

# Experience. Expertise. Empathy

## Innovation in professional services

**Martin Stewart-Weeks** | Public Purpose

Western Sydney University Professional Staff Conference

**INNOVATION: UNLIMITED.**  
Friday 30 June, Rosehill Gardens.

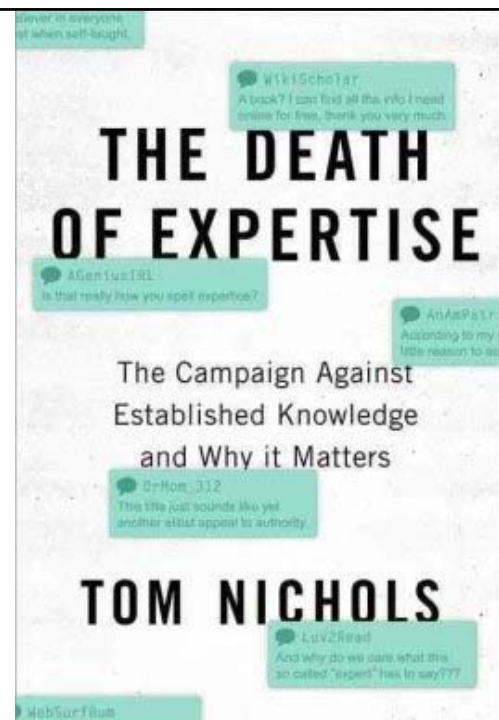


### The story

- The rules of professional services, either as an industry in its own right or as a function within larger organisations, are being rewritten.
- The faster the world changes and the more volatile the operating environment, the more rapid has to be the process of **steady, purposeful and rapid** innovation in all aspects of professional services.
- Professional services, with an emphasis on process and protocol, are sometimes seen as part of the problem.
- In truth, by harnessing a combination of **experience, expertise and empathy**, they are an inescapable and necessary part of the solution.

“In any discussion, you have a positive obligation to learn at least enough to make the conversation possible. The University of Google doesn’t count. Remember: having a strong opinion about something isn’t the same as knowing something”

<http://thefederalist.com/2014/01/17/the-death-of-expertise/>  
Tom Nichols (2014)



<http://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace-relations/what-can-you-do-when-your-employer-is-a-idiot-20170619-gwuhut>

We all have one of these stories...



“After 40 minutes, it was all done. It took twice as long as it should have, with twice as much human intervention as well as duplication and double handling compared to just going to the counter. I don’t blame the staff, they didn’t invent the nutty system, but they are the ones that have to make it work and to explain it to the great unwashed.”

## What is happening in the world?

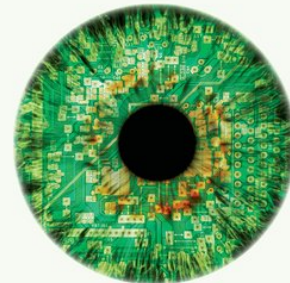
- The pace and intensity of change are changing
- In so many different domains, **trust, empathy and fulfillment** (“say what you mean and mean what you say”) are becoming the watchwords for innovation and reform
- If it is true that institutions (like universities) are basically “sustained conversations” with their stakeholders and themselves, those conversations are not going all that well
- **Distrust, disaffection and distance** seem all too often to characterise the relationship between institutions and customers and citizens
- Digital is just beginning to wreak its true disruption just when “digital disruption” threatens to become as stale cliché

## What is happening in organisations?

- Coping with change (speed, complexity, transparency)
- Navigating the contest between organisational culture, structure and values and **the changing world of work** (where does value live in a world of increasing commodification, automation and fragmentation?)
- Exploring the ancient territory of **trust and credibility** as the bedrock of effective leadership and organisational performance
- Rediscovering the difficult, but necessary balance between **“centre” and “edge”** (mediating autonomy and control, with so many “pieces”, who is responsible for the “puzzle”)
- Think like a **system**, act like an **entrepreneur**
- Learning new ways for **systems and empathy** to not just co-exist, but interdepend.

“...there is an applied dimension that requires the providers to have the necessary skills, techniques, and methods to apply their expertise and experience effectively. In this book we refer to this complex combination of formal knowledge, know-how, expertise, experience, and skills as ‘**practical expertise**’.”

RICHARD SUSSKIND DANIEL SUSSKIND

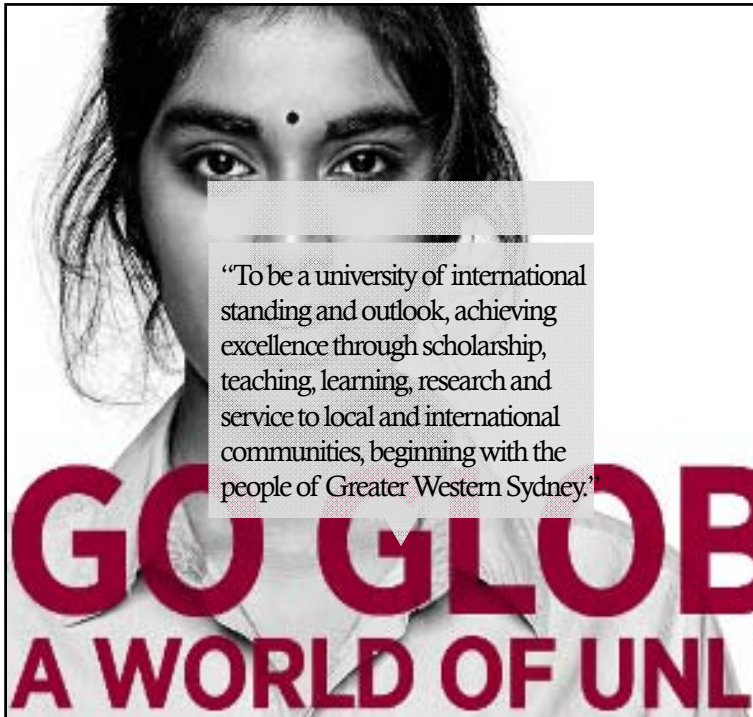


## THE FUTURE OF THE PROFESSIONS

HOW TECHNOLOGY WILL TRANSFORM  
THE WORK OF HUMAN EXPERTS

## What is happening in universities?

- **Competition and collaboration** – a new dance with powerful forces and big stakes at play
- **Digital** changes everything and nothing
- **Relevance and impact** (or “I want a job” and “I want to change the world”)
- What are we really here for – the necessary tyranny of **WHY**
- The unstoppable evolution of **cooperation** (despite the fact that, sometimes, it feels as if collaboration is an unnatural act between non-consenting adults...)
- A rising obsession with the **student experience** (which avoids the slide from demanding doctrine to distracting dogma)



“To be a university of international standing and outlook, achieving excellence through scholarship, teaching, learning, research and service to local and international communities, beginning with the people of Greater Western Sydney.”

**GO GLOBE**  
**A WORLD OF UNL**

- A lot...
- **Pieces of an increasingly complex puzzle...** Western Growth, shared services reform, curriculum redesign, leadership models, academic structure, student experience, branding, WSU and the rapidly changing region
- **Competitive pressures** that keep testing how the university plays the ceaseless game of turning its mission and values into a sustainable business
- A **strong sense of purpose** – an institution in, of and for the region and the people who live and work there

## So what does that mean for professional staff?

### Experience

Aligning professional and support services to the student experience

### Expertise

Build the (practical) expertise of professional staff - and give them the room and confidence to use it

### Empathy

Focus on the quality of the relationships between professional staff, between professional staff and academic staff and between professional staff, academic staff and students

from Greek *empathia* (from *em-* 'in' + *pathos* 'feeling')



## So what does that mean for professional staff?

### Experience

What happens and what you feel when it happens.  
Experience as an argument;  
experience as an invitation

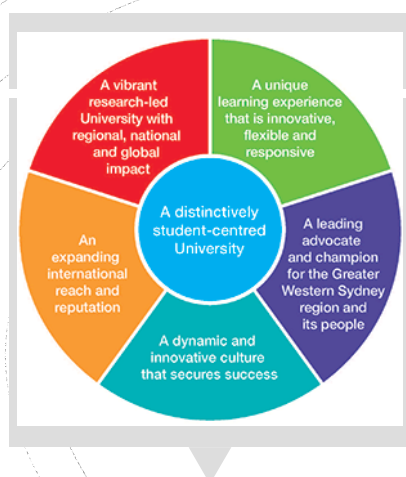
### Expertise

What you know and how you know.  
Expertise as exclusion;  
expertise as contribution

### Empathy

What you feel and how you feel.  
Empathy as insight for action;  
empathy as distraction

from Greek *empathia* (from *em-* 'in' + *pathos* 'feeling')



**Experiment** Try things out and see if they work; simple, direct, honest and clear

**Deliberately** By design, with process and with intent (systematic serendipity or how to work hard at getting lucky)

**Together** With other people, in your teams; with other teams; across boundaries and especially with the people whose experience you seek to burnish

1. Trust people's expertise and experience
2. Give people room to move and act (power and control)
3. Sometimes slow down to go faster (or, how to avoid "failure demand")

**"Failure demand"** is demand caused by a failure to do something or do something right for the customer."

John Seddon *Freedom from Command and Control: A Better Way to Make the Work Work* (2003)

Less like this



And more like this...



“...we are on the brink of a period of fundamental and irreversible change in the way that the expertise of these specialists is made available in society. Technology will be the main driver of this change. And, in the long run, we will neither need nor want professionals to work in the way that they did in the twentieth century and before.”

*The Future of the Professions How Technology Will Transform the Work of Human Experts* Richard Susskind and Daniel Susskind

