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Faculty Ambivalence of Online Education: An Organizational Change Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Online education is part of a growing trend (Wang, 2006) and the amount of students taking online classes has doubled since 2005 (Allen & Seaman, 2011). This may be due in part to the fact that a large proportion of college students belong to the millennial generation (born between 1980 and 2000) – a group of technologically-savvy multi-taskers who regard the internet as a primary source of information (Oblinger, 2008). The growth may also be because online education has overcome its earlier reputation of lacking rigor and has emerged as a respected pedagogical approach in higher education, capable of delivering innovative content in an efficient and rigorous manner (Abrami, Bernard, Bures, Brokhovski, & Tamim, 2011). Nevertheless, the application of technology in delivering education at traditional (brick-and-mortar) colleges and universities has been slow and often fraught with conflict and ambivalence.

Technological advancements are among the most significant catalysts for organizational change and transformation (Lewin & Gold, 1999; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Indeed, those organizations that fail to effectively adapt when faced with rapidly advancing technology may become stagnant or decline in their organizational life cycle, which may ultimately lead to their failure (Lewin & Gold, 1999). The authors discuss the ambivalence and uncertainty to change at traditional colleges and universities and identify faculty as an instrumental constituent whose advocacy is critical to the adoption of online education. We also identify several sources of faculty ambivalence with online education and seek to uncover additional (anecdotal) faculty concerns.