

HELM – Engage

Higher Education Leadership

In the face of Complexity

Universities.....

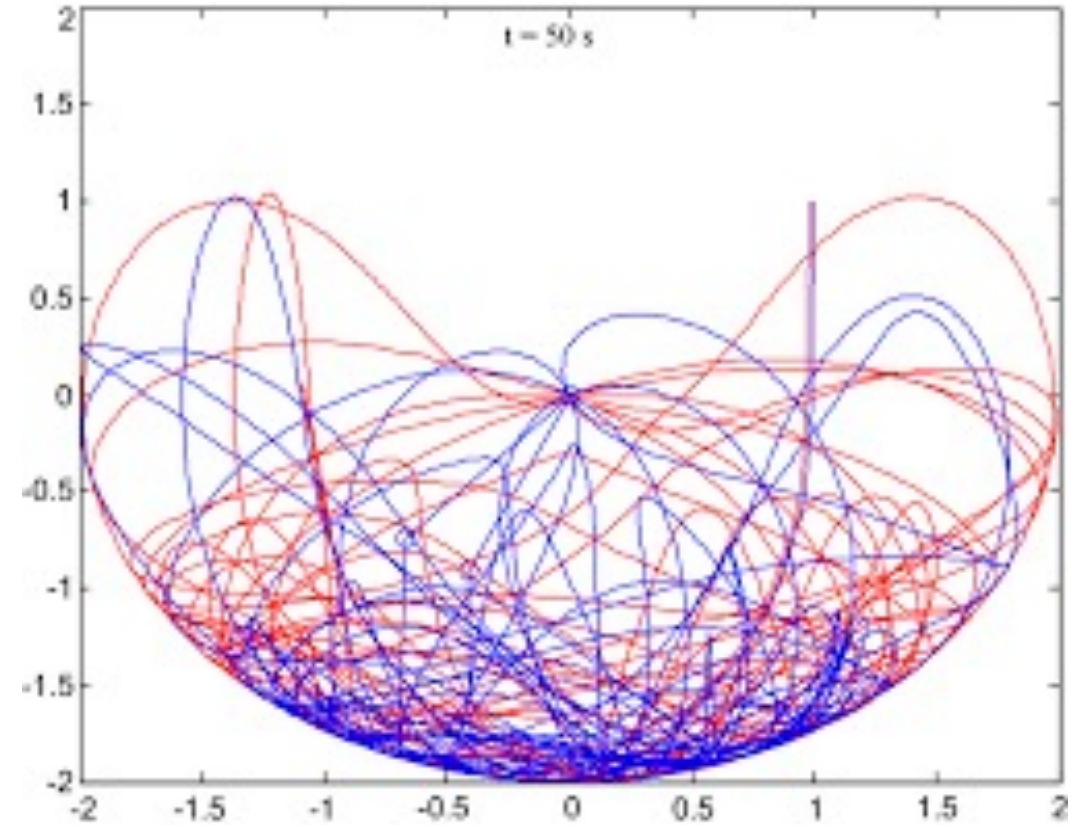
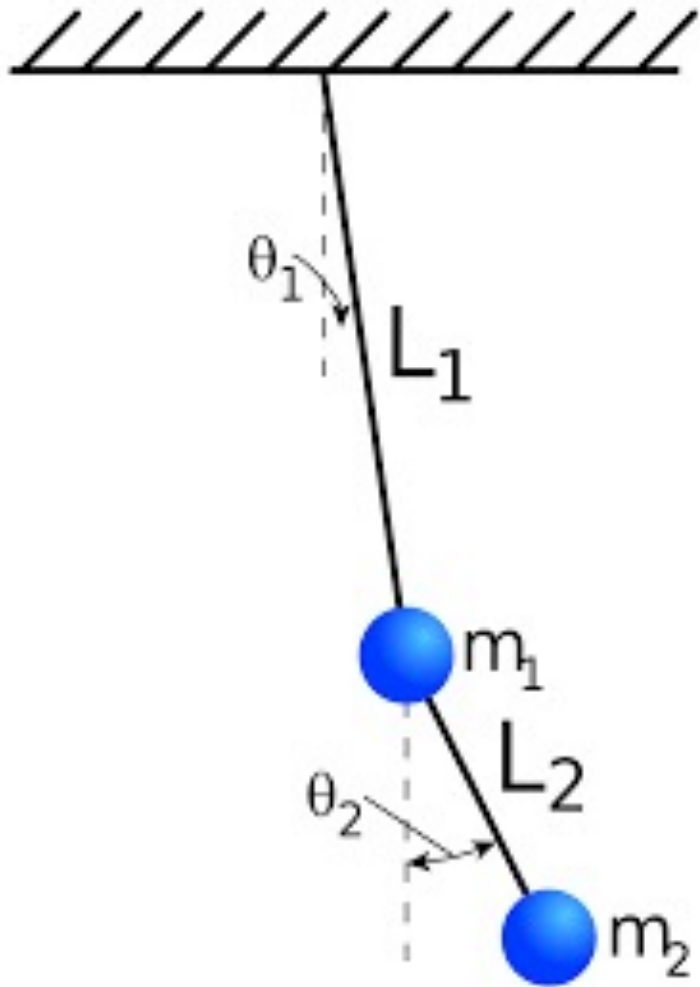
exist within contexts which are simultaneously intensely local and global
involved in knowledge industry – production, application & dissemination
complex socioeconomic spaces they intersect with other such spaces
interwoven into complex economic contexts
highly contested spaces
complex internal and external governance systems

SYSTEMIC ISSUES

- Continuing apartheid architecture of the HE landscape
 - Chronic underfunding and
 - Inadequate student funding system
 - Broken basic education system
 - Access and success
 - State of the economy and uptake of graduates
 - The research-innovation chasm
 - An incomplete PSET sector
 - The lack of a national digital T&L ecosystem
 - Future of our African languages as languages of academic discourse
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- The social ownership of our universities
 - Their long-term sustainability
 - Universities in context – local and global

ALL INTERRELATED

THE DOUBLE PENDULUM



THE DOUBLE PENDULUM

A double pendulum is a pendulum with another pendulum attached to its end.

It is a simple physical system that exhibits chaotic behaviour.

The two pendula influence each other.

The system is super sensitive to the initial conditions.

THREE TYPES OF SOLUTIONS

SIMPLE, TRIVIAL SOLUTION

CATASTROPHIC SOLUTION

BEAUTIFUL, COMPLEX SOLUTION

Complex systems

are highly composite

large numbers of mutually interacting subunits

repeated interactions result in rich, collective behaviour

feedback into the behaviour of the individual parts

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Universities are Devilishly Complex

- Universities have many moving parts:
 - Complex governance systems: councils, senates, IFs, etc.
 - Many internal constituencies
 - Many external stakeholders
 - Articulate with other parts of national education system
 - Articulate with the economy
- Interwoven into national imaginations and policy frameworks
- Interwoven into global imaginations

HUGE PROPENSITY TO SLIDE INTO CONDITIONS OF CHAOS
PARTS INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER IN NONLINEAR WAYS

universities are complex, multi-layered institutions
need systemic approaches as we design interventions
lots of gentle nudges

social institutions – multiple stakeholders each with own vision

governing councils – fiduciary responsibility with internal contradictions

managerialism – applying reductionist approaches where they can't succeed

complex academic communities – interesting but unnatural hierarchies

multiple products – private goods and public goods

'customers' – who are also 'owners'

multiple knowledge(s) and systems – epistemic access

an adage **CONSERVATION OF COMPLEXITY!!**

design
for
complexity

design
for
integration

design
for
learning

optimising
experience

simplicity
of structures

effective
agency

Returning to First Principles

First principles

Universities are social institutions (of a special kind)

knowledge intensive

and they have students

they are involved in the creation/dissemination of knowledge

their primary purpose is to develop new generations of
engaged intellectuals

what are the characteristics of engaged intellectuals?

purposes of higher education – public goods

- Creating active citizens
- Meeting the needs of the economy
- Producing new knowledge
- Creating the artist
- Generating social mobility
- Nation building

Building skills in graduates

- Critical thinking/Building skepticism
- Systemic thinking
- Problem solving
- Working in diverse teams
- Ethical reasoning
- Effective communicating
- Innovating

Renewing Humanity

at the institutional level – through deliberate design

a strong social justice agenda – as a sociopolitical rubric

Access and success

Research and innovation for development

Graduate employability/entrepreneurialism

Intellectual, social and emotional student development

building new communities of intellectuals

**place students at the centre
and
engagement**

Design for Complexity

Strong foundations

Intelligent pliability

Integration

Organisational learning – based on individual learning

The ‘soft touch’ – the nudge



Thank you