Changemaker Talent Exchange & Impact Ecosystem™

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Abstract

Higher education must develop the knowledge, skills, and perspectives that enable individuals and communities to adapt and thrive. As change, volatility, complexity, and ambiguity become the norm, educational institutions must adapt. They must help everyone become "changemakers" – able to take creative action to solve complex problems. Changemaking skills are increasingly becoming important for success in life, work, and careers. Ashoka: Innovators for the Public is developing a Changemaker Talent Exchange and Impact Ecosystem™. This paper will provide an overview of the three key components of the system: Changemaker Talent, Changemaker Solutions, and New Institutions. Its three areas of action include improving navigation, validation, and acceleration; the three ways this system will address current challenges and disconnects between higher education and the workforce. It will do so by providing a clear roadmap for a lifelong learning strategy, innovative models for credentialling, and tools for communication and translation of skills developed through the formal higher education process and beyond.

Introduction

In a world where the only constants seem to be change and disruption, there is a need for a systemic solution to developing, connecting, and supporting those with the capacities to navigate and positively address these changes ("changemakers"). This need is particularly acute at the intersection of education[i] (talent development) and the workforce (talent engagement). *It's time to reimagine the school-to-work system*. Ashoka is collaboratively developing a system to address these needs through its Changemaker Talent Exchange and Impact Ecosystem™. This paper provides an overview of the current state of this innovation.

Framing the Issue

Despite impressive global progress decreasing abject poverty, improving health, and increasing access to formal education, economic inequities are worsening[ii]. The needs of the formal labor force are not being met by formal systems of education.[iii]

Many jobs requiring a specific skillset based on repetition are disappearing. They are being replaced by those demanding the skills of adaptability, empathy, and the capacity to work with and lead fluid, ever-changing "teams of teams."[iv] Historical approaches to addressing complex, interdependent societal issues are no longer sufficient.

Changemakers are essential to the success of any organization or community. Having a high enough density of changemakers is key to thriving in the 21st century.[v] Novel ways of developing, connecting, and mobilizing changemakers are needed.[vi]

The Social Problem

The value proposition of higher education is increasingly being called into question.[vii] Governments, students, parents, and others are no longer as willing to devote funding,[viii] time, or energy to obtain formal academic credentials.[ix] Employers no longer consider a college degree a reliable marker of competency and increasingly complain about a skill gap between what students learn and what is actually needed for success in business.[x] Major employers are dropping degree requirements[xi] while others are taking matters into their own hands and increasingly providing their own training or educational benefits[xii] to better align education with the actual demands of the workforce.[xiii]

This is resulting in decreasing enrollments[xiv], decreasing funding[xv], and increases in labor market shortages (significant "skills gap")[xvi] alongside underemployment,[xvii] unemployment,[xviii] and poverty for young people.[xix] These issues are compounded by the ever-more rapidly changing needs of the labor market[xx] and poor translation of academic learning into the language of competencies and effectiveness needed for the labor market.[xxi] As a result, new strategies for continuous (lifelong) learning, innovative credentialing models, and improved methods of communication/translation are needed.

This paper presents an innovative approach to addressing these challenges by developing a *Changemaker Talent Exchange and Impact Ecosystem*.

The Innovative Solution: Changemaker Talent Exchange and Impact Ecosystem

The Changemaker Talent Exchange and Impact Ecosystem (CTX) is a systemic approach to developing society's capacity to create and effect positive social change. It consists of three interrelated components: Changemaker Talent (development and marketplace), Changemaker Solutions (connecting experts with problems, mobilizing changemakers), and New Institutions (innovative approaches to outdated institutional models). It focuses on three areas of activity: Navigating, Validating, and Accelerating. This approach has grown out of Ashoka's 40+ years of working at the front lines of social innovation and impact worldwide.

Ashoka: Innovators for the Public has been finding and supporting the world's leading social entrepreneurs for over 40 years and considers itself a "living encyclopedia" of changemakers. Over the decades, Ashoka has discovered the key competencies needed for

success as a social entrepreneur and has seen how essential it is that we create a world where "everyone is a changemaker: a world where all citizens are powerful and contribute to change in positive ways."[xxii]

While the CTX is designed for changemakers at all levels and across all sectors, the description below is focused on students within the formal higher education sector. From this perspective, the Changemaker Talent Exchange and Impact Ecosystem encompasses a lifelong learning strategy, innovative credentialling models, and opportunities to better communicate a student's competencies and capacity to learn to employers.[xxiii]

The Changemaker Talent Exchange and Impact Ecosystem is designed as an integrated social movement and marketplace dedicated to the betterment of humanity through developing the changemaking capacity of students and social entrepreneurs and connecting them to each other and key opportunities. It is being designed as a systems infrastructure to enable students to document their accomplishments as changemakers (journey boards), share their real-world accomplishments with impact (changemaker portfolio of record), and further grow their capacity and impact by helping them be discovered for and connected to economic and impactful opportunities at massive scale. The Talent Exchange is facilitated by a technology platform that enables individual changemakers and teams of changemakers to connect with each other and with leading social entrepreneurs across the globe to gain perspective, knowledge, and strategies on the problems they are trying to solve and to collaborate to address social issues.

At the heart of this system is a Changemaker Portfolio of Record (CPoR). This is designed to be one's "impact calling card." It is a way to document one's social impact and demonstration of changemaking competencies in ways that are objectively verifiable – a way to publish one's changemaker accomplishments so that potential well-matched employers can "come calling."

Social impact created through internships, service-learning opportunities, classroom projects, trial employment, and other experiential learning opportunities can be documented, verified, and highlighted in ways potential employers can easily understand and link to employment opportunities. The CPoR will enable potential employers and changemaking colleagues to find and learn more efficiently about individuals with the knowledge, skills, and capabilities needed for jobs and social innovation opportunities.

Three Components

The Changemaker Talent Exchange and Impact Ecosystems includes three integrated components: Changemaker Talent, Changemaker Solutions, and New Institutions.

Changemaker Talent

This aspect of the CTX is focused on the development and connection of changemaker talent. In the higher education context, this system is a tool to help students and others develop

their changemaking competencies and connect with employment and other opportunities for social impact.

Changemaker Solutions

At its core, the CTX is a way of more effectively connecting people with problems to be addressed with their changemaking skills.

- This is a tool to help employers find changemakers with track records of successful social impact and documented changemaking competencies.
- It is a system for improved communication – translating the higher education experience into the language of employers; helping students articulate what they have learned and what they are capable of as a result.
- It is a connector of changemakers with changemaking opportunities: for-profit, citizen-sector, volunteers, funding, research, and so forth.

New Institutions

Higher education institutions participating in this system are at the forefront of reimagining the role of such institutions in a world where the only constant is change. The CTX is being developed in collaboration with an Advisory Group of 14 Ashoka U Changemaker Campuses[xxiv] from six countries – Australia, Canada, Korea, Mexico, the UK, and the US. Changemaker Campuses are at the forefront of re-imaging the role of higher education institutions in our complex, interconnected and ever-changing world. The CTX is being designed to highlight many aspects of this new model, which considers higher education institutions to be developers of changemaker talent, connectors of changemakers, and changemaking entities themselves. This ecosystem accomplishes its goals by improving navigation, validation, and acceleration.

Three Areas of Action

Navigating

The CTX will help students and others navigate their lifelong learning journey to develop changemaking competencies and create social impact. It will help students and others monitor their progress to encourage the strategic development of various knowledge, skills, and mindsets. It will help students and others to identify a social problem, formulate a solution, bring together a team, and collaboratively address the problem.

Validating

This is a key part of the CTX's solution to the problems in communication and translation shared above. Competencies will be measured, evaluated, and verified. Social impact will also be evaluated and verified. Measurement, evaluation, and verification will come from higher education institutions, employers, project directors, and – perhaps most importantly – from those in the communities affected by social impact efforts.

Accelerating

The CTX hopes to accelerate the development of changemakers and their connection with changemakers with social problems and resources to accelerate social innovation to solve such problems more rapidly.

Development of Changemakers: Becoming a changemaker and creating positive social impact are lifelong endeavors. There is not currently a unified system to support one's development as a changemaker and leader of societal impact throughout one's life. The CTX hopes to do that by providing opportunities to practice changemaking and engage with fellow changemakers at all levels: course projects, service-learning/internship opportunities, job opportunities, and work on specific social impact projects.

Accelerating Social Impact: The CTX is designed to connect stakeholders and mobilize changemakers to address complex interconnected social issues. This means connecting expert social entrepreneurs, communities, and resource providers more effectively.

Three Solutions for Education

The CTX provides solutions to the higher education and workforce development issues raised above by providing a clear roadmap for a lifelong learning strategy, innovative models for credentialling, and tools for communication and translation of skills developed through the formal higher education process and beyond.

Lifelong Learning Strategy

The CTX provides a clear roadmap for the development of a changemaker throughout one's lifetime. Developing changemaker competencies in college is just the beginning. Further developing these competencies and improving one's capacity to create social impact are tracked, celebrated, and connected. This reinforces the capacity of an individual to continually adapt and learn new skills for new industries and social problems as they emerge.

Innovative Credentialing Models

Verification of impact (internships, service learning, social entrepreneurial projects) should be tied to verifiable assessment and progress of competency development (e.g., Changemaker Index). Changemaking skills cut across disciplines and industries and should be tracked and noted as such. In addition to more traditional forms of academic recognition, this may include micro-credentials, stackable courses, badges, and verification of competencies assessed outside formal education.

Communication Tools

This approach provides opportunities to better communicate a student's competencies, capacity to learn, and effectiveness (measured impact) to employers. As the platform grows, it is anticipated that employers will track and verify their own metrics of success with interns and employees.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Changemaker Talent Exchange and Impact Ecosystem is a work in progress. The framework for this system has been identified. The work of developing this system is ongoing. As of this writing, the focus has been on designing the system in collaboration with higher education institutions (faculty, administrators, students) facilitated by ImpactX. As it evolves, the world's leading social entrepreneurs (Ashoka Fellows) and businesses within Ashoka's Changemaker Companies lab will also be brought in to ensure the system meets their needs as well.

We see this system as the solution to many of the current issues at the intersection of higher education and workforce development and expect that these solutions will evolve as the natures of school and work evolve. Ultimately, it is hoped that the CTX will create a world where *everyone* is a changemaker and a world where "solutions outrun problems."

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