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Tomsk State University

*Post-Pandemic Future of the University:
Possible Models, Potential and Risks*

Traditional mission, role and function of the university—
appreciating, respecting, supporting, maintaining and
safeguarding the university as an essential societal institution

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Considerable rationale exists today...


- ▶ ... to suggest that global society is in the midst of a revolution that is fundamentally changing us as humans—changes that are being caused by advances in communication technology.

Communication technology is fundamentally changing us in at least four dimensions:

- ▶ Socially, in which electronic channels of communication are replacing face-to-face communication;
- ▶ Politically, in which power differentials are being flattened and sometimes juxtaposed, with unpredictable power emanating quickly from unrecognized and unseen sources;
- ▶ Economically, in which information that may appear inexpensive to send and to receive results in a greed for this information that, ironically, can enslave consumers both financially and through inordinate demands on their time;
- ▶ Culturally, in which a global culture is emerging, not only in consumer tastes for products and services, but also in in a melding of traditions and values.

We are in the “Fourth Industrial Revolution”!

- ▶ The global pandemic has only accelerated and compressed the timeframe of this revolution, which was inevitable;
- ▶ This revolution is fundamentally changing us as humans;
- ▶ These changes that are being caused by advances in communication technology.
- ▶ One indicator of a revolution is an individual's inability to ignore it.
 - Such would be difficult in today's world, save for the person who withdraws into total isolation from all of society.
 - For anyone wishing to meaningfully participate in civil society, constantly evolving communication technology not only ostensibly facilitates, but is made requisite, by those who assume everyone has and wants access to this technology.




Today's rapidly and chaotically evolving communication technology is the primary intervening variable that is creating:

- globalism, as well as its obverse,
 - Multiculturalism — together with the latter's accompanying tensions and conflicts within a global environment that is replete with a host of critically important issues that beg resolution.
- ▶ These immense changes have societal implications that are:
- inadequately understood, let alone sufficiently pondered;
 - having profound impact on individuals, which remains insufficiently measured.

What a century ago ...

- ▶ ... had become national through communication is now inarguably global;
- ▶ ... was a resegmentation of citizens into occupational and professional communities on a national scale has now arguably become a global re-segmentation, indeed fragmentation, representing seemingly infinite perspectives on multiple issues;
- ▶ ... had become inverted between public and private has become a confusing, threatening and undoubtedly highly dangerous concoction of what is private, which can become globally public at a keystroke, and what should be public, i.e., transparent



If we assume globalization will continue its present trajectory through communication technology, we must then ask these questions:

- ▶ What will tomorrow's globalization look like?
 - How will indigenous societies that have different, if not unique, cultural, historical, and ideological traditions adapt to this globalization, willingly or not?
- ▶ Despite globalization, people and their societies in the foreseeable future will remain different culturally, historically, and ideologically, and these distinctions must be understood and reconciled.

What is the mission, role and function of the university in this “Fourth Industrial Revolution”?

- ▶ I argue for its traditional and historic mission, role and function of the university as an essential societal institution that must be protected and safeguarded for the benefit of society-at-large.
 - Certainly, its primary role and function include helping students to prepare to become responsible and productive global citizens as well as engaged leaders and to prepare students for career options.
 - However, are students the products or the consumers?

The university's mission, however, is to serve the needs of its primary stakeholder:

- ▶ Society-at-large, of which it is a part.
 - The pinnacle of excellence in all areas of the arts and humanities and of science.
 - Custodian and producer of knowledge, culture, history, values and traditions within a safe and identifiable environment.
 - Community of learned people and a laboratory for the ideal functioning of such community.
 - Marketplace of new and conflicting ideas, ideologies and values.
 - Education to prepare responsible citizens and productive workers.
- ▶ Of course, the university has other stakeholders, including:
 - Government.
 - Corporations.
 - NGOs/CSOs.

Can the university in its present or in another form be sustainable in the “Fourth industrial Revolution”? If so, how?

- ▶ Should the university be “political” and ideological; what should be its beliefs and values?
- ▶ Should the university be dependent upon stakeholders who compromise its mission to society-at-large or unduly influence its role and function in its relationships with and responsibility toward its other stakeholders, ranging from students to its labor force, e.g., faculty and staff.
- ▶ Do universities lead or follow the will of society-at-large or of its other stakeholders?

Questions and discussion!