

# Economics of Globalization, Contemporary University Systems, Decisions, Cultures



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# Changing Internal and External University Structures, Decision Processes, Cultures



Increasingly, universities and their societies must invent and support ways of responding to challenges made more difficult by globalization, e.g., economic development, regulating financial practices, enhancing technological innovation, need for artistic creativity, energy problems, environmental issues.

We can analyze, evaluate, and influence acts and institutions (universities, economies, etc.) from two overlapping but contrasting standpoints: by reference to decision/choice processes and to cultures.

# Decision Processes, Cultures, Values



Universities are often expected to be economically justifiable by standards of rational decision or choice, debatable, sometimes narrowly measured economically, sometimes very idealized and non-empirical. Always, this requires fundamental critical examination of values.


“Culture” is used with many meanings, but often tends to go beyond “decision”. Understanding cultures usually involves less idealization, and requires more empirical content. This content includes, e.g., knowledge of USA or Chinese history and contemporary interpersonal relations, but also addressing “values” philosophically.

# Some University Networks




Contemporary societies, defined by globalization, are influenced by their globalizing universities, and vice versa. E.g., certain areas of economic importance may be emphasized in Jilin Province (the automotive industry, biotechnology, agriculture, etc.). But universities are expected to connect students and faculty, in education and research, with many cultures, not all “at the university campus”, not even all in the region. Universities are expected to network with government, business, and other institutions, local, national, global. Decision processes, but also cultures mainly define this.

# Complexity of the Distinction between the University's Internal and External Structures



Also, any university, including “the university campus” itself, becomes increasingly complex. More types of activities and organizations become part of “the university”. This includes sites such as scientific research parks, arts and entertainment complexes, tourism, professional practice activities and venues such as those involved in business, architecture, urban planning. Campuses come to include or overlap with labs, factories, and other production facilities, larger urban and rural physical space and land, cyberspace, not only geographically local, but far-away sites. Many elements become embodied, in novel ways, in both decision processes, culture(s), and value systems (thoughtful or not) that compose universities. Analysis, evaluation, and administration of this is complicated by increasing globalization.

# Analyzing, Evaluating, and Re-Defining Concepts “Internal” to Universities




Concepts “internal” to many universities change as universities respond to challenges of change, especially globalization. Universities everywhere, including the USA, which the author knows best, are redefining themselves and their surroundings, and being re-defined from “external” sources. Analyzing and re-defining “internal” university concepts is necessary for pragmatic co-ordination of activity in a globalizing university environment. One way to start is with analysis and proposed changes in use of key concepts used to interpret and evaluate work at universities, as co-ordinated by specific decision processes, and in specific cultural contexts, with associated values.

# Changing Concepts of Academic Disciplines in a Globalizing Environment



Change requires a combination of multi-disciplinary “philosophy”, multi-disciplinary “social science”, multi-disciplinary “administration” and “management”, etc. Categories for interpreting and working with the university “disciplines”, associated with various vocabularies, are in a process of change, influenced by globalization and economic challenges. It is best to combine more formal (maybe more mathematical) and less empirical economic and financial analysis of rational decisions and choice processes, with more participant fieldwork study, more empirical methods attentive to cultures. This applies not only to university systems, but to any complex organizations operating along with universities.


# Conceptual Schemes, Vocabularies, Translations, Changing Meaning, University Networks



Analyzing, evaluating, and changing the many languages used at universities to co-ordinate work is part of the pragmatic change that comes with globalization. In some ways this is analogous to interpreting and translating natural languages. To some extent, it is literally interpreting and translating natural languages such as Mandarin or English. In other respects, it is only analogous to interpretation and translation of languages. In general, engaging in such interpretive activities is aligned with much cultural anthropology and interpretive humanities and social science.



# Some Blurry Concepts Used in USA Universities: Research, Teaching, Service



Faculties at USA universities, for example, are usually thought of as engaged in work that can be roughly categorized as research, teaching, and “service” (sometimes also called “outreach” or “extension”). Distinctions among these areas were never sharp, but are being further changed, rapidly, and require re-evaluation. Understanding and furthering individual and group productivity, among other things, requires this.

# “Interdisciplinary” and “Multi-disciplinary” in USA Academic Culture




“Interdisciplinary” and (to a lesser extent) “multi-disciplinary” have become fashionable language in the USA, “buzz-words”, as new paradigms, new combinations of talents, new methodologies, or spontaneously innovative activities are recognized as valuable. Disciplines such as engineering and science categories (both natural and social sciences), arts and humanities disciplines, etc., evolve and change, sometimes keeping their names but changing so much that only the names remain the same.

# “Community Engagement” in USA Academic Culture



The jargon of “disciplines” and “interdisciplinary” or “multi-disciplinary” areas is mainly an intra-academic, intra-university phenomenon. Recent USA jargon about “community engagement” (furthered, for example, by the Carnegie Foundation in the USA) signifies something different. This signifies increasing interpenetration of academic and non-academic organizational decision-making and cultural forms. Influence is exercised in at least two directions, from universities outward, but also from outside into the university, seeking changes and re-direction within universities. These influences generate many questions, but also offer opportunities as the boundaries between universities and their surrounding decision-making systems and culture(s), nearby and far away, not only shift, but may sometimes fade away.

# “Fine” or “Applied” Arts at Universities



Clearly the distinction between the inside and outside of universities (a physical or a conceptual distinction), and the organization of universities, are very much matters not only of physical location and physical infrastructure, but also matters of the interpretation of the nature and flow of information, science, techniques, engineering, artistic images, sounds, environments, poetry, stories, and so on, that may be (fine or applied) “artistic” media, including “digital media”. Some university faculty and students both preserve and re-interpret the past, but also confront new artistic directions as universities move into the increasingly globalized future, e.g., in “film-making” and digital arts.

# Social Sciences and Modes of Organizational Decision Processes As Well As Forms of Culture



The vocabulary of decision-processes, as well as the vocabulary of cultures, are each used in conjunction with various disciplines and types of administrative or management practices. Among these disciplines in the case of “rational decision-making” (one set of ideas linked with decision-centered analyses) is much of economics as practiced in the USA and many other countries. Some historical economics was more interpretive about culture. Among current disciplines and less often, among related types of administration or management, in the case of culture-centered approaches, is the discipline of anthropology (especially cultural anthropology).

# Some Academic Allies of USA Social Sciences which Emphasize Culture



Besides cultural anthropology, social science areas such as history, social psychology, sociology, and political science in some activities have “cultural” foci. In professional practice areas, such as medicine, law, journalism, analogous contrasts may appear, with accounts of, evaluations of, and interventions referring to decisions at the center of some approaches, and a focus on cultures (often incorporating but not reduced to decision processes) at the center of other approaches.

# Decision and Culture Foci Best Combined and Subject to Critical Evaluation

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We need not choose exclusively one or the other approach, a decision focus or a culture focus. They can be, are, and should be combined. However, in interpreting and managing universities, and also interpreting and managing economies and financial systems with which universities function, the conceptual apparatuses of various approaches emphasizing “cultures”, and necessarily the critical examination of values, can help us better to understand, evaluate, and manage or administer what is going on with decision-making processes or cultures. This applies to macro financial crises around universities, and also to more confined but significant organizational changes likely to occur within universities. The Western, particularly USA disciplines of economics and finance could gain from internal development from their own historical resources, or supplementation from outside, by more empirically detailed culturally based analyses and evaluations of banks, stock exchanges, workers, consumers and investors psychology, trust, promises, and so forth.


# Some Recent Examples



In the continuing global economic crisis, familiar and even once perhaps slightly boring values such as truthfulness, trust, and promise-keeping have eroded, subverting confidence and provoking widespread anxiety. These problems cannot be solved by ever more cunning psychological manipulations to build manufactured trust. New globally aware cultural practices need to be developed to repair the damage, new forms of co-operation must be created which are sustained by critically examined and to varying degrees shared values. In the USA, there is increasingly an institutionalized sense among some that established collective promises and agreements such as pensions, or other contracts with the domestic population need not be honored, that debts owed across borders might conceivably be repudiated collectively, as we saw in the farcical conflicts over the USA government raising its debt limit.




# Relevance of Bio-Medicine and Related Areas of Bio-Technology



It is likely that a bio-medical orientation will also be necessary to understand how the vocabularies of decision or culture can function to interpret and co-ordinate organizational behavior, whether in universities or other institutions such as businesses or markets. However, the bio-medical level of interpretation and management can, it seems, only be constructive in understanding and coordinating individual and group activity, if bio-medical thinking is conjoined with cultural analysis, and necessarily with critical values. Bio-medicine cannot by artificial means generate legitimate trust about economic and financial systems, for example. Justice in provision of healthcare might, however, be of assistance in building legitimate trust. It is doubtful that the bio-medical level could ever enable us to dispense with decision analysis or cultural interpretation, certainly not with critical values, though bio-medicine might come to merge with new types of cultural interpretation and value judgments, making them more bio-medically sophisticated, even as they themselves revise our understanding and management of bio-medical phenomena and related areas of biotechnology.

# “Philosophy” as a Factor in Social Science and Organizational Administration or Management



This brings us to one role that “philosophy” can play, in arbitrating among different explanatory and interpretive approaches and disciplines, whether decision-centered or culture-centered, or a more sensible, complex combination of the two contrasting orientations, combined with critical study of values. Philosophy can also arbitrate, to some extent, contrasting systems of values that often function in social life, including judgments in and about higher educational institutions and economics. Without itself settling such disputes, philosophy might, among other activities, help us understand better what is going on when, for example, economics and finance-centered theory and practice use ideals of rational decision-making needing supplementation by other major dimensions of culture such as non-economic value-systems, at universities or elsewhere.

# Value Systems and the Persistence of Cultural Preservation at USA Universities



Value systems that are difficult or impossible to understand in terms of what some consider “rational” decision processes, to some extent persist stubbornly all over the place in university life, and social life generally, at least in the USA. Universities are in the view of some USA academics increasingly subject to the influences of what some academics consider too narrowly economic and finance-centered ideals of rational-decision or rational-choice processes. Abolition (or severe criticism) of some university disciplines or departments provoke widespread attention and alarm in some academic circles. The University of Nevada at Las Vegas provides one recent example among many in the USA.

# “Classics” at USA Universities



Still, to take one example, Departments of Classics (in the ethnocentric Western sense, not including the study of Confucius, Lao-Tsu, Buddha) persist, at many USA universities, even though they do not exist at many institutions and their existence is feeble or threatened at others. This is also true of many other more traditional academic areas. Maybe when there is preservation, in an age of globalization this is sometimes only sentimental, temporary, and marginal. The anxieties of academic classicists or other academics might be well-founded, as resources are re-allocated and students flock to academic areas such as the study of business, engineering, or medicine. There may be similar phenomena in some areas of university systems in China or other countries.

# Implications of Economic Globalization, for Universities, and in General, Still Unclear



But what is going on in universities, as well as what should be going on in universities, certainly in the USA, is still not thoroughly understood, despite all the fears expressed by some USA academics about too narrowly economic and career-centered decision-making by students, administrators, and others concerned with university decision-making and cultures.

Globalization is not a determinism in any sense that deprives us of choices or variable cultural stances about universities, or more generally, the societies including the economies in which universities operate and which universities should serve.

# Humanities, Arts, Critical Social Sciences in an Age of Globalization



In the opinion of the author of this presentation, the Humanities and Arts, in their USA senses, (and probably similar subjects in other countries), as well as critical social sciences, might survive and thrive very well in a globalizing economic and financial environment. These areas are quite capable of re-inventing themselves, with societal interest and support, and part of this re-invention will be combining their activities more with other disciplines and overlooked parts of the wider society. Re-invention in an age of globalization is not necessarily easy, but can be exciting and innovative in valuable ways.

# Mathematics in Universities in an Age of Increasing Globalization



This fits not only the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, but also other disciplines such as Mathematics, which can be pursued both as a pure, non-empirical subject, and as a set of more empirically involved inquiries. Mathematics can be both. The direct business, economics, finance, and engineering aspects of mathematics, for example, are important, but may not serve the same purposes, or exemplify all the value of pure mathematics, as many mathematicians will believe. Economic and political leadership should take the pure mathematicians seriously. Without them, science and technology would be constrained, but besides, their pure mathematics is intrinsically valuable.

# Globalization, Universities Beyond Campuses, Universities Across Borders



In conclusion, university systems are clearly becoming much more connected and intertwined with one another across the world, and universities are increasingly more intertwined with wider cultural systems everywhere. An age of increasing globalization will need increasing attention to the interpretation and critical evaluation of cultures that emerge from this.