

Transforming 21st Century Corporate-University Engagement: From Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) to Learning-Integrated Work (LIW)

PROF DR MAURITS VAN ROOIJEN

Co-Chairman, World Association for Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education (WACE), Boston Ma, www.waceinc.org

Rector Magnificus and Chief Executive, Nyenrode Business Universiteit, The Netherlands, www.nyenrode.nl

Introduction

Today, there are 500 million Facebook users; 2 billion YouTube videos; LinkedIn is a driving catalyst across companies for knowledge sharing, professional development and networking; eBooks and iPads are growing daily; universities, albeit sometimes reluctantly, are rethinking their partnership relevance with business and society and the power of real world experiential learning such as service learning and work-integrated learning *beyond graduation*; and business is focused on building capabilities — competitive advantage by empowering the creative talents of its employees.

At first glance, you may think all of these transformational changes are about the precision, speed, and capacity of technology. Indeed, the power of information technology is pervasive in all aspects of modern society, however, what these trends reflect is a fundamental aspect of the human condition: the natural power of engagement. People want to be connected with people, ideas, and knowledge through unlimited community engagement at home, in the workplace, locally, globally and continually. Technologies are, in fact, tools of engagement inside the workplace among employees, between universities and corporations, and across the globe. It truly is a brave new world.

Indeed, the concept of engagement may be defined across a variety of contexts and organisations. This commentary examines engagement as it relates to the *changing* corporate-university partnership and what factors will be essential for the future. Underlying this concept of engagement is the premise that learning is lifelong, occurs in diverse ways, locations, and media, and that Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is simply the predecessor for Learning-Integrated Work that continues throughout one's professional life. The synergy and potential for Learning-Integrated Work (LIW), however, will be dependent upon a revisioning of employer-university engagement.

Revisioning University Engagement

Today's universities are in transition and at a crossroads. The winds of change in the global economy, culture and society has created a dichotomy for most universities: how do they retain their traditional heritage, traditions and focus whilst aligning their mission with the rapidly changing demands of modern society. In other words, how do they enhance their value-added traditions to respond to demands for practical, real world education that is relevant, current, and translates from theory to practice into sustainable impacts. University research, service and teaching is still a critical foundation for higher education to 'push back the frontiers of knowledge' and strengthen economic development, scientific discovery, and educational empowerment. At the same time, it seems universities must rethink their traditional organisational, philosophical and operational tenants to align more closely with real world needs.

In one respect, the ivory tower institution is a concept of the past. The dominant form of university in the future will one that is a hybrid with society, acknowledging that learning and knowledge development is not nor should be an exclusive domain of universities, but that a university will be much more effective through interaction and knowledge networks. The good news is that universities are beginning to embrace this concept of 'relevance' to employer-employee needs through new models of engagement.

The university of the future (which is now) will want to be relevant, will want to see optimal impact of its research and education, will have the ambition to shape the future. This requires a university that is neither arrogant nor lacks confidence. The first and the latter lead to universities creating demarcation lines. The successful universities of the future will enjoy their interaction with society and will involve employers in education because it acknowledges that this is in the interest of all (of the students, of the employers, of the university, of society at large) and it will no longer focus primarily on the next generation academics, but rather on effective graduates that have real added value to employers and society.

Universities may embrace *Work-Integrated Learning* (WIL) as an effective educational tool, the truth is that its success depends entirely on the full involvement of employers and ideally also the government. If companies do not recognise the importance that they are partners in the educational process of their future employees, one can only have modest expectations of the success of WIL. No doubt some employers, especially those who are ambitious, who are engaged in the global war for talent and who are enlightened in recognising the quality of human capital as the main condition for competitive success, will want to be involved, but this means only a small part of students will be able to benefit from placements.

So the question is how to make sure that higher education is truly co-operative, bringing the different stakeholders together and ensuring shared responsibility. Part of the answer no doubt is to make sure that employers are engaged with the educational process, rather than just offering a small part of it, ie the placement. Engagement is a crucial part of

co-operative education and universities must actively engage employers as integral and equal partners. Though it is clear that university is the place of expertise when it comes to higher learning and that they deserve respect as such, being open to employers and seeking their involvement in the learning process through a structured dialogue should be recognised as an obvious example of mutual benefit. The university of the 21st century, in my view, should be just as conscious of its credibility in regard to employers as of its academic credibility.

In sum, universities of the future must reach out and invite employers to be integral and equal partners in the educational process, particularly in aligning (not designing) curriculum that has practical, experiential and real world relevance for employees. The path of engagement must be reciprocal rather than the one-way street of the past that always led to the university. A university education is only the first step in career development; Learning-Integrated Work (LIW) takes over where Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) left off and is a lifelong process.

From WIL to LIW: Engaging Employers as Co-Partners

At Nyenrode Business University we rarely just put any programme on the market on a speculative basis that there might be demand for such a programme. All programmes are designed in dialogue with the sector, listening to their needs. Thus the programmes are co-created. Not that employers design the curriculum — they better leave that to the experts — but to make sure that the programmes address the real requirements. In fact, at Nyenrode we go one step further: we expect that those who engage with us in such dialogue also guarantee our revenue. We ask them to underwrite the risk of developing and delivering such sector specific programmes, which is also a guarantee for us that what we do is really useful and will have real impact.

The new reality is that in order to be really successful Work-Integrated Learning will move on, at the point of graduation, into Learning-Integrated Work. When it comes to moving to higher steps on the career ladder, when it comes to moving into new areas or careers, or even just to make sure one remains in touch with new demands and insights, learning will retain its relevance. So the successful universities of the future will have to reinvent themselves as centres not just of WIL but also LIW. They will not let students leave, but will stay with them for the rest of their professional life. My own university, Nyenrode in The Netherlands, now generates two-thirds of its annual revenue from WIL and one third from LIW and I aim at changing this in the years to come to 50/50. The added benefit from this is that a university becomes less dependent on demographics, recognising that learning continues across an individual's career beyond university.

Experiential learning is an essential tool to learn to reflect on practice, putting practical experience in a theoretical context and appreciate learning not as a stage in life but as a permanent tool to success in professional life. Currently higher learning is often still too

much a matter of classroom experience of book knowledge that is not sufficiently related to reality. Though case studies are very good in spelling out that link, for many if not most understanding how the interaction can function between theory and practice in daily work is of even greater value.

Work-integrated education is a most effective tool when it comes to experiential learning. Obviously this goes beyond doing a placement or earning some credits by through a company project. The emphasis lies on the word integration, which refers not only to the support the student receives in regard to the work-experience itself but even more so in how a student is taught the process of reflection, applying analytical skills to real life situations and subsequently being stimulated to enrich the classroom environment with their real life experience.

The successful, permanent engagement of employers with higher education resulting in a truly effective structured dialogue between employers and educators, depends heavily on our ability to redefine cooperative education as a lifelong, on-going process, where students never really leave the university. In my view graduation is only the moment when Work-integrated learning shift emphasis and becomes Learning-integrated work. It is an out-dated concept that students would have all the knowledge and skills they need on the point of graduation. At Nyenrode Business University we call this Just-in-Time education to transition LIW into the mainstream philosophy of our employer engagement. How does the Nyenrode JiT philosophy work?

We have a wide range of post-experience educational programmes available, basically from middle-management upwards. Every time an alumnus or alumna needs a new level of competence, knowledge and insight they can return to his or her alma mater and add the next building block in order to be successful on the career ladder. Thus they can move up in typically six steps, with as final steps joining the board of a major company or even becoming non-executive director. These programmes not only expose students to appropriate new knowledge and skills, they also introduce them to new levels of reflection and personal development.

The Nyenrode educational philosophy is very much based on the understanding that success in professional life and even life in general is not wholly dependent on knowledge and skills but even more so on personal development: the ability to function at ever more demanding levels of the chosen profession or career. New levels of understanding how to interact with others, new levels of understanding about one's strength and how to work around one's weaknesses, new levels of understanding about shifting work-life balance in order to avoid burn-out and personal tragedy. And most importantly, that this learning is not just classroom based but actually involves residential periods, since much of these issues can be addressed only effectively through informal peer group learning. And this of course has as a major added benefit the broadening of one's professional networks with those who are in similar stages of career development.

At Nyenrode, we view engagement as multi-dimensional. We strive to build long-term, flexible partnerships with employers centered around gathering their experiential insights into curriculum development, market needs, and professional development. We also approach engagement with our students as a life-long process whereby alumni continually return to NBU for next level Just-in-Time career development, skills enhancement, and preparing themselves for senior management positions.

Moreover, we embrace technologies as tools of engagement between NBU and employers; students and employers; students with corporate employees; and faculty, students, and corporate employees with global business. An NBU education is by business for business and yet we value the engagement of students and employers from different sectors because it provides active reflection, diverse viewpoints, and an experiential interaction that enhances the quality and breath of learning inside and outside the classroom.

And finally, we engage government as essential partners to help us engage emerging labour markets and economic development needs that contribute to society. The NBU experience is not a panacea for all universities. These are simply philosophical tenants that guide our educational process that have come with inclusive dialogue and reflection.

Back to the Future: Empowering LIW Engagement

So where do we go in the future? The following summarises some key points discussed in this commentary. They are not all inclusive to Work-Integrated Learning and Learning-Integrated Work. Perhaps, however, they will provide a few ideas for reflection and dialogue between your university-company-government office and its essential stakeholders and partners.

- Universities of the future must reach out and invite employers to be integral and equal partners in the educational process, particularly in aligning (not designing) curriculum that has practical, experiential and real world relevance for employees. The path of engagement must be reciprocal rather than the one-way street of the past that always led to the university. A university education is only the first step in career development; Learning-Integrated Work (LIW) takes over where Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) left off and is a lifelong process.
- Technologies are, in fact, tools of engagement inside the workplace among employees, between universities and corporations, and across the globe. These innovations provide immense formal and informal learning opportunities for problem solving, knowledge sharing, and communications among and between students and employees from multiple sectors.
- University engagement should foster a lifelong connection among all alumni with the university. Alumni, following the NBU model, will return to the university in various roles throughout their professional lives which benefit the individual, the university, the company, and the sector.

- The global context is an essential aspect of the university-corporate partnership and providing opportunities for students/employees to reflect and experience global work opportunities is about the real world.
- Universities and corporations must foster multi-sector interaction among its students, employees, alumni, and corporate partners. Classes with students from business, government, community organisations, education, and the general workforce make for a dynamic learning environment. The value of multi-dimensional perspectives, reflection, and problem analyses in different contexts is an invaluable component of effective education.

In the final analysis, Learning-Integrated Work will drive the business and university sectors in the future. The success of this endeavour will, to a large extent, be determined by the capacity of business and universities to co-create a dynamic and flexible strategy for the multi-dimensional components of engagement.

JOURNAL

of COOPERATIVE EDUCATION and INTERNSHIPS



DR. CHERYL CATES

Journal Chair &
CEIA Representative
cheryl.cates@uc.edu



DR. KETIL CEDERCREUTZ

Journal Co-Chair &
WACE Representative
kettil.cedercreutz@uc.edu



MS. JUDIE KAY

Journal Advisor & Liason
judie.kay@vu.edu.au



DR. PETER RANS

Journal Advisor & Liason
Director Co-operative
Education, Memorial
University

EDITORIAL BOARD

DR. CHERYL CATES *Editor*
cheryl.cates@uc.edu

DR. KETIL CEDERCREUTZ *Senior Associate Editor*
kettil.cedercreutz@uc.edu

DR. SHERI DRESSLER *Associate Editor*
dressler@mail.ucf.edu

DR. MAUREEN DRYSDALE *Associate Editor*
mdrysdal@uwaterloo.ca

DR. DITMAR HILPERT *Associate Editor*
ditmar.hilpert@reutlingen-university.de

DR. KRISTINA JOHANSSON *Associate Editor*
kristina.johansson@hv.se

DR. NANCY JOHNSTON *Associate Editor*
davidge@sfu.ca

DAVID JORGENSEN *Associate Editor*
d.jorgensen@cqu.edu.au

DR. DEBORAH PEACH *Associate Editor*
d.peach@qut.edu.au

DR. RICHARD PORTER *Associate Editor*
r.porter@neu.edu

DR. JAMES R. STELLAR *Associate Editor*
james.stellar@qc.cuny.edu

PUBLICATION PRODUCTION

KATHE WITTENBERG
Style Editor

LISA BARLOW
Design & Layout

REVIEWERS

DR. JEANNE ALLEN University of Tasmania

DR. MERRELYN BATES Griffith University

DR. EMMANUEL CONTOMANOLIS Rochester Institute
of Technology

PROF. STEPHEN CRUMP University of Newcastle

DR. PRUE HOWARD Central Queensland University

MS. JEELA JONES University of Ottawa

DR. LEIF KARSSON University Kristianstad

PROF. GÖRAN LASSBO University West

DR. MARIANNE LEWIS University of Cincinnati

DR. PATRICIA LINN Antioch University

DR. BELINDA LUKE Queensland University
of Technology

PROF. DINELI MATHER Deakin University

DR. JUDY MATTHEWS Queensland University
of Technology

DR. ALAN MCALPINE Queensland University
of Technology

MS. NORAH MCRAE University of Victoria

DR. EDDY NEHLS University West

DR. AMANDA PACHECO University of Central Florida

DR. DONNA QUALTERS Tufts University

DR. ELIZABETH RUINARD Queensland University
of Technology

ASSOC. PROF. HEATHER SMIGIEL Flinders University

DR. CALVIN SMITH Griffith University

DR. LARS SVENSSON University West

DR. ROBERT TILLMAN Northeastern University

MS. LISA WARD Huddersfield University

MS. LISA WESTCOTT James Cook University

DR. JO-ANNE WILMENT University of Calgary

DR. DEBORAH WORLEY University of North Dakota

DR. ELENA ZAITSEVA Liverpool John Moores University

www.ceiainc.org/journal

CEIA, Inc. P. O. Box 42506, Cincinnati, OH 45242
Phone: 513.793.CEIA (2342) | Fax: 513.793.0463

ISSN 1933-2130

MANUSCRIPT FORMAT

Research reports should contain the following:

- Statement of the Problem
- Introduction, review of relevant literature, context for inquiry
- Description and justification for methodology employed
- Description of research finding
- Discussion of the finds, implications for practitioners
- Conclusion and suggestions for further research

Theory/practice manuscripts should contain the following:

- Statement of the topic or issue to be discussed
- Reference to relevant literature
- Discussion to include development of argument/examples of practice
- Implications for practitioners
- Conclusion and next steps

Final manuscripts must include:

- Abstract (100 to 250 words)
- Total length should be approximately 3,000 but no more than 5,000 words.
- Keywords, 5 to 10, listed alphabetically

Reviewers are looking for:

- Credibility of material in the manuscript: Does the manuscript provide a scholarly basis for arguments and suppositions as appropriate?
- Literature Review: Does the manuscript provide a discussion of recent literature?
- Research Methodology (as appropriate): Does paper employ the appropriate design and accurate analysis of the data that is sound and supported?
- Organization and writing: Is the article coherent, uses the appropriate tone for the audience, employs the correct and contemporary use of terms, and organizes sections and material properly?
- Inferences and conclusions (as appropriate): How well-supported and convincing are the inferences and conclusions; are the theoretical and practical implications appropriately indicated?
- Appropriateness of the manuscript: Is the contribution relevant and does it establish a relationship to existing knowledge?

SUBMITTING A MANUSCRIPT

- All manuscripts must be initially submitted on-line through The JCEI "Submit a Manuscript" Section.
- All manuscripts must be submitted on-line as a MS Word document. This will allow editors and reviewers to make changes and comments directly on the document, if so desired, to provide better feedback to the author(s).
- Submission of a manuscript implies commitment to publish in the journal. Authors submitting to the journal should not simultaneously submit the manuscript to another journal, nor should the manuscript have been published elsewhere in substantially similar form or with substantially similar content.



JOURNAL ACCESS FOR INDIVIDUALS IS NOW OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AT NO CHARGE!

For Institutional Subscriptions

The Journal is offered through EBSCO for purchase by institutions through a library subscription. Contact your university library to have them purchase a subscription or visit www.ebsco.com/home/contact to find the EBSCO contact for your region/country or contact your university librarian for assistance.

Vol. 45, Issue 01

JOURNAL

of COOPERATIVE EDUCATION *and* INTERNSHIPS