

Leadership Case Study: Inspiring Leaders 2013 / 2014

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Title: Developing the CiST tool (The Creative and Innovation Strategic Thinking Tool)

Introduction

This case study has been developed to satisfy the course requirements of the Inspiring Leaders Programme 2013/ 2014.

All participants were required to produce a case study as a means of sharing their learning and thinking around the topic of leadership with other BU leaders.

This case study explores the area of creative and innovative strategic thinking and explains the reasoning behind the development of the CiST tool.

Background

On 21st July 2014 I assisted the Leadership and Development team with the delivery of a training session which formed part of the 'Preparing for Strategic Leadership' programme. I was one of three BU staff members asked to assist facilitate the session and my role was to present a provocation to a group of BU leaders on the possible impact of 'Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) on the University estate. The context was provided by the YouTube video 'The Future of Education: EPIC 2020'. The video proposes a radically different HE environment by 2020, i.e. all courses are available online, all content is free, the student loan system is abolished, degrees no longer exist and are replaced by 'badges'.

The purpose of the exercise was to develop the participant's skills of enquiry. To achieve this, participants were required to analyse and evaluate the proposals of specialists who had knowledge and expertise in areas which were unfamiliar to participants.

Following the session it quickly became apparent that there were unintended benefits gained via the process of preparing for the event for the facilitators, i.e. in developing strategic ideas in the context of a radically different environment. I found that this led to creative and innovative ideas as your thinking is freed from today's constraints and the established ways of doing things. It is this experience that led to the development of the CiST tool.

The CiST Tool

The CiST tool is based on the process I followed in preparing for the leadership event outlined above. The process is comprised of four discreet steps, described as follows.

Step 1 involves the development of a scenario for the external environment at a future point in time. In my case this was provided by the EPIC 2020 video but on reflection this could be developed by individuals or teams. The key is to think radically, even if some of the concepts and ideas are considered to be improbable as this is likely to lead to the most creative and innovation concepts during later steps.

Step 2 involves a strategic analysis of the scenario, i.e. how would your department / team strategy need to change in response to the challenges posed by this new environmental context? I undertook this analysis alone and then sought feedback from a colleague, however I think there would be benefit in undertaking this as a group. Lastly, the use of established management tools such as PESTAL and SWOT may assist in developing ideas.

Step 3 involves an evaluation of the strategic responses developed at step 2. The purpose of this is to determine what aspects might be relevant to today. Key questions to consider include; how can you and your team prepare for the possibilities of tomorrow and improve performance today? Are the established ways of doing things still relevant and/ or preventing innovation?

Step 4 involves seeking feedback from others outside of your area of specialism / expertise. When I presented my ideas to a group of BU leaders I was surprised by the differing views and responses I received which on reflection helped me to further develop my ideas and concepts.

Conclusion

The purpose of CiST tool is to encourage creative and innovative strategic thinking via consideration of reality tomorrow, rather than today. It will aid BU leaders to demonstrate creativity (P1), dynamic leadership (P2) and innovation (P3), which are all strategic enablers of BU2018 and when used by a team it supports leaders to empower others by fostering collaboration and helping team members to appreciate the bigger picture.