The Changing World of the Institutional Researcher

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Structure of Discussion

• What is Institutional Research?
  – Definitions, history and professional context
• Directorate of Institutional Research: Who are we and what is our mandate? Where do we fit into the broader Unisa organogram?
• Institutional Research initiatives and activities
• Defining our role within Unisa
• The *Institutional* researcher vs Reflexive Research vs Business Intelligence
• Impact of Institutional Research
Structure of Discussion

• Changing world of the Institutional Researcher

• Relationship with the library
  – Resources we require in order to do our work
  – DISA Resource Centre
  – Library repository
    • Dissemination of research work/reports: confidentiality and ethics
  – Conclusion
  – Reflections
What is Institutional Research?

Quantitative and Qualitative Research and Analysis undertaken on behalf of the institution, aimed at assisting the institution to plan better, manage more effectively and make more informed decisions.
What is Institutional Research?

- History of IR spans over 40 years in the US
- Association of Institutional Research (AIR) established in 1966 in Michigan
- Definition of IR has evolved over the years
What is Institutional Research?

- **1962**: early articulated view: “a series of long-term theoretically-based studies of institutional functioning and educational outcomes” (Nevitt Sanford)

- **1981**: “institutional research has to do with what decision makers need to know about an institution, its educational objectives, goals and purposes, environmental factors, processes, and structures to more wisely use its resources, more successfully attain its objectives and goals, and to demonstrate integrity and accountability in so doing” (Dressel)
Peterson (1985) concluded that both the definitions and activities of IR are to some extent **dynamic** over time. Nature and role of IR continues to **evolve** as a consequence of state policy decisions, the changing student base, the growing internationalisation of HE, the shifting budgetary climate, **advances in ICT**, the increasing complexity and sophistication of decision-making and the increase in calls for institutional effectiveness.
Institutional Research viewed as:

“organisational intelligence”, as a “professional, technical speciality with strong resources and capabilities for policy-related research in institutions of higher education”

What is Institutional Research?

Objective and Systematic Research and Analyses

To make the institution more intelligible to itself

In order for planners and decision-makers to execute strategy and optimise institutional performance
What is Institutional Research?

- Simple model highlighting the sequential processes which define IR (Terrenzini, 1991)

  **Step 1**
  - Data Gathering

  **Step 2**
  - Transforming data into Information through analysis

  **Step 3**
  - Interpretation, insights, sense, meaning, context = intelligence
What is Institutional Research?

- Another illustration of IR processes
Professional Context of IR

Local

- SAAIR: 1994; affiliated to AIR

International

- AIR; AAIR, HEIR, EAIR and others
Introducing DIR

• DIR: established within DISA in October 2009.

• Mandated to conceptualise, manage, coordinate and report on an array of IR activities & initiatives.

• Proactive and Responsive role
  
  ◆ *Proactive = DIR identifies and undertakes institutional research of strategic importance*
  
  ◆ *Responsive = DIR is commissioned by Management or other decision-making structures to undertake research.*
Introducing DIR

VP: Strategy, Planning & Partnerships

DISA

DSPQA

International Relations

DIR
Introducing DIR

- DISA
- IR
- Strategy and OD
- IA
Introducing DIR

Purpose of IR at Unisa

SAAIR website:

“IR typically refers to a cluster of activities that supports decision-making, policy analysis, quality assurance, effective management, projections and planning in higher education”

AAIR website:

“a range of activities involving the collection, analysis and interpretation of information descriptive of an institution and its activities.......the findings can assist institutional leaders through informing their planning and decision-making”
IR Activities and Functions at Unisa

- Cyclical Reports
- Surveys
- Environ. scanning
- Higher Education Profiling
- Strategic Discussion Forum
- Ad-hoc research

Coordination of IR
Coordination & Management of Resource Centre
Building and Developing Capacity
Professional Citizenship & Networking
• Establishment of DIR does not imply:

   A lack of institutional research at Unisa. IR at Unisa has a solid reputation and well-established trajectory (DISA, BMR)

   That DIR has controlling oversight over all IR activities or initiatives;

   That all IR activities and initiatives are directed to DIR; or

   That the creative, spontaneous and innovative conceptualisation and roll out of IR by other departments will be undermined.
Establishment of DIR does signify that:

**Institutional research as a key function within Unisa needs to be driven and coordinated centrally within a dedicated directorate.**
IR and Reflexive Research

- Not easy to clearly distinguish between the two
- Reflexive research provides academics with an opportunity to spontaneously reflect on their interactions with students and T&L issues, usually within a discipline-specific context
- Any research about the institution and its activities can be regarded as "institutional"
- Both could share similar purposes, i.e. to guide management, planning and decision-making
IR and Reflexive Research

- Some ventured differences
  - IR concerned with institution-wide research; reflexive research usually occurs within a discipline-specific context.
  - IR concerned with institution-wide trends and patterns; reflexive research is usually focused on flagging experiences and trends within a specific discipline.
  - All IR outfits across the globe are specifically mandated to conduct research and analysis to guide institution-wide planning, decision-making & management.
IR and BI: Similar or Different?

Business Intelligence defined as:

“the integration of core information and relevant contextual information to detect significant events and illuminate cloudy issues for management decision-makers” (Scott & Hill, 2004)

In this sense, similar to IR!

• Both tasked with turning data into intelligence, by adding context, meaning and interpretation.

• “Light bulb moments” “Ah ha moments”
IR and BI: Similar or Different?

**Defining characteristic of IR:**

- Distinctiveness lies in its unique research function and capacity
  - Qualitative Research (e.g. Focus Groups, Face-to-Face interviews) and analysis
  - Quantitative Research (e.g. Surveys) and analysis
  - Evaluation Research (e.g. Programme evaluation)
  - Will use BI tools to support research and analysis
Impact of IR

Question of IR impact – So What?

Why waste time, energy and resources on research and analysis, if it has no impact on institutional policy or practice?

Learning organisation = evidence-based improvement
Impact of IR

Gap between research and policy/practice [Teichler & Sadlak; Denyssen & Breier, 2003; Subotzky, 2005]

How do we maximise the impact of IR?

- Presenting the findings at various decision-making forums – widely communicating the results
- Highlighting the consequences and implications of the findings for Unisa
- In flagging areas for improvement, signaling what is actionable
Impact of IR

While IR will illuminate areas for improvement through research and analysis and communicate findings effectively, the institution has to effect the necessary changes in policy or practice in a spirit of organisational learning and improvement.
The globalisation phenomenon has resulted in a world driven by ICT

- Telephones, Computers, Internet, Cell phones, Video-conferencing, Skype, Social Networking Sites (Facebook, Twitter, My Space, etc)

Impact of ICT has been most visible and significant in the developed world

Has reached developing countries – developing economies such as India, China, Brazil, South Africa

- Availability and use is uneven
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- How does this affect *Institutional* Researchers doing research within their Higher Education Context?

- Teaching and Learning practice is changing

- Lecturers are embracing ICTs in imparting knowledge and engaging with students
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- **Student:** “21st Century Student” or the “Non-traditional students”
  - ICT savvy
  - Prefers more flexible modes of teaching and learning
  - Resonates strongly with the ODL model
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- Researchers and *Institutional* Researchers must change the way they do research to cater for the 21st century student.
- Particularly so within an ODL context.
- Infuse ICTs into research practice.
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- How?
  - *Electronic/Online Surveys (LimeSurvey, Survey Monkey)*
  - *Sending links to online surveys using e-mail and sms shots*
  - *MyUnisa: available tool but underutilised*
  - *Using Blogs to stimulate discussion among staff/students*
  - *Social Networking sites (Quality? Confidentiality?)*
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LimeSurvey
Welcome: Dear Student,

You have been identified as being enrolled for a course for which a multi-lingual glossary has been provided. Unisa is committed to providing the best possible support to all students to ensure their success and satisfaction with all the University’s services. In particular, we aim at providing effective support for students whose home language is not the language of instruction (English or Afrikaans). One initiative in this regard is to provide such students with a multi-lingual glossary for particular courses. This is a list of translations of key terms and concepts in English, Afrikaans and some African languages. The purpose is to help students whose home language is not the language of instruction to understand these key terms and concepts better in order to increase their chances of passing.

We are keen to assess the usefulness of these multi-lingual glossaries and value your input. We therefore ask you to answer a few questions in this regard and will appreciate your honest responses. The results of this short survey will be used to inform decisions about the provision of multi-lingual glossaries. If you have not been exposed to or used multi-lingual glossaries in any of your courses at Unisa, please do not complete this survey. This survey should not take longer than 10 minutes of your time. Please note that the information provided will be held in strict confidence and will only be used to enhance Unisa’s support for students.

Thank you. Department of Information and Strategic Analysis (DISA)

Contact: Ms Yuraisha Chetty, Director: Institutional Research, 012-4292032

Administrator: Yuraisha Chetty (chett y@unisa.ac.za)

Fax To: 

Expiry Date: 

Template: default

Base Language: English - English

Additional Languages:

Exit Link:

Number of questions/groups: 19/1

Survey currently active: No

Hints: This survey is anonymous. It is presented question by question. IP Addresses will be logged. Participants can save partially finished surveys. No email notification.

Regenerate Question Codes: [Straight] [By Group]
Survey: Multi-lingual Glossaries Survey (ID:12011)

Group: DISA (ID:653)

Question: Have you been exposed to or used multi-lingual glossaries in any of your courses at Unisa? (ID:5902)

Code: 01 (Mandatory Question)

Other questions having conditions:
- QID: 5912
- QID: 5909
- QID: 5899
- QID: 5897
- QID: 5895
- QID: 5893
- QID: 5891
- QID: 5890
- QID: 5894
- QID: 5892
- QID: 5903
- QID: 5900
- QID: 5901
- QID: 5906
- QID: 5905
- QID: 5904
- QID: 5911

Help:
Type: List (Radio)
Mandatory: Yes
*Have you been exposed to or used multi-lingual glossaries in any of your courses at Unisa?

Choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No
*Please indicate your Home Language (first language or mother tongue)

Choose only one of the following

- English
- Afrikaans
- IsiNdebele
- IsiXhosa
- IsiZulu
- Sepedi
- Sesotho
- Setswana
- SiSwati
- Tsilwane
We must cater for students who do not have access to ICTs (either due to cost or residing in a location which does not have connectivity).

Access, but also know-how (skills and knowledge to use ICTs).

Increases representativeness of the respondent pool:
- Paper based surveys
- Manual capturing of data
How do we conduct all of this research effectively?

- All researchers require good information resources (books, journals, newspapers, etc)
- Either hard copy or electronic
- The “traditional library” still holds appeal for many (students/lecturers/researchers paging through books, journals, taking notes, etc), however, developments in ICT have started to change the face and feel of the library
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- Modern society is far more fast-paced and demanding, often without the luxury of much time to spare.

- Researchers (*and from our experience as IRs*) find e-library resources useful:
  - Quick, easy access to reliable information
  - Very often at one’s own desk
  - Convenient (*also for students learning an ODL environment*)
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- Important that our work is *disseminated* once management has engaged with it

- Library repository becomes useful for this purpose

- **But**

  - Issues of confidentiality, particularly with regard to sensitive reports

  - In these instances, it might not be possible to make some reports public
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- DIR has established a good relationship with the Unisa library
- Small **Resource Centre** – information resource to DISA staff members
- Does not duplicate or replace the function of the library
- Caters for **specific information needs** relating to the functional areas within DISA (IR, BI, IA)
- Steering Committee – library representatives
- Recently identified and suggested acquisitions for 2010 (some for DISA, some for the library)
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**Conclusion**

- Proud that we have a State-of-the-Art library

- Whatever its shape and form in 2020 and beyond, virtual or not, we as researchers will value information that is:

  - current/topical, historical/past, relevant, of a high quality,

  and easily accessible
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Reflections:

- Too much Technology? Proliferation?
- Do we need to be more circumspect about the use of technology in teaching and learning or research or information provision?
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Reflections:

- Advantages and Disadvantages – shades of grey
- Arguably, there is still a value in traditional methods of teaching and learning, research and information provision
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- **Nicholas Carr: The Chronicle of Higher Education (4 July 2010)**
  - Author of: “IT doesn’t matter”; “Is Google making us stupid?”
  - Contrarian approach to technology

**Question posed to him:**

**Q.** Most people would praise the Internet's power to open access to information for researchers, but you suggest a downside.
“We know that as human beings we love new information. That's pretty well proven by psychological research. If given the opportunity to find something new, we'll usually go in that direction, whether that information is trivial or important. And what the Net does is give us huge opportunities to get new information. We can see that in our habits when we're on Facebook or social networking or just on the Web in general. But that same instinct can bleed over even when we're doing formal academic research. Because there's so much information at our fingertips, we can get stuck just constantly uncovering new relevant information and never stopping and actually reading and thinking deeply about any one piece of information”.
"The other is the study by James Evans that was in Science magazine a couple of years ago. He looked at what happens when academic journals publish their archives online. The assumption is this will be a great boon to research because suddenly all these articles that used to be difficult to find, suddenly we can just search them. And what he discovered is, in fact, the effect was kind of the opposite of what we expected, in that actually the number of articles cited goes down when these journals go online. And also people tend to cite more-recent articles and not go back in time to older ones. His hypothesis is that we become so dependent on search, and the results from searches are determined by popularity of one sort or another. And the risk of using search for online research is that everybody gets led in the same directions to a smaller number of citations which, as they become ever more popular, become the destination for more and more searches. And ... he suggested that simply the act of flipping through paper copies of journals actually may expose researchers to a wider array of evidence".
Thank you

Questions?