
e-Learning: the next step in flexible delivery



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The future world of e-learning

In the last decade of the 20th century “Flexible Delivery” became a watchword that signalled change in the world of education, particularly at post-secondary level. Embodying principles of greater access and equity in education, flexible delivery is characterised by:

- A movement away from the rigidity of conventional course timetabling
- Enabling learners to pursue learning through a mixture of face-to-face and distance education methodologies
- The creation of learning resources to enable learners to gain independence from the “classroom”
- Efforts to tailor courses to meet differing educational needs and learning styles

Throughout the last decade Flexible Delivery was increasingly regarded by education administrators as a fundamental learning strategy, not as an isolated marginal enterprise (Moran, 1997). The elevation of the importance of this strategy arose out of the need to contend with:

- “Massification” – the opening up of education to the masses (Scott, 1995)
- “A fundamental change in the way that students learn and teachers teach”, an educational paradigm shift (Hall, 1996)
- Increased competition in the education marketplace, transcending national boundaries
- Government policy changes with respect to funding for education, an expectancy to do more with less

E-Learning is a further evolutionary step in the education paradigm shift towards the concept that learners have a right to learn “what they want, how they want, where they want”. E-Learning is using the special capabilities of the Internet as a delivery method to re-invent the way that people learn (Priest, 2000). The American computer giant, Cisco Systems, has an optimistic view of, and an interest in promoting, e-Learning. It is their belief that e-Learning will, in this century, be the great equaliser. By eliminating barriers of time, distance and socio-economic status, individuals will be able to take charge of their own life-long learning.

The change from Flexible Learning to E-Learning is a result of an increasing number of educators understanding and having the ability to harness information technology, particularly the Internet. There is also a possibility that E-Learning is fashionable right now and that institutions need to demonstrate that they are progressive and forward-thinking so as to assure their place in an increasing competitive marketplace.

Whittingham (1999) states “At the start of the new millennium, 50 per cent of businesses will be home-based; 95 per cent of the current workforce will need retraining, and lifelong learning skills will be a necessity. It has been estimated that 60 per cent of the jobs available at the turn of the century will require skills currently held by only 20 per cent of today’s workforce.

SBIT's e-Institute Vision

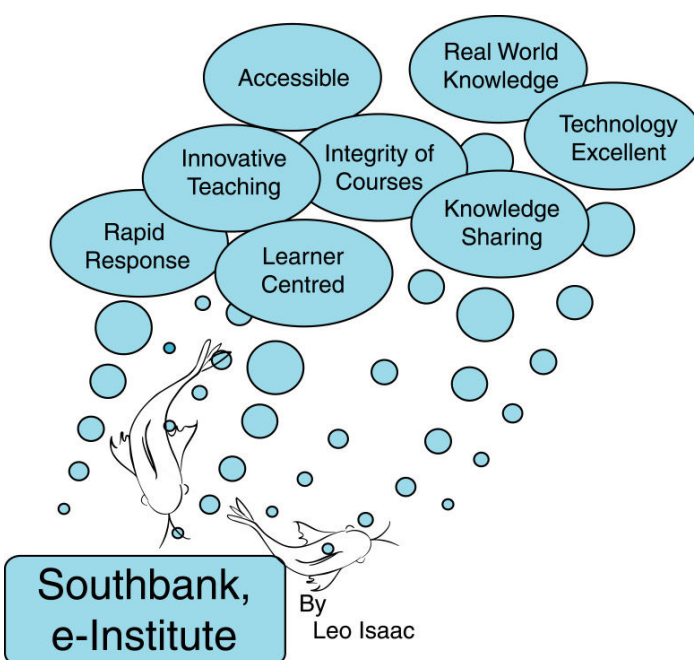
SBIT is an education provider that, like many others, is charting a course towards the “future world” of e-Learning. At present, there is a vision forming that SBIT will become “Southbank, e-Institute” by 2004.

The e-Institute vision is a venture that is necessitated by the increasingly competitive marketplace for education, rapid technological advance and a paradigm shift in teaching and learning. However it is also driven by the desire of staff to search again for the meaning of “quality education”. New understandings of teaching and learning, coupled with profound changes in technology, have advanced the theory that quality education is about developing multiple learning pathways, enabling the learner to study “what they want, when they want, how they want”.

In shaping the e-Institute vision, SBIT senior management has proposed three underpinning principles:

1. SBIT must be a generative organisation worthy of peoples' highest aspirations and fullest commitment;
2. Reinventing *the way* we produce and deliver products and services, as well as re-inventing the products and services themselves; and that;
3. Success will come from the way we gather and share information, knowledge and wisdom: rapid, accessible, complete, value-added.

The achievement of this vision will require intensified efforts in operational planning and policy development, and this article serves to expound some of the key elements that must be addressed.



Peter Whitley (2000) in his paper “The Challenge of Change” stated that the Vocational Education and Training Provider of the future will:

- Offer learning in a manner that allows student clients to select their delivery mode
- Continually evaluate and analyse its effectiveness and promote changes to improve organisational performances
- Have an organisational structure that is capable of promoting flexibility in every aspect of its operation
- Have a mechanism that encourages and rewards staff who undertake to evaluate and implement innovative training solutions.

In order for SBIT to be positioned in the manner described by Whitley, it is now necessary to identify those aspects of the institutes operations that must receive attention and to begin discussion and debate about what changes are needed.

The present state of play

SBIT offers more than 250 courses and has approximately 25,000 students currently enrolled. Its forays into Flexible Delivery and e-Learning include:

- Setting up an External Studies Unit (ESU) in 1996 to administer the external delivery of courses in Workplace Health and Safety particularly, but also other courses offered by the Applied Science Faculty. (Note: The ESU was renamed the Flexible Delivery Unit circa 1997, and then renamed again in 2000 to "Product and Services Unit".)
- Setting up e-Learn Centres at all three campuses to assist students to undertake courses in "fleximode" - a flexible learning mode. Students can come into the e-Learn Centre at any time or work from home. Initially the e-Learn Centres provided a pathway to develop skills in word-processing, spreadsheets and databases. More recently e-Learn staff are offering tutoring support in non-software courses.
- The development of a Diploma of Multimedia and partial development of an Advanced Diploma of Recreation Management for on-line delivery. Staff at SBIT have also developed an induction course for Telstra workers through a partnership with TAFE Queensland On-line
- Some incidences of timetabling that allow students some alternative classes e.g. students can choose between a day class or a night class
- Some incidences where students can commence study at any time of the year as the delivery of some modules may be repeated two or three times per year.
- SBIT has also invested in Videoconferencing facilities.

At present there is no formal system for reporting and measuring the implementation of flexible delivery initiatives. SBIT's web site provides details of all courses offered, but prospective students may be frustrated by not being able to search courses by delivery mode, or to be given details as to whether there is a compulsion to attend courses or whether study at home is feasible.

Under consideration at the moment is the setting up of a Production Centre with staff skilled in web-development, CD authoring and the production of text-based learning resources to meet the expected demand for courses in flexible delivery and on-line mode.

Key Elements

A whole-of-institute effort to adopt new technologies and teaching practises is predicated upon inducing an environment that will allow change.

This article proposes that the following six aspects, which are not listed in any order of priority, will be key components in that new environment. The author also recognises that this article is brief and serves only to assist discussion and debate of these components while respecting that many other aspects are not here included.

Key components of the new environment include:

- Developing a flexible orientation
- Labour management
- Knowledge sharing
- Student support
- Funding/Investment
- The learning place

Developing a flexible orientation

It would be fair to say that, within SBIT at the moment, there is neither widespread understanding of the term “e-learning” nor any sense that flexible delivery is anything other than an efficiency measure. Kavanagh (2000) states that it is generally accepted that there appears to be variation and a deal of confusion surrounding the interpretation of the terms “flexible learning”, “flexible teaching” and “flexible delivery”.

The first key component of change must surely therefore be to develop within the workforce a greater understanding of flexible delivery, and the benefits it may bring to learners, teachers and the institute as a whole. Shafiqu (1999) stated that policy needs to increase understanding of open, flexible delivery and online learning. The important question is *how* is this to be achieved. There is a widespread view that although change needs to be managed and not ad hoc (Kotter, 1996; Whitley, 2000), a top-down approach may meet with resistance. Phelps et al (2000) suggest that managing academics is “analogous to herding cats”, as the culture is one where academics are more open to self-management than external management.

Increasing understanding of flexible delivery may not therefore be achieved by centralist or specialised units imposing professional development activities on staff. This is the view taken by Hanrahan and Ryan (2000). They report that at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) the approach has been to work from inside teams by identifying mentors who would lead an induction process for other academics in their own Faculty in on-line teaching. These mentors were given a small financial inducement that they could use to buy some release time or to spend as they wished within the school.

Whitley (2000), on the other hand, argues that without the support and commitment of middle managers the stalling of flexible delivery is inevitable. Whitley states that middle managers must believe in flexible delivery, be committed to its adoption, be able to articulate a vision and practice of flexible delivery and be prepared for the journey of discovery, leading teams and the organisation toward a new vision for the

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organisation's business. This would suggest, therefore, that provision of training in flexible delivery to the workforce must also include middle managers amongst participants.

Increasing the appetite of staff for flexible delivery is not by itself a sufficient measure to achieve its implementation within the envisaged timelines. Rapid development in information technology is very challenging to us all, including academic staff. Taylor (1996) commented that a general lack of understanding of the potential of "knowledge media" is a major barrier to the implementation of flexible delivery. Staff will require constant mentoring to develop literacy and skills in information technology. At the team level there is a need to employ and/or develop personnel with skills and knowledge in information technology to be able to efficiently convert new ideas into teaching and learning solutions.

A combination of two factors, therefore, may enable SBIT to 'possess a flexible orientation', a phrase coined by Woolley (1999). These two factors are:

1. An understanding of the benefits of flexible delivery and how it will contribute to enhanced learning.
2. An ability on the part of staff to acquire technical expertise, particularly in information technology, to deal with the complexities of flexible delivery and e-learning.

In order to achieve these aims policy development should address the following:

1. The need to positively discriminate in favour of activities that build flexibility into learning and teaching. Horton (2000)
2. The setting of specific and measurable objectives to ensure realistic investment of SBIT resources. Horton (2000) provides examples such as:
 - 50% of students will be studying on-line by 2000™. (TAFE SA)
 - Every learner/learning program will have access to online support by 2002, not as a substitute for the human resource, but as an enrichment of the learning experience (Barnsley College, UK).
3. Encourage flexible work practices by identifying leaders, or persons with the right mix of skills and interest, and setting them up to achieve agreed goals and supporting them, so that they may achieve peer-to-peer mentoring.

Labour Management

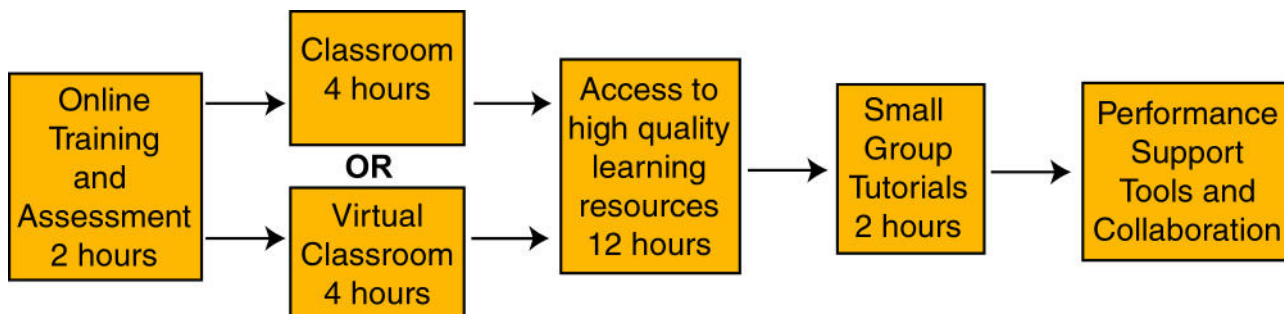
It is predictable that this key factor for achieving the e-Institute vision will be a major stumbling block. At SBIT there is already a belief among teaching staff that there is no satisfactory way of valuing the work input of teachers involved in flexible delivery. The very root of the problem is that systems still measure time input rather than measuring outcomes. Postle and Ellerton (1999) state that an industrial model of service is a barrier to the introduction of new technologies. Horton (2000) states that educational authorities pushing flexible delivery must also start considering flexible work practices. He states that the online teacher is *always* available and poses the question of what this will mean in terms of timesheets and expected work practices.

The present practise of labour management at SBIT relies on the measurement of "annualised" hours. Teachers have an annual target of 819 teaching hours, which can be reached by delivering classes for 21 hours per week for 39 weeks of the year. This system encourages teachers to timetable the full amount of nominal hours for each module delivered. If a module has 20 nominal hours it is likely to be timetable for 10 sessions of 2 hours each, even when the full nominal duration is not required.

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Furthermore it should be borne in mind that personal guidance given to students or simply answering course enquiries from the public is teachers time never measured.

This system is not set up to encourage teaching staff to develop new teaching strategies or to recognise the efforts required to develop new resources or experiment with new methodologies.



The figure above represents one of the many possible alternatives to full face-to-face delivery, in other words an e-Learning strategy. In this scenario the student still receives the nominal 20 hours for the module. However the actual teacher delivery time is 14 hours as per table below. This e-Learning delivery strategy is dependent upon the development of high quality learning resources.

Strategy	Student Receives	Teacher Time
Online training and assessment (at home, at work or in institute e-learn centre)	2.0	0.0
Classroom or virtual classroom	4.0	4.0
Print, CD ROM or Web Based resources	12.0	0.0
Small group tutorials – 4 per group	2.0	10.0
Totals	20.0	14.0

For teachers who might implement such an e-Learning strategy there is a fear of being stricken by a double-edged sword. For example not only does the system have difficulty measuring the efforts to develop new teaching resources that are required for flexible delivery but also there is a real fear that any time saved will simply result in the allocation of additional teaching load to ensure the 819 hours is reached.

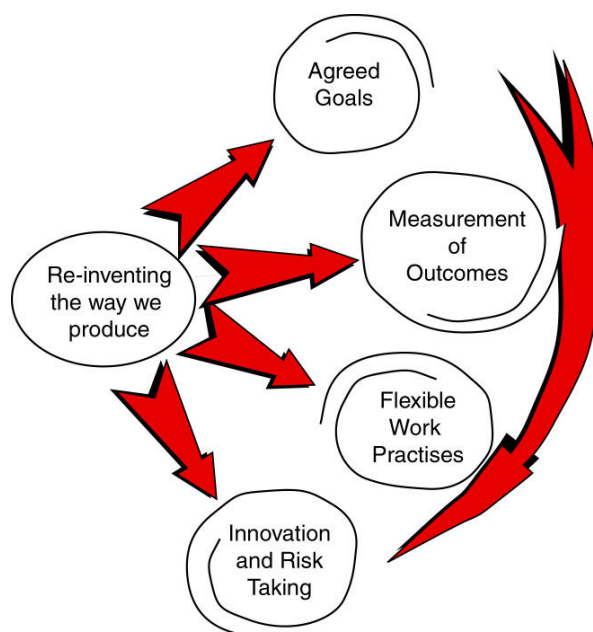
To achieve the e-Institute vision, labour management must be radically overhauled. The figure to the right illustrates some of the key components of such a change.

Agreed Goals

Goals could include the development of resources (print, CD ROM and Wen-based), management of programs, the trial of new teaching strategies, mentoring of colleagues, increasing fee-for-service business and/or the development of specific industry links.

Measurement of Outcomes

The achievements of teaching staff could be measured in terms of the standard of work produced (peer review), on-



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time delivery of outcomes, effect on clients, contribution to staff morale, self-development activities undertaken, accessibility of resources created and/or systems implemented for course improvement.

Flexible work practises

This would include the setting up teaching staff in an appropriate environment for the development of teaching resources, either at home or at work, self-management of time input, and the development of easy systems for reporting to supervisors. Horton (2000), commenting on the need for flexible work practises, stated “I don’t talk about ‘flexible delivery’ or ‘flexible learning’ or ‘flexible whatever’ like a product on a shelf. I prefer to talk about ‘being flexible’. Why? Because then we have to learn how to be flexible by doing it, not just by saying we know what it is”.

Innovation and risk taking

Certainly there are risks involved in allocating human and financial resources to speculative projects in flexible delivery. Nevertheless, there must be a capability on the part of management to deal effectively with risk otherwise the institute’s profile in the marketplace will dwindle. Innovation may be encouraged by tuning into suggestions made by staff and to support their initiatives to create better products or experiment with new strategies. Rewards, not necessarily monetary, should be provided for achieving all goals. Investing in significant professional development opportunities for staff may be viewed as a risk, but although there will be incidences of failure, overall there is likely to a great benefit.

Organisations that pursue innovation as a goal, however, are likely to create better conditions for broad organisational change and adaptation than ones that don’t. The purpose and role of innovation is to break new ground, to stay ahead. Innovators are typically explorers, not settlers (Horton, 2000).

Stace & Dunphy (1998) proposed that any new structure (for the implementation of flexible delivery) should reflect:

- rapid channels of communication;
- minimal, but sufficient, control systems;
- broader spans of work control and even self-managing teams;
- more authority for local decision making, combined with maximum accountability;
- broader job designs and more challenging work; and
- de-emphasis of status differences and separation of pay level from hierarchical status

Knowledge Sharing

Achieving the e-Institute vision will cause SBIT staff to strive in product development on an unprecedented scale. Furthermore, the increasingly competitive education marketplace requires that SBIT’s products must reach a high standard. These factors elevate the need for collaboration and knowledge sharing among staff to an absolute necessity.

The human capital of SBIT is vast but as yet it shows a distinct separateness that comes from the structuring of people into faculties, business units and depends. Whilst the call of “working across areas” is often heard from senior managers it happens only on a superficial level. There is little connectivity among staff and there does not exist at this time sufficient mechanism for encouraging collaboration. Visser 1996 states that most schools, and for that matter also the traditional distance education

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institutions, are not learning communities. They are simply closed organised structures designed to turn uneducated individuals into educated ones. They do themselves, as social entities, not learn and are not designed to do so.

Yearsley (2000) commented that collaboration among staff cannot be easily forced. The infrastructure and encouragement must be present. The following table indicates possible components to be considered.

Infrastructure	Local Area Networks, Email, Intranet, Knowledge Databases, Web Based Discussion Forums
Encouragement	Flexible Work Arrangements, Centres of Excellence, Space to Think and Reflect, More Positive Work Environment, Reward for Sharing, Recognition

Yearsley repeatedly emphasises that trust is an essential ingredient in collaboration and he identifies that it is a corporate culture issue. In an environment where staff are expected to freely distribute the result of their knowledge creation efforts they may feel vulnerable.

The e-Institute vision therefore requires the corporate culture of SBIT to transcend beyond the internal divisions imposed by working in different teams, buildings and/or industry groupings (i.e. groupings such as business, sport and recreation, information technology). What needs to be created is a learning community where knowledge creation is appropriately valued and recognised, and where sharing is the order of the day.

There is also a need for the institutions to maintain a measure of control over their intellectual property. Whitley (2000), following his visit to the Open Learning Agency (OLA), Vancouver, commented that institutions need to maintain a level of responsiveness to the education marketplace by ensuring that knowledge resources are adaptable, flexible and cost effective, the organisation must have the capacity to change and customise materials. It would seem that such control would be very hard if not impossible to effect without a system that could identify and locate knowledge resources. A learning community would therefore need to take full advantage of information technology by creating a database of resources that is accessible by all. In an organisation as large and diverse as SBIT, such a database would, in all probability, enable a rapid response to demands for new educational products.

Funding

Achieving the necessary funding is critical for the successful implementation of flexible delivery/e-learning. However there is a basic "Catch 22" situation at work here. The irony is that at the very time that the higher education sector needs extra funding to make the transition from traditional face-to-face teaching to more technology-based flexible delivery the funding base is being reduced (Holzl, 1999).

There needs to be a significant financial commitment of the institute to cover the time for academic staff to develop new modes of teaching, the salaries of professional staff to support them, the infrastructure for delivery, and changes to student support and administrative systems (Working Party on Flexible Delivery, University of Queensland, 1997)

Unless additional *external* funding can be found, the creation of flexible delivery products is dependent upon diverting resources from other areas or sacrificing other priorities. Few institutes have any "fat"

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which can be utilised to provide energy for product development. Nevertheless it seems reasonable to suppose that the adoption of flexible delivery requires a close examination of all funding possibilities.

It is proposed that there are four basic strategies that can be employed:

- Strategies that gain extra funding

Funding specifically for the advancement of flexible delivery/flexible learning pathways is scarce. The Australian National Training Authority does provide funding through its *Learnscope* program for the piloting of modules or programs with a particular client group using technology as the primary delivery system. A small pool of funding through TAFE Queensland Online also exists. SBIT has accessed this funding but with 16 TAFE Institutes in Queensland there is no guarantee of repeating previous successes.

While funding to assist programs to convert to flexible delivery does exist, the amount of funding available is sufficient only to act as a catalyst. Clearly there is a need to establish other means of funding if a more widespread adoption of flexible delivery is to be achieved.

- Strategies that stretch the budget further

The allocation of financial resources is always dependent upon priorities. It is for this reason that a great deal of effort is required to provide staff with opportunities to discover the benefits of flexible delivery / flexible learning. Resources can be diverted from other teaching and learning priorities provided staff view flexible delivery as having sufficient importance.

In any faculty budget, salaries and the provision of learning materials are the major expenditure items. To divert resources into the development of flexible delivery products it may be necessary to cease delivery of some academic programs that have the lowest profitability or utility. This drastic step will be dependent upon Institutes having a 'flexible orientation' (as earlier described).

There needs to be a re-examination of priorities and an identification of funds that can be diverted to the development of flexible delivery programs.

- Strategies that 'borrow' funding internally

In this strategy, there is essentially no extra funding. The cost input to create resources for flexible delivery is borrowed from future earnings in the hope that savings created will pay back the amounts borrowed at a later date (Bacsich, 2000). This might be achieved by assigning academic staff, whose positions are funded by centralised or 'profile funding', to generate flexible delivery pathways. Whilst staff are engaged in these activities they are essentially un-funded. Salaries expended will not be recovered immediately from fees or government funding. However, on completion of products, the institute will have a means to earn additional income that achieves a measure of greater efficiency in the ratio of cost inputs to revenue received. This increase in efficiency enables the institute to recover the loss incurred in the creation of the flexible delivery product.

- Strategies reliant on the use of profits derived from fee-for-service activity

Continued uncertainty over future government funding is causing academic institutions to expend considerable effort to develop independent sources of income i.e. fee-for-service programs. It would be exceptionally wise for institute directors to earmark a percentage of such surplus revenues specifically for product development. Horton (1999) suggests that academic institutes should consider developing their own internal funding programs that positively discriminate in favour of

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activities that meet agreed criteria for building flexibility into learning and teaching. Such funding could be on the basis of the ability to match central funding with departmental funding derived either from core academic activities or additional fee-for-service activities. A matching on a dollar-for-dollar basis may ensure that departments extract as much benefit as possible rather than to sideline surplus human resources into “projects”.

The above strategies may have levels of risk that are not appealing to managers who, due to the nature of their profession, are risk averse. However, these risks have to be balanced against the risk of “doing nothing”. Within the confines of these strategies there is sufficient room for manoeuvre and, although funding is a critical component, to claim a lack of funding as a reason for doing nothing simply is unacceptable. In order to achieve the e-Institute vision managers should seek all external funding available, but continue with change processes if it is not forthcoming.

Student Support

In the flexible delivery / e-learning environment the learner needs assistance to deal with questions such as what to study, when to study, what mode of study, what resources to utilise, with whom can I communicate and how can I collaborate with others. The ethos of flexible delivery is to increase access to education and to enable students to learn in own time and in their own way. Many an experienced teacher will tell you, however, that freedom and choice does not always make for easy learning. There is a need for reassurance, facilitation, coaching, and provision of instruction and encouragement to assist learners set and achieve goals. There is also a need to deal with the range of common personal problems that students have.

The employment of teachers in an e-learning environment will require management processes to ensure that student-teacher communication is effective and that teachers are proactive in this matter. The opportunity for individualised support, albeit in brief episodes, is perhaps a key benefit of flexible delivery. Whitley (1999) states that flexible delivery is predicated on providing greater access for student clients to all learning resources, including the “people” resource. The research found that those providers of training and education who were successful articulated a clear desire to have staff in constant communication with the student client.

Horton (1999) found incidences whereby academic institutions are developing teaching/learning process models that provide students with a **guarantee** of learning support for a module or unit of study. In one example he quotes “In this module each learner will have access to 26 hours of active with the teacher, 12 hours of access to high quality learning resources (print, CD-ROM, video, on-line etc) and 2 hours of personalised guidance around study and assessment tasks. Horton also provides examples of where institutions have set specific goals for the quality of learning support e.g. “every learner/learning program will have access to online support by 2002 – not as a substitute for the human resource, but as an enrichment of the learning experience (Barnsley College, UK).

There will be budgetary implications in terms of the provision of counsellors and infrastructure such as video and telephone conferencing facilities, email, net meetings and discussion forums in the future. It may also be worthwhile to consider providing affordable computing leasing opportunities for learners. In some areas there may be a need to provide learning support through tutors or counsellors who are resident in regional centres to reduce the tyranny of distance. There may also be a possibility in some regions to develop radio frequency broadcasting to provide information and support. Internet “radio” broadcasting should also be considered. Through these channels learners could have the opportunity to send in questions and, with permission, have answered via broadcast transmissions to *all* learners. “TAFE radio thanks Joe Citizen of Thargomindah for this next question that relates to report writing.”

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The extent of student support that will be needed to achieve the e-Institute vision can be gauged from other institutions that have been set up for e-Learning or are making the transition. One example is provided by the Illinois Virtual Campus whose mission is to provide access to distance courses and programs and to provide local support to students through Student Support Centres. The results of the first year of operation indicated a need for the following:

- Access to computers and the Internet at little or no cost to the student.
- Access to technical support (by phone or in person) such as uploading assignments to a teacher/tutor
- Access to libraries (browsing library catalogues via the Internet)
- Test proctoring
- Access to help from an academic advisor or career counsellor
- Marketing – general promotion of the institute and its programs

The above needs for support of learners give added weight to the notion that e-Learning or flexible delivery will not always result in reduced costs or increased profitability. While it is expected that the technologies needed for e-learning will become cheaper and more in use by the population with every passing year, in the short term the transition to flexible delivery will be a costly business, not least in the provision of learner support. In the longer term, however, rapid and constant interaction between learner and teacher is likely to be an expected norm.

The Learning Place

One's personal experience of teaching leads to the belief that "learning" is inextricably linked to the "environment" in which learning takes place. Rows of seats and tables in homogenised classrooms are learning resources that induce people to sign-in and switch off. Occasionally, and as often as the good teacher can, this bland environment is substituted for a variety of on- and off-campus activities where the learner is subjected to "the real world".

Enter the computer and the Internet and this remarkably changes. The virtual world of cyberspace brings possibilities of "teleporting" the learner to different times and places, not only in terms of enabling the learner to dialogue with content experts in any place in the world, but more especially to utilise the visual medium for learning. Whilst on-line learning is much criticised by many in the teaching profession, what exists at the moment merely represents humanity's first fumbling attempts to master connectivity on a grand scale. The computer and the Internet not only connect person to person irrespective of distance, but it will connect people irrespective of time. In this medium, in the near future, learners will be able to witness the deeds of people as they make history, investigate the workings of complex machines from the inside, visit any place on earth (and some in space), and search the most unimaginable quantities of information on the planet.

However that time has not yet fully arrived for this technology and the learning place of the e-Institute in the next five years will therefore be a blend of old and new technologies. In consideration of the competitive marketplace for education, and the increasing expectation of students for quality services, there is no time to wait for technology to be invented.

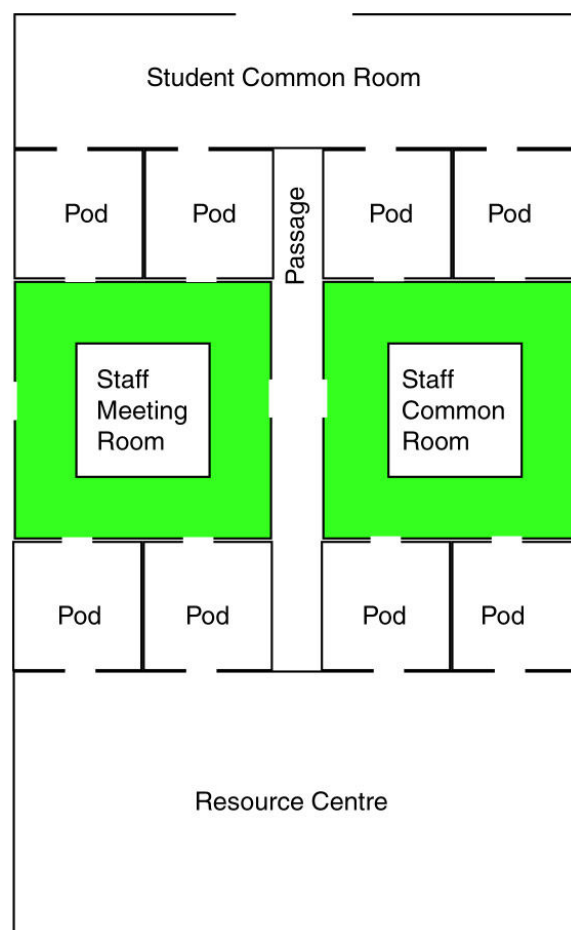
Horton (2000) commenting on his visit to Seneca@York campus in Toronto states that Peter Kanitz, Principal, takes the view that the demand for maximum resource utilisation heralds the disappearance of much classroom space and practice. Mono-purpose rooms, computer labs full of PC's but only half-full of

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students, term or semester timetabling of high cost space, will all be challenged by notions of shared and multi-purpose use, and enhanced self-management of learning. At Seneca@York there has been a movement towards flexible “pods” that provide a smaller number of computers in an area for small, but friendly group learning. Flexible delivery, using new teaching/learning technologies, will permit a considerable degree of asynchronous learning, and this tends to render the large class inoperable. As a result the interaction between teachers and learners will be shorter, more intensive and using technology. This will necessitate comfortable, technology-equipped rooms where a small number of learners can work collaboratively with or without a teacher. Seneca@York’s learning pods point the way to the future.

The diagram to the right illustrates the author’s view of how the learning pods idea may be employed in the future design of learning places at SBIT:

1. The general idea of the learning pod is that it increases quality of education experiences through more intense (but shorter in duration) student-teacher interaction and through provision of information through technology.
2. Each learning pod is fully equipped with computer and Internet/Intranet access.
3. A teacher may rotate around a two or more pods, spending 10 – 20 minutes in each pod. The ability to rapidly move between pods is therefore essential.
4. Places where students and teachers meet need to be close proximity to where teachers have workstations.
5. Teacher workstations adjoining pods have windows to enable teachers to know when students appear or require access.
6. The resource centre provides students with individual computer workstations and a range of other learning resources that are specific to course needs.
7. Learners may move about freely between learning pods, the resource centre and the common room.
8. 4 – 6 teacher workstations are grouped together in a staff room (shaded area). Smaller staff rooms foster increased collaboration among teachers who are involved in the delivery of the same programs.



As Moran (1998) reminds us about TAFE: “As TAFE becomes more heterogeneous with Institutes going after particular market segments, each Institute will have to consider what role each campus will take on – will it be a virtual campus, a local student support centre associated with a larger centre, or traditional bricks and mortar classrooms”.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to identify and discuss some of the key components to be considered in the development of policy and for the preparation of operational plans within SBIT. While it

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is probable that, among teaching staff, “the jury is still out” on the benefit of e-learning/flexible delivery, there is nevertheless an imperative to speedily commence operational planning for its adoption as a main teaching platform.

SBIT has recently renewed and committed significant resources to a Workforce Development Program. This is highly commendable and needed to deal with rapid change in the educational marketplace. The workforce development program, if driven skilfully, is capable of achieving the necessary steps for SBIT to achieve a flexible orientation, for the workforce to be involved in knowledge sharing on a grand scale, and for enlightenment to spread into the dark corners of labour management.

The Workforce Development Program as instrumental as it is in achieving change must also be accompanied by a rethinking of *our* learning place. If we are to successfully contend with the pressures of an e-learning/flexible delivery environment, then tradition must be replaced with ingenuity in terms of the physical structures within which teaching/learning will be conducted. The standard classroom that accommodates 30 persons will likely be of little use in this new environment. Teachers and learners may be anywhere and not in the same time space.

From here on the challenge is so great that, in some quarters, the option to sit out quietly and wait for retirement may be appealing. Whether we like it or not, technology is now a main driver of change. There is no room nor sentiment for making excuses why we cannot change, for change we must.

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