University teachers' conceptions of "Changemaker": a starting point for embedding social innovation in learning and teaching

Bethany Alden Rivers, Ming Nie and Alejandro Armellini
Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, University of Northampton, Northamptonshire, UK

Abstract

Purpose—This paper reports on a study aimed at understanding the different conceptions that University of Northampton teachers hold of "Changemaker", an institutional initiative to develop capacities for social innovation.

Design/methodology/approach—The study took a phenomenographic approach to identify a small number of qualitatively different conceptions of Changemaker among teaching staff. Face-to-face, phenomenographic interviews were carried out with 30 teachers across the university. Transcript data were analysed using thematic inductive analysis.

Findings—Five different conceptions of Changemaker were found: 1) Changemaker as university strategy; 2) Changemaker as critical thinking, perspective shifting and problem solving; 3) Changemaker as employability; 4) Changemaker as social betterment and 5) Changemaker as personal transformation.

Research limitations/implications—The outcome space of conceptions represents the beliefs of teaching staff at the University of Northampton. The approach to research and plans for the practical application of findings may be of direct benefit to other education providers as they develop their own models for teaching and learning.

Practical implication—The findings from this study will inform the next phase of the project, which involves the development of a skills/attributes/behaviours matrix for Changemaker.

Originality/value—The findings of this study will address the absence of literature on teachers' conceptions of phenomena related to social innovation, social entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship. Understanding teachers' beliefs of such phenomena is relevant to the growing number of universities that address these subjects in the curriculum.

Keywords Changemaker, social innovation, social entrepreneurship, phenomenography, conceptions, categories of description, pedagogy, learning and teaching, learning design, employability, problem-solving, transformative learning

Paper type Research paper

Background

The University of Northampton has a considerable profile as a leader toward positive social impact, and it aims to be the leading higher education institution for social enterprise in the UK by the end of 2015. Recently, these efforts and ambitions have earned the University recognition as an AshokaU[1] "Changemaker Campus". AshokaU has the "ultimate goal of making everyone a Changemaker" by helping individuals embrace the "unifying principles" of social innovation listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Unifying principles for "everyone a Changemaker" (adapted from Curtis, 2013)

1. Believe in a responsibility to make positive changes in society.
2. Have the power and resources to make a difference (tangible and intangible).
3. Take initiative to bring about innovative change, local and systemic.
4. Work with others to maximise impact, working in groups and networks.

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[1] AshokaU is a global network of social entrepreneurs that works to nurture cultures of social innovation across university campuses. See AshokaU.org for more information.

5. Know and live authentically according to one's values.
6. Practice empathy by engaging in another person's world without judgement.

These principles suggest that the development of personal values, beliefs and activities lead to one's ability to influence positive social change. Phrases such as "Believe in…", "Take initiative…", "Practice empathy…" all point to an individual's capacity. Whereas phrases such as "…make positive changes in society", "…make a difference",
"bring about innovative change", imply a social dimension. The dual-focus on the personal and the social does not imply a dichotomous relationship. Inherent in these principles is the reflexive and overlapping nature of developing the individual's capacity through active social engagement (e.g. "engage in another person's world", "work in groups"). In this way, the personal and the social can develop, experientially, in a learning cycle. The AshokaU initiative to foster social innovation across universities campus offers an extension to this model by suggesting that it is the higher education institution that can mediate this learning process (see Figure 1).
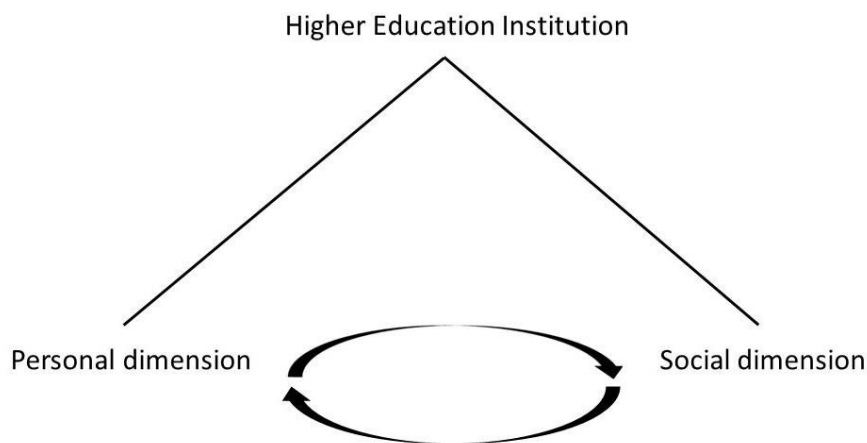

Fig. 1. The role of HEIs in developing individuals as Changemakers

A challenge for the University is how to embody "everyone a Changemaker" across the disciplines and different levels of study. AshokaU provides guidance for incorporating Changemaker principles into learning and teaching activities but it also encourages universities to develop their own strategies for fostering a culture for social innovation. In an effort to develop a model of learning and teaching for Changemaker that is relevant and impactful to the learners and teachers at the University, a project is underway to develop our own conceptual framework. This paper reports on an initial phase of research—understanding teachers' conceptions of Changemaker—that will inform the pedagogical development toward social innovation.

Introduction
Since achieving the Ashoka Changemaker designation, the University has developed a particular discourse around social innovation and what it means to be a "Changemaker". The richness and variety of biographies within this community of practice, along with the range of

learning contexts, provides scope for different conceptualisations of Changemaker. So, although the discourse around Changemaker is shared, it is reasonable to assume that staff will interpret Changemaker in different ways.

Studies have shown that teachers' approaches to teaching are strongly influenced by their own beliefs (Kember, 1997) and that teachers' approaches to teaching can influence learners' approaches to studying (Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse, 1999). When considering ways of embedding values into the curriculum, it is sensible to start by understanding teachers' existing beliefs about "Changemaker".

This paper aims to address the following questions: 1) How do university teachers at the University of Northampton conceptualise "Changemaker"? and 2) What is the relationship between these different conceptions? It is believed that the answers to these questions will form the basis of a conceptual framework for developing a pedagogical model.

Pedagogy and social innovation

The notion of developing learners' capacities for social innovation, or finding "new ways that work", is not an entirely novel concept (Mulgan et al., 2007). As themes such as social innovation, social entrepreneurship and intreprenuership increasingly become popular in higher education, various models for teaching these subjects have emerged. Heriot et al.'s (2008) study, which used student consulting projects as the basis for an active learning pedagogy for problem solving, is one example of how a particular course was designed to develop students as agents of change. Enterprise education has an established footing in UK higher education but focuses primarily on enhancing employability and developing links with industry (Jones & Iredale, 2010).

Intrepreneurship education, as described in the literature appears to be similar in many ways to the principles of Changemaker. Intrepreneurship is an individual intention or drive to innovate within an organisation, developing and implementing novel solutions to organisational problems often in a

"bottom-up" way. (Probst et al., 2013, p. 25)

Studies such as Hallam, Leffel & Womack (2008), Kansikas and Murphy (2010) and Probst et al. (2013) discuss organisational prerequisites, students' perceptions and approaches to teaching intraprenuerial skills. However, each of these studies addresses a particular cohort of students enrolled on a particular course. The present study focuses on developing a model that is meaningful across multiple disciplines and levels of study. To this end, this paper reports on the ways in which teachers understand the notion of social innovation in terms of Changemaker. It is this range of conceptions that will influence teachers' engagement with the Changemaker agenda and their innovation of the principles in their teaching practice.

Conceptions of 'Changemaker'

For the purposes of this project, it was necessary to form a field of knowledge around the concept of Changemaker in order to understand how these beliefs would be translated into learning and teaching activities. Phenomenography seeks to identify a small set of "qualitatively distinct descriptive categories", or conceptions (Booth, 1997, p. 138). The relationship between these conceptions forms an outcome space (or framework) that can be used to inform and enhance practice.

There is abundant literature on phenomenographic studies looking at students' conceptions of learning (cf. Eklund-Myrskog, 1996; Purdie & Hattie, 2002), with the most classic study being Säljö's (1979) research. This line of inquiry has been extended to explore students' conceptions of learning in relation to different contextual aspects such as learning

environment (cf. Tynjälä, 1997; Dart et al., 2000; Entwistle & Peterson, 2004), culture (cf. Pratt, 1992; Watkins & Regmi, 2002), mode of study (cf. Collin, 2002; Alden, 2011) and subject (cf. Marshall et al., 1999; Koballa et al., 2000). Students' conceptions of learning also have been studied in relation to approaches to learning and epistemological development (cf. Lonka & Lindblom-Ylänne, 1996; Vermunt & Vermetten, 2004).

Teachers' conceptions of learning have been investigated (cf. Aguirre, Haggerty & Linder, 1990; Patrick & Pintrich, 2001) as well as teachers' conceptions of other phenomena such as e-learning (Stein, Shephard & Harris, 2011), reflection (Alden Rivers, Richardson & Price, in press) and teaching (Prosser, Trigwell & Taylor, 1994; Kember, 1997). The literature, however, does not point to any studies of teachers' conceptions of phenomena linked to social innovation, social entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship—those areas that are more closely related to Changemaker.

The present study was designed to gain a "from the inside", or second-order perspective on teachers' beliefs about Changemaker (Marton, 1981, p. 177). By taking a phenomenographic approach to this research, it was possible to discern "differing conceptualisations" among teaching staff (Entwistle, 1997, p. 129).

Participants

After obtaining ethical approval, approximately 60 teaching staff (10 teaching staff per academic Faculty) were contacted by email with an invitation to take part in this study. Thirty of these staff provided informed consent to participate (15 male and 15 female teachers). In phenomenographic studies, this sample is considered a reasonable size (Trigwell & Richardson, 2003, p. 41). Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of staff by Faculty.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of participants by Faculty

Faculty	Number	%
Business	8	27
Social Sciences	7	23
Education	6	20
Health	2	7
Arts	4	13
Science & Technology	3	10

Method

Face-to-face interviews were carried out with these participants between March and April 2014. The interview protocol included three questions as shown in Table 3. The choice of wording and ordering of these questions deliberately echoed Säljö's (1979) phenomenographic study on students' conceptions of learning. In a similar spirit, the first two questions prompted the participants to talk about the phenomenon (Changemaker) in terms of their own context as a teacher at the University of Northampton. The final question asked the participants to explicate their own meaning of the phenomenon, which up to that point had been understood implicitly.

Table 3: Interview protocol

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1. In what ways is the University of Northampton a Changemaker Campus?
2. To what extent does Changemaker apply to the work you do at the University?
3. What does Changemaker mean to you?

Interviews were short and focused, yet the interviewers took opportunities to probe the participants for deeper, richer responses. The interviews ranged from 3 minutes to 11 minutes, with an average length of 5 minutes.

Analysis

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed for analysis. Using thematic inductive analysis, the first researcher analysed the data in three iterative stages of list-making, grouping and labelling (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process resulted in a set of five qualitatively different categories of description.

The second researcher carried out a separate phase of analysis, working backward. In this phase, the second researcher went through each transcript to identify evidence to support each category of description. The second researcher was satisfied that there were no additional data to suggest that other categories of description existed (i.e. the existing data could be mapped to the five categories). Both researchers were satisfied that each emerging category was discernible.

Further analysis of each category explored what Marton and Pong (2005) described as the "structural aspect" of each conception to understand the variation within the categories of description. This involved a two-stage process that Marton and Pong explained as involving 1) identifying conceptions in terms of their overall meaning and 2) understanding the different elements within each category. In the following section, the structural aspects of various conceptions are discussed as *different ways* that participants talked about the same conception.

Findings: Research question one— How do university teachers at the University of Northampton conceptualise "Changemaker"?

Data are presented in this section to describe each category of description. Gender-specific pseudonyms are used in place of real names.

Category of description 1—Changemaker as institutional strategy

This category of description describes Changemaker as a catalyst for the University. There appeared to be two ways of looking at Changemaker as institutional strategy. For some participants, Changemaker is a "status" or "badge" that reflects the work that the University has already been doing.

> The Changemaker label is brilliant but I think it's giving a label to something that already existed, so I think that's a great strength of the University. (Stuart, Social Sciences)

> I would say they are a Changemaker campus but for me they always were anyway before they had the Changemaker status […] I think they just now have that badge and that title. (Martha, Business)

> …for me, it's something positive for the university. You know the first university in the UK with Changemaker status and therefore as a university it is important for us to embrace what that means. (Annie, Health)

For other participants with this conception, Changemaker was an aspiration toward something still to be achieved. Inherent in this belief is the drive to embrace the opportunity to *deserve* the Changemaker status.

> …so again it's the sense of when doing the day-job how you actually fit that within this University-wide aspiration to be Changemaker. (Peter, Social Sciences)

> If I am a Changemaker then Changemaking has to be assimilated into every department. (Jacky, Arts)

> To me it's an idealism, a direction that the University is keen to move in. (Leeann, Business)

> I suppose it's about signing up to a set of values, beliefs, or principles that are consistent with the other Changemaker campuses. So at the moment it's an ideology rather than something in practice. (Nelson, Social Sciences)

Category of description 2—Changemaker as critical thinking, perspective shifting and problem solving
Participants with this conception of Changemaker talked about it in terms of gaining new perspectives and inspiring critical thinking.

> I think the key things of Ashoka of seeing social problems that need novel solutions, getting students to empathise with each other… (Stuart, Social Sciences)

> …empowering them to find solutions to problems that many students face in school. (Carla, Education)

> …Changemaker means to me to trying to look at things in a different way than they've been looked at before. (Sarina, Social Sciences)

> Our students should be able to go off after university and think critically, find problems and solutions, develop stuff. All universities and especially schools of education should be able to do that. (Daniel, Education)

Category of description 3—Changemaker as employability
Participants with this conception of Changemaker talked about it as a way to help students align themselves with industry for the purposes of gaining employment. In all cases, participants talked about how the University is working with the community to enhance employability.

> We focus on practical ways to teach students so when they graduate they can find a good job and do a good job. So, Changemaker for Northampton University, we might bring more policymakers, regulators, top managers of academic from a research point of view. So, they're bringing those people in. Local community to other campus. (Xiaolu, Business)

> I see lots of stuff going on in school and community and how this is making students employable for the long term. (Jennifer, Education)

> It links to the idea of employability being very important and I think it is a spinoff from that. So developing links and encouraging students to be more employable… (Laura, Business)

> I guess my understanding of it is very much about aligning the university with industry and trying to provide the students with skills to go out into industry and work and implement change in their careers as they work within industry. The Changemaker elements tend to work around employability. The ability that we enthuse the students to think about how they can work in industry and how they can make a change in the industry they've chosen. (Martin, Arts)

Category of description 4—Changemaker as coming together to share resources with the aim of social betterment
Participants with this belief of Changemaker talked about is as making a positive change to a social situation. Some talked about their beliefs in terms of society as the *bigger picture* to which we need to contribute.

> …another way is building culture, building community, a collective identity of working for finding improvements around us. (Karl, Business)

> …to me it's about helping individuals be part of a broader system of social change. (Michael, Social Sciences)

> As far the role of the university, it's about empowering the next generation of people. About making them aware of the responsibility, that we're part of a wider, broader community and that we need to contribute. (Paul, Education)

> It's not just making change for the sake of making change. There has to be continuity. Constant change means constant disruption if everything is turned over again and again. I think that it definitely has to do with social values. It has to do with doing something for the interest of the wider public good. (Sarina, Social Sciences)

Others with this conceptions talked about Changemaker in terms of doing something meaningful for someone else.

> The term Changemaker or the process of being a Changemaker, just means making a difference. So, whether that is something small or whether that is huge and life-changing, it is a philosophy of doing something useful and not just for yourself. (Martha, Business)

> I think it's important because any lecture, any discipline, it's about making your students good social citizens. We teach our students about corporate responsibility and ethics. It's about looking at yourself and doing the right thing and helping other people. (Laura, Business)

Category of description 5—Changemaker as personal transformation
This category of description is different from the other categories because it describes Changemaker in terms of changing one's personal trajectory, taking control of one's life and developing as an individual. Some participants with this conception talked about it as a way to take control of one's coursework and/or professional life.

> …everything we do is about helping students make a difference in their work, in some ways… (Hannah, Education)

> … to take charge of their professional identify and decide who they want to be…
> So it's actually forcing people to ask themselves: who do I want to be. (Carla, Education)

Other participants with this conception talked about Changemaker in terms of seizing opportunities to change one's life.

> And for that to not just be in the academic sphere but within a much larger idea of how universities can change individuals' life opportunities. I think that's really great. (Peter, Social Sciences)

> I see education, in particular higher education, as a way of not so much as teaching people but as empowering and guiding people, allowing people to meet their individual potentials and I think on that basis, HE is about inspiring change in individuals. (Michael, Social Sciences)

> [A] Changemaker as a person would be somebody who can see things that need done and make things happen. (Hope, Education)

> We are advocates for the women and we empower the women to make changes in their experience in their pregnancy… (Teresa, Health)

Findings: Research question two—What is the relationship between these different conceptions?

The variation among conceptions is found in understanding what makes each category different from and similar to the others. In phenomenographic studies, the outcome space attempts to explain this discernment and relationship between conceptions.

The data suggest there are five different conceptions. During the second phase of analysis, the researchers identified areas where the evidence appeared to overlap multiple categories, showing a possible relationship between conceptions. There are data to suggest that the conception of Changemaker as an institutional strategy appears to overlap with problem-solving, employability and social betterment. Changemaker as critical thinking, perspective shifting and problem solving appears to overlap conceptions related to personal transformation, social betterment and employability. Daniel, for example mentioned these categories as he talked about Changemaker.

> We train all different areas, teachers, nurses, musicians, business, policemen, social workers. The university has to look at ways they can work with people of all areas and often times in difficult situations so they have to have open minds, think creatively, how they can work with people and for the benefit of all people, both here and abroad. (Daniel, Education)

Lisa talked about Changemaker in terms of the University's agenda (strategy) and gaining skills (employability) to apply to a broader community (social betterment).

> Changemaker, to me, does link to the University's concept around social entrepreneurship, having a social conscientious, looking at how skills that students can gain through university and their studies can be applied to the broader community with a social conscientious. (Lisa, Social Sciences)

Michael talked about Changemaker in terms of inspiring "change in individuals" by helping them "try new ways of doing things", suggesting a relationship between personal transformation and perspective shifting.

Where individuals held multiple conceptions, there exists a possibility of a hierarchical model. In this respect, an individual may hold a conception at a certain "level" as well as all the ones "underneath" it. Carla, for example, talked about Changemaker in terms of personal transformation, critical thinking and as an institutional strategy. Peter talked about Changemaker in terms of social betterment, personal transformation and institutional strategy. Despite these examples, it was unclear whether there was a least sophisticated nor most sophisticated conception and neither of the researchers believed that these data indicated a pattern to support a developmental model.

It is plausible, however, that the participants hold multiple conceptions of Changemaker. Studies on conceptions of learning suggest that learners hold a "range of conceptions", but that some conceptions are more "influential in shaping their learning behaviour" (Purdie, Hattie & Douglas, 1996, p. 99). Alden Rivers et al. (in press) found that teachers hold multiple conceptions of reflection, depending on their beliefs about the origin and the practice of the phenomenon. Considering the outcome space in this way, teachers may hold multiple conceptions of Changemaker and these conceptual categories may be overlapping. Set against the backdrop of Figure 1, Figure 2 offers one way of viewing these five different categories of teachers' beliefs about Changemaker.
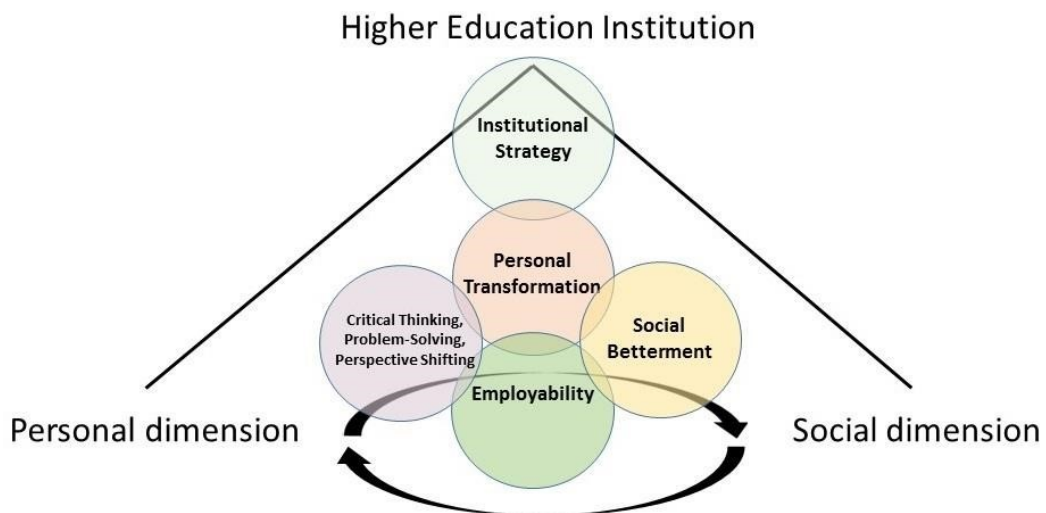
Fig 2. A possible outcome space for teachers' conceptions of Changemaker

Discussion

This study aimed to understand the range of ways teachers conceptualised Changemaker for the purposes of informing a meaningful pedagogical model for the University. Viewing these different conceptions in an outcome space helps to delineate between the conceptual categories and to consider the relatedness of these beliefs. By taking a phenomenographic approach, it was possible to address these research questions and to form an outcome space of teachers' conceptions of Changemaker.

Figure 2 is a useful milestone toward developing a pedagogical framework. By understanding the different ways that teachers understand Changemaker, the University can consider the multiple and varied approaches toward capacity development. However, one limitation of such a construct is that it is a representation of the beliefs of teachers at a particular institution at a particular point in time. Therefore, while the findings are relevant to the University of Northampton, they may not be generalizable to the wider higher education sector. It is plausible, though, that the methods for exploring and developing a bespoke framework for social innovation education are relevant to other higher education institutions and educators.

Another limitation of these findings is that they represent only the beliefs of teachers, rather than the beliefs of multiple stakeholders involved in the higher education experience. A further phase of research, carried out in a similar way, will explore students' beliefs about Changemaker. It will be important to understand whether data from students offer new categories of description and if they corroborate the conceptions identified in the present study.

The next step

An outcome space showing students' and teachers' conceptions of Changemaker will provide a basis from which the research team can start to outline skills, attributes and behaviours associated with the development toward each conceptual category. Focus groups of teaching staff, professional staff and students will be an important part of this modelling process.

Understanding such a matrix of skills will inform programme design in as much as the matrix can serve as a tool for constructing learning outcomes and assessment around various conceptions of Changemaker. A tool, such as this one, also will have implications for programme approval and periodic quality review, as the quality team will be able to ascertain those learning activities associated with Changemaker. In these ways, this proposed matrix will

be particularly useful to the University as it seeks ways to embed social innovation across multiple disciplines and different levels of study.

It was relevant to take a phenomenographic approach to understand what the Changemaker designation meant for the University. By embracing the different beliefs of teachers, and eventually of students, the University is developing a grassroots pedagogical model that offers flexible routes toward developing stronger social innovators.

Acknowledgements

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