

Boosting Impact and Innovation in Higher Education

The Knowledge Entrepreneur and High Diversity
Groups in Universities

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By

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Preface

Now, in the latter stages of my career, I am writing a book with a focus on universities. This comes somewhat as a surprise. Earlier in my career, I would not have envisaged this. However, now that I am spending substantial amounts of time working in universities, it is easy to understand the reasons for such a focus. Through my consultancy work running university-related experiential leadership development programmes, I have quickly re-affirmed my respect for universities as unique institutions that act as highly ethical guardians of knowledge, educators and researchers in a world that is wont to exploit, distort or ignore best knowledge for self-interest. Yet, I fear that universities are not seen for the full potential that they have to offer to our conflicted world. Universities are not seen as the leaders of the knowledge economy, innovation nor policy debate. In my own country of Australia, universities have been under funding pressure for some time and, to their credit, have responded with some serious re-organisation in order to remain viable. But they have failed to reimagine themselves in the eyes of the community and continue to conduct teaching and research in much the same way they always have. I believe this is a shame as having had the privilege to work with brilliant minds in universities, I am disappointed that potential is not being appreciated and utilised by society. Universities must take responsibility for this and recognise that preserving their fine traditions alone is not what is needed of them in the world today. Coinciding with my consultancy work in universities has been the growing prominence of far right-wing groups that are managing to influence government policy across the globe with ideologies that pay little deference to best knowledge.

While it would be relatively easy to goad universities to be more proactive in stepping up to lead global policy-making debates, I believe that first there needs to be some cultural change and skill development to prepare for such a role. The role requires the up-skilling of academics and changes to some aspects

of university cultures. With that in mind, this book is offered as a practical first step in up-skilling universities to lead more effectively in a world that is crying out for wise, intelligent yet innovative leadership. Subsequently, this book is a practical guide for those who work in universities and wish to apply their knowledge in innovative ways to some of the world's pressing issues.

The title of this book is constructed around two main themes that have a symbiotic relationship – those of the *Knowledge Entrepreneur* and *High Diversity Groups*. High Diversity Groups is the concept I have developed to indicate groups that not only have high degrees of diversity but also have well-developed and specialised cultures that mine diversity for creativity and subsequent innovation. The skills needed to operate effectively in High Diversity Groups are represented in the Knowledge Entrepreneur Toolkit presented in this book, and when mastered, are enacted through the role of the Knowledge Entrepreneur. At the heart of the argument in this book is a proposition that those working in universities, particularly academics, need to develop their intra- and inter-personal skills to the same level as their discipline-based knowledge skills, if they are to more effectively work with their colleagues and impact the societies they serve. High Diversity Group cultures will stand in contrast to discipline-based cultures, requiring processes that will most likely challenge conventionally held notions of best group practice. The focus throughout the book is on practical (rather than theoretical) discussions around both of these themes. Do not expect a traditional academic book here. It is written as a practical guide, not a theoretical book. I am sharing what I know is effective in developing the type of skills and cultures to which I refer.

The ideas in this book come from many sources. Many are a result of my training and work as a teacher; Department of Education Consultant in two states of Australia; Station Leader for the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions; Operations Manager for Queensland Natural Resources and Mines; Principal Project Officer, Leadership Development with the Queensland Premiers Department; and, through delivering countless experiential leadership programmes to more than 1000 participants over 17 years in private practice. Additionally, I undertook my master's degree by research mid-career obtaining an M.Ed. with first class Honors and then a PhD by studying the social processes of organisational change. As a student, I had the opportunity to attend local, national and international conferences. Moreover, I was exposed to university cultures as a

mature-aged adult and as someone with a keen interest in organisational cultures and change processes.

However, there are many other experiences and sources of influence that have informed this book. I am fortunate that my life partner, Dr Gayle Jennings, has been a career academic and provided me the opportunity to vicariously experience an academic career. To Gayle, I will always be grateful, not only for encouraging and guiding me through my research degrees but also for the opportunities to understand many viewpoints about universities and to accompany her to national and international conferences and other university-related functions where I became increasingly fascinated by the cultures of universities. Gayle epitomises the professional and ethical academic and remains a source of wisdom to this day.

Up until 2010, the majority of my consulting work had been in government departments, not for profit organisations and private companies. And in this work, I was privileged to work with my business partner, Tony Wheeler. Tony is a highly experienced and talented group facilitator from whom I learnt much over the years. Tony introduced me to a number of the models and processes that are described within. Together, we refined the processes through co-facilitating many experiential leadership programmes over a period of 10 or more years. To you, Tony, I will always be grateful for your generosity in sharing your knowledge.

In 2010, I was invited to do work at the University of Western Australia (UWA) by an internal organisation consultant who had experienced my work elsewhere. This person was Ree Jordan, who has since left UWA and is undertaking research for her PhD at the University of Queensland. Ree now works with me as a part-time consultant and has an in-depth understanding of university cultures and the processes necessary for experientially based developmental programmes. I am always grateful to Ree for her insight, her ability to 'read the room' and her unique talent in preparing groups to participate in programmes.

UWA has undoubtedly been a primary source of the inspiration for this book and it is there that I refined many of the models and processes offered throughout this book. It would therefore be remiss of me to not only acknowledge UWA generally for the valuable experiences and insights that inform this book but also acknowledge some of the key people who have trusted me to run development programmes that might be considered somewhat 'risky' or 'edgy' by those who are more risk-averse. In particular,

I wish to acknowledge (in the order they engaged me for specific projects) Professor Shelda Debowski, Director of Organisational and Staff Development; Professor John Dell, the Dean of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics; Ms Paula Langley, Engineering Faculty Manager; Professor Tony O'Donnell, Dean of Science; Ms Christine Richardson, Science Faculty Manager; Professor Alex Cameron, Deputy Vice Chancellor Education; and, Professor Matthew Tonts, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Business, Law and Education. I am especially appreciative of the time generously given to me by Professor John Dell and Christine Richardson in the early stages of this book. A sincere thanks to you all for showing faith in me and the processes employed and for the leadership you all displayed by modelling the learning behaviours so necessary to make the processes suggested in this book a success. Of course, a huge thanks to the many UWA people who participated in these initiatives, from whom I have learnt so much and hold in very high esteem. I think there are several hundred of you now across UWA and I collectively recognise you rather than individually name you.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, this book is practically focused and aims to provide a framework for universities to enhance the already great teaching, research and other activities that they undertake in our societies. Although I stated that it was not suffice to goad universities to take more proactive leadership roles at a time where there is clearly a void of best knowledge informing politics, I must state that I don't recoil from such provocation totally. It is just that to play such a role would, in my opinion, be a step too far at this point without taking the necessary time to build the skills and cultures to be successful.

The Knowledge Entrepreneur role and the potential for High Diversity Groups to develop truly innovative solutions to the challenges facing universities and to the major issues facing our world provides a powerful strategy for universities to evolve in innovative ways and lead beyond their current boundaries of influence.

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