Chapter 11

Institutional Enabling Strategies

Ruth Bridgstock¹ & Neil Tippett²

¹Griffith University

²University of South Australia

Abstract

University structures and processes often militate against the promotion of connectedness learning. From the outside, they are often seen as walled gardens, restricting the flow of people and information between themselves and the outside world, while on the inside, the often-used metaphor is a series of siloes, where staff, programs, and organisational areas in different academic and functional areas all work in parallel to each other with relatively little interaction. If we are to support students to develop connections and use these to work and live productively and meaningfully, then it follows that universities themselves should also be well connected. This chapter explores the range of approaches that universities can use to overcome the institutional barriers to connectedness. Seven enabling institutional strategies are outlined which can be used to create, grow and maintain inter- and intra-institutional connectedness. The chapter then introduces three empirical studies which explore how these enabling strategies are being integrated within and across different higher education institutions, and the impact they have had toward enhancing graduates' connectedness capabilities.

Keywords: graduate employability, enabling strategies, institutional connectedness, partnerships, stakeholder engagement, leadership

Institutional Enabling Strategies

<a>Introduction

Over the preceding chapters we have explored the importance of connectedness capabilities for graduates and also identified the pedagogic approaches which can be used within higher education to foster students' connectedness capabilities and networks. In this final section of the book, we address the larger question of how degree programs, organisational areas such as Faculties or Divisions, and universities more broadly, can enable connectedness learning.

Seeking to characterise the extent of connectedness learning and teaching in higher education institutions, Bridgstock (2019b) conducted in-depth interviews with 71 higher education staff, university alumni, and employers / recruiters throughout Australia. Two key thematic challenges to higher education connectedness emerged. First, the university was often seen as a 'walled garden', with relatively limited and mostly transactionally-based interaction between the institution and entities outside of it. Second, the university could be depicted as a 'series of siloes' in which staff, programs, and organisational areas all have relatively little interaction with each other, even inside departments, and interactions/collaborations are hampered by structural and bureaucratic factors. Although these challenges were seen to be consistent across the higher education sector, there are many approaches that universities can use to overcome these institutional barriers, and this chapter will discuss some of these. Following this, the chapter then outlines seven enabling institutional strategies that can be used by universities to create, grow and maintain inter- and intra-institutional connectedness, which in turn create conditions for the development and use of connectedness pedagogies and capabilities. Finally, the chapter introduces three empirical chapters, which explore how these enabling strategies are being integrated within and across

different higher education institutions, and the impact they have had toward enhancing graduates' connectedness capabilities.

<a>The connected institution

If we are to support students to develop connections and then to learn from them, work with them and build productive and meaningful careers and lives, it follows that universities should also be well connected. This argument can be made at a number of levels. Foremost, in a practical sense, if the university maintains productive relationships with industry, community, researchers and teachers within and beyond the institution, it can leverage these to offer distinctive and enriched collaborative learning experiences that also grow students' connectedness capabilities and networks (Bridgstock, 2019a). In so doing, the institution models reciprocal connectedness practices and capabilities at the level of staff and organisational behaviour, infusing connectedness within the anatomy of the university itself. This modelling requires both professional learning and a shift in organisational culture, which can be further strengthened and propagated through connectedness practice. Thus, through building a culture of connectedness, the institution starts to enrich its own knowledge and practices, and enhance its external reputation (Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010). These benefits can also extend beyond the institutional walls, contributing to the enrichment of knowledge and practices among the university's partners.

The notions of knowledge transfer and knowledge exchange between universities and industry are by no means new (Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008), however, the literature in this space still tends to focus on research, commercialisation, and to some extent community service activities (the 'third mission'), with teaching and student involvement lagging somewhat behind (Xia, Caulfield, & Ferns, 2015). Indeed, in comparison, learning and teaching seemingly suffer from a lack of strategic or systematic development and

INSTITUTIONAL ENABLING STRATEGIES

management of external engagement and partnerships, such as client relationship management approaches. The rise of work integrated learning and the associated need to manage partner relationships for large numbers of student placements means that this is changing, albeit slowly (Fleming, 2016; O’Leary, 2013; Tran, 2016).

Anticipating the changing role of the higher education sector, Bridgstock (2017) suggests a utopian vision of the future university as the hub of a knowledge network, demonstrating potential benefits of the connected university to students, teachers, industry, professionals, users and university researchers. She conceptualises the future university as being based on overarching, accessible, empowering, dynamic, global, communally constructed frameworks of open materials and online platforms (Tapscott & Williams, 2010) that are continually evolving and adapting in response to external and internal changes. The hub acts as both a conduit and knowledge integrator for the latest university and industry generated research and practice trends that students, professionals and communities alike can access as needed. Learning occurs authentically through experiential practice, embedded into communities and networks, with learners able to search out task-relevant knowledge and information from the knowledge network, with the support and facilitation of teachers.

This utopian vision offers a counterpoint to the highly bounded bureaucratic institutions that universities are today. Many universities are set up in ways that actively work against developing better networks (Ankrah & Al-Tabbaa, 2015). Social networks are based on the open sharing of information, learning, and connections; however, universities still tend to cautiously guard their research, curriculum and staff/students by keeping them inside of the walled garden, limiting their access to the outside world. Minocha, Hristov, and Reynolds (2017) reviewed practices across UK higher education for graduate employability, concluding that university-industry interaction represented a significant opportunity for growth and strengthening. Risk management and the protection of data and intellectual

property are part of the reason for this practice being underdeveloped, however, by engaging in highly protective behaviour, universities limit the opportunity for reciprocal and trusting relationships to develop; relationships which can form the foundation for effective collaborative work.

Industry stakeholders can also find that universities are difficult to work with as institutions. Universities can work at a different pace to other organisations, and their processes and administrative requirements can be barriers to engagement. In addition, many higher education institutions have not yet adopted integrated and strategic stakeholder engagement and management practices. These institutions continue to engage in low-value, short term transactional interactions with external partners (such as sending students for placements each semester, with little acknowledgement or interaction with the partner otherwise), and purely bottom-up, academic-led small collaborations that are based on individual relationships and disappear when the staff member moves elsewhere. Different parts of the institution may make multiple bottom-up unco-ordinated approaches to potential partners.

A key challenge and concurrent opportunity for universities is to engage in strategic, deeper long-term and highly reciprocal collaborations with external partners that are multi-pronged (teaching, research, commercialisation, community). Each prong of activity can complement the others in building knowledge and practice, fostering a symbiotic relationship between partners. For success, common goals to collaborative work that address mutual benefits to all stakeholders need to be developed, with both partners working towards the goal through a close partnership (Choy & Delahaye, 2011; Cooper, et al., 2010; Peach, Larkin, & Ruinard, 2012). The benefits of such partnerships must be reciprocal, including enriching authentic learning experiences for students, reputational effects for universities,

INSTITUTIONAL ENABLING STRATEGIES

providing a ‘talent pipeline’ for industry, exposure to fresh new ideas for all partners through research and practice, and improved curriculum.

Another key challenge for universities is silo-busting. Interdisciplinary teaching, collaborations between teaching and research, and shared endeavours to build external partnerships are all highly valuable activities, and yet many in universities find it difficult simply to share knowledge and practice (Al-Kurdi, El-Haddadeh, & Eldabi, 2018). In 2005, Friedman et. al. lamented, “it is unfortunate that universities, while they may ideally be teaching organisations, generally do not have any of the characteristics of learning organisations. There is little knowledge sharing; ten different faculty members may teach the same course, but they will not work together to share ideas. There is still very little team teaching in a typical university” (see Friedman & Kass-Shraibman, 2017, p. 295).

Many scholars agree that inter-disciplinary interaction and collaboration could be increased inside universities, to the benefit of many (Örtenblad & Koris, 2014). As students learn to connect with others through scaffolded authentic practice, so too many university staff will benefit from professional learning opportunities that support them to collaborate effectively with others in the university for mutual benefit. Some researchers have found that academics have generally positive attitudes towards knowledge sharing and collaborative practice but may be inhibited in doing so by individualistic organisational culture, instrumentalism, inconsistent leadership and messaging, and barriers in terms of information technology and organisational structure (Fullwood, Rowley, & Delbridge, 2013). Strong disciplinary affiliations and long-held beliefs about curriculum and pedagogy can also be barriers to collaboration and sharing. Cultural change is required in order to foster connections inside higher education institutions across disciplinary and functional silos, and to support institutions to work effectively with stakeholders outside the organisation.

<a>Institutional enabling strategies for connectedness

At present, higher education institutions clearly struggle in using connectedness to move beyond walls and silos to establish more strategic, integrated and sustainable approaches to education. The Connectedness Learning Approach outlines seven enabling strategies that can be used by universities to create, support and maintain partner, collaborator and network engagement plans and practices to cultivate better connected programs, organisational area and institutions. Implemented institution-wide, these enabling strategies can help ensure that structures, processes, teaching staff, curricula and pedagogic practices are all aligned in supporting students to develop connectedness for life and work. The seven institutional enabling strategies are:

1. *Develop an integrated suite of connectedness pedagogies and partners:* build an integrated program of connectedness pedagogies. Maximise the benefit of connections by partnering across multiple pedagogic approaches where appropriate. Partner with stakeholders across multiple pedagogies where appropriate.
2. *Identify, develop and strengthen key relationship broker roles:* which individuals and teams will be responsible for developing and maintaining extra- and intra-university/program connections and partnerships? What level of resourcing (including workload allocation) will be required? How will the benefits of personal points of contact be balanced with the risks of individually brokered connections?
3. *Reduce institutional barriers to extra-university connectedness:* streamline processes, create simple, responsive and personal points of contact, reduce forms and 'red tape', and simplify and standardise intellectual property, legal and insurance processes.
4. *Identify, make and grow strategic extra-university connections:* identify key industry and community partners in line with strategic plans, actively seek connections for consultation and engagement, offer genuine value to connections (e.g., continuing

INSTITUTIONAL ENABLING STRATEGIES

professional education and networking opportunities, a pipeline of excellent students/graduates for employment, access to facilities, research expertise) and manage connections sensitively.

5. *Strengthen and maintain extra-university connections:* develop deeper stakeholder engagement strategies, moving from finite and transactional to long-term partnerships and collaborating on mutually beneficial tasks (e.g., knowledge exchange activities, investment and building trust, keeping one another ‘in the loop’).
6. *Foster intra-university connectedness:* ensure that networks of individuals and programs engaged in similar or related practices (e.g., alumni engagement program leaders, faculty stakeholder engagement managers) are built across organizational areas to maximise learning, knowledge exchange and connection sharing.
7. *Use connectedness-enabling digital tools, platforms and infrastructure:* where possible, choose digital technologies that support and enable connectedness—for instance, those that are industry-authentic, open and connected into wider networks beyond the university (e.g., social media, blogs, industry-authentic online portfolios), and adopt data management strategies to support this.

To guide the effective implementation of these strategies, the Connectedness Learning Approach also outlines eight learning principles that support institutions in applying connectedness across programs, organisational areas and the university as a whole. These principles are:

- The program is ‘plugged in’ to wider professional, industry and interest groups and networks.
- The program seeks out and develops new relationships in a strategic way, according to principles of reciprocity.

INSTITUTIONAL ENABLING STRATEGIES

- The program deepens the relationships it has in effective ways, including through valuing its connections.
- Interactions and communications are straightforward and effective.
- Processes are simple and straightforward, with ‘red tape’ minimised.
- Partnerships and networks within the university (intra-university connections) are present and optimised.
- There are enough resources (people, workload, funding) to foster sustainable connectedness.
- There is an evaluation plan in place that covers the above dimensions.

This volume includes three chapters that focus explicitly on various institutional enabling strategies that support connectedness learning, and the development of connectedness capabilities among students and staff.

In Chapter 12, Kerr, Wright & Barraud consider how universities and schools can work together to support the development of learners’ 21st century skill sets by documenting the design and delivery of a co-curricular design-led social entrepreneurship program initiated by a secondary school and developed through collaboration with a university partner in Queensland, Australia. Discussing the creation, implementation and evaluation of this program, the authors provide a practical account of how inter-institutional partnerships can be developed and maintained for mutual benefit. The chapter provides evidence of how the program was able to support connectedness learning among both students and teachers, and in doing so, create opportunities for further learning and collaboration.

In Chapter 13, Hammer et al., describe a pilot initiative to integrate enabling strategies into institutional program review and enhancement processes at a regional Australian university. Comprising a cross-disciplinary project team which included careers and

INSTITUTIONAL ENABLING STRATEGIES

employability staff, the authors use documentary analysis to map existing connectedness learning within the Creative Arts and Engineering programs. Subsequent interviews with selected stakeholders were used to determine the effectiveness of these approaches, and identify strengths, gaps and opportunities for unit and program enhancement. In discussing the findings, the authors address the challenges that universities face in embedding connectedness learning into institution-wide review and enhancement processes, yet also provide recommendations and examples of good practice which can support educators in integrating connectedness learning pedagogies within their own disciplines.

In Chapter 14, Kitto et al., considers how universities can start using systemic enabling strategies to deliver connectedness learning at scale, and over a lifetime. Drawing upon the lessons learned from two ongoing projects at the University of Technology, Sydney, the authors explore institutional barriers to large scale connectedness learning. With a specific focus on student data, institutional connectivity and digital infrastructure, the chapter provides a series of practical recommendations that could be generally applied within any university looking to move towards a model of lifelong connectedness learning.

<a>References

- Al-Kurdi, O., El-Haddadeh, R., & Eldabi, T. (2018). Knowledge sharing in higher education institutions: A systematic review. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 31(2), 226-246.
- Ankrah, S., & Al-Tabbaa, O. (2015). Universities–industry collaboration: A systematic review. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 31(3), 387-408.
- Bridgstock, R. (2017). The university and the knowledge network: A new educational model for 21st century learning and employability. In M. Tomlinson (Ed.), *Graduate Employability in Context: Research, Theory and Debate*. London: Palgrave-MacMillan
- Bridgstock, R. (2019a). Graduate Employability 2.0: Education for work in a networked world. In J. Higgs, G. Crisp & W. Letts (Eds.), *Education for Employability: Learning for Future Possibilities*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers
- Bridgstock, R. (2019b). *Graduate Employability 2.0: Enhancing the Connectedness of Learners, Teachers and Higher Education Institutions. Final Report of the National Senior Teaching Fellowship*. Canberra: Department of Education and Training.
- Choy, S., & Delahaye, B. (2011). Partnerships between universities and workplaces: Some challenges for work-integrated learning. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 33(2), 157-172.
- Cooper, L., Orrell, J., & Bowden, M. (2010). *Work integrated learning: A guide to effective practice*. London: Routledge.
- Fleming, J. (2016). *Collaborating with WIL Stakeholders: Success factors for sustainable relationships*. Paper presented at the 2nd International Research Symposium on Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education, Victoria, BC.

- Friedman, H. H., & Kass-Shraibman, F. (2017). What it takes to be a superior college president: Transform your institution into a learning organization. *The Learning Organization*, 24(5), 286-297.
- Fullwood, R., Rowley, J., & Delbridge, R. (2013). Knowledge sharing amongst academics in UK universities. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 17(1), 123-136.
- Hammer, S., Ayris, P., Basson, M., Batorowicz, B., Devine, J., Forbes, M., . . . Wade, B. (2019). Integrating connectedness learning into institutional program review processes in an Australian regional university. In R. Bridgstock & N. Tippett (Eds.), *Higher Education and the Future of Graduate Employability: A Connectedness Learning Approach*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar
- Jongbloed, B., Enders, J., & Salerno, C. (2008). Higher education and its communities: Interconnections, interdependencies and a research agenda. *Higher Education*, 56(3), 303-324.
- Kerr, J., Wright, N., & Barraud, T. (2019). Developing a connected learning community for social entrepreneurship through university and high school collaboration. In R. Bridgstock & N. Tippett (Eds.), *Higher Education and the Future of Graduate Employability: A Connectedness Learning Approach*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar
- Kitto, K., O'Hara, J., Philips, M., Gardiner, G., Ghodrati, M., & Buckingham Shum, S. (2019). The connected university: Connectedness learning across a lifetime. In R. Bridgstock & N. Tippett (Eds.), *Higher Education and the Future of Graduate Employability: A Connectedness Learning Approach*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar
- Minocha, S., Hristov, D., & Reynolds, M. (2017). From graduate employability to employment: Policy and practice in UK higher education. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 21(3), 235-248.

- O’Leary, S. (2013). Collaborations in higher education with employers and their influence on graduate employability: An institutional project. *Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences*, 5(1), 37-50.
- Örtenblad, A., & Koris, R. (2014). Is the learning organization idea relevant to higher educational institutions? A literature review and a “multi-stakeholder contingency approach”. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 28(2), 173-214.
- Peach, D., Larkin, I., & Ruinard, E. (2012). *High-risk, high-stake relationships: Building effective industry-university partnerships for work integrated learning (WIL)*. Paper presented at the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) National Conference, Deakin University, Geelong.
- Tapscott, D., & Williams, A. D. (2010). Innovating the 21st-century university: It’s time. *Educause Review*, 45(1), 16-29.
- Tran, T. T. (2016). Enhancing graduate employability and the need for university-enterprise collaboration. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, 7(1), 58-71.
- Xia, J., Caulfield, C., & Ferns, S. (2015). Work-integrated learning: Linking research and teaching for a win-win situation. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(9), 1560-1572.