

## **Reinventing Ourselves: Thinking About Staying Relevant in Today's Dynamic Higher Education Arena**

### **Abstract**

As the business world continues its constant and persistent evolution, staying relevant becomes much harder. This session seeks to explore the nature and meaning of relevance and examine the issue of relevance within several of the roles educators may find themselves. The engaging round table discussions will focus on 5 key changes areas (i.e., the general business environment, technology [i.e., online learning technologies, etc.], society [cultural references, etc., as we age], academic disciplines, and higher education) where faculty members may struggle to stay relevant as they progress in their academic careers.

### **Three Keywords**

Relevance; Career Relevance; Career Change Strategies

### **Introduction**

As educators and administrators, we often cite an individual and collective need to maintain relevancy within our given discipline. Curiously, little has been published in this area of individual relevance with the primary emphasis of relevance in academic life being on the connection of curricula contributing to employability and related outcomes of students graduating from academic programs ranging from business, to law and nursing, and other professional-degree programs.

Intuitively, we believe that there exists an unexpressed understanding of what it means to be or remain relevant. For the purpose of discussion, The New Oxford American Dictionary (2005) states that something that is relevant is “closely related to the matter at hand” (p. 1430). While this definition provides a baseline for discussion, it also introduces and illustrates the fluidity of the term relevance. The definition specifically notes that relevance occurs in cases

where a close relation, not an exact relation exists, and relevance is dependent on the particular matter at hand or within a specific place and moment in time. The achievement or maintenance of relevancy thus raises some issues for academics. In particular, it can be argued that professional relevancy may be dependent upon things such as stage of career, nature of employment (e.g., tenure-track position versus non-tenure-track position), geographic location, the role one fills within a specific moment in time (e.g., instructor versus administrator or mentor versus instructor), and the needs, capacity and capabilities of one's employer.

### **Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

As the business world continues its constant and persistent evolution, staying relevant becomes much harder. New technologies and management approaches emerge. Economies experience growth, stagnation, and decline. Customer preferences changes. Politics and political rhetoric evolve and devolve. Social norms, values and expectations shift. As a result, businesses of all shapes and sizes are disrupted. So as an "experienced" employee, what should you be doing to make sure that you can stay relevant?

This session seeks to explore the nature and meaning of relevance and examine the issue of relevance within several of the roles educators may find themselves. We see five key areas where faculty members may struggle to stay relevant as they progress in their academic careers:

- Relevance to changes in the General Business Environment
- Relevance to changes in Technology (Online learning technologies, etc.)
- Relevance to changes in Society (Cultural references, etc. as we age)
- Relevance to changes in our Academic Disciplines
- Relevance to changes in Higher Education

To facilitate this discussion, a group of facilitators will explore the transitory nature of relevance in various stages of their careers to date. Added to this will be discourse that will occur via round table discussion as session facilitators and participants explore the meanings and challenges in maintaining relevance in higher education. One of the anticipated outcomes of this session is that participants will become more aware of the challenges and issues related to the persistent call for educators and programs to stay relevant. A second anticipated outcome is that the session will enable a sharing of ideas regarding the strategies that may be employed to maintain one's relevance regardless of academic station.

### **Session Description**

The following is a summary of the proposed session:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Time</b>
Introduction of Facilitators and Session	5 Minutes
Roundtables discussing each area of relevance - We anticipate doing 2 rounds of approximately 15 - 20 minutes each	35 minutes
Debrief of tables and idea exchange	15 minutes
Wrap Up & Closing	5 minutes
<b>Total Time</b>	<b>60 Minutes</b>

## ***Introduction***

- “Relevant” Definition and Overview of Facilitator and their Quest for Relevance

## ***Relevance Round Table Discussions***

- Tables with each facilitator to discuss following issues about being relevant in each of the major areas:
  - Describe how this area has changed since you began your career.
  - Describe how you have had to change in maintain relevancy in this area.
  - What have you done to stay relevant in this area or think we should do?

## ***Conclusion***

- Key Learnings
- Key Action Steps

## **References**

The Oxford American Dictionary, 2005. Oxford University Press, New York, NY.