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Institutional Commitment and Leadership as Prerequisites for Successful Comprehensive Internationalization

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1 Abstract

Internationalization of higher education institutions in the twenty-first century is commonly regarded as a process that is essential for the development of a wide range of activities and engagements. Nowadays, a growing number of leaders of higher education institutions do not question the need of internationalization, but instead are actively looking for the ways of how to engage in it. Becoming an increasingly important phenomenon in higher education, the internationalization is though of- ten practiced as an incremental adjustment to the current international activities of a university. However, a considerable body of evidence suggests that it is critical for the higher education institutions to develop a systematic approach to internationalization. Emerging in research as a powerful tool to international advancement of a higher education institution, the internationalization has attracted considerable attention. This paper seeks to explore the institutional practices of internationalization in higher education within the framework of 'comprehensive internationalization' proposed by the Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement (CIGE). The present paper has a dual purpose, firstly, to explore and build upon previous findings in this area to advance the discussion around such an important topic as internationalization and, secondly, to inform the actions of higher education leaders as well as other stakeholders on building international activities to further the university's mission and objectives and make a positive social impact.

Keywords: Internationalization, Higher Education, Globalization

2 Introduction

Internationalization as an answer to accelerating globalization has received an increased attention in the twenty-first century, especially among researchers and practitioners of higher education. The two terms of 'internationalization' and 'globalization' are certainly linked, but should not be used interchangeably. The

former, in particular in higher education, is considered as a process that 'involves increasing the range of international activities within universities and between universities and other educational institutions and the numbers of international students and academic staff' [1], while the latter generally represents the trends of the increasing international interdependence and growth of cross-border activities. The globalization thus urges universities across the world to re-invent themselves and to introduce transformative institutional changes that would serve as a 'foundation for a balanced and integrated university experience at the interface of global and local exposure' [2]. The transformative institutional changes that the internationalization brings, are often conceived as a means to gain a competitive advantage on international markets and also to internationalize current practices and strategies of a university [1].

The definition of internationalization as such remains being a subject of significant debate despite the growing number of publications dedicated to it. The most often cited and arguably the most encompassing definition of internationalization in higher education is suggested by Knight [3] who describes the internationalization as:

"the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education."

Although Knight's definition demonstrates the procedural and integrative nature of internationalization, it remains fairly vague in further description. One of the most practically-oriented definitions though might be formulated by Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement (CIGE) [4] that argues that the internationalization is:

"a strategic, coordinated process that seeks to align and integrate international policies, programs, and initiatives, and positions colleges and universities as more globally oriented and internationally connected institutions. This process requires a clear commitment by top-level institutional leaders, meaningfully impacts the curriculum and a broad range of stakeholders, and results in deep and ongoing incorporation of international perspectives and activities throughout the institution."

Additionally to integration, the other essential requirements of internationalization are mentioned as to be aligning in its nature and leadership-driven, if a university has the objective to introduce a meaningful change. To represent the 'comprehensive' process of integration of policies, programs, and initiatives, CIGE [4] also proposed a model for the implementation of 'comprehensive internationalization' at higher education institutions. The model depicts internationalization as a double arrow linking six pillars that collectively form a 'comprehensive internationalization' approach: (1) articulated institutional commitment, (2) administrative leadership, structure, and staffing; (3) curriculum, co-curriculum and learning outcomes; (4) faculty policies and practices; (5) student mobility; (6) collaboration and partnerships. The interconnectedness of individual pillars through the 'comprehensive internationalization' demonstrates the idea that progress or lack of it in one area can have a positive or negative impact on the others [1]. Although the system of six pillars brings clarity to the

overall process of the implementation of internationalization, it should not be understood as a model for the standardization of higher education institutions. Instead, universities are encouraged to use the internationalization to differentiate themselves, promote cultural diversity, including promotion of their own culture, as well as to foster intercultural understanding, respect, and tolerance among peoples' [5]. The curricula, policies and practices in a particular university of a particular country might require a specifically adjusted internationalization approach taking into account the culture and socio-economic conditions [6].

As the purpose of this paper is to explore the practices of internationalization within the systematic approach, the practically-oriented breakdown of 'comprehensive internationalization' proposed by CIGE will be beneficial to categorize the possible internationalization practices. A limitation of this approach is that certain internationalization practices are intertwined between several of pillars and thus could arguably belong to each of them. Such cases will be discussed individually and their primary inclusion criteria will be noted. The internationalization practices discussed in this paper represent measures, policies, programs, and activities that develop and guide internationalization efforts and facilitate internationalization progress of higher education institutions. Despite its exploratory nature, the purpose of the present paper is to build upon previous findings and to advance the discussion around the internationalization and thus to assist higher education leaders, practitioners, and other relevant stakeholders to further their missions and more effectively achieve their objectives of internationalization.

3   Articulated institutional commitment

Higher education institutions across the world are in a period of significant transformation. The accelerating globalization and the emergence of global markets urge universities to become increasingly internationally competitive, in particular, in providing quality education, attracting talented students and researchers, and securing funding of their operations and projects. The competitiveness that previously was a driving force primarily for private sector nowadays shifts even the public sector towards managerialism [7]. Although the use of business-like principles and practices in higher education can undoubtedly bring the efficiency and the effectiveness, such transformation of higher education institutions and their adaptation to the new international realities requires comprehensive strategical, structural and cultural institutional adjustments [8]. This section will mostly discuss the strategical aspect of institutional adjustments to globalization while the structural and cultural aspects of it will be examined further in the text.

In higher education, internationalization is often discussed as a process that is fundamental to the successful adaptation to globalization. As Maringe and Gibbs [9] argue, the higher education institutions that successfully adapted the internationalization demonstrate: (1) an articulated institutional commitment with well-defined strategies and objectives; (2) an expanding scope and scale

of international student and staff exchange programs; (3) a strong position on the international student recruitment market; (4) practices of international educational services export; (5) integration of international aspects into curriculum and pedagogical approaches; (6) development of internationally focused research; and (7) development of joint research and other higher education initiatives with international and global organizations. Considering these characteristics of a successfully internationalized university, it can be concluded that the internationalization does not only assist in the integration of international or intercultural aspects into the educational and research activities but also helps to establish the business-like principles and practices such as strategy development or services export, and scale them internationally.

The first and foremost decision when introducing internationalization at the higher education institutions must be taken regarding the key internationalization strategic choices. As the internationalization can be referred to as:

"an ongoing, future-oriented, multidimensional, interdisciplinary, leadership-driven vision that involves many stakeholders working to change the internal dynamics of an institution to respond and adapt appropriately to an increasingly diverse, globally focused, ever-changing external environment [10],"

it becomes clear that the role of the leadership of a university and its vision are central to the strategy development process. Although strategies are formal institutional documents, they do not have a single format. Most certainly the strategies include mission statements and the objectives formulated based on the vision of the leadership of a university. Besides the central direction of development, the strategies as one of the tools that managerialism brought to higher education, are supposed to guide the planning, target-setting, implementation and control processes of their activities [11]. In other words, the strategies, especially the overall institutional strategies, have to identify the mission statement of a university, its objectives, the social, cultural, political and economic environment in which the university operates, the target markets of students and staff and the ways to reach them as well as the assessment procedures to evaluate the progress. The fact that all three principal functions of universities, including education, research and knowledge transfer, offer global prospects, obligates the universities to include international aspects into their strategies [12]. The invasive nature of internationalization only proves the critical importance of it for the higher education institution as a whole and suggests the prioritization of it as the inability of achieving the desired state of international affairs of the university may 'throw the whole system into jeopardy' [13]. The emphasis on internationalization typically is either incorporated in the overall institutional strategy or articulated in a separately developed formal internationalization strategy. If published separately, its close alignment with the overall institutional strategy has to be considered. Ideally, the internationalization strategy must only strengthen the institutional strategy.

The strategizing process of higher education institutions becomes though even more challenging in the globalized environment of the twenty-first century. The global markets of students and staff bring new aspects for the universities to

consider while articulating the strategies. With the growing national and cultural diversity of international students, faculty members, and staff on campus, the first and the foremost aspect to be considered might be the ethics or the course of actions, values, beliefs, and understandings in the multicultural environment that the strategy encourages. Regarding the encouragement of the academic and administrative staff, the notion of responsibilization in higher education is often discussed that suggests that there must be a system established at the university that would specify and impose what is expected of each employee and recognize and reward responsible and successful behavior [14]. The new ethical multiculturalism or what might be referred to as 'international mindedness' is one of the practices to be expected and rewarded for in the twenty-first century as well as to be promoted among individuals, cultures, and societies, especially on campus [15]. The dynamic nature of international student enrollment and exchange as well as the dynamic nature of international research and collaboration only bring another layer of challenges and support the institutional initiatives aimed at the regular contextual analysis and revision of the institutional and internationalization strategies.

Additionally to strategizing, the managerialism and internationalization in higher education also transformed financial management. As internationalization as a comprehensive process might require significant level of commitment and investments, the largest part of funding typically is covered by the internal resources of a higher education institution. The emergence of global markets though allowed universities to gain the access to various new external sources of income and funding such as international student fees, international research organizations, international non-government organizations, and others. Considering the risks of internal investments and the emergence of international funding, as it is argued by Taylor [11], human resources with new skills of higher education and internationalization administration are required, especially equipped with international marketing, business planning, and risk management skills. These skills will help to efficiently distribute the resources, recover the internal investments, grow the external income sources, and attract the external funding. Even though the current trends might radically challenge modern universities in adaptation to the new international realities, they are also able to reward those that respond with an entrepreneurial spirit with the access to the new forms of cross-border activities and international income and funding sources.

The overall progress of institutional internationalization as a rule is monitored by the higher education institutions using internal data collection, but also can be assessed based on the world university rankings. The rankings are generally the listings of universities ranked according to several estimates, including international outlook and internationalization of education, research and knowledge transfer. In terms of internationalization, the evaluation criteria of rating agencies often include number of international students, number of international staff, and reputation among international researchers and employers. The rankings are constructed and published by the independent rating agencies such as ShanghaiRanking Consultancy (ARWU), Times Higher Edu-

cation, QS Quacquarelli Symonds and others, the recent emergence of which is often explained by the four main drivers: (1) transition to knowledge-intensive economies; (2) demographic pressures and the global pursuit of talent; (3) criticality of higher education to the economy and society; and (4) informed student choice and consumerist attitudes towards higher education [16]. It can even be argued that the rankings have significantly contributed to the establishment of the international market of higher education of the twenty-first century. It is worth noting that the rating agencies provide mostly the quantitative data and their rankings processes, evaluations and methods are barely transparent and accountable [17]. Therefore, it is highly recommended for the universities to also internally collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data such as the integration of internationalization into the university's culture, its motto and campus life; influence of internationalization of campus life on its members and societies; quality of teaching and learning of global skills cultural awareness, and the sense of global responsibility; and improvement of university's academic partnerships and research activities. The evident difference between the data that is collected by the rating agencies and the data to be collected internally raises the point of the importance to strategically define the progress criteria that will not merely serve the improvement of the ranking position but will be beneficial for the qualitative improvements of a higher education institution with the development of its internationalization. Although the internationalization has already become an essential and vital aspect of higher education, it still might be a time-consuming, resource-demanding, and fairly long process for certain universities. Furthermore, considering the fact that the rating agencies publish in their listings only the limited number of the top universities large number of which have a history of tens of years, it could be rational for the universities not to change the institution's strategy and mission to comply with the ranking criteria and to put their long-term focus on the qualitative improvements that the internationalization can bring.

4   Administrative leadership, structure, and staffing

The relatively recent phenomena of globalization and the global markets represent nowadays a new global environment in which the universities of the twenty-first century operate. The fact that universities are now exposed to the international competition not merely poses the threats but simultaneously offers new opportunities, especially for the innovative and forward-thinking universities. The internationalization of higher education, as it has been discussed in the previous section, is a key strategy adopted by universities as a response to the influence of accelerating globalization and the emergence of global markets, the implementation of which requires the university-wide integration. As the strategy and structure of the university have long been considered as fundamental variables of organizational change and innovation, it is reasonable to suggest that the internationalization also requires adjustments to the university's structure [8]. The institutional structural adjustments might involve development of new

leadership forms and offices, development of new hiring policies and training programs for administrative and academic staff, and changes in the organizational culture [18].

The wide scope of international activities that a university in the twenty-first century might be engaged in and the complexity of the internationalization as a process from the managerial perspective require strong university leadership, ac- countable organizational structure, and professional staff. Even though the forms of leadership and the organizational structures of higher education institutions may differ depending on the particular institutional strategy, its objectives, and organizational culture, the key elements of organizational arrangements of the universities since the intensification of the international competition, as argued by Foskett [12], are common: (1) the president, chancellor, rector, or as it is sometimes called the director of a university has a well-articulated strategic vision of the development of the university and recognizes the vital role of internationalization for the overall institutional development; (2) there is a senior member of institutional leadership, typically holding a position of vice-president, vice chancellor or vice-rector, that is responsible for the internationalization and international activities; (3) the university has an international office or international relations office established for the coordination and implementation of the internationalization strategy. The three necessary structural characteristics of the internationally engaged universities above all demonstrate the internationalization's administratively intensive nature.

The top leadership of a university as a management body consists of the president, chancellor, rector, or director of the university and its deputies or senior members of leadership that may hold the positions of vice-presidents, vice-chancellors, vice-rectors depending on the particular university structure. Although the presidents are generally considered to be the top catalysts for the internationalization of higher education institutions, the other administrative staff are playing the key roles [1]. The international office of a university that is directly involved into coordination of the internationalization reports in such structure to the vice-president, vice-chancellor or vice-rector for internationalization. As the American College President Study's research demonstrates that more than half of the responding presidents of higher education institutions do not have any type of international experience or training [1], the second element of the university leadership structure of internationally engaged universities which is the senior member of leadership who is responsible for internationalization is often the key driver of internationalization in the university. The lack of international perspective only hampers the presidents from the complete understanding of the international aspects of higher education and the position of vice-president, vice chancellor or vice-rector for internationalization who has a well-articulated vision of what its means to be an internationally engaged university becomes essential for the development and management of the internationalization strategy. The appointed senior member of leadership as the primary driver of internationalization must report directly to the president and be actively involved into the discussion of the institutional strategy, espe-

cially its international aspects, man- age the linkages and partnerships of the university, and represent the university on the global arena [1]. The position of senior member of leadership for internationalization as such is most likely becoming a necessary feature and common practice of the higher education in the twenty-first century.

The effective integration of the internationalization of a university is typically coordinated by a single office [1]. Therefore, the last but certainly not least element of the organizational arrangements of the globally engaged universities after the recognition of the institutional internationalization as a key strategic activity by the president of the university and the appointment of the senior member of leadership for internationalization is the establishment of international office that could act as a central unit of internationalization and international activities. The administrative staff of the international office plays a key role in the institutional internationalization as its functions may include negotiation of partnerships, maintenance of the global networks, and development of mobility and joint-research programs. The operations of the international office are coordinated by the head of the office. The subordinate coordinators of the international office might either be assigned to the faculties of the university or work as the university-wide coordinators depending on how integrated the faculties and departments are. The integrated universities provide strong formal interconnectedness between university management and the university's faculties and thus provide a centralized decision-making process, while in the non-integrated universities the faculties represent autonomous legal bodies with their own decision-making authority [19]. Independently from the degree of the integration of the faculties, international offices must have good links with all other departments, faculties, and services of a university to fully realize their tasks and the overall institutional internationalization.

Discussing the three elements of the structural arrangements of the internationally - oriented universities and the overall integration of the internationalization, it is critical to point out the factors that might significantly influence the university internationalization. One of the factors that has been gaining an increased attention in the academic literature over the last two decades is the organizational culture. Unlike the strategy and its objectives, that due to the international prospects of teaching, research, and knowledge transfer, have to incorporate international aspects and thus might only encourage internationalization, the organizational culture depending on its attributes can either hinder or facilitate the process of internationalization. Developed as a result of the high frequency of social interactions, the organizational culture, particularly in the university, rep- resents the values, beliefs and attitudes of everyone associated with it, including institutional top leadership, board members, academic and administrative staff, and students [8]. Based on the typology of Sporn [20], organizational cultures can be characterized by two attributes: (1) weak or strong; (2) internally focused or externally focused. Although the weak and internally focused organizational culture with its characteristic internal disintegration of units and focus on bureaucracy can be effective in certain environments, such

culture will not provide a significant contribution and rather hinder the process of the comprehensive university-wide internationalization. The typology implies that the strong and externally focused organizational culture is more likely to provide support to the management to adapt to the dynamic external environment. Shared values, meanings, understandings, commitment to entrepreneurship, and flexibility of the strong and externally focused culture can certainly help to integrate the internationalization effectively [8].

All three elements of the organizational arrangements of the internationally-oriented universities also depend on the professionalism of the academic and administrative staff. The overall professionalization of higher education and its internationalization as an intrinsic aspect of higher education is one of the recent trends in the university management of the twenty-first century. The emergence of such organizations as the American Council on Education's Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement in the United States of America and the European Association for International Education in Europe only supports the importance of internationalization and the need of universities for the expertise, research, networking, collaboration and additional resources in this area [11]. International literacy becomes a high priority in higher education [8]. The inter- national literacy of the academic and administrative staff of the university as well as its overall internationalization can be easily examined looking at the mission statement, strategic plan, job descriptions of the top leadership and other information that can be found on the website of the university. Also, the universities of the twenty-first century realize the need to establish globally focused development programs for the academic and administrative staff not necessarily working in the international offices but employed in the enabling offices such as admissions, education, student affairs offices, housing [1]. Experts with the professional experience of international activities, especially in the educational sector, are actively sought after by the globally engaged universities as only the formalized structures with professionals associated with it can guarantee accountability and quality assurance in the internationalization of higher education.

5   Conclusions

Globalization is dramatically reshaping political and economic boundaries, increasing the exchange flow of almost everything - especially in education. Institutions of higher education that remain incapable of operating effectively within the framework of globalization, will be at a disadvantage more than ever before. Thus, internationalization should be seen as a necessity rather than a requirement.

Internationalization of higher education institutions in the twenty-first century is definitely a time-consuming, resource-demanding, and fairly long process. As a result, institutional commitment and administrative leadership become pivotal as they lay the foundation on which other components of internationalization will be then based.

It is worth pointing out that comprehensive internationalization is driven by the mission, values, and motivations of these institutions. However, the final goal of comprehensive internationalization is not to prescribe a specific model or standard, but by recognizing a diversity of approaches, to allow each institution to choose its own path, which is consistent with its mission, values, programs, and resources.

At present, just a few institutions have made the systemic commitment to comprehensive internationalization. What differentiates these institutions is that they usually have a broad, deep, and long-standing framework of views and commitment at all levels including administration, teaching and research staff, and students, while others start comprehensive internationalization virtually from scratch quite often having very little or no experience in international matters or just having the student and staff mobility.

Recognizing the ever-changing global environment, higher education institutions should strategize to make sustainable and systemic changes to their structure, processes and activities to let comprehensive internationalization be successful. And, this could be one of the possible directions for future research.

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