



I, We, All of Us.

The GRLI Deans & Directors Cohort

29-30 April 2020

Introduction	1
Background	1
About the Cohort	2
Day 1: Sensing, Connecting, and Collecting Themes	3
Session 1: What I/we need to best contribute to this emerging future?	3
Session 2: Given the changed current context, what are the key questions that arise in relation to my work?	4
Day 2: Opportunities and strategies for change	5
Discussion: With full acknowledgement of our current context, with the risks and challenges as well as the opportunities posed, what strategies are emerging for transformative change?	6
April 29-30 2020 GRLI Deans & Directors Cohort Participants	8
Appendix - Questions for Proposed Actions	10
References	11

Introduction

Background

“The best way to lead in a crisis is to be a good leader before the crisis”

This report synthesizes two days of conversation held during the COVID-19 pandemic via zoom on 29-30 April 2020 as the 5th meeting of the GRLI Deans & Directors Cohort. Originally the meeting was to be held at University of Colorado Boulder with a focus on “Regenerative Management Education.”

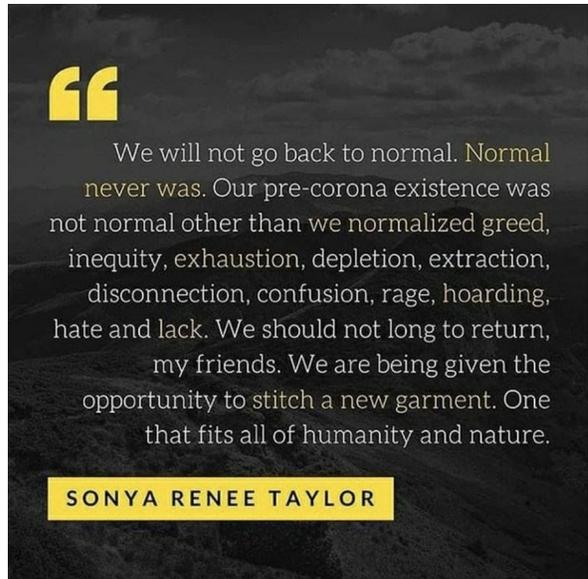
However with the lockdown in place globally, the event theme shifted to discuss “Management Education in a Disrupted World.”

None of us could have imagined just how disrupted our lives and world would become. The COVID-19 pandemic has upended every aspect of our home lives, professional responsibilities and norms, and society as a whole.

Faced with this reality, our planned multi-day, in-person Deans & Directors Cohort gathering was reconfigured as an online event.

This brief paper sets out the theme, dilemmas, and opportunities shared by the meeting participants. The notes and curated themes that follow are a snapshot of the reflections of those in attendance (see participant list at end). As business school deans and directors, in their roles as change agents, this community is well-suited for the systemic challenges we face.

As part of an established learning community of senior leaders, Deans & Directors Cohort participants find support for Globally Responsible action at their own institutions and communities. And perhaps more importantly, the Deans Cohort provides a fertile space for Deans to collaborate on systems-level change initiatives to benefit the entire Management Education ecosystem. This ability to effect change on a systems level is a true differentiator for the cohort..



We invite discussion on this paper with participants (listed below) and our collected communities for further input. Join the conversation at [GRII.org](https://www.grii.org).

About the Cohort

The idea for a “Deans roundtable” was suggested by Julia Christensen Hughes during the GRII’s 2016 AGM held at Kemmy Business School in Limerick, Ireland. The stated purpose was to help academic leaders develop an emergent understanding of globally responsible management education, as well as share tested strategies for facilitating transformation towards the achievement of that end.

Since forming in 2017, and now known as the *GRII Deans & Directors Cohort*, the group has grown into a collaboratory comprising **70+ deans, directors, and learning partners** acting as catalysts of change. As a growing participant-driven co-learning initiative, participants collaborate with new open research, start new centres and programmes, and explore initiatives aimed at transforming management education. See this [EFMD Global Focus](#) article for more information.

The Cohort’s ongoing collaboration has been energized through in-person meetings in Canada, France, the United States and most recently in November 2019 for its fourth in-person meeting in Portugal.

The 5th event – held online on 29-30 April due to the pandemic – was first and foremost about connecting as individuals with global peers, all of us in our own homes and offices, and to start processing the shifting landscape under lockdown.

On each of the two days, participants met for 2.5 hours. Expertly held by the GRII team, participants engaged in group discussion and smaller breakout sessions.

[View the Agenda](#)

For more information on GRII’s approach to whole person learning and convening of collaborative action-oriented dialogues see these resources on the [GRII Website](#):

- The Collaboratory Book
- Learning for Tomorrow
- WPL Manual

Day I: Sensing, Connecting, and Collecting Themes

After introductions and check-ins, participants twice broke into smaller groups to discuss a theme or set of questions, and then reported back in plenary.

The comments below represent “points raised” or observations, as steps in a collective, collaborative process to sense, connect, and collect emergent themes. They should not be taken in any way as the unanimous position of the group.

Session I: What I/we need to best contribute to this emerging future?

In discussion, participants shared their individual strategies for coping with and/or capitalizing on the current and developing context. Participants shared:

- Aspects of personal disruption as they attempted to shift to the reality of lock-down and distance work. Some shared stories of the economic impact on local business and family members. Others reflected on health issues, with some directly affected by Covid-19 (family, relatives, friends, colleagues). The result, reported by many, was difficulty focusing.
- Growing awareness of the need to care for our own health and well being. Personal coping strategies included: embracing healthy routines (make your bed); being in nature; exercise - bike riding; meditation; daily communication with faculty, staff and students.
- The need for retaining “human touch” in whatever way we can as we move forward.
- Theme of collaboration - a belief or feeling that we need the kind of leadership that changes systems, rather than situations, and the concern that this leadership does not exist everywhere it is needed.
- Acknowledgement of our own relative privilege, living in secure environments.
- Questions asked about how we might embrace research that offers solutions for inequality, insecurity, prejudice, and other exclusive behaviors that are coming to the fore in the current circumstances.

Session 2: Given the changed current context, what are the key questions that arise in relation to my work?

In the second breakout, participants shared their questions relating to their students', communities' and institutions' needs. Below are thematic questions and ideas that were shared with the whole group in plenary.

- Teaching and learning
 - How is/should the curriculum going to change?
 - How can we test new ways of doing things (of learning) - with students learning in both face to face and on-line at the same time?
 - What impact will this have on international students?
 - How do we teach attitudes/values on line?
 - How can we most effectively pivot to virtual technologies in teaching? Can we think about offering some best practices programs collaboratively within the GRLI community? Is this feasible, desirable, possible?
 - Since virtual experiences lack the richness of a face to face experience, how can we find ways to recreate quality, interactive, creative visual experiences?
- Research implications/new areas of study
 - How can we bring solutions as researchers/practitioners?
- Strategic transformation potential
 - How do we ensure that we are not so engulfed in the present, that we forego the opportunity to lead a "reboot"? What does courageous, effective leadership look like that creates an appropriate sense of urgency and challenge to what has been, and helps steer our business schools to a better future?
 - What are the opportunities to capitalize on these shifts? (Less time spent in meetings/commuting etc. provides opportunity for thinking strategically.)
 - How do we continue moving forward on sustainability priorities when university priorities have shifted elsewhere?

- External stakeholders
 - What are our alumni doing during this crisis? How do we make our relevance more visible?
 - Can we examine our institutions' support for business as a force for good? (Can the current situation be an opportunity to demonstrate relevance, by engaging actively in local economic recovery initiatives?)
 - How do we best serve local markets/communities?
- Business model of higher education
 - To what extent are our current business approaches still relevant?
 - Criticism of higher education's response to COVID-19. Students pushing for refunds and potential litigation for broken contracts - quality differential of face to face vs. online learning experiences. Can we use the cohort to identify best practices and share resources?
 - What is the value of our physical facilities and resources centralized on a physical campus in a Covid-19 world? How essential is that? And, beyond COVID-19?

Day 2: Opportunities and strategies for change

The second day was hosted for deans only, to provide the opportunity for senior leader exchange. Building on the themes and questions raised on the previous day, participants broke into two smaller discussion groups and then reconvened to continue the conversation.

“How we will come out of this crisis, depends on what we begin to do now. That's about leadership, but it's also about our strategies. If we believe radical change is needed, it's important to really, really think about what is essential to do now, what is essential for the future, and it's about research, it's about teaching, and without question, it's about societal impact.” – Anders Aspling, Founding Secretary, GRLI

Discussion: With full acknowledgement of our current context, with the risks and challenges as well as the opportunities posed, what strategies are emerging for transformative change?

Challenge	Opportunities
<p>1. Disruptive shift to online learning & loss of in-person connection</p> <p><i>“How can we build an environment where people have safe, physical distance, but are able to form close social bonds?”</i></p> <p>Some considerations included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Part-time students with multiple life/work/family roles ● End/pause of in-person on-campus life ● People sitting all day at screen and burning out, “Zoom fatigue” ● Loneliness/Need for Connection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leverage instructional design to combine asynchronous synchronous and learning and offering opportunities for students to connect ● Pursue cohort models for greater connection ● Hybrid experiences - Give students more engaging screen experiences, but also find ways to connect those in person who want connection ● Build competencies for online interactions with global courses & whole-person facilitation, to prepare students for a work world with less flying/traveling
<p>2. Business model implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Concerns for 2021 e.g. <i>“Organizations are not configured to be in suspended animation for two three years.”</i> ● Concerns for international students <i>“How do we change the way in which students flow around the world to our universities, what they’re looking for and where they feel safe?”</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learn from other physical environments that have seen tumultuous upheaval and how it’s disrupted education. e.g., free university movement ● Institutional partnerships (e.g. a coalition of New York City universities) ● Consolidation of regional/state systems for economies of scale ● Jumpstart existing initiatives around online learning and around distributed hubs of education
<p>3. Leadership and change making</p> <p><i>“We all at some level see ourselves as champions of the faculty, but more importantly we see ourselves as champions of a mission.”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Convene a summer zoom conference of faculty. <i>“In light of the current crisis, in what way is your discipline contributing to us understanding what's going on and making progress, and what disciplinary norms may be being challenged?”</i>

<p><i>“Are we essential now? Our business goals, what we teach, how essential is our research, are we preparing our students to be essential contributors to society?”</i></p> <p><i>“One of our main duties is to make sure, also to respond that we built organizations that can adapt and show resilience to their continuously changing circumstances.”</i></p> <p>Further insights from the discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In a COVID-19 world, disciplines with entrenched norms & teachings may no longer be relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Instead of the current hierarchical model to how degrees are approached, consider a circular management education approach ● Use the SDGs as a framing lens to encourage holistic perspective, ● Lead with the people who are on board, rather than work hard at putting a lot of energy into converting people who are not on board, because sometimes they come along on their own. ● Fund collaborative/interdisciplinary projects ● Widen circles of discussion 1) Include students as agents of change, advocates, and strategic allies. 2) Bring external voices of Stakeholders to faculty conversations ● Focus on resilience building for future crisis and pandemics
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April 29-30 2020 GRLI Deans & Directors Cohort Participants

Institution	Attendee Name	Role
Western Governors University	Rashmi Prasad	Dean, College of Business
Utah Valley University	Norman Wright	Dean
Gothenburg School of Business Economics & Law	Marie Stenseke	Deputy Dean of the School of Business, Economics and Law
Kent State University	Cathy Dubois David DuBois	Associate Dean for Administration Chair, Council of Responsible Enterprise / CORE Associate Director, Assessment and Accreditation
George Mason University School of Business	Maury Peiperl Anne Magro Lisa Gring-Pemble	Dean Deputy Dean Senior Associate Dean for Strategy and Impact Co-Executive Director, Business for a Better World
University of Guelph Lang School of Business	Statia Elliot Rumina Dhalla	Interim Dean Associate Professor and CSR Coordinator
Malardalen University	Thomas Wahl Rana Mostaghel	Dean at the School for Business, Society and Engineering Programme Director
University of Jyväskylä School of Business and Economics	Hanna-Leena Pesonen	Dean

LeaderShape Ltd.	John Knights	Chairman, LeaderShape Global
The New School	Mary Watson	Executive Dean
Exeter University Business School	David Allen Ilke Inceoglu	Dean Professor of Organisational Behaviour and HR Management Programme
UNEP	Hilary French	Program Management Officer, UNEP North America Office
ESADE Business School	Josep Franch	Dean
Sasin Graduate Institute of Business Administration of Chulalongkorn University	Ian Fenwick	Director, Sasin School of Management
GRLI	Claire Maxwell	Oasis School for Human Relations
	Julia Christensen Hughes	Founding Dean: Gordon S. Lang School of Business and Economics, University of Guelph
	Anders Aspling	Founding Secretary General GRLI
	Claire Sommer	GRLI Associate Communications
	John North	GRLI Associate with Executive Responsibilities

Appendix - Questions for Proposed Actions

GRLI Founding Secretary Anders Aspling shares these questions for Deans & Directors Cohort participants, as proposals for continuing inquiry and actions.

What is ongoing now? What do we learn as the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences are unfolding?

Mapping our dilemmas for support and shared learning.

- What are the biggest challenges we're currently facing?
- What are appropriate actions?
- What kind of facilitation and support can we mobilise and provide within us?
- Further development of the "Collaborative Grid"; i.e. an inventory of available resources amongst us? (Initiated by Dayle Smith at the November 2019 GRLI Deans Cohort).

What management/business education do we want to see for the future?

What are key dimensions of the business/management school of the future?

- Based on what we believe in, represent, know and are learning - what kind of school and management education do we aspire for?

Are there specific opportunities needed to take advantage of now in order to shape the management education of the future – people and planet centered and for a better world for all of us?

- Can the current crisis be used as some sort of "tipping point"? Or, are what we experience, how we act, what we learn and what is unfolding already a tipping point of kind in itself?
- Are there characteristics and basic pillars of what we aspire for that would be of value to share beyond the cohort?
- Would a collective statement of some kind by the Cohort be of value at this time?

References

From Wayne Visser (AMS): [Global Leadership Skills Workbook](#)

From Anders Aspling: [Opening Remarks to the Deans & Directors Cohort – 29 April](#)

From Julia Christensen Hughes: “100 ideas in 100 days exploring how business schools can innovate through and beyond COVID-19”. Visit 100futuremba.com to follow and comment/build on ideas.

GRLI articles prepared for the Meeting as pre-reading and conversation starters:

[Management Education in a Disrupted World](#)

Our current global reality calls for courageous academic leadership for dealing with immediate priorities as well as future change. Perhaps we can learn from our colleagues in the frontline of healthcare and consider what “triage” within our own context makes most sense, while planning for a better future.

[10 Observations at the outset of the Pandemic](#)

By Julia Christensen Hughes

The last several weeks have challenged us in ways most of us could previously never have imagined. For those of us with both formal leadership accountability and the emotional and intellectual energy, it’s not too soon to start sharing what strategies we are employing as well as considering how we might help shape a better future.

[A critical perspective on SDG8 in the time of Corona](#)

By Hanna-Leena Pesonen

As the COVID-19 pandemic has, at least temporarily, hit the world economy exceptionally hard, economists are debating the shape of the much expected recovery (will it be U, V or W and how steep or not?), and the world is anxiously waiting to see growth. Implicit in these framings of the economic crisis due to COVID-19 is an expectation of the future where we wait for economic growth. Would this also be the time to start questioning the nature and quality of growth?

[Globally Responsible Business Education: A Viral View](#)

By Ian Fenwick

We recently adopted the summary positioning statement of ‘inspire.connect.transform for a better, smarter, sustainable world.’ Almost every word of that statement now has mutated its meanings!

Reporting on the GRLI Deans Cohort 5th Gathering

[Globally Responsive Business Education: An Antipodean View](#)

by Mike Ewing

What has been more interesting to experience have been the myriad other adjustments and innovations in response to the virus/lockdown, many of which have resulted in unforeseen positive (and some negative) consequences.