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No borders

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Good morning everyone,

Thank you for inviting me. Thank you for your leadership Didi – I am absolutely delighted to be here!

It is difficult to follow Michael from his insights yesterday. And a privilege to speak to you in this intimate conference.

My topic today, is about change – a personal story about changes and how that might extend to larger narratives born in small groups engaged in critical conversations – which influences institutional narratives. The kind Roxa and Martenson have written about extensively. [SLIDE 1: saga]

Their work brings to life a change multiplier that works through a web of networks which eventually explains the saga for an enterprise.

The great anthropologist Margaret Meade also talked about small groups and change. There is a well-known line which I love: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has”. [SLIDE 2 quote]

This morning, I'd like to talk about a theory of change through the lens of a teacher. I've been a teacher for most of my career. And a practitioner who has crossed boundaries of identity including my more recent roles as a university administrator.

I hope that my reflections will provide a mirror for you to think about how you've changed over time, and how the unwritten codes between the small groups that influenced your practice and your own theory of change continue to evolve.

So, here is my short story. I began teaching finance in 1982 at McGill University in Montreal, Canada right after completing an MBA. [SLIDE 3 a]

I continued night school to get a professional accounting designation because that is what my elder brother was doing, and what my parents expected from us. While my brother became an accountant and my father loved him for that, I started to moonlight and teach a few blocks down the street at Concordia University, where I had completed my bachelor's degree. [Click SLIDE 3b]

I loved teaching with all my heart. I devoted most of my time during those years to teaching. Ten years into my career, I received a national lifetime teaching fellowship. [SLIDE 3c]
I wrote several textbooks and designed the first open online course for Concordia to collect data for my thesis.

I identified myself as a teacher practitioner and I was pushing the boundaries of career advancement by focusing on what I considered to be scholarly activities.

At one point I became a publish or perish poster boy. [Slide 4]. That was not fun and a difficult period in my career.

This is when I learned my first hard lesson: which was to come to terms with colleagues who were skeptical about my scholarship. They politely regarded me as an excellent practitioner but not a real scholar. I learned that a professional degree and SoTL work wasn't going to be enough to get a permanent position.

I was young, naive and felt like I had hit a wall. So, I returned to McGill for doctoral studies, and enrolled in Educational Psychology to eventually come back to my Finance department at Concordia and make my case for tenure.

Earning tenure when your terminal degree is from another discipline comes with a second hard lesson: which is about *how* your peers evaluate your scholarship [SLIDE 5]. To this day, it is the number of articles published in certain journals and a research program within that discipline which determines whether you are admitted into that micro-culture.

While that works quite well for research institutions that court expertise as the defining criterion, I think we underestimate our colleagues who, if given a chance, are able to express their scholarship in multiple ways *and* express their scholarship *across* disciplines.

But this tends to be the exception. And I've often wondered how it can become the rule.

In 2013 I joined McMaster University, in the Greater Toronto area. [SLIDE 6a]

All of the 3 universities I've worked in are also well-established and recognized institutions in Canada, representing an ecosystem that one gets absorbed in. [SLIDE 6b]

However, these universities continue to struggle to evaluate other core activities we do as academics which are scholarly but often misunderstood. Here I am referring to the peer-evaluation of practice. In teaching, in curriculum and professional work, which don't seem to have evolved all that much.

Evaluation boundaries have not stopped colleagues, many who are in this room to engage in scholarship across disciplines and in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

All of this to say that my experiences have strengthened a particular view I've summarize in the title of this talk which is "no borders". [SLIDE 7] By *no borders* I refer to a change agenda that I tried implementing as a teacher, then as an administrator at McMaster, and now most recently at LUMS University in Pakistan.

No borders has in my mind at least five overlapping elements that I'd like to talk about. Each of these element works within a larger system that I think universities can successfully embrace.

Before I describe the elements, in my younger days I used to think that the responsibility for a change agenda like no-borders was the responsibility of administrators.

But the third lesson I've learned is that for any sustainable change, the greatest allies, in this case for a *no borders* are faculty. Furthermore, the role of students as change agents should never be underestimated.

1. Shared Governance [SLIDE 8]

On this first element, of course, faculty must be represented as key stakeholders in a shared decision-making structure. But in Pakistan and likely in most of the developing world, this is typically not the case.

Trustees and senior administrators tend to overextend their influence. Add the colonial footprint which turned governance into rigid bureaucracies where power distance is a norm. This top down model has its benefits but mostly the side effects are a loss of trust with efforts to devolve power perceived as a signal for the loss of control.

To build and foster trust, the first thing we did at LUMS was to devolve power. Its time has come and faculty yearned for it. By creating School Councils and a University Council as well as Standing Committees faculty and students are entrusted with more power and more responsibility. A shared governance model we have now enacted in policy might be a first for higher education institutions in Pakistan.

2. A Core Curriculum [SLIDE 9]

The second leg of no borders speaks to redesigning curriculum and its core. I find William Perry's Schema for intellectual development helpful to understand the stages of learning and commitment. It describes intellectual growth we often see in the classroom and a core curriculum can speak to enable students to transition from remembering to understanding.

At LUMS university, admission standards are as high as any top western university. The first year is a critical transition year for students, where increasingly mental health issues often manifest themselves, where cultures clash and where students want to take pathways to learn subjects which they are unable to access.

A university-wide core curriculum could instill depth instead of breadth, cohesion over fragmentation and flexible pathways that provide windows into threshold concepts championed by the likes of Mayer and Land. Core courses must be taught by the most seasoned and senior professors.

A core designed in the progressive liberal arts tradition, can provide students opportunities to learn from various disciplines before declaring their majors and specializations.

Many universities like Stanford have design-thought the first-year experience which partly address Rector Meiyer's challenge of rethinking our offerings for students and for bridging Perry's Stages of development from memorization to understanding.

3. Transdisciplinary Work [SLIDE 10]

Most of us are likely familiar with Becher and Trowler's work on *Academic Tribes and Territories*. As you can see there are other perspectives worth exploring here.

I'll skip these for now and hope we will have a chance to explore later. Maybe Michael can join me to address questions about disciplinarity.

My own view is that while expertise creates the boundaries for knowledge in the disciplines and in the professions, which is required, it also isolates faculty and creates silos within the university which does generally do not address contemporary challenges societies face.

Preparing students to confront grand challenges is complicated by the 4th industrial revolution is transforming the nature and future of work. According to the World Economic Forum, by the time today's new university student graduates, machines will perform more tasks than humans.

Universities must develop and operationalize different conceptions of knowledge to address grand challenges.

Universities must become more relevant and contribute more meaningfully to improve the human condition.

But how do we integrate independent, fragmented, discipline-focused knowledge through new structures and programming that encourages disciplines working together to generate use-inspired research that bridges gaps between theory and applied practice.

How do we fuse disciplines that attracts faculty to work with others which is necessary to address some of the grand challenges that are interconnected, universal and highly complex.

In Pakistan, these challenges include demographic shifts, human migration, sustainability and humanitarian issues.

Funding agencies like the World Bank, Dfid, USAid and others are encouraging Asian universities to adopt frameworks that emphasize UN's Social Development Goals and more recently the World Bank's Human Capital Index.

I think grand challenges are a moral imperative for educators of our time that could, at least for some institutions, lie at the very heart of the academic enterprise.

And a no-borders philosophy might provide a workable framework. A no borders philosophy is rooted in a transdisciplinary view of education. No-borders encourages cooperation between different sectors of society to address complex issues.

This is a process that encourages stronger ties with the business community, with government and with NGO's. Its adoption allows the scholarship of integration, application and policy to flourish.

Transdisciplinary education is therefore a means and not an end. And at LUMS, future growth of knowledge is envisioned through Centers and Institutes which I will elaborate on later.

4. Knowledge and Scholarship [SLIDE 11]

On this element, I think it is safe to say that generally, new faculty quickly understand the norms associated with research productivity in a given department, and these norms should be encouraged.

However, as mentioned earlier, not all faculty wish to progress exclusively by those norms that exclude other forms of scholarship that embrace knowledge about practice including teaching and professional work.

At LUMS we are enacting a rigorous peer review system for the development and evaluation of practice.

In this system, faculty define pathways for career progression through norms that speak to a broader understanding and artifacts of scholarship in teaching, curriculum and applied work.

5. Students as Partners [SLIDE 12]

The fifth element for a no-borders agenda involves engaging students as pedagogical partners.

I am encouraged by the growing academic literature on student partnerships led by the likes of Healey, Cook-Sather and Felten and many other student authors, some of whom are now co-editors of excellent journals such as the *International Journal of Students as Partners*.

When we first started the Student Partners Program at McMaster university, a partnership typically consisted of 1 faculty to 3 students. The power distance between faculty and students turned out to be the biggest challenge, but as faculty learned to trust the abilities of students and spent more time with them, good things happened.

The result was student co-researchers, co-authors, co-presenters and co-designers of their learning. And what had been a radical idea quickly became the new norm.

At LUMS, I am struck by the vibrant student body that is diverse, active, and has the potential to engage in shaping a no-boundaries change agenda.

There are over 50 active student societies, numerous sports teams, and co-curricular initiatives, which provide fertile ground for students to shape their own learning experiences. Pedagogical partnership programs extend these experiences.

So, there you have it. [SLIDE 13]

I've outlined five elements of a no-borders philosophy. These elements are connected, and I hope to learn more about how they can be seamlessly and systematically integrated.

Let me to add a few additional observations to these 5 elements.

I mentioned I worked at Concordia University in Montreal.

Concordia was founded in 1974 following a merger and is a relatively younger university by western standards. McGill University on the other hand is a much older institution founded in 1813.

Both universities, however, have massified over the years and today each have more than 40,000 students.

McGill is by and large regarded as research-intensive and that culture permeates across the institution.

Concordia, like many other younger universities, was successfully differentiating itself as an undergraduate teaching-intensive, practitioner-oriented institution.

But it adopted the same cultural norms of research-intensive universities and has since struggled to excel at neither.

Incidentally, these two universities are credited to launch the first and second Teaching and Learning Centers in Canada in the mid 1970's. These Centers were peripheral places where informal conversations about teaching were encouraged, and where course evaluation systems evolved. Until recently, very few faculty knew that such service centers existed.

In the US, there were similar developments. I remember meeting Lee Shulman, Barbara Cambridge and others in Washington in the early 1990's.

[Slide 14] I also met Earnest Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation and author of "Scholarship Reconsidered" whose work inspired me to think about no-borders.

Of course, a LOT has happened since the 90's. Although great progress has been made in the SoTL arena, 30 years later, at a celebrated conference a few weeks ago, existential questions about SoTL are still being debated. [Slide 15]

At ISSOTL, one set of challenges was grouped under the question of how SoTL can be better valued among peers.

Another presentation highlighted how another set of challenges was associated with interdisciplinary collaboration. The authors pointed to a deeper sense of frustration about why SoTL still remains largely unknown to most faculty.

Saunders, Bamber Trowler, Kezar and others provide case studies where institutions have enhanced the scholarship of teaching, assessment and curriculum. Despite these exemplars, they conclude that change in Higher Education is still largely about changing the culture.

Which brings us back to change agendas and theories of change.

Most administrators I know haven't been effective in getting faculty to change cultural norms that broaden the scope of what counts as scholarship.

I confronted this challenge as Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning – a position that was created at McMaster in 2013, which incidentally, created the third oldest learning and teaching center in Canada.

I was given an institutional mandate to do whatever it takes to make teaching count. I had a very healthy budget and the full support of the Provost and the President. [Slide 16]

In 5 years we transformed a service center into one of the largest Institutes for learning and teaching in Canada. The Institute began producing quality research which students were co-producing and co-disseminating. A framework for the peer review of teaching had begun in earnest. Inter-faculty forums for a program of educational development were also starting to take root.

The Institute attracted distinguished international scholars, public intellectuals, assessment experts, and indigenous leaders including Geoff Norman, Henry Giroux, Mick Healy, Torgny Roxa, Barbara Oakley, and Louise MacDonald to lead a no-borders agenda on teaching and learning.

The Institute received visibility culminating in the achievement of the Times Higher Education Global Teaching Excellence award. [SLIDE 17]

This elevated McMaster's role on the world stage as a leader embodied through signature pedagogies like inquiry and PBL, SOTL work, and the exemplary student partners program.

A more sobering assessment would suggest that, notwithstanding these achievements, no more than 20% of the faculty engaged with the Institute many of whom were already strong advocates of making teaching count.

The efforts of the Institute were less successful in embedding its work formally within departments and-faculties across the university. We were even less successful to change policy. The dominant culture within each department remained, well, dominant.

Once my 5-year term ended, it didn't take long for a new Provost to unwind the programs and to return the Institute back to its prior role of service provider, much like a bookstore.

An obsession with rankings and branding signalled new priorities. We have to wonder, if so much can be undone so quickly, how can we modify our approach to ensure change can be ingrained and sustained?

For me, just as one door closed, another opened.

I speak to you today as the teacher I've always been but also as Vice Chancellor of a much smaller and younger, top-of-its-class university in Pakistan. [SLIDE 18]

And as I think about my work at LUMS, I see it as an opportunity, perhaps one more chance, to lead change.

In this role, I have a slightly broader view of how an institution functions, and how LUMS might be a better fit for a no-borders philosophy.

Most of my Canadian friends aren't curious about that view or about that philosophy – they're more curious to ask why, after a lifetime in Canada, did I move back to Pakistan?

I have been considering another important question about how young universities in developing countries like Pakistan might learn, or unlearn, or relearn from more mature universities in developed countries like Canada.

On the “why did I go back” question.

One altruistic reason is to make a bigger difference and have a more immediate, and hopefully lasting impact.

Going full-circle and reconnecting with my past is one thing. But most of all, it was timing and opportunity.

It's easy to see LUMS has the largest collection of top academics in the country, sprinkled in 5 schools nestled in a beautiful 100-acre residential campus. Most importantly, LUMS seemed to be at a tipping point in its development.

Faculty were crying out for change. They had experienced a hierarchical, top down administration that had abruptly changed their career progression opportunities to mimic the approach of western institutions.

A research-intensive agenda left other forms of scholarship embodied in teaching excellence and professional practice behind.

In a broader sense, a new Prime Minister was ushering in bold and systematic changes across the country. Security concerns were diminishing and most importantly, the demographics of the nation positioned education to be the fastest growing sector in the economy, which of course is a good problem for universities to have.

There is also something to be said about the people.

For so long, bad press had coloured my perception of Pakistan as a failed state. Stories about religious extremism and a bloated corrupt bureaucracy didn't help. Was it safe to work there?

One year later, here is what I can share.

On matters related to education especially in developing countries, the great H.G. Wells summarized it best:

Quote: *"Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe."* [SLIDE 19]

I count myself among many educators who are fundamentally optimists.

And seeing is also believing.

I came back to a Pakistan that continues to have a multicultural history: over the centuries, it has been impacted by Persian, Afghan, Central, South, and Western Asian, as well as British influences. There are 70 official languages spoken in Pakistan. Poetry, mysticism and Sufism are celebrated in various art forms that reflect rich traditions.

Pakistanis are crazier about cricket than Canadians are about hockey. They also celebrate weddings like no other nation. Indeed, Pakistan has treasures that have always drawn the attention of the west.

And then there's its best friend China. China's global one-belt one-road initiative and the China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor or CPEC comes with a 60 billion-dollar budget that bodes well to strengthen that relationship.

Pakistan is also one of the youngest countries in the world.

The numbers are staggering. It is so young that half of its population, which is roughly 100 million people, are in their 20's or younger.

Any high-impact intervention that a leading university makes is emulated by some 200 other universities, that aren't doing all that well.

For example, when LUMS introduced a 4-year bachelor program, the rest of the country abandoned its 2-year programs to emulate that 4-year norm.

There is a forced multiplier that has an even larger impact if a university tackles the grand challenges facing the country.

On the question about learning or unlearning, and relearning from more mature universities

I've tried to explain how my experiences at Concordia, McGill and McMaster universities in Canada gave me a chance to look at how various theories of change are in play. This experience taught me a no-borders agenda which is why I believe I was hired at LUMS.

And while it's been only slightly more than a year, most of my time has been spent establishing trust by putting faculty first; by listening to them and persuading them that this agenda will serve the institution well.

This can only happen if faculty leads this agenda, which is essential for change to endure.

I hope no borders does not come across as a recipe. It will only be successful if senior leadership can embrace power sharing. The faculty see this in action if it is demonstrated through decentralizing budgetary control, and by flattening the organizational structure.

Most importantly, I think they see it if it is underwritten by broadening the scope for what counts as scholarship.

While no-borders considers multiple fronts, at LUMS these are becoming visible through a dozen Centers. [SLIDE 20] These Centers are cross-appointing faculty, and their mandates serve the institution that wants to address the grand challenges facing Pakistan.

Centers are the hubs for potentially world-class work that in some cases began years ago.[SLIDE 21].

For example, the Executive Development Center has been successfully building managerial capacity in Pakistan for over 30 years.

Applied research from Centers for Water and Energy has recently revealed that Pakistan has excess water and energy. That is a huge finding. More mega investments only create circular debt. Solutions, however, lie in smart grids that unlock distribution bottlenecks.

At the other end of the spectrum, the LUMS Learning Institute is a first in Pakistan, it was launched a mere 3 months ago. As you can see there are many more in-between.

I ardently believe that the future growth potential of LUMS lies in the growth of centers without borders. Working in them must therefore become as important as working in a department.

Again, building trust in small groups is key, as is providing visibility for scholarship from within private spaces into the public domain.

QS has ranked LUMS as no.1 in the country for graduate employability [SLIDE 22]. It is the only business school in Pakistan that is AACSB accredited and therefore among only 5% of business schools worldwide with this distinction.

LUMS is a small university with an annual intake of about 1,200 students with the overall goal to produce thought leaders. [SLIDE 23] It is accessible in that one in three students who receive significant financial support recruiting students from over 100 towns, villages and cities through its national outreach program that is now in its 19th year.

[SLIDE 24]13,000 alumni have gone on to become remarkable leaders, many of whom came from humble beginnings.

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Faculty must breathe new meaning in young and agile universities like LUMS and give no borders a chance in the 21st century.

It makes our work worthwhile.

Thank you.
