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PURPOSE

Distance Learning, an official publication of the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA), is sponsored by the USDLA, by the Fischler College of Education at Nova South-eastern University, and by Information Age Publishing. Distance Learning is published four times a year for leaders, practitioners, and decision makers in the fields of distance learning, e-learning, telecommunications, and related areas. It is a professional magazine with information for those who provide instruction to all types of learners, of all ages, using telecommunications technologies of all types. Articles are written by practitioners for practitioners with the intent of providing usable information and ideas for readers. Articles are accepted from authors with interesting and important information about the effective practice of distance teaching and learning.

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The United States Distance Learning (USDLA) is the professional organization for those involved in distance teaching and learning. USDLA is committed to being the leading distance learning association in the United States. USDLA serves the needs of the distance learning community by providing advocacy, information, networking and opportunity. www.usdla.org

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11600 North Community
House Road, Ste. 250
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(704) 752-9125
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Michael R. Simonson
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Distance Learning journal
Fischler College of Education
Nova Southeastern University

3301 College Avenue
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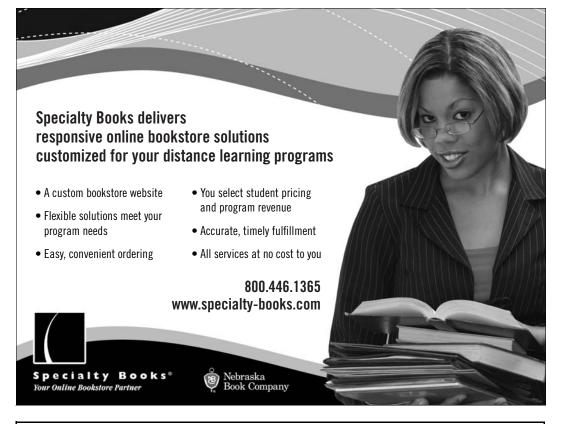Figures and tables should fit width 6 ½" and be incorporated into the document.

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IN UPCOMING ISSUES

Expediting and Sustaining Change
Diffusing Innovation in Dynamic Educational Settings

Jeff Dungan and Jessica Hale

INTRODUCTION

Change is critical in most organizations. International schools attempting to redefine 21st century education for their students are constantly innovating pedagogies and school structures. International schools tend to be dynamic, fast-paced, nimble learning environments constantly innovating to meet the demands of evolving student populations. Hayden, Rancic, and Thompson (2000) found common characteristics of international schools included open-mindedness, flexibility of thinking, and action with the pragmatic skills of students. International schools in the East Asia region are well resourced and often looking for ways to differentiate themselves in the highly competitive global educational marketplace. The International School Consultancy (2016) reported international schools in Asia are growing faster than any other

Jeff Dungan,
Shanghai American School-Puxi.
E-mail: jeff.dungan@saschina.org

Jessica Hale,
Oasis International School-Kuala Lumpur.
E-mail: jessicahale@oasisis.org

market in the world, claiming 54% of international schools worldwide. All too often, though, international schools wanting to remain relevant adopt innovations only to see them lose momentum and evanesce. Indeed, sustaining changes and making them remain in light of staff or school leadership turnover in many ways is the holy grail of institutionalizing educational innovations in international schools.

However, ask someone what the word "innovation," in the context of international education, means to them and you are likely to get many different answers. Indeed, defining the term innovation can be somewhat nebulous. Everett Rogers (2003), the preeminent scholar on diffusion of innovations, defined an innovation as "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption" (p. 12). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2014), a seasoned research institution of innovation and education, defined educational innovation as the "introduction of new products and services, processes for delivering services, ways of organizing activities, and new marketing techniques to improve the provision of education based on the social and educational objectives as measured by stakeholders" (p. 25). Diffusing innovations is largely a social construct. The viability of diffusing and sustaining change depends on the support of school leaders, leveraging targeted staff members who are perceived as change agents and opinion leaders within the school, and vetting innovations based on characteristic criteria to increase diffusion rates and expedite the diffusion of an innovation.

Recently, two studies were conducted in the Asia region as part of two different doctoral dissertations. Dungan (2017) studied East Asia Regional Council of Schools (EARCOS) school leaders' use of formalized planning including diffusion of innovation theory and opinion leadership when diffusing innovations within their schools. Dungan's main focus was how these aspects of innovation diffusion influenced their decision to adopt distance education into their delivery of instruction. Hale (2017) examined international schools in the Asia region to determine identifiable characteristics of innovation in a school. Hale sought to find both perceived characteristics of innovation and global leaders' observed characteristics of innovation. Conclusions from Hale's study established specific practices of innovative schools and a support model for leaders desiring to create an innovative environment. Although these studies differed in objectives, sampling, and methodology, similarities emerged regarding the role of leadership, opinion leadership, and the characteristics of innovations that led to schoolwide adoptions. The authors believed that by isolating some of these similarities in their studies, international schools may benefit in being able to vet innovations and diffuse them more rapidly within their schools. Additionally, schools and school leaders that are open to the notion that an innovation can be modified and remixed as an entirely new innovation, known as positive deviance (Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, 2010), are more likely to see innovations remain, even in light of staff and leadership turnover.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP'S ROLE IN DIFFUSING INNOVATIONS

Hale's (2017) study found a leader's role in innovation in a school included characteristics of support, collaboration, communication, and being connected or networked. Innovative school leaders were perceived as those who fostered an openness to risk-taking and built a culture where staff experienced a freedom to fail. Participants unanimously claimed support from leadership as the most important characteristic to ensure an innovative environment in a school. More specifically, leaders who provided support through vision, establishing

relationships, and the use of existing resources were found to foster empowered communities capable of generating novel ideas and implementing innovations. Leadership's role was not to introduce the innovations themselves but, instead, to provide support to organizational stakeholders tasked with implementation of an innovation (Hale, 2017).

Furthermore, participants in Dungan's (2017) study noted that organizational positioning was an important factor for individuals to be perceived as critical to successful implementation of an innovation. Individuals in administrative positions were perceived as better positioned than teachers, specialists, or instructional coaches due to a wider sphere of influence and having more time to dedicate to diffusing and institutionalizing innovations at the organizational level. School administrators were also noted to have greater access to financial resources to facilitate training and professional development groups that were impacted by an innovation. Similarly, Hale's (2017) study noted individuals in midlevel administrative roles are better positioned to identify areas for innovations and gauging community support. Thus, these individuals play an integral role in supporting school leaders' initiatives by leveraging their social networks in order to rally support for implementing change.

Dungan (2017) found that school leaders articulated pressures from various school stakeholders to maintain the status quo. Afraid of being perceived as disruptive innovators by their leadership peers and school, stakeholders diminished their desire to make disruptive pedagogical innovations, even when they saw value in doing so. Interestingly, the notion of school leaders who were perceived as highly innovative by other international school leaders was shown to be a function of their cosmopoliteness (degree of networking and connectedness to other school leaders), the degree to which their networks were heterophilic (made up of ideas and opinions from different sources and fields), their perceived competence, and the schools they led (Dungan, 2017; Rogers, 2003).

CHANGE LEADERS AND OPINION LEADERSHIP

Change leaders and opinion leaders carry different roles in diffusing innovations in an organization. Fullan (2011) identified change leaders as those who are driven toward practice instead of theory, exercising the characteristics of resolve, motivation, collaboration, confidence, impact, and simplicity. Rogers (2003) noted that opinion leaders serve as direct conduits for innovations to enter organizations, help change organizational norms, and accelerate changes in behaviors or systems within organizations. Differentiating these two roles can have a powerful impact on identifying individuals within an organization to effectively identify and implement organizational changes.

CHANGE LEADERS

Fullan (2011) described a change leader as "having the capacity to generate energy and passion in others through action." Foundational to leading change, Fullan advocated practice-driven theory. In other words, engaging in theory as a way to move forward instead of as a constraint. Change leaders learn through experience and utilize theory to support and inform behavior. Similarly, Pascale et al.'s (2010) concept of "positive deviance" claims an individual's ability to react effectively to difficult situations is rooted in learning from experiences rather than theory. Learning through practice and real-world experiences tends to be abstract and ultimately creates an adaptive (and effective) decision-making process that can be utilized in complex situations. Exercising resolve through purpose and practicing