

Making sense of the purpose of higher education in the generative artificial era

15/08/2026



The Outline of This Presentation

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- Discourses on Artificial Intelligence
- Technological Frames
- Purpose of Higher Education
- Research Question

- **Research Methodology**

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- **Discussion**

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Työsuojelurahasto
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Introduction and Theoretical Framework

- Generative artificial intelligence and management education in higher education
- **Artificial intelligence:** sociotechnical change reshaping authority and agency in education (Bearman et al., 2023)
- **Two opposing views on AI & learning**
- **An optimistic view;** opportunities for learning, support writing, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills (Kasneci et al., 2023)
- **A critical view:** new technology can undermine learning (Lindebaum & Fleming, 2024; Lindebaum & Ramirez, 2024) and critical thinking (Larson et al., 2024)



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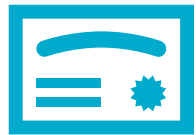
Introduction and Theoretical Framework



- **Technological frames** (e.g., Cornellissen & Werner, 2014)
- *The assumptions, knowledge, and expectations about how technology is used and applied in the organizations that organizational members collectively construct*
- **Make sense of technologies and assign meanings to technologies**
- Subsequent use of technologies (Cornellissen & Werner, 2014; Orlikowski & Gash, 1994; Tripsas & Kaplan, 2008)
- **Technologies are a prominent part of higher education**
- Technologies as tools, volition (e.g. efficiency), activities (create, solve problems) (Basdogan et al., 2022)

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Research Question: How do organizational members use technological frames to make sense of higher education in the context of new technologies?



The purpose of higher education; Ashwin (2025): Instrumental (secure employment and financial goals) and transformational (perceiving the world)



Student learning and intellectual perspectives (Ashwin, 2025); **learner identity** (Brunce et al., 2017), **identity development** (Biesta et al., 2021)



Labour market and professional roles, personal development, contribution to societal development and progress (Brooks et al., 2021)



Consumer culture: economic value and getting a well-paying job (Molesworth et al., 2009)

Research Methodology

- **Research Settings**

- University of Applied Sciences (Business School)
 - BBA and MA business degrees
 - Professional teacher training
 - Faculty: pedagogical training (60 ECTS)
 - RDI activities and close cooperation with working life and local companies
 - AI-innovation hub in its European University network (eight European universities)
 - Integrate artificial intelligence into teaching, learning, and renewal of working life
- The launch of generative artificial intelligence in November 2022
 - Impact on learning and studies
 - The first guidelines by the Rector's Conference (July 2023) & the ethical use of AI in learning and studies

Research Methodology

- **Research Process**

- Ongoing R&D process focusing on business transformation and human-AI interaction in service businesses and open education; **developing AI solutions for lifelong learning**
- Insight: LLM and risks to student learning
- Ethical approval; new technology alters organizational structures and professions (Barley, 1986)
- **Semi-structured interviews** and pre-defined themes, e.g.,
 - Organizational identity, strategy, tensions, practices, changes in teaching and learning

- **Insider perspective**

- Pre-existing roles, contextual knowledge, and established relationship within the organization (Greene, 2014; Toy-Cronin, 2018)
- Advantage: insights into social processes (Ravasi & Canato, 2013) and nuanced understanding, trust (Greene, 2014; Toy-Cronin, 2018)
- Disadvantages: overfamiliarity, making assumptions, maintaining analytical distance, potential role conflict (e.g., Greene, 2014)

Research Methodology

- **Participants**

- Five top managers, six middle managers, 20 lecturers and 11 students

Participant Group	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Total
Lecturers	19	20	39
Leaders	9	10	19
Students	6	8	14
Student's group interview	3	3	6
Total	37	41	78

- **78 Interviews**; face-to-face or MS Teams
- Fall 2023 (first round) and spring 2024 (second round)
- The average interview length: 43 minutes
- 1,296 pages of single-spaced text (font size 12)
- Notes and summaries of interviews

Research Methodology

- **Analysis process**
- **Reflective thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and Atlas.ti & Excel
- First round after first interviews: inductive – deeper and richer understanding
 - *Experimenting, the job of lecturer, ethic*
 - Reflective discussions and research diary
- Second round after second interviews and how new technology was interpreted
 - Inductive, reflective discussions and research diary
 - Interpretations, and **refine coding** (e.g., *make education more efficient*), additional insights and discussion with broader project team

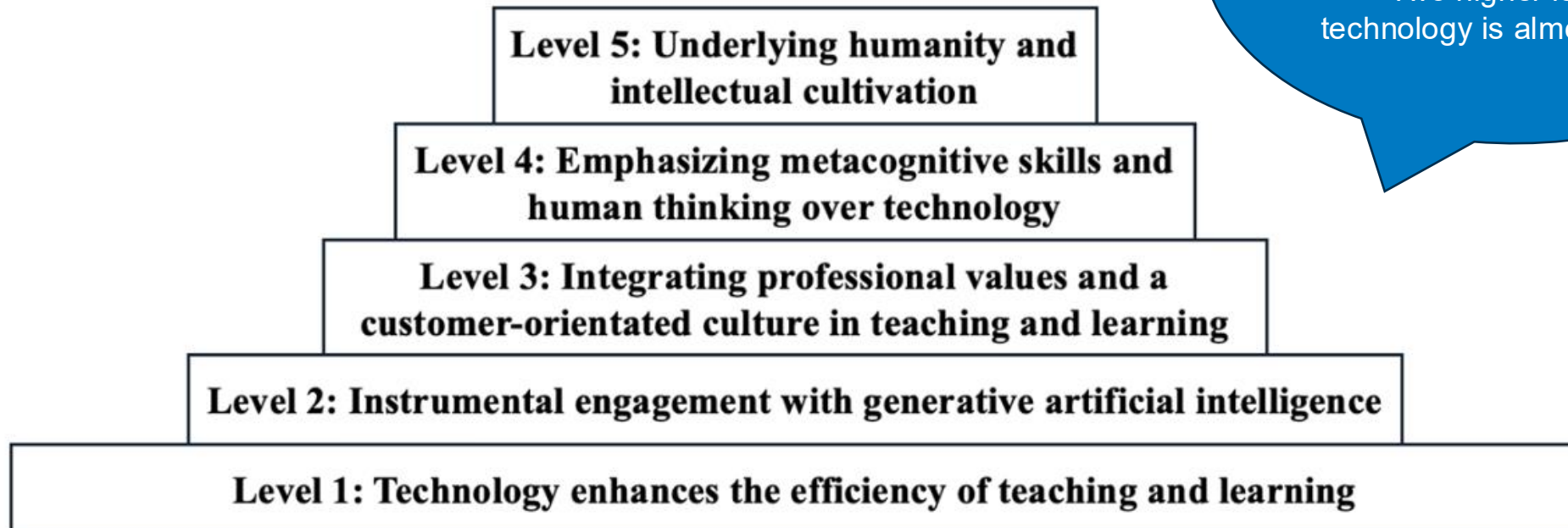
Why are we here at the university and why we spend our time here?



- Third round: “zoom-in” and re-reading each interview
 - Applying relevant codes (e.g., *education change*) and **writing a research story** for each participant, and reading them as a whole
- Example of the story:
 - *The change brought by AI is important, and participant argues that we must acknowledge the opportunities it offers. The participant believes that artificial intelligence will bring substantial change to H.E. However, what does not change is the following: our ability to learn and learning requires processing*
- “Zoomed-out” by reading researcher stories
- **Findings and developing a hierarchical model**

Findings

The hierarchical model of the purpose of higher education



Three lower levels:
technology is present in
teaching and learning
Two higher levels:
technology is almost absent

Findings

- **Level 1: Technology enhances the efficiency of teaching and learning**

- Practical tool to improve teaching and learning
- Places where students acquire knowledge
- Education offering economic value (Ashwin, 2025; Molesworth et al., 2009)
- Technology can be easily integrated into daily (academic work)
- Normalization of artificial intelligence into higher education
- Focus on performing tasks
- *Efficiency, productivity, optimizing studies*

- *At the end of the day, I use it [GenAI] relatively little. However, if there are many assignments that require substantial subject knowledge, it is possible **to use time more efficiently**. In addition, it is possible to teach yourself certain things as I mentioned earlier (Student#3, T2)*
- *For example, when students' outputs, such as PowerPoint presentations or reports are evaluated, **I could use [Gen]AI by giving it evaluation criteria and asking, "What do you think?"** However, I haven't done so because I don't think I have a right to do so. (Lecturer#15, T1).*

Findings

- **Level 2: Instrumental engagement with artificial intelligence**

- Integrate to learning processes
- *A key difference with level 1: artificial intelligence in dialogic interaction with users*
- Interactive learning tool
- Curiosity, positive perception and help students to learn
- Naïve or exploratory stage

- *It is a form of “**support intelligence**” from both the students’ learning perspective and the lecturer’s work perspective. So, it has brought, and continues to bring, **many opportunities to design pedagogy so that we can benefit from support for learning.** (Leader#8, T1)*
- ***I want to take it into my teaching as a tool, encourage its use, and not make it a taboo.** (Lecturer#2, T1)*

Findings

- **Level 3: Integrating professional values and customer-orientated culture into teaching and learning**

- Students must possess skills of using new technology
- Skills are demanded by students, work life, industry, and organizations
- Higher education is a place to acquire skills
- Concerns about student learning
- Learning is a fundamental value, and learning must be safeguarded
- Prominent theme in the data

- *Previously, in the essays, students had to reflect business models with their own thinking. Now, we have noticed that ChatGPT can do essays just like that. So, now **we have to think about the kinds of assignments students need to do for genuine learning to take place.** If ChatGPT does the whole essay, learning does not occur. (Leader#4, T1)*
- *If ChatGPT produces a brilliant output, the question is: has a student truly learnt or understood it? Overall, I think this is problematic. **Does genuine learning or expertise occur?** (Lecturer#4, T2)*

Findings

- **Level 4: Emphasize metacognitive skills and human thinking over technology**

- Metacognitive skills: the importance of human thinking, the complexity of knowledge, the depth of understanding
- *Differs from previous levels: emphasis on higher-level thinking skills*
- Relationship between humans, technology, and the core of higher education

- *In a way, seeing the possibilities, I could do this or that halfway with [Gen]AI. **It has actually given me confidence in my own skills** and work because I've managed to resist the temptation to misuse it. That makes it easier to be proud of the work, even if the grade ends up being only average. Because **it's something I produced myself.** (Student#3, T1)*
- *We need to be smart, and it [GenAI] is only one tool among many. However, it underscores **the importance of one's own thinking, critical thinking, and evaluation of sources.** (Leader#5, T2)*

Findings

- **Level 5: Underlying humanity and intellectual cultivation**
 - Humanity: human-to-human interaction, intellectual development, broad academic and cultural knowledge, ethical reflection, human growth and development through higher education
 - What it means to be human
 - Cultural and academic values
- *Human encounters, the need for dialogue, and the superiority of dialogue as a form of communication. **Technology cannot replace human, and face-to-face encounters. Right now, when we discuss with students, we emphasize psychological safety, and students' well-being, and these will be even more important.** (Leader#10, T2)*

*We should not lose ourselves there [in GenAI], where this discussion is rooted. **Intellectual cultivation, real intelligence, knowledge processing, and pedagogy should be preserved.** (Leader#6, T1)*



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Discussion

Contribution to technological frames and management education literature

Different technological frames co-exist and illuminate dynamics between technology, teaching and learning, and the purpose of higher education

1. **Level 1:** Technology (tool) to optimize learning and studies (a broader societal discourse of efficiency)
2. **Level 2:** Technology (instrumental value) serves an interactional tool in learning
3. **Level 3:** Professional values, customer-orientated culture, learning is valued
4. **Level 4:** Metacognitive skills and human thinking over technology – boundaries between humans and technology
5. **Level 5:** Humanity and intellectual cultivation

Education delivered through technology
Other people are excluded

Customer-oriented culture and student learning are not mutually exclusive

Technology is not present

Discussion

- **Practical implications to business schools**
- The importance of higher education developing higher-level skills
- Discussion of the purpose of higher education – institutional and societal level
- The value of higher education in improving societies
- **Limitations and future studies**
- Faculty with pedagogical training and student learning as an internalized value
- Study conducted in Northern Europe, higher education is valued and education enhancing wellbeing
- Participating student orientated learning and personal development
- **Observational studies:** social processes and collective sense-making practices
- **Analyse prompts** and learning assignments related to them

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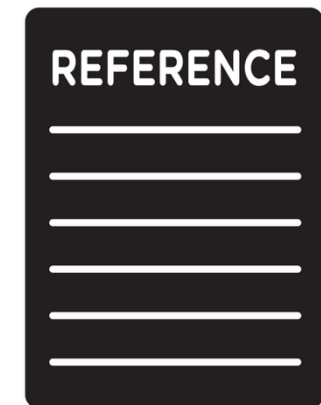
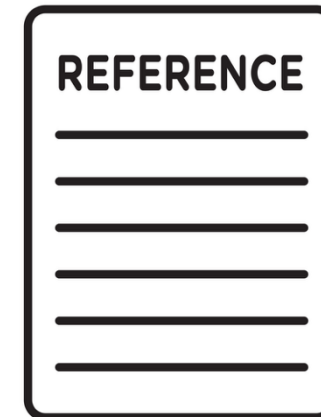


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