Chapter 2

You can't not do it

Flexible learning is related to major changes facing higher-education institutions throughout the world. For flexible learning to be meaningful in an institution, it must be more than the effort of occasional pioneers; the institution must commit itself to a change. In this chapter we focus on the institutional perspective. What sorts of changes are occurring? What factors have influenced institutions that have already made a commitment to more flexible learning and technology use? What motivates policy in these areas? The main lesson framing this chapter is: *you can't not do it.*

The context for change in higher education

Although the institutional level is the outmost of our circles in the figure at the start of the chapter, institutions themselves are situated within a number of broader contexts that shape and constrain their own developments, which are not shown on this figure. This broader context includes government, the business community, accreditation boards, agencies determining the national technological infrastructure, and the market itself: potential clients and those who influence them. Many trends can be identified in developments in this broader context relating to flexible learning and higher education. These include (Collis and Gommer, 2000; Encarnação, Leidhold and Reuter, 2000):

- *Virtualization*. People are becoming more comfortable with Internet technology as an everyday tool. Thus, using the Internet for learning will become a normal extension.
- *Lifelong learning*. New forms of learning experiences are being seen as necessary in order to keep up with continuing changes in work and the context of work (see Chapter 1).
- *Personalization for the individual client*. As individual tailoring, via the computer, becomes part of e-commerce and society more generally, its application to education, particularly lifelong learning, will be strong.
- *Globalization and internationalization*. Throughout the world, business is more and more taking place as a combination of local and international. Businesses are forming alliances to take advantage of one another's local markets and to have the combined resources to operate internationally.

These trends suggest two main lines of development. One is the line relating to *quality control*: on one extreme, the Internet can be seen as a free channel, allowing anyone to access and contact anyone else. On the other extreme, the Internet can be seen as needing to be ordered; made secure; made a place to do business with consumer confidence; made a place to go for entertainment, with confidence that one's norms will not be offended. A second line of development relates to the *local vs global* aspect: will customers shop at the corner store or via a virtual portal whose server may be continents away?

Given the unstoppable surge of use of the Internet throughout society, these trends and questions are affecting all sectors, including higher education. In Chapter 9 we discuss the implications of this for the future. In this chapter, we focus on current developments.

What's happening in universities?

Higher-education institutions throughout the world are in a period of rapid change. Changes occurring in the primary processes of higher education –

courses and degree granting – are closely related to the contextual trends of virtualization, internationalization, lifelong learning and customer orientation that are part of society in general. In this context, there is a strong message appearing in the popular media as well as in professional circles: 'Traditional universities and colleges face a bleak future unless they significantly alter their instructional methods to keep pace with developments spurred by the Internet. In order to survive, these institutions must… understand their own strengths and reputation among the public, and customise their teaching methods to the different age groups of students' (*Financial Times*, 2000). As institutions are more and more trying to reach students who do not fit the standard residential degree programme, individual courses or even entire degree programmes are being offered via the Internet, which is perceived as saving both universities and students money and time.

Flexibility is seen as the key idea, and flexibility requires technology. Thus, new developments in technology feature in much of the change in higher education. In this section, we look at this change from an anecdotal perspective via an overview of ways in which universities are responding to the perceived social demand for flexible services. These can be clustered in terms of new characteristics of the university ('being wired'), new models for flexible delivery, and new partners and competition.

Being wired

Throughout the world technology expenditures have become a major item at higher-education institutions, moving from support for certain technical faculties to required infrastructure for all staff and students. In a recent survey in the USA, the degree of *wiredness* of a university was seen as an important part of its profile to potential students. 'Undergraduates are as interested in a college's Net resources as in its curriculum or social life. Schools are as boastful of network infrastructures as of celebrity professors… The Net is transforming the college experience and at a breakneck pace' (Bernstein, 2000: 114, 116).

What are some of the manifestations of being wired? What is it that the public, at least in the countries that can be grouped with the US, is coming to expect of universities? Bernstein's survey identifies criteria such as:

- Incoming students receive or are required to purchase a computer.
- Lecture halls and an increasing number of classrooms are wired for high-speed network (local area network and Internet) access.
- Student residences offer computer equipment including printers and network connectivity for student use.
- Prospective students can contact appropriate persons for information via the WWW, through which they may also apply.
- Students can register for classes, drop classes, access their grades and access their course schedules via the WWW.

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- Space on a WWW server is available for instructors and students.
- Students have institution-hosted e-mail and network accounts; Internet access is unrestricted in terms of time, cost and what can be accessed.
- Library resources can be perused and reserved via the network.
- Technical support is generously available.

Usually, justifications for all this wiredness are not given in terms of specific learning-related needs. Rather, the expectation of students and society is that the institution must do it, because everyone else is doing it. The move towards making this technology push concrete is occurring through a variety of institutional models. In this section we look at the general trend toward being *virtual* as well as new sorts of initiatives taking place within higher-education institutions themselves as examples of these models.

Models for flexibility delivery

Higher-education environments of the future are being envisioned to include many aspects of flexibility, such as in the student's choice of modules to combine together to meet course and degree requirements (Ben-Jacob, Levin and Ben-Jacob, 2000). There are many ways in which this flexibility increase is being realized. The individual institution can become more flexible in its own practices, can join with other universities in a variety of models, or can join with other non-university partners in a variety of models. Also, new players, both related to traditional universities and not, are becoming providers. Often these new approaches are collectively and metaphorically called *being virtual*. We discuss these in terms of the idea of being virtual in itself, and of how this is being expressed in the form of new initiatives within institutions.

Being virtual

The term *virtual university* and its companions *virtual classrooms, virtual reality* and *virtual libraries* (no one yet seems to offer a virtual degree) are typically used as metaphors. Usually what they refer to is less radical than the terminology might suggest. The business of the *real* university continues, often with little or no contact with the fringe services or courses offered via the *virtual* approach. Many different uses of the term virtual appear not only in the popular media but also in professional and academic journals. Among the many different meanings are:

- virtual as a vision or metaphor for the idea that anyone, anywhere, can experience the benefits he or she needs from a university, while remaining at home and at work;
- virtual as a way of describing how the traditional university can gradually move to be more flexible in the options it offers to students in terms of how, when and where they complete certain course requirements;
- virtual as a way of describing how the resources and experiences available

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within the traditional university are being broadened for those within the university (ie the services of the university library are no longer bounded by its own physical collection);

- virtual as a way to describe specific organizations and consortia, sometimes comprised of traditional universities but often not, which now offer alternative experiences in competition with the traditional university;
- virtual in terms of mobility, where a student can stay at home (or home university) and still participate in a course at another university;
- virtual in reference to specific technical environments (typically WWW-based) that serve as the realization of these ideas in terms of providing the interface by which the individual interacts with the *virtual* situation;
- virtual in reference to some sort of informational service such as a portal site via which links to information and contact persons about courses and programmes are provided.

Combining these perspectives, at least 11 pay-offs can be suggested for the *virtual university* relating to virtual mobility and internationalism. All are being facilitated at the present with WWW-based environments. Table 2.1 shows these pay-offs.

Table 2.1   *Implications of becoming virtual*

Perspective	Pay-offs
Student perspective	1. Improved preparation for actual mobility; improved contact with home university while away; improved contact between supervisors at home and external universities.
	2. Improved chances to participate in learning activities, ranging from short interactions to full courses, with students at external universities but while staying (completely or partially) at home.
Faculty perspective	3. Improved opportunities for collaboration with external collegues in learning activities for students from involved universities (see 2 above).
	4. Improved opportunities for research and professional interactions with external colleagues in conjunction with physical mobility or in place of it.
Institutional perspective	5. Increased opportunities for new student intake.
	6. Increased opportunities for consortia patnerships and other collaborative initiatives.
	7. Reduced costs and time demands relating to external travel.
	8. Increased efficiency in information dissemination, in information access about programmes elsewhere.
Strategic perspective	9. Increased multicultural and international awareness, and sense of European identity.
	10. (Possibility of) increased exposure to other languages, relative to their economic value (ie better business opportunities).
Technologists' perspective	11. New markets, new research questions and new creative opportunities.

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The most likely benefits to trigger real development of virtual ideas are those that relate directly to the market: for the increasingly competitive lifelong learning market, for institutional decision makers who seek new streams of intake and income (Collis, 1998a). As another observation, those who use the term *virtual* are not so often those who actually are carrying out the *virtual* activities, but instead politicians or marketers or social prophets who fuel the mass media with images of the changing world. While social prophets may not be of direct impact to traditional higher education, the fact that they often articulate the public mood is. The *more-flexible, more-international, more-virtual university* is a metaphor whose time has come.

New initiatives within the institution

Individual universities are also engaged in many other forms of new initiatives relating to flexible learning. Many traditional universities are paralleling traditional distance-education universities in making courses available to students at a distance (Collis, 1999f). Even if this does not occur, WWW environments are becoming the portal through which course registration occurs, course materials are obtained, course interactions and communication occur, and course examinations or final projects are managed. There are many different types of approaches within the traditional institution:

- An individual department can offer a *special course or programme* to a non-typical cohort of learners, such as professionals from a certain company. These are on a contract basis, and usually have no overlap with the regular programme.
- An individual faculty can offer a *variant of a department's Masters' programme* via a distance model. In contrast to traditional distance-teaching institutions, in a traditional campus-based institution this usually means that the instructors involved are expected to handle both a face-to-face cohort and a distance cohort, usually without extra support or training (see Chapter 5).
- An institution can be systematically organized for *dual-mode delivery*. Dual mode generally involves two separate but equal versions of a course, such as an on-campus and distance version. It is an extension of the above *variant approach* in that there is usually institutional support in place for the distance students.
- An institution can maintain a service for *continuing education* or *professional development*. Typically such a unit is outside the faculties, negotiating with them for the availability of certain courses and instructors for particular courses to be brokered by the unit.

The variation that is occurring with these sorts of courses is increased flexibility in terms of time and place. Learners in these different variations increasingly have the possibilities of taking some variations of courses via the WWW or on the Internet. Most often, courses offered via use of a WWW environment and not

having any face-to-face contact sessions are not yet a common feature of the entire institution, but are more frequently on a small-scale or experimental basis. There still seems to be a general belief in many cases that in the regular programme learners expect face-to-face time with the instructor and will somehow feel cheated with less of this.

Another way that the individual university is responding is in not necessarily offering courses at a distance, but in making the course-participation process more flexible in other ways. The University of Twente is the site of many examples of on-campus use of network technology to diversify instruction (see Chapters 7 and 8). Many other institutions now are developing such ideas, hoping to draw students to the home campus and programme. *The Pew Learning and Technology Program Newsletter* (http://www.center.rpi.edu/PewHome.html) reports monthly on examples of 'redesigned learning environments' using technology for more-flexible learning within traditional institutions.

In summary, there are many models via which an individual higher-education institution is experimenting with more-flexible delivery. But perhaps more than 'doing it alone', institutions are looking into new collaborations.

New collaborations

While individual universities are investing heavily in technology, the trend toward more-flexible learning is frequently being carried out via the university joining in a partnership with other universities or other partners. A major development is the emergence of new groupings of institutions, coming together apparently to find a more potent way of market penetration than if they continued to operate only on their own. These can be seen in different forms: international education consortia that may or may not involve commercialization, corporate universities where a major player is a multinational company, university networks of various sorts and start-up ventures with technology companies (Brockhaus, Emrich and Mei-Pochtler, 2000; Cunningham *et al*, 2000). Partnerships can also take place between a group of universities and new partners such as telecommunications vendors, software companies and the media industry, or companies whose primary business is not education, but which control facilities and resources (Latchem, 1998). Such new partners often serve as *brokers*, in collaboration with organizations that can deliver content, such as universities.

The main trends that compel universities to seek collaboration in the area of technology and flexible learning are twofold. 'First, the huge investments and complex multi-sided expertise that are necessary to develop and implement comprehensive ICT strategies require sharing of costs and joining of forces. The second reason is related to ICT itself: the use of these new technologies is resulting in more and global competition among universities' (Van der Wende and Beerkens, 1999).

There are a number of models that can be identified in which the traditional university may be included as a partner (or excluded):

- new alliances with other educational institutions such as *university networks or consortia and international educational consortia* (and variations of these with non-university partners);
- *corporate universities* (companies now offering on-site training programmes for their employees are moving to online variations);
- partnerships between private *online enablers* (Anderson and Downes, 2000) and public institutions;
- *virtual universities* that operate entirely online, are not extensions of an existing university and may offer an entirely Internet-based degree.

From several of these a model is emerging in which actual courses are chosen from expert instructors around the world, with the local institution providing the personalized support, social and technical infrastructure, and application settings.

Other partnerships are taking place among universities themselves, without broker services or non-traditional partners. These can include partnerships where smaller universities identify courses offered by some that are not available at the others, and then arrange for students to participate, via the Internet, in courses that are not available at the home institution. Other times a partnership occurs among several universities that have some pragmatic connection with one another. Or the partners may share a common professional base, such as the arrangement whereby MBA students at three US universities will be able to take classes at one another's institutions using technologies such as chat and video-conferencing as well as the WWW. At a less-integrated level, there are examples of universities teaming up around a common portal site. Yet another model is the formation, usually at the governmental level, of a new entity, which integrates in some way the course offerings of some number of institutions in its jurisdiction, and often offers some extra added services.

Thus, there is a great deal going on with regard to flexible learning and technology in higher education. We indicated that social trends such as virtualization, lifelong learning, customization and internationalization are stimulating these changes. But how does this stimulation process work in practice in terms of the influences on policy in an organization? We move from the descriptive overview to an analysis of factors underlying this description. What factors influence change towards flexible learning in higher education?

Factors influencing change in higher education

Change occurs in an educational institution in a number of ways. Sometimes change is a bottom-up affair, where a few individuals or events stimulate a multi-plier effect. Change can also occur in a top-down manner, where a decision or policy is announced or phased in from those above and outside those who will have to implement it. Those involved with top-down decisions may be department heads or institutional administrators or government policy makers.

In the case of a change towards new technologies and more-flexible learning, an institution can typically be categorized in one of three phases with respect to the bottom-up/top-down nature of change. The use of technology in higher education can take place at the level of the individual instructor – the *pioneer*, it can be supported by decisions that convince and help instructors to use technology – *encouraged use*, or by decisions that require all instructors to make use of technology – *systemic use* (Collis and Van der Wende, 1999). The first case, where the initiative is limited to the individual instructor and no decisions are taken at the unit, faculty or institutional level, is that of *no policy*, whereas the second and third reflect some levels of policy development and top-down stimulation. The third, systemic use requires policy and top-down involvement. In this section we look at factors influencing change, including one particular factor – the sense of inevitability.

Why change?

There have been many analyses of why institutions feel the need to incorporate more technology into instructional practice, at either the encouraged-use or systemic-use level. Fisser (2000), from a literature review as well as a review of reports from 35 institutions already having policy with regard to technology use for flexible learning, identified 38 factors that are stimulating the use of technology for flexible learning in higher education. She grouped these factors into seven categories as shown in Table 2.2. The number of times each factor was mentioned in the 35 institutional reports is also shown.

Fisser's was not a full-scale study in the sense that the institutions were not each asked specifically about the influence of the 38 factors. Only a secondary analysis of the text of internal reports and conference papers was used, and thus authors may not have intended to be exhaustive in their comments. However, the results that were obtained are still interesting. The factors mentioned most often related to the need for more flexibility as a stimulus for technology use (n=24); for technology as a medium for new teaching models and for new conceptions of learning (n=29 and n=23); and for technology just because it is there (emerging technology, n=20; new technology, push/hype, n=30; available technology, n=27; and available technology-support facilities, n=26). Many of these suggest a technology orientation. In her further analysis, Fisser found a nearly even split between economic reasons (ie getting more students or new sources of funding) and reasons relating to social concerns (ie reaching the disadvantaged, offering re-entry possibilities, supporting lifelong learning) as motivating top-down policy for increased technology use.

You can't not do it

These results have a close similarity to our own experiences from interviews with decision makers at a number of universities in 13 countries during 1998, 1999

Table 2.2 *Factors stimulating change involving technology in higher education, and number of institutions (n=35) reporting the factors*

Grouping of Factors	Factors from the Literature	Number of Institutions Surveyed (n=35) Reporting the Factor to be Important
Environmental pressures	New market	11
	Business education	1
	Part-time students	7
	Lifelong learning	14
	On-demand training	2
	Funding	15
	Partnerships	13
	Tailor-made products	2
	Dynamic environment	0
	Competition	7
	Response to threats and opportunities	2
	Flexibility	24
	Knowledge management	0
	Changing student demographics	15
	Fiscal constraints	0
	Demands from employers	5
	Demands from learners	11
Technology developments	Emerging technology	11
	Dependence on IT	2
	New technology (push, hype)	30
Institutional conditions	New organization structure	7
	Broad participation	13
	Shared vision	4
	Concrete plans	12
	Improved access to education	10
	Leadership	10
Educational developments	New conceptions of learning	23
	New teaching models	29
	Focus on learner/learning	19
	Individual differences	3
	Active learning	11
Cost reduction/ cost-effectiveness	Reducing costs	10
	Cost-effectiveness	11
	Benefits	2
Support facilities	Administrative support	9
	Technical support	18
	Availability of technology	27
	Availability of facilities	26

and 2000 (Collis, 1999d, in press a; Moonen, 2000d). In each case we asked the policy makers why their institutions were considering policy or had already made policy about network technologies (the WWW and Internet). While Fisser found a nearly even split between economic reasons and reasons relating to social concerns (ie reaching the disadvantaged, offering re-entry possibilities, supporting lifelong learning) in her analysis, we came to the conclusion that the social concerns in turn relate to economic incentives: more students, more subsidies, more funds. We also analysed many different strategic plans involving technology for traditional universities and found they all included statements about offering high-quality education (as has always been the case) as well as about the importance of information and communication technology in the learning process. However, few operationalized their goals beyond general statements such as 'attention to individual students' or 'preparing the students for the future'. Operationalizations are typically left to internal committees and working groups. Our first lesson learnt, 'Be specific' (see Chapter 1), is not usually being followed.

Despite the source of information, however, we found a common theme emerging, either explicitly or implicitly, a theme related to a sense of inevitability. We call this the 'you can't not do it' persuasion.

The most consistent response in the interviews that we conducted was that the decision makers felt that 'you can't not do it'. There was a shared sense of inevitability, of urgency: if a university does not keep up, does not strive for new cohorts or to maintain existing cohorts, then it will face even more substantial difficulties than it is now encountering. Network technologies, particularly use of the WWW, are seen as necessary strategic tools in this task of keeping up, and of maintaining or gaining new students or new sources of funding. In terms of their stated aims for policy relating to the use of the WWW, university leaders, of course, do not make statements as direct as 'you can't not do it'. However, the sense of this inevitability came out of every interview.

There was also considerable interest at the decision-making level for the cost-effectiveness aspects and the effects of technology-mediated learning, but neither a specific nor even a general calculation of cost–effectiveness seems to be contributing to decision making. Again, the main argument is 'you can't not do it': everyone else is doing it, and if you don't want to lose students, then you have to do it, too. Economic reasons are agreed to be important, but estimated based on intuition (Moonen, 2000d; see also Chapter 6).

There is also another aspect of 'you can't not do it'. Universities are sensitive to their public images; having an image of making use of technology adds to their modern cachet. In contrast, not making use of the Internet and the WWW suggests not keeping up with the times, not being a leader in the information society. Such image aspects are nebulous but important, not only in the competition for students but also in the positioning of a university in its own circles, regionally and nationally.

These observations lead to our third lesson, a lesson relating to the power of the idea whose time has come:

Lesson 3: *You can't not do it.* The idea whose time has come is irresistible.

This is a lesson, as well as a current trend, in that we have experienced this irresistibility before.

Déjà vu and the pendulum effect

We perceive the 'you can't not do it' feeling as an iteration of a similar wave of 'you can't not do it' rationales occurring in the early 1980s with respect to computers in education. Beginning in the early 1980s, countries and regions around the world began to pursue various initiatives to stimulate and support the use of computers in their educational systems. These initiatives took many different forms in different countries, some focusing on strategic support for hardware- and software-related programmes, some on strategies more directly focused on curricular and instructional aspects of computers, some (fewer) on strategies for the school manager and others (many) on different approaches to teacher education and support. Different general patterns of motivations were identified, such as preparing students for future careers or strengthening the human-capital base in society (Hawkridge, 1991). Typically these motivations were stated in vague and non-measurable terms (see Lesson 1) but none the less fuelled large expenditures and high expectations.

The wave of social and technological developments that stimulated interest in computers in schools in the late 1970s and early 1980s appears now to be paralleled by a similar surge of interest in educational aspects of information and communication technologies in higher education. Throughout the world, the use of wide-area network capabilities for communication and access to new forms of information engagement is stimulating a wave of initiatives with respect to technologies related to the Internet such as e-mail and the WWW. This wave can be seen as an iteration of the 'computers in education' wave of 10 to 15 years earlier. What is most significant in this comparison is that the sense of inevitability, of 'you can't not do it', that appeared in the early 1980s is appearing again. Table 2.3 shows this comparison.

Knowing that this is the current climate can help the decision maker: he or she must respond, and responding at the present time means supporting technology for some aspect of more-flexible learning. The *why* is therefore not so important as the *how*. 'How' involves implementation, the focus of the next chapter. But a pendulum effect can also be expected. If there are only vaguely stated goals and a sense of irresistibility with regard to the motivation of decisions, then the experiences of 20 years of efforts relating to computers in education are likely to reap-

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Table 2.3 *Push factors related to technology in education (updated from Collis, 1996c)*

Push Factors	Computers in Education, 1980	The Internet and Education, 2000
Technological breakthrough	The microcomputer.	Public access to the Internet and WWW.
Social response	We must have a computer, in our homes, in our schools.	We must be able to get on the Internet, in our homes, in our schools.
Social vision	Personal computers will revolutionize society and will create powerful new opportunities for those who can handle them.	The information highway will revolutionize society and will create powerful new opportunities for those who can handle it.
Commercial push	A vast new market for goods and services.	A vast new market for goods and services.
Social expectation	Schools must not be left behind; all students must make use of computers.	Universities must not be left behind; all students must make use of the Internet.
Vagueness	Metaphors and predictions are strong; results are anecdotal.	Metaphors and predictions are strong; results are anecdotal.
Pioneers show the promise	Both in theory and practice, there are impressive ideas and examples of how the computer can enrich and re-engineer education.	Both in theory and practice, there are impressive ideas and examples of how the WWW and other network environments can enrich and re-engineer education.
Educational decision makers must and do respond	Every school must get computers; funding must be found; new initiatives are needed; policy and strategy are needed.	Every course must make use of the WWW; funding must be found; new initiatives are needed; policy and strategy are needed.
The overall movement is unstoppable	Computers are pervasive throughout society; you can't not do it.	Interconnectivity via the Internet is pervasive throughout society; you can't not do it.
The rich will get richer	An incentive, and a fear.	An incentive, and a fear.

pear with the WWW in education. Those (often disappointing) experiences will be discussed in Chapter 3 as well as Chapter 4.

While Table 2.3 supports the impression that the current feelings of inevitability about network and Internet use are similar to those of two decades ago with respect to computers in education, we note one major difference. This new aspect is convergence. There is a convergence of technologies but also of pedagogies and institutional approaches (we discuss this later in this chapter) that suggests a more comprehensive response now than was the case with stand-alone educational software in the 1980s.

Convergence

Thus, there are pressures on the institution to expand its technology services and also pressures on it to experiment with new variants of courses and course-delivery methods. While there are many models and variations, and much hype, relating to the new role of the university, one trend is indisputable. This is the trend towards *convergence*. The traditional differences between distance-teaching universities and traditional universities are fading. There is a rapid, recent and substantial change in numbers of traditional campus-based universities providing distance education. In Canada, for instance, this resulted in an increase of 50 per cent in eight years. The proportion of universities offering distance education in some other countries are: France – 40 per cent; Sweden – almost all; USA – almost all; and for the UK – around 75 per cent (Daniel, 1996). In Australia, at least 23 (out of 39) universities are offering distance education (European Association of Distance Teaching Universities, 1998).

The division between traditional universities and universities organized around distance and open delivery is itself fading, not only because more and more traditional universities are offering courses to distance students. The concept of *distance* is rapidly losing meaningfulness (Collis, 1999f). Given the fact that many distance-teaching universities require their students to come occasionally to face-to-face sessions (perhaps with a local tutor or at a study centre) and are continually augmenting their own educational delivery to add more communication and interaction possibilities, the actual difference between their offerings and those of traditional universities seems to be getting less and less. The strengths of traditional distance-education institutions have been their carefully developed study materials and the flexibility they offer in terms of at least some aspects of time and place of participation. These strengths are now being picked up by traditional universities. This is widely understood in Australia, where student statistics no longer include the term 'distance education', but mode of study is classified as full time and part time. Karmel, of the Australian Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, in noting the trends in universities says: 'The way in which a student studies will be a matter of personal preference and will not depend to any important extent on where the student lives, which institution the student attends or whether the student is on campus, off campus, full-time or part-time. Distance education is becoming an anachronism' (1998: 617).

Given this convergence with relation to distance and other flexibility aspects, we believe there is one fundamental difference between the traditional distance-teaching universities in Europe and the traditional universities, which is less likely to change. This is the distinction that relates to the role of the instructor in a course. In the traditional university, the instructor is typically the author, developer, manager, teacher, administrator and evaluator of his or her courses. While this can and does have its weaknesses, it also has some important strengths. These strengths are often intangible: the opportunity for university students gradually to become 'initiated into the profession' of being an academic, of being formed as

an intellectual (see Lesson 2, with respect to contribution as well as acquisition). This is a modelling process that overlaps but extends further than the experience of being in a course. The opportunity to have an *intellectual apprenticeship* with an experienced senior academic, the same person whose external scientific and professional work and research should be permeating his or her course-handling approaches, the same person who is expert enough to have written the course, is an important benefit of the traditional university. It has roots as far back as the master–apprentice relationships of the Middle Ages. (Perhaps 'mentor' and 'junior researcher' are more acceptable words in current times; see Chapter 5.)

Being part of an academic community is more than having e-mail discussions with fellow students and a tutor; it is the chance to learn the norms and absorb the energy and professional style of those who have leadership roles in the broader scientific world. Through the personal involvement of the experienced faculty member in his or her course, the pre-structured subject matter can be related to the new developments in the field and in the instructor's own research, something more difficult to do in mass-produced study materials. While clearly not every course in the traditional university brings such serendipitous benefits to its students, enough do, so that the experience of scaffolded development as a member of a professional community occurs over time for many students. It is important that this strength of the traditional university is not weakened in the attempt to become more flexible (Collis, 1999f). While there is a sense of 'you can't not do it' at the present, there can also be a pendulum shift towards the 'basics' and away from virtualism – unless an institution grounds its vision about technology and flexible learning in pedagogy and sound implementation strategies.

Summing up

In this chapter we have surveyed some of the current developments in traditional higher-education institutions and related these not only to social trends but also to a sense of inevitability about technology and flexible learning. Thus the lesson for this chapter was:

Lesson 3: *You can't not do it.* The idea whose time has come is irresistible.

But we also saw the risk of a pendulum swing unless changes relating to technology and flexible learning stabilize in the institution. In Chapter 9 we return to this institutional-change perspective, looking at scenarios for the future. In the following chapter we continue in the current time: once an institution decides it 'can't not do it' and chooses a flexible approach, how does it proceed? Will those on the workfloor – instructors, students, support persons – be able and willing to translate the vision into practice? This is an implementation problem.