



Virtual Distance and Learning: an Application of Organizational Best Practices in Education

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Abstract

Technology has fueled the rapid growth of learning tools within organizations and educational environments. Advances in communication technology have reshaped the nature and frequency of day-to-day interactions amongst employees and customers as well as teachers, students and parents. Virtual Distance, a measurable phenomenon discovered by Dr. Karen Sobel-Lojeski, is a multidimensional construct that identifies and explains challenges brought on by a multitude of factors. Virtual distance is defined as the perceived distance between two or more individuals or groups, caused by the persistent and pervasive use of technology-mediated work and communications. When detected, virtual distance has a significant and negative impact on organizational outcomes including learning. Levels of virtual distance increase when people rely heavily on computer mediated devices. Many fortune five hundred companies have acknowledged virtual distance and taken strategic action to mitigate its presence in an effort to enhance learning. Our most recent research focuses on the identification of virtual distance within academic environments. Technology is a major factor in the future of education. Increased reliance on technology-mediated devices can have negative learning consequences. As such, the incorporation of virtual distance management into educational settings is essential in order to identify, measure and manage its presence. The integration of instructional and learning technology without proper virtual distance management would be a disservice to educators, students and parents.

This paper investigates the impact virtual distance can have on academic environments. It explores the importance of identifying, measuring and managing virtual distance and its implications for learning. Organizational examples are presented along with educational applications.