Reviews / Comptes rendus

Resilient Universities: Confronting Changes in a Challenging World

Edited by J. E. Karlsen and R. M. O. Pritchard
(Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2013, 412 pages)

This collection of essays, in *Resilient Universities: Confronting Changes in a Challenging World*, provides a concise and in-depth overview of the current pressures facing institutions of higher education in light of a perceived paradigm shift in North America as well as Europe. The publication grew out of the European Association for Institutional Research 2012 Conference, which dealt with discussions on far-reaching changes confronting European universities, such as dwindling public funding, increasing quality assurance oversight, and the rising of the knowledge economy. Overarching themes such as "[f]alling demographic trends, stagnating economies, government debts and pressure for certain outcomes are making it difficult for some institutions to achieve sustainability, let alone prosperity" (p. 14). Admittedly the book only focuses on European universities (as stated clearly in the introduction), but in the themes presented and discussed, there can be found parallels in postsecondary institutions here in Canada and the United States, making the case studies and theoretical models featured a valuable reference tool for university administrators worldwide.

The book is comprised of 14 chapters, along with a list of figures, tables, and abbreviations. I found Chapters 1, 2, and 3 the most insightful since they provided a thorough discussion of the concept of resilience as it can be applied to institutions of higher learning. These chapters also provide a concise overview of the changing face and function of the university itself.

Chapter 1, "Resilience—The Ability to Adapt," authored by the editors, J. E. Karlsen and R. M. O. Pritchard, introduces the concept of resilience as it could be applied to institutions of higher learning. According to Karlsen and Pritchard, the construct of resilience can be defined "as the institutional capability to effectively absorb, respond to and recover from an internally or externally induced set of extraordinary demands" (p. 2). This view of resilience is one of a "form of adaptive capacity" (p. 5), reflecting the need for institutions to be both reactive and flexible

at the same time and able to handle any unforeseen challenges without losing focus. The remainder of this first chapter gives a detailed synopsis of the thematic content of the subsequent chapters, allowing the reader to easily pick and choose chapters for further reading, based on the short summaries provided.

Chapter 2, entitled "Reframing University Adaptation," written by Karlsen, begins with a comprehensive discussion of the concept of institutional governance and how it could best be defined. Ultimately, governance models that are inclusive of faculty, administration, students, boards, and external business concerns are deemed to be adaptive or resilient if the institution is governed by a "collective mindfulness." This concept "calls for flexible strategies and mindful reading of signals from both the institutional environment and the organization itself" (p. 41). The chapter ends with a proposed model for institutional adaptation that presents a "functional-historicist structure [as a] genesis of megatrends and core drivers [that] initiate a system of governance, which in turn impacts on the institutional responses resulting in distinctive adaptive patterns" (p. 47).

Chapter 3, "Higher Education's Future: A New Global Order" is subdivided into two sections: the first section provides a succinct overview of the changing role of the university as result of increasing external pressures, especially since the economic downturn in 2008. Universities are increasingly facing global competition from higher education institutions from countries around the world and have to continually position themselves accordingly. Governments are increasingly imposing quality-assurance processes on universities, and research is being put before teaching and creating a widening gulf between research-intensive universities and teaching-oriented universities. The second section of Chapter 3 uses Ireland as a case study to explore the themes presented in the first section. The author, Ellen Hazelkorn, concludes the chapter with a sobering summary of five major contradictions created by having higher education situated at the core of policy making, and these five contradictions are currently also being felt by universities in North America (p. 79–80).

The subsequent chapters either present case studies or theoretical discussions. Although most of the book has a wholly Eurocentric focus and describes higher education policies and policy reform within the European Union, the overarching themes, theories, and models presented would be applicable to the higher education system in North America. In conclusion, most of the chapters deal with broad institution-wide themes such as "government unpredictability and arbitrariness" (p. 11), the changing relationship between administration and faculty, and the increasing necessity to fundraise to supplement public-funding models (Chapter 12). However, the statement "training for resilience involves mastering three strategic management practices: cultivating foresight, rehearsing non-routine behaviours, and building an experimentation-oriented community" (p. 19) had the most resonance for me as a practicing continuing-education professional because I felt it accurately reflects the practices within which most continuing education units operate and recognizes their innately resilient character.

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