Globalization and the Ethics of Demand

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INTRODUCTION

This paper was stimulated by a panel titled "Degrees of Difficulty: A 360-Degree Perspective of Globalization" that I shared at the UCEA conference held in San Diego in April this year (2006) with my colleagues Richard Hezel and Christine Geith. The three perspectives we brought to this UCEA panel represent parts of this current environment and some of its challenges: the opening up of market opportunities worldwide, the entrepreneurial response of universities, and the change-management dilemmas for research-intensive institutions. Richard Hezel's company, Hezel Associates (http://www.hezel.com/), provides expert services and research on education effectiveness and practices, with a focus on business and technology. In San Diego, Dick reported on their latest research, a study of the characteristics of demand for e-learning in 42 countries. Chris Geith, Director of MSU Global (http://www.msuglobal. com) at Michigan State University, develops new businesses to market the university's institutes, programs, and services worldwide. Chris outlined her approach to online product development, including research on models and best practices. My work with the University of Sydney, in Australia, is with an institutional research unit—iTEV—that evaluates the return on investment in technology-supported learning. iTEV has developed a business model for education ventures in continuing and postgraduate education with the university as the investment partner.

PROFESSIONALS AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The UCEA panel was an opportunity for me to reflect on the changing role of the professional in continuing and higher education. As President of the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia, ODLAA (http://www.odlaa.org/), I am charged with how best to target and provide compelling services that attract and retain members. A professional association needs to understand the characteristics of demand for its services if it is to remain relevant. What services will appeal to the new entrant, to the mid-career professional or career changer, and to the career veteran or organization leader? More importantly, what now defines a professional in this broad field of practice? How does one analyze professional development and training needs when open and distance learning professionals comprise multiple professions from every discipline? We are a broad collective of individuals; we belong to a network of networks. In fact, we are not unlike our client communities. As part of a broad umbrella organization our members also choose to join other professional associations that are seemingly more targeted, in such fields as e-learning, computers in education, or international education.

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The liberating influence of new technologies and pedagogies that has expanded the opportunities in continuing and higher education also led to a leveling of the playing field for many professional associations in education. A few years ago ODLAA found for the first time in its history that membership was declining. We were failing to attract the new entrants to the profession because they were looking for basic skill development in e-learning and to share experiences as they applied the new tools in their classrooms. We did not appeal to the new generation of professionals. As a well-established association with 30 years of development, had we fallen asleep at the wheel and failed to move fast enough to meet the new demand? Should we have simply changed our name, replaced "open" with "online," as many argued, or was it more complicated than that?

Collins and Porras (1994) in their book *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, note that visionary companies continuously out-

perform their competitors by creating tangible mechanisms designed to preserve core values and stimulate progress:

> In a visionary company, the core values need no rational or external justification. Nor do they sway with the trends and fads of the day. Nor even do they shift in response to changing market conditions (p. 75). … Through the drive for progress, a highly visionary company displays a powerful mix of self-confidence combined with self-criticism. Self confidence allows a visionary company to set audacious goals and make bold and daring moves. … [S]elf criticism. … pushes for self-induced change and improvement before the outside world imposes the need (p. 84).

Professional associations are nonprofit organizations and have very different objectives from such visionary companies; however, we share many characteristics, including that of remaining relevant. Have we also been built to last? When we examined our association and reasons for the decline in membership, the process led us to re-commit to our fundamental values, the philosophy behind our approach to learning and professional practice. Our values were embedded in our name and especially in the word "open," while the word "online" could well fade away. Ian Roffe (2005) defined the use of the term "open" in his very useful article "E-learning in Europe" in the 2005 edition of *CHER*:

> Open learning … is distinguished from other forms of learning through the degree of autonomy given to the learner. Autonomy can stretch across decisions on place,

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time, duration, and circumstances of study … it can also extend to learner choice on the curriculum … (p. 80).

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We also reexamined the meaning of profession and what it means to be a professional in a particular field of practice. The Australian Council of Professions (1997) defines a profession as:

> … a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and uphold themselves to, and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognized body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to exercise this knowledge and these skills in the interest of others.

A professional, then, "adheres to ethical standards" and is "prepared to exercise this knowledge and these skills in the interest of others." These two action statements resound with our core values. As educators we profess that all people have a right to education, to reach their full potential, and to pursue educational opportunities throughout their lifetimes. Globalization enables trading opportunities and opens new markets while at the same time, in bringing the whole world closer, globalization makes it difficult to ignore the underserved. We needed to reestablish our professional stance as an association towards all learners. We needed to influence policy and practices using new forms of open and distance learning to address the pockets of poverty in the world as well as the new businesses we were generating to capture the new "learner earners."

THE PROFESSIONAL'S DILEMMA

There could hardly be a more exciting time to be working as a professional in the field of continuing higher education. Where we used to deliver our programs in our institutions, we can now deliver programs to our learners. What were once primary constraints determined by our institutional context—space, place, time, curriculum, instructors—have been liberated by

new business models, information and communication technologies, new pedagogies, and the globalization of the market. Those constraints are now the basic components that can be manipulated to design products that are creative and innovative, that add value and can be delivered to learners anywhere in the world. So why are so many continuing higher education professionals frustrated and not able to take full advantage of this period of creativity and innovation?

Globalization, the rise of the for-profit sector, and the disaggregation of the value chain in education and training have enabled many new entrants. New entrants have dominated the most profitable markets with their focused investment strategies and created a highly competitive environment. Many established institutions, those that previously "owned" this business of continuing higher education, have found it difficult to compete and respond to emerging learner markets fast enough. The changes in universities and colleges brought about by deregulation and refinancing are overwhelming the capacity to be nimble, even from the edge of the campus. Continuing higher education professionals are thus caught between two worlds: the inner world of institutions grappling to build responsive infrastructure and the outer world of lifelong learners who don't have time to wait.

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Of course there are many who are thriving in the new environment, and professionals are keen to hear about best practices and to learn from others. We are all pressed for time, however, and, like our client learners, desperate to find a balance between life and work, without losing our footing in the knowledge society.

Globalization and the development of a knowledge society bring new meaning to the digital divide. A knowledge economy needs education as its growth engine and access to networked technologies as a fundamental necessity. Sustainable communities are those that are embedded with learning and able to adapt and respond to the social and economic challenges they face. We now live in socio-ethnic diverse nations, and we need to have cultural intelligence to understand how best to live, learn, and

work together. In many developed nations, and Australia is an example, we have rural towns and communities that are on either side of the digital divide. Depending on circumstances some are well connected, and some are not connected at all to the world's information and communication networks. Many developed countries also have an aging population that will be earning for longer and expecting to be learning for longer. On the other hand, the developing world has the opposite demographic where the median age is more like 19 or 20 and where the demand for basic primary and secondary education far exceeds supply.

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At a recent ODLAA conference held in Adelaide in 2005, we hosted a pre-conference workshop on development issues in the Pacific region. The Pacific is a water mass, rather than a land mass, and covers an area bigger than any continent. Transportation between the islands has always been a challenge. What changes will connectivity bring? The nations of the Pacific have more than 60 distinct cultures, each with their own language. Like Europe, the nations of the Pacific are seeking to integrate on a regional level and to cooperate on an economic basis. Increasing social and political instability, however, threaten to undermine development. The instability is driven partly by inequality, with unemployment in rural areas driving more people to cities not able to deal with the influx. In addition, there are severe shortages of skilled workers in essential services such as education and health and in basic trades.

The Solomon Islands presents a typical profile. It has a median age of 18, and the the population is expected to double within 25 years. Up to 70 percent of children do not complete primary and secondary school; 40 percent leave without finishing primary school. There are 16,500 births a year in the Solomons, which translates into a need for 547 new classrooms each year. Each classroom must come with at least one teacher and the basic equipment and furniture required for 30 children. In the health area, that

birth rate demands at least 16 new health clinics to be built, staffed, and equipped each year (Rogers, 2005).

We all know that learning is linked with quality of life: the kind of job you can get and whether you can improve your career prospects. Yet the level of demand in developing countries is such that there is no way that it can be met through conventional education. It is essential to explore alternative modes of delivery using distance-learning technologies and new pedagogical approaches to implement programs that are scalable and of high quality and that make use of technologies that are both accessible and affordable.

What role do we have as education professionals with access to skills and knowledge to assist in the amelioration of these challenges? What role can our public education institutions take to ensure sustainable communities, whether situated just down the road from the main campus or on the other side of the world and potentially part of our virtual campus?

The dilemma facing continuing and professional education professionals in the current environment of financial pressures, global competition, and education inequality, is one of balance and identifying an ethical stance. How can we harness our skills and practices to serve the well being of the community generally and at the same time serve the needs of our institutions, which seek to build profitable enterprises in the commercialization of knowledge?

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STIMULATING PROGRESS

Returning to Collins and Porras (ibid.), a sustainable professional association must preserve its core values and stimulate progress if it is to last. Stimulating progress is about constant change and self-improvement. It means letting go of old practices and generating solutions or responses that might, for example, assist us in meeting the challenges in the developing world or our own local communities. Members of our professional associations

are grappling with change in their daily work. My own work in Australia and that of my fellow panelists in San Diego is primarily concerned with the entrepreneurial environment of universities and the world's education markets. The challenges in the university where I work must be balanced with the concerns I have about global development issues.

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Globalization is having an impact that reaches deeply into all aspects of education and training. Internationalization of curriculum, research, and study experiences is now de rigueur and considered an essential component of modern education. Cross-border trade in education services is generating major changes within higher education through the development of overseas campuses, joint degrees, twinning arrangements, distance and e-learning, and the development of customized programs for profit. The Australian education sector is what one would call e-learning capable. Education is its second biggest service export. Australia commands 3 percent of the global market share in education while the United States has 7 percent. Putting this into context, Australia's higher education sector, based on a national population of 20 million people, is punching well above its weight. Australia's trading position in education was initially driven by the fact that we had some free capacity and an entrepreneurial spirit. We were early entrants in cross-border education and developed systems and businesses that worked well. We are now in a much more competitive environment and dependent on international revenues to offset the decline in public funding. The stakes are much higher now, and the Australian higher education sector cannot afford to lose its position in the world market.

The University of Sydney is Australia's oldest and one of its three most prestigious universities. Sydney commands the highest research-funding load in the country, has 50,000 students and more than 5,000 staff members. It is largely campus-based, with a majority of undergraduate students, and research productivity is its highest priority. It has not moved into distance education and prefers to attract students to the campus to be part of the community of researchers. Nevertheless, the appeal of flexible learning to lifelong learners cannot be ignored. Postgraduate students are

asking for more convenience and prefer a mix of delivery modes to mini-mize attendance. The university offers several degrees that can be earned with minimal or no attendance on campus and expects this area to grow rapidly. The Master's in Veterinary Public Health Management (http://www.vetsci.usyd.edu.au/ publichealth_management) and the Project Manage-ment Graduate Program (http://www.pmgp.usyd. edu.au/) have both received awards of excellence and are fine examples of the university's response to external demand.

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These two programs have also benefited from a strategic development program initiated through the vice chancellor's office. The Innovations and Technology in Education Ventures unit (http:// www.usyd.edu.au/itev) was set up to identify programs that were demand-led, enhanced the university brand, and were commercially viable. iTEV implemented a man-aged-investment model that regarded the program as if it were an indepen-dent business. The university contributed funds that had to be dedicated to market analysis and sales, product design, and business management, functions usually absorbed by the academic departments and academic researchers. The funds were provided on terms in agreement with the dean, interest-free, and repayable against the business, thus encouraging performance monitoring. Outcomes from these projects and others have been captured in case studies that demonstrate the diversity of models in use across the disciplines.

The model is simple and applies basic business principles. We are seeking to identify education ventures that are demand-led and designed to meet the needs of the future workforce. They need to be relevant to individuals and their employers in industry and government. We work with entrepreneurial deans and faculty who want to develop successful and profitable programs. We know that professional management of an education business demands commercial expertise as well as academic leadership. To be customer-focused it must have high-quality services. To be profitable its products must be designed for scale and distribution. The market intelligence we need is highly specialized and aligned with the re-search strengths of the university. Most importantly, we are getting better at understanding the buying-decision framework. Who is actually paying?

Is it the family, the employer, or the student? What is the opportunity cost for the learner? What are they shopping for? Will all the stakeholders see a return for their investment?

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Stimulating progress in our institutions is about tapping our professional skills to manage change. While there is so much opportunity for creativity, many professionals are experiencing frustration. The role of the professional association is tremendously important in providing a space for that collective experience. Opportunities to meet with like-minded people and to share best practices and survival skills are needed to restore the resilience factor.

A COLLECTIVE "LEARNING BY ASSOCIATION"

One of the biggest changes in higher education in recent years has been the acceptance and recognition that we do not work alone and that we need to include our partners in our decision making. There are many issues to be resolved here, and there is active debate around the nature of academic freedom and the autonomy of scholarship within the changing environment. Part of this process, though, is the recognition that our professional associations need to welcome new members. In ODLAA it was clear that we had become a "closed shop." Where were the professionals who make up the increasingly casualized workforce, operating outside of our institutions, and to whom were we outsourcing most of our core development business? Where were the CEOs of the private companies on which we were now dependent as partners to design and deliver our services?

We haven't solved this dilemma in ODLAA yet—far from it—although we are examining what we can do differently to ensure that these new professionals—our partners in the business of continuing and higher education—are part of our collective. To stimulate progress we need this wider circle of expertise to join us and help change our thinking. To preserve our core values and to stimulate progress, individually we must engage and

contribute to the profession; collegially we must question, critique, and refine our practices to ensure new generations of members; and collectively we must sustain the many communities of practice, our partners in the value chain of our joint enterprise (adapted from Wenger, 1998).

Stimulating progress and enabling change require a vision that we are confident of realizing, an endeavor that requires us to do things differently from the way we do things now. We need to realize that if communities of the future are to be smart communities, they must be connected within themselves across all classes, races, ages, and genders. We need to realize that learning spaces are shifting from classrooms to coffee shops, retirement homes, shopping malls, mobile homes, planes, trains, and offices. Our higher education institutions therefore need to be integrated more closely with their communities, to be embedded in their community. The ivory tower needs to become a beacon and the campus walls transformed into permeable membranes.

We can do this if we continue to "learn by association" (Rusaw, 1995) and exercise our professional knowledge and skills "in the interest of others."

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