

The Light at the End of the Tunnel of Change: A Blend of Opportunities for a Transformed Future

Joanne Austin, Sharon Carlton
Swinburne University of Technology

Joanne Austin has worked in the tertiary education sector for 23 years and has held a number of management roles -she is currently a Faculty General Manager at Swinburnes Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale. She was the Chair of the ATEM Bass Region for over 5 years and is now on the ATEM Council. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and Graduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching and Learning.

Sharon Carlton has worked in education administration for about 15 years and has a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree. Her professional education experience ranges from working in and with schools, to spending many years supporting the further education sector through to working in the higher education environment. Her current role is the Executive Project Officer at Swinburne's Faculty of Higher Education, Lilydale.

Joanne and Sharon are both currently studying their Masters degree at the University of Melbourne.

The Australian tertiary education environment is currently undergoing substantial change on a number of fronts. There are changes in legislation; declining funding; declining on-campus and international student numbers due to global economic issues; new private providers in an increasingly competitive market; tech savvy students who want to study in a time, place and space which suits their needs; increased competition for research funding and the need to increase research outputs; the new 'voucher system'; increasing targets for students from low socio-economic backgrounds; universal education targets... and these are just a few of the challenges!

The environment in which the tertiary sector also finds itself becoming increasingly demand driven with a much stronger emphasis on becoming 'customer focussed'. In addition, universities must meet challenges brought about by 'open source' content, exponential growth in online delivery, ever evolving and new technologies and changing work roles including the blurring of academic and professional staff boundaries.

Like all other universities in Australia, Swinburne University, as a dual sector university, has had to engage with forward planning in preparing for and responding to national and international changes to the tertiary education landscape. Online and blended learning is now a priority with the development of Swinburne Online in partnership with the SEEK corporation, in addition to current arrangements through Open Universities Australia and other partnerships as they arise. Relationships with TAFE have also become more important as pipeline opportunities into higher education through pathways, guaranteed entry and embedded degrees at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, with a view to ensuring retention of students through the tertiary system and throughout the student life cycle.

This paper explores how the Faculty of Higher Education at Melbourne's Lilydale Campus is strategically transforming and positioning itself to set up the right blend of programs, delivery arrangements, people, space and technology. These strategies are leading to some successes but not surprisingly, have posed a series of challenges which have been simultaneously frustrating and rewarding.

Some of the issues faced by the faculty include high staff turnover in key leadership roles, a review of all the faculty's programs leading to perceptions that the faculty was being targeted for change and the need to re-think academic and administrative quality assurance mechanisms associated with managing for a split in program design and

delivery. Amidst this has been an environment of uncertainty, with staff nevertheless rising to meet and surpass those challenges. The faculty has also seen new and emerging roles fall out of the challenges, a blurring of role boundaries and the inevitable review of business functions and structures.

Some questions with which faculty staff have been fairly comprehensively engaged are:

- When will ongoing leadership positions be resolved?
- How does the faculty manage a huge jump in workload when new innovations have been presented for implementation in very short time-frames?
- How can current systems translate across new pedagogical and administrative models?
- What new systems or adjustments are required?
- What does the faculty, and possibly the university, need to lose?
- What management frameworks and models help to contain but not constrain such fast paced change?

This paper applies Quinn and Rohrbaugh's Competing Values Framework and John Kotter's 8-Step process for leading the way into the tunnel of innovation, change and transformation. It takes a journey through a miasma of dead ends and windows of opportunity, heads towards the light of success, and provides some bread crumbs as food for thought for those grappling with similar challenges in getting the right blend.