

VISION STATEMENT: FROM LIFELONG LEARNING TO THE LIFELONG LEARNING UNIVERSITY (L3U)

The notion of ‘university’ is from a time, when the totality to which it refers was achievable, because information was scarce and took an effort to find. Today, information is available at our fingertips day and night and constantly follows us everywhere, eager to be processed. The general challenge no longer lies in gathering facts, but in keeping up-to-date with them as they are constantly transformed. A fact today stays a fact for a shorter time than it used to. Hence, people need to update their skills, competences and knowledge more frequently than ever before. However, as knowledge itself is growing ever more specialized, it becomes increasingly difficult for traditional institutions to define key competencies and design assessment tasks in response.

This is changing the landscape of higher education – and fast. If the primary authority of the university has traditionally rested on its longstanding monopoly on generating research and knowledge and providing access to it through teaching and dissemination, then this status is being challenged across a number of platforms – from the booming for-profit educational sector offering skills-oriented nanodegrees, over corporate academies like Apple U and Deloitte Academy, to more or less formalized on-demand learning environments and MOOCs that shift the weight from ownership to an access model of learning. Research and knowledge production, as well as access, is increasingly being provided beyond, and is available faster than at, the university. This vast expansion in higher learning environments is quickly redefining the role of the university in society and becoming a call for smarter models for lifelong learning.

In the briefest of versions, this describes the central challenge for higher education institutions today. Talk about higher education still tends to refer to students entering university to complete a degree in silos of faculties with teaching organized in traditional lectures. What is more, most lifelong learning initiatives today primarily focus on stockpiling and transferring hard skills – e.g. engineering, data, web, and coding competencies, understanding the notion as a synonym for adult education. This not only ignores a multitude of other reasons why people want to study, it also makes learning into a primarily individual project.

As a business university, we at CBS want to invest in the cultivation of competences that enable communities of learners, because we believe that individual learning is a team sport. We see a growing need for talent that

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can translate and mitigate between the very human experiences of business practice, strategy, and culture on the one hand and the mathematical and data analytical domain of new technologies on the other. The complexity of most contemporary industries makes it equally important to update so-called 'soft skills' such as problem solving, critical thinking and the ability to learn. With the focus in current models of lifelong learning being predominantly on upgrading skills and certifying new competences, so far we see very little innovation in this domain. Looking into the future, we believe an important task of the university will be to teach students of all ages how to learn, so that throughout their lives they can confidently explore the abundance of (online) information available, knowing what they are dealing with there. Whether a manager, an accountant, a lawyer or a physician, the ability to communicate, share and use information to define and solve complex problems, the ability to adapt innovatively in response to new demands and changing circumstances, and the ability to create new knowledge by marshalling and expanding the power of technology, integrating it with expanding human capacity and productivity, will be of imperative importance.

What is needed is more focus on students of all ages and levels of professional experience who wish to move in and out of formal learning environments. This not only means taking up the challenging task of transforming the physical and organizational framework of the university towards more flexibility and mobility (we still predominantly think of the institution as a 'place'). It also encompasses a more radical claim: lifelong learning must be leveraged more holistically as a driver for institutional change. Rather than a synonym for adult education, the notion must come to be a constitutive part of what 'university' might come to mean in the future. If the university no longer holds a monopoly over learning and learning can take place anywhere, then university needs to break out and be where learning takes place. This not only calls for an increased focus on more (international) collaboration, networking and co-creation (with other learning institutions), but also actively seeking out emerging learning environments and experimenting with how to participate in them as an institution for higher education. For us at CBS, this challenge can be summarized like this: *If learning can take place anywhere throughout adult life, how (and in what capacity) can CBS come to be present where that happens?*

A model of the Lifelong Learning University

Below is a simplified model of the three dimensions that make out the vision of the L3U at CBS. Rather than a model of progression (from A→C) it should be viewed holistically as an illustration of the three legs that the vision rests on. Ideally, these dimensions work sustainably together in an institutional ecosystem that takes the idea of the business university as a part of society a step further than today.



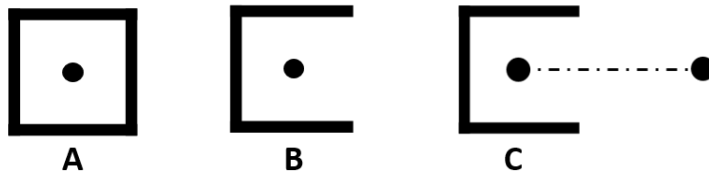
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DIMENSIONS OF THE L3U



(A) illustrates the traditional ‘ivory tower’ understanding of the university and the important positive values that this model stands for: integrity of scholarship, honoring the facts, determining the truth, cultivating doubt, protecting life, guarding the culture, imagining the common good, defining justice – but also such down to earth elements as ‘campus experience’ and the experience as a student of partaking in a living and breathing community of learners that is larger than oneself. Here the demarcation of the academic institution from (or above) society is sharply defined. It is based on the academic ideal of producing balanced research environments that allow the feeling of immersion in specific tasks or activities to be combined with the more pragmatic component of motivation referring to how the task or activity fits into the learner’s future plans.

(B) illustrates the ‘traditional’ understanding of lifelong learning, including executive and other forms of adult education. In this very prevalent understanding, lifelong learning is largely synonymous with adult education – even if in some cases the latter is understood as an upgrading of skills to a new level, while the first is continuous learning on the same level. This important dimension is traditionally strong at CBS, one of only few business schools to offer an MBA accredited by AMBA, EQUIS and AACSB alike. CBS also offers the leading national master in public governance (MPG) and a large number of diploma degrees. Here the membrane separating the academic institution from society is softened (corresponding perhaps to the strategic ideal of ‘business in society’), but still largely remains unchanged: people are invited in to learn, and leave when they are done learning.

While (A) and (B) represent already existing dimensions of the business university, (C) illustrates a dimension of the vision for the L3U, which is yet to be explored and harnessed. Rather than (re)constructing courses based on existing knowledge and inviting learners in to join them, the role of the university here is to identify, mobilize and qualify learning environments outside of itself. This calls for a flexible and mobile model of lifelong learning focused on conveying traditional academic values such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, social skills, and thought leadership to emerging learning environments in companies as well as in public institutions. The ideal here is not to create a new kind of ‘consultancy model’, where the academic institution competes with professional consultancies to provide tailored solutions, but rather to find a model for how already existing or emerging external learning environments may contribute to identifying in ‘real-time’ the skills and capabilities we

need to learn in a fast changing society. Lifelong learning in this model becomes a driver for institutional change that may feed back into both (A) and (B) in an institutional ecosystem.

Knowledge you can't google: from adult education to educating adults

To summarize, the vision for lifelong learning, and the transformation towards the L3U that we want to explore at CBS, is a response to a challenge that sounds as seductively simple as it is difficult to comprehend: the contemporary pervasiveness of information has the potential to disrupt everything implying coherent knowledge. First, this means: our understanding of academic expertise is under siege. An 'expert' at the university is no longer the only access point for facts and skills otherwise unavailable to the layperson, because information has been 'set free'. We need to engage constructively with this challenge and understand how and what we can learn from it for the role of the university in future societies. We need to engage in 'knowledge you can't google'.

A first step towards the L3U will be to create fertile ground for experiments and experiences to learn from for further action. In the following years, we want to conduct a series of learning experiments designed to identify and understand CBS' potential role as an academic institution in emerging learning environments beyond the traditional boundaries of the university. To this end, we are establishing a standing working group under the leadership of the associate dean for lifelong learning. Consisting of stakeholders from both inside and outside academia, the first task of this group will be to design such learning experiments.

We want to identify existing environments in society, where learning takes place, but which might be further qualified by a model of academic and pedagogical participation. We want to explore how to mobilize and nurture learning environments locally in companies or public organizations, and experiment with how academic competence might contribute to analyzing, scaling and understanding concrete challenges for learning purposes. We want to move away from the dissemination of matters of fact and towards the joint exploration of matters of concern in communities of learners.

With this first initiative, we aim to leverage not only CBS' transformation towards a lifelong learning university, but also to contribute to a broader rethinking of the higher educational system and its continued relevance in Danish society.



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