Knocking Down Barriers to Motivation Through Fostering Transparency, Communication, and Resilience: Onboarding Online Learning through Change Management

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Abstract:

According to Ryan and Deci (2020) and Badali et al. (2022), motivational barriers continue to hinder the effectiveness and equitable online learning. This qualitative case study explored how a Southeastern U.S. university used Kotter's (2012) Eight-Step Change Model to foster transparency, communication, and resilience while onboarding faculty and students into a robust online learning environment. In alignment with the views of Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) and Hodges et al. (2020), and consistent with the steps of the Change Model, the university created a sense of urgency by linking declining engagement to poor digital learning experiences. In step with Kezar and Holcombe (2017), a coalition of faculty, instructional designers, and consistent with the suggestions of Fullan (2016) and Al-Fraihat et al. (2020), student advocates were formed to co-construct solutions and develop an inclusive vision for change. Using a single-site case study methodology, data were collected from semi-structured interviews, institutional documents, and observations (Yin, 2018). In concert with the views of Trust and Whalen (2020) and Martin et al. (2019), communication strategies emphasizing transparency, feedback loops, and inclusive dialogue were central to building trust and buy-in. Prioritizing the removal of access-related barriers, implementing short-term wins like modular course redesigns, and celebrating incremental success (Garrison, 2011; Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009) became the strategic vision. Faculty engagement increased, student motivation improved, resilient online learning communities emerged, and course completion rates improved over time (Pelikan et al., 2021). The case illuminated the conclusions of how deeply embedded cultural shifts—grounded in inclusive change management practices—can anchor long-term improvements in online learning. Consistent with the views of Lowenthal et al. (2022) and Darby and Lang (2019), actionable insights for academic leaders, instructional designers, and policy makers seeking to close motivation gaps and drive sustainable change in digital learning were provided.

Keywords:

Online learning, motivation barriers, change management, faculty and student engagement, transparent communication strategies.