Social Entrepreneurs?: University Academic Managers in Venezuela and Australia

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OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

- Contextual and conceptual frameworks
- The Instituto Tecnológico at UCV
- The LEID Centre at CQU
- Conceptual and material implications
CONTEXTUAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

- International changes to the work of university academics/managers
- Work casualisation and intensification
- Tensions arising from steering between state and market (Danaher, Gale & Erben, 2000)
- Debates between “the liberal tradition of” and “the business case for” education (Bailey, 1999)
- Commodification of knowledge
- Commercialisation of university services
- Students as ‘learners’, ‘clients’ and ‘customers’
• Universities as a ‘greedy institution’ that “demands commitment and undivided loyalty from its voluntary members” (Franzway, 2001, p. 3)

• Pressures on academics to be(come) entrepreneurial and to acquire non-government funding

• “The term ‘Enterprise University’ captures the spirit of proactive networked engagement, underpinned by self-referencing identity, which characterises the new kind of non-profit institution in all of its academic, executive and administrative operations” (Marginson, 2002, n.p.)

• “…social capital identity resources…are the ability and willingness of people to engage in action for mutual or community benefit” (Kilpatrick, in press)
• Distinction between business/private and social entrepreneurs

• “…managers who use entrepreneurship in a way that is philosophically based on developing the community achieve outcomes for the good of the whole” (McConachie & Simpson, in press)

• “…when social[ly] entrepreneurial acts are motivated principally to create social benefit, they demonstrate when and how the higher education sector is being more responsive and responsible to its communities” (McConachie & Simpson, in press)
“A social entrepreneur is a different kind of social leader who:
- Identifies and applies practical solutions to social problems by combining innovation, resourcefulness and opportunity.
- Innovates by finding a new product, a new service, or a new approach to a social problem
- Focuses first and foremost on social value creation and in that spirit, is willing to share openly the innovations and insights of the initiative with a view to its wider replication
- Doesn’t wait to secure the resources before undertaking the catalytic innovation
- Is fully accountable to the constituencies s/he serves
- Resists being trapped by the constraints of ideology or discipline
- Continuously refines and adapts approach in response to feedback
- Has a vision, but also a well-thought out roadmap as to how to attain the goal” (Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, 2004, n.p.; emphasis in original)
- Poised between:
  - public/private
  - state/market
  - service/profit
  - social/economic capital

Social entrepreneurs can be seen as ‘boundary riders’ and ‘freedom fighters’, yet also as potentially co-opted by and complicit with the forces of late capitalism and globalisation
THE INSTITUTO TECNOLOGICO AT UCV

- UCV Venezuela’s oldest university, founded by Royal Decree of King Felipe V of Spain in 1721 as the Royal and Pontifical University of Caracas
- Currently more than 50,000 students, 6,000 academics and nearly 8,000 non-academic employees
- Nine faculties in Caracas, two faculties in the regional city Maracy, five distance education centres and 12 experimental stations throughout Venezuela
- Provision for Indigenous students living in Amazonas region and Orinoco River Delta
- 1996 began Samuel Robinson Program, a social intervention program directed at students from low socioeconomic backgrounds
• Instituto Tecnológico established in 1964
• Two kinds of courses:
  - short courses from eight to 40 hours’ duration covering topics like the transportation and distribution of natural gas and the supervision of civil works
  - accredited programs through licensed agreements such as with the World Meteorological Organisation
• Broker services for external clients such as conducting mechanical separations and comparing meteorological data collected by conventional instruments and automatic weather stations to evaluating the results’ accuracy and utility
• Particular challenges for social entrepreneurship in conditions of political instability and economic hardship
THE LEID CENTRE AT CQU

- Established in October 2003, as part of the Division of Teaching and Learning Services
- Interprets “Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development” in terms of policies, projects and publications relating to CQU’s teaching and learning
- Four core values: “Leadership, Empowerment, Integrity, Diversity”
- Boyer’s (1990) four scholarships:
  - Discovery (research)
  - Integration (linking research with own and other disciplines)
  - Application (service)
  - Teaching (transmitting, extending and transforming knowledge)
- Notion of ‘strategic scholarship’
- Some strategies of social entrepreneurship:
- guest edited special theme issues of journals (evaluation and open and distance education, multiliteracies and open and distance education, regional universities and their communities, rural education, vocational education and training)
- *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development* (open source software, mentoring processes underpinning REACT section)
- stakeholder-focused program evaluations
- seeking to map multiple students’ voices and academics’ perspectives
- seeking to enhance quality and outcomes of students’ learning (eg, student attrition and retention; reproductivist, constructivist and transformative views of assessment; evaluation as multiple interests; innovation as transformation of practice)

- Some constraints on social entrepreneurship:
- difficulties of access to staff members at international campuses and offshore sites
- complexities of coordination and integration across a multicampus institution
- enduring perception that teaching and learning are less highly valued than research
- some management discourses seek simple answers to multifaceted questions
- inevitable disruptions of an external organisational review
CONCEPTUAL AND MATERIAL IMPLICATIONS

- Social entrepreneurship is useful in drawing attention to alternative and multiple understandings of the purposes and effects of formal education
- Social entrepreneurship provides a potential basis for universities to recreate their relationships with their communities and constituencies
- Social entrepreneurship highlights many of the competing discourses and contradictory forces framing the work of contemporary academic managers
- Social entrepreneurship might be an unstable oxymoron, at least in universities
• Social entrepreneurs might be ethically attentive at the ‘micro’ level, yet swamped by entrepreneurial imperatives at the ‘macro’ level.

• The remarkable resilience of strategies of marginalisation and of disempowering binaries creates an obstacle to social entrepreneurs’ transformative agenda.

• Social entrepreneurs face a fundamental ambivalence around universities as agents of elitism and late capitalism and/or as sites of counternarrative and transgression.
References


