EMPLOYERS’ DEFINITION OF THE LIFELONG LEARNING UNIVERSITY: THE LAVA PARADOX

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ToC

1. Introduction: 3 university models
2. Employers’ demands: an empirical approach for a small scale survey
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Introduction: 3 university models
An historical note on three models

• In 1810, Whilhelm von Humboldt founded the Berlin university as a model for modern universities

• In the 60’s a new paradigm was build up to respond to families’ social expectations and employers’ needs: “massified university”

• Since the 90’s, in a context influenced by several “global economic crisis”, the “market” university became the new model
The influence of economical theories

- **1960-1975**: massified university
  - Mincer (1958), Schultz (1961), Becker (1964)

- **1975-1985**: offer and demand diverge
Lifelong learning in the adequationist view

- Lifelong learning can become an ideal response to conciliate two points of view:
  - The classical human capital approach
  - The ‘Over-educated American’ theory
- LLL allows the worker to learn when needed for some external reasons (promotion in a firm, period of unemployment...).
- This utilitarian goal of lifelong learning corresponds to the “adequationist” scheme
Stresses at the interface

Humboldtian university

“Market” university

Massified university

Ształberg, Maes & Sylin (2009)
Employer’s Demands: An Empirical Approach
Small-scale survey

• We conducted a small-scale survey implying 30 CEO’s chosen amongst the most important Belgian employers

• Ethnomethodological Approach

  • We wanted those CEOs not to tell us what employers’ lobbies could say about universities and lifelong learning: we were looking for their own point of view.
Small-scale survey

• Questions:

• 1. What are your personal expectations towards universities?

• 2. What are the specific cities of universities in comparison with all the other training operators?

• 3. What kind of reforms should be undertaken by universities to better fulfill the employers’ expectations?

• 4. How do you define the lifelong learning university?
# Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Proximity degree</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1</td>
<td>University diploma, children or relatives currently follow university courses</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 2</td>
<td>University diploma</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 3</td>
<td>Ex-university student, never graduated</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 4</td>
<td>Self-made men, no diploma</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Category 1

- Category 1 = strongly linked with university
- Their point of view:
  - ‘We expect the universities to better match the job market needs’; ‘The contents of the courses should be more focused on the skills needed for the job market’
  - ‘University should maintain theoretical contents’
  - ‘University students should develop a critical point of view’
  - ‘Commodification is a danger for higher education’
  - ‘Firms should not educate the youth: it’s the mission of universities’
  - ‘Continuous training within the universities should focus on theoretical, abstract aspects’
Category 2

- Category 2 = former students, graduated
- Their point of view:
  - ‘Universities should provide brains’
  - ‘Innovation is the key-concept’
  - ‘There has to be a balance between pure and applied research’
  - ‘Applied research is too often neglected in continuous training programmes’
  - ‘more practical skills and entrepreneurship should be learned during initial and continuous education’
Category 3

- Category 3 = ex-students, never graduated from universities (but graduated from other HEIs)
- Their point of view:
  - ‘Snobbery is synonym of university’
  - ‘Universities are like an ivory tower’
  - ‘There should be more professional trainings in universities initial and continuous education’
  - ‘Students should be forced to follow useful courses’
  - ‘Technical, vocational trainings in the secondary schools should be the priority for public fundings, not university’
Category 4

- Category 4 = self-made men
- Their point of view:
  - ‘Education as a whole should be updated’
  - ‘Diploma is not important any more, what matters most is the professional experience’
  - ‘Continuous training is not at all the business of universities’
  - ‘All the universities should merge into one big university, with less faculties, less staff and less teachers’
  - ‘University should train engineers, not philosophers who do not know what is a factory’
Lifelong Learning University?

• CAT1: ‘It’s necessary to develop university courses for a wider, more diversified audience. Older students should attend classical courses, not only continuous education trainings. Continuous education is really important, and universities should emphasize on their research results, that’s their best asset in that field.’

• CAT2: ‘It’s important for the university to develop continuous education programmes that balance theory and practice. ‘Innovation transfer’ should be the goal of such courses. More attention should be paid to practical aspects, applied research and job-related skills.’
Lifelong Learning University?

- CAT3: ‘Continuous education is really important to guarantee that workers are up-to-date in doing their job. Universities can contribute to those kind of trainings, even though it is more specific to some faculties such as civil engineering, business, law, medicine.’

- CAT4: ‘Continuous training is not at all the business of universities. Or only in some really specific fields.’
3. The Lava Paradox
From balanced to unilateral views

• The employers which are more directly linked to the university conceive it and its lifelong learning in non-obvious ways.

• They try to balance two different approaches of universities: one is more ‘classical’ (humboldtian), the other is closer to the ‘market university’ model.

• The more distant from universities the CEOs are, the more they seem to have a sharp, clear point of view on universities.

• They do not refer to them in a laudatory way, and they clearly want major reforms.
The Lava Paradox

• From fluid lava...
  • When the employers are close to a university; they seem to develop a melted, fluid opinion of universities’ courses

• To stone.
  • When they are far from any HEI, they give harsh, unilateral judgements on the universities’ trainings.
Why such a Paradox?

• Closer to the university means more complex and abundant informations

• A conflict of interest (Bourdieu, 1989) for the CEOs of CAT1...
  • On one hand, the father wants what is best for his children;
  • On the other hand, the employer wants to hire workers which could be quickly efficient in their jobs.

• But...
  • On one hand, the symbolic status of diploma is guaranteed by the theoretical approach, based on the results of fundamental research, that the university offers in its courses.
  • On the other hand, ‘on field’ skills are better developed by more practical, down-to-earth approaches
Conclusions
As a conclusion...

• Employers’ expectations as they expressed them should be considered with great caution with respect to their level of ‘proximity’ with the university.

• Employers’ lobby claims are aggregated point of views. They summarize radically different approaches of universities and lifelong learning.

• Those claims should therefore should be put in perspective with the individual points of view of those of the CEOs who really know what the university courses actually ‘look like’.