New Frontiers for The New Australian Institute of Music

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ECONOMIC RATIONALE

Universities, both public and private, in Australia (firmly encouraged by higher education authorities) are currently concerned with the mind-set, mechanisms, and practices that are necessary for universities to reinvent and reengineer themselves in order to become successful, surplus-making organizations. The Australian Institute of Music is no exception. Given the context of current economic pressures, this surplus-making exercise is fundamental to future growth, quality provision, and student/staff morale. Important matters such as changing mind-set from a "scarcity" to "abundance" mentality; encouraging new venture units ("skunk works") within elements; changing management style at all levels to facilitate entrepreneurial activities; effectively using outsourcing for teaching and administrative purposes; developing strategic alliances and networks; and developing the notion of thinking globally even though working locally; and requiring exploration.

To operate within the *new institute* within the *new economy* calls for a change in thinking and approach. There is a need for a new approach—a new organization. Limerick, Cunnington, and Crowther (1998) speak of a new form of organization that is required:

A new form of organisation is set to take us into the twenty-first century. It will have strategies, structures and cultures which are quite different from those with which we have been experimenting for the past decade and which are dramatically different from those that served us so well during the previous 20 years or more. It will offer new opportunities as well as new problems for management, and it will demand new mind sets, skills and competencies from those within it. (Limerick, 1998, p. 1)

This is hardly an easy task, with academic elements often opposed to, or at least uncomfortable with, entrepreneurship and with university bureaucrats experientially far removed from contemporary business practices. In the short term, it is necessary to empower university elements to develop entrepreneurial activities. Concurrently, the larger organization needs to reinvent itself attitudinally to deal with flexibility, a broader range of initiatives, and a focus on significant add-on value to its conventional operations and to deal with profit from its initiatives. The Australian Institute of Music has, from necessity, always been proactive in a range of innovative and experimental activities. Its survival (since 1968) has been predicated on the belief that ongoing innovation and change are ongoing commitments and must be maintained at all costs.

In order to put new initiatives in place and to respond quickly to new demands and opportunities, flexibility and autonomy are essential elements of a successful proposal. Kanter (1989) argues that winning the new game:

...requires faster action, more creative manoeuvring, more flexibility, and closer partnerships with employees and customers than was typical in the traditional corporate bureaucracy. It requires more agile, limber management that pursues opportunity without being bogged down by cumbersome structures or weighty procedures that impede action. Corporate giants, in short, must learn to dance. (Kanter, 1989, p. 20)

In these respects, higher education institutions must learn to dance anew by mastering new maneuvers, taking on new shapes, and searching for new opportunities. Speed is essential and timing imperative if market issues are to be satisfied for both the university and its clients.

PEDAGOGICAL AND DELIVERY ISSUES

The claim is that flexible delivery provides new alternatives for higher education providers and clients alike, especially opportunities to offer courses off-campus and offshore. Flexible delivery, then, is perceived as a marketing and development tool as well as a means of catering to local teaching and learning needs and requirements. The challenge to higher education management centers around creating the best methods of achieving diversity and reaching new markets in an increasingly competitive climate, and, at the same time, distributing programs while maintaining quality.

Flexible delivery is a subset of a larger issue, namely, organizational flexibility. The keys to organizational flexibility appear to be technology, customer satisfaction, and quality control. The technology issue is related both to the delivery mechanism, such as the use of Internet, CD-ROM, and e-mail, and the communication means. Customer satisfaction is related to the way courses are designed to maximize participation, especially in relation to duration and location. Quality control places the focus on both the perceived and real measures of delivery success, ensuring that courses maintain appropriate standards despite the range of delivery mechanisms. More formally, flexible delivery has been defined as follows:

An approach to vocational education and training which allows for the adoption of a range of learning strategies in a variety of learning environments to cater for differences in learning styles, learning interests and needs, and variations in learning opportunities. (Flexible Delivery Working Party, 1992, p. 47)

Flexible delivery then encompasses a wide range of approaches to teaching and learning. It emphasizes alternatives for students in an effort to maximize the quality of the teaching and learning process and create greater accessibility for a range of student types. For universities, the challenge of flexible delivery is the capacity to design, promote, deliver, and evaluate provision. In the tertiary context, it forces the provider to reassess traditional provision modes in terms of client needs and wants. It places the emphasis firmly on client issues and satisfaction and de-emphasizes provider demands.

Virtual courses are offered using some or all of the following:

- Innovative and interactive online delivery
- Intense periods of study (weekends, after hours)
- Industry recognized leaders (professional musicians, administrators, etc.)

- Synchronous communication (videoconferencing)
- Asynchronous communication (video, e-mail)
- Stylized print material—commercial quality of presentation
- CD self-contained learning packages (similar to online course material for students not online)
- CAL ("computer-aided learning," where the software teaches, trains, and also examines the students if required; staff can then be accessed via e-mail tutorials/videoconferencing)
- SMS (short message service) text message for student contact

This multimodal presentation format allows students the greatest access and choice of environment that most suits their life and learning styles. Students who need greater time to process information are ideally suited to CAL and online delivery, as they can spend as much time directly interfacing with the tutoring media as they require. Similarly, a student who needs less time on a particular course can choose to complete the coursework at a faster pace and employ their time elsewhere in their studies. Smith (2000) noted, "To retain customers, it is vital to focus on what people want and need rather than on what we want to sell to them" (Smith, 2000, p. 7).

The Virtual Institute of Music and The Virtual Institute of Management Sciences provide students with the opportunity to complete an eCertificate of Music at pre-degree level and a Master of Arts Management in a multimodal virtual environment utilizing all of the virtual modes noted. Most subjects offered within The Virtual Institute of Music and The Virtual Institute of Management Sciences are delivered in a variety of modes to suit the students' learning requirements

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

The virtual project was based on the work of Bofinger and Whateley (circa 2002) that centered around creating a greater range of options and flexibility for study. Four key vehicles were identified to help develop the approach to undergraduate and postgraduate offerings:

- The use of the *Internet*
- *Intensive* delivery of product
- Involvement of *industry* mentors
- Ongoing *innovation*

Individually, each of the elements is not groundbreaking—the practice of combining them, however, within the Australian context, is quite unique to music schools, and a significant achievement for The Australian Institute of Music.

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