

## International Journal of Higher Education Management (IJHEM) Volume 2 Number 2 February 2016

### Editorial Comments

This edition of the *International Journal of Higher Education Management (IJHEM)* contains eight scholarly articles conforming to the principal objective of the journal, namely the dissemination of both applied and theoretical knowledge. The papers provide a stimulating insight into a range of issues, both with local and global significance and afford us an opportunity to appreciate the way in which various individuals and institutions are wrestling with various challenges ranging from student engagement to new technology. The findings of a number of these papers are significant not only for academicians, but also for professionals, policy makers and those responsible for local, regional and national educational strategy. It is evident that whilst there is clear evidence of mankind's ingenuity in a range of circumstances, there is also evidence presented herein of a lack of foresight in a variety of sectors and areas of human endeavour.

It is especially heartening to see a marked increase in papers from outside Europe and North America being submitted for consideration for publication. Demographic indicators certainly point for a marked diminution in the influence of Europe as a whole and thus many of the thought leaders and innovators are likely to come from parts of the world which for too long have been neglected and overlooked.

IJHEM's Editorial Board is grateful to the contributors for making this journal the platform by which they have chosen to put their research into the public arena, and trust that they will use their good offices to ensure that others do the same.

The opening article deals with an issue that is of paramount importance to all those in leadership and management positions, namely the design and delivery of effective student engagement platforms. A **pedagogical perspective on online teaching** by **Kjaegaard** and **Thomsen** offers a penetrating insight into the mindset in regards to the educational approach of one of Europe's most prestigious business schools. The six pedagogical principles presented in this paper alone could serve as a significant guide for those engaged in education across the globe. Online teaching has opened a whole new front, one which whilst ripe with potential, evidently also requires considerable planning and thought if it is to be executed effectively. Rather than being an educational cure all, online teaching provides a useful mechanism where distance is involved and would appear to be a valuable supplement to existing and time honoured approaches.

A key dimension of online teaching is made explicit here when the authors write that these teaching tools; "allow students to take responsibility". Herein lies the rub of things, those in leadership roles in educational institutions should be doing all in their power to ensure that students become independent and critical learners. This paper makes it abundantly clear that this is easier said than done. Students hailing from different cultures and parts of the world have differing expectations, invariably they do not approach learning in a uniform way and whilst some feel at ease with formulating their own opinions, others are far more reticent and to some

extent reluctant to deviate from the established orthodoxy. There is no mention here of the language used as the medium of instruction, we the reader assume that for such an international institution it will be English, but even here lies a whole raft of challenges about language competency, comprehension and even connotation. A perennial concern about online learning is that it rarely provides opportunities for deep and meaningful heuristic learning. Do online courses encourage participants to become autodidacts? The fact that the Copenhagen Business School has chosen to follow a lecturer driven approach to online courses is in itself of interest, all the more so as there appears to be less prescriptive and to permit a degree of passion and individuality to permeate the programme.

By incorporating interviews with students as well as the standard feedback mechanisms an interesting dimension has been added to the research here. Additional value could well have been incorporated by some form of breakdown of findings in regard to gender and whether students were classified as mature students or not. There has been some research done in regards to gender difference in response to Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and thus this almost certainly warrants some consideration. There are also legitimate questions that should be asked about how the content is monitored with regard to its suitability for those students who may be visually or hearing impaired or be hampered by conditions such as dyslexia. The limitations raised concerning group work, whilst not surprising, provides food for thought for other institutions considering embarking on a similar initiative.

Online study affords a wealth of opportunities for data collection and data mining, which if approached in the right spirit can further enhance the experience, satisfaction and success of students. This study has proved that online teaching is a useful adjunct to mainstream teaching and furthermore can be framed in a manner that ensures that it remains true to pedagogical principles. Not every institution is likely to have the same results, primarily because the motivations for such vary so considerably. What can be said with some degree of certainty is that we are likely to witness similar developments across the education sector.

The second paper: **Effective Facilitation Methods for Online Teaching** by **Obizola** reinforces the findings of the first paper and gives some indication of the sector specific usage of online courses. The utility of such teaching should of course come with the caveat that functionality is heavily dependent on levels of connectivity as well as reasonably fast Internet speeds, important elements that are often assumed, but often far from ideal. I note with interests that the author uses the word "trend" to describe the recent phenomenon that has seen a plethora of online teaching platforms emerge. Assuming that this trend continues, it looks more than likely that more and more institutions will embrace this new teaching route either as a way of extending an institution's global footprint or as a means of saving money. Obizola makes an important point when she writes about the time and resources required to develop such learning tools, a fact that some in leadership and management roles have not fully grasped.

Mention is made of the particular suitability of online teaching platforms to the health sector, especially for those in a nursing role. Institutions such as the Duke University School of Nursing have sought to make a virtue of the fact that they recruit didactic instructors, some of whom will play a key role in online learning platforms. The UK's National Health Service (NHS) has seen online learning as a powerful learning tool across its entire portfolio (See:

[www.e.lfh.org.uk](http://www.e.lfh.org.uk)) Whilst e-learning is clearly a significant development its ultimate effectiveness does depend on the learner truly being at the centre of the process. To what degree those that construct courses fully understand the dynamics of the online learning environment is a moot point. "love of learning" whilst this sounds admirable is notoriously difficult to calibrate and whether we like it or not the powers that be that decide timings, staffing and funding seek concrete evidence, some of which is very hard to obtain. Some useful pointers are contained in this paper which reaffirm the value of blended learning. Perceived flexibility is a significant dimension that contributes to the attractiveness of online learning. Yet for all the supposed benefits, as things stand the lion's share of the resources being created are being put together by individuals who themselves have no experience themselves of having to learn online. Assumptions are often made about the learners and whilst over time the body of relevant literature in this regard will provide a more comprehensive picture of the situation on the ground, it is important to note that it is still early days. Nursing programmes still tend to be quite limited, although there are nascent signs of a number of splendid initiatives such as HEAT (Health Education and Training) bringing African health specialists together with the Open University to develop resources that are relevant and tailored to appreciate the particular dynamic and challenges prevalent in a range of developing countries.

Higher education institutions are increasingly being viewed as integral to national economic success. Where once academia and business were seen as distinctly separate entities, there has been a gradual sea-change in attitudes in recent years largely brought on by harsh economic realities and the realisation that greater co-operation and knowledge sharing is mutually beneficial. Our next paper is entitled: **Promoting a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia - Role of Universities** by Yusuf and Atassi. What is happening in Saudi Arabia certainly would appear to echo what is happening elsewhere, especially in regards to the fact that it is economic necessity that has proved to be the dynamo of change. An over-reliance on petro-dollars has stifled innovation and diversification across the Saudi economy for decades and as a consequence the Middle East powerhouse has been at the mercy of the vicissitudes of the market place, especially in regards to the global price of oil. Rather belatedly there is now a national drive to foster innovation and entrepreneurship, the latter being especially important in the light of growing rates of youth unemployment. It has been estimated that some two thirds of the Kingdom's 29 million citizens are under the age of 30. Universities and other higher education institutions are expected to play their part in helping implement what is a shift in national policy.

This paper draws our attention to the fact that Saudi Arabia has an aspiration to become one of the top ten most competitive countries. This would appear to be quite a tall order, especially in the light of the fact that according to World Economic Figures for 2014-2015 Saudi Arabia ranked 24th in the Competitive Rankings. The establishment of centres of entrepreneurship education certainly sounds like a step in the right direction, but such initiatives do not guarantee a shift in culture. For many smaller and medium sized enterprises it is not entrepreneurial spirit that is lacking, it is the access to finance and the connections that enable a business to grow and prosper.

Germaine to this topic is the role of freedom of thought, a factor that the authors themselves acknowledge is; "pertinent for the creative process". Certain cultures are innately conservative and research has shown that this stifles the ability to question and thus impedes the creative process. To what extent the current regime and its forces of control are prepared to permit the type of freedoms that are prerequisites for a thriving culture of innovation and entrepreneurship is a point for further discussion. The dead hand of patronage lies heavy on many Saudi education institutions, and whilst there may be a desire to approach things differently, the speed of change is likely to be extremely slow in some respects. Perhaps some interesting lessons could be learned from the likes of Coventry University Enterprises Ltd (CUE Ltd). The innovation ecosystem presented in this academic paper helps all concerned to visualise and appreciate the challenges that lie ahead.

The seeds of attitudes that shape those who manage to get as far as entering higher education are sown at a formative stage. The Jesuit maxim; "Give me the child for the first seven years and I'll give you the man.", whilst to some extent a point of debate, in many respects holds true. Early influences in moulding attitudes is very much at the heart of the fourth paper: **Domain identification and stereotypes: representations of scientists among Romanian elementary school students** by Thompson. There is a general acceptance that scientists as featured in popular fiction and on film have often been portrayed in a particular manner. Ever since Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley had her book *Frankenstein (The Modern Prometheus)* published in London in 1818 those who dabble in science, whether pseudo or otherwise have been viewed in a very particular and often unflattering light. This paper in seeking to understand some of the factors behind gender perceptions about science and scientists in Romania elucidates the significant role that primary educators play in shaping and to a very large extent fixing attitudes. This and other research underscores the importance of the iconography and lexicon used throughout education.

The use of the 'Draw a Scientist' (DAST) method is intriguing, although one cannot help thinking that 'Draw a Dictator' might elicit very similar findings. It is important not to underestimate the importance of local circumstances. In Romania very few primary teachers have had any real or prolonged exposure to the scientific field. The fact that scientists are generally viewed as male is probably further compounded by the fact that the one woman in Romania known to be a scientist was none other than Elena Ceaucescu, wife of the Nicolae Ceaucescu the Romanian dictator. When Romanians think of influential women they often think of her, and generally she is seen to have been a malign influence, one that brought immense discredit to the field of science.

It is regrettable that the realm of science is viewed by young children, especially by girls, as an alien environment, one that is forbidding and not for them. What is presented here, makes clear that it will take a concerted effort to change perceptions and misconceptions.

It takes a certain amount of courage and originality of thought to question the established order of things. **The fifth paper is entitled: Innovative change in the management education accreditation industry** by El Namaki. From the outset the author makes clear their concerns when they state that the; "Management education accreditation industry is an industry in trouble." The very choice of language should awaken the interest of the reader, not least

because academia and academic institutions are so accustomed to holding such a high opinion of themselves that a word such as "industry" is certain to grate in the manner that the words "being in trade" did to particular classes in former times. Accreditations have become so sought after that very few of us have stopped to question what the intrinsic worth of the accreditation and whether the criteria of such accreditation bodies is fit for purpose in 2016 and beyond. Educational institutions see the value in status and money of emblazoning websites and marketing logos and accreditation marks, but few if any would have the temerity to question whether all the hoop jumping is really valid or whether those that deign to give accreditation are as august as they would like the academic world and other stakeholders to believe.

Whilst not positing that a cabal exists El Namaki appears to have considerable misgivings about an "industry" that has become self-serving and to some degree complacent and self-satisfied. It is a fact that the main accreditation bodies are dominated and framed by the Anglosphere. The higher education sector worldwide has tended to accept things as it is and some are fearful of asking searching questions. No one is seeking to accuse the main accreditation bodies of the sought of institutional failings that have been recently laid bare at FIFA, but we would all do well to look at things afresh and be prepared to ask the sought of questions that are all too neglected due to a preoccupation with day to day activities or because they might ruffle a few feathers. Those in leadership and management roles have a duty to think differently and whether one agrees with the reservations raised by this paper or not, it is heartening to see an academic being prepared to look as well as see.

The next paper by **Ndou** and **Sebola** is entitled: **Capacity building in local government: An analysis in South Africa**. The failings of some in leadership and management roles in higher education has often been attributed to the fact that the education sector appears to delight in its apparent separateness. Where once it might have been acceptable to seek sanctuary within an ivory tower and luxuriate in the sense of intellectual isolation, now the dynamic has change to such a degree that institutions and those that run them need to be open to new ideas. This paper has some pertinent pointers for higher education, especially if it aspires to be far more than mere; "passive service providers". There are a range of useful parallels to be drawn here, especially in regards to capacity building. The definitions of capacity provided are ones the world of education would do well to take note of. Just as the situation for those operating in local government has become; "more complex and demanding", those leading and managing higher education face similar challenges.

An interesting area of focus highlighted by this research is in regards to the requirements of local government. One of these requirements is in respects to working to ensure a safe and healthy environment. Universities and educational institutions are faced by an increasing number of demands, some of which raise ethical considerations as well as concerns about restrictions on free speech. Governments, the media and society in general are asking more and more of those in leadership roles. Anyone familiar with the work of Student Rights ([www.studentrights.org.uk](http://www.studentrights.org.uk)) will recognise the sensitive nature of these issues. Higher education in South Africa and further afield has witnessed righteous indignation and outbreaks of irrational anger in the form of the Fees Must Fall Movement and the Rhodes Must Fall campaign.



In stating; "Human resource development for every organisation is critical." Ndou and Sebola remind those in leadership roles that it is beholden on them to cherish the greatest resource an institution or organisation has, namely its staff. Funding restrictions, institutional firefighting and internal politics all appear to conspire to frustrate those endeavouring to carry things forward, but it is clear that there are valuable lessons to be learnt from what is taking place elsewhere.

A key preoccupation of those in leadership and management roles is that of the formulation of litigation avoidance strategies. Fear of litigation is a key contributor to institutional inertia. There are some in educational institutions who are so fearful of implementing change that their tenure seems to be marking by sitting and occupying a position and precious little else. The Walpolean doctrine of 'letting sleeping dogs lie' appears to be very much in vogue in some quarters. One does not have to go far in universities and colleges to discover senior personnel who have opted for a laissez-faire approach. These so-called leaders appear intent on abdicating their responsibilities in their quest for a quiet life, untrammelled by the need to make decisions, or engage in the cut and thrust of the exercise of responsibility in a highly complex organisation. Difficult decisions in relation to resource allocation and risk analysis are integral to business leadership and management. The penultimate paper: **How to Excel in Analytical Decision Modelling** by **Deshmukh** examines the ways in which Excel can be optimised with a view to helping students gain a practical and relevant understanding of issues pertinent to the business environment. This heuristic approach helps consolidate and secure learning and enables learners to appreciate something of the enormity of the challenges that they face, whilst demonstrating the value of being pro-active rather prevaricating.

In a similar vein the final paper: **Creation of better template models of strategic planning and leadership control aided business simulation games based on real-life case studies and analysis tools** by **Das** addresses the importance of providing the appropriate tools and experience that enable key decision makers to better do what they are appointed to do. Some of us may well be aware of flight and skiing simulators, but business simulation is itself becoming big business. Linking back to earlier papers a growing number of institutions recognise the value and utility of simulation games, whether these be for medical training or for helping personnel tackle crisis management scenarios. As in all such simulation games it is imperative that participants appreciate that they have their limitations and yet they add a useful dimension when it comes to practical learning. The current pressures on leadership and management are such that any tool that enhances judgement and discernment is to be welcomed.



Mark T. Jones  
Managing Editor  
International Journal of Higher Education Management (IJHEM)