# **Education of Economists and Managers**

ISSN: 1734-087X | ICV: 83.85

Volume 54, Issue 4, December 2019 Received 22 November 2018; Revised 18 July 2019; Accepted 31 December 2019

DOI: -

Kruk, M. S. (2019). Intellectual capital management in universities in the face of internationalisation challenges. *Education of Economists and Managers. Problems. Innovations. Projects*, 54(4), 31-43. Retrieved from https://econiournals.sgh.waw.pl/EEiM/article/view/1837

# Intellectual capital management in universities in the face of internationalisation challenges

Marzena Sylwia Kruk

#### **Summary**

Managing internationalisation in higher education is a complex process. It requires engaging all intellectual capital at the university's disposal (intellectual capital, all university's stakeholders, material and organisational resources). The increasing number of foreign students is the main determinant behind the need for internationalisation process management. Capable management in this area becomes a must in the face of new challenges before universities go international. Today, higher education is gaining an international character. An increasing number of young people migrates in the pursuit of new educational and professional experiences outside their home country. Foreign students constitute a valuable social capital both from the perspective of the host country as well the university in which they study. Also, the country of their destination, after they graduate, benefits a lot. Foreign exchange of students is the subject of public discourse and practice. Some important issues are indicated in this area, e.g., education co-financing for foreigners, brain drain phenomenon (loss of human capital in favour of other countries) or the human capital import (Dumitru, 2012; Straubhaar, 2000; Salt, 1997; Solimano, 2006). Managing these students, who are sometimes already employed, as well as their professional competences development, are becoming a crucial element in the internationalisation process of Polish universities. The diagnosis of possessed social capital will enable real actions in various internationalisation dimensions. The purpose of the article is to draw attention to the issues of managing intellectual capital of universities against the background of internationalisation process and its requirements. In the course of the study we used the intellectual capital concept of L. Edvinsson (1997) (theoretical dimension of the work). Due to the high growth dynamics of the number of foreign students, we focused only on this particular internationalisation area. The measurement of selected indicators of social capital of this group of students can be a source of knowledge and may inspire to take actions in the field of internationalisation process management (practical dimension).

**Keywords:** management, educational migration, internationalisation of universities, foreign students, intellectual capital, social capital

# Intellectual capital management in universities in the face of internationalisation challenges

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#### Abstract

Managing internationalisation in higher education is a complex process. It requires engaging all intellectual capital at the university's disposal (intellectual capital, all university's stakeholders, material and organisational resources). The increasing number of foreign students is the main determinant behind the need for internationalisation process management. Capable management in this area becomes a must in the face of new challenges before universities go international. Today, higher education is gaining an international character. An increasing number of young people migrates in the pursuit of new educational and professional experiences outside their home country. Foreign students constitute a valuable social capital both from the perspective of the host country as well the university in which they study. Also, the country of their destination, after they graduate, benefits a lot. Foreign exchange of students is the subject of public discourse and practice. Some important issues are indicated in this area, e.g., education co-financing for foreigners, brain drain phenomenon (loss of human capital in favour of other countries) or the human capital import (Dumitru, 2012; Straubhaar, 2000; Salt, 1997; Solimano, 2006). Managing these students, who are sometimes already employed, as well as their professional competences development, are becoming a crucial element in the internationalisation process of Polish universities. The diagnosis of possessed social capital will enable real actions in various internationalisation dimensions. The purpose of the article is to draw attention to the issues of managing intellectual capital of universities against the background of internationalisation process and its requirements. In the course of the study we used the intellectual capital concept of L. Edvinsson (1997) (theoretical dimension of the work). Due to the high growth dynamics of the number of foreign students, we focused only on this particular internationalisation area. The measurement of selected indicators of social capital of this group of students can be

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#### Introduction

The resources needed to manufacture and deliver products and services are becoming increasingly mobile and can be transferred from country to country, from region to region. Transfer of knowledge, technology, workforce, products and capital has become a reality (Dworzecki, 2001, p. 12). The students undertaking studies outside their own country constitute one of these capitals. "Temporarily migrating employees also consist of foreign students who, using student visas, travel to obtain education, and who generally intend to return to their home countries after graduation" (Mucha, 2013, p. 60). R. Alarcon, defines "educated migrants" as the ones with completed at least four years of higher education, but mainly with a master's degree or doctorate (Alacron, 2007, pp. 243–244).

As noted by J. Mucha there are examples in recent years of the interest exhibited by both scientists and university authorities in persons studying (and in particular those obtaining diplomas) abroad, and especially their motivations to remain in the host country, often as researchers or employees (Mucha, 2013, p. 64). Educational mobility is a way to achieve not only the students' personal goals, but also broader goals – national or institutional. Depending on the form, duration or nature of the stay, it may, among others, support the quality and innovativeness of learning, strengthen the university's staff potential, improve didactic activities and significantly improve the level of scientific research. Educational mobility serves as a tool for exchanging and gaining experience, as well as creates relationship capital and significantly facilitates the development of professional and scientific competences (MPiPS, 2013, p. 22).

Migrants strengthen cultural diversity, which in turn strongly stimulates innovation, and hence economic growth and residents' income (Florida, 2010). An increasing number of foreign companies based in Poland are looking for mobile students and future employees (Świdrowska, 2015, p. 238). Admitting students from other countries stimulates economic growth (Knight, 2008). Supported by state immigration regulations, foreign companies or universities and by their own economic, social and cultural capital, young people easily cross borders and participate in global labour markets (e.g., international corporations). The benefits of hiring students from other countries while they are studying are recognized not only by

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universities, but also by entrepreneurs seeking mobile employees. In their opinion, foreign students may be better prepared to work in a globalised economy and continuous changes on the international labour market than graduates without experience of international mobility.

# Internationalisation of universities – general remarks

Internationalisation of universities is "the process of incorporating the international, intercultural and global dimension in the process of providing educational services at the academic level" (Knight, 2008, p. 21). Internationalisation in higher education is a 'purposeful process of integrating the international, intercultural and global dimension into the goals, functions and mode of operation of higher education system in order to improve the quality of education and research for students and employees and to provide a significant contribution for the society (Egon-Polak et al., 2015, p. 29).

In addition, internationalisation – along with prestige, scientific potential, scientific effectiveness, educational conditions and innovativeness – is one of the six main universities' ranking indicators. Internationalisation was measured using seven indicators. These are:

- number of programmes run in foreign languages (4%),
- number of students studying in foreign languages,
- share of foreign students in the total number of students,
- foreign academic teachers,
- student exchange,
- student exchange arrivals,
- multiculturalism of the student environment i.e., the number of countries from which a minimum of 10 students are present on a given university (Study in Poland, 2016).

Since the signing of the Bologna Declaration (1999) in Poland, a rapid increase in the number of students from abroad has been noticeable (Figure 1).

Polish Central Statistical Office's (GUS) data indicate that Polish universities have documented a record increase in students from abroad. Their number of foreign students amounts to 72,743, i.e., 6,950 more than in 2016/2017. This is an increase of as much as 10.56% in one academic year, reflecting the current dynamic growth of internationalisation in Poland. At the same time a decrease in the number of native students by 4.22% (1,291.9 thousand students) is visible. In turn, in the 2018/2019 academic year there were 78,343 foreign students.

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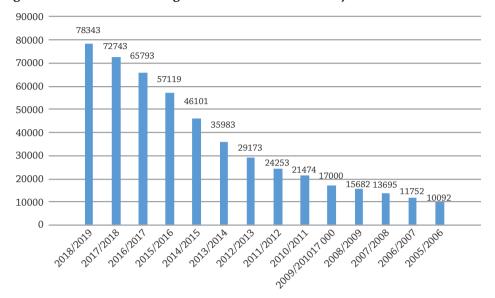


Figure 1. The number of foreign students in Poland in the years 2005-2019

Source: Study in Poland (2017).

According to the Perspektywy Ranking from 2016/2017, the highest internationalisation rate was achieved by the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University and equalled almost 6.72% (Study in Poland, 2017). In turn, in 2018/2019 foreign students from almost 50 countries (mainly from Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, India, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia) constituted over 10% of all candidates admitted to universities (UMCS, 2019).

According to the National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA), the increase in the number of foreign students is also highlighting such needs as: a holistic perspective in the management of universities' internationalisation, activation of the macro level associated with the presence of foreign students, as well as increasing awareness of the role of universities in the process of cultural adaptation and integration of foreign students (NAWA, 2019). Universities are increasingly directing their education offer to foreign recipients (Bielecka-Prus et al., 2015). The benefits of admitting students from other countries for the duration of their studies are recognised not only by universities but also by entrepreneurs seeking mobile employees. Foreign students may be better prepared to work in a globalised economy and to continuous changes on the international labour market than graduates without experience of international mobility. A. Elliott and J. Urry believe that in the postmodern era, continuous mobility is a constitutive element of the new transnational elite of "globalists" (Elliott, Urry, 2010, pp. 65–68).

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The model of the third generation university (Wawak, 2012), also called the entrepreneurial university, evolved in a natural way as a continuation of the university's earlier vision manifested in the form of the Humboldt-type University in which an additional aspect of management and entrepreneurship appears. According to this model, universities cannot exist as independent institutions, and globalisation and the consequent internationalisation of universities have the most significant impact on this situation. The university begins to function as an enterprise, acquiring the best human resources from the environment, striving to develop science through network connections and, consequently, aiming at maximising profit (Nowicki, 2013, pp. 29–30).

The vision of an entrepreneurial university is based on "rational (creative, effective) management of social and intellectual capital through university-specific processes and activities, that is: research, education and culture-forming relations with the environment. Its statutory tasks should include: multiplying social and intellectual capital, which are a factor of multidimensional personal development and changes, both in close and distant environment" (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2010, p. 58). Management at the level of human capital comprises shaping systems of teamwork, participation, motivation, organisational structure, climate and organisational culture as well as all kinds of relationships between people. According to T. Wawak, current management in universities does not ensure the proper utilisation of their resources, which is why pro-quality management restructuring is necessary to improve management quality (2012).

# Intellectual capital of the university in the internationalisation process – theoretical aspect

Definitions of intellectual capital are closely related to knowledge management. "Knowledge resources are the basis for the creation and development of intellectual capital. Intellectual capital is created on the basis of management of knowledge valuable to the organisation, which at the same time constitutes components and a material for creating intellectual capital" (Bombiak, 2011, p. 84). The value of intellectual capital is, to a large extent, a reflection of the effectiveness of the knowledge management process, while knowledge is inseparably connected with people who are the creators of innovations and intangible assets in an enterprise (Feliniak, 2005, p. 393).

"Intellectual capital means knowledge, experience, technology, organisational technology, relationships with clients and professional skills that provide the organisation with an advantage in the market" (Edvinsson, Malone, 2001, p. 40).

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Separating components of the concept of intellectual capital is important for its effective management. This allows one to identify organisation's strengths and weaknesses that need to be improved. Moreover, an important feature of intellectual capital is the possibility to measure it (e.g., Sveiby, 2001; Kaplan, Norton, 2006; Edvinsson, 1997). "The essence of these methods lies in an attempt to estimate future benefits resulting from the possession and use of intangible assets that form enterprise's intellectual capital. They allow to assess the effectiveness of investments in intangible assets (Bombiak, 2011, p. 90). Concept of L. Edvinson developed in Skania indicates two basic components of intellectual capital, i.e.:

- human capital,
- structural capital.

Human capital includes knowledge, skills and experience of employees, which, supported by creativity, drive the development processes of the organisation. These are also the qualities brought in by the employee (intelligence, creativity), his ability to learn and motivation to act and share knowledge. Structural capital is an organisational ability to support employees' productivity. It includes organisational capital and client capital (Bombiak, 2011, pp. 84–85)¹. The term "intellectual capital" in relation to universities can be understood in several ways:

- university staff (faculty), students and organisational culture;
- qualifications, knowledge and scientific achievements of employees;
- the sum of human, organisational and social capital of the university;
- system solutions (management method, strategies) (Fazlagić, 2012).

Intellectual capital of the organisation refers strictly to its efficiency in the use of employees' personal resources, obtaining synergy effects thanks to elements of the company's internal structure and creating new and existing opportunities in the organization's environment (Bombiak, 2011, pp. 84–85). The use of all university resources works well within the concept of organisation management.

Intellectual capital management in general terms comes down to identifying, measuring, using and developing the hidden potential of the company. The effectiveness of management depends largely on the degree of implementation of these activities. Intellectual capital management is an integral part of the company and defines the goals for the company. The main objectives of intellectual capital management involve recognising and identifying individual elements of intangible assets, their

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Organisational capital includes systems and tools improving knowledge flows in the organisation, customer capital means customer relationships. Further division regards organisational capital, in which innovation and process capital are distinguished. Innovation capital concerns the ability to renew an organisation in the form of intellectual property rights and other intangible assets. Process capital concerns procedures, techniques and programmes enhancing effectiveness in the functioning of the organisation (Bombiak, 2011, pp. 84–85).

measurement as well as appropriate use and development to achieve strategic goals (Pobrotyn, 2012, p. 124). The core of intellectual capital management is to create conditions for generating, acquiring, transforming and accumulating knowledge.

The method of intellectual capital management at the organisational level depends on the adopted concept of intellectual capital, the company's strategy and situational conditions (Harasim, 2013, p. 13). In relation to the internationalisation process, intellectual capital management at universities in the context of internationalisation boils down primarily to the development of legal acts and strategies that will contain specific indications, tools and methods that contribute to the increase of internationalisation rates.

The internationalisation of higher education and science is included in the development goals of the Strategy for Responsible Development 2016 adopted by the government. These aims assume creating conditions conducive to the internationalisation of universities as well as innovativeness and commercialisation of research results and encouraging students from outside the European Union to study in Poland (EU, 2019). Pro-quality activities at the university are increasingly often included in the internationalisation strategy, the competitive advantage is determined by the possession of international accreditations, as well as the possibility to obtain double diploma (Wysocka, Leja, 2018). In Poland, the new Act on Higher Education emphasises internationalisation of doctoral studies and facilitation of the creation and conduction of international joint studies (Journal of Laws, 2018, Item 1668, Chapter 11). Internationalisation is also one of the main areas that are the subject of compulsory curriculum assessment at universities, carried out by the Polish Accreditation Commission (Journal of Laws 2018, Item 1668, Chapter 11).

In the context of a knowledge-based economy, the role of intangible resources, including information, knowledge and intellectual capital, is growing. In modern organisations, exists a need to look for tools and methods that enable organisations to gain a competitive advantage. This includes an efficient IT system (Pobrotyn, 2012, p. 124). Universities also require constant changes in this area. I. Hofman writes about specific methods that should be implemented at universities as part of their internationalisation. These are: diversification of education programmes in terms of scientific disciplines and interdisciplinary studies (from the student's perspective – the most attractive), expanding education offer with European languages, a coherent promotional strategy at international educational fairs, the use of word-of-mouth marketing and care for public relations (Hofman, 2015, p. 140).

Universities supporting the migration policy should also pay attention to the university's stakeholders, also employing specialists in the field of social potential management. The key factor is to build mechanisms enabling studying abroad and admitting students from other countries (Kaczmarczyk, Turowicz, 2008, p. 11).

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## Social capital of foreign students – practical aspect

Migrating scholars as well as foreign students accumulate social capital (Mucha, 2013, p. 63). Sociological concepts of social capital mainly emphasise issues such as networks, trust, norms and social competences (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995; Fukuyama, 1997; Lin, 2001). In turn, W. Glaser (Glaser, Drain, 1979) stresses student migration networks as determinants of the creation of an "educational channel" (Andrejuk, 2011, p. 153). Identification of the educational channel can generate and strengthen university's promotional activities, which contributes to the increase of potential future students.

J. Coleman defines social capital as an attribute of small groups in which strong relationships are established. "Social capital, in this sense, is not created by people consciously, but it is the result of the creation of strong bonds in small communities that have been established because of individual goals. In this way, individual goals can be transformed into benefits from established relationships with others" (Sierocińska, 2011, pp. 71–72).

On the other hand, P. Bourdieu defined the so-called individual social capital. "Social capital is a set of real and potential resources related to having a permanent network of more or less institutionalised relationships based on knowing people and recognition (group membership), which provides each of its members support in the form of capital owned by the collective" (Bourdieu, 1986).

In the circle of sociologists and economists, it is important not only to define social capital, but to measure it. The World Bank studied social capital by measuring membership in local associations and networks (including density of membership and the scope of connections with other groups) (World Bank, 2002, p. 2). Also trust (from strangers, to government institutions, etc.), social communication (cooperation, conflicts and conflict resolution) and group activities (size of activity and willingness to participate) are considered (Sierocińska, 2011, pp. 77–78). Surveys are also conducted which the use of research tools, such as, e.g., The Social Capital Assessment Tool (SOCCAT), and Integrated Questionnaire for the Measurement of Social Capital (SOCAP IQ). Based on the research carried out using these tools, one can measure the size and direction of social capital development in a group of foreign students. Indicators such as student networks, competences, feelings of stress or alienation, norms and values may be considered.

The measurement of social capital among foreign students is an important element in the process of internationalisation of academic centres because the study of capital allows the identification of, e.g.:

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- formal and informal student networks, e.g., between students from the same country and between networks with a country of origin;
- the issue of trust and relations with the social environment, e.g., between foreign students and the academic and local environment;
- norms and values guiding students from other countries;
- elements of risk and conflicts;
- elements that contribute to the increase of knowledge and competences among students from other countries.

The study of social capital among foreign students can contribute to the verification of both strengths and weaknesses of actions taken at universities, towards this group of students. In addition, such studies give the opportunity to diagnose elements of risk and conflicts.

Social capital measurement can be carried out, e.g., by Career Offices. However, this requires the introduction of an efficient system for managing the internationalisation process at universities and the introduction of specific solutions taking into account the type of university, the country of origin of foreign students and regional, local and economic conditions, etc.

#### Conclusions

Today, internationalisation of universities is a very important process that contributes to the development and improvement of quality at universities. It is a multi-faceted process, which includes, e.g., internationalisation of research, didactics, exchange of researchers, arrivals and departures of foreign students. Universities are progressively directing their educational offer to foreign recipients (Bielecka-Prus et al., 2015). All aspects of internationalisation pose a challenge for universities. This requires a new approach to university management, including both internationalisation issues and internationalisation process. Such multiple forms of internationalisation constitute a kind of international campus (Wysocka, Leja, 2018).

University's intellectual capital is the focal point in the entire internationalisation process. It can be presumed that this capital includes both the human capital of the university (stakeholders), tangible and intangible resources (knowledge, qualifications), as well as the adopted manner of management. Internationalisation of the university should be ingrained in the management system. This will allow for efficient and compatible actions at various levels and dimensions of internationalisation.

Particular attention while managing the internationalisation process should be paid to students from other countries. Social capital of this group of young people is one of the many intangible resources at the university's disposal. The study of

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social capital should be a permanent element of university's internationalisation management. Research results become a valuable source of knowledge and stimulate further action. After completing their studies, foreign students can make full use of acquired knowledge and skills in the international environment and the labour market. An important problem is the openness of graduates to the international labour market as well as the problem of "brain drain". This position is confirmed by W. Glaser's studies carried out as early as in 1979, who also proved that foreign students differ in their preferences of choosing which country to stay in depending on the completed field of study (Glaser, Drain, 1979). The university's internationalisation contains many important issues. However, managing this phenomenon should be a starting point for actions undertaken in this area. Proficient management in academic centres, also in international dimension, contributes to the pro-quality development of universities.

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