Industry–Relevant Smart Community Partnerships

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THE REGIONAL COMMUNITY OF LOGAN CITY

Logan City (population of 400,000) is Queensland's third largest city and one of the fastest growing in Australia. The population is expected to grow to almost 500,000 by 2011 (Logan City Council, 2001). Other characteristics of the region include its relatively young population profile, and the higher than average proportions of persons from low socio-economic and non-English speaking backgrounds who live in some areas of the region. Further, unemployment rates tend to be high in parts of the region and higher education participation rates are low. Economic activity tends to be based in small and medium business and light industry. The employment profile of the region has a lower proportion of professionals, managers and administrators than the rest of Queensland. Overall, the regional profile has a higher proportion of tradespersons, clerks, plant and machinery operators, and sales and personal services workers than state averages.

A COMMUNITY CAMPUS

Griffith Logan is a community campus with over 2,600 students. Its creation in 1998 was driven by the regional community. The campus was planned and developed by involving and listening to the regional population. The students at Griffith Logan largely come from the Logan region. The close links that the campus and its broader community are building together are another special strength. The links are extensive and range from practical work experience for students, regional development, partnerships and links with schools. All degrees are offered in on-campus flexible learning mode. Flexible learning is an approach that seeks to provide choice and options for the learner, using campus and home access to the Internet and packaged subject resources (Baskin, Barker & Woods, 2003). The approach retains student-staff and student-student on-campus interaction, and suits many students who are unable to take full-time study due to family, work and other commitments. Most class activities are scheduled during the daytime, except in the part-time business, management and commerce courses.

From the beginning Logan was, and still is, at the cutting edge of innovation in student-centred learning and educational delivery. The emphasis on flexible learning-the massive investment in technology and learning resource development-will always be a feature of Griffith Logan. Flexible learning at Logan has attracted substantial national and international interest and the approaches developed at Logan are being adopted at other campuses of Griffith University. One outstanding feature of this approach was that it was compulsory for each course at Logan to have a Web site that would be integral to the teaching of the course. Another feature was the encouragement to incorporate student-centred learning in course design and development by giving students greater choice, access, flexibility and responsibility for their learning through innovative teaching.

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING BUSINESS INDEX (TALBI)

The community-wide Teaching and Learning Business Index (TALBI) is an electronic action learning (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996; Bourner & Flowers, 1999; Limerick, Passfield & Cunnington, 1994) index and database that can be used by businesses, educators, students and researchers to integrate local industry more closely with learning and research programs at Griffith University. In doing so, it provides a practical focus to learning and skill development within a community and practitioner context (Limerick, Passfield & Cunnington, 1994). At present, access to TALBI is via Griffith University's

School of Management Web site, and the Web sites for the individual organisational development and management courses that use TALBI.

The index has three components-a business database, profiles of participating businesses, and an archive of the Executive Summaries of past students' organisational development projects. The business database provides a searchable index of the businesses operating within the Logan district, based on the Business Register, compiled by the Logan Regional Economic Development Board.

Featured within the profiles of participating businesses are descriptions of organisations interested in acting as business mentors, along with study contacts and their areas for involvement and expertise. The archive of student projects contains past student fieldwork projects and research endeavors undertaken within local organisations on topical business issues. When a new cohort of students starts the process of trying to find an organisational site to undertake their applied management project, they read the Executive Summaries of the projects that other students have completed in a particular organisation. In this way, they can build on previous work, and so avoid "reinventing the wheel" in an organisation. If possible, new students make contact with students who conducted the project and gain their experience of having interacted with the personnel of the business they wish to contact. Practitioners in local businesses, most of which are small businesses, appreciate that they do not have to orient students to aspects of the business that can be read about on the database. Further, it is more likely that organisations will benefit from the students' involvement because the new project is developed in the context of previous projects.

The database is used in a number of courses focusing on organisational development, with the primary focus being the "Applied Management Project," a third-year undergraduate management subject where students conduct a group research project within a chosen organisation. A subsequent third-year undergraduate management subject called "The Reflective Practitioner," requires students to return to their project organisations to review the success or otherwise of their project. An introductory first-year management subject, a second-year management decision-making subject, and operations management courses also uses the index (Barker, Woods & Baskin, in press).

THE POTENTIAL OF THE SMART COMMUNITY-FUTURE TRENDS

The Smart Community initiative offers the potential to enhance the professional, social, cultural and economic development of Management Students by offering access to "situated learning experiences" in a way that embeds and blends academic study and practical workplace experience in an ICT-mediated framework. The challenge of the past has been to blend theory and practice in management studies, to produce graduates with the experience, profile and skill-sets that industry both seeks and values. This has been the warrant for practice in Management Education, and in times past, would have relied upon a regulatory or professional body generating guidelines to standardise management education practices. In New Zealand, where the accreditation process effectively involves the New Zealand

Figure 1. The networked smart community
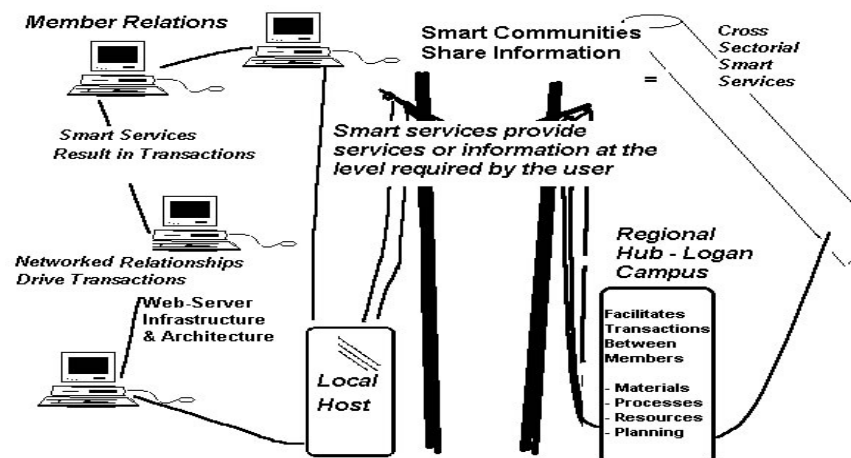
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