Preface

Overview

There can be little doubt that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have experienced massive changes in the past three decades. Across England, the US, Australia, and New Zealand, new public management has introduced corporate governance structures, strategic plans, performance management, quality assurance processes, a client-focused approach to students and curriculum, and a commodification of higher education that has seen an unprecedented growth in international student numbers. In particular, higher education has been positioned as a means to contribute to the knowledge economy and gain a level of competitive advantage in the global marketplace. In the past two decades, the numbers of HEIs have increased, and this has in turn created a number of challenges for administrators, academics, students, and the broader community. The ability and agility of universities to respond to economic and political change, meet the demands of (competing) public, private, and international interests, as well as interpret their own trends and performance has had consequences for the governance and management of universities and for the public perception of the role and worth of higher education. Consequently, the nature of the academy, and what it means to be an academic and undertake academic work, has also changed.

The contributors to this book interrogate ways in which knowledge is now shaped, produced, and reworked to meet international demands for productive workforces. Chapters in this book examine:

- The changing political and socio-economic landscape of higher education;
- The impact of increased accountability and the performative environment of higher education;
- New relationships between universities, the state, industry, and professional bodies;
- How knowledge is managed, produced, and audited in modernized universities;
- The changing nature of the professional and academic workforce;
- Influence of new knowledge, new technologies, and new learning spaces; and
- Tensions between new curricula and external forces.

Readership

This book will be essential reading for anyone involved or interested in higher education policy and management, academic work, and the changing nature of universities in the 21st century. This book will also be of particular relevance to those engaged in the study of educational administration, higher education, policy, sociology, and public sector management. The book can be used in postgraduate Master’s and
Doctoral programs. This is a growing market internationally, and the book will be attractive to students who are examining issues of new public management and its impact in universities, challenges to teaching and learning that new technologies and ways of working present, how the academic workforce is being re-shaped to meet the demands of the global knowledge economy, and the role of knowledge production and knowledge producers in the contemporary higher education environment.

CHAPTERS

This book is organized into three sections that interrogate the higher education policy context, knowledge production, and knowledge workers: all aspects of academic work in modernized universities. We draw on critical aspects of the various literatures to show the impact of increasing demands for internal and external accountabilities that variously are changing the nature of the academy and what it means to be an academic and undertake academic work. While the majority of examples are drawn from our own policy environment, Australian higher education, we internationalize the debates by showing how the trends we have identified are circulating across a number of institutions of higher education in the UK, US, Europe, and the wider Asia-Pacific region.

This book is a collaborative effort by academic staff at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia and brings together a collection of chapters that illustrate our ongoing research agendas. The chapters align with the IGI Global theme of Advances in Higher Education and speak to the overall theme of the modernized university and the challenges and possibilities this offers for academic work as well as teaching, learning, and research. Specifically, we address ways in which knowledge is now shaped, produced, and reworked to meet international demands for productive workforces.

The first section of this book, “Knowledge Work and Knowledge Workers,” draws together the institutional, policy, and practice challenges that confront universities in the contemporary environment. The first chapter offers a contextual overview of the higher education landscape and documents change and reform across almost three decades that have irrevocably altered governance, management, and the core functions of universities. These changes have included:

- Massification of higher education;
- New modes of governance and management;
- Financial pressures and shifts in funding for teaching and research;
- Increased accountability and quality assessments;
- Impact of internationalisation and globalisation;
- New relationships between universities, the state, industry, and professional bodies;
- Increasing demands for the use of new technologies; and
- Contracting of academics and their work.

There can be little doubt that these are massive changes, and as Sheila Mukerjee argues in Chapter 2, they have stimulated the need for a level of organizational agility. Although organizational agility is a necessary capability for universities in times of turbulence, this is not straightforward, as universities seek to grow, succeed, and thrive in increasingly competitive and innovative spaces. Tensions and challenges that have erupted include clashes of culture and values, the impact on organizational structures and modes of operation as there has been an optimization of business processes for efficiency and agility, the
necessity for the development of a risk profile for innovation, and the increasing demand for resources, technological innovations, and disruptions. The concluding call in this chapter is for universities to develop and nurture agile capabilities and capacities in order to harness the potential that change offers.

Acknowledged across the chapters in this book are the pressures of fiscal constraints, increased competition, and rapidly developing information technologies that universities now must manage. An immediate consequence has been that specialist professional staff and manager-academics have taken up roles associated with the expanding corporatization of universities. Andrea Simpson and Tanya Fitzgerald present the argument in Chapter 3 that professional and specialist staff members are now the majority of the university workforce across Australia, Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The emergent binary between professional (or administrative or support) staff and academics can create tensions due to the perceptions of the relative status of one type of work and workers in higher education over another. This binary is further blurred as academics move into managerial roles and the work of professional staff cuts across academic and administrative domains.

An examination of the response by Australian universities to equity policies and objectives is the focus of Chapter 4. In this chapter, Matthew Brett dissects knowledge and equity claims and proposes the use of a knowledge-centric lens as a valuable tool for analysis. He argues that knowledge-related objectives are broadly fulfilled through policy and funding that support teaching and research activity. Equity-related objectives are broadly pursued by policy and funding that seek to influence the characteristics of staff and student populations. Whilst there has been demonstrable progress against knowledge-related objectives, progress towards ideals of equity of access remains elusive.

In Australia as well as elsewhere, there are a number of constituent groups within the higher and further education sector. Policy at a local, national, or international level can prompt a range of social, political, and economic changes. But, as Damon Cartledge asks in Chapter 5, do we make good on policy promises in the field of Technical and Vocational Education? The chapter reveals that deeply entrenched values around forms of knowledge and their sense of educational “place” get disturbed in the process of change, and educators must now reflect critically on how to improve the knowledge structures required to meet the educational promises of the 21st century.

The second section of the book, “Knowledge Production and Knowledge Practices,” is a collection of chapters that examines the growth of knowledge practices and the consequent implications that new knowledges stimulate. For example, in Chapter 6, Dorothy Smith questions what are seen to be “common sense” knowledge and knowledge practices and shows how regulatory systems operate to determine what is “common” and therefore increasingly acceptable. Drawing on the example of pre-service teacher education, Smith argues for a more visible assertion of the complexity of education and educative processes.

The advent of new technologies has provided opportunities for classrooms, laboratories, and lecture halls to be re-conceptualized and utilized as learning spaces. In Chapter 7, Gregory Powell discusses the changing relationships between teacher and student and shows how the social setting of the learning space can prompt a wider sharing of ideas as well as the transfer of knowledge and skills.

New learning spaces across and within the digital divide are the focus of Chapter 8. Catherine Lang and Narelle Lemon argue that social media tools have changed the ways in which academics and students communicate, participate, and publish in modern universities and thereby influence knowledge production, exchange, and transfer. These tools provide opportunity for public global dialogue, continuous discussions in the online space beyond the four walls of a physical classroom, and greater interactions between individuals and collective groups. Drawing on case studies, Lang and Lemon demonstrate the ability to create and curate content while engaging with global connections to enhance and disrupt traditional ways of working in academia.
Across a number of Western nations, there have been ongoing policy attempts to widen participation in higher education. The policy triggers have included the economic desire of nations to contribute more fully to the global economy as well as increased national productivity. Importantly, universities have sought to increase pathways into higher education for non-traditional groups of students, as Michael Brown highlights in Chapter 9. The central question posed in this chapter is whether increased access and representation is a policy desire that has not been enacted at local levels, particularly for non-traditional learners.

In Chapter 10, Michael Brown is concerned with sustainability within higher education both as a practice and pedagogical tool. He presents a model of/for sustainability and argues that it is the responsibility of educators to incorporate sustainable practices and sustainability objectives in their academic programs. In recent years, there has been a marked emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) as a robust and coherent set of academic fields that contribute to the global knowledge economy. Damon Cartledge, in Chapter 11, puts forward the argument that this is a utilitarian approach to knowledge construction and production, and argues for the inclusion of a broader knowledge base that incorporates more aesthetic forms of knowledge. He suggests that a focus on STE(A)M (where A represents Aesthetic, Artisan, and related terms) might well provide a more holistic approach to knowledge claims. A model is presented that proposes an interconnection between the STE(A)M elements.

Similarly, in Chapter 12, Mary Burston maintains that knowledge claims are not neutral and have the potential to change the nature and purpose of higher education. Drawing on the example of entrepreneurialism, Burston unpacks the knowledge claims and adopts the notion of fungibility to provide an alternative interpretation of current discourse, concluding that properties of knowledge matter for higher education, citizenship, and democratic participation in the knowledge economy.

The third section of this book, “Knowledge Producers and Knowledge Reproduction,” draws together a number of key themes. In Chapter 13, Jacolyn Weller muses on the changes experienced in moving from being a professional expert to a novice academic. She traces the challenges and complexities of the transition into academia and offers a snapshot of her experiences.

The next two chapters, by Gregory Heath (Chapter 14) and Lorraine Ling (Chapter 15) offer a contribution to philosophical debates about the nature of knowledge and the role and purpose of universities as contemporary institutions. In particular, Heath advocates for multi-mediated knowledge epistemologies that are collaboratively generated and which directly underpin knowledge production processes. Revisiting core concepts and arguments, Ling exposes the social complexity and supercomplexity of universities as institutions and ways in which knowledge brokers and knowledge management are nonlinear but are constantly renegotiated.

The final chapter by Dorothy Smith draws together the chapters of this book. Using the Delphi technique, she asked each author to respond to the question, What does it mean to be a knowledge producer in a modernized university? Responses were collated and commonalities and differences documented. Importantly, Chapter 16 is a collective response to the title of the book and highlights both the continuities and discontinuities that academics face as they interpret and engage with the turbulent times in which they work.
CONCLUSION

The turbulent times that swirl around the higher education sector have provoked a number of changes. These changes are significant because they have altered what it means to be a university, attend a university, or work in a university. Across 800 years of history, changes within universities have been glacial, and accordingly, the authors of this book propose a focus on the turbulence that changes over the past three decades have created. Despite the upheaval in structures, processes, pedagogy, governance, and leadership, and the academic workforce, universities have demonstrated a durable level of adaptability and agility to withstand the magnitude and intensity of these changes.

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