Internationalising Education: from Partnerships to Strategic Leveraging " (A Business School perspective of collaborative issues in developing overseas programmes in Asia)

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This working paper explores some of the urgent collaborative research issues that should receive priority among the International Offices, Faculty Deans and key staff involved in initiating and developing programmes for offshore delivery. Over the last 20 years we have seen the unabated drive by Australian Universities to plant offshore programmes all over Asia, some with more and others with less success. This is a period of consolidation and we need to take stock of the current situation and reflect retrospectively with a view to preparing a new agenda for strategic educational thrusts for the new millennium. What more needs to be done?

There are several prospective research issues proposed in this paper pertaining to strategic management/administration and marketing of overseas tertiary programmes that should be of importance as much to the Dean as it would be to ground staff who are championing the drive for overseas programme development. I hope that this would be the basis of inviting a panel of collaborators among the participants at this seminar to work with my faculty at Temasek Business School in exploring more deeply the issues raised herein.

There are essentially three areas of further investigation which I would like to suggest:

1. The need to assess the institution s "readiness to internationalise": auditing the critical success factors.

Have we ever considered the fact that universities, just like business corporations have different capacities and capabilities to launch themselves into the international arena? Has there been a comprehensive strategic audit with detailed checklists of key success factors produced for educational institutions? Such an exercise should cover the examination of internal and external factors not just pertaining to the university s capacity to internationalise but should additionally incorporate the auditing of overseas partners and collaborators to see what would be the important "fit factors" that account for potential success in overseas delivery. Ultimately we should seek to create a comprehensive auditing scheme that can calibrate an "export readiness index" as an early signal to the faculty intending to mount a programme off-shore.
2. Applying the "Supply Chain" paradigm for International Education.

I have seen a "garden variety" of delivery models being used across Asia ranging from pure correspondence type programmes to full face to face delivery. Every one of these modes has unique properties that should be investigated from the perspective of the supply chain, which has become the darling business concept for the corporate world. What possibilities would it hold for us in education? For one thing, it will force us to investigate which areas need particular attention when managing with overseas partners. Where are the key linkages- staff, IT, resourcing? It will not be surprising to discover (after auditing the supply chain) that many a programme is being run on an "arms-length" basis with many areas of possible integration being overlooked. My basic thesis is that to be successful in international delivery, the university should not become a supplier but an integral part of the service delivery system of the overseas partner/collaborator. The requirement essentially is one of managing the partnership from the beginning and not at output stage (where the university then takes over responsibility for teaching/delivery.) The implications would impact on areas of curriculum development, credit transfer arrangements, students and faculty exchanges. These are essentially our supply chain resources. In a traditional model these are seen as inputs from one to the next stage. In integrated supply chains, such resources become "common platforms" which are interchangeable. Can we ever imagine this happening in tertiary education?


Several overseas programmes in Singapore require some form of advanced standing. Many of our Polytechnic students go on to complete undergraduate courses in Australia. Prior to this they have spent 3 years in a Diploma course. The switch from one system to the next is not merely pedagogical. We are in the "services marketing business" and the intangibility of our offering necessitates that we research and manage "customer expectations." This just makes good common sense for relationship marketing and customer care. The issue here is: are our transfer students perceiving that they are undergoing a seamless transition to tertiary education? Do they understand the equity in credit transfers? Do they recognise and assimilate the building blocks in subject learning and understand the change in cognitive learning styles. If these expectations are studied and managed in a proactive manner we will have more effective role change model which a specific Faculty will be able to inculcate into newly arriving student cohorts. This makes for a more faculty-specific orientation processes rather than the generic approach used by the International Office. My proposal is to have a joint project between the university and the overseas partner to develop an instrument which can be used on samples of entry level, current undergraduate and alumnus. Expectations can be measured on a variety of salient factors, (which are programme/faculty specific) and is traceable to the before,
during and after graduation phases. Comparisons of scores would be of immense value in curriculum planning, teaching and student management.

These are some of the few issues which I believe warrant greater attention by universities and their overseas partners. If examined further you may have noticed a patterned approach in the 3 research issues briefly discussed above, namely preparing for internationalisation, managing the process and evaluating outcomes against expectations.

Internationalisation is an incremental phenomenon. Investigation to the areas suggested above might lead university institutions into a better state of preparedness. In most cases a resource based / economic approach is followed. While necessary this is not a sufficient pre-condition. Staff development, pedagogic polycentrism and management of the interfaces are equally critical. With these issues in mind, the university and its overseas partners can move from a purely transactional mode to one where delivery systems become closely inter-meshed. Leveraging of each other’s resources, people and systems becomes a natural extension of such an exercise.

References
