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Editorial Comments

This inaugural edition of the *International Journal of Higher Education Management* (IJHEM) contains nine thoroughly researched and scholarly articles. Conforming to the Academy's editorial policy, they have been selected such that the basic objective of dissemination of knowledge both applied and theoretical is adhered to. Globally we are witnessing an extraordinary growth in demand for higher education, along with all the attendant pressures that accompany such demand. Management teams are faced with having to adapt to a raft of challenges ranging from buildings and basic infrastructure to the rationalisation of faculties and support staff. What is clear from these papers is the fact that no country is immune from pressures concerning funding, student and staff expectations and the need to ensure that education institutions are fit for purpose. At IJHEM we are fully committed to a robust selection process and from the outset seek to ensure that this academic journal makes a positive and purposeful contribution to the understanding of issues affecting higher education management. I wish to salute the successful contributors for their endeavours and feel confident that others will find these papers both stimulating and thought provoking.

The first article in this edition is entitled: **Ways to Improve the Competitiveness of Russian Higher Education in the Global Education Market** by Plotnikova et al. All higher education institutions are acutely aware of the fact that they are being scrutinised and compared as never before and therefore this study certainly manages to raise a number of pertinent points in regards to how Russia needs to adapt. Whether we like it or not global university rankings and league tables have become a fact of life, something that some may well view with fear and trepidation, whilst others view them with a near prurient fascination. In analysing the Russian situation this study provides a fascinating analysis of how Russian higher education institutions have fared during a period of momentous change, particularly during the transition from the Soviet Era to the post-Soviet Era. It is regrettable that some in the Western world traditionally have had a rather jaundiced view of Russia and invariably have had little or no knowledge of the great educational tradition that has existed in Russia for centuries. Past glories are one thing, but in an increasingly globalised world no country can afford to ignore the role that higher education plays in national prosperity and in its standing. The erosion of prestige should always be a matter of concern as this not only undermines confidence and morale it also impacts upon important research and the development and protection of intellectual property. This study also underscores the value that can be gained from attracting foreign students, not only the monetary value, but also in degrees of connectivity around the globe. Whilst the USA and UK are currently the most successful nations at attracting foreign students, the dynamic is indeed changing. Non- English speaking countries are recognizing the value of offering programmes in English and this is clearly a factor that could be holding Russia back to some degree. In homing in on rankings in general, and the Quaquarelli Symonds (QS) in particular this research endeavours to make comparisons that offer pointers as to how Russia might go about enhancing its educational standing. Different traditions and approach offer various

solutions with the likes of University of Helsinki (Finland) and Peking University (China) each presenting workable models. Importantly there is a realisation by the Government in Russia that this needs to be a national priority and thus there could well be potential for Russia's Higher Education to emulate the UK's Russell Group with its emphasis on centres of research excellence. In seeing the value of academics contributing to foreign peer reviewed journals here is another practical solution that will help change perceptions as well as ensure that Russia is part of the mainstream when it comes to Higher Education. Funding, in the post-Soviet era has been a source of concern, hence the desire to garner a revenue stream from foreign students. The way forward will not be plain sailing, yet this study makes clear that others nations have managed it, so why not Russia?

The second paper entitled: **Institutional Factors Influencing the Academic Performance of Students in Principles of Accounting** by Akenbor and Ibanichuka raises some fundamental questions about student engagement and motivation. Those in leadership roles in educational institutions occasionally lose sight of the fact that if there is a genuine desire to get the best out of students there must be in place mechanism that monitor student attitudes and seek to act and adapt accordingly. Accountancy as a subject grounded in mathematics is viewed as a challenging one, which in the wrong hands can easily become arid and difficult to fathom. This study makes clear that students are often required to study the Principles of Accounting without being given a choice and as a consequence soon develop an antipathy towards it. Demanding subjects have been resented since time immemorial, but this does not mean that those responsible for learning and progress can abdicate themselves of the task of working to find ways to stimulate a positive and meaningful learning experience. Nigeria, as West Africa's economic powerhouse desperately requires competent individuals who have a sound understanding of accountancy, yet this study reveals a seeming lack of concern about the fact that so many students appear to resent studying a key subject. Teaching and learning methodology requires a willingness to be open to new ideas and to ensure that those in leadership roles prioritise the elements likely to facilitate positive outcomes. The research undertaken makes clear that the National Universities Commission of Nigeria needs to be far more pro-active, especially in regard to inspections of facilities such as libraries and their access and the role of ITC. Merely possessing a library means nothing, it is imperative that the materials and resources contained therein are modern, relevant and used. National capacity building is much more than examinations, it requires an appreciation of the ways to stimulate and engage, as well as deploying precious resources effectively. This study makes clear that there are areas that leadership both at a governmental and institutional level should work to address. Student feedback and findings should not be dismissed as the disgruntled carping of youth, but as valuable insights that are pertinent to a range of stakeholders. If Nigeria is to address some of its weaknesses it would do well to take note of the findings and recommendations revealed in this paper.

Traditional means of offering tertiary education are coping under considerable strain for a variety of reasons. One area that is exercising policy makers and educationalists is that of accessibility. The third paper in this volume: **Establishing a Saudi e-University: Transition to Asynchronous Learning at King Abdulaziz University** by Al-Sharqi and Yusuf endeavours to

explore the practical ways in which accessibility is being improved using a multifaceted platform. In common with other nations demand for higher education is rapidly exceeding supply, a problem exacerbated by the size of the Kingdom and certain cultural attitudes and expectations. The issue of gender is one that is particularly sensitive and cultural norms have traditionally meant that the uptake of higher education from remoter parts of the country has remained low. The rising costs of brick and mortar campuses provide an added incentive for new and stimulating alternative learning offerings. Saudi Arabia is not alone in experiencing certain pressures in regard to higher education and thus study makes plain that there has been an awareness of need for some considerable time. Distance Learning via Open Education Resources and Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) offers a practical and seemingly cost effective solution. That said, there are some in the realm of education who are yet to be convinced by the true value of MOOCs. King Abdulaziz University has already begun a process by which it is working to find suitable platforms that increase accessibility, without impairing quality. Anticipating and addressing the requirements of a population is one that requires pragmatism as well as a keen awareness of robust guidelines in regards to acceptable topics and the suitability of the methods deployed to teach and access them. This research highlights difficulties with regards to language proficiency, especially in English. Where success has already been noted has been in the area of engaging with women students. With the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia being a conservative and patriarchal society the issue of women's education is a sensitive one. The country recognizes that all of its people are a national resource and e-Learning offers a mechanism by which women outside the main metropolitan centres can develop their knowledge. Saudi Arabia has embraced new technology with gusto, although there are some who view the speed of technological and social change with some alarm. A particular telling comment made in this paper is; "Society's overall willingness to accept the legitimacy of e-learning will have a bearing on its future..." As in all such initiatives there remains plenty of work to do in regard to raising awareness, as well as ensuring that learners are imbued with a sense of ownership of that in which they are participating. ICT, satellite channels and diverse other platforms clearly have the potential to engage in fresh and stimulating ways.

Continuing the theme of the contribution ITC in Higher Education can make to national development the fourth article of this volume is entitled: **Emerging Profile of ITC - Enabled Commerce and Management Education in India** by **M. M. Gandhi**. India has emerged as a veritable powerhouse of ambition, something that has manifested itself in a range of ambitious projects such as its space mission to Mars and the planned construction of the Statue of Unity. Being such a vast nation means that excellence is not always consistent across the country and attitudes to ICT serve as a useful means of measuring the willingness to affect positive change through new technology. Gandhi in his research places considerable emphasis on "blended" and "digitalized learning" something that in some institutions appears to be at odds with traditional pedagogy. The elite institutions have recognized that ICT is a "tool for national development", but the situation on the ground appears to be patchy with many institutions suffering from a lack of resources or having management structures that have a somewhat capricious attitude to ICT. With India eager to play its part in the global raise it desperately requires appropriately trained manpower and the type of quality Research and Development that traditionally higher

education institutions have been famous for. Whilst this paper makes clear that progress is being made it is evident that much more is required, especially from those in leadership and management roles if ITC is to be fully optimised, especially in Commerce and Management Education. Progressive developments offer the possibility for social transformation, something that will only take place if pockets of resistance, fear and inertia in the education profession are addressed. India is not alone in having some institutions that treat computers and IT equipment as if they were hallowed museum exhibits. Gandhi is forthright in his belief that there is an urgent need to set about; “making practical experience an inherent part of the curriculum requirements”. In the modern world education is not an end in itself. Academia can gain much from endeavouring to align its curriculum to meet the needs of industry and the market place – a point that many educators find somewhat unnerving. If India is to have a chance to realise and exploit its full potential educators will be required to look afresh at how ICT is used in a manner that is both engaging and relevant.

The fifth paper of this volume is entitled: **Comprehensive Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions in the Light of the Requirements of the Labor Market – An analytical study of the labor market of Sadia town in Algeria** by **Abdelmadjid Badri**. This paper gets to the heart of one of the knottiest problems that exists across the higher education sector, namely whether institutions are fit for purpose. Whilst this paper views this from the perspective of the Maghreb, the issues it raises are universal. For centuries universities and colleges have appeared to weave an aura of mystique, something that has been integral to their prestige. In recent decades with the proliferation of institutions coupled with changing societal expectations there has been a sea change in attitudes. Attempts are now being made to measure outcomes, satisfaction and relevance, especially in relation to the world of work. The first paper of this volume made clear that league tables are now a fact of life, well Badri makes clear that employers and other stakeholders have certain expectations of higher education institutions are not afraid to articulate them. It is inevitable that some educators will feel uneasy at having their world challenged by notions such as Total Quality Management (TQM). Yet the need to identify strengths and weaknesses not only makes sense, the process itself is a healthy one, if entered into in the right spirit. The right spirit is one of collaboration, rather than a rush for judgement and sanction, and this is where effective management and enlightened leadership are vital. This paper reveals a general perception amongst external stakeholders that standards have in some way declined, this has become something of a perennial complaint by prospective employers and society in general. Perception and reality are often two very different things, and whilst universities may feel decidedly defensive about such criticism they cannot afford to ignore legitimate grievances or concerns. In recommending the need for greater autonomy Badri sees empowerment as a means of addressing such challenges. As ever communication is of paramount importance, not only as a means of harmonization with stakeholders, but in order to ensure a free flow of information that may better inform policy decisions. One intriguing question that warrants exploration is that of gender and whether there are different expectations concerning the findings. Just as some enlightened companies offer the opportunity for exit interviews, maybe there might be scope for exit feedback forms. Equally much can be gained from the spirit of partnership and collaboration with prospective employers of graduates. This

study certainly raises some important questions, ones that will continue to exercise those in leadership and management roles not only in Algeria, but across the globe.

Where once higher education was deemed an end in itself, now there is a near universal expectation that higher education equip young people for the world of work. Our next paper: **Entrepreneurship Education and Its Concerns in South African Universities** by **Tshikovhi** and **Mvula** helps elucidate an issue that is preoccupying a range of stakeholders. Unemployment and underemployment have serious social costs and as this study makes explicit the situation in South Africa is indeed dire at present. With an unemployment rate currently running at 25% not only does South Africa compare unfavourably with other BRICS economies, it is in danger of entering a downward spiral of despair and all the social problems that go with it. It must not be forgotten that context is king and there are a range of factors that have coalesced to cause the present gloomy situation. Chief amongst these are the legacy of the Apartheid Era along with regional instability which has resulted in vast numbers of migrant workers entering South Africa and being prepared to work for considerably less than the local workforce. With neither the public nor private sector able to absorb the numbers seeking work, this study makes clear that many now are looking to higher education universities to equip the young with the appropriate skills. Entrepreneurship training has been viewed as a potential panacea, one that will imbue students with a spirit of independence. The idea has been laudable and a number of initiatives and programmes launched, yet results such as they are have proved mixed. Merely offering training is no guarantee of success. What this study reveals is that for all the good intentions the bulk of the training being offered by higher education tends to be theory based education, a classic example of leadership falling back on the familiar. Heuristic learning requires far more imagination, time, planning and resources, and thus it comes of little surprise that management and leadership have tended to opt for the simple and cheaper solutions. Yet this begs the question is theory bound entrepreneurship education really the cheaper option? If those who graduate are left unemployed it is the country as a whole which pays the price. There are countless studies that make the correlation between unemployment and social problems. Already in South Africa we are witnessing attacks on migrants, with Somalia Diaspora businesses experiencing the frustration of South Africans who feel consumed by despair and frustration. This timely study makes clear that entrepreneurship training needs to be relevant, equally there has to be an appreciation that higher education cannot be expected to be able to tackle or solve all societal ills.

Our next paper is entitled: **Implementation of Talent Management Strategies in Higher Education: Evidence from Botswana** by **Norman Rudhumba**. The greatest resource that any institution has is its staff, yet it would appear that whilst time and energy is spent in fretting about facilities and the equipment to fill them the attention given over to supporting and harnessing personnel is often at best inconsistent and at worse seemingly absent. Economic pressures mean that higher education institutions are faced with having to do more with less and thus it is imperative that the skills and talents are fully optimised. In choosing to focus on Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) this research has ventured into an area where there is a constant quest to seek competitive advantage. Busy institutions by their very nature make assumptions about those they hire to work for them, it is assumed that staff will soon

assimilate the core values of the workplace and work with positivity and purpose. Such assumptions are not unique to the realm of educational institutions, but are prevalent across the world of work. This study makes clear that right across the employee spectrum there are reservations about effectiveness what it comes to talent management. To have discovered that less than 50% of the institutions examined used systematic performance management process is highly revealing. Communication appears to be a familiar stumbling block, for if there is a lack of clarity of purpose institutions have little chance of being efficient places attuned to identifying specific skills and harnessing them accordingly. In speaking of; "A silo approach to talent management..." Rudhumba captures something of the underlying weakness, many of which stem from poor or ineffective leadership. It would have been interesting to see whether attitudes to weakness varied substantially depending on the nature of role within the institution or according to gender. This research certain should act as a wake up call, especially as more than 42% of respondents felt disengaged in some way. All organisations whether private or public have much to gain from fully utilising their staff. Roles and responsibilities are much more than a title or a job spec, they need to be defined and refined on a regular basis. No one doubts that management and leadership have many calls on their time that said, it is imperative that talent management strategies receive appropriate attention and are appropriately communicated and monitored.

The penultimate paper of this volume is entitled: **Typology of Mentoring Relationship in Nigerian Universities** by **Arugu and Nweake**. Higher Education Institutions are dependent on their staff and the ability to ensure that all have embraced the institutional ethos. In order to help support staff, reduce stress, promote socialisation and provide a way for new staff to see a way through challenges mentoring can prove invaluable. Arugu and Nweake in acknowledging the role that higher education plays in national development make a cogent and convincing case for a far greater degree of mentoring across Nigerian Universities. A 'career friend' in the form of a non-judgemental mentor has the potential to give the mentee confidence. Mentoring has benefits primarily for the mentee, but also for organisational effectiveness. Formal mentoring works at its best when it is confidential and with the mentee at its epicentre. "Off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking." (Clutterbuck and Meggison, 1999) is at the heart of the case for mentoring. This paper underscores the importance of on-going concern for all staff and the value to be gained from establishing a support mechanism that provides the emotional scaffolding that enables individuals to fulfil their potential and gain a better sense of well-being. Whilst this study makes clear that a number of informal mentoring processes take place, if Nigerian universities are to draw the best out of their human resources there is much to be gained from ensuring that formal mentoring programmes made a standard feature of life at higher education institutions.

The final paper of this volume is entitled: **Introducing a Business Plan Approach for Entry Level Academic Knowledge Transfer Activities** by **Kaapo et al.** One of the greatest challenges and potentially one of the greatest opportunities for higher education institutions is that of knowledge transfer activities, especially with the world beyond the institutions themselves. Historically there has often been an uneasy relationship between academic institutions and the world beyond. Even venerable and world renowned universities such as the

University of Oxford have struggled with the issue of 'town versus gown'. Mistrust, resentment, indifference have all played their part in the seeming stand-offs that have taken place. Thankfully, there has been a gradual realisation in recent years that all parties are the poorer for such attitudes, which makes this paper all the more stimulating and relevant. Higher Education Institutions have often been slow to capitalise on the assets that they have and whilst spasmodic efforts are occasionally made to engage community, business and other stakeholders, the channels by which knowledge is transferred are rarely formalised. In examining the existing systems that exist in a number of Albanian institutions Kappo *et al* have identified informal mechanism that exist, as well as discovered something of the potential impediments to developing more concrete mechanisms. Some academics and others in leadership and management roles are sceptical of the value of knowledge transfer, with some diehards almost viewing as engagement with the world of business as an anathema. Opportunities for joint research and the sharing of research & development (a key factor in GDP) have the potential to bring about a gradual shift in attitudes. This research makes a strong case for codification of areas for knowledge transfer, as well as making clear that this need not be an onerous task if approached in a methodical manner. Higher Education Institutions are well placed to capitalise on existing physical facilities, research and specialist personnel, something that external players are not always fully cognizant of. New technology affords a means of collating such opportunities as well as presenting a platform for engagement. As in all endeavours the value of measured communication is the key as this can help avoid misunderstandings and plays a pivotal role in changing mindsets. Such endeavours gain lasting value if grounded in a spirit of mutuality and thus those in leadership and management roles are central to the ultimate success of such initiatives. What often surprises many institutions is the fact that invariably they have initiated a number of such activities without really thinking about it, but in formalising and codifying such processes there would appear to be a great chance of lasting benefits that help consolidates the institutions relevance and viability in the modern world.

It is has been heartening to see a wide geographical spread of the articles selected to feature in this inaugural edition of IJHEM. Whilst it is encouraging to see a growing number of research papers being submitted from outside what might be called the Anglosphere, it is important that we acknowledge the challenges both for authors and reviewers alike. The world of higher education is truly international and I look forward to IJHEM continuing to play its role as a means of knowledge transfer.

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