Chapter 9

Cooperation between a Distance Teaching University and an On–Campus University: The Creation of a Dual–Mode University

Louise Bertrand
University of Quebec, Canada

ABSTRACT

There are more and more reasons for combining distance learning with classroom learning, not only because of the availability of new technologies but also because of the changes they induce in the student’s relationship to knowledge and in their way of life. Nonetheless, there are few instances of dual-mode universities being created by combining a distance university with an on-campus university. This chapter relates the experience of merging a distance university (TELUQ) with an on-campus university (UQAM), the reasons behind the fusion, and the lessons learned from the experience.

INTRODUCTION

In the closing decades of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, the conditions in which universities exist and grow underwent major upheavals. These resulted in a decrease in the power of governments on which non-profit university funding depends; a shrinkage in funding that has led to the measurement of “university performance” in a quest for economic viability; the pervasiveness of consumerism and individualism; and, above all, the development of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT). The social, economic, and cultural turmoil thus produced is unparalleled. Some fundamental factors of transformation have been at work in recent decades: universal access to information and knowledge; Internet-based openness and collaboration for knowledge production; and the existence of multiple networks of continually evolving relations.

The advent of ICT has produced profound changes in the way we learn and process knowledge (short-term memory management through multi-tasking or breaking the chronological sequences of learning through hypertext, for example), in particular amongst the newer generations of stu-
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dents whose cognitive development coincided with technological development. It is the very process of acquiring knowledge that is fundamentally transformed, making the emergence of ICT an epistemological revolution of a scale equivalent to that produced by the invention of the printing press. Its manifestations, their numbers and their spin-off effects are growing exponentially. Knowledge institutions par excellence, universities are at the forefront of the revolution that places knowledge at the heart of socio-economic development. The adjustment of their fundamental teaching and research missions through secular structures at the pace required by the advent of what Castells (1996, 1999, 2000) calls the “network society”, a social model of networks in constant evolution, is an unparalleled challenge.

Early and timid measures undertaken to integrate ICT in university teaching were more about gluing new technologies to traditional teaching methods. Some few universities added distance technologies and learning to their portfolio, to become dual mode institutions. Australian universities adopted this practice a few decades ago. In the province of Québec, Laval University has been the only campus-based institution combining, for a few years, the two teaching methods in a substantial number of programs. Notwithstanding, two questions remain. Firstly, does adding new technologies to traditional teaching methods really afford students with the full advantages of bi-modal integration? And secondly, can university institutions really integrate the full potential of distance and class-room technologies to their operational and economic models?

Out of a desire to answer the above questions arose, as early as 2002, a unique project which merged a traditional university with a distance university into a single institution, an attempt to integrate two autonomous institutions (while maintaining a relative autonomy for the distance university part), the Télé-université (TÉLUQ) and the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). This article explains why TÉLUQ and UQAM chose to merge and what can be learned from this experience, but it starts with the reasons why changes in traditional university teaching models are necessary and urgent.

This article is a first step of an attempt to delineate the potentially unique managerial and governance characteristics of bona fide dual-mode universities integrating the full potential of distance and classroom technologies. This article is based on an analysis of the official merger documents, interviews with key actors and on the author’s personal experience as director general of TÉLUQ from 2003 to 2008.

THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY AND RELATIONSHIP TO KNOWLEDGE

The technological developments of the last few decades have made available some extraordinarily powerful tools that significantly modify the access to knowledge environment and the process of knowledge acquisition itself. These developments accelerate the appearance of mutations that force universities to transform the relationship to knowledge, the very relationship which it is their mission to establish between a subject, the student, and a body of scientific knowledge, soft skills and hard skills, by employing all the means at their disposal to ensure the success of this relation. Universities give access to knowledge, not just information, making available to students not only the objects of knowledge, but also the devices that allow them, through their own action on these objects, to interiorize a formalized body of knowledge and to transform it into personal knowledge.

The relationship to knowledge has been profoundly transformed by the arrival of information technologies, resulting in the transition from an oral and written culture to a cyberculture. The oral tradition, on which universities are based, persists to the present day. Some consider this tradition the sine qua non of a quality education, with its direct contact with professors, dialogue