

The University of Hertfordshire: Is this the Face of the Entrepreneurial University in the UK?

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Introduction

The University of Hertfordshire has taken a bold lead in the process of differentiating its offer by seeking to become a leading edge exemplar of a truly business focussed – entrepreneurial – university.

By adopting such a positioning the University was, from the outset, clear that this was not simply embarking on a cosmetic marketing exercise to attract attention by spinning certain buzz words about the importance of being ‘business facing’.

Before deciding to stake a claim to being ‘entrepreneurial’ the University of Hertfordshire had to reassure itself that its entrepreneurial positioning is not about public relations hype and ‘wordplay’. It is about delivering, in concrete terms, against this promise.

'When I use a word it means just what I want it to mean' (Humpty Dumpty in Alice in Wonderland)

One of the dangers of aligning a University with the term 'entrepreneurialism' is that, for some, the term could be seen as something akin to the way the TV programme the 'Dragon's Den' works. That is, it could suggest 'entrepreneurial' behaviour is about dreaming up a zany idea that no one else has ever thought of, and then trying to get people to invest in this idea, before going on to make many millions.

And it is true that entrepreneurialism does embrace classic entrepreneurial 'eureka' moments. For instance, Stelios of EasyJet fame now decides he wants to enter the Mediterranean cruise market. But he wants to reduce the average age of the passengers from 55 to 25 years. Youth is the target market he is after. He achieves this through an 'insight'. If you want young passengers, leave the boat in ports, like St Tropez, over night, so the passengers can go clubbing. Do this rather than follow the convention whereby the boat travels overnight from one cruise destination to the next. In this way his young passengers can sleep off their hangovers as they then travel during the day.

However in a high proportion of cases it has to be recognised that entrepreneurial flair is fashioned less around the above kind of 'eureka' insights and more around clear, deep thinking. It is a platform of 'profound understanding' – often grounded in some research - about the underlying trends, characteristics and opportunities that exist within a market that lies at the heart of an innovative idea. But what often happens is that, in the

hype surrounding entrepreneurialism, the ability to ‘agonise’ about a problem – apply ‘perspiration’ – is glossed over and seen as playing second fiddle to moments of pure ‘inspiration’.

For example, many will remember the Wright Brothers’ comment about inventing the aeroplane ‘we threw away the theory books and then we invented the aeroplane’. This one liner adds fuel to the ‘inspiration’ rather than ‘perspiration’ view of creativity. Their soundbite gives the impression that the invention of the aeroplane came down from the ‘muse’. But, in practice, what the Wright Brothers did – having thrown away the *existing* theory – was to build their own ‘*new empirical*’ theory. They meticulously tested, in endless experiments, the success or failure of different sizes and gradations of wing span and so on. Thus they proceeded in a disciplined way by creating a new theory. The aeroplane was the result of discipline, built on trial and error and creative flair.

The point being made is that it is easy to be carried away with the idea that, at the heart of any entrepreneurial activity, is a gifted intuitive individual with innate creative gifts that will lead to a ‘eureka’ type moment of brilliance, which in turn will lead to a new invention. Whereas the reality of many entrepreneurs is that entrepreneurial activity is a combination of discipline and flair.

Intrapreneurs count too

In positioning the University of Hertfordshire as entrepreneurial it was important to communicate the fact that this positioning is meant to be wide-ranging and inclusive, rather than centre on the exclusive preserve of a small elite. Clearly it is counter

productive for the University to send out the signal that it is positioned to support only a handful of elite entrepreneurs. Thus it was critical to acknowledge that large numbers of individuals work as what Glifford Pinchot called 'intrapreneurs'. This is the phrase that was coined to refer to people inside larger corporations who 'take direct responsibility for turning an idea into profitable finished products through assertive risk-taking and innovation'. Thus the University of Hertfordshire's reference to being business-facing and entrepreneurial embraces individuals who may be salaried employees of the organisation, but who work with considerable autonomy and personal freedom, to create successful outcomes – whether this be generating revenue and profit for their organisations or achieving other targets.

Developing the point about the University of Hertfordshire's emphasis on inclusivity, rather than exclusivity, in embracing its entrepreneurial positioning, it is also important to recognise that the 'intrepeneur' may be working in the public or voluntary sectors, not just in the commercial sector. Individuals responsible for delivering effective outcomes within government, the local authority and voluntary sectors, may not be working to the commercial imperatives, such as revenue and profit, but they nonetheless work in an accountable way to achieve measurable targets.

Entrepreneurialism as 'making a difference'

So far I have reviewed some of the challenges of overcoming some of the stereotypes and misperceptions about what the term 'entrepreneurial' means. This has taken us through the dangers of taking a far too elitist view of entrepreneurialism – the notion of

this being the preserve of a small number of people with particular creative gifts who only operate solely in a profit making way. Instead, I have painted the picture of the terms business facing and entrepreneurialism as embracing intrepeneurs and applying to individuals from the commercial and non commercial sectors. I have begun to fashion a definition of 'entrepreneurial thinking' as being grounded in discipline and being a product of applying different types of intelligence in order to bring about successful outcomes. In sum, the University finds it helpful to think of being its entrepreneurial positioning as centring around having the knowledge and skills in a commercial and non-commercial scenario to 'make a difference'.

Can you train people to be entrepreneurs – to make a difference?

Many would argue that 'entrepreneurs' are born not made. Several years ago, a UK Sunday Newspaper ran a humorous 'entrepreneurial test'. The idea was that you were asked a number of questions, and depending on one's points score, you would be classified either as an 'entrepreneur' or a 'journeyman wage slave'. Amusingly, the opening question asked in the test was 'do you have any formal education beyond the age of 14 years?'. The instruction was, 'if yes' to this question, deduct 10 points from the potential entrepreneurial score! Against this backdrop, let me briefly review what we know about how to develop entrepreneurial skills – the ability to make a difference.

There is acknowledgement in the literature of what is referred to by Liao, Murphy and Welsch as the construct of 'entrepreneurial intensity'. This is defined as a 'measurement of the focus and commitment of individuals in relation to an entrepreneurial adventure'.

Linked to this will be the idea familiar to many readers of certain people having Type-A personality characteristics. Here I am referring to individuals 'with an intense sustained desire to achieve; the eagerness to compete; persistent drive for recognition; a continual involvement in deadline activities; habitual propensity to accelerate mental and physical functions; and a constant alertness to new opportunities'. These can be compared and contrasted to Type B personality types who, it is alleged, 'sometimes sit and think', but sometimes just sit.

A study by Rae and Woodier concluded that participating in a university degree programme, with an emphasis of on entrepreneurialism, is not, in itself, 'an adequate preparation for entrepreneurialism'. There is also further evidence to show that in a comparison between graduates who became entrepreneurs (in the sense of taking up self-employment rather than becoming employees) there was little suggestion of each of these two cohorts having received different types of skill development whilst in higher education.

It is also argued in the literature that a pre-disposition towards entrepreneurialism - can be cultivated through a range of initiatives, including one-to-one mentoring around applied multidisciplinary case studies, and other innovative activities. For example, at the University of Hertfordshire, students undertaking its entrepreneurialism module are cast in the role of fund raisers for a charity, and on a competitive team basis, asked to actually carry out in practice an initiative to raise money for their chosen charity.

Thus the evidence on the existence of an entrepreneurial 'gene', and if this did exist, how to cultivate it, are inconclusive. None the less the University takes the position that

it is possible, through a range of initiatives, to embed real life skills and real life work experience into the academic experience. This is aimed at producing individuals that become more sensitive to taking personal responsibility and making a difference – our definition of entrepreneurialism - than will be the case if none of these interventions were made.

Being an entrepreneurial University is about creating a ‘fundamental shift of mind’

At the heart of the University of Hertfordshire’s commitment to becoming an ‘Entrepreneurial University’ is the notion of bringing about a ‘fundamental shift of mind’ in the way in which the University engages with business. This is reflected in the way the decision to become an entrepreneurial university has been accompanied with the instigation of a Cultural Change programme. The University of Hertfordshire’s ‘Mindset’ initiative is aimed at embedding a business-facing culture throughout the University. Specifically the ‘shift of mind’ focused around six key areas. Below I briefly review each of these shifts in ‘mind-set’, and then later review each in closer detail.

Being a listening post in touch with business

Given the University of Hertfordshire’s entrepreneurial, business facing, and business-like stance, it is important for the University to make a genuine commitment to develop a deep understanding of business needs. This reflects the University’s aim to be genuinely demand-led. Specifically, the University always starts with the key question, ‘what does business tell us it wants?’ At the University of Hertfordshire this listening

starts by building up its appreciation of the nature and complexity of the business environment.

One issue the University is tackling is the 'one size fits all' approach to small businesses that characterises much Government thinking about the SME sector. This needs challenging and unpacking. There are over 3.7 million businesses in the UK. Amazingly 99% are small enterprises employing fewer than 50 employees. Thus, given the high proportion of employees working in SME's - for a University that purports to understand business, to be able to begin to 'segment' the vast canvas that is labelled the 'small business sector'.

One framework the University of Hertfordshire has found helpful in understanding the smaller business segment was a classification to identify the range of smaller business 'personalities'. This framework was built out of a business consultancy project that we conducted for a financial organisation keen to understand the needs, and frustrations, being experienced by smaller businesses in their relationship with banks. The study suggested that in the SME sector we will find our '*serial businesspeople*'. These are individuals who at the outset are aware that in setting up a business their aim is not necessarily to take income from the business, but to secure a profit stream that then becomes the basis for subsequently, valuing and then selling, the business, so that they can use the assets to set up the next business.

This is in sharp contrast with the *craftsman* segment. These are individuals, whose skills as a carpenter, tailor or picture framer, for example, lie at the core of the business. Their

financial horizons, and business acumen, will be quite modest. Their approach to business centres around building their reputation for the quality of their craft skills.

This is in turn different from the *'lifestyle'* businesses, where the individual, possibly because they have left former employment with a supporting pension, are able to intermingle work with leisure, thereby achieving a combination of work and non work goals. Thus their businesses pivot less around optimising profit, and more about what the economists refer to as *'satisficing'*, providing an adequate financial return, while also enjoying their lifestyle.

Then we have the *'trapped'* segment: individuals who may be running a small business because they have inherited it from their family and/or do not know how to extricate themselves from this commitment and/or because they have been made redundant and were unable to obtain *'paid employment'* and were *'forced'* into self employment to secure income. This category would also include hand-to-mouth businesses that are driven along by day-to-day events with little opportunity for the owners to get their heads above the parapet and establish whether the business is actually viable. If they were not putting in so many hours, and effectively massively *'subsidising'* the business, could it survive? For individuals in this category, unlike the *'lifestyle'* or *'craftsman'* categories, there is little enjoyment. Business life is like being at the Alamo: they are battling heroically against all odds - their bank, their creditors, and ever more demanding customers and alike.

A further segment was the *'hobbyist'* category, where a hobby, such as cricket, may have made way to the creation of a small business, such as the opportunity to set up a

business importing and exporting cricket balls from the Indian sub-continent and selling them via a mail order catalogue. These hobbyist businesses offer the benefit of the owner being intimately knowledgeable about the sector in which they operate. But on the reverse side of the coin, they perhaps can be too close to one of their passions – cricket - to be sufficiently objective about the business issues. In a choice between ‘networking’ at a Test Match and working out their Gross Margin and/or Average Debtor days we know what the choice will be.

Listening to what employers say they want from their graduates is also high on the University’s agenda. Thus, the bedrock of University’s commitment to be business facing pivots on its willingness to be a genuine listening post for what employers expect of universities, and what undergraduates are expecting when they enter the world of work. We now look at channels in place to ensure that there is a constant two way feedback between the University and the world of work.

The first and most notable of which is the University of Hertfordshire’s involvement with Exemplas – the product of a merger between the University’s Business Partnership and the independent Hertfordshire Business Link – which is now a national business support organisation. The University of Hertfordshire has a 98% ‘share’ in Exemplas and through this relationship can connect to 500,000 registered SME businesses nationally providing advice, consultancy and facilities. Exemplas, which also works with the private, public and voluntary sectors, is also a conduit for student placements.

The second conduit for listening to, and keeping in touch with business, is the Faculty *Strategic Advisory Board*. This is made up of leading representatives from industry,

commerce, central government and the voluntary sector. The aim is for representatives from the world of work to help 'road test' different ideas emerging from each Faculty for building collaboration between academia and business. These fora ensure that the University is kept up to date with leading thinking from the world of business and government.

Focusing research excellence on areas of high business impact

Another key platform for creating the University of Hertfordshire's entrepreneurial approach is to ensure that its thinking is grounded in leading edge research on issues that are central to, and related to, entrepreneurialism.

One area in which the University of Hertfordshire provides key insights into the world of business flows from the research undertaken by the Complexity and Management Centre, under stewardship of Professor Ralph Stacey. This provides an important platform for seeking to ensure that organisations are effective in adapting to their ever changing and increasingly complex environment. Complexity Theory provides us with frameworks to better understand the intricate human relationships at the heart of any business.

It is a discipline that draws on theories from psychology, sociology and other natural sciences, including evolution theory, social constructionist thought, process psychology and psychoanalysis. It seeks to put the *individual* – rather than systems and processes - at the heart of the analysis of the organisation's behaviour. It examines the way in which individuals, facing information overload, uncertainty and unpredictable events, will

respond. It is through the understanding of this complexity – at the individual level - that we can help organisations adapt to the ever changing nature of modern business.

Another centre for research excellence at the University of Hertfordshire pivots round the work of Richard Wiseman, the Professor of the Public Understanding of Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire, and the author of the best selling book, *The Luck Factor*. Picking up on some of the themes discussed earlier in this article about the basis for the notion of ‘entrepreneurial intuition’, Wiseman has undertaken various experiments that help us better understand how to fashion success – be more effective and take personal responsibility - through the way we broach and think about particular problems.

For example, Wiseman has been pioneering in encouraging creative thinking in the field of business through numerous experiments. Most recently, articulated in his book *Quirkology*, published in 2007, Wiseman demonstrates how we can often miss the obvious that is in front of us. Wiseman has pointed out that many organisations tend to squeeze out original thinkers. He notes that traditional business people and scientists tend to be good at classic ‘puzzle solving’ and sitting exams, which requires adherence to the notion of right or wrong answers. They are less comfortable solving complex ‘problems’, which unlike puzzles, always require the ability to be able to cope with a residual amount of uncertainty.

Wiseman provides us with numerous illustrations of the power of adopting an unconventional approach to work in order to come up with novel ideas. For instance, he believes when the resolution to the problem is not clear, then sleeping on the issue can

play dividends because, while dreaming, disparate ideas can come together in unexpected juxtapositions in a way that can often provide a creative solution. Thus the Wiseman message is that we are often guilty of failing to see the bigger picture because we are too busy focussing on the narrow tasks in hand. Wiseman's thinking is inspirational because it plays at the heart of encouraging people to think entrepreneurially in the sense of building their confidence and becoming bold enough to make a creative difference.

And the third area of research excellence I will refer to in this paper continues the theme of how the University of Hertfordshire is helping businesses thrive in today's complex environment. This centres on developing frameworks designed to help entrepreneurs make sense of today's myriad of market and consumer information, much of which is imperfect, but if weaved together into an integrated 'storyline', does begin to help decision-makers become more aware of the choices in front of them.

Specifically, in my own, Centre for Entrepreneurial Development (CfED), we have developed various analysis frameworks that help decision-takers, faced with competing, often contradictory, sources of market and consumer evidence, to make more informed decisions. In the past consumer data could stand as solitary pieces of evidence in a vacuum. But with today's information explosion each piece of new incoming evidence needs to be contextualised and 'triangulated' with other sources of existing information. But this requires the development of new analytical frameworks for assessing the 'safety' of this integrated evidence.

Here, academics interested in strategic entrepreneurship, are at the forefront of developing 'holistic' analysis frameworks to help entrepreneurs and business owners get to grips with the different types of evidence flowing into the organisation about its markets and consumers. A useful framework is the notion of incorporating incoming evidence into a 'fuzzy logic matrix'. This draws on orthodox statistics, Bayesian statistics, psychology, research methodology and strategic entrepreneurship. But it is presented in an accessible form to help decision-makers make sense of the mass of imperfect evidence that we are confronted with each day. It is a framework for understanding today's multiple sources of imperfect evidence also provides a segue into organising the presentation of the data i.e. the compelling form of a 'story'. We have known for some years now that time urgent, highly successful, decision-takers want the evidence presented in succinct integrated way in the form of a 'story'.

The power of storytelling in a business setting derives from the fact that we know individuals, when trying to understand complex organisational and social phenomena, tend to relate to the issue if this is explained as a personal story. This is why filmmakers have learnt not to tell dramatic events, such as the Normandy D-Day landings, on a vast semi-documentary canvas, but instead to bring the action down, to a small time frame, and talk to us through the lives of individual characters, with whom they know the audience will relate. They know that people will relate to a film focused on '*Saving Private Ryan*' aka as Tom Hanks (incidentally much of this film was shot on the University's deHavilland Campus).

Here in discussing some of the University's research expertise I have used three illustrations to highlight how the University of Hertfordshire is helping to enhance business effectiveness. The University's work in understanding organisational complexity, developing insights on the notion of 'informed intuition', and the development of evidence based frameworks for safe decision-making come together to help us address an age old dilemma in business. This is sometimes referred to as the 'data is dumb, but beliefs are blind' issue. By this I mean that businesses often become polarised between decision-makers who rely exclusively on their entrepreneurial intuition and those who want to play it by the numbers.

Thus in one camp within organisations we have those who will be captivated by Henry Ford who once famously said, 'If I'd have listened to my customers, I would have invented a faster horse'. This lays down a marker – it is dismissive of putting the data ahead of entrepreneurial flair. But an exclusive allegiance to the 'data is dumb' intuitive school of decision-making can be the road to ruin because it can gloss over the dangers of 'blind faith'. The following paraphrases an observation made by Piers Brendan in his autobiography of Mussolini. Brendan tells us that gradually Mussolini developed a blind faith in his 'intuitive powers', such that he came to believe, because he was never challenged by subservient apparatchiks, that he could proceed in a messianic way to put the alleged 'superiority' of his intuition over and above all the feedback and reality checks that were being passed across his bow.

So frameworks that help us handle complexity, develop creative flair, and foster intuition, in an informed disciplined way, are helpful. It is here, where the University of

Hertfordshire is making a major contribution in blending academic rigour with business hunch and intuition. Ultimately entrepreneurial decision-making is about 'flair' and inspiration. But disciplined prior thinking has a role to play. Lou Gerstner, ex Chairman of IBM, once said 'business decision-making is easy, once I have had someone frame the choices for me'.

A thriving business consultancy platform

It is to be expected that a University that has elected to position itself as business facing, and entrepreneurial, would be able to boast a rich body of business consultancy conducted on behalf of local employers, and those based further a field in the UK and overseas. And this indeed true of the University of Hertfordshire. I have already discussed the special relationship that the University enjoys with business given its role within Exemplas. There is also the University of Hertfordshire's 'Business Services Group', which is designed to act as a 'revolving door' between business and academia.

The University has also set up local businesses, either part or fully funded by the University. For example it has set up a bus company, serving not only its students, but the general public, as well as a facility for organising conferences for external organisations at the campus. UNO, with a turnover in excess of £12M is arguably the largest University bus company in the world. The University's extensive track record in business consultancy reflects the way that over the years it has been successful to striking up relationships with the *local* business community. Thus we find in the 1970's

that the University of Hertfordshire, then Hatfield Polytechnic, was one of the first to provide an Honours degree in Computer Science, and given the proximity to the De Havilland Aircraft Company, this allowed the University to develop a special consultancy relationship with the aerospace industry, which continues today with the University invited to collaborate in the Government's 'University Enterprise Network' a major national initiative announced in November 2008¹.

A further example of the University working in a synergistic way with local businesses centres on the location of the nearby Elstree and Borehamwood Film Studios and the Universities' School of Film and Music. Thus we find the University's staff and students are involved - each year - in making sets and models for all the UK made films, from James Bond to the Harry Potter series.

Another key plank in the University of Hertfordshire's strategy to help bridge the worlds of academia and work is the Graduate Consulting Unit (GCU). The Unit provides an opportunity for University of Hertfordshire graduates and post-graduates to work on *live* business projects, under the supervision of University staff, and thereby giving them a close experience of real life business assignments.

The initiative is a pioneering example of the University's commitment to working closely with business. GCU clients receive first class research data, and expert business consultancy advice

¹ The University Enterprise Network programme will initially focus on science, technology, engineering, maths, innovation and the nuclear sector. Around 100,000 students and graduates will be given the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial and business skills and will benefit from support and advice on how to develop their business ideas, as well as gaining experience of enterprising companies. The networks will be overseen by the National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship (www.ncge.com) and will receive additional sponsorship from privately-owned firms and regional development agencies.

and solutions at attractive rates, meanwhile the University learns more about the employment sector and the practical knowledge and skill levels of its staff and graduate students are enhanced. It is an illustration of the 'virtuous circle' at work. The learning from the world of business can be disseminated through the University, thereby improving the quality of the University's teaching, ultimately enhancing the 'employability' of its students.

Now in its third year the GCU continues to develop and has 12 employees (two of whom are full time). Over 100 students having benefitted from working in the Unit on over 40 projects for fee-paying clients generating fees in excess of £300,000. In 2008, the GCU won the regional award for People Development in the British Chambers of Commerce Business Awards and finalists in the National Business Awards in the Entrepreneurial Spirit category. The GCU model has generated significant interest in a number of other Universities in England.

Developing multidisciplinary problem solving frameworks that combine academic rigour and business pragmatism

The University of Hertfordshire in positioning itself as 'entrepreneurial' is keen to foster a way of solving real life business problems that combines the best of academic rigour with appropriate levels of business pragmatism. The University aims to move away from simply running courses that describe or talk *about* business, but instead weave together the best of what we know from academia with what we know about the way the business world works, in order to provide solutions *for* business. This shift from lecturing 'about' business, and being detached from business, to being more 'engaged' with the world of work, and providing solutions *for* business is crucial to developing students and staff who could make a (entrepreneurial) difference.

The whole subject area of how the relationship between theory and 'practice' is managed has had a chequered history in the UK. We can trace back to an era where the naïve idea existed that theoretical thinking skills can sit in one category, and practical skills sit in another bucket of expertise. And many will remember a phase in the evolution of the British education system, where some children were tested at the age of 11 and actually allocated to schools that essentially focused on practical skills, such as metalwork, while others went to schools that were more focussed on academic subjects. This type of separatist thinking is now largely bankrupt. Most now realise that virtually all practical skills, such as making a dove tail joint, if you are a carpenter, require a sound understanding of basic theory. And there are very few jobs that can deny *all* practical considerations and rely exclusively on theoretical principles.

The challenge of combining critical theoretical principles with business practice sounds comparatively straightforward. But it remains a major intellectual challenge. It is easy to nod in the direction of making academia more relevant to business by offering various 'bolt on' (seemingly) applied courses. However dotting a few bits of business practice around what is essentially a traditional academic curriculum only takes us so far. This remains a long way from developing truly multi-disciplinary frameworks that genuinely improve the way problems are defined, refined, and solved. This needs frameworks that go beyond simply sprucing up traditional academic disciplines to make them look a little bit more business like for the outside audience. It needs the development of applied frameworks that really do bridge the worlds of academia and business.

This challenge of developing a truly multidisciplinary approach to business problem solving embraces (at least) two challenges. First, there is the issue of examining a business problem from a number of different (academic) perspectives. And, secondly, there is the thorny issue of how precisely we fuse what we know from this (combined) theory with best practice, in order to provide business with practicable solutions.

Considerable progress has been made in improving academia's ability to simultaneously draw on different disciplines in order to solve business problems, rather than persist with the old discipline based silo mentality. Gone are the days when a problem may have been examined from exclusively from, say, the economist's perspective, with scant regard for what, say, the psychologists would have made of an analysis of the same problem. The dangers of the silo discipline approach and the power of the more holistic analysis of problems are now acknowledged.

The way forward in this area, when teaching young people to look at a problem in a multidisciplinary holistic way, is to be realistic about the amount of theory they can be expected to know when operating in this multidisciplinary way. Rather than assume that the students will be able to study *all* of the theory underpinning each of the relevant disciplines, realism needs to prevail about identifying the 'dominant concepts' that are needed to play out the multidisciplinary analysis. This takes us back to the pioneering work of Seymour Papert, with his book 'Mindstorms: Children, Computers and Powerful Ideas'. Papert was one of the first to alert us to the importance of ensuring young people understand the relevant practical concepts before they become embroiled with all full-on background theory. Only now is the power of this message being fully

recognised. Thus in Future Trends in Education 2007: we find a reference to: 'we must know how to manage, construct and deconstruct knowledge at a conceptual level'. Let us take an example, of what I mean by focussing on the concept first. In teaching the notion of statistical correlation, the first stopping off point would be to communicate the *concept* of looking at the 'strength of the relationship between two sets of data', *before* plunging the student into the minutia of calculating, say, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. This notion of having an appreciation of key principles and theories at a conceptual level is helpful to students, and one to which the business world relates.

Acknowledging that taking personal responsibility, being effective and making a difference, is now a legitimate part of the University curriculum

In discussing employer's expectations of graduates leaving university I have made reference to the need for interpersonal skills, including the need for graduates to be a good communicator who can work effectively within teams. The University of Hertfordshire, has made good progress over the years in factoring the development of such interpersonal skills into their academic offer. The last decade has seen a massive shift away from *just* providing undergraduates with knowledge in a particular academic discipline, towards acknowledging the importance of developing a rounded individual who is confident working in a team to solve practical problems.

However the University of Hertfordshire, through it's 'entrepreneurial' positioning, has paid particular attention to the lessons that seem to be surfacing from a growing body

of what one might call the 'Success' literature. Here I am referring to burgeoning number of books that are encouraging us not to accept the view that we are born with a *given* level of confidence, creativity/or skills as a communicator, but must be open to the fact that these, hitherto seen as pre-destined traits, can be developed.

For example, Edward De Bono has led the way in the field of encouraging us all to belief in our creative potential. Through numerous books De Bono has shared with us over the years techniques to help us improve our lateral thinking and creativity. De Bono makes the points that these techniques - various 'thinker toys' - may not 'Turn us into Einstein's or DaVinci's, but they nonetheless can improve the creative contribution an individual makes'. Thus the point being made by De Bono is that through various techniques – supported by different types of tuition, including mentoring - it is possible to enhance the innate level of an individual's current performance in the area of creativity.

From this pioneering work by those who have helped us believe that we can make a more creative contribution to problem-solving than we might initially have thought, we find this principle extending into other concepts, such as building levels of personal confidence. Importantly there are few people now, in either academia or business, who would not accept that there has been a paradigm shift in terms of acknowledging that it is possible to formally develop these softer interpersonal skills – including confidence – as part of the undergraduate curriculum. This is underlined by the following comment made by Sir Martin Sorrell, Chairman of the WPP media group, Martin, notwithstanding his pedigree as a hard nosed practical hands on businessman grounded in finance and

the 'bottom line', makes the following observation about, the elusive concept of confidence. 'Confidence separates winners from losers... everyone, from novices to the most experienced leaders, needs to learn how to shed the loser's curse and maintain a winner's advantage'.

In terms of 'teaching' to young people the importance of taking personal responsibility for making a difference, the start point is gaining commitment to the notion that it is possible to formally boost personal effectiveness skills. The next step is to 'touch' the world of the staff member or student. Here returning to the power of 'storytelling' discussed earlier in this paper, it becomes important, early on in the dialogue about what range of techniques and mentoring can improve interpersonal skills, to provide what is often called in the motivational speaker trade as 'lean-in stories'. That is stories to which everyone can relate and will sit up and pay attention.

A powerful 'lean-in' stories to 'touch' staff and students in communicating the importance of taking personal responsibility would be the 'Lenny Skutnik' incident. This story pivots around a plane that crashes into the icy Potomac River in Washington. As this is the centre of US Government the plane is quickly surrounded by the full panoply of rescue officialdom – army, navy, air force, FBI and more. Very quickly the area is buzzing with men talking to each other on walkie-talkies, signaling to helicopters and organizing lots of complicated arrangements. However in the confusion the cries of a surviving air hostess who – is clearly saying – as the coast-to-coast TV as the news crews zoom in 'will someone please help me', are being ignored. As she is about go under the icy water for the third time, it becomes clear to Lenny Skutnik, a young clerk a nearby

office that the complete might of the US rescue machine was not going to save this stewardess.

Lenny takes off his jacket, and dives into the icy water, grabs the stewardess by the scruff of the neck, and drags her to the bank of the Potomac and safety. Originally this story was told as one of Lenny's *physical* bravery: diving fearlessly into the icy water and so on. But the subsequent revisionist accounts of Lenny's actions now acknowledge his 'psychological bravery'. He had to make a personal decision, that he, and he alone, a humble office worker with no swimming or life saving qualifications, and nobody else, not even the mighty US military, could make the difference between this stewardess living or dying. And then he had to take action on his analysis. So it has become a classic example of taking personal responsibility for delivering successful outcomes.

Competitive Renewal and the 'virtuous circle'.

One of the key characteristics of successful businesses is the recognition that they must constantly renew their competitive advantage. They will be continually revisiting the uniqueness, and effectiveness of the 'value propositions' that they fashioned to cater to the particular needs of each of the market segments in which they operate. They will continually ensure that each of these value propositions continue to differentiate their company/brand from that of their competitors in each market segment. And this thinking – competitive renewal - is also true of the University of Hertfordshire's approach to its own entrepreneurial positioning.

Thus the University of Hertfordshire is constantly reviewing the way it should respond to the business world, communicate with its staff, students and stakeholders. It is important that the university is always in a state of readiness to respond to new developments that could quickly transform the world of education and/or business operates.

For instance, the arrival of the Web 2.0 delivery platform has been ticking over in the background for a number of years. But now, in a very short space of time, this new technology platform is beginning to transform the way people interact. Thomas L Friedman in his book 'The World is Flat', argues that 'technology is flattening the variations around the world! Because Web 2.0, Blogging, Social Networks, Online Encyclopaedias, Podcasting and the i-Intelligent – thinking are instantly connecting existing knowledge from all over the planet'.

For example, social networking via Facebook and Myspace and other vehicles is transforming many dimensions of our lives. It means that customers, via blogs and other initiatives, are developing different points of contact with organisations from whom they buy products. It also means that consumers can talk to other consumers, in a host of different interactive platforms, and share views about products, and services.

It is also a technology that raises the bar in terms of the expectations that both staff and students will now have about the way in which information will be imparted to them. For example, Gartner predict that 'by 2010, 70% of the population of developing nations will spend 10 times longer per day interacting with people electronically than they do in person'. Today the technology exists for a employer seeking training from the University

to request – using RSS Feeds (Widget) technology – the precise information and tuition styles he wants, and expect to have this bespoke targeted knowledge delivered to him/her in any one of a number of ‘delivery mechanisms’, ranging if he/she is on the move, their Blackberry, or mobile device, to a combination of vid and/or podcasts. Thus adopting an entrepreneurial stance means that the University of Hertfordshire has to be constantly on its toes to ensure that it stays ahead of the pack in the way it does business and communicates with its different stakeholder groups.

Summary

The nub of what the University of Hertfordshire is trying to achieve, in positioning itself as being ‘business facing and entrepreneurial’, is to develop young people who take personal responsibility for making a difference – being personally effective in delivering successful outcomes.’ To achieve this, the University must genuinely listen and respond to business needs. It also needs to ensure that its research activities continue to focus on areas of high business and civic impact. Furthermore, it seeks to continually enhance its business consultancy platform. Also high on the agenda is the need to develop multidisciplinary frameworks that bridge the conceptual world of academia and the practical work arena. The University is also realistic about the way – in pursuing such an enterprise culture - it must seek alignment from different stakeholder groups. And the University does not shrink from the challenge of delivering graduates into the workplace who not only have a firm knowledge base, but who are also good team players and engaging communicators, with well developed interpersonal and practical business solving skills.

The ultimate goal is to create a Virtuous Circle whereby the University, by virtue of being at the leading edge in understanding what business needs, not only provides a quality service to business and the community, but also ensures this expertise feeds back into enhancing the quality of the teaching and research undertaken at the University, whilst also improving the consultancy skills of staff and the employability of students.