Better path for delivery

Rachel Lebihan

Australian business schools are too similar and must reinvent themselves to stay competitive, a visiting academic told a Sydney audience on Friday.

In a provocative address on the future of management education delivered at an Australian Business Deans council seminar at the University of Technology, Sydney, Peter Lorange, the president of Lorange Institute of Business, Zurich, and former head of IMD business school in Switzerland, said universities were not too different in structure, focus and governance to what they were in the 19th century.

“I don’t think we can say that we are really changing that much,” Professor Lorange said, adding that in contrast, the world of business was constantly

Continued next page

From previous page

reinventing itself. He said research had been the driving force in business schools over the past few decades.

“But I think perhaps it has led to a vacuum when it comes to new pedagogy.”

Professor Lorange said business schools should stop delivering lectures in which academics talked “one-way” for an hour-and-a-half, when research showed that students typically listened for a maximum of 20 minutes.

Academics need to become “more like orchestrators”, activating and facilitating discussion.

At his business school in Zurich, students do not sit in tiered lecture theatres but around tables — six or seven to a group.

Lecturers walk around the room, talking and engaging with students for 20 minutes, followed by 20 minutes of group discussion and 20 minutes plenary.

“In two days, a Friday and a Saturday, you can really come up with a highly potent vitamin pill for executives,” Professor Lorange said.

He acknowledged this approach would not necessarily work for large undergraduate classes, and that it was a high-cost delivery model.

But he said fewer “more luxury learning experiences” combined with more technology-induced self study was a feasible option and something for business schools to explore.

“It’s a big challenge for us to change from being one-way ramblers to doing more listening,” Professor Lorange said.

“We aren’t necessarily ready for that, it requires a lot of re-tooling by each of us.”

Professor Lorange also questioned the need for a full-time dedicated faculty at each business school.

“I simply don’t understand why we can’t have more of a stable network of part-time faculties and leading practitioners who can be called on when it comes to their area of speciality,” he said.

“It strikes me in Australia you have fantastic concentrations of people in a few places.

“But I simply don’t understand why there couldn’t be more cooperation between faculties among some of the schools in the Sydney, Perth and Melbourne areas.”