Fostering New Values and Stories in Higher Education: What Climate Change Brings to the Educational Table

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In 1962 the company Humble Oil ran an advertising campaign that claimed "Each day Humble supplies enough energy to melt 7 million tons of Glacier" (Figure 1). Today this advertisement seems bizarre! It is likely that to a future generation the Lisbon Declaration, issued by the European University Association in 2000, which set a 2010 European target of becoming: "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs, and greater social cohesion"[1] will seem equally hapless. After all, there is no mention of the environment, of a relevant ethically oriented values base, of a wider human context, nor of a vision reaching beyond the narrow economy and social maintenance of the status quo. The focus is totally on market share and maintaining present practices and assumptions.
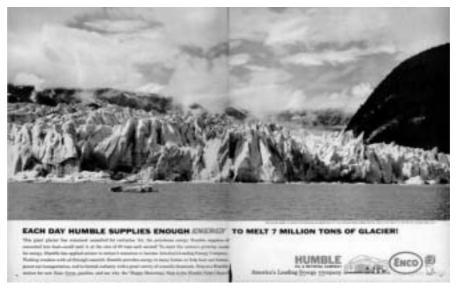

Figure 1. Humble oil's "enough energy" advertisement from 1962

Values and Institutions

In all this the link between values and institutional process is left unaddressed. Institutions and the cultures they support are expressions of collective consciousness. Human culture, which is the architecture of our shared values, is the collective expression of the human drive to secure a stable future. Institutions in the current era are the main expressions of this drive. Education is now an institution that is increasingly turned to for support in this endeavour. The Lisbon Declaration, cited above, illustrates how education is a central plank in the state's struggle to maintain control over our hearts and minds.

Now creeping into this struggle are a range of new terms generated in part by the climate change debate. The climate change literature is now exploring adaptive capacity and its sidekicks vulnerability and resilience (Adger, 2003; Daffara, 2010; Preston, 2009) in an attempt to move beyond the loaded and somewhat bald debate about risk (Beck, 2009) and tipping points (Gladwell, 2002). Thinking about adaptive capacity makes the connection between the natural world and human social structures more transparent. Adaptation becomes a social process in which institutions either learn (ie evolve) or fail. Adaptation also allows us to see the human world as the result of a collective search for solutions that emerge as the result of human activity. Societies are problem solving organisations and culture becomes the mix of human values and actions that seek to provide the illusion of stable identity and a recognisable tomorrow.

This raises the question: Can education facilitate adaptive capacity or is its alliance and reliance on current knowledge and practice an impediment to effective change? It is easy to be pessimistic when thinking about change and the overwhelming grid lock that our system appears to be trapped in, but it helps to think hopefully while guarding against naivety. So it will be argued in this paper that a qualified "Yes" can be given to this answer provided, and this is the small print in the contract that can act as a neat escape clause, we who make the system, support and perpetuate the system with our obedience to the rules of the system reassess our values and start living as though tomorrow really does matter. Values lie at the heart of systems. They are the glue that holds the world together. Change the values and you change the system. When there is a values mismatch things get strange and people get stressed.

Civilizational Value Shifts

Throughout history there are examples of moments in civilisations when there is no longer a clear match between a dominant value set and the context they seek to manage. At such points societies either collapse or transform (Diamond, 2005; Tainter, 1988). The great historian Ibn Khaldun described such points in his cyclic theory of *asabiyyah* in which social process was built around the cohesion (or lack thereof) of groups. The central premise he had was that once a context has been stabilised entropy sets in. This, for Khaldun, was essentially internal and centred on the decay of values and vision in a ruling group. Yet, it could also be the result of values that work in one context but fail to respond effectively to new contextual factors (Khaldun, 2004).

The Indian philosopher P. R. Sarkar also suggested cycles, but argued that the cycles were related to dominant psychologies or modes of consciousness which he linked to the Indian *varnas* of worker, warrior, intellectual and merchant. He contended that when one mode was dominant it became so aligned with vested economic and political interests that ultimately it failed to respond effectively to new contextual determinants (Inayatullah, 1997). Ultimately societies and their institutions would fail because of the investment in forms of expression that maintained the vested interests of the few over the many. Sarkar suggested that such cycles could only be broken by individuals, he called them *sadvipras*, who looked out for the interests of all. The education system he saw as well placed to educate for such morally courageous, holistic and visionary people (Bussey, 2010).

To educate for such people would certainly increase the adaptive capacity of our times. But there is a problem. Education is usually thought of as a process of transmitting information and hopefully knowledge to others. Values however, are neither. Values are deeply held beliefs and assumptions about the world. They are neither rational nor fully explicable. They have more to do with the guts and the heart than the head, though if you are trained to think reflectively and critically this certainly helps in their articulation. To educate the guts and the heart requires a more fully aware approach to learning. One that acknowledges that education is at least as much about conditioning as it is about informing. Institutions condition us all. We are born into institutions, live in them and usually die in them. In so many ways they define us. So the institutions – values nexus is central to a rethinking of higher education's possibilities.

Beyond Limitations

The current system of higher education is pretty limited. How many staff and students look forward every day to coming to their university? Not that many, and that is because the institutions fails to engage the whole of the person – it is for students simply a stepping stone to some distant place they call the prosperous future and for staff it is a place where they are always over worked and pushed about by so many institutional drives: pass rates, attrition rates, publication rates, research points etc... For both staff and student there is not much of a quality Present, only a past they are trying to escape and a future they are trying to reach.

Furthermore, they are both so conditioned that they often fail to recognise the present moment when it invites them to pause and reflect. Many students distrust a teacher who asks their opinion, invites them to think and challenges them to find the information for themselves. They feel they are paying for a service and this is a bit like a fast food outlet where they just need to be given the information so they can give it back to the teacher as proof of learning. Similarly, teachers become carless and distant from students, seeing them as a necessary chore that stands between them and great research; or as empty books that need to be filled with the light that they alone carry. There is no space for reciprocity or dialogue. Together both teachers and students collude in making their university an under achieving information factory. Thus, they reflect their conditioning back in a feedback loop and reinforce the limitations of

the system itself. The collective consciousnesses at work dulled by habit fail to see what a wonderful place a university or other institution of higher (or lower) education can be (Bussey, 2008).

Universities as Expressions of Collective Consciousness

To understand institutions as expressions of collective consciousness is a powerful insight. It allows those working in them to 1. access deeper resources in challenging unsustainable practices and 2. promote forms of cultural development that transform dominant modes of activity. When the latter is aligned to values that offer new ethical and cultural visions of human potentiality the stage is set for cultural renewal.

Higher education is at such a cross roads. The dominant matrix of educational modelling is still firmly committed to the interests of a worldview and culture that is rapidly losing integrity, purpose and moral authority. Entropy, the scourge of all complex systems, has set in (Christian, 2003). There are signs aplenty that this vision is no longer sustainable. The drive to leverage crude forms of energy that is exemplified in Humble Oil's advertisement is still the dominant paradigm. Institutions of higher education can challenge this paradigm by promoting alternative possibilities for human expression, challenging the monopoly on moral authority held by the prestige universities and offering alternative models of excellence for university practice (Razak, 2008).

Such institutions adopt a futures orientation that anticipates the needs of future generations and builds this mode of thought into the construction of policy and pedagogy today. Thus they become bridges to the future actively facilitating sustainable cultural and educational pathways for their staff and students (Miller, 2000). This requires the nurturing of new stories that promote values that can inform policy and decision making and open institutional practice to creative engagement with the challenges of the present (Greene, 2001). All futures thinking is partisan in this way. It is designed to promote preferable futures over the probable (Bell, 1993).

Transforming the Logic of an Institution

The logic behind institutional transformation and/or failure can be captured in a series of premises that work the tension between the individual and their context, the role of institutional rationality in meaning making, the link between values and purpose and finally the centrality of new stories in transforming unsustainable contexts (Derrida, 2005; MacIntyre, 1989). The following set of premises present a logical sequence of assertions that deepen our thinking on engaging values in higher education.

Premise 1 (The Obvious)

Institutions shape people and people shape institutions

Premise 2 (The System)

Institutions institute the rational as reality

Premise 3 (The Paradigm)

The rational is contextual & value laden

Premise 4 (The Story)

When the rational, i.e. the story, fails so do institutions (or they change)

The first and obvious point to be derived from this set of premises is that our institutions are already value laden. To use Lyotard's term, institutions are *performative* in nature (Smith, 1992); they perform the 'real'. Here of course the real is that subset of universal possibility that currently orders our relationships across a spectrum from the interpersonal, intrapersonal to the transpersonal and also between the various ecologies that flow across and through cultural space – natural, technological, axiological, epistemological and ontological. Secondly, these premises are interlinked and layered in nature. They suggest an important causal relationship in which actions across the levels reinforce one another. They are a reading of Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) in which performativity is highlighted through a set of logical relationships (Bussey, 2009a; Inayatullah, 2004).

A Values CLA

The obvious has been described in the previous section in which people enact the role assigned them by the institution. This is the level of the minutiae of daily life where habit is paraded and life seems a maelstrom of discrete events without much rhyme or reason. Both rhyme and reason however, are enacted by institutional players at the level of the system. At this level players can experiment with cause and effect by varying their actions to align them with a value set that they feel is more in harmony with a sustainable future. The bedrock for such an experiment is the level of paradigm, where worldviews and the values that sustain them are articulated not simply in policy and funding but also in the choices and aspirations of social actors. The story underpins both policy and choices with a meaningful metastructure that ties the Obvious, the System and the Paradigm into a coherent whole.

To suggest institutions of higher education educate for a *sadvipra*, as Sarkar (Sarkar, 1998) does, is to suggest a new story. Now, although this story may be new to us it does not mean that it is new to context. Any story-as-emergent-trend must have been in the fabric of our context all along (Bussey, 2009b), it has simply been hidden by a hegemonic narrative that made such alternatives, if noticed at all, seem aberrant, trivial or ungrateful (Laclau, 2001).

To engage universities in a new story can be understood as an adaptive capacity that fosters resilience. The new story requires a new language, and new language takes time to diffuse through a culture. Its passage itself tells a story of migration from periphery to centre. If we follow three terms for a moment this is evident. In 1972 Meadows (1972) introduced the world to a new reading of the term 'limits' which she paired up with 'growth'. Twenty years later Beck (1992) introduces the world to a new reading of the word 'risk' which he in turn pairs up with 'society'. After another ten years Gladwell (2002) introduces us to the concept of the 'tipping point'. Each step

leads us towards a new understanding of human activity; each on its own is a static snap shot of a feature of human reality – humanity finding limits, humanity taking risks, humanity engaged in a crazy balancing act. Yet each moves consciousness towards an awareness of the complexity that is testing current adaptive capacity.

New Stories

So we are learning a new story and more and more our institutions are being challenged to come into line with this. This requires institutional learning and strong visionary leadership. If we want universities to change we need to be part of the change now. If we wish them to educate for sadvipraship, then we need to be *sadvipras*. Sadvipras transform the forms they come in contact with by seeing them with new eyes. Institutions have taught us, conditioned us, to look to others to make things happen. The new story is about taking responsibility for change. It is about engaging all of our self in making it happen. We must embody the new while living the old. This is a transitional phase in which new possibilities are all around us but incomplete.

This is a challenge as it means teachers need to teach differently and students need to learn differently. One step forward in the adaptive move is to take comfort in the learning orientation of social institutions. As noted, social institutions are problem solving institutions. They have evolved over time through facing and dealing with problems. Thus we have democracy as a response to the lack of accountability of authoritarian rule and we have capitalism as a response to the sluggishness of agrarian commerce. Today our institutions face a global challenge. The main constraints in dealing with this challenge are a lack of imagination, vested interests that resist change and a lack of leadership.

We are all leaders in drag, hiding our potential. We can embed a new set of values in higher education by working as if they are already fully functional. This is a refusal to be defined by the old story. Its energy relies on our enthusiasm for a new story that seeks to embed sustainable values in our universities. We do this work best when we do it for others. In this way we build a self that is linked to our collective life. And when we apply futures thinking we break out of the present and inhabit our pasts and futures as creative beings.

There is no curriculum for this process. It cannot be planned in that way. This freedom comes from our story being above the institutions that seek to tie it up in rules and procedures (Deleuze, 1987). The story is alive in us all and lies immanent in the cultural world about us. We can engage it in the classroom by being more engaged in the creation of meaning, working constantly towards a critical reflexivity that keeps us awake and resistant to habit, and by enjoying the moment.

Conclusion

Those of us who work in higher education are receiving a range of contested signals that are currently struggling for control over this story making process. Some stories are fear based and seek to lock out, control, define and legislate due process. Other stories are based on love and seek to generate possibility, hope, inclusivity and

flexibility (Tolle, 2005). Whether we like it or not this is an unstable yet creative space. It is one in which violence and trust wrestle for the hearts and minds of us all.

Institutions are having to find their way in this environment by engaging what Ananta Kumar Giri calls a 'labour of learning' (2005, p.27). Universities working with the present for the future are bridging institutions. They are working on understanding how story can be used to generate new possibilities while retaining legibility within the current higher education narrative. Such institutions have done this by bridging between an emergent context for the university and the need to be seen as responsible. This is a delicate balancing act which requires openness to the future and a deeper understanding of control, not as based on managerialist fear, but as based on trust and a delicious anticipation of the creative possibilities that lie before them.

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Notes

1. The Lisbon Declaration can be found at http://www.bmwf.gv.at/fileadmin/user_ upload/europa/bologna/EUA_lisbon_declaration__07.pdf

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