

The university of the future and lecturer identity¹

A jövő egyeteme és az oktatói identitás

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Abstract

This keynote address builds on several papers I have written concerning ‘the university of the future’. An initial blog for the Higher Education Academy (Moon, 2017) entitled, *95 theses for reforming Higher Education. Are HEI’s catalysts for a sustainable society?*, set the scene and provided the stimulus for considering how the collective identity of the university has changed since inception and still presents tensions and challenges today. Subsequent papers published by Moon (2019a, 2019b, 2021a, 2021b) build on this foundation to present an argument that societal ‘impact’ can be used to cut through the tensions in a way that galvanises staffs and students around common themes and values such as identified with the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG’s). In this keynote address I regard lecturer identity as a dynamic process which is influenced by the above tensions and challenges, and further explore how societal Impact can be used to build lecturer identity including examples from my own pedagogic practice.

Keywords: university of the future, lecturer identity, sustainability, SDG’s, impact

Absztrakt

E vitaindító beszéd több, a „jövő egyeteméről” szóló tanulmányomra épül. A Higher Education Academy iniciális blogja (Moon, 2017) „A felsőoktatás megreformálásának 95 tézise. Vajon a felsőoktatás katalizátora-e a fenntartható társadalomnak?” címmel kialakította az igényt annak átgondolására, hogyan változott a felsőoktatási kollektív identitás a kezdetek óta, ami még ma is feszültségeket és kihívásokat jelent és eredményez. Moon (2019a, 2019b, 2021a, 2021b) későbbi tanulmányaiban erre épít, és arra keresi a választ, hogy a társadalmi „hatás” felhasználható-e a feszültségek leküzdésére oly módon, hogy az oktatókat és a hallgatókat olyan közös témák és értékek mentén ösztönözze, mint például az „ENSZ Fenntartható Fejlődési Céljai”. Ebben a vitaindító előadásban az oktatói identitást egy dinamikus folyamatnak tekintem, amelyet a fenti feszültségek és kihívások erősen befolyásolnak, és vizsgálom, hogyan lehet a társadalmi hatásokat felhasználni az oktatói identitás fejlesztésére, beleértve a saját pedagógiai gyakorlatomból származó példákat is.

Kulcsszavak: a jövő egyeteme, oktatói identitás, fenntarthatóság, Fenntartható Fejlesztési Célok, hatás

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Introduction

Moon (2017) mimicked the seminal *95 theses* allegedly pinned to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg on 31 October 1517 by Martin Luther. The original protest concerned indulgences paid to the Roman Catholic Church and Luther's protest is thought to have kick-started the reformation. My own 95 theses were not pinned to the doors of the university but were based on Luther's original format and presented as an updated series of concerns about the identity of Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) and how the sustainability agenda was calling for reform from outdated institutionalised forms of education to those more relevant to the pressing needs of today. Of course, universities have already developed from their middle-age origins. However, it is salutary to recognise the purposes of the first universities and whether these values are as relevant today. Of course, HEI's are also influenced by national culture and Furtado (2012 and 2017) provides an overview of how these national identities have been formed and their concomitant influence on institutional practices including the formation of various universities across the globe. For the purposes of this address though I will focus on university identity vis-à-vis lecturer identity.

In general terms, my own *95 theses* (Moon, 2017) also called for reform of institutionalised practices. However, with the need to tackle climate change and other pressing societal issues and problems, there have been more recent calls to educate students about conserving nature rather than exploiting nature; and using profits for social impact not just maximising profit for economic gain (see THE, 2022). Based on a survey of HEI's conducted by Moon et al (2018a) for Enterprise educators United Kingdom (EEUK), which found that the majority of 300 HEI's had not committed to tackling the majority of SDG's, the author of this paper argued that all universities can reform their curriculum and operations around the goals of Sustainable Development. With this mind, universities can sign up to the UN Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI, 2022) and or the SDG Accord (2022). However, beyond simply making a declaration or signing a commitment, these initiatives call for real change in ethos and practices aka 'identity'.

Background

The UN SDG's provide a catalyst for change as they are wide ranging in scope and based on widespread stakeholder views. The author has thus outlined how the SDG's can be used to review existing university missions and curriculum as well as identify opportunities for change (Moon 2018b, Moon 2019a, 2019b). And, coupled with increasing pressure on universities to demonstrate the impact of their teaching and research, there has been a greater emphasis on practice. Thus, educators, even if they are mapped onto different teaching, research or practice pathways, still need to demonstrate the impact of their work. This has led to lecturers integrating an emphasis on employability skills, researchers conducting more applied research, and practitioners being used to inspire students based on their experience. If there were apparent separate identities of lecturers based on teaching, research and practice, then to some extent the new emphasis on impact could lead to these separate identities being less distinct. Or, perhaps there will be a reaction within universities to this changing agenda and cause entrenchment of lecturer identities based on more traditional roles? This keynote presentation explores these influences in more detail.

The university of the future

To some extent universities have already changed with the impact of new technology and the digitalisation of education. These influences have been heightened due to the pandemic and the need for more remote or hybrid/blended forms of teaching and learning. Post-pandemic studies will document these changes and their effects on staffs and students. In the meantime, the future of the university as an institutionalised structure has come into the spotlight. Moon (2017) outlined various outdated institutionalised structures and practices. Table 1 thus recognised various ‘tensions’ that can exist in HEI’s today. The table is not intended to juxtapose one set of ideals against another. However, the table is intended to provide a basis for exploring the extent to which such tensions exist and what can be done to manage them. To take a few examples, HEI’s compete for students and thus need to create a unique identity but they increasingly need to collaborate with other HEIs to win research grants, HEIs need to constantly focus on quality but excessive managerialism can mitigate against the professional autonomy of the lecturer, etc.

Table 1

Tensions in higher education institutions

University	Higher Education Institution
Mission	Culture
Self-regulation	Government policy
Vocational	Non-vocational
Local	Global
Freedom	Autonomy
Research	Teaching
Generalist	Specialist
Innovative	Standardised
Estate	People
Grants	Fees
Diversity	Homogeneity
Silo thinking	Transdisciplinary
Practitioners	Academic
Managerialism	Staff and student centred
Elitist	Liberal
Public ethos	Private claims
Pure	Applied
Competitive	Collaborative
Copyright	Open source
Physical spaces	Electronic spaces
Sustainability	Complacency
Cynicism	Advocacy
Instrumentalism	Broader values

Without going into further detail, it is pertinent to note that in my own career (25 years in HE and 10 years in the private sector) I have witnessed these tensions in practice at various organisations. Attempts at culture change that are top down have tended to fail. Whereas change that is brought about through collaboration and empowerment tends to be more readily accepted and lead to more lasting change. Similarly, the clarion call for sustainability is based on triple-bottom-line principles i.e. social and environmental not just economic. Thus, universities that embrace such sustainability principles are likely to be more robust economically and have the capacity to address social and environmental problems. Impact can be narrowly defined by

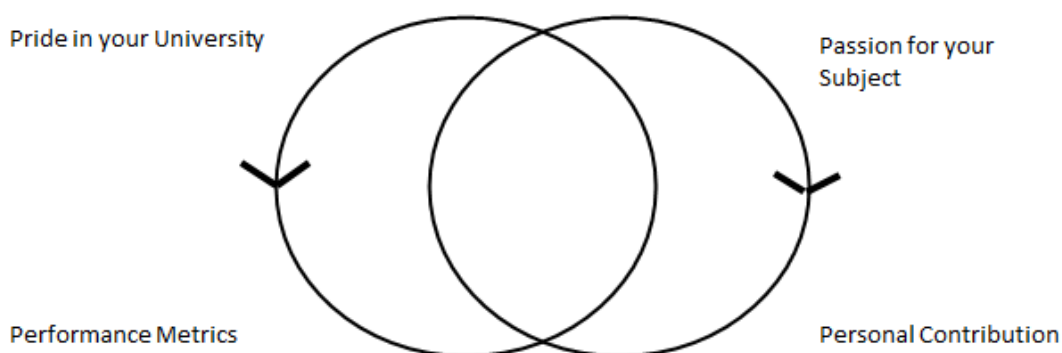
taking an instrumental approach but also has the capability, if more broadly defined, of leading to the development of shared values related to sustainable development. In fact, a recent survey of 3000 students by Times Higher Education (Bothwell, 2022) indicates that international students value the sustainability of universities very highly and are willing to pay higher fees as a result.

HE identity and lecturer identity

Given the influences outlined above it is clear to me that identity is a dynamic process. This applies to universities as organisations as well as to their staffs and students. Figure 1 presents this dynamic process as concentric circles which could be operating independently of each other and in opposite directions and causing tensions or could be overlapping and moving in the same direction. There are pros and cons to either of these possibilities. On the one hand, tensions can highlight issues and problems and cause change i.e. be disruptive. On the other hand, if there is less tension then smoother relations may exist between stakeholders and less wasted effort in trying to gain agreements when views are opposing. The introduction of a ‘managerialist’ culture into universities with the emphasis on certain performance metrics can thus be perceived positively or negatively depending on the prevailing culture or identity of the university.

Figure 1

Lecturer identity as a dynamic process



Impact as a new paradigm for identity

Impact thus has the potential to become a new driver for identity in universities – for both staffs and students. However, this potential carries a health warning. If the emphasis on impact is imposed on staffs through autocratic or bureaucratic processes, then the potential for impact to engender support across university stakeholders could be lost. It is thus imperative for any new emphasis on impact to be introduced in a collaborative way. The case study written by Moon (2021b) demonstrates how one university (Middlesex University, London) engaged with stakeholders to develop a new strategy towards 2031 and gain support for the university becoming more sustainable. This also builds on the arguments presented by Moon (2021a) that there is a need to plug the ‘green skills gap’ in universities. However, the tendency of higher education institutions has been the ‘massification’ of education (ever higher numbers and less attention to individual learning needs) which can mitigate against the development of more

innovative practices. The paper by Moon (2021a) also shows how there is a need to develop empathy, compassion and connectedness to nature in order to tackle the SDG's - yet most business and management courses are not attuned to the needs of social and environmental entrepreneurs over traditional business and entrepreneurial mindsets. The new impact rankings of universities (THE, 2022) are a case in point, as for the first-time universities are being evaluated on their progress in achieving the SDG's. However, any ranking could lead to 'gaming' to improve one's rank *vis-à-vis* other universities rather than in absolute terms.

Pedagogy and practice

In my own teaching I have used the SDG's in an instrumental way to highlight pressing issues and problems facing society and to highlight existing solutions. However, I have also used the SDG's as a source of inspiration to stimulate the creation of new solutions; and this has the added benefit of supporting more transdisciplinary and collaborative approaches as complex or wicked problems need such cooperation. Engaging students with broader than instrumental values and practical projects has been my strategy for developing mindsets away from narrow instrumental values and complacency of students (Moon, 2021a).

However, there is still a need to engage students to overcome overt or creeping cynicism from some students and staffs (Moon, 2021a). Compulsory modules or mandatory inductions are one approach but to many this is a last resort and indicates that the university has predominantly failed to integrate broader values and practice into the curriculum. If universities reward students for academic success and this is based on completing an increased number of exams, and other summative assessments, then this can mitigate against less formal evaluation, formative development, and extra-curricular experience. The latest pushes in universities to develop micro credentials and digital badging are perhaps an indication of an attempt by universities to bridge the gaps between academic courses per se and industry needs and the desire to recognise extra-curricular activities that employers and students value so highly. For example, independent research cites that numerous companies are 50 times more likely to recruit Enactus students than the average graduate (Enactus, 2022).

In this keynote address I played the trailer for the film *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*. This clip may have come as a surprise to most delegates at an international conference. However, when four students are placed in detention by the college principal they are told: 'you need to work out who you are and who you want to be'. The four students are then transformed into four avatars in a computer game including one doctor and one professor. The four have distinct characters and have to learn what unique skills they have to progress through the game levels and succeed in 'getting back to reality'. Their strengths are listed in a pop-up window on screen but only through practice are the characters able to realise their goals. The use of such films and stories has been an important part of my pedagogic approach to encourage students to see that university is not just about gaining theoretical knowledge and completing written assessments but is as much about being inspired, changing ones' mindset, and learning in practice. There are numerous experiential techniques and practical activities that students can engage with in this regard; and I have used computer simulations, films, and practical sessions, with a great deal of success. I also encourage students to read more broadly, including keeping up with the news, going to the theatre, art galleries and museums. Culture in all its forms, from the past to the present, provides invaluable lessons on how to develop oneself and form identities that will have lifelong meaning in the real world.

Today is my daughter's birthday and we will watch Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* in the open air, with a picnic, at a local forest. The play is about love and identity. In fact, the characters find their identity in the forest and many of Shakespeare's play are about identity, such as identity formation and development, mistaken identities, and identity crises, etc. There is comedy and tragedy and much material to discuss with students to get them to think about identity as a topic and reflect on their own experience. I encourage all lecturers as part of their professional identity to ensure that they use whatever techniques they can to enrich the lives of their students and encourage them to be open-minded and consider how the natural environment needs to be conserved rather than exploited for material gain. We have a duty as professional lecturers to educate students about the damage caused by humans to the environment, and through our inspirational teaching we can inspire students to be more ethical and sustainable in both their thinking and in their practice.

Conclusions

This keynote paper has highlighted the identity of institutions and lecturers as a dynamic process. The history of universities has led to the development of higher education institutions (HEI's) and more 'corporate' identities with standardisation of offerings and academic processes. However, there have also been calls for reform and some universities have reimagined themselves as not only centres of learning but also centres for value creation in other ways e.g. by placing health or sustainability at the core of their missions. I have argued in this keynote address that 'impact' has the potential to galvanise support across differences in institutionalised practices by engendering support for common values around social and environmental outcomes. This emphasis on impact does come with challenges of its own and any overly narrow definition of impact could be deleterious. However, there is the potential to engender support across disciplines and other institutional divides.

Biography of the author

Chris Moon is a multiple award winning eco and social entrepreneur with a PhD from Imperial College, London. He was formerly Head of Sustainability at two companies and divisional director of Energy and Sustainability at the UK's largest private firm of consulting engineers. He has consulted to leading organisations including Pfizer, Reuters, BT, Canary Wharf Group, ACPO and the NHS; and audited numerous SMEs. He was awarded an Outstanding Teacher Award in 2019 and has over 100 publications, is co-author of the acclaimed Economist book, *Business Ethics*, and co-editor of *Universities and Entrepreneurship* published in 2021. He is a fellow of the RSA, HEA and EEUK, lead judge of the international Innovation and Entrepreneurship Teaching Excellence Awards, judge of the F Factor, judge of the National Enterprise Educator Awards, and judge of the Global Green Stories competition. He is Research and Dissemination Lead for Enactus UK and University Advisor; EEUK and PRME-UK lead contact for MDX and is visiting professor at several overseas universities. Chris has an MSc in Applied Psychology, PGCHE, mini-MBA, and BA (Hons).

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