

Service as a Value for Reorienting Higher Education?

Marcus Bussey
University of the Sunshine Coast
Australia

Abstract

This paper explores values in Higher Education. It suggests that values change is an important condition for the reorientation taking place in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Plasker's 100 Year Lifestyle is used as a context for this reflection and the value of service is offered and explored as a possible zone of 'value generalisation' that has the openness and flexibility to accommodate a range of often conflicting value positions. Finally, the Universiti Sains Malaysia is offered as an impressive example of the commitment necessary to consciously shift the value basis of an HEI. In this example we see a collaboration between futures thinking and institutional value reorientation.

Keywords: Values, service, anticipation, golden rule, ecoversity, value generalisation

Some years ago a dear friend gave me a copy of Eric Plasker's *The 100 Year Life Style*. The book opens with Plasker outlining three principles that maintain quality of life – health, purpose, joy and resilience – as an integral part of a healthy future oriented life style. These choices he frames as pertaining to the individual but they also hold relevance for institutions which, after all, are simply groups of people organised around an idea with a purpose.

Plasker (2007, p.15) offers three principles for change.

1. Change is easy. Thinking about it is hard.
2. Change happens one choice at a time. Think progress, not perfection.
3. Approach change with your ideal 100 year lifestyle in mind.

Futurists earn their bread and butter because of Change Principle number 1. We help organisations and their members think about change, acting essentially as anticipatory knowledge workers in the knowledge economy. When the thinking is done we can debate the ease or difficulty of implementing change: I am not convinced that change is easy. Most of the evidence suggests that it is not (Hon, Bloom & Crant, 2014; Kegan, 2009). What I acknowledge is that without the futures thinking, conscious 'anticipatory' change is virtually impossible.

In this paper I will explore an aspirational value change in the context of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The lens will be an examination of the value of service as a possible antidote to the neoliberal value of 'self-service'. Universities and other HEIs have been rescripted over the past decades. For instance, Australian academic Richard Hil in his highly acclaimed book *Whackademia*, quotes Lindsay Tanner, a former Australian Finance Minister, as stating: "Universities are knowledge department stores" (Hil, 2012, p.9). Implicit to this

statement is that students are customers and knowledge is the commodity on sale. Students can pick and choose, essentially following the self-service principal of the market place. The shift from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy is flagged in the new metaphor of the department store. Thus Hil notes, “The notion of universities as institutions for the collective good has largely been usurped by the need to survive in an increasingly cut-throat market place” (Hil, 2012, p.10).

The Good?

The notion of the ‘good’ of course is a moveable feast. Jim Dator reminds us that the golden rule of ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ is in fact a trap and that one person’s good is often another’s poison. His recommendation is the adoption of a situational ethic:

In our modern, congested, multicultural world, a better, new Golden Rule might be, ‘Do unto others as they wish you to do unto them’. In this sense, then, ethics becomes ‘situational’ (something to be negotiated between strangers and newcomers) rather than something absolute and obvious for people who live together from birth to death (Dator, 2006, p.26).

Like the notion of the good, service is also situational. It posits another, or an Other, to whom we are connected and with whom we can engage (Butler, 2004; Noddings, 2003). The ‘other’, as Dator points out, can be a future-generational Other, or a non-human Other. As he observes: “all living things have rights, and therefore when humans kill or injure other life forms, ethical considerations should be brought to bear” (Dator, 2006, p.25). This is the position of those arguing for the ecoversity as a newly conceived HEI that has as its prime concern the fostering of a relational ethic of learning/educating. Garlick, Matthews and Carter for instance argue that:

...universities ought to function primarily as a public good and thus have an ethical responsibility toward redressing the human-nature divide. [We] propose that universities adopt a relational ethics and transform themselves as spaces and places wherein their residents might live a ‘mutually engaged’ existence with wildlife and local ecosystems (Garlick, Matthews & Carter, 2011, np).

Once again the ‘good’ is offered as a guide to the practice and identity of HEIs. I have no doubt that current HEIs function according to a neoliberal definition of the ‘good’ and do relatively well on such metrics. Yet I also have no doubt that such a ‘good’ is limited in vision to the individual-as-consumer, the corporate, the species and the state. Deeper senses of the good are thus subsumed within a system of relations that are not mutual, fail to foster an awareness of the relational, overlook the deeper and emerging possibilities of humanity alive to its place in the Cosmos as co-creator, and equate knowledge with information management. New human possibilities are emergent and challenge the dominant HEI system but struggle for legitimacy. Nonetheless, futures thinking acts as a critical frame through which to explore such ideas and the role values play in both legitimising present conditions and destabilising accepted notions of the ‘good’.

Value Generalisation

HEIs serve their societies and reflect dominant assumptions about how the world works. They are indeed committed to a range of social ‘goods’. Such goods Hans Joas (2013) argues are deeply internalised frames of reference that have historical roots and contextual force that generate ‘subjective certainty’. Following Joas, for service to be taken as a good it must generate a sense of ‘self-evidence and affective intensity’ (Joas, 2013, p.173). Given that the cultural,

social, environmental and technological forces at work on individual and collective identity are formidable and unrelenting it is hardly surprising that HEIs are currently struggling to express a set of collectively acceptable ‘goods’. However, they are managed by clever and sincere people who are adept at serving more than one master. All forty Australian universities, for instance, address sustainability and claim to be committed to the goals of education for sustainable development (ESD). Their commitment to ESD principles is significant. Yet it is largely framed within the neoliberal context and therefore compromised at its root by metrics of success that miss the point. Dominant metrics, as outlined by Gavin Moodie (2015) do not capture what matters outside of a narrow band of indicators. As he observes:

Most of the measures have a lot to do with prestige and not much to do with the outcomes of their graduates or the quality of the education their students receive (Moodie, 2015, np).

Similarly, in reference to English higher education’s responses to ESD, Scott and Gough have noted:

... all this action in relation to sustainable development is occurring in parallel with a quite fundamental (and separate) debate about the purpose of higher education. A common contemporary view is that universities exist in order to provide for the skills-needs of the economy in the future. Indeed, this perspective has become so widespread that it may often take the form of an unconsidered, tacit assumption rather than an explicit rationale (Scott & Gough, 2006, p.93).

These reflections highlight the ability of the social ‘good’ of competition to trump other social goods such as those promoted by ESD principles and practices. That the conversation is happening is important but the future awaits, challenging the ‘curriculum of the present’ (Scott, 2006), with a host of ethical and empirical concerns.

My interest in service as a core value in HEI is that it bridges a range of concerns held by advocates from various camps. It is possibly a place where difference can exist whilst key steps are taken to move beyond a neoliberal hegemony that prioritises a very narrow present over a richly expansive future. In this I follow Joas’s suggestion of a ‘logic of communication about values’ (Joas, 2013, p.174) where he offers the category of value generalisation. He suggests, that:

... amid the plurality of competing value systems it is possible to reach agreement on new areas of common ground (Joas, 2013, p.174).

Service as a Value Generalisation

Service as a generalised value offers such an opportunity to test Joas’s argument by putting it to work. Firstly, service offers a neat counterpoint to the neoliberal value of self-service. This is not, however, a rhetorical sleight of hand. It has tangible implications. This leads to the second point, service is a rich source for reframing what HEIs do – it is not a call for rebuilding the system but for reorienting it because, as Joas puts it, values are ‘the articulation of experience’ (Joas, 2013, p.174). Thirdly, service does not displace the neoliberal presentist curriculum but expands on it whilst subtly reframing what self-service means.

My argument therefore is that institutions dedicated to value changes in general and service in particular act as bridging-institutions because change happens incrementally according to Plasker’s Change Principle number 2, one choice at a time. Yet choices are not made in a vacuum, so we all need to be committed to choices that further our long term vision. This vision is best built around

images of institutional and civilisational health. So to avoid what Plasker calls “toxic choice” (Plasker, 2007, p.20) we invoke Change Principle number 3: A vision of what the institution and the society it serves could be in the future. Change Principle number 2 reminds us of the centrality of process, aka Plasker’s ‘progress’, in choice making and change; Change Principle number 3 reminds us that values underpin choice and have a central aspirational role to play in generating meaning, purpose and expression.

Plasker’s principles aimed at a healthy individual future are, I believe, as applicable to institutions as they are to individuals. Health is a value that sits at the heart of service. Values aligned with service are not necessarily those aligned with the growth and fiscal orientation of HEIs. Yet as I note above, they are also not mutually exclusive. Either way HEIs generate capital – and this is (and always has been) social, cultural and economic in nature. Perhaps they can produce an ecological service oriented capital too – in the form of relational consciousness and the skill sets that such awareness demands?

Relational Rationality

This paper is suggesting that values that foster service have the potential to reorient HEIs by generating transformative educational opportunities (Thomas, 2009). Thinking about values and service however is not a purely intellectual affair, it is deeply personal and embodied (Bussey, 2014). As Joas (2013) notes – values produce ‘affective intensity’, ie identity, and generate the subjective sense of ‘self-evidence’. Such thinking and the affective intensities that accompany it is, from a pragmatic perspective, enacted. Action and thought are deeply intertwined, with action reinforcing thought and thought testing/validating/experimenting via action: in short this is a form of action learning to which futures brings an anticipatory edge (Inayatullah, 2006; Stevenson, 2002). If planetary, social and institutional health are values we hold dear then this is an invitation to explore a range of service modalities framed within a relational awareness that our individual health is linked to questions of equity, inclusion, care, mutuality and so on (Butler, 2004; Eisler, 2007; Noddings, 2003). Wilkinson and Pickett for instance underscore the connection between distributional equity and wellbeing, providing ample evidence of the connection and arguing for a new distributive model (2009). The rational in this context informed by relational consciousness.

Relational rationality has its own flavour. With the emergence of networked consciousness and action (Castells, 2012), the ecological recasting of systems (DeLanda, 2006) and the geohistorical question of the Other as a disowned voice in public discourse (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994) relationality becomes a tool for reconnecting and revaluing the heartland of higher education. For me this emergent awareness is expressed via service (as opposed to instrumental relevance and self-service), one choice at a time. We need to follow Plasker’s advice and take small steps, with the ‘100 year’, ie sustainable, lifestyle in mind. This keeping the long-term in mind enables us to avoid those toxic choices that ‘limit our life’ and the integrity over time of our institutions. In this article I am framing the choice for higher education in terms of service/self-service as the ‘rhetorical lynch pin’ to examine what might change in the way our universities do business.

There is nothing irrational about focusing on self-service and short term outcomes from a neoliberal perspective. However, if we were to deploy the concept of the 100 year lifestyle to HEIs, other values and concerns arise. Service to the broader community of planetary stakeholders then becomes the rational way to assess and enable healthy futures. Such a shift in rationality requires us to think in terms of values and their effects on a host of social-ecological processes. A closer look at the value of service and how it could be applied in HEI goals and curriculum is now warranted.

Service in HEIs

The 100 year lifestyle invites us to think about service via a temporal orientation. The presentism of neoliberal logic is exploded when the present is expanded to include the next hundred years. This expansion is further increased if we adopt Elise Boulding's two hundred year present (Slaughter, 2005). By broadening the temporal realm, we immediately become aware of deeper sets of relationship. Service can respond to this depth by offering Service to the Past, the Present and the Future. These temporal domains suggest the following:

- Service to the Past unleashes dangerous memory. The sense of hidden possibilities in culture and also the sense of connectedness to the past – the peoples, the geographies, the ecologies, the cultures and technologies etc that have directly or indirectly informed the present. This raises ethical questions that challenge the given representations of the patterns of change. Service to the past is both an orientation and a practice. As an orientation it demands only that narrow presentism be set aside and a broader inclusive attitude be adopted. As a practice it involves all subjects (not just history) in rethinking aspects of the curriculum that are time-blind.
- Service to the Present builds on the relational logic described earlier in this paper. It begins by challenging limited senses of self and reorienting thinking and practice around what we understand as human potential. It expands the definition of human to include the world humans inhabit. There is no separation, no autonomous humanity, no culture that stands outside of nature. Self-service in this context becomes service to the world, not simply a utilitarian formula for an individual investment in the future. Awareness of the relational dynamic at work across geographic, economic, cultural, ecological domains is essential as is engagement across these sectors. Transdisciplinary realignment is a key to such service.
- Service to the Future develops imagination, creativity, hope and moral courage. It fosters practical optimism in students and staff by valuing the acquisition of practical skills that build capacity that has merit beyond individuals. Such skills are all energised by an anticipatory imagination that links HEIs to the broader project of generating resilient and inclusive futures. The future calls to us not separately but collectively and poses the ethical constraint that we act not just on behalf of, but alongside (across time) with future generations and the worlds they inhabit.

Such a framework can be taught and has powerful resonances for students as my own teaching testifies. More importantly however is that the tripartite value of service acts as a value orientation within which individual value sets, often potentially in conflict, can meet and collaborate in a generalised values domain.

What it takes

HEIs are exploring ways to reorient their values and chart new futures for their stakeholders. Few have taken this task more seriously than Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). Malaysia's premier university, USM has been working for over a decade on understanding how to engage the value of service as a defining ethic of the university. To use the language of Joas USM has established a 'generalised value domain' and under the guidance of futurist Sohail Inayatullah, and with the direct support of the university president Dzulkipli Abdul Razak, USM has worked through a sustained process of values clarification and futures thinking to craft a new dominant vision for itself (Inayatullah, 2012; USM, 2007a; USM, 2010).

USM has performed a skillful balancing act that bridges the desire to transform whilst maintaining legitimacy, even increased reputation, within Malaysia's higher education context. This

delicate balancing act is presented in their strategic document ‘Transforming Higher Education for a Sustainable Tomorrow’ in the following terms. Having assessed the status of the European Union’s leading universities USM noted:

“Judging by their talent pool, abundance of resources and supportive governance, USM believes that we simply cannot play the same game in order to be excellent. As defined by their ‘rules’, we chose a different path to strategically be eminent and excellent measured in different terms and contexts ... USM has chosen to position itself as a world renowned university for sustainability with relevance to the future, nurturing, learning, conducting research and services towards the stated goal” (Razak & Ramli, 2008, p.64).

To realise this goal the university needed to adjust experience at the system level by initiating a set of new systemic processes. At the level of the day to day, life goes on as usual (ie all contemporary institutional concerns are still on-going as core business) though students and staff are becoming involved in sustainable programmes across the university campus such as: The White Coffin Campaign (reducing/eliminating polystyrene use on campus), the Campus-Wide Recycling Project, the Tree Planting Project and involvement in the Earth Hour and Earth Day campaigns (Razak & Ramli, 2008, pp.39-40).

Such programmes of course have a systemic basis being reflective of the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) beginning to emerge here (Inayatullah & Milojević, 2015). For instance, USM has adopted the Blue Ocean Programme (Razak & Ramli, 2008, p.18) to generate new thinking about the future and its possibilities. This programme is deliberately open ended. USM recognises that the change must come from within (Razak & Ramli, 2008, p.10) so that the institution is in control of its own future and actively aligning with values that seek to promote its stated objective of sustainability, relevance and service to its region and to the developing world in general. Thus it is seeking to become a Regional Centre for Excellence (Razak & Ramli, 2008, pp.21-22) and to direct research towards the bottom four billion people on the planet.

At the level of paradigm USM is developing a value base that fosters service and partnership models as the most effective route to sustainability. Its goal is “to achieve excellence holistically within a small ecological footprint” (Razak & Ramli, 2008, p.10). To further this, it is challenging disciplinary categories by actively supporting interdisciplinarity and challenging traditional disciplinary silos. It now has a new story – the ‘University in a Garden’ (Razak & Ramli, 2008, pp.14, 39) and a new value focus – service to the bottom four billion people on the planet. This is a suitably heroic mission and one which draws support from its regional context where the Malaysian government declared it to be its APEX University¹ in 2008. Table 1 offers a CLA of this process of accessing a new story.

Table 1. *Mapping USM's Transformation*

Universiti Sains Malaysia		
Litany	Institutions shape people and people shape institutions	University Ranking; student numbers; teaching, research, publication rankings; assessment. Plus: recycling, tree planting, Earth Hour and Earth Day
The System	Institutions institute the rational as reality	Blue Ocean Programme (Razak & Ramli, 2008, p.18); Inside Out Approach(Razak & Ramli, 2008, p.10); Regional Centre of Excellence (Razak & Ramli, 2008, pp.21-22); APEX university
The Paradigm	The rational is contextual & value laden	Service; Partnership in tension with Competition and economic metrics; holistic excellence
The Story	When the rational, i.e. the story, fails so do institutions (or they change)	University in a Garden; Change the rules of the Game

USM can be seen to be aligning its story and values with an emergent context that will have relevance for many decades to come. Thus it is seeking, following Plasker's 100 year life style principles, to ensure health, make choices one at a time and keep its goal of sustainability and service to the disadvantaged at the heart of all it does. This process began with an intensive period of reflection that included all core players, the seventy four members of their 'Dream team' (Razak & Ramli, 2008, pp.100-101). This is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. *USM's '100 Year Lifestyle'*

USM's '100 Year Lifestyle' Plan	
Change is easy. Thinking about it is hard.	The futures scenario work summarised in USM's Constructing Future Higher Education Scenarios (USM, 2007b) describes the futures thinking at the heart of USM's sustainable lifestyle agenda
Change happens one choice at a time. Think progress, not perfection.	Blue Ocean Programme (USM, 2007b, p.18); Inside Out Approach(USM, 2007b, p.10); Regional Centre of Excellence (USM, 2007b, pp.21-22); APEX university application
Approach change with your ideal 100 year lifestyle in mind. (Plasker, 2007, p.15)	University in a Garden; Service; Partnership in tension with Competition and economic metrics; holistic excellence

Plasker's process is quite fluid and can be understood as an unending and folded process of becoming (Deleuze, 1993). New stories and values generate new forms of expression and order rationality and process in ways that support this.

Values as a defence against Chaos

The emergent story being charted above is reflexive in nature. It requires institutions to be vigilant in assessing their own progress in achieving goals that without a reflexive system of self-appraisal may well be rhetoric in which green campuses become the substitute for green minds. Thus USM have developed a rigorous set of Indicators that seek to eliminate, reduce, raise or create (ERRC) conditions that support their primary values set (Razak & Ramli, 2008, pp.68-71; USM, 2010). A broader reflection allows us to see the emergence of relational values as a basic feature of cultural evolution. Namely, that humanity has generated civilisation in order to escape the instability of the random and the chaotic. Yet paradoxically the random and the chaotic are the goad to anticipation and creative emergence and the reimagining of order when what is 'rational' fails. As actor participants we are all part of this drama and must acknowledge that in responding to context we also shape context (Bussey, 2016 Forthcoming).

What drives activity in this context are our values. In fact, all our activity as individuals and communities is based on values. Our institutions enact and maintain these whilst individuals internalise, challenge and hybridise according to their aspirations and the pressures they find themselves under. So civilisations are expressions of values. Culture – the act of cultivating values? – is the value expression of context. Our values determine what it is we take as rational, which as we have seen is a dynamic causally layered field of interrelated processes of meaning making that determines how consciousness operates within context.

There has been much talk about paradigm shifts (Kuhn, 1996), the great turning (Korten, 2006), the tipping point (Gladwell, 2002), worldshifts (Laszlo, 2009), macroshifts (Laszlo, 2001), but what does this mean to institutions like the university which have the potential to represent the aspirational and cultural heart land of an emergent planetary civilisational project? Currently they act as gate keepers for a neoliberal model of learning but some, like USM, are seeking to redefine universities by aligning them with a deeper ethical agenda that is based on values such as service that assert the fundamental requirement of learning to facilitate the utilisation of human potential and to put this potential at the service of the planet (Inayatullah, & Gidley, 2000; Razak & Ramli, 2008).

In this context, universities like USM find themselves seeking to represent the dominant economic value system of a secular Western model of educational delivery whilst remaining true to their cultural and normative agenda. As a result, they are transitional or bridging institutions that must navigate, on the one hand a value system based on a secular Western economic paradigm that promotes competition, rankings, economic accountability, structural imperatives, quality assurance and linear ahistorical utilitarian learning. While on the other hand they seek to develop valid and constructive contexts – a value generalisation - for extended cooperative holistic learning that promotes health, balance, integrity, relationship and inner accountability to values that will underpin a sustainable culture at both local and planetary scales (Nehls & Bussey, 2013).

Conclusion

Transitioning to a new world order that values sustainable process requires transitional institutions as legitimacy is required for those not yet ready to risk everything on a single role of the dice. They are also necessary as none of us working in the present university system can clearly conceive of what sustainable cultures will look like and how their institutions will behave.

This paper has sought to tackle the question, How do we embed values and service in higher education futures? Such a question might suggest there is an answer, a formula or linear process we can follow that will help transition us from condition A to condition B. In the cultural field however process is messy and multiple and can better be described, using Deleuze and Guattari's term (1987),

as rhizomic. The chaotic and multiple nature of rhizomic space always leaves out the unexpected lines of flight that an idea or process takes. These ‘lines’ are unpredictable and cross boundaries and geographic spaces in the most unanticipated ways. Thus changing institutional values requires us to accept liminality as a quality of transition and to play with a consciousness of between-ness that accounts for disorientation as part of reorientation (Bussey, 2009).

Universities used to educate for elites, then they were massified and linked to nation building projects (Gatto, 2002; Miller, 2006). The dominant ethos was neoliberal competition premised on self-service; now global contexts are reframing human activity and higher education has the opportunity to respond proactively in these postnormal times (Sardar, 2010) by looking to move away from competition and towards service oriented values in which the hyper individual becomes the ‘nested individual’. In these shifts we see institutions essentially committed to the legitimation and maintenance of the status quo coming under increasing pressure. Institutions usually control context and supply its dominant logic. YET, there are many who inhabit institutions today that nurture within themselves and their immediate environs alternative visions of what human beings can do.

Correspondence

Marcus Bussey
 Arts Research in the Creative Humanities (ARCH)
 University of the Sunshine Coast,
 Locked Bag 4, Maroochydore DC, Queensland, 4558 Australia.
 CRICOS Provider No: 01595D
 Email: mbussey@usc.edu.au

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