

Quality Education to Underprivileged through Change Management in Open Distance Learning(ODL) within Dual Mode University: A Story of School of Open Learning (SOL), University of Delhi (DU),

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Relevance

The objective of this case study is to analyze the challenges faced in institutional development under Open and Distance Learning(ODL) framework in India's best university and suggest a way-forward to strengthen ODL movement within dual mode universities leading to empower the marginalized sections of students in improving their levels of learning. We examine India's first effective ODL initiative, introduced by University of Delhi(DU) in 1962, now known as School of Open Learning(SOL) to provide an inclusive and cost-effective quality higher education. Presently, around 400,000 students are enrolled at SOL to realize their dreams. We explain how envisioning and implementing institutional development in a situation stagnated with internal inertia and inadequate affirmative action at the top can be reformed through change management including e-governance and capability building through process transformation.

During the journey of half a century, SOL has mixed experiences. Our study is significant in the context of global development in which many underdeveloped countries expand higher education in an 'either-or' model; focusing on 'either' conventional universities 'or' establishing open universities to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio(GER). In India GER is around 17% that we want to increase to 30% by 2020. Similar situation could be found in Asia and Africa. Students favor conventional universities in terms quality higher education. Keeping in view the over blowing demand for quality higher education, we may say that conventional system is unable to manage such a large number of students due to limited capacities in terms of infrastructure, man power, library and other resources in underdeveloped countries. In this context, dual mode university design for quality higher education to the masses including marginal sections of society would be appropriate strategic intervention keeping in view cost, quality and accessibility parameters as well to maximize potentials accrued due to 'demographic dividends'. We may say that opportunities are within dual mode, keeping in view accessibility, cost and quality parameters.

Our story tells that the rules of game provide parity between conventional and ODL at DU. However, while implementing rules of the game, the policy indifference at the top makes the path of institutional development more challenging. While analyzing internal factors, we explain a transformation process enabling to crack institutional inertia created due to lack of work culture. Typical inertia in a public university converts internal stakeholders just to condemn their situation and enjoy inefficiency in delivering public services without accountability.

We experienced that despite policy priorities at national level, peripheral treatment given to the ODL institutions in terms of administrative and other policy support in a dual mode university. Expansion and opening various courses including institutional framework in terms of providing capable man power and other support structures have gradually been stagnated in the absence of appreciative work-culture. These are major issues for institutional development and we are confident to resolve these issues. Significantly, SOL example lies in its futuristic implications in terms of sharing the benefits to the ODL students that are mainly accrued to a relatively small number of students of the conventional system generated through public exchequers. Our case study is replicable in the light of public policy focusing expansion, equity and excellence based on e-governance. Despite negativities, transformation process of SOL from manual to virtual is a success story.

Statutory Parity- Conventional and SOL Students

Dual mode structure at DU ensures parity between conventional and ODL, which is unique and powerful statutory provision. Common academic bodies- Academic Council and Executive Council design the policy for development of both. Within DU ordinances, we may identify four important parity provisions. The first is identified as institutional parity which

ensures equivalence between the campuses meant to manage the conventional and ODL. In this reference in addition to prevailing structure, an initiative was facilitated by Commonwealth Learning in 2004 resulted into establishment of Campus of Open Learning (COL) with multiple enabling features.

The second statutory dimension relates to ensure quality in learning processes. Organic linkages between SOL and conventional faculties are established. Syllabi, curriculum and other quality monitoring tools are common for both the streams as designed by the conventional system. Counseling sessions are arranged for SOL students and learning environment is created through virtual interaction. Third dimension is concerned with convergence between these two in which physical spaces, civil structures, library, faculties and other available facilities of regular colleges are used by SOL. Study materials are developed by teachers from conventional colleges facilitated by SOL faculty members. SOL students given chance for face to face counseling in conventional colleges. Fourth aspect is related to evaluation of the students. There is a common evaluation mechanism for both the streams. It means that students of SOL and conventional system get question papers of similar difficulty level and evaluated on the basis of same parameters. This ultimately leads to graduation of students in different subjects by awarding degrees.

Simply designing structures and legal framework do not deliver unless we implement them and enable SOL students to enjoy benefits through structural changes. We may say that alteration leading to quality output is more important including e-educational governance. We tell how manual processes are transformed, which were stagnated and usually treated as routine cumbersome activities creating inconveniences to the students.

We observed an anticipated rise in the number of students at SOL which necessitated overhauling existing administrative and institutional framework to keep pace for technology enabled quality higher education. During last three decades, growth at the SOL could be seen in terms of increasing number of support employees, reducing number of teachers and stagnating number of courses allotted to SOL.

Managing Change- Internal Process Transformation

Change management, aiming to achieve the vision of virtual quality education in a cost effective manner, requires indomitable efforts to push the ODL institutions which has been cramped between 'lack of commitment' at the top and 'inertia enjoying attitude' at the bottom. SOL is between hammer and anvil situation, negotiating within the constraints and challenges enabling students to realize their dreams.

Under the institutional development, five major challenges being faced by SOL leading to convert it as learning organization are, namely, 'designing and implementing appropriate ICT solutions', 'managing people', 'distributing study material and converting it into self-instructional learning resources', 'learning challenges' and 'policy priority and affirmative actions by DU. Four challenges come under our own zone of influence. However one challenge related to 'policy priority and affirmative support' mainly depends on the university's top authorities

One of the fundamental change management is concerned with defining, designing, strategizing and implementing appropriate ICT solutions through process transformation. This challenge has been accepted as one of the major tasks for institutional development. We have realized that managing people and ICT challenges are two sides of the same coin. Our learning says professionally competent people with positive orientation are more capable to innovate and implement ICT interventions and capable to radically alter manual system. Converting manual processes into e-governance mode took almost five years to stabilize(2005-2010). SOL is a unique case study of successful implementation of cost-effective and participatory Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) despite non-professional attitudes of a considerable section of stakeholders and apathy at the top. One agency has been identified for conducting survey and providing software that helped us to transform SOL into a web based system of integrated learning management. Many problems erupted during the survey and appraisal processes. We had extensively reviewed the lessons learnt from other e-governance initiatives carried out in different parts of India. Our e-governance

initiative was mainly confined with need based ICT solutions for process reengineering. We have not looked readymade solutions available outside. We were clear that readymade outsourced solutions are not appropriate cost-effective enterprise.

Our approach was mainly based on two aspects, namely, use of simple web based technology and incremental automation starting from students' enrolment. We hired the services of young engineers specialized in software applications, networking, database management, website development and multimedia e-learning. Gradually, different modules- from students' enrolment to evaluation- were prepared and demonstrated to the users. The employees were given extensive ICT training and hand holding at the time of enrolling students on computers. There was an initial resistance due to certain interest based aspects, which have been gradually settled, however, it has slowed down speed of transformation. We took risk of admitting students on computers since the beginning that provided dividends in terms of a comprehensive database created since 2005. Now the output is automatically get ready on the basis of software for further transmission in terms of conducting face to face counseling, library facilities, entitling study material, I-cards and ultimately leading to get examination admit cards. The automated system has given wings to the functioning of SOL, which has not only reduced queuing time and financial cost to the students but saved SOL employees from conducting cumbersome repeated manual activities. Gradually, employees started realizing benefits of students' information management system to ensure quality public services to such a large number of students with precision after integrating secondary data avoiding any possibility of forged admission.

We gradually realized integrated use of mobile phones and Interactive voice response system (IVRS) enabling students to get information about various aspects of admissions and examinations from the database. We recognized the power of mobile phone as a means for effective communication and even e-learning. More than ninety percent of our students have mobile phones. We created a database of mobile phones and with the help of software, all the relevant information which were sent through surface mail are now communicated through Short Message Services (SMS) saving time and cost. Phones are also used for radio counseling enabling community radio station (opened in 2007) to work as multipurpose communication channel between students, community members and SOL faculties. We starting online admission and even for communicating various information from 2012. Gradually, online system is gaining popularity among the students for which we channelize media resources including social media. We are collaborating with a few corporate houses helping to generate email id's and providing user friendly soft wares to such a large number of students and now popularizing paperless communication with the students in terms of sending examination admit cards and even mark-sheets along with provisional degree certificates.

Another unique challenge in terms of change management is associated with making employees to use e-governance tools. Our e-governance is a slow journey in turbulent waters that did not produce magic results in a short span of time. In the beginning of the ERP, employees were uncomfortable due to their inability to comprehend the software applications and more importantly, due to vested interests many changes are delayed. In a manual system, all rules were known to specific employees who handle processes, like, admission, examination and other related issues. Under ERP, instant verification is done, which was not possible earlier. Completing multiple functions within shortest span of time is the biggest advantage of process transformation. Significantly, with perseverance and pushing ERP, huge database of more than two and half million students have been created in the last eight years. The combined result of ICT based and people centered management initiatives taken the secret of rules out of hands of a few employees, who would be using that information even for rent seeking. With the result power balance tilted towards students and they become most powerful entity in this whole game of delivering quality education. We have now introduced integrated online solutions and hope that it will take over helping students to enjoy public services virtually. ERP helped us to create multiple positive externalities to the civil society. Further, we learnt that technological changes are dynamic that need to be updated every time without giving finality to the solutions.

Managing people in public sector organization enabling them to deliver efficient public services is another upheaval challenge. Inertia was developed at SOL during last twenty years in which employees were unable to think out of box- innovatively beyond their routine. We have realized that it is easy to develop civil structures, procure instruments and support material in any organization. However, the most difficult task in this context is to ensure that the people should produce results. Critical is quality governance that is mainly decided by the satisfaction level of students. Non delivery or delay in public services is the biggest characteristics in a typical government organization. However, many a time, SOL becomes a victim of the situation affecting from all sides. Delayed delivery of services gives a bad public perception, which sadistically enjoyed by those people who avoid to appreciate the capabilities of both the marginal students and SOL. It also provides opportunity to play blame game by not appreciating the public utility functions delivered by SOL. We have tackled this process by converting these constraints into a finest opportunities. Accordingly, we focused on appreciative approach in improving the capability of selected employees.

Interestingly, our approach to manage people aimed at achieving effectiveness and efficiency through participatory administration while working with more than five hundred employees those are already appointed in a hierarchical public sector. We initiated a work assessment study with the help of an international agency in 2006 and analyzed manpower surplus/deficit within the organization in the context of converting SOL into a leading ODL institution working in a virtual environment. On the basis of the analysis, we realized the capability mismatch, critical areas of improvement in work culture and ethical aspects. All these issues are addressed by adopting capacity building and leading by example approaches.

It has been found that employees needed to appreciate and think innovatively on their role to ensure instant availability of students' services. A comprehensive training strategy was initiated starting from the higher to middle level officers and gradually involving other officials under 'training of trainers' cascading model. It took almost three years (2007-2010) to put a small dent on the inertia, however, still the effectiveness in functioning of a major section of employees is yet to be achieved. Focused objective of open accessibility and participatory management and appreciative innovation and improving competency of employees helped us to create an enabling environment. Senior officers of the organization were given opportunity to participate in excellent training organized by professional agencies. In these programmes, our employees participated with the employees of other public/private sector organizations those are already managing change. This exposure cracked the possibility of innovativeness within the challenges of handling the largest number of students. These training programmes were repeatedly carried out on annual basis. We learnt that need based on-job training programmes improve competencies of the people. The paradigm we follow in capability building- training is best when it operates within working environment and focus on attitudes rather than skill and knowledge. Capability building is continuous process and we are continuously focusing on the smallest activity required for process change.

Further, in the context of managing people, even the role of employees association has also been realized as a prominent opportunity. Within the inertia syndrome, we realized that employees union has only been confined to corner management in getting benefits in terms of promotion, appointment and enjoying other perks that may lead to provide additional income to employees. Interestingly, in a 'manual system', employees union dominated the whole processes and on many occasions, restored to non-professional practices, like, strike and other agitating tactics to hold the management on ransom. SOL serves more than four hundred thousand students and on different occasions within academic year work pressure increases on the employees to ensure timely delivery of various services. On many of such strategic moments, employees union threatened to go on strike and many times, it was called resulting acute inconvenience to the students and parents at the time when services are required the most. Managing employees union is tactical; however, we decided to follow a straight strategy using administrative capability building and legal measures. The judiciary supported us by granting a permanent injunction on strikes.

Orientation of faculty to deliver quality public services is one of the biggest challenges in institutional development in a typical government institution,. Attitudinally, ODL system is given peripheral treatment in a dual mode university resulting into various issues, like, non-

filling of the faculty positions, difficulty in editing old study materials, developing study materials in self-instructional mode and more importantly, persuading the faculty to lead ODL movement in dual mode system. We took up these challenges and continued participatory dialogue with the faculty members at various forums available under statutory as well voluntarily levels. Importantly, the ODL system is managed within conventional framework at the University level that also resulted into inertia syndrome. Despite this constraint, we have been convincing the regulatory authority to approve the faculty appointments as well re-designed strategies to manage the challenges concerned with faculty development. In the most difficult situation, we devised our own strategy by identifying the resource persons who are available within jurisdictional areas of the university, like, retired and working teachers as well others who fulfill academic eligibilities as prescribed by the regulatory authorities. In this manner, we created a huge database of resource persons including serving as well retired University teachers and other resource persons volunteered to provide face to face teaching learning support. We introduced online registration of resource persons in different academic disciplines and utilized their capabilities for teaching-learning processes including various activities concern with examinations. Besides these efforts, we collaborated with Commonwealth Learning in developing capabilities of faculty members to provide self-instructional study material in the form of open educational resources. Regular capability building training programmes are being organized enabling SOL faculty members to develop user friendly contents and e-educational resources. This is a continuous process and many of the milestones in terms of quality learning resources are to be met.

In a typical ODL framework, study material played a powerful role which is generally sent to the students through surface mail. In our context, availability of the study material could be seen in three ways, namely, development of study material, printing and distribution of study material. Interestingly, distribution of study material in a manual system can only be done through surface mail after a lapse of valuable time. However, in our situation on account of gradual improvement in online activities, queuing time of the students is reduced considerably. It triggered simultaneous distribution of the study materials at the time of admission itself. In the present scenario, more than ninety percent of the students get benefits simultaneous distribution of study material. This small change created a big up-thrust in terms of improving governance. It provides an opportunity to start studying the contents rather than waiting too long. It is a cost effective delivery system of public services, which means saving on postal charges. Third aspect is concerned with creating a better public image and generates positive externalities. It is appreciable as we serve more than four hundred thousand students. Interestingly, cost of developing ERP has been compensated by saving on postal charges. In a governance sense, SOL is a good business model also. In conventional system, quality has a very high cost that is cross subsidized. It also underlines the paradigm which says that better management is eighty percent quality.

Combined effect of all the above interventions helps to create a learning environment for the students, like, face to face counseling by using the recourses of conventional system. In these centres, we help students in improving levels of learning on the basis of class-room interaction. It is an easier said than done situation as providing face to face learning environment to such a large number of students becomes difficult under the conventional sense of teacher centric learning.

It is interesting to mention that before conducting class room sessions, study material is distributed to all the students enabling them to use study material as learning resource in counseling sessions. Interestingly, face to face learning environment is not very popular among the students due to various factors as counseling sessions are not mandatory for the students and many a times, it will be very difficult to estimate the number of students turning in one counseling centre. Community radio also provided a creative platform to SOL students to excel their talent in addition to improve their learning. We have been experiencing changes in the ICT that is gradually making traditional teacher centric class room environment almost redundant. We have initiated e-learning process by converting our study material into e-learning formats by introducing interactivity and other aspects on the basis of open software. We are convinced if we can provide better multimedia e-learning platform under the learning management system and provide tablets to our students, then a student centric silent learning revolution will take place in which our counselors facilitate learning processes using virtual

mode. In this whole institutional building process, initiative for e-learning is integrated with e-governance at the SOL.

Significantly, peoples' management, ICT interventions and distribution of study materials could be seen as internal aspects that can be tackled directly by the SOL management. However, a few critical challenges are concerned with policy and priority towards ODL in a dual mode framework. As we have already discussed above that the DU structure ensures a parity between conventional system and SOL. It has been observed that many a time despite the parity already reflected in the books, affirmative intervention towards SOL and commitment at the top is lacking. We may say that the conventional system, which has remained as a core to help the periphery, generally converts itself into an enclave. In our case, SOL caters more than sixty-five percent of the total strength of students of DU. Despite that we have found that the university policy planners are more oriented towards the conventional system, however, genuine need to encourage SOL students is self explanatory. On the basis of above made analysis, the institutional challenges, implemented feasible interventions and the learning for others are given in Table 1. We may say the convergence based dual mode system-conventional and ODL- is a and effective strategy for human development to answer the issues of accessibility, quality and cost-effectiveness in higher education in the developing countries, specifically in Asia and Africa.

Conclusion

On the basis of our learning we may say that institution building goes beyond civil structures, it is initiating and internalizing imagination. People are important assets in any organization, and their orientation is done through leading by example, leadership and team building efforts along with effective capacity building training. ICT goes beyond technology as it is a game of mindsets and envisioning rather than simply computerization. In an organization, which is functioning since long, a big bang ICT approach will not work. Incremental adaptation of simple ICT solutions leading to achieve long term learning vision is optimal approach. E-governance is more governance than technology. Quality is determined on the basis of effective governance, providing library, ICT support and counselors' accessibility to the self-motivated students. Learning is voluntary and it would always better to create an enabling environment for the learners. Quality incorporates availability and instant distribution of hard and soft copies of learning material. Dual mode convergence based learning framework is appropriate to maximize benefits on demographic dividends. It provides mutual benefits and facilitates in sharing the benefits accrued to the students of conventional system. Policy neglect towards the ODL within dual mode needs to be reoriented by delivering better results in terms of managing a large number of students who are hungry for quality higher education.

Majority of the governance aspects are evaluated on the basis of perception of students and parents about public services available within ODL framework. In our context, future challenges are concerned to convert SOL into a virtual organization by providing tablets as learning instruments, collaborating with open educational resources, generating relevant learning materials for the students along with quality monitoring. We say that our success is evaluated when satisfied students leave SOL premises with a big smile on their faces symbolizing their empowerment to accept their career challenges.

Table 1: Implementation of Process Re-engineering related Strategic Interventions for Institutional Development through Change Management at School of Open Learning, University of Delhi

| Institutional Challenges | Major Issues/Constraints/Problems | Feasible Interventions already implemented within SOL | Learning for Institutional Development for others |
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| <p>Managing People and Capability Development of Academic and Administrative Employees. Criticality of change in a system established in 1962 and almost remain stagnant without inculcating new changes happening around University of Delhi on quality governance, efficiency, effectiveness as well the Capability of ODL</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Capability mismatch related to existing employment structure and change requirement, from 'hierarchical' to 'flat organization' ➤ Work culture related aspects, lack of accountability and professionalism ➤ Inability to fill Manpower requirement for efficiency ➤ Public sector attitude- 'Enjoying inertia' and blaming others ➤ Role of employees association to hold system on ransom- 'strikes' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ On Job training focusing on attitudes by giving exposure to employees on team building & leadership ➤ Continuous hand holding by monitoring and initiating participatory dialogues ➤ Faculty Development in terms of emerging roles of ODL in dual mode universities ➤ Approaching the Judiciary to restrict 'employees association' not to disrupt public services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Leading by examples- initiate changes by demonstrating personal integrity and empathy ➤ Focusing on capability development through appreciating enquiry. ➤ Negotiating with employees association through judicial interventions. ➤ On job capability enhancement of faculty members and monitor |
| <p>Challenges on Introducing Information and Communication Technology (ICT), including Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) to transform 'manual' processes to 'automated' systems</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensuring process mapping on 'students support services', 'office automation' and 'learning management systems LMS' ➤ Complicated process mapping. ➤ Completing ERP solutions on the basis of process –reengineering ➤ Lack of capable manpower for implementing ERP solutions. ➤ Employees' resistance to use ICT solutions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Developing ICT vision. ➤ Simple ERP solutions based on the SOL's requirements ➤ Constant capacity building support to the employees. ➤ Ensuring ICT structure in terms of hardware and software and applications ➤ Incremental approach to apply ICT solutions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ICT is a game of mind-sets rather than simply technical intervention. ➤ More emphasis on governance than electronics. ➤ Big bang does not work in conventional organization. ➤ Long term ICT vision. |
| <p>Learning Challenges- in terms of providing teaching-learning opportunities to the students using convergence approach</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Weak face to face counseling system, non-cooperation by the conventional colleges for classes ➤ Inability to use civil structure, library and faculty of the conventional colleges ➤ No systematic face to face counseling sessions. ➤ Inability to utilize and less popularity of radio for learning purpose. ➤ Weak e-learning systems, difficulties in setting appropriate learning management system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Persuading colleges to provide space, faculty and library resources to SOL ➤ Convergence approach for face-to-face learning by using faculty of colleges ➤ Using mobile telephones for SMS communication ➤ Using conventional colleges space twice a day for conducting counseling ➤ Popularizing Radio counseling by improving contents ➤ Installing learning management system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Quality cannot only be determined by face to face teaching-learning ➤ Critical is to improve other students' support services, follow principle- quality is 80% management. ➤ Convergence with conventional system for faculty, space and library resources ➤ Using radio for learning purpose & web-linking |
| <p>Developing and Distributing Study Material, Difficulties in conversion existing material into self Instructional study Material</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Delay in distributing of study material. ➤ Study material is available in conventional format, lack of self instructional approach. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Systematic planning for developing, printing and distributing of study material. ➤ Instant delivery of study material | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Providing hard copy and soft copy of study material. ➤ Focus on Open Educational Source Learning Material. |

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| <p>and further into web based e- learning resources</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Delay in development of printing and distribution. ➤ Rapid changes in the Syllabi within Conventional System and inability of SOL to keep the pace | <p>through backward planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Designing ICT based solutions- CDs & pen drives ➤ Using Radio as broadcasting learning contents in an interactive manner. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Capability Building in Developing Self Instructional Material ➤ Radio and Mobile Telephones are most cost effective tools |
| <p>Policy Challenges at the University level working under the Dual Mode system</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Gap in Policy, Prescription and Implementation in Dual Mode ➤ Excluding ODL in sharing the benefits of development accrued to Conventional Institutions ➤ Delay in Conducting Examination and Declaration of Results of ODL Students ➤ Lack of Initiates for Co-ordination between ODL and Conventional system. ➤ Despite policy priority bias reflected towards conventional system. ➤ 'Enclave' & 'Periphery' Syndrome | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Raising issues of Equity based and Cost Effective ODL system for Quality at Various University Forums ➤ Clearly Defining the Internal and External Environment and Priority given first to Internal Influence Zones ➤ Constant Negotiation with the University and State Level Authorities on the Futuristic Role of ODL in Dual Mode System as the Practical Solution to the Problems of Low GER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Constantly pushing the agenda of ODL students within the Dual Mode system. ➤ Proper co-ordination between conventional and ODL. ➤ Convincing the Competent Authorities the Capacity of ODL System Capable to Provide Quality Education ➤ Delivering Public Services using Internal Effectiveness to break the Mind-Sets |