

Editorial

Revisiting Universities: The Challenge of the 21st Century

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Delivering impact is nowadays on top of the agenda of universities, worldwide. But what exactly does that mean? Universities' primary mission is to educate the young generations, by providing them with basic knowledge on a wide array of topics and disciplines and most importantly, by training them how to continuously learn - learn by doing, by reflecting, by challenging facts and perceptions, critically and constructively. Yet, the education mission, which can be seen as a long term investment from nations into the development and nurturing of their capabilities, competitiveness and growth, is increasingly complemented and supplemented by another role: supporting economic growth in the short run. This pressure to generate and disseminate actionable knowledge, and support its application and immediate implementation into real life, contemporary businesses, entails a tremendous shift in the way universities operate, both in terms of time and space. And this undeniably creates tensions: it is common knowledge that universities and private sector firms are not sync in the way they think, act and deliver.

The next obvious question is: what can be done to ensure that universities do support economic competitiveness, growth and wellbeing? And how can they realistically and reasonably perform this while keeping their intrinsic features, i.e. allowing for reflective thinking, and stepping back from the effusive, fast evolving and increasingly profitability-driven environment? It is obvious that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for this, and that every country, every institution has and needs to find its own way, yet there might be common hints: Interdisciplinary, Stakeholder Engagement and Translation.

Interdisciplinary has always been a key and distinctive feature of this Journal and we will keep advocating it - interdisciplinary is the key for innovation to take root, flourish and blossom. Combining STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and obviously STEMM (same, adding Medicine) with HASS (Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences) is undoubtedly a key success factor for innovation. Breaking silos within universities is however easier said than done, and creating a shared understanding on a subject matter can be a difficult task. A shared understanding does not mean a common understanding though, as divergent and complementary views should be catered for, and even emulated, to stimulate intellectual richness and diversity on a singular matter. Breaking the silos, leveraging on T-shaped individuals should however be promoted and rewarded, and HR incentives, and promotion mechanisms

should embrace this multi-, cross-, inter- disciplinary perspective, thus departing from the outdated, yet still widely spread, discipline-based system. In the short run, accommodating for reverse contribution (we would even call it reverse engineering, fully acknowledging to be engineers ourselves) and publication in respective disciplines to accommodate the restrictions of current promotion schemes - yet, these need to be changed and we strongly advocate for a revision of HR promotion systems to align with a multi-, inter-, cross- disciplinary vision of the world and an impact-driven mission of universities.

Stakeholder engagement, in whatever forms - pre-research focus consultation, participation in research experiments and observations, or research results adoption, is another must. Amazingly, and despite the policy pull or even push, numerous research initiatives are conducted without any stakeholder engagement. Blue sky research is undeniably needed, yet eventually, sooner or later, any discovery should lead to an invention and further to an innovation - and this needs stakeholder involvement, with the broadest understanding of stakeholder - from policy to business. Our view is the sooner, the better, with respect to stakeholder engagement. Without falling into the trap of lobby-driven research, obviously.

Translation - most of the world has not yet, sadly, taken up this concept. And we advocate for its wide and unconditional adoption. Beyond Technology Transfer, knowledge adoption, diffusion and conversion, Translation infers a grounded, deeply rooted set of mechanisms and belts to ensure the ingraining of knowledge into practices, routines and social behaviors. It conveys the multidimensional features of knowledge as academia can generate, across all disciplines, and combining various disciplinary insights in an integrative way, and paves the ways - multiple, in essence - to value creation. Because value creation is in itself a multifaceted concept, value being measured in monetary or non monetary terms. But value creation entails the interaction, or even integration, in an ecosystem. These editors view ecosystems as self-sustaining systems, which are market-oriented, yet not exclusively driven by market considerations and where all stakeholders, civil society and governments have a role to play.

This Issue has unearthed some features of the power of technologies to support and foster invention, translate it into innovation and foster its adoption, acknowledging its heterogeneous and multifaceted nature. We wish you a stimulating journey in your reading of this issue of the Journal of Innovation Management.

Innovatively Yours,

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Editors