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**Higher Education Capacity Building:
Looking to the future**

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**Higher Education Capacity Building:
Looking to the future**

Cherry Stewart

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DEHub, based at the University of New England (UNE), was established in 2009 as a Federally-funded central agency for distance education research. It aims to promote knowledge transfer about best practice in distance education and support national and global collaborations on evidence-based approaches to effectively and efficiently employing new technologies in distance education. DEHub works to inform and influence policy and improve practice based on research outcomes, both nationally and internationally. DEHub has fostered an extensive, worldwide network of researchers in online and distance education so as to be able to facilitate connections between educators and other stakeholders in higher education.

About the Author

A strong passion for learning and teaching grew from an early career in primary school teaching with Indigenous peoples. Cherry Stewart, as an eclectic and resourceful teacher, found it quite tedious to carry around slides, pictures cut from magazines, film reels, long playing records, audio tapes and numerous books when teaching. Thus, she quite naturally gravitated towards multi-media and online technologies to support the creation of interactive and learner-centred environments. This passion has extended into years as an educational leader in industry, Vocational Education Training and university contexts. Cherry has over forty years practical and theoretical experience in primary, secondary and tertiary education, educational management, curriculum design and academic development. She currently works as lecturer and educational designer in the School of Education, University of New England, and researcher at Macquarie University, Australia. She provides Open Education Resources in teaching and learning at [Just4Learning.org](https://www.just4learning.org).

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No. 2

Higher Education Capacity Building:
Looking to the future

Cherry Stewart

DEHub
Innovation in Distance Education

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Higher Education Capacity Building: Looking to the Future

Abstract

This position paper provides a capacity-building perspective to support the changing nature of the Australian higher education landscape as articulated in the Bradley Review (2009). Distance education is becoming more ubiquitous as professional learning and development increasingly requires just-in-time information and is a life-long learning process. A review of research and theoretical literature in the fields of academic development, leadership and change as applied to higher education provides the foundation for discussion of capacity building within this ubiquitous context.

Introduction

Through the use of digital technologies, Australian universities can engage globally and become a significant player in international education. Visions for long-term sustainable strategies for global engagement are synonymous with building strong learning communities. The ability to foster such learning communities demands a strong skills base for globally based Australian educators. I begin this paper by defining capacity building in the higher education context; the historical background for distance education within the Australian environment places capacity building within a changing social context. Then, I consider the additional factors impacting Australian higher education institutions as they strive for sustainability at both the institutional and global level. I continue by investigating the concept of academic development, and bring together leadership and change management concepts to focus on the potential of enhancing the overall capacity of higher education to meet the needs of changing student cohorts.

Capacity Building

‘Capacity building’ suggests a people-centred and adaptive approach to supporting effective skills, knowledge and attitudes rather than a technical focus. Heifetz (1994) links human social, systemic and biological factors to emphasise the need to focus on the development of our organisational and cultural capacities to address problems successfully. He makes a distinction between technical and adaptive problems and the processes for dealing with these. Technical problems have ‘known factors’ and may involve a routine, well-established process in their solution. Technical issues are often well addressed in a traditional teaching environment. Adaptive problems, such as adopting and adapting to technology-based distance learning, demand innovation and learning (rather than teaching) and academic development. Capacity building is a process where both individuals and groups engage in adaptive problem solving directed towards an articulated and agreed goal. Capacity building values each individual in the learning chain, appreciating their desire to accomplish both personal and

institutional goals by effectively supporting and contributing to their role in the organisation and the society.

The term, capacity building, arises from the lexicon of community development, suggesting that individuals or groups should determine their own needs, values and priorities. In addition, the philosophy states that these individuals or groups must also receive support in the process of achieving their identified and confirmed goals. Linking capacity building to community development, McGinty (2002) states: "Capacity development is the process by which individuals, organisations, institutions and societies develop abilities (individually and collectively) to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives" (p. 1).. The usage of the term 'capacity building' brings to mind other terms, such as 'empowerment' and 'participatory management', where skills are enhanced collectively and in situ. Capacity building is more encompassing than the concepts of academic development, leadership or change management singularly. Two premises underpin its usage in this paper: first, capacity building is not something that can be completed in isolation from other factors in the encompassing environment; and second, regardless of whatever point in their development, humans have capacities to continually learn, extending and building upon their current knowledge (Eade, 1997).

Capacity building results in change. Not only individual change but also change to the context in which individuals learn; change is accepted as the only constant. Capacity building results in adaptive, creative response to change. Capacity building is different from academic development. The latter is generally a strategy for 'teaching something'. Capacity building is the result of learning and innovative behaviours (Rogers, 2003). Capacity building requires support for a process of learning and change universally. Capacity building is measured against individual or collective goals, rather than standards set universally. Capacity building is a naturally reciprocal arrangement where learning changes the context, and the context affects the new learning. Under these circumstances, capacity building is not an event, but an adaptive process that develops from new learning. Higher education institutions, seeking to engage in the ubiquitous distance-learning environments, must examine their assumptions about academic development, leadership and change.

Distance Education in Australia

At one time, distance education was considered outside the mainstream of higher education, and a means of industrialising the learning process (Burge, 2007). The disaggregation of the teaching act characterised distance education (Peters, 1994, as cited in Kegan, 1998)) and was reinforced by the development of large distance education centres for materials production to support the process of study for distance education students. In Australia, the New England Model (NE) (Chick, 1992) provided printed materials for students but also ensured connection between academics and the wider community—the community of not only the learner but also their family and geographic community (Laverty, 1980). This integrated form was supported fiscally, and many lecturers visited their students and held local tutorials. The idea of a learning community was the mainstay of the NE.

In his review of distance education at the University of New England (UNE), Smith (1979) noted that UNE's external studies emphasised a systemic approach to creating effective learning materials, combining this with dialogic interaction. The distance education program implemented strategies for staff/student contact and regular student group activities, and had regard for 'learners learning' rather than 'teachers teaching'. These strategies emphasised two-way communication between tutor and learner for dialogic conversation. Academics provided information to students to enable the creation of geographically supported study groups. In its early implementation, the NE was radically different from other implementations of the correspondence models of other institutions (Chick, 1992). Other universities provided independent self-paced study using markers separate from the on campus activities. UNE, on the other hand, required all academic appointments to teach both internal and external enrolments. Academics considered their students as integrated cohorts—they received the same information, were required to engage in the same tasks, and were marked equally. However changes in technologies and the economic philosophies of government have impacted heavily on these distance-learning communities, with many students becoming isolated from both lecturer and peers.

Challenges to Higher Education

The social milieu's impact on learning

The 21st millennium has heralded a society with pervasive usage of mobile and digital technologies. These provide immediate interaction with other humans anywhere in the world, as well as access to a wide range of information sources. Social and technological change at the global level is occurring at, what might seem to many of us, a very rapid pace. A multitude of technologies: mobile phones, internet, audio and video on demand, net-based social networks, virtual environments and games with interactive avatars, are all examples of the way humans access information in the digitally dominated world. Such easy access strengthens how users convert this information into useful knowledge and action.

Several decades ago, as technologies, such as broadcast television, radio, CDROM and internet web pages, came into being alongside policies of economic rationalism, communication between tutor and student became focused on produced learning resources and feedback on essay assignments. As these technologies have evolved, so too have the models of distance learning; indeed, due to the very nature of asynchronous distance education, the need for students and lecturers to converge in a same time, same place environment is no longer necessary. Taylor (2001) maintains that we have evolved through five generations of distance education. Most recently, with the widespread adoption of interactive technologies and social-media, people may come together in non-contiguous modes focused on a shared purpose. Using digital technologies, they may communicate and support one another in their learning processes. Thus, distance education may extend beyond the isolation of independent self-paced study to one that fosters learning communities; learning communities that incorporate a holistic capacity building framework for both students and staff within their professional and social context.

The impetus to radically alter tertiary education was predicted sixteen years ago by Zey (1994). He maintained that “the university of the future will undergo a transformation so profound as to make it probably unrecognisable by current standards” (p. 234). Further he predicted that curricula would be radically different, emphasising practicality rather than theory and identifying the role that distance learning would play in the learning of post-secondary students. More recently, Bonk (2009) proposed a mnemonic: WE-ALL-LEARN

- Web searching in the world of e-books;
- E-learning and blended learning;
- Availability of open source and free software;
- Leveraged resources and open courseware;
- Learning object repositories and portals;
- Learner participation in open information communities;
- Electronic collaboration and interaction;
- Alternative reality learning;
- Real-time mobility and portability;
- Networks of personalised learning.

to emphasise the web-based infrastructure with its unlimited free access to information (content) and a growing culture of participation and knowledge-sharing. Emphasising the dramatic changes heralded by Zey (1994), Bonk (2009) acknowledged the here and now of changed learning conditions.

In his argument for creating a sustainable future, Cortese (2003) called for a change in mind-set and strategies for educating ourselves. He suggested that, if world populations are to value, create and act on social and economic problems, they must focus on building capacity to do so. Indeed, Cortese (2003) strongly placed the blame on the shoulders of “people coming out of the world’s best colleges and universities [who] are leading us down the current unhealthy, inequitable, and unsustainable path” (p. 2). Consequently, a new vision of higher education is essential. It is necessary to rethink the actions and interactions that will lead to a population with the capacity to deal with the complexities of sustainability in technology enabled learning and living.

New Learners in Higher Education

In addition to the changes in access to information via digital technologies, there is an impending burgeoning of off-campus higher education learners. As more nations around the world educate their populations at to secondary level, technology supported distance learning becomes a welcomed and, sometimes, the only option for extending professional knowledge and skills in the adult workforce. Gallegher (2001) reported to the OECD collective that, Between 1994 and 1999 there was a 9 % increase in the proportion of [Australian] students who were studying full time yet who were also in paid employment [referred to as learner-earners]” (p. 4). The new-students may also be ‘earner-learners’ (Cunningham, et al., 2000): – persons with an existing, full-time job who undertakes study. Changes to the “student profile mean that students trying to juggle both work and study are naturally interested in increased flexibility—such as reducing or eliminating the number of hours they have to spend on campus—and the ability to fast track their education” (Gallegher, 2001, p. 4). All of these factors lead to the demand for flexible forms of education and the application of interactive networked technologies within a life-long learning paradigm.

Denman (2009) identifies four main considerations for growth in distance education provision: (1) accessibility; (2) diversifying educational operations; (3) personal and technological mobility; and (4) citizen equity. These issues challenge institutions to reconsider their teaching strategies and cater for an increasing diversity of learners and their individual needs. Even more so, these issues challenge university employees who provide the resources and support students through their learning processes. Thus, it is imperative that higher education institutions consider holistically their capacity to provide the relevant services, both via its systems and processes and through the relevant human resources.

Market Forces Applied to Education

The Cunningham et al. (2000) study of ‘borderless education’ identified not only the changes in technologies, but also the opening of higher education to market forces as creating profound implications for academics in Australian universities. The new competitive environment does not bring with it the traditions of higher education such as collegial governance, linked research and teaching, or academic autonomy and control” (Cunningham, 2000, p. 15); they call for the expansion of new approaches to meet the learning needs of corporate employees at a professional level as well as the traditional pre-service professionals. In response to emerging market forces—in order to remain competitive—universities must

ask themselves four fundamental questions: (1) How can higher education providers take full advantage of the affordances of web-based technologies to be competitive in the 21st century? (2) How can both academic and administrative staff be supported effectively in adopting these technologies for learning? (3) How might these technologies be adapted to this rather encompassing task in a ubiquitous context? (4) How, moreover, can higher education providers be sure that the resources applied to improving technology-based teaching have resulted in more effective learning in the global context?

Changing existing paradigms

While capacity building results in change, it also requires change. Many universities in the western world have had a long history of providing distance education. Yet, many academics within these institutions find their conventional knowledge of teaching and learning significantly challenged when they are asked to teach students with access to internet-based technologies anytime and anywhere (Stewart & Adlington, 2010). While early adopters may use digital tools actively, others ignore the possibilities. Still others, who try online learning for distance students, revert to traditional practices. Some may be receptive to change; others reject it. The degree of change and the complexities associated with it are often too confounding. Time and again there is deep concern over the structures and strategies needed to adequately support changes leading to interactive distance learning opportunities (Oomen-Early & Murphy, 2009; Stewart & Adlington, 2009a; Vlachopoulos, 2009). As higher education institutions implement digital tools to support distance and on-campus students, it becomes evident that a number of technology-based learning solutions are not congruent with existing practices and/or policies. Rather than change these practices, policy makers continue to force square pegs into round holes. Traditional beliefs may well impede the adoption of new educational practices suitable for both academic and student learning in the 21st century.

Much of the change in higher education research literature reflects the issues and challenges of planning the right program at the right time to impact teaching activities. Multiple development strategies have been categorised in a variety of ways (Ling, 2009; Prebble, et al., 2005; Roberts, Brindley, Mugridge, & Howard, 2002; Snyder, Marginson & Lewis, 2007). These are summarised in Table 1.

Organisational level	Group or Team-based level	Individual/Personal level
Change management	Short-term focused workshops or seminars	On-the-job contextual activities
Leadership culture	Formally credited programs (e.g. Graduate Certificate Tertiary Education)	Mentoring
Evaluative use of student and peer feedback	Collegial communities of practice	Just-in-time consultations
Performance management		Conference attendance
		Self-study

Table 1: Organisational development strategies implemented in isolation.

The efficacy of each of these strategies in isolation is questioned by the lack of relevant research to support conclusive links between what higher education institutions do and how students benefit from the resulting actions. While we may each believe that we are part of connected communities, a common language and strategy for dealing with issues is often difficult to detect in higher education. We hear daily of the vision of ubiquitous and seamless computing services supporting learning environments for everyone, on an anytime, anywhere, just-in-time basis. Yet, it seems to be a long and hazardous road from the availability of web-based technology to a culture of distributed and life-long learning (Beuschel, 2003). Universities may become ubiquitous learning organisations, not because of technology, but because of affordances provided by technology (Oblinger, as cited in Siemens, 2006). To take advantage of affordances, university leadership must recognise and commit to a negotiation across a range of stakeholders, learning the language and creating the culture of critical reflection in the process of adaptation (Conner, 1998). Cavallo (2004) believes new models for growth and change are required at the macro or systemic level. In higher education, this would require each university to rethink and reorganize the teaching and learning context into an adaptive learning organisation. Thus, the university leadership fostering blended and distance education must encourage adaptive learning behaviours. (Davies, 2007).

While some higher education leaders suggest that automation of teaching using intelligent, flexible learning systems would solve issues of quality learning in distance education (Taylor, 2001), others focus on the development of strategies to maximise the professional skills of educators (Davies, Hides, & Casey, 2001; de Gagne & Walters, 2009; Seely-Brown, 2008; Sharpe, Benfield, & Francis, 2006; Snyder, et al., 2007). Yet, most higher education support processes replicate strategies of an era fast disappearing. Just as classroom teaching may be teacher-centred, most academic development and change initiatives are institutionally or individually focused rather than focused on building the capacity of the human resources as an integrated whole.

Academic Development

The concept of 'academic development' suggests it is possible to know what is required as professional learning for individual academics; it suggests being able to deliver these needs in a planned program of 'development' activities, workshops or seminars, or other activities. On the other hand, capacity building is support in determining one's own goals. Capacity building links people in endless and intertwined networks. Since the early 1970s, Australian universities have supported academic staff with a variety of strategies (Hicks, 1999). Through the nineties and into the 21st century, academic development units have taken on multiple roles and have responded with a multiplicity of strategies, as listed in Table 1. In most Australian universities, two different perspectives dominate academic development provision: (1) a centralised teaching and learning support service or (2) a more dispersed model. The focus of both of these models has been hierarchical in nature, with decisions being made by others rather than the academic learners themselves. Hicks identified four formats in the Australian environment that range from a strong centralised unit providing programs across the whole of the university, to a faculty, school or discipline based organisation and implementation.

The generic centralised institutional models as described by Hicks (1999) where teaching experts organise training programs for content experts, decontextualise both the learning of the academic and their relationships with student cohorts. Academic development suggests a 'deficit' where appropriate skills and attitudes must be transferred from the academic developer to the academic. Enhancement programs (institutionally determined seminars and workshops, and Higher Education Certificates) have become institutionalised within academic support units—and may not be aligned with individual or group needs in the changing educational climate. Furthermore, Moore (2006) believes that most programs of professional development are 'provider-centred' rather than 'learner-centred'. These programs become a 'cog in the wheel' rather than the integrated whole that works to solve the issues and challenges of change.

Provider-centred strategies indicate mechanistic rather than adaptive thinking. They focus on an external need within a system, expecting the human element to make the necessary adjustments as a piece of clay might be moulded in the hands of a sculptor. This perception seems to dominate the 'training' paradigm of academic development, and assumes that quality teaching is improved by targeted academic development. Regardless of the topic covered, these programs decontextualise both the learning of the academic and their relationships with student cohorts, as well as decontextualising the academic from the institutional change as a whole. Rather than continue this deficit thinking, a more encompassing adaptive framework is essential.

Moving forward, Hicks (1999) suggested an integrated model for the development and integration of technology to the teaching process, and Boud (1999) promoted a holistic approach. Johnston (1997) also recognised some deficiencies in the organisation of these units, suggesting a balanced and coherent approach might better contribute to teaching quality. Holistic, encompassing strategies have been suggested. Yet, following a comprehensive review of academic development in Australian higher education institutions, Ling (2009) reports the 'emerging issues' are not new but are known issues that remain unresolved.

Gosling (2007) identified a change in the United Kingdom environment, moving towards a combination of the models identified by Hicks (1999). Regardless of the structural form of the programs provided, most are for the expressed purpose of maximising teaching strategies (Holt, 2010) not capacity building opportunities. While some elements of capacity building in higher education are undergoing change, courses, seminars and workshops continue to be the dominant paradigm for academic development. These programs have often been established without comprehensive assessment of faculty needs.

Ling (2009) separates the historical approaches of academic development into four categories: (1) teacher-focused—providing individual teachers with practical, technical skills about teaching in different teaching contexts; (2) learner-focused—integrated conceptual models of teaching and learning; (3) organisation-focused—driven by university mission statements and detailed strategic planning, and evaluated against performance indicators; and (4) sector-wide focused—government initiatives meant to increase the capacity of institutions to engage. It is crucial that higher education combine strategies to engender adaptive and holistic ‘capacity-building’ for results both internal to the organisation, as well as for the benefit of the community as a whole that is external to the organisation.

Higher Education Leadership

Leadership for learning is imperative to ensure quality-learning experiences. Too often the management, implementation, and evaluation of processes aimed at ensuring quality graduate outcomes focuses on presentation factors or end product, rather than an integrated process leading to student learning. Traditional quality assurance philosophies generally focus on the student-reported experience of the learning context (Ramsden, Prosser, Trigwell, & Martin, 2007). Within these philosophies, the teacher-centred model, rather than a learner-centred focus, is promoted. While much research over the past 30 years has investigated the connection between students' context of teaching, little has been done to establish connections between university leadership and student outcomes. Ramsden et al. (2007) used a survey format to research "the lecturer's experience of leadership for teaching, collaborative management of teaching in the department, collegial commitment to student learning, several aspects of the context of classroom teaching; and the lecturer's approaches to teaching" (p. 143). From this study, they conclude that there is "evidence that collegial and positive perceptions of leadership for teaching and management of teaching [learning leadership] are associated with perceptions that student learning is valued and that the teaching context supports high quality teaching" (p. 152).

Learning leadership is a complex and under-explored concept with multiple ways of interpretation and practise within the learning and teaching context. Several studies have indicated that university leaders want practical and detailed insights into what is the best approach for taking 'good ideas' and making them work (Fullan, 2008; Parker, 2008; Tait, 2007; Taylor, 2005; Wagner, et al., 2005). The Scott report (2008) suggests that current approaches to leadership development might not be focusing on the capabilities that count in the 21st century learning environment. A new view of learning leadership may link more directly to how both organisations and individuals manage change (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Via meta-synthesis research, Robinson and Hullinger (2008) investigated 17 New Zealand studies of school leadership, examining the links between leadership and student outcomes. The analysis revealed five leadership dimensions critical in fostering the holistic capacity building of both teacher and student, and the adaptive change of the institution:

- providing educational direction;
- ensuring strategic alignment;
- creating a community that learns how to improve student success;
- engaging in constructive problem talk; and
- selecting and developing smart tools.

Change is not an event, but a complex learning and unlearning process for all concerned. Learning leaders play a key role in supporting change-focused learning and in modifying the environment of universities to facilitate it. Ginns, Prosser and Barrie (2007) highlight the need for constructive alignment of institutional process and outcomes with the activities of academic development units. Engaging conceptual change in teaching practices at an individual level requires an institutional mission that not only espouses a learner-focused philosophy but also one that creates and supports a dynamic 'learning organisation' perspective among employees in all roles across the institution.

Change focused learning leadership involves a capacity to use one's knowledge and skills to solve a problem while in the process of working on it, rather than implementing a known procedure (Heifetz, 1994). Leadership focused on developing adaptive skills, as distinct from positions of authority that seek to impart technical skills is required. Such a perspective will focus on meeting the challenges of interactive networked learning for distance learners. In the 21st century higher education milieu, leadership cannot remain strictly focused on the role of Vice Chancellor, the executive management team or Heads of Schools. Leadership is required at all levels of the organisation—leadership in the form of personal and collaborative adaptive change (Davies, 2007; Fullan, 2007; Kegan & Lahey, 2001). Synergies achieved through such a process may lead to new knowledge about what are effective approaches for employee capacity building. Employees who engage in capacity building recognise their role as contributing to not only their own but also to the enhanced capacity of others including their students. They recognise their own responsibility for changing their own thinking (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Too often, work conditions thwart professional learning and reflection: personal and professional capacity building.

Universities as learning organisations

Senge (1990) defines learning organisations as generative, adaptive and creative. Other authors have stressed the capacity to share insights and knowledge, build on past experience and continually transform cultures (Friedman, Friedman, & Pollack, 2005). A learning organisation encompasses the whole of the organisation. A learning organisation becomes skilled at fostering, within it, leadership that reflects on new knowledge and insights, diffusing double-loop learning (Argyris, 2006) throughout the organisation. Applying this definition begs the question: are our universities learning organisations?

Friedman et al. (2005) suggest that few universities are learning organisations. Quite ironically, they state: "[these] teaching organisations do not know how to learn" (p. 32). To address this enigma, Friedman et al. (2005) suggest eight strategies enabled by Web 2.0 technologies that could contribute to capacity building of both staff and student. In adopting these, learning leaders would maximise the internal transfer of learning by addressing the "twin fears of change, and of things that are new" (p. 34). These are:

1. The creation of synergies between scholars of differing disciplines.
2. Internal mechanisms for peer pre-submission review of research and teaching programs.
3. Organisational strategies that support courses taught by multiple faculty members, emphasising cross-discipline expertise and collaboration.
4. The integration of work-based learning with the theoretical constructs achieved by a partnership between educators and business and industry practitioners.
5. Internal communication flows that support knowledge sharing from bottom to top rather than the administrative hierarchy that currently exist in many universities.
6. Technologically enhanced administrative and pedagogical designs bringing student-contributed information into the knowledge-sharing and creation process.
7. Inter-disciplinary degree programs related to real-world issues and challenges, supporting students to contribute to the social, cultural and economic world beyond the university borders.

The 2010 Horizon Report (Johnson, Levine, & Stone, 2010) suggests digital literacy is of rising importance in every discipline and profession, including higher education professionals. Digital literacy is less about the tools and more about ways of thinking and seeing how these tools might be applied to learning and teaching. Few higher education educators have a deep conceptual knowledge of “what is possible with the new scholarly forms of authoring, publishing and researching” (p. 5). Transforming higher education institutions into learning organisations capable of supporting learners in devising sustainable futures, seeks faculty who respond to different challenges; challenges that not only require technological or pedagogical information workshops, but strategies that support mental shifts recognising the socio-cultural situ of mediated action.

Change Management

Socio-cultural or constructionist philosophies have not yet become widely accepted in university teaching. Yet these philosophies align with the nature of an information-rich and global society. Universities need to re-vision capacity building and create different learning opportunities. Higher education institutions have generally been organized into highly specialised areas for knowledge transmission: traditional disciplines. Such structures do not contribute to interactions that promote the sharing of information across disciplines and to building diverse forms of knowledge. Thus universities seeking to serve the ‘new’ 21st century learner must rethink their strategies for change. They must engage in change via a capacity building route.

Prosci Research (Creasey, 2010) describes change management as the process, tools and techniques to manage the people needs required for a business outcome. This concept incorporates both organisational change management processes and individual change management strategies. In practice, change management thinking presents a very structured and mechanistic approach to transitioning individuals from one practice to another. For example, if a new learning management system is to be implemented, the academic development unit may be approached to provide systematic training to all employees to ensure that they have the technical skill to use the system. This may be done while separate workshops are provided for pedagogical concerns. Still other, quite separate activities may be conducted in the discipline area discussing an associated research agenda. If a course or degree program is to be changed, a project management schedule might be devised listing the elements to be impacted, prioritising them and entering the resulting list into a schedule of change and timetabled to fit into the trainer's schedule. Generally, the focus is on the processes, the systems, the organisational structures, or the job roles, rather than the capacity building of the human resources.

Distance Education for 21st Century Learning

Leaders for distance education cannot follow the crowd if they want to effect high impact professional learning. Instead, they must build upon the strength of character of early distance education pioneers who riled against the “barriers established by educational institutions to almost everyone except the already privileged members of society” (Moore, 2007, as cited in Burge, 2007, p. 121). Changes in technological infrastructures support more universal education in an ‘anywhere-anytime’ mode. However, it is not the technology that will provide universal high impact education. Technology provides the tools but it is leadership focussed on capacity building that will bring about the changes envisioned. Collaboratively constituted knowledge about learning, teaching, management through teamwork and policy creation are far more important. Capacity builders engage a common lexicon to discuss, analyse, criticize and build upon teaching and learning theory through research.

A 2007 study conducted for the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (Snyder, et al., 2007) confirms little real change in teaching strategies has occurred in Australian universities to keep pace with either the changing technological or social conditions . This study found “in the 15 case studies there was just one example of a major technology mediated curriculum change that unequivocally generated more student-centred or self-regulated student learning” (p. 57). In some instances, they identify significant resistance to the idea of blended or distance strategies with respondents identifying these as ‘inferior’ to an on-campus experience. “Pedagogical innovations seldom occurred in a context free from institutional and managerial imperatives” (p. 200). There appears to be a disconnection between organisational agendas, and teaching and learning agendas in many of the programs investigated. The researchers suggest that new learning paradigms would be of value to higher education employees and the students they serve. Reforms that incorporate institutional innovation brought into synergy with academic innovation are likely to be the most effective.

Learning Design for 21st Century Learning

Many researchers report time as a key issue for academic involvement with blended and distance learning design, yet, a quantitative study conducted by Zhen, Garthwait & Pratt (2008) disputes this. Instead, they identify issues of self-efficacy and philosophy as being more problematic. Stewart and Adlington (2009b) articulate similar findings. They relate academic reluctance to Senge’s (2000) concept of personal mastery. For many academics, it is not an easy task to learn about the Web and all the potential tools and their application and new pedagogical strategies, as they expand exponentially. The task of staying up-to-date becomes even more difficult, if one does not want to learn new things; or does not view the world of higher education via a 21st century learning paradigm.

Higher education practitioners who direct their personal motivation and engage in learning design as an intellectual challenge, are often at the leading edge, and are often given the label of being early adopters (Rogers, 2003; Vlachopoulos, 2009). The more traditional university teaching philosophy is grounded in explicit forms of words, numbers and figures accessible to humans as an individualistic, cognitive phenomenon, rather than a socio-cultural and personal phenomena that shifts in time and place (Greenwood & Levin, 2005). Excuses

of lack of support, time restraints or lack of experience in design or technologies are often used to conceal more deeply held beliefs that the new tools and strategies are just not right for a university's knowledge producing systems (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Mishra and Koehler (2006) argue that connecting and integrating contextual academic content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and technological knowledge (TPACK) will result in effective academic development and improved student learning. Their TPACK model provides a framework for integration concentrating on overall skill development. An in-situ collaborative design process underpins the model creating opportunities for the 'negotiation of meaning'. Heinecke (cited in Mishra, Koehler, & Zhao, 2007) describes the TPACK strategy of academic development for a technology-based learning environment as "a refreshing sociological approach to technology integration' (p. xv). This Community of Designers approach focuses on active engagement with authentic problems. Each iteration of the professional learning experience is unique and entirely dependent upon the mix and needs of participants. Context is an element of the model. However the 'context' considered by these researchers is not directed towards an encompassing learning organisation but rather the single classroom. While the process and individual outcomes are described, a future challenge is applying the model within a holistic university environment advancing capacity building.

Learning contexts

Contemporary learning theory (Friedman, et al., 2005; Kop & Hill, 2008; Siemens, 2004) recognises relationships between teaching and learning as extremely complex and involving, not only students and teachers, but also learner peers, external experts, an ever-changing curriculum, and contextual influences on both teacher and learner. In addition, there are many personal and professional influences. To take advantage of the affordances of Internet based learning technologies, university leadership at all levels must recognise and commit to a negotiation across a range of stakeholders. Distance learning is evolving into a much more ubiquitous form of learning (Bonk, 2009) where professional capacities are supported through just-in-time and life-long learning (Salmon, Jones, & Armellini, 2008). The ability for students to add to the information pool rather than just assimilate it is made possible by these new technologies. Yet, it seems to be a long and hazardous road from the availability of web-based technology to a culture of distributed and life-long learning (Beuschel, 2003).

Positioning for Capacity Building

Contemporary learning theory (Friedman, et al., 2005; Kop & Hill, 2008; Siemens, 2004) recognises relationships between teaching and learning as extremely complex and involving, not only students and teachers, but also learner peers, external experts, an ever-changing curriculum, and contextual influences on both teacher and learner. In addition, there are many personal and professional influences. To take advantage of the affordances of Internet based learning technologies, university leadership at all levels must recognise and commit to a negotiation across a range of stakeholders. Distance learning is evolving into a much more ubiquitous form of learning (Bonk, 2009) where professional capacities are supported through just-in-time and life-long learning (Salmon, Jones, & Armellini, 2008). The ability for students to add to the information pool rather than just assimilate it is made possible by these new technologies. Yet, it seems to be a long and hazardous road from the availability of web-based technology to a culture of distributed and life-long learning (Beuschel, 2003).

With the advent of integrated networked solutions for distance learning, both academic and support staff in higher education are facing major shifts in roles and responsibilities. Realigning support for higher education practitioners in distance learning requires creatively addressing the challenges inhibiting research-based teaching practices and change processes. Contributing to these blockages are the paradigms and philosophies by which education is offered and managed. Generative capacity building requires a new cultural foundation that is not linked to the pervasive culture of teaching, but rather, an in-context culture of learning.

The context in which the distance education professional works requires him or her to be ever aware and observant of the learner priorities in relationship to societal needs, adjusting their guidance and support to maximize an agreed goal. Achieving this service orientation requires a delicate balance between pragmatic, limited content provision and good teaching practices to engage the learners deeply. In such an environment, the role of academic development changes from an input model managed by a central unit, to capacity building via supported personal and professional research-based practices and authentic in context activities. New models of growth and change are required at the systemic and institutional levels. In such an environment, the academic role becomes defined by the whole of institutional practices. Not only the university leadership but also academics and students become contributors to, and participators in a learning organisation culture.

Rather than concentrating on academic development, capacity building would emphasise support within a group level quality management agenda. As an adaptive in-context process, it would not be appropriate to compare goals against the quality frameworks established by others. Capacity builders would clearly articulate their own principles and standards. They would adjust their own performance goals. Impact management would not be tied to individual success, but rather to team-focused and collaborative goals. Universal participation in evidence-based life-long learning cultures would support progressive development towards appropriate personal and professional goals.

Effective practice in distance teaching and learning would focus on the personal and professional goals of the learners. It would ask each learner to identify the impact they strive for. The adaptive curriculum design and implementation processes would link explicitly to real-world contexts. The design process would incorporate comprehensive stakeholder (teaching academics, university management and administration as well as the linked communities and students) involvement. Those involved would be cognisant of a digitally based learning milieu rather than looking backward to traditional paradigms. In addition, the infrastructure would ensure that universal usage of digital learning tools was invisible. Thus, enabling seamless connecting, leveraging and capacity building between all levels of users.

In the final analysis, to truly respond to the 21st century student environment, universities need to reconsider capacity building in terms of institutional issues associated with strategy, policy and infrastructure, as well as technology, pedagogy and discipline-content. Changes that will promote the much-needed capacity building involve the whole university and changes to the governmental regulations that block the development of responsive and adaptive learning environments. New thinking requires significant alteration to structures and processes enabling blended and distance learners to be responsible for their own learning, contributing directly to shared-knowledge building. Finally, internal and external processes will all be based on well-researched and documented evidence that meets the needs of stakeholders across the whole of the higher education.

Leading the 21st century with a more encompassing capacity building framework will align the emerging social and educational paradigms. A major challenge is identifying ways and means of bringing higher education leaders, administrators, academics and students to an in-depth understanding of these inter-related factors rather than reporting on the out-of-context strategies we use now.

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