

# High Level Roundtable for Vice Chancellors: Introduction



**17 March 2016**

Presentation delivered at the High Level Roundtable for Vice Chancellors in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Professor Asha Kanwar  
President & CEO, Commonwealth of Learning

A very warm welcome to each one of you. Thank you for joining us from around the Commonwealth and beyond. As we know, distance and eLearning have opened up access and promoted equity by offering more affordable opportunities for quality education. But have we overcome the crisis of credibility that continues to haunt many of our ODL institutions? Prof Ansary and I spoke of this and decided to organise a meeting where we could use our collective wisdom to address this continuing challenge. Let me also say how grateful we are to Prof Ansary, Suffian, Rizal and the team from Asia eUniversity for being such gracious and generous hosts.

But first let me begin with a brief introduction to the Commonwealth of Learning or COL which is an intergovernmental organisation established by Commonwealth Heads of Government. Our headquarters are in Metro Vancouver and we have a regional office the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia in New Delhi.

Our mission is to help Commonwealth member states and institutions to harness the potential of distance learning and technologies for expanding access to education and training. We report to ministers of education and our strategic plans are endorsed by them at the triennial meetings of Commonwealth education ministers.

After wide consultations with stakeholders around the Commonwealth, we developed our new Strategic Plan 2015-21, entitled 'Learning for Sustainable Development'. COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. Learning must lead to opportunities for economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation. Higher education will have an important role to play as governments seek to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals identified by the international community.

The international community has identified 17 sustainable development goals and these goals will define the development agenda for the next 15 years. Goal 4 of the 17 SDGs focuses on education. The objective of this Goal is to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all' by 2030.

In its recent document, Education 2030: Framework for Action, UNESCO recognises the role of quality distance education, technology and MOOCs to improve access to tertiary education.

Governments are struggling to increase access to Higher education as many regions have APRs of 10 to 15%. Higher education continues to face several challenges. The World Bank has identified five: supporting the autonomous management of tertiary institutions, maintaining financial stability,

developing evaluation and accreditation mechanisms for distance and online provision, supporting lifelong learning and ensuring that the marginalised sections of society such as women have access to tertiary education.

An ICDE report articulates the key areas of concern in ODL relating to —leadership, quality and research.

Quality continues to be a serious concern even as the number of open universities continues to grow in developing Commonwealth countries. In 1988, there were only 10 open universities in the Commonwealth, of which three were in Canada and one in the UK.

Nearly three decades later, that number has tripled. You can see that the growth has happened in developing countries. The five Open Universities in Commonwealth Africa, will soon be joined by open universities in Botswana and Kenya. As we know, Asia has over 70 open universities and the numbers continue to grow.

While we see new institutions springing up in the developing world, the older ODL institutions are going through turbulent times. Phoenix University has seen a decline in enrolments and Athabasca is coping with a funding crisis which has assumed existential proportions. Our common concerns are the impact of technology on ODL, the issues of quality and credibility and how ODL can be harnessed to advance national development.

Within this broad context, we decided to structure the two days around four complementary themes: leadership; quality, ICTs and Best Practice.

I'll give a brief introduction to each of these themes and raise some questions. A more detailed discussion will follow the presentations in the subsequent sessions. Let's begin with Leadership.

Bolman and Deal wrote an influential book, which identifies four frames of leadership. You might like to reflect on which frames describe your leadership style. (Adapted from Daniel Skarlicki and Dave McPhillips, 'Meeting the Leadership Challenge', Sauder School of Business, UBC)

The first is the structural frame. In this you focus on defining and achieving goals. What is our goal? What steps are needed to reach the goal? Who will need to do what and by when? How can we measure the results?

The second is the human resources frame in which you value people as an important resource. Before making a decision you think about how will this issue impact our staff? How can we get staff input and buy-in on this issue? How can we build consensus and motivate our staff?

The third is the political frame when you recognise that conflict and competition are a fact of life. And you think about: What are the obstacles and how to overcome? Who are we competing with for scarce resources? What is our power base? How can we improve it? Who do we need as allies?

The final frame is the symbolic—when you understand that while there are multiple perspectives, you need to create an organisational identity and a common goal. What are our values? What do we care about? What do we stand for? What symbols can we use to capture attention, shape perceptions? How can we communicate our values?

Which frames fit you best? What is it that you need to stop, start or do differently to be a better leader?

We did an analysis of women leaders--let me share the stories of two remarkable women: the first Dame Carol Kidu, a former minister from Papua New Guinea and Peria Jakkamal, an illiterate farmer from a

remote village in India. What did these two women leaders from such diverse cultures and backgrounds share? One, they are both people-oriented, empathetic and respectful. Two, they had the courage to break out of traditional moulds, but they did this through constant negotiations rather than disruption. They were both excellent networkers and good communicators and finally they were lifelong learners.

Geoff Colvin's recent book *Humans are Underrated* says that the leaders and high achievers in the C21 will be 'relationship workers' as opposed to the 'knowledge workers' of the C20. Robots will perform most tasks better than human beings but it is humans who have social skills and empathy, can solve complex problems and are creative.

What new models of leadership do we need in the C21 university? Are leaders of open universities different from leaders of campus institutions? Are they more like corporate CEO's? One area of concern is how do we create a second cadre of leaders?

Especially women leaders. You can see the gender imbalance in this meeting. What are the statistics from public universities in the Commonwealth? 17% women VCs in the UK, 14% in South Africa and only 3 % in India.

Quality is a perennial concern, especially now since dedicated OU's face so much competition.

At the Time Summit on Higher Education, the US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan called for more accountability through the development of a university ratings system—one factor of which would be the earning power of an institution's graduates. So we note that as both the demand and costs increase, there will be an increased need for quality in higher education.

Do we know how much our graduates earn?

National QA systems flourished across the world—spreading to 117 countries in the 2010's as compared to the 65 in the 1990's (Eaton, 2012). Has this resulted in improved quality?

Let us now look at how QA has developed in ODL institutions across the Commonwealth. There was no discussion of QA when the first open universities were set up. The discussion in the 1960's and 70's referred to 'standards' which Roger Mills defines as 'objective measurable, outcomes. What then were the criteria used to measure standards? As Koul sums up, these were i) 'process of course preparation and the quality of study materials' ; ii) 'feedback and interactivity in the guise of counseling, tutorials, assignments' and iii) 'usability of ODL for the subject concerned' . The reference point was the conventional system where high standards were upheld in terms of well-qualified faculty and facilities.

The nineties became the decade when quality dominated discussions of ODL. The discussion shifted very quickly from developing QA systems in distance education in developed countries (Australia, UK, New Zealand, Canada) to how these could be adapted to different developing contexts (India, Hong Kong, for example).

In the past decade the emphasis has shifted to the integration of both external and internal QA measures so that institutions develop 'cultures of quality'.

QA has always been seen from an institutional perspective. What about the learner? What role will they have in rating their professors and their institutions? This is already happening.

I think the questions before us then relate to how we can become more open to emerging developments? How do we involve stakeholders in the QA process? And what do we need to do to prepare for Learning Analytics?

Let us look at some developments relating to ICTs.

What are the emergent trends in technology globally? The recent Horizon report estimates that in the next two years, there will be a greater emphasis on measuring learning and blended learning would be used increasingly. Over the next three to five years, and institutions will redesign their learning spaces and focus on deeper learning approaches. In the longer term, we will see more innovation and a rethinking of how institutions work. (Johnson et al, 2015). Are we prepared to make these transitions effectively?

There has been an increase in number of countries adopting OER policy in the last decade and several have made a commitment to open education. Fiji is the latest addition with a national OER policy adopted this year. There has been an exponential increase in the number of OER repositories and open licensed materials on the web.

In which ways have OER disrupted ODL practices? Open universities have traditionally built their reputations on the quality of their content. This was the family silver which was well-crafted and well-protected. By making quality content free, OER have pulled the rug of 'quality courses' from under the feet of open universities. ODL institutions will have to focus on learner support as their USP rather than their courseware.

The advent of OER signal three key shifts. Traditionally open universities had an industrial model—the open universities of the future will be a more connected model. There were course development teams within open universities responsible for creating content. Now the teams will be dispersed around the globe and will adopt/adapt existing OER. The rise of OER will encourage the student to be a producer rather than the consumer of content

Top universities have taken the lead in offering MOOCs to a world deprived of quality education at a low cost. Asia has not been far behind, as you can see from some of the key initiatives here. How will this disruption affect Open Universities?

Some experts suggest that MOOCs are the iTunes of education, and will be a big game changer. This estimate is based on three important aspects of the current education system: one that it is rigid, two, it highly expensive and three, take a lot of time to complete. MOOCs seem to address all three concerns.

Open universities have so far largely operated within national or regional jurisdictions. With the MOOC platform, the world has become a connected classroom. Students had limited interactions with their tutors in study centres. There is a greater emphasis on peer to peer interactions and use of social media. Open universities of the future will increasingly make use of emerging technologies to support their learners.

In general, ODL institutions have not played a leadership role in either the OER movement or in developing MOOCs. It has mostly been research universities. Open Universities have yet to adopt and appropriate these emerging options

How can ODL institutions benefit from OER? How can they plan ahead to redesign learning spaces to keep pace with developments in technology? How can we personalize learning?

Finally let us briefly touch on the final session—which will be on the best practice that we will share with each other.

The only point I want to make in this regard is that best practice does not only thrive in rich institutions. Resource-poor institutions can be very creative in addressing its challenges. Kyambogo is a teacher

training university in Uganda and uses distance learning. Trainee teachers come on weekend to designated study centres, but if a learner is absent for more than two weeks, the tutor gets on the bicycle and travels miles to the learner's home to find out the reason for absenteeism. This culture of care leads to a culture of quality within institutions.

In this final session, I hope we will share stories within 3-5 minutes of how we raised the credibility of ODL in our institutions, what innovations we introduced and what was the result and what was my unique contribution.

With that, thank you for your kind attention.