered on-site at HCC and are taught face–to- face.

Recently, the WL program director decided to expand the language program. As Spanish is one of the most popular languages amongst students and has the most enrollments, it was chosen for the pilot project. The program director wants to collaborate with the University of Mexico. A pilot project is the hybrid program where some portion of a course is taught by the professors from the University of Mexico online and the professors at HCC face-to-face teach the rest of the course.

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TLI must collaborate with WL to develop new hybrid courses. Since this is the first ever

hybrid language course offered at HCC, the language instructors need to work together with

instructional designing team to create a foolproof hybrid course.

The Most Salient Features of the Situation

The professors at HCC have been teaching languages in a traditional method. A little

technology has been introduced over the past few years for audio/ video assignments. However,

there is no online component in current syllabus. The professors at HCC will have to work in

conjunction with students as well as with the professors from the University of Mexico.

Some senior professors are adamant with the new teaching practice and believe that a

language is best taught by interacting face-to-face, communicating in person and by repeating

and practicing. The director of WL, on the other hand, is eager to introduce new ways to teach

languages by modifying the teaching pattern according to the learners' requirement. The present

generation is more attracted towards the Internet learning and the students would find this

learning method more interesting and fun.

The Challenge

The director of WL has to lead a team of Spanish faculty along with the instructional

design team from TLI. The WL faculty is not keen on modifying the current syllabus. The

Spanish language faculty appears hesitant about working with foreign instructors via Internet.

The instructional design team needs to work with the WL faculty on current syllabus. It is more

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challenging for the design team to come up with a best possible technology that also works well in the University of Mexico. If the current learning management system at HCC fails to work at the University of Mexico, the design team has to make extra efforts to train WL faculty with the new technology.

The Solution

The situational leadership and the transformative leadership styles suit this particular scenario best. The situational leadership defines four types of leadership styles based on the maturity levels of the followers. Depending on the maturity level of subordinates, the leaders are supposed to choose an appropriate style.

In this scenario, the WL leader must choose an appropriate leadership style for each case. The group can be broadly classified as WL team and TLI design team. The WL team has lower maturity when it comes to the technology and teaching online. The TLI design team has more experience in dealing with technology and working on the learning management system. However, the TLI team has very little to none experience in designing and teaching a language lesson plan, while the WL team is expert in curriculum design, planning and teaching Spanish.

The scenario conditions require different leadership styles for different situations. The WL director can appropriately guide the team members based on individual experience. The following table 1.1 outlines the situations and appropriate leadership styles. The experience for each team is based on 1-10, 10 being the most experienced. The leadership styles are classified

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based on the maturity levels. S1 is the leadership style for the lowest maturity level and S4 is for

the highest maturity level.

Situation	WL Team		TLI design team	
	Experience	Leadership style	Experience	Leadership style
Designing a lesson plan	9-10	**S4**	0-3	**S1**
Experience in teaching a language in face-to-face setting	9-10	**S4**	0-2	**S1**
Experience in designing teaching methods for online learning	0-4	**S2**	9-10	**S4**
Experience in choosing the appropriate technology	0-3	**S1**	9-10	**S4**
Modifying a face-to face curriculum for the hybrid course	3-5	**S3**	3-7	**S3**

Table 1.1

The WL director is introducing a new way of teaching language. The director is also

adjusting her leadership style for each team member, ultimately bringing the best out of each

individual. This leadership style shows transformative leadership qualities.

Conclusion

According to Kotter, "Leadership is a set of processes that creates organizations or adapts

them to changing circumstances"(Kotter, J., p.25). Situational leadership offers different

leadership styles based on different requirements. In the above scenario, the WL director needs

to alter her leadership style based on each individual experience. By introducing a new mode of

language learning, the director is also showing her ability to handle transformative leadership.

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Nevertheless, distance education need to have a solid leadership (Beaudoin, 2005) for

implementing new technology and for making online courses more viable.

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