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Rewriting the Future: How Metamodern Education Can Redefine Society and Leadership

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Abstract

This food-for-thought paper challenges traditional paradigms and proposes a metamodern framework for redefining the optics on the role of education in society, advocating for a new social contract rooted in shared values, inclusivity, and interdisciplinary collaboration. How can we democratize higher education and empower individuals to navigate the uncertainties of the 21st century? Is moving beyond fragmented knowledge and fostering skills-based education truly beneficial? Moving beyond postmodern fragmentation, metamodernism emphasizes cooperation and holistic development, presenting a blueprint for transforming society by bridging individual agency and collective progress. The Inner Development Goals (IDG) promotes skills-based and humanity-focused leadership that addresses the inner and outer dimensions of sustainable development. This transformative skills-based approach to leadership encourages educators and institutions to embrace complexity and ambiguity, preparing future leaders to leverage inherited chaos for meaningful change. This approach challenges traditional paradigms and calls for a dynamic interplay that aligns with the metamodern ethos.

Keywords/key phrases: Higher Education, Inner Development Goals, democratization, , skills development, metamodernity, New Social Contract

1. Introduction

The 21st century requires new ways of thinking and understanding feelings that will help us survive and prosper in a world where the Internet has radically changed our lives. Postmodern humanity is struggling with spiritual and environmental depletion in a new philosophical paradigm.

Some apparent frameworks and applied manifestations of metamodern philosophy in the field of "people development" mark the emergence of the need to re-sign a new social contract for education from the International Commission on Future Education UNESCO (ICFE, 2021) and a new psychological contract between employers and workers, by Institute of Personnel and

Development (CIPD, 2021). The New Social Contract on Education (ICFE, 2021) should unite humanity in the face of the challenges of the 21st century around shared values and collective efforts to ensure the development of knowledge and innovation needed to build a stable and peaceful future for all social, economic, and environmental justice.

2. Era of Uprising Metamodernity

Respected critics of postmodern revisited postmodernism's values and premises, accentuating the constant complex development of modernism and denying that postmodernism can be a substantial or long-term detachment from it. Postmodernism is sceptical of interpretations that claim uniform validity for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races; on the other hand, it concentrates on relative truths for each individual or within each paradigm and therefore has a relativistic view of reality.

What is emerging after postmodernism? One must go beyond the boundless inhomogeneous polyphonic eclectic decentralized postmodernism and take a meta-position to answer this question.

The monograph *Metamodernism: The Future of Theory* (Storm, 2021) goes beyond these deconstructive projects to offer a way forward for the humanities and social sciences by introducing a new model of a theory called metamodernism. Through postmodernist critique, Storm gives a new, radical description of the ever-changing nature of society - the "social ontology of the process" - and its materialization in temporary zones of stability or "social species." According to Storm's wording, the prefix "meta-" here "primarily offers a position of a higher or second-order outside (post) modernism" (Storm, 2021, p. 5).

Metamodernism is a revolutionary manifesto for research in the human sciences that offers a more inclusive future of theory in which new forms of both progress and knowledge can help us survive and prosper in a world where the Internet, Globalisation and International Law Violations have radically changed our lives, where humanity is struggling with the inner capacity to comprehend and react to these challenges overloaded with environmental depletion of our time.

A shared understanding of the instability of planetary life in the Anthropocene gives rise to a compass of survival (Raworth, 2017) as well as to the viability of humanity in a new philosophical paradigm and the opportunity to reach the next level of social development. The frameworks of **integrated dynamics** (Wilber, 2000), **spiral dynamics** (Beck & Cowan, 1996; Graves, 1970; Cowan & Todorovic, 2000), **rethinking organizations** (Laloux, 2014), **applying Theory U** (Scharmer, 2016; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013), **integral politics** (Fein, 2023), and **integral management** (Pekar, 2016) have significantly influenced contemporary approaches to leadership, organizational transformation, and cultural dynamics. Each of these perspectives provides unique integral insights into understanding human development, value systems, and strategies for leading change effectively in diverse settings.

The anthology *Dispatches from Time Between Worlds: Crisis and Emergence in Meta-Modernity* is an attempt to perceive the context by exploring the preconditions, coherence and scale of "metamodern" sensitivity: the structure of feelings, cultural ethos, epistemic orientation and imaginary worldview that emerged over the past two decades (Rowson & Pascal, 2021) almost as in the Skovoroda-Jaspers' discourse (Lyuty, 2022). Similarly in the eyes of metamodernists, our world system is dying, and another is about to be born with its own culture

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- new rules, attitudes, norms and traditions different from previous epochs of human development. Reflecting on the combined influences of pre-modern, modern and postmodern thought, leading metamodern philosophers go beyond mere criticism of the vision and methods of a viable and desirable future, formulating the maxim that only a new revival can solve the meta-crisis (Pascal, 2021).

The anthology *Metamodernism: Historicity, Influence, and Postmodern Depth* unites the most influential voices in a scholarly and critical discussion of postmodernism (Van den Akker et al., 2017), explaining the aesthetics, arts, and culture of the 21st century. It explores a world immersed in chaos, characterized by trace elements, atomized avatars, billions of videos, microlearning and the clip thinking typical of the postmodern condition.

This qualitative transition from the philosophical ideas of diversity, atomization and palimpsest of postmodernism to the meta-idea of **meta=[beyond]**: reaches the position of the second-order supra-systemic point of view and the ability to organize the inherited chaos through the idea of **meta=[between]**: cooperation, collaboration, inclusion based on shared values and interdisciplinary cocreation.

3. New Social Contracts in Higher Education

The new Social Treaty on Education (ICFE, 2021) aims to unite humanity in the face of the challenges of the 21st century around shared values and collective efforts to ensure the development of knowledge and innovation needed to build a stable and peaceful future for all social, economic and environmental justice.

The psychological contract is a dynamic concept that can be applied to understand the relationships between an employer and an employee. The new psychological contract (CIPD, 2021) defines individuals' expectations, beliefs, ambitions and obligations, as perceived by employers and employees, and impacts daily behaviours. Recognizing how the context is changing from the pressures of VUCA reality and the challenges of the 21st century, the psychological contract offers a way to monitor employees' attitudes and priorities in terms of dimensions that affect a different level of performance and, therefore, a different level of relationship - the concepts of **cooperation, values-based inclusion, and co-creation**.

The adaptive, holistic, and integrative pedagogical approach suggested by this framework aligns with the multifaceted and dynamic nature of essential skills development in higher education (Cole & Donald, 2022). Emphasizing such transformational skills as *perspective-taking, long-term orientation, and visioning* highlights the necessity of understanding diverse viewpoints, applying strategic foresight, and developing a flexible vision to effectively address 21st-century challenges and navigate the complex realities of modern work environments. These skills are increasingly acknowledged across various professional fields (Baruch et al., 2023; Donald & Jackson, 2023). Skills development focusing on *social skills, communication, integrity, intercultural competence, and resilience* is vital across all areas of higher education (Donald et al., 2019, 2023 Nimmi et al., 2021, 2022). Universities must prioritize cultivating these transformational skills to ensure that graduates are prepared to manage the complexities and dynamic challenges inherent in future managerial roles.

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Humanity is actively learning the methodology and direction toward a metamodern situation, as human-centeredness and the meta-idea of 'co-' are shaping both philosophical thought and the practical implementation of concepts in the humanities and social sciences. This is evident in applied framework manifestos from influential global organizations such as UNESCO, CIPD, the SDGs, and IDGs, which guide the future of education and cooperation.

The ability to see tectonic shifts in time, ideological trends, and their philosophical basis is a fundamental skill for philosophers, strategic leaders and 21st-century thinkers. This enables them to join the value-based global communities with values of **cooperation, collaboration, inclusion based on shared values** and **interdisciplinary co-creation**.

4. Opportunity for Democratization in Higher Education

The concept of "democratization of education" has gained significant attention in recent years as higher education institutions strive for more inclusive and accessible educational environments. In her work, Shtaltovna (2018a) undertakes a concept analysis to clarify the nuances of the concept of "DEMOCRATIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION" understanding this concept as a foundation for developing strategies and roadmaps aimed at democratizing education in Ukraine and beyond. Within the context of higher education, Shtaltovna (2018b) acknowledges the ambiguity surrounding the concept of "DEMOCRATIZATION" and distinguishes it from other related processes like liberalization, destandardization, and restructuring. Shtaltovna (2016) provides a conceptual framework that aids educators in the process of democratizing education in Ukraine and beyond.

In the realm of cyberspace and digital transformation, Makhachashvili and Shtaltovna (2021) explore the ontological and cognitive aspects of this evolving environment. Their research views cyberspace as an integral ontological entity with unique attributes that require new forms of cognition and perception. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of educational democratization, as digital technologies play a crucial role in expanding access to education. Makhachashvili and Shtaltovna's work underscores the need for transformational innovative approaches to understanding and harnessing the potentials of the cyberspace in the pursuit of democratized education.

In business schools within higher education, the development of skills is crucial, not only to ensure academic success but also to prepare students for their roles as informed and responsible members of democratic societies and as leaders in sustainable and ethical business practices (Jakubik, 2019, 2020; Jakubik et al., 2023). For leaders in the 21st century, well-honed cognitive skills are essential for effective decision-making, strategic formulation, and the promotion of sustainable practices within their organizations and in broader social activism.

5. Higher Education and Pedagogical Focus on Inner Development

Indeed, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are increasingly recognizing the need to integrate inner development as a core component of pedagogy to cultivate humanity-based and sustainability-focused leadership. Traditional education models often emphasize external, technological, and technical skills; however, there is a growing awareness that developing the internal human dimension is equally crucial for meaningful transformation toward sustainability. Inner capacities such as *self-awareness, empathy, critical reflection, and ethical*

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decision-making can better prepare future leaders to address complex global challenges from an early age. This involves HEIs reimagining curricula to include transformative skills learning experiences that go beyond conventional classroom settings, encouraging students to engage deeply with both inner and outer dimensions of change.

The Inner Development Goals (IDG) framework has a distinctive motto: **Transformational Skills for Sustainable Development**, and unites a wide array of skills and competencies, structured into 5 core areas of focus. Essentially, the IDG framework serves as a foundational tool for educators, leaders, and individuals dedicated to fostering a more sustainable, responsible, human-centred and well-informed world (Shtaltovna et al., 2024).

Courses like *One Year in Transition* provide a compelling example of how inner development can be nurtured through experiential learning that combines micro-phenomenology and thematic analysis. Such approaches help students develop a more relational and interconnected perspective, supporting their ability to act as courageous and principled change agents for sustainability (Pöllänen et al., 2023). This pedagogical shift not only supports the development of sustainability competencies but also empowers students to internalize and embody these principles as part of their identity, facilitating long-term, systemic change at individual, collective, and societal levels (Garcia-Alvarez et al., 2023). By integrating these inner dimensions of leadership and sustainability into educational practices, higher education can be foremost in producing a new generation of leaders committed to ethical and sustainable development.

In the context of higher education, there is a growing emphasis on integrating inner development and sustainability into pedagogy to prepare future leaders who are equipped to navigate complex global challenges. Methodologies that focus on future-oriented research, such as those utilizing augmented reality and design thinking, are proving mutually beneficial in advancing sustainability-focused education. New ways of teaching and learning that enable inner dimensions, such as *self-awareness, creative confidence, and values-based engagement*. For instance, Nordén (2024) highlights how student teachers in higher education experienced transformative learning through activities like designing hybrid learning environments, which encouraged sustainability mindsets and competencies like intra-personal and interpersonal skills, futures-thinking, and professional knowledge-driven change. This study illustrates how integrating design thinking with inner transition approaches can foster a more profound commitment to sustainability within higher education by bridging theory and practice in didactic modelling.

Moreover, the concept of the "caring university" proposed by Disterheft (2024) further emphasizes the importance of nurturing both inner and outer sustainability for transformative change in higher education as they prioritize both community and planetary well-being. Experimental learning spaces, such as The CareLab for People & Planet at NOVA University Lisbon, have demonstrated the potential for *self-determination, emancipatory empowerment, and a sense of community* among participants. While these initiatives may not immediately lead to significant structural changes, they cultivate a culture of care and hope, laying the groundwork for more profound, systemic transformations. By adopting a more holistic approach that balances inner development with sustainability goals, higher education institutions can create environments that support personal growth and collective action toward a sustainable future.

The evolving role of universities in preparing students for the complexities of contemporary work and life has become a topic of increasing importance in both academic research and practical implementation. In their work, *The Role of Universities: Enhancing Students' Capabilities for Work and Life* (Jakubik et al., 2023), the authors provide a comprehensive framework connecting academic and operational competencies with students' life-world becoming. Shtaltovna and Muzzu (2021a) explore the impact of the pandemic in their article *Teaching Digitally-Ready Soft Skills for Employability*. This research investigates the adaptation of teaching strategies to the online teaching of essential soft skills in students, experimenting with various methodologies based on their digital capabilities and experiences (Shtaltovna & Muzzu, 2021b). The findings showcase digital teaching practices to effectively nurture students' crucial skills, especially when traditional classroom settings are disrupted.

In addition to the above sources, Shtaltovna's work (2021) introduces a unifying perspective on skill development assessment through a 6-level chart. This chart, proposed in the article *Can a skill be measured or assessed? 6-level skills development approach to skill assessment*, addresses the evolving concept of skills in academia and the professional world. Finally, Makhachashvili (2021) explores the adaptation of qualification assessment processes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic analysing how universities in Ukraine and India utilized ICT tools for online assessment of language programs. Collectively, these sources underscore the imperative for universities to adapt and evolve in response to changing circumstances, whether driven by technological shifts or global crises.

6. Conclusion

Incorporating the ideas of metamodernity into the IDG framework in Higher Education across the globe calls for a **transformative skills-based approach to leadership** to provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the evolving educational and leadership landscape. Metamodernity, which emerges as a response to an evolution beyond postmodernism, reflects a cultural, philosophical, social, and educational context that rethinks the fragmented, atomized elements of postmodern thought. The metamodern "meta-idea" of **meta=[beyond]** marks a shift towards a higher-order, supra-systemic viewpoint. This shift is characterized by the ability to organize and make sense of inherited chaos through the concept of **meta=[between]**, which emphasizes cooperation, inclusion, and interdisciplinarity.

In this context, metamodernity calls for the same suprasystemic vision of the needs of Higher Education and the Role of Universities in the face of the Sustainable Development Goals. It requires not just a philosophical shift but a practical framework that can be applied to leadership and education of both modernist and postmodernist paradigms.

The practical implications of this food-for-thought paper can reignite educators, policymakers, and leaders within higher education and beyond. By adopting a metamodern framework and integrating the Inner Development Goals (IDG) into curricula, universities can foster holistic and adaptive leadership skills necessary for addressing complex global challenges. Policymakers can leverage these insights to reform educational policies, emphasizing interdisciplinary collaboration, inclusivity, and the development of cognitive, emotional, and ethical competencies. This shift can lead to a more engaged, ethically driven, and sustainability-focused generation of leaders capable of driving meaningful change across sectors. For

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practitioners, embracing this transformative skills-based approach means reimagining teaching practices and institutional strategies to prepare students not just for the job market but for active, responsible participation in an interconnected world.

Through integrating metamodern thinking into a transformative, skills-based approach to leadership, we acknowledge the importance of moving beyond fragmented knowledge and towards a holistic, collaborative, and adaptive model of leadership. This approach is aligned with the Inner Development Goals (IDG) framework, which promotes a holistic and integrative development of cognitive, emotional, and ethical capacities. It encourages leaders to engage in **deep cooperation, inclusion based on shared values, and interdisciplinary collaboration**, thus highlighting a more sustainable and responsible approach to leadership.

Ultimately, the Transformative Skills-based Approach to Leadership, informed by the principles of metamodernity, challenges traditional paradigms and invites educators, leaders, and institutions to embrace complexity, ambiguity, and the interwoven nature of today's world. It calls for a dynamic interplay between inner development and outer action, preparing leaders not only to manage inherited chaos but to leverage it for meaningful and sustainable transformation through cooperation and a values-based inclusive vision for the future.

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