

Session 8

FINDING SUNKEN TREASURE: DISCOVERING A KEY TO UNLOCK ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

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Embarking on a voyage to improve the use of our facilities, we sailed through the reefs of enrolment and the abyss of academic workload planning, battled the many tentacles of the institutional octopus and discovered some organisational treasure - increased student satisfaction, workload efficiencies and improved performance. Mastering the challenge of paddling through the waves, we've found ourselves riding the waves.

Achieving improvements in key cross organisational processes like enrolment, workload planning and resource utilisation is always a struggle because of multiple business owners. Wintec's initial intention was to improve the use of facilities. Surveying people about preferences for class times, we also asked "potential students", who didn't enrol, why not. Without intending to, we found valuable information on organisational barriers to enrolling. A key factor was the long lead time potential students required – some 3 to 6 months. We decided to "lock" the timetable at least 4 months before semester 1 to give students certainty on the day and time of their classes. This has been the magic key which has enabled us to untangle the octopus tentacles of enrolment, student loans, workload planning, fee setting, timetabling, programme approval, budgeting and quality to "unlock" the treasure of efficiency, increased student satisfaction to over 90%, and improved organisational performance.

By locking the timetable, and tightly restricting approved changes, we have captured the information needed to make improvements in a wide range of functions, many we did not anticipate. Picking off the octopus tentacles one by one, rework caused by teaching departments making changes to scheduled teaching has reduced noticeably, and has meant an improvement in student satisfaction, and reduced withdrawals caused by timetable changes. Financially, we have closed the gap between the student's applying for and receiving their student loan and paying their fees. With a 90% correlation between payment and attending class on the first day, we now have a more reliable indication of actual student numbers for the start of the year. Locking the timetable also meant we had information which previously only been known at the teaching department level. We used this information to confirm student start dates. Phone calls to Enrolment dropped by one third as a result. We ran institution-wide induction, using students, which halved the time required in the departments. It enabled us to give induction the organisation "look" and quality we now expect, and research shows helps retain students. As other performance improvement "treasures" float by we've grabbed them. We've fallen in the water a few times, and some days it's not so much "riding the waves" as coming up for air while battling the octopus, but on the whole we're surfing not sinking!

Presenters Biography

Sheryl Morgan is currently the acting Head of School of Business at Wintec (Waikato Institute of Technology, Hamilton, New Zealand). When not living on the dark side in academia she is the Project Development Manager in the Chief Executive office. Her role is to manage strategic and high risk projects, and to coach and train in project management.

She is an internationally accredited professional project manager with a career in tertiary education that has included time in a range of areas from HR, enrolment, libraries and learning support to business development. She has a mixed bag of qualifications, including librarianship, business and project management.

Cursed with an irreverent sense of humour, she interprets her mobile phone number, which ends in 007, as licensed to reorganise, helpful for anyone working in tertiary education.