



ACTIVITIES OF STAFF AND ITS TEAM-LEADER FOR UPGRADING THE COMPETENCES OF DISTANCE LEARNING ADULT STUDENTS

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Abstract

Nowadays, adult education is mostly affected but global economical processes, and this is characterized by the following: orientation towards labour market requirements (along with it – competition between labour force competences, threat of unemployment, etc.); international knowledge system; variety of communication systems.

The society pays increasing attention to the development of the practical skills and competences, however, due attention should be paid to social rights and responsibility as well as facilitating and providing study motivation and flexibility. New and efficient transition to new methods, services and technologies has to be encouraged and ensured. Job-related distance learning was used already at the beginning of the 20th century and it has still maintained its role as one of the most useful and flexible forms of acquiring competences for adults, especially in rural areas.

Like in any management process, the main role in the management of the distance learning study support system resources is played by a professional team and team-leader. The model of modern distance learning manager and the main tasks of the team-leader, managing distance learning study support system resources is described in the article.

KEYWORDS: adult education management, resource management, team-leading, distance learning study support system, model of distance learning manager, adults' competences.

Introduction

At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, mankind is facing a transition from the industrial production to the age of information and communication. Our society is characterized by the following:

- development of new information technologies;
- growing globalization of economy;
- segmented labor market;
- unemployment;
- changes in the role of a woman, new family model;
- immigration caused cultural and linguistic variety;
- social, political and economic differences on the local, national and international level.

Nowadays, adult education is mostly affected but global economical processes, and this is characterized by the following: orientation towards labour market requirements (along with it – competition between labor force competences, threat of unemployment, etc.); international knowledge system; variety of communication systems.

The society pays increasing attention to the development of the practical skills (for the purposes of adult education – competences), however, due attention should be paid to social rights and responsibility as well as facilitating and providing study motivation and flexibility. New and efficient transition to new methods, services and technologies has to be encouraged and ensured. Employees have to be encouraged to renew and improve their theoretical knowledge and professional skills all their lives.

The role of distance learning is crucial in education management as well as renewal and perfection of professional adult competencies. Job-related distance

learning was used already at the beginning of the 20th century and it has still maintained its role as one of the most useful and flexible forms of acquiring knowledge for adults, especially in rural areas.

Relating the issues of education management, most scientists emphasize the flexibility of its framework (education science is multi-dimensional, because it is closely linked with sociology, pedagogy, education policy, etc.) and purposefulness (Bush, 1995; Daft & Marcic, 2001; Oldroyd, Elsner, Poster, 2006). The principle of management goal orientation was worked out theoretically by G. Odiorn and G. Humble (Klauss, 2002). It is based on the acknowledgement that purposefulness and goals play the central role in the management process.

The author is certain that this is a very important principle in the management of adult education and specifically in the management of distance learning. It is determined by the following factors: adult education is specifically goal oriented; the ways of goal achievement enjoy significant freedom (possibility to use innovative forms, for example, distance learning, different distance learning study support system resources; possibility to develop self-incentive and facilitate creativity, that is, the adults can participate in setting crucial study related goals, choose and prioritize resources that help to achieve the goals.

According to the author, the term distance learning management means purposefulness (clear, definite, possible and achievable goals), adjustment of a creative and open study support system, ensuring its operation and development through different resources.

Modeling as the main research method was used, revealing the variety of the distance learning study

support system resources and to create a relevant study support system and its management model that would meet the needs of the adults. Management of the distance learning support system resources has been looked upon in the context of improving adult competencies with the focus on innovative adult education possibilities.

The structure of the paper is as follows. The next chapter provides the analysis of the main functions of the team of distance learning providers. Then the author introduces the model of a modern distance learning manager (team-leader) and describes his/her essential competences, personal traits, ethical norms and values. And finally the author describes the structure of resources of distance learning study support system and analyzes team leader's objectives, managing these resources with the aim to perfect adult learners' competences.

The team's capability and sinergetic performance

The study needs of adults in terms of distance learning can get satisfied if they are being managed by a professional. Speaking about the staff of distance learning organization, the main thing is these people's capability of working in a team and realizing their objective, which is to be students' advisers, assistants, recommendation and information givers as well as like-minded people.

In order adults involved in distance learning could get professional support, a strong team of employees is needed, which is able to perform the following functions (Pikeringa, 2002):

- *Get and process information.* In the process of distance learning management this function is especially important due to several reasons: a student can address any staff member, it means that any staff member at his/her disposal must have the basic information about the study process or he/she must know which person is the most competent in terms of the question asked. According to his/her responsibility level a team member has to be ready to use the information, which is at his/her disposal, and make decisions connected to its use.
- *Introduce innovations.* This function is especially significant in terms of team's ability to improve study support system all together and its elements apart. Speaking about the perfection of adult competences, new methods in terms of achieving necessary competences can be introduced.
- *Persuade and influence.* This function can be expressed both internally and externally. Inside the team, persuading and substantiating one's personal opinion the best problem solutions are being discussed. Collaborating with students, this function is one of the most important ones, as it reflects one of the most essential consultant duties in the study support system management. Persuasion and substantiated influence perform a very significant role if keeping in mind distance learning marketing, advertising and other questions.

- *Develop.* As well as any organization also distance learning institution in the process of its development relies on particular basic principles, it has its strategy, goals and tasks. At a distance learning organization the mentioned elements are subjected to one goal – satisfaction of the students' needs. Keeping in mind that the study needs of adults are determined by rapid society development, the distance learning organization must become a dynamic, active, and responsive institution.
- *Form the structure.* In order to achieve common aims, each team member has to act as the element of a single system, who knows what, when, and how to do to get the results set.
- *Produce or provide services.* The range of products and services provided for adults is quite impressive, it means that it is necessary to involve real professionals in the team or the people, who want to become the ones and do become due to educational processes arranged by organization.
- *Evaluate and ensure conformity.* At a distance learning organization it is essential to carry out regular performance evaluation process, which can be expressed as the analysis of students' progress, the analysis of employees' and students inquiries, evaluation of complaints and recommendations, and so on. In the dynamic process it is essential to find inconsequences in management and eliminate them in time for the quality of offered products and services not to suffer.
- *Coordinate.* The achievement of common aims depends on the team members' work consistency and unity. This function practically ensures the qualitative achievement of the rest aspects, and is one of the most important ones in the work of distance learning organization personnel.

As Great Britain management specialist Sue Clemenson admits, the major feature of a personnel team is balance (Vadībzīnību rokasgrāmata, 2003), as it includes not only particular functions, but also unites different persons and attitudes. Unity, creativity, laxity, and energy, as the main parameters of a team's synergetic performance, are also mentioned by Latvian management specialist M. Kehre (Kehre, 2004).

The support of any team is its manager, team-leader.

Competent team -leader as a key person, managing adult learner's competences

In order the team-leader could manage the resources of distance learning study support system (*Study support system is a summary of different resources whose operational goal is perfection of the competences important for adults*) successfully and reach the goal set together with the team – develop adult competences, his/her performance should be based on three cornerstones, which form the basis of the model of a modern manager (Fig.1).

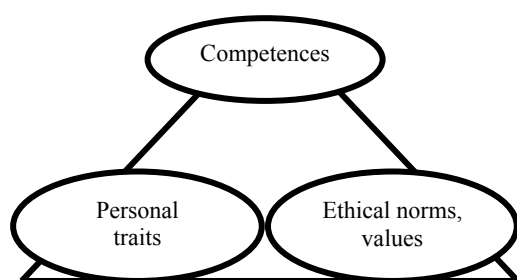


Figure1. The model of a modern distance learning manager (team-leader)

From the Fig.1 we see that a distance learning manager (leader) should have the competences, which can be got by any adult during distance learning in that particular organization:

- Professional, including management competences (e.g., management of distance learning specific features, ability of working with adults, knowledge of management theory and practice);
- Self-determination competences (the main one-ability of being the leader);
- Social and communication competences (e.g., ability of creating the image of an organization, ability of listening to others' views, discussing, convincing, and so on).

As the most substantial personal traits the author emphasizes the following ones:

- Wide mental outlook that allows one to orientate in numerous spheres, and is necessary for the purposeful use of resources, for the choice of working methods, management style;
- Creativity, innovations that allow to introduce new elements, to choose innovative methods of management of resources in the distance learning system;
- Responsibility, steadiness, efficiency;
- Ability to risk reasonably (choosing innovative methods, study support system resources, and so on);

- Resistance to stress (work connected with innovative forms and approaches, which are not always realized and accepted by society, the major audience is adults having diverse experiences);
- Inner necessity for distance learning and self-perfection (is as a stimulus for the rest team members);
- Belief in the idea of distance learning itself and in one's power to accomplish that.

While managing distance learning study support system and its resources, a manager has to follow general ethical norms as well as definite values. As the most essential ones the following ones have to be mentioned:

- Students and their needs (it facilitates the formation of an adequate study support system, ensures successful communication, feedback, cooperation);
- Professional team of academic and service staff (ensures the work of study support system, rational choice and use of resources, achievement of the aims set);
- Adult education as the mission of a distance learning organization that ensures long-term society development.

Respectively, ethical norms are those which are considered to be traditional and commonly accepted ones:

- Be honest and respectful mutually;
- Not to manipulate people;
- Be a demanding manager, not insulting another person's self-respect;
- Keep one's promises, be precise and explicit;
- Use honest means in reaching the goal;
- Not to leave any work unestimated;
- Evaluate critically both achievements and shortcomings, not to run into self-satisfaction.

Speaking about the management of resources, we emphasize the following essential tem-leader's objectives (Table 1):

Table 1. Team- leader's objectives in the process of managing the resources of the distance learning study support system

Resources	Planning objectives	Organizational objectives	Motivational objectives	Monitoring objectives
1.Methodological				
1.1.Lectures	plan the structure of lectures in accordance with distance learning concept, organization's goals and objectives; plan regular lecturers' consultations	create positive learning environment (rooms, equipment); introduce distance learning methods	motivate students to take active part in lectures; motivate lecturers to use interactive methods	control the quality of lecturers' work
1.2.Study materials in writing	make contents and form the concept (conformity with the requirements of a programme, adult needs, distance learning principles, availability, comprehensibility, practical	ensure practical application of the learning contents in collaboration with lecturers and employers; arrange reviewing	motivate students to provide feedback regarding the contents of study materials; motivate lecturers to update and supplement the contents of materials	monitor the compliance of reviewer's, pilot testers', and students' recommendations in the process of creation of new study

	orientation and so on)	and pilot testing of study materials; organize inquiries concerning the conformity of the contents of study materials with purposeful perfection of adult competences	regularly, paying special attention to the possibility of developing and improving competences necessary for students	materials and improvement of the existing ones
2.Human resources	plan the structure of employees necessary for work; plan the principles of team making, the criteria of employees' selection; create the models of personnel education and motivation to ensure successful team work	make qualitative support corresponding to the structure (inviting the best academic staff, practitioners working for enterprises); ensure employees' regular educational process (inside the enterprise or outside it)	motivate employees to engage in distance learning, applying different motivation means; motivate them to participate in the process of work in cooperation with employers in order to clarify necessary competences and to elaborate control mechanism	check employees' achievements; state existing problems while working with adults; state work conformity or non-conformity with standards, eliminate drawbacks
3. Information and technological (IT) resources	plan the support of necessary IT resources in accordance with organization's goals and their realization possibilities (financial resources, ability to use IT and so on)	form the structure of exploitable IT resources, ensuring both employees' and students' access to these resources; organize regular feedback about the efficiency of IT resources in terms of improvement of adult competences	encourage the use of IT resources to ensure academic as well as organizational study support; motivate adults to use IT, speeding up and making communication possibilities diversified, developing technical, communicative and social competences	evaluate success of operation of IT resources in order to reduce expenses; monitor (in case of necessity inviting IT or distance learning experts), clarify the perspectives of IT use, possibilities to choose the resources, which conform with variable market conditions and adult competences adequate to them
4. Material	create the feasible model of distance learning study support system, which conforms with the organization's goals set and their realization possibilities; plan the material support necessary for successful organization performance in accordance with anticipated financial resources (premises, technics and so on)	ensure adequate material environment in accordance with the chosen model of the support system; create the image of organization in society, using the elements of internal environment	motivate personnel to improve material resources in accordance with the requirements of labour market and students' needs	control the efficiency of the use of material resources; follow the main progress trends of material resources, introduce innovations in organization environment
5.Financial	plan financial means necessary for the achievement of the aim; plan probable financial sources; plan finance management system to guarantee the financial stability of the organization	organize the use of financial resources in accordance with distance learning goals; stimulate the investment of financial resources into human resources and methodological resources to ensure long-term development of distance learning support system	motivate employees to participate in various projects to get financing for improving quantitative and qualitative characteristics of distance learning support system; encourage employers' financial interest in terms of forming distance learning support system suitable for adult needs	carry out regular monitoring and distribution of resources necessary for the improvement of study support system improvement in accordance with the goals planned

Skilfully managed usage of the distance learning study support resources can facilitate mastering or developing of the competencies needed for the adults by feedback which serves as the basic element of the improvement of the study process and by promoting distance learning organizations as open, flexible and competitive long term development organizations.

Like in any management process, the main role in the management of the distance learning study support system resources is played by a professional manager. His/her performance determines the operational ability of the organization and its potential to exist and develop in the conditions of the demands of the labor market and the offer of the innovative study forms.

Summary

Necessary for adults competences are a variable value as its topicality to a great degree is determined by labour market requirements, it means that according to launching conditions of the principle of management goal orientation, distance learning ensures:

- regular goal testing and updating according to adults' needs in labour market circumstances;
- diversity of means necessary for reaching the goal;
- regular system of evaluation and control which provides adults and distance learning organizers with the opportunity to be certain about the results achieved while moving further to the aim.

Management, providing by distance learning staff-team and its leader is being characterized as:

- creative management, in other words, when defining the aim and ensuring all the management functions, original, non-standard thinking is being applied. It is especially necessary to persuade the society of distance learning opportunities in adults education altering the stereotypes about the means of improving competences and possibilities of their use;
- open management, it means that management mechanism is clear for every member of the organization, recommendations to ensure management, to choose resources are regularly received from different sources (from adults, employees, employers, experts in the area, etc.);
- participative management, which facilitates adults' (involved in distance education) participation in decision making in terms of getting competences that are topical for them.

The proposed model of modern distance learning manager (team-leader) and the structure of team leader's objectives, managing distance learning support system resources would help distance learning providers to work out the most suitable system of competences –oriented adult learning.

Further research is intended to develop the separate management models for widening of the most important adult learners competences, for example, self- directing, social, professional, etc.

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ДЕЙСТВИЯ КОМАНДЫ ПЕРСОНАЛА И ЕЁ ЛИДЕРА В РАЗВИТИИ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТИ СТУДЕНТОВ ДИСТАНЦИОННОГО ОБУЧЕНИЯ

Резюме

В наше время образование для взрослых главным образом подвержено влиянию глобальных экономических процессов, что характеризуется следующими факторами: ориентацией на требования рынка труда (на ряду с этим – конкуренцией компетентности рабочей силы, угрозой безработицы и т.д.); международной системой знаний; разнообразностью коммуникационных систем. Общество уделяет повышенное внимание развитию практических способностей (если говорить об образовании для взрослых – компетентности), тем не менее, соответствующее внимание должно уделяться как социальным правам и ответственности, так и содействию и предоставлению учебной мотивации и гибкости.

Роль дистанционного обучения является ключевой как в сфере менеджмента образования, так и в плане восстановления и совершенствования профессиональной компетентности взрослых. Для того чтобы вовлечённые в дистанционное образование взрослые получали профессиональную поддержку, необходима мощная команда персонала, способная осуществлять следующие функции: осваивать и обрабатывать информацию; применять нововведения или инновации; убеждать и влиять; развивать; формировать структуру; создавать или предоставлять услуги; оценивать и обеспечивать соответствие; координировать.

Опорой любой команды является её руководитель-лидер. Чтобы руководитель мог успешно управлять ресурсами системы поддержки дистанционного обучения и вместе с командой достигать поставленной цели, а именно, совершенствования компетентности взрослых, его деятельность должна опираться на 3 краеугольных камня, которые формируют основу модели современного руководителя: компетентность, личные качества, этические нормы и ценности.

Руководителю дистанционного обучения (лидеру команды) должна быть присуща та компетентность, которую может приобрести любой взрослый в процессе дистанционного обучения в управляемой им (руководителем) организации: профессиональная, в т.ч. компетентность в сфере управления (например: знание специфики дистанционного обучения, умение работать с взрослыми людьми, знание теории и практики менеджмента); компетентность в сфере самоопределения (самая существенная – способность быть лидером); социальная и коммуникативная компетентность (например: способность создавать образ организации, умение выслушивать мнения других людей, умение дискутировать, убеждать и т.д.).

Среди наиболее значимых личных качеств стоит выделить следующие: широкий кругозор, позволяющий ориентироваться в различных сферах и необходимый для

целенаправленного использования ресурсов, выбора методов работы, стиля управления; творческий подход, новаторство, позволяющие вводить новые элементы в систему дистанционного обучения, выбирать инновационные методы управления ресурсами; ответственность, уравновешенность, деловой подход; умение обоснованно рисковать (при выборе инновационных методов, ресурсов системы поддержки обучения и т.д.); устойчивость к стрессу (работа связана с инновационными формами и приёмами, которые не всегда сразу понимают и принимают в обществе, основная целевая аудитория – это взрослые люди с опытом разного уровня); внутренняя необходимость дальнейшего образования и самосовершенствования (служит стимулом для остальных членов команды); вера в идею дистанционного обучения и в свои силы при её реализации.

Управляя системой поддержки дистанционного обучения и её ресурсами, руководитель должен соблюдать общие этические нормы и основываться в своей работе на определённые ценности. Одними из наиболее важных

ценностей являются: студенты и их нужды; профессиональная команда академического и обслуживающего персонала; образование взрослых, как миссия организации дистанционного обучения, обеспечивающая долгосрочное развитие общества.

В свою очередь, в качестве этических норм можно рассмотреть традиционные и общепринятые нормы: честность, требовательность и др.

В статье также проводится анализ наиболее существенных задач руководителя-лидера команды в сферах планирования, организации, мотивации и контроля при управлении наиболее важными ресурсами системы поддержки дистанционного обучения, а именно, методическими, человеческими, информационными и технологическими, материальными и финансовыми ресурсами.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: менеджмент образования взрослых, управление ресурсами, управление командой, , система поддержки дистанционного обучения, модель руководителя дистанционного образования, компетентность взрослых.

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