EDITORIAL

The article presented in this issue of DEOSNEWS is quite different from many of the articles that appear in the literature of distance education. Rather than reporting on a particular program or technology, or discussing underlying theory, author Roger Kaufman takes a step back for a "wider view." He discusses the idea of working from the basis of an "Ideal Vision" of "the kind of world we want for tomorrow's child." Kaufman argues that such a vision serves as an appropriate starting point for identifying organizational contributions, specifically those in which distance learning has an important role.

IF DISTANCE LEARNING IS THE SOLUTION, WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? BEYOND DDSS

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INTRODUCTION

Some in our field have encouraged a wider-angle view of Distance Learning: we should go beyond our "craft" notion of the field and take on a system-view. This would have us focus on the broader system rather than on the narrower teaching/course focus that is the conventional paradigm. This article picks up on that emphasis and suggests that distance learning be seen as a means to societal ends and as an opportunity to redefine what education and training should deliver. This would have all we use and do contribute to achieving measurable objectives that are beneficial for both our society as well as our organizations. An objective for distance learning is provided that links what we do and accomplish to moving ever-closer to the kind of society we want to help create.

WE KNOW DISTANCE LEARNING IS USEFUL AND THAT IT WORKS. SO WHY ISN'T IT THE STANDARD?

These are exciting times for educational and training organizations. We are getting notice from scientific journals to news magazine, from educational conferences to legislative hearings. The demands for improving what we deliver to learners and being more socially responsive are well documented. Most states, as well as higher educational agencies world-wide, are either doing distance
learning (DL) or are seriously getting ready to. Distance learning professionals are in a position to be called on to help fashion the next generation of education and training. (I use "distance learning" as equivalent to "distance education." The reason for using "learning" is to avoid disenfranchising those who are interested in training and might discount education. With both, the emphasis is on performance.)

We can either continue to improve the delivery of existing content or we can help create a new future for DL and our societal partners. The ample DL implementations world-wide are studied, and we try to learn from what others are doing. Many educators and politicians are looking for ways of cutting budgets by reducing the labor-intensiveness of delivery by thinking of DL as a cheap way to provide courses to more people with the same number of instructors. Even with differences in definitions of what DL is, what it should deliver, and how it should be done, DL is still being seen by people outside the specialty as an add-on and not as a way to redefine education and training purposes before selecting the medium of delivery. And as long as DL is an "add-on" or is focused on delivery and not on learner performance, its effectiveness in and beyond the classroom is diminished: it will not become the standard for the continuous improvement of what education and training do and accomplish.

Distance learning must have several linked purposes and move from "how" to "what" and finally to "why." Delivery technology is the simplest part. The identification of what to deliver and to whom, (a "needs assessment" concern, Kaufman 1992 & 1995) as well as justifying why we deliver what we do, will be the hallmark of whether or not DL becomes the education and training standard, for determining if we will help change the future rather than simply reacting to it.

The great management expert Peter Drucker has reminded us for many years that we are getting better and better at doing that which should not be done at all (Drucker, 1993). Branson (1988) makes a convincing case that simply trying harder to deliver education without challenging most of its basic assumptions and the conventional wisdom will be futile. In DL, to focus only on the means—delivery methods, means, and locations—and not the ends—what learners must know and be able to accomplish in and beyond the conventional classroom—is to squander this great opportunity. We must shift from a focus on "how" to one of "what and why." And we must be able to prove a positive return from DL in terms of learner success in and beyond the classroom.

Rather than falling victim to being responsive to the conventional wisdom of delivering existing courses differently—what I choose to call the DDSS syndrome: Different Delivery, Same Stuff—we should shift to a wide-angle approach to help define what DL should deliver and justify why we want to deliver it in terms of societal payoffs and consequences. Such a shift is a further extension of Moore's (1993) suggestion that we go beyond a craft/teacher unit of analysis to a system perspective.

We should take advantage of the fact that we are members of a "learning society" and must contribute to an ever-improving society. Distance learning is a means to educational and societal

A learning society is one where everyone in it understands and acts on the basis that (1) the world is ever-changing, (2) individual skills, knowledge, attitudes, and abilities will also have to change, sometimes dramatically during the course of personal and occupational experiences (Marshall & Tucker, 1992; Carnavale, 1991; Rummier & Brache, 1990), and (3) information and validated learning opportunities must be readily available to everyone regardless of color, race, creed, sex, age, religion, national origin, time, or location. A learning society, and indeed learning organizations (c.f., Senge, 1990), are vital to our national and state interest. We have no choice: either create the future or become the victims of it (Drucker, 1994; Marshall & Tucker, 1992; Toffler, 1990; Kaufman, 1992, 1995; Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990).

Without ever improving our abilities, we cannot hope to stay nationally as well as internationally competitive and remain major players in terms of social and commercial concerns and opportunities. Distance learning can and should be the primary vehicle for defining and delivering this ideal. And it is a practical ideal, for if we don't do it, a positive future is not assured.

REDEFINING THE DL MISSION AND CONTRIBUTION

If DL is the solution, what's the problem? We are in a position of having to justify what DL is and what the costs and consequences (Kaufman, 1995; Kaufman, Herman & Watters, 1996; Kaufman and Grise, 1995) of its application are. Distance learning, I suggest, must be a primary vehicle for providing learners with the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and abilities to be successful in school and make a positive societal contribution. It should—must—show a positive return to the learners who avail themselves of it and to the society that pays for it. If DL cannot stand the test of delivering positive returns for what we put into it, we will become a solution to no known problem.

Distance learning is the process that delivers interactive, responsive, and valid information and learning opportunities to learners at a time, place, and in a form appropriate and convenient to them. It enables learners to gain knowledge and make continuous improvement as they become increasingly successful as learners, citizens, and fully functioning individuals. Distance learning may use a variety of delivery means, ranging from mailed self-study materials to interactive audio-video. Distance learning can be fully implemented remotely from the source, or it might be used in combination with conventional delivery, such as lectures augmented with E-mail interactions with the instructor(s) (Based on Florida State University Report to the President, 1993).

Several major challenges face us in higher education as we intend to serve well our clients both within the university context and beyond. Among the challenges will be to identify:

1. What to provide and why provide it.
2. How and when to best deliver.
3. How to integrate content and learning opportunities.
4. To whom to deliver.
5. How to institute and assure continuous improvement.
6. How to know when to add, subtract, modify, or discontinue content and methods of design and delivery as well as how and when to integrate among learning content.
7. How we are progressing toward (a) our Ideal Vision of the kind of world we want for tomorrow's child, (b) our organizational mission, and (c) our distance learning objective, and (d) modifying as required.

We should note that as we re-engineer our organizations (Hammer & Champy, 1993) so should we re-engineer our society (Drucker, 1993; Kaufman, 1992; 1995; Senge, 1990; Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990; Toffler, 1990) in a continuing cycle. And we must realize that the cycle time available for defining and delivering useful learning opportunities is dramatically shrinking.

The paradigm I urge is one that treats DL as a means to organizational and societal ends. Based on a definition of an Ideal Vision--the measurable statement of the kind of world we want for tomorrow's child--we then identify the contribution our organization should make to the Ideal Vision, and from that derive the objective for DL.

The mission objective for each education and training institution (i.e., what each institution is to deliver to its clients) is best based upon rolling-down from an Ideal Vision. Based on the Ideal Vision, the institution and distance learning partner organizations select, in coordination with others, those results which they commit to deliver. Of course, no single institution can be responsible for the achievement of the entire Ideal Vision. From the mission objective of each institution, the objective for distance learning identifies those results to which effectively and efficiently delivered distance learning will contribute. Thus, there is a linking relationship which flows from the Ideal Vision to the mission objective of one's organization, and then flows to the objective for distance learning.

Following is an example based on the work for and with distance learning committees at the Florida State University and a Florida-wide Board of Regents DL Task Force on Strategic Planning and Needs Assessment (From 1993-95 I served as Chair of the DL committees.)

IDENTIFYING THE FUTURE WE WANT FOR TOMORROW:
AN IDEAL VISION AS THE BASIS FOR DL

An Ideal Vision--defined by education and training partners--states the kind of world we want to develop and achieve for tomorrow's child. An Ideal Vision is frankly ideal. It identifies what we would create, not what we think we can deliver. It is actually "practical dreaming" (Kaufman, 1995) because unless we define where we ideally want to be, we cannot begin to continuously move toward it. It is practical and not theoretical, although we might not get there in our lifetimes or the lifetimes of our children. If we do not want to ultimately get to the ideal, what levels of triage are we willing to endorse? It provides a tangible, measurable "North Star" toward which we may steer and uniquely contribute.
An Ideal Vision is for society--the one we want to create with others--not for any organization. It is best stated in measurable performance terms and free of solutions, methods, resources, and how-to-do-its. An Ideal Vision is used to guide us (and, of course, is open to modification and change). An example of an Ideal Vision was derived by consensus of the planning partners for Florida:

**An Ideal Vision (for Florida)**

The world will be at peace, and there will be no murders, rapes, starvation, crimes, nor substance abuse. Floridians will feel secure and move around the state safely without regard to time or place. It will be free of injurious infectious disease, and every child brought into the world will be a wanted child. Poverty will not exist, and every woman and man will earn as much as it costs them to live unless they are going to school and moving toward preparing themselves to be self-sufficient and self-reliant--no one will be under the care, custody or control of another person, agency, or substance.

All citizens will be assisted to help themselves so that they are self-sufficient and self-reliant. People will take charge of their lives and be responsible for what they use, do, and contribute. Personal, intimate, and loving partnerships will form and sustain themselves. No species will go extinct due to unintended and/or illegal human intervention, pollution, or action. Beaches, cities, towns, and countrysides will be free of litter, graffiti, and defacement. Accidents will reach zero, and thus there will not be any accidental death or disability in daily living.

Government's contribution will be assisting people to be happy and self-sustaining, and will reinforce independence and mutual contribution and will be organized and funded to the extent to which it meets its objectives. Florida and U.S. business will earn a profit without bringing harm to its clients and our mutual world.

(Because this vision was derived by consensus, there are some elements that are not societal/mega level. However, the intention is to identify in results terms the kind of work desired for tomorrow's child.)

**Adding Measurable Criteria**

The world will be at peace with no losses of life nor wounded or disabilities from declared or undeclared wars (as certified by the United Nations and the US State Department), and there will be no murders, rapes, crimes, starvation or substance abuse (as certified by the Florida Attorney General, and/or Florida Department of Health & Human Services (HRS/US Department of Health & Human Services (DH&HS)). Floridians will feel secure and move around the state safely without regard to time or place (as indicated by a zero rate of personal assaults as certified by the Attorney General). There will be no admissions (nor requirement to imprison) to prisons (as certified by the Florida Secretary, Department of Corrections). The recidivism rate for prisoners will be zero.
The unlucky and unfortunate among us will be assisted to help themselves so that they are increasingly close to being—and become—self-sufficient and self-reliant, as indicated by an increase in life expectancies for this population and increase in the amount of money their work produces and contributes to their subsistence (as certified by the US and/or Florida Department of Labor). People will take charge of their lives, and be responsible for the consequences of their choices concerning what they use, do, and contribute (as indicated by no incarcerations, no personal abuse of others and substances, 100% registering to vote and voting at least once every two years (as certified by the Florida Attorney General and/or US Dept. of Justice). Personal, intimate, and loving partnerships will form and sustain themselves (as indicated by a zero divorce rate, no judgments of physical abuse for persons living together, as certified by DHRS and/or US DH&HS). We will be free of injurious infectious disease (as certified by the US Centers for Disease Control and HRS), and every child brought into the world will be a wanted child (as indicated by no child living below the poverty level (each individual’s consumption is at least equal to or less than their production (as certified by the Florida Department of Labor (DoL)), and zero convictions for child abuse (as certified by the US DH&HS and/or Florida DHRS). Poverty will not exist, and every woman and man will earn as much as it costs them to live unless they are moving toward preparing themselves to be self-sufficient and self-reliant (such as going to school) and not be under the care, custody or control of another person, agency, or substance (as certified by the US DH&HS &/or Florida HRS, and/or the Florida Department of Labor and the FETPIP, an exemplary Florida database).

No species will go extinct from unintended and/or illegal human causes as verified by DER. There will be no deaths or disabilities from accident as certified by the Florida Department of Transportation and/or the Department of Highway Safety.

Government’s primary contribution will be assisting people to be happy and self-sustaining, will reinforce independence and mutual contribution and will be organized and funded to the extent to which it meets its objectives (as indicated by funding levels and Mega results referenced by agency budgets and evaluations, as certified by Florida TaxWatch, an independent Florida organization. Florida business will earn a profit without bringing harm to its clients and our mutual world (as certified by the U.S. Departments of Commerce, Interior, and H&HS, and/or the Florida Department of Commerce).

As previously suggested, rolling down from an Ideal Vision, any organization can identify which of the results it will, either independently or in cooperation with others, commit to deliver and move continuously toward its accomplishment. Following is an organizational mission derived for one university as it began its DL planning.

A Possible University Mission Objective
By the year 2000, all of those who graduate from our system will enroll in accredited graduate higher educational programs and/or get jobs in their first, second, or third professional or career choice. In addition, they will choose to continue their formal and/or informal education and training.

All graduates will be responsive and responsible citizens who volunteer in civic activities. They will have come through a university that has served them so that they compare favorably on valid and reliable criterion and/or norm referenced assessments for their general and specific knowledge and abilities.

Their education will take place in a drug-free, crime-free, and supportive environment. All who seek it will have universal access to appropriate information and knowledge with validated learning opportunities geared to each learner's diverse characteristics, abilities, and potential. Learners will leave realizing that their higher educational experiences readied them for life, work, and the future.

The foundation for the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes they acquire will be based on research conducted, completed, and published in refereed journals (or jury acceptance for the performing and literary arts), and the university will be rated in the top twenty higher education institutions in the US. The top research ranking will be substantiated by it being among the top twenty universities in the US in terms of external contract and grant funding in the areas within which they offer graduate and undergraduate programs. In addition, at least 10% of a faculty in each academic department will be honored by earning at least one of the following indicators of distinction:

- President or past president of a national/international professional society.
- Awarded Fellow status in their academic/professional society.
- A member of the National Academy of Sciences or equivalent.
- Awarded a local, national or international award for outstanding teaching.
- Editor of a professional journal.
- Published textbook(s) considered as in the top five quoted texts in their field.
- Exhibited in a national juried show.
- Awarded a national award for a performance, poem, book, art product.

...or other comparable demonstrations of contributions.

The learners will show no differences in graduation rates, job placements, economic success, employer satisfaction, or
dropouts on the basis of irrelevant variables including: location, color, race, creed, sex, sexual orientation, religion, or national origin.

The next step was to identify the objective for DL: identify what contribution is to be made to advance to the achievement of the mission and move toward the Ideal Vision.

An Objective for Distance Learning

By the year 2010, every Floridian will have full access to valid, individually responsive, and useful learning opportunities, including information, delivered in an appropriate as well as convenient place and time—usually remote from the delivering source, by the most effective and efficient means that current pedagogies and technologies allow. The learning opportunities they receive will assist them to continuously function as knowledgeable individuals and effective citizens.

The content of the learning opportunities will be for both degree- and non-degree seeking Floridians (including professional and personal development as well as skills/competence certification). The learning opportunities will provide them with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and abilities to (a) continuously improve their self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and quality of life, (b) increasingly become responsive and responsible workers and citizens who are not under the care, custody, or control of another person, agency, or substance, and (c) allow each individual to make contributions to themselves—both in the workplace as well as in their lives—and to Florida as we move progressively toward our shared Ideal Vision and the mission of our university.

Each learning experience will have been designed, developed, and certified as having valid content and as being cost-effective and cost-efficient in the achievement of performance objectives. The delivery of learning opportunities will be through channels of communication selected on the basis of a costs/results analysis and will provide positive cost-consequences in terms of payoffs for (a) Florida, (b) distance learners, and (c) any distance learning partnerships. The source of the distance learning experience will be from any origin which provides validated learning materials, and the learning experiences will be made available without concern for the agency making it available.

The mastery of content, graduation and completion rates of course/program/certificate programs and activities, and the satisfaction rates for learners using distance learning options will be at least as successful as the cohorts completing their studies on the campuses. The progress of learners will demonstrate contribution to the institution’s mission objective and meet all certification/accrediting/professional requirements.

BECOMING THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING STANDARD

By first defining the world we want to help develop before selecting courses, content, and delivery technology, we shift from a hardware/course/instructor oriented DL to a societal one. In this
approach, the Ideal Vision provides the prime referent for deciding what an organization is to contribute and then identifies what DL is to deliver. This societally-oriented DL approach is a more useful way of conceiving our mission and contributions. This recommended approach will allow us to rethink education and training and provide the opposite of DDSS: we will be able to define learning experiences and delivery methods on the basis of what people must know and be able to do in order to help, together, create the world for tomorrow's child.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

If DL is to be successful, it is suggested, it must make a contribution to society and be able to justify the expenditures for it on the basis of what it cost as compared to its return to society and the organization. Indicators of the costs and consequences of any intervention, including DL, is a topic for further research and development. One starting point is called "costs-consequences analysis" (Kaufman, 1995; Kaufman & Grise, 1995; and Kaufman, Herman & Watters, 1995). Following is a bare identification of areas for future research on justifying our expenditures and efforts on the basis of return in terms of societal (Mega-level results and consequences) results and payoffs.

An Indicator of Mega-Level Consequences

One metric offered as an indicator of societal impact--Mega-level consequences, or a cost-utility payoff--is that an individual's consumption be equal to or less than their production (Kaufman, 1972; Kaufman 1992; Kaufman 1995; Sobel & Kaufman, 1989):

\[ C \geq P \]

Consumption is less than or equal to production--C is cost as indicated by dollars/money expended by an individual and P is production as indicated by dollars/money obtained by an individual.

This indicator--an approximation of Mega-level consequences and payoffs--is only for an individual, and uses money as a proxy for costs and consequences. By using money as a proxy, there is the assumption that people put money where their values lie, and thus C is based on what it costs to exist, and P is what one gets for what they contribute. Further, a basic definition for Mega-level results is that no person will be under the care, custody, or control of another person, agency, or substance and that is also indicated by the measure "C is less than or equal P."

Either before or after a DL process is defined or delivered, an analysis could identify if there have been any payoffs in terms of societal consequences for the individual involved. While not a complete indicator of the contributions of DL alone, comparisons could be made between a DL program and other delivery modes.

Using some metric of societal payoffs, future research on DL should define what are the returns for using the process as well as identifying the efficacy and efficiency of alternative delivery
modes as well as different definitions of DL.

REFERENCES


Report to the President from the Distance Learning Committee. (1993). Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University


OTHER RELATED LITERATURE


Florida State University, Department of Educational Research.

