Corporate Universities v Traditional Universities: Comparison through Published Organisation Documentation

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This paper is a part of an ongoing empirical, multi-modal comparative investigation into corporate universities in the US and the UK, the first stage of which was reported in Walton and Martin (2000). This second stage consists of an in-depth comparative study of the aims and objectives of corporate universities in the UK and US compared to traditional universities by means of mission statements/ guiding principles and associated documentation obtained from organisational web sites. The research has been undertaken to enable triangulation with data obtained from other sources.

Keywords: Corporate University, Mission Statements, Traditional University

Dasenbrock (2002) comments that: "references to the corporatization of the university are virtually ubiquitous in the discussion in the humanities about vectors of change in higher education", a process that is being resisted by beleaguered humanists who are as decisively outnumbered as the Spartans were at Thermopylae. (p.1). From his perspective the phrase "corporate university" is a way of expressing that traditional universities are far more concerned with issues of profit and loss and competing in the marketplace than they were a generation ago. He alleges that the University of Phoenix in the United States is the icon of this shift, and that it is literally a *corporate* university. In reflecting on the core purpose of so-called traditional universities he goes on to differentiate between "credentialising" universities - where the student is purchasing essentially a credential not an education - and "research" universities.

This connotation is different to the dominant discourse in the HRD field on the subject of "corporate universities", where commentary has focused on their emergence and rapid growth in the corporate world in recent years. Walton (1999) observed that "inspired by an original idea generated at the Walt Disney Corporation, the notion of a corporate university is becoming increasingly fashionable as an overarching designation for formal learning and knowledge-creating activities in an organization" (p.412). In 1990 there were held to be some 400 corporate universities of this type in existence, primarily in the United States. According to Corporate University Exchange (CUX), a New York consultancy firm that specialises in supporting corporate university development, this figure had risen to 2,000 by 2001. Heller (2001) forecasts that by the year 2010 the figure will have risen to 3,700. There is also evidence of this becoming increasingly a global phenomenon, with, for example, eight corporate universities reported in Germany. A number of definitions have been provided for a corporate university, of which the following are typical:

> The strategic umbrella for developing and educating employees, customers and suppliers in order to meet an organisation"s business strategies. In a corporate university employees build individual and organizational competencies, thereby improving the company"s overall performance. (Meister 1998)
> A corporate university is a function or department that is strategically oriented toward integrating the development of people as individuals with their performance as teams and ultimately as an entire organization by linking with suppliers and customers, by conducting wide-range research, by facilitating the delivery of content, and by leading the effort to build a superior leadership team. (Wheeler 1998)
> A CU is an educational entity that is a strategic tool designed to assist its parent organization in achieving its mission by conducting activities that cultivate individual and organizational learning, knowledge and wisdom. (Allen 2002)

Taken collectively, the emphasis is instrumental, a strategic tool for helping an organisation to achieve its objectives and mission through learning processes. Learning, knowledge, research and wisdom are not perceived by these writers to be ends in themselves.

Problem Statement

These different connotations on *corporate* universities provide a backdrop to this paper. There have been a number of academic and other studies that have looked into the relationship between corporate and traditional universities. Assertions have ranged from future-gazing statements to the effect that corporate universities may become a major threat to traditional universities as they compete for students and faculty (Thompson 2000), to the view that it is difficult to establish any relationship between two independent phenomena with different objectives and values (Blass 2001). Hard comparative evidence has been difficult to find, and reported case examples have mostly been small in number and based upon convenience sampling in one country. On the whole, the academic studies have treated the corporate universities as an emergent phenomenon that have to justify their claim to be a "university" and have treated the so-called traditional universities as relatively fixed in their aims and objectives. A number of questions remain unresolved. Is there any evidence of convergence of outlook between entities coming from different roots and traditions, yet drawing upon the same overarching designator for their activities? If there is evidence that traditional universities are becoming more "corporatised" and instrumental in approach, is this reflected in their expressed aims and objectives? If the corporate world is drawing upon terminology historically reserved for the academic arena, is this reflected in the published purpose statements of their "universities"?

Theoretical Framework

The ethos behind traditional universities has been discussed over the centuries since their origins in the Middle Ages when teaching was viewed as a commodity like any other and it was expected that new students would sample lecture courses before making their academic purchases (Cobban 1999). Newman (1853) defines a university as "a place of teaching universal knowledge"(p.1) and contends that "the very name of university is inconsistent with restrictions of any kind" (p.25). This has led to the espoused views that, ideally, a university should provide a sanctuary for democratic principles, uphold uncensored expression, and encourage the unfettered exchange of ideas and the right to dissent under the name of academic freedom.

Virtually all of contemporary universities fulfill at least three missions or purposes, regardless of nationality or prestige: teaching, research and public service (Perkins 1973) although the balance between these and their practical expression vary considerably. American higher education in particular is held to have a bewildering variety of institutional missions and objectives, a fact which Graham and Diamond (1997) commented on as being probably one of its greatest strengths. In the UK at the time of writing there is a hot debate over whether there should be a differentiation between teaching universities and research universities, with only the latter being entitled to public funding for research.

A number of commentators has suggested that in the context of the *corporate* university, the term *university* is used more for its aspirational and symbolic connotations to position of learning activities within an organisation than for any attempt to replicate traditional university practices or values (Thomas 1999, Walton 1999). Walton (1999) argued that virtually no corporate university would meet the requirements set out in dictionary definitions of the word "university", nor would they wish to. Walton and Martin (2000) pursued this in their UK empirical study that evaluated the extent to which corporate universities meet the criteria conventionally associated with "university". Criteria used were "sponsorship of research"; "openness of access"; "focus on education" as opposed to "training"; "provision of high level qualifications"; "evidence of scholarly activity and independence". They concluded that:

> Despite adopting the university label, and in some instances a faculty structure, the corporations studied did not achieve the curriculum range, broad-ranging academic expertise and research sponsorship of a conventional university; in many instances, developing partnerships with higher education to overcome this deficiency. The study brought to the fore the inevitable difference between the performance-driven learning imperative for corporations and the independence of thought required of a true academic community (p.9).

Blass (2001) conducted an exploratory study into differences and similarities between CUs and traditional universities. The criteria she adopted for her comparison were: origins from which universities took their title; historical development; aims and outcomes; level of education aspired to; size and diversity of student bodies; knowledge generation; issues surrounding ownership and control including notions of academic freedom; and linkages with other public universities. She concluded that finding any similarities at all was difficult. She also concluded that many of the corporate universities approached were often unable to answer her questions, as the issues had never previously been considered. Her overall conclusion was that the corporate university and public university are two very different configurations that will always remain separate entities. She also commented that corporate universities are eroding the value of traditional universities by taking on the title of "University". In the

UK she had difficulty in identifying which organizations had a corporate university and only investigated two in detail. Thompson (2000) identified a common focus on lifelong learning as the only point of similarity with traditional universities. He also suggested that corporate universities should be perceived as a source of support to their counterparts in that they provided more than "20% of the voluntary support for higher education in the United States" (ibid. p.327).

Terminological confusions bedevil this field. Not all organisations that claim to have a corporate university use the term "university". In the UK there are some legal restrictions on its use. "Academy", "Institute of Learning", "School of management", "Learning network", "College", "Business learning" are all featured labels of organisations operating as members of Corporate University Exchange (CUX.). There is also a propensity to changes in nomenclature or even disappearance, especially within the CU arena. During the period covered by this study, Deutsche Bank dispensed with its CU and the Arthur D Little CU was acquired by Kaplan Higher Education, a division of Kaplan, Inc., which is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Washington Post Company. As a part of the agreement, the name of the ADL School of Management was changed to the Concord School of Management

In recent years there has been greater clarity on what corporate universities value, with the New York based Corporate University Exchange introducing in 1999 five criteria for excellence, listed by Murray (2002) as. 1. Alignment: aligning corporate learning to business strategies. 2. Alliances: developing strategic learning alliances with external providers. 3. E-learning: creating a learning environment through technology. 4. Marketing: developing and implementing innovative marketing and branding techniques. 5. Measurement: measuring the value of an organisation"s investment in learning. This would seem, at face value, to reinforce that corporate universities are different beasts to traditional universities. In order to obtain stronger empirical data, this paper has reviewed published statements such as mission statements, core values, guiding principles, aims and objectives from a sample of traditional universities and corporate universities in both the United States and the UK.

Such published documents from organisational web sites could be termed "value oriented texts", designed to communicate with a range of internal and external audiences. They include core values and guiding principles; vision and mission statements; aims and objects. Such public expressions of what the organisation holds dear have become endemic in organizational life, although they can be perceived at one level to be no more than rhetorical declarations of intent, examples of "espoused values", as opposed to "theory in use" (Argyis & Schon 1978). It was not the purpose of this research to establish whether what was written was replicated in practice, rather to establish a tangible source of data that could legitimately be used for purposes of comparison. David (1989) and others refer to mission statements as being distinctive to each organisation. However, the research looked for areas of similarity as well as difference, recognising that "organisational mimetics" and "institutional isomorphism" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) could lead to common areas of focus.

King and Cleland (1979) list as the espoused reasons given for organisations having mission statements: 1. to ensure unanimity of purpose within the organisation; 2. to provide a basis or standard for allocating organisational resources; 3. to establish a general tone or organisational climate; 4. to serve as a focal point for individuals to identify with the organisation"s purpose and direction; and to deter those who cannot, from participating further in the organisation"s activities. 5. to facilitate the translation of objectives into a work structure involving the assignment of tasks to responsible elements within the organisation.6. to specify organisation purposes and the translation of those purposes into objectives in such a way that cost, time and performance parameters can be assessed and controlled.

David (1989) identifies from a content and statistical analysis of seventy-five mission statements that were obtained from chief executive officers of large companies the following nine areas of focus.1.Customers. 2. Products or services. 3. Location. 4. Technology. 5. Concern for survival. 6. Philosophy. 7. Self-concept. 8. Concern for public image. 9. Concern for employees. He goes on to argue that mission statements should 1. Define what the organisation is and what the organisation aspires to be. 2. Be limited enough to exclude some ventures and broad enough to allow for creative growth. 3. Distinguish a given organisation from all others. 4. Serve as a framework for evaluating both current and prospective activities. 5. Be stated in terms sufficiently clear to be widely understood throughout the organisation.

Johnson and Scholes (1999) respond to criticisms that such statements are bland and too wide-ranging by commenting that it might be politically necessary to have published statements with which most if not all stakeholders can identify (p.243).

Methodology

For sampling purposes the population was first stratified, and then randomized. Thus, for traditional universities, the first stratification was between the UK and the US, and then within each country further sub-divisions were undertaken. In the UK 20 universities were initially sampled which was 15% of the total population. The 40 universities sampled from the US constituted just over 1% of the total population of 3,500 universities. This difference between the two countries was discussed by the researchers at the outset, and reviewed at various stages of the study, but it was always the intention to engage in non-probability sampling and not engage in a statistical analysis. Issues that were considered were that the primary methodology of content analysis is notoriously time consuming and that there was anxiety that the volume of data could become unmanageable. From the standpoint of the overall research project, this was always seen as a relatively small part of the investigation confirming or otherwise data obtained from fieldwork and the consistent conclusions being drawn in the literature that corporate and traditional universities were different types of entities. Had the findings in any way presented unexpected or interesting new data about the traditional universities then further sampling would have been undertaken. But by far the most significant reason influencing judgment over whether to engage in probability versus non-probability sampling concerned the corporate universities. Here appropriate web site data was patchy, subject to significant change over the course of the investigation, and in some instances non-existent, and the number of reported CUs was rapidly increasing over the course of the investigation. Web sites were randomly accessed until a sufficient number was reached from which meaningful comparative data could be obtained.

Using the terminology of Carley (1990), the original intention was to subject the texts from each institution to a conceptual content analysis in which both the existence and frequency of terms and associated constructs was elicited, coded and compared. This was the approach followed by David (1989) who subjected to a simple content and statistical analysis, seventy-five mission statements that were obtained from chief executive officers of large companies. However it quickly became apparent that the existence or otherwise of terms was sufficient for the purposes of coding and demonstrating similarities and differences between traditional and corporate universities. This was then followed by a relational analysis, in which the context in which terms were used and their relationship vis-à-vis each other was established and compared, where apparent areas of similarity emerged. The constructs identified by Walton and Martin (op cit.) were used by the authors as the initial basis for coding, but were modified and added to in accordance with the findings from the textual analysis. A variant of discourse analysis was used to identify key concepts, isolate and establish frequency of categories and themes that emerged from both the traditional and corporate university texts. Key themes and messages of each in turn were then compared and contrasted.

Findings

Each of the UK universities from the original sample had a web site that gave a clear indication of its value orientation. There was less consistency in the US universities, perhaps reflecting the conflict between academics and top management of what a university is about that emerged from the literature. The corporate university web sites were very variable in the volume and quality of information provided. Figure 1 is a simple content analysis of key terms that were identified, based on those universities from which appropriate data could be obtained.

Following the notion of institutional isomorphism, the higher level of congruence in traditional universities is not unexpected. Collectively, they have been in existence over a far longer period of time than their corporate university counterparts. But mere words in themselves can be deceptive – it is the context in which they are used that adds significance, the words they are associated with, and the meanings attributed. It is this realisation that underpins the relational approach to content analysis (Carley, op. cit.), and is essential to understand in comparative studies. As discovered in the Walton and Basra (2002) comparative survey of continuous improvement initiatives, the same word can denote very different things, both within and across organisational settings. Prior (2003) reinforces the perspective that textual analysis needs to attend to the "full pattern of referencing between objects cited" (p.122).

Figure 1. Comparative Analysis of Key Terms used by Traditional and Corporate Universities
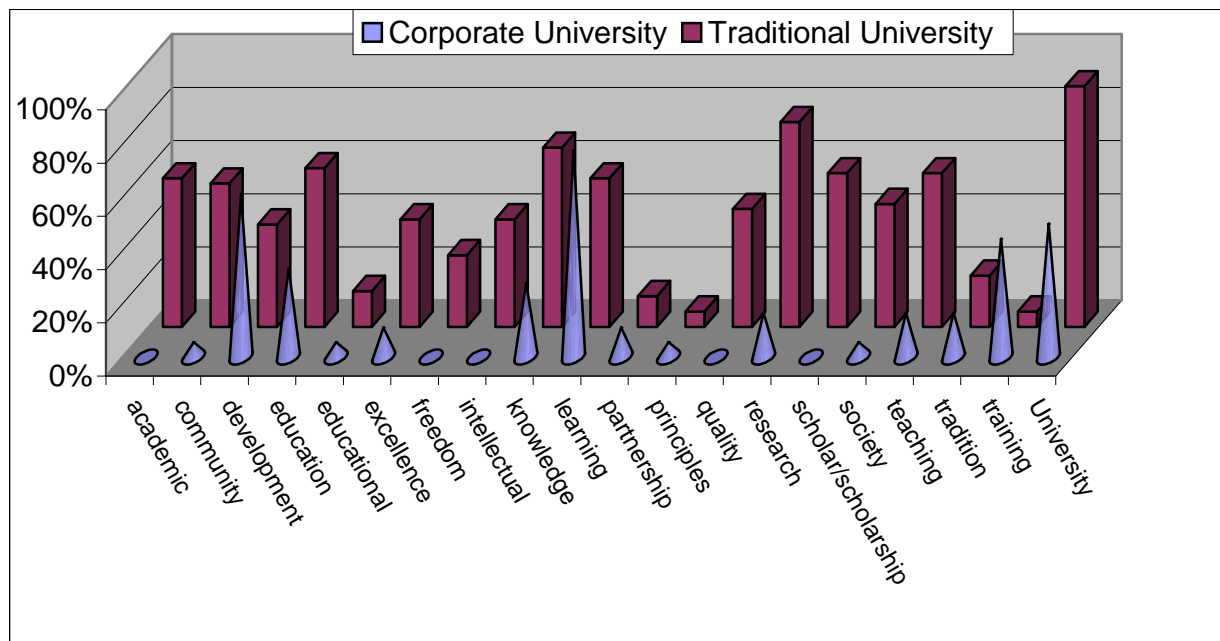
n.1 = 60 Traditional Universities (40 from US and 20 from UK); n.2 = 40 Corporate Universities

Table 1. *Terminology Usage*

Corporate Universities	Traditional Universities
1. Learning referred to by 78% of those sampled	1. University referred to by 90% of those sampled
2. Development referred to by 61% of those sampled	2. Research referred to by 77% of those sampled
3. University referred to by 50% of those sampled	3. Knowledge referred to by 67% of those sampled
4. Training referred to by 45% of those sampled	4. Education referred to by 60% of those sampled
5. Education referred to by 33% of those sampled	5. Teaching referred to by 58% of those sampled
6. Knowledge referred to by 28% of those sampled	6. Scholar/scholarship referred to by 58% of those sampled
7. Research referred to by 17% of those sampled	7. Learning referred to by 56% of those sampled
8. Teaching referred to by 17% of those sampled	8. Community referred to by 54% of those sampled
9. Tradition referred to by 17% of those sampled	9. Society referred to by 46% of those sampled
	10. Quality referred to by 44% of those sampled
No other term was used more than by more than 12%	11. Intellectual referred to by 40% of those sampled
	12. Development referred to by 39% of those sampled
	13. Freedom referred to by 27% of those sampled
	14. Tradition referred to by 19% of those sampled

Below are some examples that are derived from the comparative analysis. By far the most common term used by corporate universities was "learning", referred to in 78% of the CUs sampled. By comparison, usage of "learning" in traditional universities was about 56%. Below, in Table 2, are some typical examples of the context in which these words are used.

Table 2. "*Learning" as Referred to in the Data Sample*

Traditional - "seeks to establish a learning culture in which teaching and research of the highest quality are able to flourish equally" (University of Kingston, UK). "To support scholarly learning is the central mission of the University" (Syracuse University, US). "In the interest of learning and in recognition of the special role that society assigns to universities, we make parallel and inseparable commitments to teaching and research" (Case Western Reserve University, US)
Corporate - "Learning is a key part of our competitive advantage. To build that advantage and exploit it to enhance our employer brand we have created the BT Academy" (BT Academy, UK). "Where Learning never ends - The Tennessee Valley Authority, like most businesses today, operates in a constantly changing environment and must constantly reinvent itself to survive and thrive. At TVA, we view employee training as a tool that helps us achieve this. TVA University – our learning system is organised with that in mind" (TVA University US). "Oracle University offers a full range of organisational learning services and training products. By bundling services and training methods, we can give you maximum effectiveness and maximum value" (Oracle University US).

"Learning" within the traditional university is here associated with "scholarly" activity and a "teaching and research" culture" giving a meaning oriented towards intellectual pursuits and a means unto itself. "Learning" within the corporate university is here associated with "competitive advantage", "survival", "effectiveness" and "growth" giving a meaning oriented towards the bottom line and a means to an end.

The words "develop"/ "development" represent the second highest word used within the corporate universities" sample and were referred to 61% as opposed to 39% in traditional universities. Many different connotations emerged, covering both institutional and personal aspects. See Table 3 for examples of usage.

Table 3. "*Development" as Referred to in the Data Sample*

Traditional - "To identify new areas of study and research for development and enhancement, responding to contemporary developments in both the intellectual and national environment" (University of Oxford.UK). "Deliver that mission by the continuing development of its distinctive academic style, based on a belief that teaching and research are enhanced where the application of knowledge to useful ends, is seen as complementing the basic processes of acquiring and disseminating knowledge" (University of Bath, UK). "The university will provide personal development and social justice" (London Metropolitan University). "Develop responsible students capable of critical reasoning and practical action" (University of Plymouth, UK). "Students are the focus of the University as they seek intellectual, personal and cultural development" (Utah State University, US). In all areas, the goal is to develop students' communication and critical-thinking skills, ethical judgment, global awareness, and scientific and technical knowledge. Students remain the primary focus of the University" (Clemson University US).
Corporate - "The main elements included the development of a corporate-learning database for sharing best practice and publicising learning resources" (Rover Business Learning UK). "We believe that people starting their careers will increasingly want to work in companies that make such a commitment to the long-term development of their employees" (BT Academy, UK). "The Center is recognized as one of the world's premier facilities for business education and professional development" (Arthur Anderson, US). "Optimize your return on investment while saving on employee development" (Oracle University, US).

In this case, our sample of traditional universities shows the word "development" referring to the development of themes such as a "distinctive academic style", "intellectual and national environments", identifying new areas of study, and personal growth. Our corporate university sample refers to "development" in the context of themes such as a "corporate learning database" and "*employee* development". We get a sense here that development in a corporate university context is primarily conveying sustainability of the business and is unabashedly corporate-centric in its usage. We did detect some overlap when talking about staff development. The University of Lancaster in the UK was typical of a number of traditional universities in seeking to fulfill its mission by *inter alia* "recruiting, retaining and developing high quality academic and support staff".

The word "research" was the second most common term used by traditional universities (77%) as opposed to only 17% by corporate universities. This supports earlier research reported in Walton and Martin (2000) that found that only 3rd generation corporate universities look toward "sponsorship of research" as a core value. They write that a 3rd generation CU "combines continuous learning with research and technology acquisition and strategic development focused directly on the local and global needs of the business and employees". Therefore, the findings

support the expectation that only a small percentage of the sample held any evidence of corporate universities utilizing the word "research". These were most likely to be from CU's of this 3rd generation classification.

Table 4. "*Research" as Referred to in the Data Sample*

Traditional - "We are committed to the advancement of knowledge through critical and independent scholarship and research of international significance" (University of Southampton, UK). "Serve the national, regional and international communities through: The conduct, dissemination and exploitation of internationally recognised research and scholarship which increases knowledge, skills and understanding, both for their own sake and as a means of contributing to economic, social and cultural development" (University of Durham, UK). Because research is essential to the mission of a land-grant university, Auburn University will continue development of its research programs. The primary focus of this research will be directed to the solutions of problems and the development of knowledge and technology important to the state and the nation and to the quality of life of Alabama citizens (Auburn University, US). "The University is committed to the advancement of knowledge and to the cultural improvement of society through the production of research and scholarship and the presentation of creative works in the arts" (Indiana State University, US).
Corporate – "Committed to build a self-sustaining culture of learning and continuous improvement right across the company through education, training and research in partnership with academia" (BAE Systems, UK). "Learning and research will be designed to contribute to improvements in healthcare standards" (National Health Services University, UK). "Air University conducts research in air and space power, education, leadership and management" (Air University, US).

Table 4 illustrates a different emphasis on the meaning of the word based ----on its context. "Research" in a traditional university is here associated with knowledge generation and "cultural improvement of society". Research for a corporate university is much less aspirational in tone, very pragmatic and applied, and where appropriate to be done "in partnership with academia", perceived as a separate entity.

The word "knowledge" represents the third highest word used within the traditional universities" sample and was referred to by 67% as opposed to 28% in corporate universities. See Table 5.

Table 5. "*Knowledge" as Referred to in the Data Sample*

Traditional - "Freedom as a means of advancing knowledge and the continuous development of teaching, research and scholarship"(London Metropolitan University, UK). "We will seek an environment in which faculty and students are engaged in the search for knowledge" (Tufts University, US). "Engage in research, artistic and scholarly activities that advance learning through the extension of the frontiers of knowledge and creative endeavor" (University of Pittsburgh US)
Corporate - "The promotion of better acquisition and transfer of knowledge within the organization" (Rover Business Learning UK). "We are a knowledge company working in a knowledge economy and we are deploying state of the art technology to give our people the learning edge we need" (BT Academy UK). "At TVAU knowledge isn't locked behind ivy-covered walls. We believe in giving people training they can use on the job" (TVA University US). "Building knowledge bridges worldwide to create synergies. The CU aims to promote the participants" strategic orientation, competencies and capabilities to achieve the strategic goals" (Schering US).

"Knowledge" in the traditional university is associated with words like "advancing", "search" and "extension of the frontiers" implying knowledge is a pursuit that adds to the stock of wisdom and entails profound understanding. Whilst "knowledge" in the corporate university is associated with "transfer of", "company", "economy" and "strategic goals" and indicates "knowledge" as a business tool aligned to furthering corporate objectives.

One last note of analysis, there was absolutely no evidence (0%) of the use of "intellectual" and/or "freedom" in any of the corporate universities sampled. Whereas in the traditional universities sampled, "intellectual" and "freedom" represent 40% and 27% respectively. As stated by Lou Henry Hoover House, President of Stanford University in 1997, "The traditional university has values that it prizes above all others: freedom (not just academic freedom), nondiscrimination and equality of opportunity to assure intellectual openness" (House 1997). Perhaps issues of "freedom" and "intellectual openness" reflect the fundamental differences in espoused value orientations between a traditional university and one coming that from the corporate world.

Conclusion

This study gives broad support to other reported findings that corporate universities and traditional universities have different aims, objectives and values. There is little evidence of convergence of outlook between entities coming from different roots and traditions. It also reveals a common set of values for traditional universities across the two countries as seen in the rhetoric, be it old or new universities in the United Kingdom or public or private in the United States. It reinforces the instrumental orientation that CUs attach to their activities. There is less evidence of expressed values reflecting the corporatisation of traditional universities. It also demonstrates the importance of conducting a relational analysis when studying texts, and establishing the context in which words are used. There is also evidence that CUs are still "feeling their way" in terms of projecting what they stand for. The question remains as to why corporations feel the need to use academic terminology to justify their learning initiatives.

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