

Chapter 13

Managing a University Inclusive Access (E-Book) Program to Maximize Stakeholder Satisfaction



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With the dramatic increase in the cost of textbooks, university Inclusive Access/E-book (IAE) programs have become a popular alternative for providing the required course content to students at a rate that is significantly lower than the cost of traditional textbook models. IAE programs typically provide course content to students through a course-fee structure that is added to students' tuition and fee schedules for each semester. Overall, universities often use IAE programs in order to reduce the cost of textbooks and to increase accessibility to required course materials. This chapter provides a discussion on how college of business at Texas A&M University–San Antonio (A&M-SA) utilizes the four functions of management for successful management of its IAE program.

The four functions of management include planning, organizing, influencing, and controlling. At A&M-SA college of business, these management functions are systematically used to achieve the university's IAE program goal of maximizing stakeholder satisfaction. It took careful and extensive planning to set important goals and measures of execution before the IAE program was launched. After its launch, the program has been organized in ways that frequent feedback loops (controlling) have been implemented to assess the program efficiency. It is also important to evaluate and manage the influence from various stakeholders of the IAE program such as students, faculty, staff, administrators, and publishers. This chapter will focus on managing an IAE program to maximize student and faculty satisfaction.

Two survey studies were conducted in order to assess the success of these four management functions for the IAE program at A&M-SA. In one survey research, 170 students reported their feedback on various aspects of the IAE program. These students were recruited from 34 classes spanning all majors in the college of

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business such as management, marketing, accounting, finance, computing, and cyber security. Students' participation in the survey research was voluntary and anonymous. The survey was administered online through the Qualtrics survey tool. In another study, 50 faculty members were contacted to participate in the survey study to talk about their experience and satisfaction/dissatisfaction about the IAE program. The survey was administered online through the Qualtrics survey tool and participation was voluntary and anonymous. Twenty faculty members responded to the survey, among which 11 faculty members completed the survey. Several interviews were also conducted with the IAE program administrator and publisher representatives to gather feedback from these key program management personnel. The empirical evidence from these studies are reported in the following sections on each management function.

Planning

Embarking on the development and implementation of an IAE program takes extensive planning on the part of the program manager. Certo and Certo [3] define planning as "the process of determining how the organization can get where it wants to go and what it will do to accomplish its objectives" (p. 107). For a university IAE program, this involves determining what the needs of the stakeholders are. In other words, the planning function involves determining what students and faculty need in order to be satisfied with the program. In order to maximize stakeholder satisfaction, the program manager needs to be mindful of the role and purpose of each of the stakeholders. In order to do this, specific program objectives need to be identified for each stakeholder group.

Chulkov and VanAlstine [4], Falc [5], and Millar and Schrier [8] report that the most important factors for students being satisfied with a e-book program is that they have options of both an electronic textbook and a printed textbook. Accordingly, this preference is incorporated into A&M-SA's IAE program goals (e.g., goal number four, below). For students, A&M-SA's IAE program needs to meet five objectives [7]:

1. Provide the required course content at a price that is competitive or lower than price of the same content at other retail or used marketplaces
2. Provide the course content to students no later than the first day of class
3. Make the content accessible via the university's Learning Management System
4. Provide access to a low-cost printed version of the course content
5. Make the content accessible online (via the Internet) and offline (via a downloaded version) and on multiple devices

The survey data from students' feedback provided evidence on how successfully these goals have been met by the IAE program. In the survey, 170 students reported how satisfied they were with various aspects of the IAE program in the scale of 1 to 5 (1, very dissatisfied; 2, somewhat dissatisfied; 3, neutral; 4, somewhat satisfied; 5,

very satisfied): overall satisfaction (mean = 3.97, SD = 1.272), price of e-books (mean = 3.75, SD = 1.298), timely delivery of e-books at the beginning of the semester (mean = 4.21 SD = 1.115), e-book integration to Blackboard (mean = 4.10, SD = 1.217), availability of print copy (mean = 3.23, SD = 1.378), and ease of using the e-book (mean = 3.83, SD = 1.339). When the students reflected on comparison between e-book and traditional book, majority of the students reported that they believe the e-book is superior to the traditional book in the following aspects: (1) ease of using such as finding information, highlighting, note-taking, etc. (percentage of respondents reporting the e-book to be superior to the traditional book: 65.5%); (2) enriched user experience such as flash cards, availability of online quiz, additional multimedia learning materials, etc. (90.6%); (3) convenience such as having convenient accessibility to the book whenever and wherever and storing (digitally or physically) and carrying the book (digitally or physically) (83.6%); (4) long-term accessibility (long after you took the class, if you want to revisit the book) (42.1%); and (5) ease of reading and facilitating comprehension and memorization (60.8%). These feedbacks from the students reflect that the students have predominantly positive attitudes about the IAE program in terms of its cost advantage, accessibility, timely delivery, ease of use, convenience, and enriched experience. Overall, the IAE program has successfully met the students' need.

In a study examining the faculty perspective on e-book programs, Bossaller and Kammer [2] found that the most important factor for faculty satisfaction is content choice and control. Accordingly, for faculty, the A&M-SA's IAE program needs to meet four objectives:

1. Multiple publishers must be included as content vendors so that academic freedom is ensured.
2. Provide well-designed instructor supplemental materials such as PowerPoint slides, test banks, case studies, videos, etc.
3. Provide electronic homework products to students in needed courses (mostly quantitative courses).
4. Provide technical support to assist with using the products efficiently.

From the survey data of 11 faculty members, 45.5% of the faculty believed that the e-book program did not compromise their academic freedom in terms of which textbook they can choose for their courses. Similarly, only 54.5% of faculty reported that the e-books they were using for their courses were exactly their favorite textbook choices, while 45.5% reported that sometimes they cannot get their favorite textbook in the e-book format. About 81.8% of the faculty agreed that they have received sufficient organizational support (such as having e-book coordinator and IT support) from the institution to adopt the e-book. The faculty being surveyed also reported how satisfied they were with various aspects of the IAE program in the scale of 1 to 5 (1, very dissatisfied; 2, somewhat dissatisfied; 3, neutral; 4, somewhat satisfied; 5, very satisfied): ease of adopting the e-book (e.g., placing e-book order for the courses) (mean = 4.09, SD = 0.701), supplemental teaching/learning materials (mean = 3.82, SD = 0.982), publishers' technical support (mean = 3.27 SD = 1.421), cost savings for the students (mean = 3.82, SD = 0.982), university IT

support for integrating the e-book to the Blackboard (mean = 3.82, SD = 0.874), and increased work productivity due to the resources offered by the e-book (mean = 3.73, SD = 1.009). These data indicate that the IAE program has reasonably met the faculty's needs of using e-books in their classes.

Organizing

In addition to the planning function, the organizing function is also a critical factor that leads to program success (or not, as the case may be). One important issue to consider is allocating sufficient organizational resources in order to allow the program to be successful. Another important organizing element is the placement of the e-book program within the university's organizational structure. Certo and Certo [3] define organizing as "the process of establishing orderly uses for resources within the management system" and "organizing skill is the ability to create throughout the organization a network of people who can help solve implementation problems as they occur" (p. 67).

In order to give a program a chance at success, sufficient organizational resources need to be assigned to it. For an IAE program, these organizational resources include primarily human and technology. For instance, an employee needs to have the IAE program as their main job responsibility so that they are accountable for program success. Technology is an important factor for program success and, accordingly, needs to be sufficient to support the program goals. This is particularly important since Ainsa [1] reports that students who use computers more frequently are better prepared to best utilize the technology associated with IAE programs. Furthermore, Falc [5] reports that the biggest frustration that students face with e-books is associated with technology.

Ultimately, the self-sufficiency program goal suggests that the users of the program must ultimately pay for it. Since IAE programs typically replace or are a substitute for traditional textbooks, the primary users of IAE programs are students. Therefore, the cost of the IAE program should be borne by the students. While this is a reasonable conclusion, the program manager needs to be mindful of the number one objective of the program – that is, providing the required course content at a price that is competitive or lower than the price of the same content at other retail or used marketplaces. The additional fee charged to fund program resources (i.e., human and technology) needs to be built into the course fee so that the final course fee paid by the student reflects a lower price than a traditional textbook. According to Dean Hurley [7], this is the fee model that A&M-SA's IAE program utilizes. The survey data from 170 students indicates that majority of the students (74.7%) believed that the IAE program has saved them money compared to the traditional textbooks, additional 19.4% of students thought that the IAE program may have helped them save money, and only 5.5% of the students did not believe in such cost benefits of the IAE program. Although students had the option to purchase the print

copy of the textbook at a modest cost, only 16.5% of the 170 students actually purchased the print copy.

Based on the survey data from 170 students, 45.9% of the students never encountered any type of technical problems while using the e-book, and 33.5% of the students were able to have the technical problems resolved effectively by the publisher's technical support team. However, 20.6% of the students encountered technical problems that were not solved. This means that a significant number of students were having technical problems which should be better addressed. This is where the IAE program can be improved.

An interview with the IAE program coordinator reveals the success as well as many challenges that an IAE program may have. At Texas A&M University, one IAE program coordinator needs to work on getting timely e-book orders processed and ensure smooth operation of all e-books throughout the semester for over 500 classes at any given time. This job can easily get overwhelming with many moving pieces coordinating among numerous stakeholders: students, faculty, publishers, and university administrators. Some publishers seemed to have greater difficulty to integrate their e-book learning platform into Blackboard. The communication messages sent from the IAE coordinator were sometimes neglected by faculty to cause delay or mistake on e-book orders. Fortunately, these issues can be resolved with follow-up communications, especially since the IAE program has received wide acceptance from the faculty, and more and more students are getting used to and embrace the e-books. The future of the IAE program will be even brighter with more technology advancement and the increasing prevalence of the habit of learning on electronic device. The interviews with publisher representatives confirmed that they will continue to improve their technology and technical support to facilitate better user experience and lessen administrative burden.

Influencing

Certo and Certo [3] define influencing as “the process of guiding the activities of organization members in appropriate directions” (p. 5). Furthermore, change is often disliked simply because it represents something different. When an organization undertakes the implementation of a program which represents a major change in how business is conducted, some stakeholders may resist (Certo and Certo [3], p. 247). When implementing an IAE program, both students and faculty will need to adjust to the changes that result from no longer relying on a traditional textbook program. In order for the IAE program to be successful, the program manager must develop the best process for influencing stakeholders that the new program is better than the old program.

In most organizational settings, peers and colleagues are the best advocate for influencing others. Specifically, students have the best chance of influencing other students while faculty has the best chance of influencing other faculty, of the positive benefits of the IAE program. In order to address this problem and positively

influence stakeholders, Dr. Hurley [7] initiated student ambassador and faculty champion programs. Student ambassadors were paid as student workers and visited classes (via coordination with faculty), cafeteria, and other common gathering places for students. Essentially, they were charged with talking with students, assisting them with any e-book problems they had, and explaining the program to them. Faculty champions were recruited to participate to the IAE program by adopting e-books for their courses. In 2010, when the IAE program was initiated, iPads were also being introduced into the higher education landscape [6]. While faculty training for the program focused on cost savings to students, all faculty who adopted an e-book were issued an iPad. This resulted in many faculty championing the IAE program. However, awareness of the faculty champion program need to be increased. Of the 11 faculty members being surveyed, 72.7% had not heard about this program.

The survey data shows that the students' attitude about the IAE program has improved after having experience of using the e-book: among the 170 students being surveyed, only 58.8% of these students had a positive attitude about the e-book when they first heard of it. There were 77.6% of these students who think of the e-book favorably after using the e-book. This is consistent with the feedback that faculty had received from the students: 54.5% of faculty reported receiving positive feedback from their students regarding their e-book experience, 27.3% of faculty received mixed feedback from the student, and only 9.1% of faculty received negative feedback from the students. The IAE program should continue to focus on the efforts of getting faculty champions and student ambassadors to promote the IAE program among all faculty and students.

Controlling

Certo and Certo [3] define controlling as a "systematic effort by business management to compare performance to predetermined standards, plans, or objectives to determine whether performance is in line with these standards and presumably to take any remedial action required to see that human and other corporate resources are being used in the most effective and efficient way possible in achieving corporate objectives" (p. 14). Essentially, controlling involves the use of program feedback to improve the program and to modify program elements to better meet program goals.

After the IAE program was launched, the most frequent complaint from students was that they did not have a device at home to be able to access their e-books. In addition, some students who looked at computer screens all day at work complained that their eyes were tired and they did not want to have to look at a computer screen to read their e-book. As part of the controlling function (i.e., the feedback loop) and to remedy this issue, in 2011, the IAE program launched a low-cost student iPad rental program. At \$50 per semester, students were able to rent an iPad as part of the IAE program. Almost immediately, these student complaints disappeared [7]. However, the recent survey of 170 students indicates that only 15.9% of the students

are aware of the iPad rental program. Work needs to be done to increase awareness of this rental program among students.

Occasionally, some students complained that e-books were more expensive through the university IAE program compared to when they can be purchased by themselves online. This feedback indicates that the program administrators need to have more communication with the students about the fee structure of the IAE program especially when it is offered through the course tuition and the price for the e-book itself is not completely transparent. Some students also complained that the e-book was difficult to access after the course was over. The university IAE program may want to reevaluate whether to grant students continuing access after the courses are over and reach new arrangements with the publishers for providing permanent access to the e-book without added cost to the students.

The survey data on 170 students across a class major also reveals an interesting fact that students tend to prefer the e-book for less technical course subjects such as management, marketing, history, English literature, sociology, etc., while they prefer print book for more technical course subjects such as statistics, engineering, accounting, finance, etc. (see Table 13.1 below).

When the faculty was asked “If E-book is optional, would you still choose E-book for your classes?” There were 54.5% of faculty indicating that they will definitely use e-books, while 45.5% of the faculty wanted to use the e-book for some of their classes. No faculty indicated that they will not use the e-book at all. This reflects the overwhelming acceptance of the IAE program among the faculty. The faculty members also voiced a few concerns or suggestions about the IAE program. For example, the process to place the e-book order was not completely smooth sometimes: there were mixed messages on when the book order was due and there was little flexibility when late changes need to be made. The faculty felt continuous pressure from the publishers to switch to their textbooks. The students complained about not being able to review past quizzes or assignments. And most often, faculty felt frustrated that their favorite textbooks were not offered in e-book format. These concerns will be addressed when the university continues to improve its IAE program.

Table 13.1 Students’ preferences of e-book cross course subject

Course subject	Prefer e-book	Prefer print book	No preference	Course subject	Prefer e-book	Prefer print book	No preference
Marketing	70.6%	15.9%	13.5%	Accounting	44.7%	44.1%	11.2%
Management	66.5%	20.0%	13.5%	Statistics	41.2%	45.9%	12.9%
History	60.6%	22.9%	16.5%	Finance	45.3%	40.0%	14.7%
English literature	56.5%	27.6%	15.9%	Physics	51.2%	30.0%	18.8%
Sociology	63.5%	15.3%	21.2%	Engineering	41.8%	30.6%	27.6%
Average	63.54%	20.34%	16.12%	Average	44.84%	38.12%	17.04%

Conclusion

The university's IAE program has been an effective program which has made access to textbooks much easier and less expensive for students. There are many factors that go into implementing an IAE program. This chapter summarizes the four functions of management (planning, organizing, influencing, controlling) which are used for the implementation of the IAE program. Reflecting on these four functions of management provides the feedback loops for university leadership and administrators to make modifications to the program in order to better meet the program's goals. As technology improves, many of the obstacles experienced with current IAE programs will be reduced, and as programs become more common, more ideas as to best practices will make future program deployments easier.

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