

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

A LIFE BEYOND THE GOLDEN ARCHES

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Abstract

Societal expectations of higher education have changed significantly in the past quarter century without equivalent increases in funding. These changes leave a shortfall between the outcomes higher education is expected to provide, the experiences it aspires to offer and those it can deliver. This shortfall has contributed to higher education's McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1996). Although flexible delivery (flexible delivery) and technology-enhanced learning (technology-enhanced learning) are common strategies to narrow this shortfall, I argue that they can actually increase its breadth. I apply Simons' model of *levers of organizational design* to show how higher education can effect cultural changes to help to transform this shortfall into an entrepreneurial gap, thus offering higher education a possible future beyond the golden arches.

"Can you tell me what we're waiting for, Señor?"

– Bob Dylan

Expectations of Higher Education and the Shortfall of Resources

In this era of knowledge economies and societies, many governments now recognize that "*universities are critical to the national innovation system*" (Australian Research Council, 2008, p. 2) and hence to prosperity within a highly competitive globalised market for intellectual capital and intellectual property (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2004; World Bank Group, 2002). Meanwhile, following widespread shifts toward neo-liberalism and "technological and economic reductionism" (Bullen, Robb, & Kenway, 2004, p. 7), many governments have shifted roles from providing and funding elitist higher education (higher education) towards regulating mass higher education (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). Expectations of higher education have therefore undergone significant changes (Boarini, Martins, Strauss, de la Maisonneuve, & Nicoletti, 2008). Characteristic of these changed expectations are increases in academic capitalism, accountability and compliance, massification, and McDonaldization.

Academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) describes a shift in the aspirations of research. Humboldt's vision of universities searching for truth and knowledge (Nybom, 2007) has been replaced by universities searching for the production and commercial exploitation of intellectual property (World Bank Group, 2002), to enrich academics, subsidize universities (Bok, 2003), and fund economies (Australian Research Council, 2008). Quantitative assessment of research reduces higher education's freedom to self-define goals, policy or quality assurance for research (see Henderson, Shurville, & Fernstrom, 2009).

A new culture of *accountability* of both the quality of learning and teaching (Kis, 2005) and its fitness for the labour market (Boarini, Martins, Strauss, de la Maisonneuve, & Nicoletti, 2008) has mainstreamed androgogic and student-centred learning styles (see Browne & Shurville, 2007). While this shift may be overdue, its culture of regulatory compliance leaves higher education with less room to self-define policy, practice and quality assurance of learning and teaching.

Massification and McDonaldization of higher education refer to the unprecedented growth in *student numbers* and the oversight of their preparation for the workforce (Baker, 2007; Hall & Atkinson, 2006; Ritzer, 1996; Scott, 1998; Trow 2006). Some critiques of massification and McDonaldization have been profound:

Ritzer's thesis is that western societies are being characterized by a desire for rationality, efficiency, predictability and control. McDonaldization is the process by which. . .fast food restaurant principles are applied to a wide range of production activities and service provision. Ritzer argues that higher education is no different from other service industries and consumers require the same standardization, reliability and predictability in terms of [higher education] provision as they do when purchasing a burger meal. (Lomas, 2001, p. 73).

In sum these changes mean that the purposes and regulation of the ivory towers can be hard to distinguish from those of the golden arches.

Unfortunately, policy makers have challenged higher education to meet these expectations without commensurate increases in funding (Herbst, 2007; Johnes & Johnes, 2008). This challenge creates a shortfall between available resources, societal expectations and higher education's own aspirations. Society requires higher education to narrow this shortfall via innovation and entrepreneurialism. However, in terms of double loop learning, regulation offers higher education the leeway to change its action strategies, to increase efficiency, rather than to shift its high level control variables, to enhance effectiveness (Argyris, 1992).

Flexible Delivery and Technology-Enhanced Learning in Compliance and Cost-Conscious Cultures

This shortfall has created compliance and cost conscious cultures where institutions are forced to undergo radical transformations in efficiency to either achieve or transcend societal expectations (Evaline, 2004). Arguably, despite this shortfall, much of higher education has set its sights beyond the golden arches to pursue a post-Fordist (Nunan, 1996) model of flexible, mass-personalisation where “the *winners* design *customized* products and services *on time, on demand* faster and more perfectly than their global competition” (Gee & Lankshear, 1995, p. 6; Shurville, & Browne, 2006; Shurville, O’Grady, & Mayall, 2008).

Flexible delivery is key to meeting societal expectations (see Seddon & Angus, 2000). Canonically, flexible delivery provides “students with flexible access to learning experiences in terms of at least one of the following: time, place, pace, learning style, content, assessment and pathways” (Chen, 2003, p. 25). Flexible delivery facilitates mass-higher education which is integrated with work — which is itself increasingly flexible (Hall & Atkinson, 2006) — and shifts costs and responsibility from society to the individual (Gee & Lankshear, 1995; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). So in economic terms, flexible delivery enables students to attend higher education and earn wages to pay their fees.

Flexible delivery also provides a framework for androgogic learning and teaching approaches that prepare learners for lifelong learning (Browne & Shurville, 2007; Luckin, Shurville, & Browne, 2006), and a means to implement the teaching-research nexus (Boyer Commission, 1999). It can also facilitate education for those with disabilities (Getzel, 2008). As Nunan observed, “while part of the framework for flexible delivery may be borrowed from economics, there are progressive interpretations of flexible learning which are structured around competing social and humanist values which have educational expression through concepts such as constructivism, open education, student-centred learning, life-long learning, deep learning, and accessible learning structures” (1996, online). So flexible delivery is an educational philosophy with which to move beyond McDonaldization and implement Nunan’s ethical post-Fordist visions.

Flexible, post-Fordist delivery calls for a Copernician transition of the centre of power and convenience from academics to learners. In other words the learners become the star and the academic become the orbiting body. Unfortunately, this reversal often places substantial demands upon academics, professional staff and, ironically, the learners themselves (Chen, 2003). So although flexible delivery provides a way to increase access to higher education, a path to improved learning and teaching, and a philosophy for post-Fordist higher education, it can also tend to widen this shortfall between resources, expectation and visions.

Some believe that the shortfall can be reduced by systems for technology-enhanced learning that offer educational and institutional flexibility (Balacheff, Ludvigsen, de Jong, Lazonder, & Barnes, 2009; Conole & Oliver, 2006; Laurillard, Oliver, Wasson, & Hoppe, 2009; Shurville, O'Grady and Mayall, 2008). In Australia, for example, the application of ICT/technology-enhanced learning to academic and business process has recently been shown to produce cost improvements in the order of 3.3% across all Australian universities — with a range of 1.8% to 13.0% (Worthington & Lee, 2008). Moreover some argue that technology-enhanced learning can mediate new educational experiences:

Our perspective. . . is not focused on efficiency in terms of using technology to accelerate learning processes by faster delivery and distribution of learning materials. It is rather oriented towards the role of technology to enable new types of learning experiences and to enrich existing learning scenarios.” (Laurillard, Oliver, Wasson, & Hoppe, 2009, p. 289)

However, the price of technology-enhanced learning can — oft-times erroneously — be seen to be a driver for cost-conscious senior managers when the reality is more complex:

Unlike conventional forms of course delivery which require physical plant of limited capacity, many Internet-based e-learning courses have theoretically unlimited capacities. If the substantial initial costs of course creation can be invested then there is the potential for significant return on investment. . . an attractive proposition to the senior managers of universities beset by the pressures discussed earlier (Williams, 2006, p. 515).

So, flexible delivery mediated by technology-enhanced learning has been widely and perhaps naively perceived as a means for higher education to enable reductions of the cost of provision of McDondaldsized education (Roberts, 1993) and, more tenuously, to enable flexible, post-Fordist mass-higher education (Laurillard, 2007), when it can actually be more expensive and labour intensive to implement than traditional approaches (Guri-Rosenblit, 2005).

Setting Institutional ‘Levers’ for Double Loop Learning

Robert Simons (2005) invented a model to (a) help organizations to design effective roles in terms of resource allocation, entrepreneurialism and double-loop learning; and (b) set appropriate cultural expectations for collaboration and

cooperation. It contains four levers which can each be set independently from low to high:

- The *lever of resources* sets the number of resources for which an individual is given decision rights and held accountable for performance.
- The *lever of accountability* (which I refer to as the *lever of leeway*), sets the amount of trade-offs which an individual can make that affect the evaluation of their performance. With a high setting, an individual can, for example, refine their goals — in harmony with organizational strategy and policies — to increase the effectiveness of the targets they are changing. This refinement can make their work more effective and efficient. Having a high setting for this lever is like having the freedom to change the control variable in double-loop learning (Argyris, 1992).
- The *lever of influence* sets the size of the individual's social network and sphere of influence within the organization. A high setting increases the individual's ability to collect and disseminate information across the organization. It also offers the individual the opportunity to attempt to influence the priorities of others.
- The *lever of support* sets the amount of informal help and goodwill that anyone can expect to receive from others across the organisation either in the normal performance of their duties or when they innovate.

Simons argues that reining in the *lever of resources* while simultaneously loosening the *lever of freedom leeway* creates his entrepreneurial gap. This entrepreneurial gap encourages individuals to solve problems in resource-light ways by practicing innovation and double-loop learning. This disparate pair of settings for the *levers of resources* and *leeway* can be enabled by simultaneously setting the *levers of influence* and *support* to high values. These simultaneous high settings for the *levers of influence* and *support* mean that individuals and departments across the organization are expected to contribute knowledge and goodwill to innovative practice and join innovative initiatives. The positions for the *levers of influence* and *support* are set by example from the organization's leaders and by rewarding behaviors that match the desired settings. The cultural outcome of collegiality means that individuals and units who are narrowing the entrepreneurial gap do not have to fear undermining or other pathological behaviors, such as "tricks" and "black holes" (Scott, 2007, p. 17). Simons provides the example of Harvard Business School applying this matrix of settings to good effect (Simons, 2005).

Due to its cultural history as a collegiate environment (Becher & Trowler, 2001), higher education is in a good position to implement higher settings for the *levers of influence* and *support* than might be achieved in industry. My thesis is that if institutions can implement high settings for these levers, then some of the shortfall might be transformed into an entrepreneurial gap, with opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship. This brings us to how stakeholders in flexible delivery and technology-enhanced learning can set the matrix of levers.

Adjusting the lever of resources: The setting for this lever largely externally imposed by public funding. However, academics and educational technologists can apply expert power to ensure that chosen human and technical resources are fit for purpose. Maximizing this constraint can entail engaging with change initiatives and winning over Information Technology Services (ITSs) to support innovative solutions. The most important considerations are a combination of educational and institutional flexibility in educational software (Shurville, O'Grady, & Mayall, 2008) and participation in development and deployment of services (Shurville & Williams, 2005). Senior educational technologists are starting to acquire new influence within ITSs and senior management so that they can affect human resources, purchasing, support strategies and technological choices (Shurville, Browne, & Whitaker, 2008; in press).

Adjusting the lever of leeway: The setting for this lever is largely externally imposed by regulation of higher education. Academics and senior educational technologists can lobby externally for changes to policies for managing learning and teaching and research. Managers and senior managers can contribute by applying the settings for the levers of influence and support to be discussed below to enable academics and educational technologists to work with colleagues from local, national and international communities of practice to lobby for evidenced change.

Adjusting the levers of influence and support: Academics and educational technologists can help to increase these settings by establishing and attending meetings of special interest groups across the campus and beyond. They can also establish and take part in local, national and international mentoring schemes and contribute learning designs to social networking sites, such as the LAMS repository (Shurville, O'Grady, & Mayall, 2008). Senior academics and senior educational technologists carry sufficient expert and legitimate power to influence local policy on such initiatives (Shurville & Browne, in press). It is a matter of choosing to prioritize being an agent for this particular change. As the *lever of support* is set by modeling and rewarding appropriate behaviors, it is essential that academics continue with the tradition of collegiate practice and that educational technologists, who have acquired new found strategic importance (Shurville, Browne, & Whitaker, 2008; Shurville, Browne, & Whitaker, in press), establish a

code of conduct that prioritizes similar collegiality and transparent allegiance to theory (Shurville Greener, & Rospigliosi, in press).

Conclusion

Choosing to engage more deeply with a collegiate model of institutional culture in the face of mounting workloads is not easy. Nor is it a nice to have. If you accept the arguments made above, then fundamental changes have taken place concerning who sets the positions for two of the levers that govern our experience of higher education and, more importantly, the experience of up to 50% of our fellow citizens. It is important that academic and professional stakeholders in flexible delivery and technology-enhanced learning choose to wrest and retain control of the remaining levers and give them an occasional affirmative nudge. To do so, they need to model behaviors and engage in initiatives that *might* transform the shortfall between resources, expectations and vision into an entrepreneurial gap. In turn this transformation *might* help higher education to offer everyone a life beyond the golden arches.

Acknowledgements

These acknowledgements might help to put the title into context. As a dyslexic, I was cast aside by the British secondary education system of the 1970s where “they hated you if you were clever and they despised a fool” (Lennon, 1970). So, I spent my youth in a succession of unskilled jobs — including McDonald’s Epsom branch, whose managers gave me a badly needed second chance. Dylan’s whose words “I’m ready when you are, Señor” (Dylan, 1979) turned my tide. James Fryer had sufficient faith to teach me Basic programming, which got me started. However, many other people made my journey from the golden arches to this keynote possible. Among them was Willie Taylor who encouraged me to enroll in an access course at Southwark College — without the requisite qualifications or fees — and *ensured* that I was accepted. Ironically, it got tough to pull yourself up by your bootstraps in Thatcher’s Britain; but Willie stood by us. He taught us and he marched with us — standing his ground when the police horses charged. He taught me that an education is a right worth fighting for. Professor Andy Clark, Dr Lyn Pemberton, and Professor Aaron Sloman took similar chances on me and offered heavenly support. As Lennon continues, “when they’ve tortured and scared you for twenty odd years, then they expect you to pick a career” (1970). Thanks to Willie et al., upon earning a PhD, I was able to trade the golden arches for a career in higher education; since then it has been, in Carver’s word, “*gravy*” (Carver, 1986). Today, I am proud to work for the University of South Australia, where equitable access — for Indigenous people, those from Adelaide’s northern suburbs, and those with disabilities — is a premise. My mother Shirley and my wife Marian have always modeled such values; I love them for it. I would also like to thank: Professors J. Fodor and S. Orlando; fellow original ICICTE Musketeer Prince Asher Rospigliosi; and Ken Fernstrom, Nicole Levinsky, Barry O’Grady and Nancy Pyrini of ICICTE, for helping to “make it”, in Crumley’s words, “worth the dyin” (1993).

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