

Chapter II

Ethical Conundrums in Distance Education Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

Launching and sustaining innovative new academic programs is typically a complex enterprise, especially distance education projects, and more particularly, such initiatives attempted by individual institutions with little or no prior experience in this arena. Inherently parochial, colleges and universities usually experiment with online courses on their own, but increasingly, as institutions engage in more ambitious efforts to develop full programs of study offered at a distance, they are recognizing, enthusiastically or reluctantly, that collaborative arrangements may make the difference between success and failure, especially for those with little expertise and few start-up resources. Partnerships are being forged between two or more higher education entities, and even more remarkably, there is growing evidence of academic institutions partnering with for-profit corporate organizations. Unfortunately, these unions too often result in more collisions than collaborations, especially when there are differing values among the parties involved. Through the presentation of selected mini-case studies representing several actual higher education-corporate partnerships, this chapter identifies and analyzes a number of ethical dilemmas, some philosophical and others practical, which should be considered by those who enter into distance education partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

The relatively sparse body of literature on the topic of ethics in distance education is now finally being augmented, as evidenced in this volume,

as well as a few other selected publishing and presentation venues. To date, most work on this subject has taken a microview, focusing primarily on ethical issues that may arise with individual faculty and students, or within teacher-student

relationships in the distance environment. Another approach has been the interest in so-called values education or character education, in hopes that education can promote the “right” values and foster ethical behavior. Less common is attention to the **macroview** of distance education ethics, that is, at the organizational level. It is this author’s working assumption that academic quality and ethical integrity of any distance education course depends approximately 50% on the individual faculty responsible for that offering (microlevel), and 50% on other academic officers who plan, manage and evaluate distance education programs and courses (**macrolevel**). This author leaves it to fellow contributors in this volume to further address critical forces at the microlevel; he here attempt to extend the discussion by examining related questions regarding ethical **dilemmas** from a broader **macro** perspective.

In an era that seems to amplify a decline in public morality, corporate scandals, and global conflict, these well-publicized events are assumed to influence attitudes about individual ethical behavior, especially among the younger citizenry who witness their elders engaged in chronic misdeeds. There is evidence that as many as three-quarters of students today admit to some form of academic fraud, most commonly in the form of cheating on exams and plagiarism. This has caused considerable concern among faculty, especially those who teach at a distance, that students enrolled in such courses and programs are particularly vulnerable to unethical behaviors, and at the very least, to uncivil behavior in online discourse. As a result, institutions and instructors have taken great pains in recent years, as distance education offerings have proliferated, to address ethics related to computer usage, and formulate policies that provide guidelines for students. Virtually every institution has established a set of well-promulgated regulations for students to follow, designed to ensure some semblance of ethical behavior in classrooms and cyberspace.

Curiously, despite this heightened attention to ethical practice, directed primarily at consumers of distance education, those who plan, manage and evaluate distance education activities seem to give little attention to ethical practice as providers. This is not to suggest that unethical behavior is noticeably rampant in the distance education arena, but rather to note that the telecommunications revolution in academe has provided significant opportunity for new initiatives, growth and income and, with this development, there are also situations in which individuals and organizations can easily overlook, or perhaps ignore, areas in which their own ethics may, at times, be compromised.

Should the establishment and monitoring of a set of standards for ethical practice in distance education be the responsibility of a government, an NGO, a national association of providers, institutional providers, or self-regulating by individual faculty (ICDE Dusseldorf 2001 Conference)? Who is to blame, and what is the degree of liability when students become victims of poor quality in distance education? At present, there is no recognized body that ensures the adoption or enforcement of a code of ethics for distance education. In their rush to capitalize on the burgeoning distance education market, many institutions, in addition to having little resident expertise in technology-aided pedagogy, certainly have little awareness of potential ethical considerations in this arena.

DISTANCE EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

Organizational arrangements in which **partners** with differing attitudes and values enter into collaborative agreements to design and deliver new academic programs are increasingly common. Long known for their parochial approach in the knowledge industry, colleges and universities

are suddenly being challenged by new educational providers able to compete with them, often utilizing a for-profit mode as a strong incentive to encroach into a domain in which institutions have enjoyed a monopoly for so long. The “forced marriages” that now occur with some frequency between these unlikely partners exacerbates the danger of having two or more players with disparate goals and distinct means of achieving them.

While there are certainly many examples of viable **partnerships** that function compatibly, achieve shared goals, and deliver quality products and services to students, and do so in an entirely honorable manner, it is certain that there are also less noble ways in which an opportunist mentality gets in the way of one or more partners that inevitably clouds ethical standards of the enterprise. One party may be insistent that academic quality, however it may be defined, must be paramount in all decisions and actions, while the other, though equally convinced that it too adheres to these same principles, appears nonetheless intent on pushing enrollment numbers, regardless of how this is to be accomplished.

The growth of online courses and degree programs, virtual institutions, corporate universities, for-profit providers of instructional software and, as a consequence, the exponential increase in online registrations, is surely one of the most dramatic developments in the education and training sectors worldwide, in terms of scope and speed. On the surface, this remarkable phenomenon should be seen as a great equalizer, driven by the availability and use of technology by greater numbers of learners. But many see a dark side to this, identifying technology as “a new engine of inequality” (Gladieux & Swail 1999). Those that use technology regularly, whether at home, work, or school, gain significant advantages that magnify further opportunities, thus creating the specter of a “**digital divide**” on a world-wide basis. Certainly, minimizing the adverse impact of this

trend, whether it is real or imagined, ought to be an ethical responsibility of distance educators.

There are practices in distance education that are generally recognized as “**Best Practices**,” yet there are no widely accepted ethical principles that can be touted as standard operating procedure. While there are surely many practices in distance education that could be called into question, both in terms of efficacy and acceptability, there is generally an air of benign tolerance of these, in the absence of any widely promulgated and adopted criteria. While certain standards of performance are expected, much latitude is provided to allow for differing styles, especially in the online environment, to avoid reducing such teaching to a mechanistic process. So-called “**Best Practices**” usually reflect a prevalent school of thought adopted by a program or institution; likewise, ethical approaches to teaching and learning generally reflect an explicit or implicit ethos by the provider.

Ethical issues may encompass a wide variety of beliefs and behaviors including, for example, what is or is not taught, how it is taught, and what constitutes effective teaching and satisfactory learning. In this regard, distance educators bear significant responsibility, now and in the future, for defining and practicing what constitutes ethical acts, whether on the part of individuals or institutions engaged in distance education. This is especially so because any unethical act potentially creates conditions that invite others to act likewise (ICDE 2001 Dusseldorf Conference). And the advent of “diploma mills” utilizing electronic resources puts even greater demands on legitimate providers to actively address ethical practices.

Those who facilitate others’ learning must be guided by ethical concerns and moral values. Universal access to education may be considered by many as an ethical priority, and instructional technology is recognized as a means to facilitate this goal. Yet, the increasing dominance of tech-

nology can also foster unethical behavior, without adequate safeguards and the clear presence of an ethical culture. Educational administrators and teachers, whether in classroom or online courses, regularly face ethical issues, to a greater or lesser degree, without any training whatsoever in dealing with such matters (Beck & Murphy, 1994). Personal and professional and institutional principles designed to guide day-to-day practice may exist in some fashion, but ultimately, individuals must create an atmosphere of honesty and fairness in dealing with peers and others affected by their behaviors.

Added to this phenomenon is the emergence of the student-centered approach to pedagogy, which increasingly removes the instructor from a historically authoritative role, and recognizes the learner's prior knowledge base, current learning styles, and so forth. This trend can allow for significant student control and greater detachment on the part of the instructor, resulting in less social presence and greater psychological distance. In these settings, it is possible that ethical dilemmas faced by either teachers or students are further exacerbated by a more equitable balance of power and lessened authority of the teacher? In short, ethical issues may take on additional meanings in the distance education arena, and perhaps be more difficult to monitor and appropriately address. Still, educators must model the behaviors they expect of students, despite the distance factor. This may be done by articulating and exhibiting ethical teaching and research standards and practices.

There are likely those in academe who view differing positions on ethical questions, especially if these situations involve a connection between an academic institution and a for-profit organization, as an existential struggle between capitalism and democracy. Most academic types are determined that any program or course they are associated with must remain pristine and immune to any nefarious motives, especially if these seem to

have monetary consequences favoring a for-profit partner or are adverse to students' interests. This author proposes that such variances in how individuals and organizations interpret and resolve ethical challenges are typically more modest in scope and significance. While one or both parties in disagreement regarding how best to proceed in resolving an issue may be tempted to claim the moral high ground, it is probably more likely that their discord revolves around relatively mundane matters of a more practical nature.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Every **organization has a culture**, with values and expectations that may be implicit with each entity, but are seldom explicit between two partners hoping to work in tandem. Goodwill may be easily outflanked by desire for success that is defined differently by each party. For example, one side sees the need for students who receive satisfactory services; the other sees the highest possible number of recruits converted to registrations as the goal. In short, the more entrepreneurial partner values tangible results; the other values meaningfulness of purpose. This dichotomy might also be characterized, in some instances, as a distinction between servant **leadership** and entrepreneurial leadership. Neither side is more obviously professional than the other; rather, each has a particular perspective on what it values most (e.g., short term gains-admissions and retention), or perhaps long-term goals (e.g., reputation and legacy).

Ethical **dilemmas** are often exacerbated by two different but interactive parties, each having to make choices based on what each sees as the "right" values. And if getting it done is viewed as more important than getting it right, tough issues may not benefit from much, if any, self-reflection before action is taken. Too often, a wrong decision can seem temporarily right, and attempts at

intervention to correct the situation may come too late. Complicating collaborative decision-making between two groups, each anchored by its respective core values, is that the situation may well constitute a dilemma for one party, yet the other remains oblivious to any conflicting issue to be resolved before action is taken. As Kidder (1995) points out, one's moral imperative could be another's moral dilemma, or even another's moral outrage. Yet, seldom do contractual partners agree in advance to a set of principles for problem solving and decision-making.

Organizations should systematically engage in values clarification at the start of a relationship to define the rules of engagement and to identify parameters of mutually acceptable behavior. Kidder further suggests that nobody can claim exclusive hold on moral discernment, and that 21st century choices demand a "morality of mindfulness." Clinging stubbornly to one value at the exclusion of others leads to thoughtless moralizing rather than moral thinking.

Thomas Sergiovanni (1992) suggests that congeniality should not be a substitute for collegiality, nor apparent cooperation for true commitment. Collegiality relies on norms and values agreed to by like-minded people, based on a common commitment, with shared identity and goals, and thus feel obligated to work together for the common good. This strong dedication to a set of ideas and values leads to a firm course of action, even to the point of creating an artificial reality that compels the players to stay the course. Such cohesion within a single organization is difficult enough to achieve and sustain, but to establish and maintain it between two ambitious partners can be even more elusive.

Sergiovanni argues that, ideally, decisions should transform the environment for the better, and thus constitutes the highest form of "rightness." But instead, decisions typically produce results, followed by a reaction, often one that is unanticipated and not necessarily shared by both affected parties. Kidder also notes that if

the setting in which two parties are engaged in complex planning and processes represents a new, exciting accelerated situation for opportunity, one side may be more daring and more nimble, and less constrained by a need to examine the moral landscape before taking a gamble on what happens next.

ETHICAL RELATIVISM?

Is one moral stance as good as another? Is **ethical relativism** a legitimate principle to follow? Do certain situations justify altered ethics and actions? Is it reasonable to adopt a code of situational ethics, wherein one does what is contextually appropriate? Thinkers from Plato to C.P. Snow have written of two cultures and the clashes that ensue; ultimately this dichotomy is what Kidder refers to as a "dilemma paradigm." He offers, as an example, gender-based differences, with men valuing justice, rights, and equality, and women valuing nonviolence, relationships, and caring. It is quite possible that in certain types of organizations, senior leadership is in the hands of a female team, while its partner is dominated by men with an entirely different ethos and decision-making approach largely determined by certain gender-based values and priorities.

Ethical conundrums involving two partnering entities are more public than moral dilemmas being sorted out between individuals. They typically involve individuals who represent their organization's position, and this sometimes requires discussion among various stakeholders who then become more aware of issues under consideration at the organizational level. At this stage, both individual and organizational values may enter into the arena of discussion and disagreement, with the former watching to see what the organization will ultimately say or do, and if it truly represents a collective position compatible with their own values, or with those the organization officially espouses.

Kidder reminds us that Socrates opined that only the individual can remain truly principled, and that a more public life demands compromises that make true morality impossible. Thoreau, likewise, argued that his public/political obligation would compel him to act against his own conscience. But Hobbes contended that those in public positions are subject to a public morality, not a private set of values. Today, in a different environment of media scrutiny and religious activism, the public demands that one's public and private life must reflect a moral consistency

In an era of burgeoning distance education programs, precipitated by the advent of the Internet, quite a number of small, faith-based institutions with declining enrollments explored distance education delivery modes as a means of increasing enrollments to a viable level for growth and, in not a few instances, for survival. Some were enticed to enter into agreements with for-profit entities that promised attractive numbers for a substantial share of tuition revenues. For many of these, it became a financially attractive arrangement. But this particular category of distance education partnership also created especially challenging dilemmas for institutions that operated on the basis of strong religious convictions that guided their instruction and services to students, as well as their business practices. Ethical stances founded on creed may present somewhat inflexible postures that can quickly clash with a partner more inclined to adapt to the situation at hand and promote a culture governed more on what might be labeled ethical relativism.

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

International distance education partnerships have the potential to be both especially satisfying, as well as particularly challenging, to execute effectively. Once educational programs cross national borders, any number of social and cultural issues may arise, along with all the same

issues that can plague partnership programs offered within the same country. Tony Bates (1999) has written about such partnerships, and distinguishes between franchise arrangements and joint programs. Franchises are typically designed by one institution but delivered by another under a license or contract agreement. Despite a number of advantages to such arrangements, there are also inherent difficulties; there is often not equity between the two partners, especially if there is an assumption that one has greater academic expertise than the other. On the other hand, as Bates notes, the "weaker" partner may still have some competitive advantage over other peer institutions in their setting who don't have the benefits a partner can provide. Joint programs create the prospect for more equality among two or more partners who may engage in programming together, each contributing more or less equal resources. In this case, each partner is likely to have some academic leverage to safeguard its own interests.

What motivates institutions to enter into such **international partnerships**? Obviously, the potential for revenues is key, because online courses might be offered to foreign students at a premium rate. Although one could argue that this raises some ethical issues (e.g., only more privileged students can gain access to required technology; tuition dollars are leaving impoverished countries), another view is that the partnership allows access to education not otherwise available and thus contributes to increased individual and national prosperity. And it can be argued that the increased availability of technology via relatively inexpensive, public Internet cafes does, in fact, make technology readily available to those seeking education delivered online. International partnerships can also enable a poorer or less experienced institution in a developing country to more quickly acquire distance education expertise and enhance its prestige and fortunes (Bates, 1999).

At another level, one partner may advocate a teaching/learning philosophy that its partner finds inappropriate for the population it serves.

For example, a "Western" institution will likely promote discussion, critical thinking, and group work as essential to learning, while the partner finds the notion of students discoursing with, or challenging the teacher's views to be culturally, socially and politically incorrect. And what about language-driven issues between partners with differing notions regarding the appropriate language of instruction? Should the "Western" institution insist that all instruction be in English, even if students have limited ability in English, while the partner requests that all or at least some instruction be in the native language? These issues may be complicated even further if a primary motive of some students is to be exposed to new approaches to learning, so that they might become more competitive for admission to advanced studies in other countries later (Bates, 1999).

Then there is the matter of ensuring equal services at the same level of quality for different consumers. Bates asks the provocative question: Is it realistic to expect that students studying through a partner institution in another country will receive the same resources as counterparts registered at the sponsoring institution? Who is responsible for assuring integrity of content, delivery and assessment for all? How much latitude, if any, should be allowed to accommodate cultural differences that could make a program relevant and viable for diverse learners?

LEADERSHIP

In any distance education partnership, similar to the situations described in this discussion, or any number of permutations thereof, is it realistic to expect distance education faculty and administrators to become ethical **leaders**? Wilcox and Ebb (1992, p. 27) define an ethical leader as "serving the common good, ... by working within a framework of shared beliefs concerning standards of acceptable behavior." This seems to

be a reasonable and doable proposition, but what if those leaders in a partnership do not hold and value shared beliefs that guide their approach in problem solving and decision-making?

Ethical **dilemmas** are often compounded by issues of power. Someone with more resources has more power and so can manifest that power imbalance by making decisions that impact someone in a more dependent situation (e.g., professor over student). But power can also result in "nondecisions" wherein the person with power can prevent consideration and resolution of issues. Another variation of power distribution is evident in the situation where key players each hold a certain degree of power, but mainly in their respective spheres of influence, thereby possibly canceling out one another's authority to influence or act where their spheres intersect.

Leadership within each organizational body is guided by a selective moral authority, with shared values that define the group; these are not easily changed within the group, nor are they likely interchangeable between two groups. In fact, a tribe mentality often sets in and is reinforced by mutually antagonistic positions that are fueled by that moral authority. If such differences are not expressed and negotiated in good faith, partnerships can become flawed, and not likely to ultimately succeed; indeed, the relationship may deteriorate to the point where no resolution is possible. This condition may exist even while both parties pretend their working relationship is civil and productive.

Partnerships require careful stewardship from each party, and this is not necessarily always located at the top. In many instances, it is a second-tier manager, program director or other mid-level leader who is critical in guiding a collaborative relationship with the least amount of miscues and misunderstanding among partners with disparate positions on key issues. But what happens if the top leader is unenthusiastic about the partnership and so forces the liaison to give

his or her counterpart mixed messages? And what happens if an organization is in transition, or if there is a change in leadership, with possible difference in style and substance? Or the partnership principals each bring a distinct style to the engagement, one with a transactional style, wherein the most effort goes into maintaining a cordial relationships, while his/her counterpart is a transformative leader who sees the partnership as an opportunity for organizational innovation and growth? A stable and comfortable partnership can be disrupted and even sabotaged by any one or more of these seemingly small and often subtle differences.

CASE STUDIES

The selected **cases** presented here are intended to illustrate the dynamics involved between partners in distance education situations. These are composite sketches of varied circumstances reflecting several different partnerships with which the author is familiar with, rather than scenarios exclusively representing any actual single partnership. Do these cases represent a clash of ethical positions? Perhaps not ostensibly, but they can be viewed as examples of situations where differences in academic philosophy, as well as opposing business considerations, gradually begin to compromise a previously viable partnership. Facile resolution of the myriad dilemmas summarized in these cases are not proposed here. Each situation requires careful diagnosis, thoughtful problem solving, and strategic action enabled by those empowered to act in each unique time and place.

Case #1: International Partnership

A small, growing U.S. university launches its first international program for health professionals in a Middle East nation. To do so, it establishes a

contractual relationship with an in-country organization that has arranged several successful partnerships with a select few other U.S. institutions. An effective working affiliation quickly evolves, due in large part to a solid relationship between the key contact persons in leadership roles representing each entity. The in-country partner is able to recruit a critical mass of degree-completion candidates to make the program quite cost-effective at a relatively early stage of development. The two academic departments involved are enthusiastic, as it is an expedient means of increasing student numbers, and also offers faculty an opportunity for cross-cultural teaching experience abroad. In the fall and spring terms, some university faculty are sent overseas to teach, and their host-nation counterparts are hired to teach in-country. Students also attend a summer residency on the U.S. campus.

However, costs for travel, compensation, housing and per diem escalate, and due to security issues, it becomes increasingly difficult to lure U.S. faculty to teach abroad. Some university personnel overseeing the program come to recognize that this program is an ideal candidate for offering some courses via distance delivery, as a significant reduction in operating expenses would likely be realized. But as this option is explored, it becomes quite apparent that the partner has serious reservations regarding the prospect of converting a number of courses to an online format. They contend that students are unaccustomed to this approach, and that the National Council of Higher Education in their country would likely not approve moving in this direction.

Here, we have a situation in which the two partners come to have a serious difference of opinion, with one side concerned about reducing costs and the other concerned about losing income due to possibly lowered enrolments as a result of any changes in a program that seems to be running well. To complicate matters, the partner is also able to use the argument that a third party will make life

difficult for all if distance education is introduced. The U.S. partner is uncertain if the resistance to distance education is real or imagined, but in either case, it emerges as an impediment to program changes that it feels are vital to continued success.

Case #2: Short vs. Long-Term Gain

A campus-centric university enters the distance education arena by offering a new master's degree in education, working with a west coast for-profit organization that is establishing **partnerships** with several other small institutions just getting started in this delivery mode. Agreements are easily reached regarding an appropriate division of labor between the two partners, with the clear understanding that the university plays the lead role in all academic matters. The nonacademic partner is to receive a substantial portion of tuition revenues for product development, materials distribution and marketing. Approvals for this new program are secured within the institution, and the for-profit partner designs an aggressive marketing campaign. But almost immediately, once basic operating procedures are agreed upon, several issues surface, making it quite obvious that there are significant differences of opinion on how to actually implement the program. These issues involve a complicated mix of business considerations and academic principles.

First, there is the question of marketing and how recruiters for the for-profit arm are to be compensated; salaried or on a per-enrollee basis? The for-profit wants the latter, as a motivator to generate numbers. What is the appropriate number of credits for a master's degree? The nonprofit argues for the minimum acceptable number in order to facilitate the "sale" of the degree program. What tuition should be charged? The nonprofit contends that a discounted tuition will be attractive and result in a critical mass of students early in the life of the program. Should there be a residency requirement? The nonprofit prefers there not be one, as this would result in

higher costs and less convenience for students, and so make the program less attractive. And how flexible should policies be? The nonprofit encourages very student-friendly policies (e.g., leniency regarding extensions for course completion). As might be expected, the educational institution assumes exactly the opposite stance on each of these questions.

As with the first case, one party interjects a third party into the equation to bolster its position, when the university insists that unless the dispute is resolved in its favor, the regional accrediting body may find fault with the program. Similarly, the for-profit group strengthens its position by reminding its academic partner that the other peer institutions also implementing a similar program have no difficulty at all complying with the recommendations proposed by the for-profit partner.

Case #3: Service vs. Cost-Effectiveness

A college creates its first fully online degree program, a certificate of advanced graduate study, and contracts with a for-profit company to provide technical support in setting up courses, training faculty, and offering ongoing online support as requested to faculty and students. The organization also provides the instructional platform, as well as the server for course delivery. As is the usual arrangement, the for-profit partner is to receive a percentage of each course registration as payment for these various nonacademic services. The institution chooses to market the program, having developed a strong curriculum with little apparent regional competition, having successfully sought all necessary academic approvals, and having created a curriculum that will certify students in the field in all states, and thus is confident there will be a strong market demand for such a program of study.

However, inadequate attention is given in the first year of the program to aggressively market it;

as a result, enrollment numbers are discouragingly low, and neither partner realizes any significant new net revenue from the venture. Despite low numbers of both students and faculty, the institution understandably still wants its partner to provide adequate tech support, training and course set-ups, but the original contractual arrangements were sufficiently vague that the for-profit group is able to gradually reduce its battery of services, so that it can realize some cost-savings and avoid having to terminate the contract at the next renewal point. Contact between the two partners lessens, enrolments fall, and the program is barely self-sustaining as it enters its second year of operation, with no clear direction or intervention from the college administration to address problems.

The **cases** described above also raises the specter of dissolution, as already precarious relations between partners can become even more fragile and quickly unravel. Much of this discussion has focused on issues to be attentive in establishing distance education partnerships, but ethical conundrums can be at least as vexing at the exit point of such relationships. As with marital separation, organizational partners are unlikely to decide at precisely the same moment that the arrangement ought to be terminated. Despite termination clauses and other written agreements, things happen and circumstances may change unexpectedly for one or both parties. A financial exigency for one, justifying a breach of contract, can be seen by the other as an egregious ethical lapse.

SUMMARY

Are there viable models for ethical decision-making in partnership arrangements? **Partners** need, at the very least, to identify and articulate their respective assumptions and values to determine how disparate these may be, and if these are likely to encumber further collaboration. Participants must respect one another's multiple and differing

responsibilities, loyalties and obligations to various constituencies; then some attempt to define the **dilemma** may be useful; followed by sharing options; realistically assessing consequences of each choice; exploring possible compromise positions; and finally, coming to agreement on the most suitable response to the situation.

All parties must be clear regarding their respective motivation for moving into any joint international distance arrangement. Each should acknowledge the benefits it envisions for itself and its constituents. Letters of agreement are important to clearly define goals, expectations, responsibilities, timeframes for planning, deliverables, financial arrangements, and so forth, before any actual activities are launched. All key players, planners, course developers, instructors, and so forth, should be sensitized to any potentially volatile issues before any products or services are offered. The rush into online courses and full programs delivered within or across national boundaries ought not to be undertaken unless participants benefit from lessons previously learned by others.

Kidder suggests three principles that could effectively guide decision-making at the organizational level, though these are unlikely to be actively acknowledged, especially by both sides.

- Do whatever produces the greatest good for the greatest number;
- Act only as you would want all others to act; and
- Do to others what you would want done to you.

In the final analysis, no detailed formula is readily available, nor are any presented here, for guiding appropriate action in **partnership** situations, whether in the realm of distance education, or any other field of endeavor. Making ethical decisions depends on many variables, and such dilemmas are not easily resolved, even among fairly compatible partners. Kidder argues

that “noble compromise” is necessary in most cases, oftentimes requiring that a third option be reached that is not the first choice of either party, but is nonetheless an acceptable one. Kidder also suggests that by successfully making a tough choice on one issue, the partners can clarify their respective positions, and thus guide them toward subsequent satisfactory resolutions on tough issues in the future.

The ambitious work to be accomplished in the distance education arena is often too complex to be effectively accomplished without a partner, and the outcomes are too important for the benefits of such partnerships to be squandered. The difference between success and failure in these enterprises ultimately depends on adequate attention and commitment to maintaining the highest ethical standards individuals and organizations can possibly achieve together.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Ethical relativism holds that morality is relative to the norms of one’s culture. The belief related to what is right or wrong differs across cultures and individuals. Due of this difference of opinion about the morality, cultural relativism and subjectivism, it becomes difficult to arrive at a common agreement on moral values. Thus, research efforts must be directed toward planning, designing, developing and marketing educational products for distance learners. Further research needs to be focused on how the culture would shape the learners, faculty and administrators’ ethically appropriate behavior. More studies are needed to investigate misconduct of different stakeholders in the area of education. Research studies are recommended to examine the pressure the academics face during ethical decision-making. There are situations selecting between two rights. How this situation of conflict is tackled involves ethical dilemma.

Corporate social responsibility is gaining momentum. International partnerships and increasing use of technology to the cause of education are renewing emphasis on corporate ethics. Organizations and institutions are investing in ethical trainings and programs. We need to focus our attention on the impact of such training and programs that would provide an insight into the relationship between formal programs and workplace culture and ethical behavior. Suitable investigations to understand the ethical elements of organizational culture, the relationship of organizational values and organizational behavior, and how the behavior is controlled by organizational culture would provide measures to promote ethical conduct. Further important issues seeking attention relate to examining the impact of various leadership styles on ethical dilemma, culture, effect of punishment and reward systems, degree of involving employees in culture change, ways of crisis management, and how an ethics program impacts organizational leadership and culture. Research studies may be oriented to assess the effectiveness of national, regional, racial, gender, economic, and political culture on the culture and values of an organization.

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