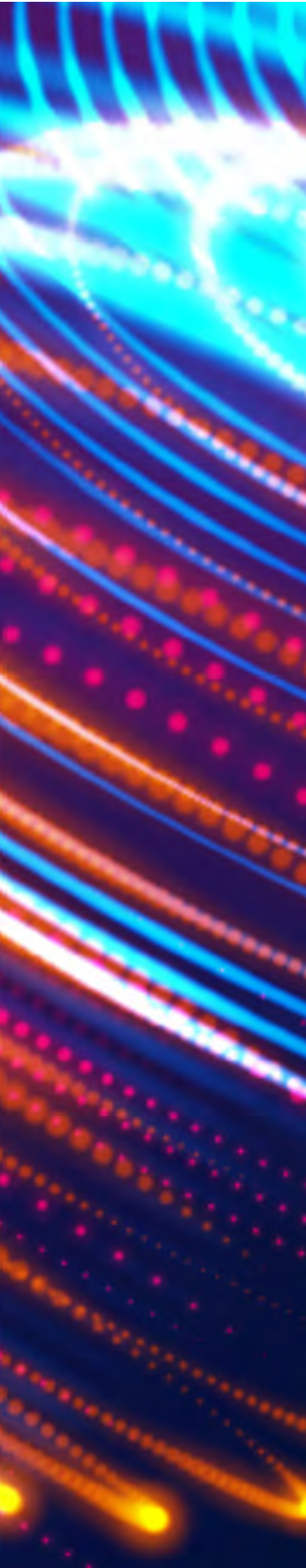


Business School Internationalisation in a Changing World

Exposure to different cultures and ways of doing business are important elements of business school education. In the face of major societal, environmental and technological transition, **Julie Perrin-Halot** and **Simon Mercado** examine how internationalisation is evolving and how more sustainable practices can be adopted



For several decades, the world's business schools have been taking a strategic approach to internationalisation. In previous articles and commentaries (e.g., Mercado & Perrin-Halot, 2018), we observed that enhanced international cooperation and capacity building stood as the most cited benefits of internationalisation at the institutional level. At the individual level, international strategies were seen widely as drivers of international learning and mobility.

Whilst these drivers remain pertinent today, the landscape has fundamentally changed and approaches to internationalisation are necessarily evolving. This evolution in the focus and character of internationalisation is taking place at a time of major societal, environmental, and technological transition. It also comes in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and in a context of heightened global instability. For many, we have entered a period of disruption and 'poly-crisis', which exposes fundamental shortcomings in our business-as-usual approaches. In higher education (HE), we are at the confluence of a world coming undone and a world reinventing itself, and there is a growing recognition that HE providers need to make a deliberate and impactful response.

Attaching to this is a critique of the last thirty years or so of sectoral internationalisation framed by such macro-level developments as the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) and the Bologna Process, which delivered a more open and harmonised European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This critique includes a questioning of a global model in which close to 6 million people move across borders annually to study for a degree or degree-related credits at a heavy environmental cost. Implicit here is a questioning of what Healey calls the export education model, in which recruiting institutions (in largely wealthy countries) contribute not only to these environmentally damaging mobility flows but also to north-south inequalities and brain-drain effects (see Healey 2023).

Towards Internationalisation 2.0

All of this creates the imperative and conditions for a new paradigm in internationalisation, which we reference here as *Internationalisation 2.0*. The case could be made for putting an end to mobility and what continues to be a determined pursuit of financially-driven internationalisation in the sector. When looking at carbon emissions generated by staff and student mobility alone, there is clearly an issue with concerns raised over the environmental impact of international flights. Surveys done with students show that low-cost flights remain far more popular than the alternatives including the costlier and more onerous rail option. When concerns over north-south inequalities and coloniality are factored in, the case against internationalisation as we have known it builds convincingly.

Yet, global challenges require global solutions. To tackle the grand challenges of our time and to take a more proactive role in addressing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, we need strong collaborations across national borders, industries, and organisations. We see in the data released in 2023 a marked correlation between international collaboration in research and the impact of that research, as measured through field-weighted citation impact. International education can be a powerful vehicle for enriching teaching and learning, and, for creating a more connected and humanist world. International mobility experience and other forms of international engagement play a fundamental role in creating global mindsets, in developing tolerance, curiosity and the capacity to interact and work across all types of differences. As higher education professionals, most of us agree that international and intercultural exposure and experience are an important part of a student's development and that eliminating this dimension risks doing more harm than good.

The question then becomes, how do we continue to include internationalisation as a fundamental part of our activities as an HEI while ensuring that our choices and impact are aligned with economic, societal, and environmental transitions?

The STRIVE framework

The STRIVE framework, shared in a first EFMD seminar on Internationalisation 2.0 in June 2023, proposes to bring clarity, method, and tools to the different dimensions of this question and plots a way forward for schools. The framework identifies six key priorities for future internationalisation, all of which intersect and correspond. The framework can give direction to business schools and their communities as they rethink and re-engineer internationalisation for a better world and environment. Behind the model is a view that we must strive to move beyond current business models and practices. The wordplay is naturally deliberate. Our approach emphasises the importance of a more responsible (R) and sustainable (S) internationalisation model, in which our practices are also deeply ethical (E) and inclusive (I). All of this points to more equitable collaborations and the pursuit of a more just and diverse higher education landscape. A key lever for this is a more transnational (T) approach to internationalisation in which partnerships are increasingly multilateral (one with many) rather than purely bilateral (one to one). A second is the adoption of new technological innovations and habits to promote what is widely referred to as virtual (V) internationalisation. Let us take a step into these six domains and priorities of the STRIVE framework (Figure 1).

“

...business schools must reorient their internationalisation models and direct them towards enhanced climate and biodiversity literacy



Sustainable (S) Internationalisation

The starting point of the model, and perhaps our core proposition, is that business schools must reorient their internationalisation models and direct them towards enhanced climate and biodiversity literacy, as well as to more sustainable business models and practices. On the one hand, sustainable internationalisation implies education and research that can help address the myriad of challenges around climate change and biodiversity, bringing in knowledge and science from outside of the traditional business disciplines. On the other hand, it demands that schools themselves are walking the talk through greener policy and action. This change in institutional behaviour is difficult to realise in the context of a continuing commitment to physical mobility of persons, but there are certain actions that





Figure 1. The STRIVE framework

can and must follow, such as focusing more on longer-term mobility, virtual supplements to physical mobility, and that which delivers the highest value-add. Other options include the introduction of carbon passport schemes (limiting total travel), systemic CO2 footprint measurement and quota setting, and/or carbon emission off-set initiatives. Whatever the approach or methodology, attacking the environmental cost of staff and student mobility is an important step, which should involve environmental plans to minimise the carbon footprint of international travel and wider international engagement. To help schools address these imperatives, potential reference points include the spectrum of UN Sustainable Development Goals, peer-generated guidelines such as the net-zero promoting CANIE Accord, Green ERASMUS directives, and other national and international frameworks.

Sustainable internationalisation presupposes that business schools are using internationalisation to create greater awareness among their stakeholders around the broader societal, environmental, and economic issues that the planet and its populations are facing. In its widest sense, sustainable internationalisation means that those engaging are fully cognisant of the impact of their choices of location, of mode of travel, and of the lifestyle they are leading in their destination of choice. It involves critical thinking about cultural, developmental and economic differences and pushes participants to reflect on how for each personal internationalisation project, they can create positive value and impact.

Transnational (T) Internationalisation

Already, business schools have moved beyond an era of bilateral (1-2-1) cooperation agreements into more diverse and multilateral networks. These range from funded consortia projects through to common interest networks such as RRBM, EQUAL, PRIME, GBSN and GRLI. In terms of their ability to deliver joint actions (in education and research) and intelligence sharing, these networks are paving the way to new initiatives and means of understanding and addressing our grand challenges.



1-2-1

Already, business schools have moved beyond an era of bilateral (1-2-1) cooperation agreements into more diverse and multilateral networks

In our view, business schools will need more engagements of this type to realise their missions, to secure funding, and to address the issues they should be tackling. They should effect internal changes that allow them to pool resources, credits, and capacities with other institutions more easily. In all such cases, we see the potential in combined expertise and resources for imagining new scenarios and creating the conditions necessary for making impactful and lasting change.

It is noteworthy here that the European Commission has prioritised transnational engagement through new European University Alliances focused on inter-university degrees, campuses, and research projects. These are envisaged to involve more than 500 HEIs in 60 or more groupings. The broad idea is to strengthen the international dimension of higher education and research and to empower universities as key actors of change in the twin green and digital transitions.

Responsible (R) Internationalisation

Our first interpretation of the concept of responsible internationalisation is that international actions, programmes and projects should support institutional commitment to social responsibility and equity. In the same vein, research and education should focus where possible on responsible citizenship and leadership. Responsible internationalisation also requires an explicit focus on inclusion and ethical behaviour which we address in subsequent sections.



Institutions can play their part by creating systems to ensure that students and staff on mobility are aware of the carbon costs of their activity



Responsible internationalisation also entails a sense of personal responsibility for each individual engaged in an international activity, with reflexes around impact assessment and evaluation. Institutions can play their part by creating systems to ensure that students and staff on mobility are aware of the carbon costs of their activity and have options available to reduce that as far as possible. They should also be primed to identify and seize opportunities for positive impact wherever they go.

Increasingly important and often overlooked is the fact that institutions have a responsibility for the safety and well-being of their inbound and outbound mobile participants. In the most basic sense, risk management and mitigation should be the institutional norm with specific attention to the relationship between risk and international activity. Systems and processes must be in place for rapid and effective action if a student or staff member on mobility for the school is in a situation that threatens their health or safety.



Inclusive (I) Internationalisation

An inclusive approach must correct the, sometimes exclusive, nature of current internationalisation policies and practices. For example, degree- or credit-based international student mobility is a socially selective process, whereby students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to participate. As put by two leading commentators, “while credit and degree mobility is increasing globally, this billion-dollar industry reaches only a small student elite, leaving 99% of the world’s student population behind” (de Wit and Jones, 2018:16).

With a focus on greater equity of access, inclusive internationalisation must look to bring international education and experience to a broader group of students, lowering costs and access barriers. Rather than bringing

international learners across borders at high cost, institutions can move to local markets to provide their courses in country or online. In terms of more traditional mobility, institutions must also look at financial support for international students and at their pricing strategies, which too often impose discriminatory fees and/or higher prices on international students versus their domestic counterparts.

The inclusive internationalisation agenda also includes the development of effective strategies for internationalisation at home (IaH) focused on international activities at the home institution for staff and students who do not travel. It also requires that business schools promote, harness, and respond to diversity in learner and staff populations, recognising and validating different backgrounds and perspectives. Here, challenges range from inclusive curriculum design through to inclusive teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

Virtual (V) Internationalisation

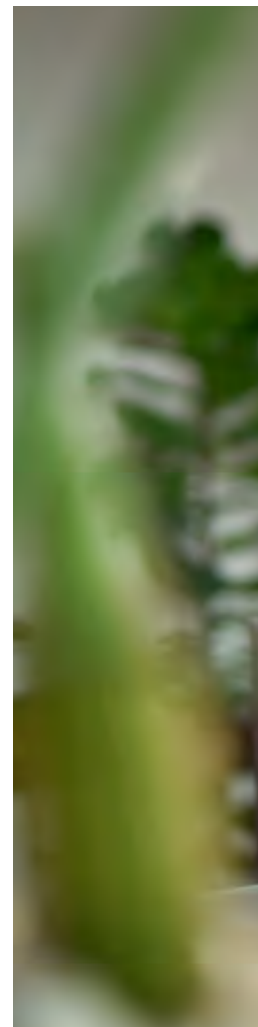
Internationalisation of higher education has been naturally affected by the development of digital technologies and e-learning markets. Online learning already had an established place in the global market before the COVID-19 pandemic turbo-charged technology adoption and virtual internationalisation. Virtual pathways to internationalisation can include online distance learning (at least that part of which takes place across borders), virtual exchange, and online collaborative international learning (COIL). What has become apparent is that virtual exchange and mobility can supplement and at times replace physical mobility, taking a place in hybrid mobility strategies that deliver internationalisation to a wider population and help institutions to reduce their carbon footprint. Of course, it is doubtful that virtual exchange and mobility can replace in-person experiences in terms of cultural immersion and personal development. That said, VE can offer students authentic intercultural learning experiences and can contribute to the more sustainable and inclusive internationalisation approaches we advocate.



Ethical & Equitable (E) Internationalisation

The span of considerations here is vast. At the highest level, institutions will need to make difficult decisions about the ethics of engaging with entities in specific states and regions subject to international censure or restrictions. In recent times, business schools have faced challenges of this type within their partnership portfolios (e.g., links to Russian business schools and their partners). Complex issues surround partnering in countries with strongly conflicting value sets. For certain, business schools and their parent institutions must engage in internationalisation that prioritises the well-being, equity, and ethical considerations of all those involved, both from the school side as well as in the host location. This is a values-based approach and must be built on many of the elements shared throughout the framework above. Ethical and equitable internationalisation means that schools approach partnerships where values are aligned, and cultural sensitivity is practiced in both directions. It also means providing equal opportunity to all those wanting to participate in internationalisation activities. Accountability and transparency are critical as are strategies to mitigate potential negative impact - codes of ethics have their place here.

An ethical approach to internationalisation also includes a commitment to protecting the rights and interests of international students as cross-border subjects prone to specific risks. It may not be possible or easy to de-risk the sectoral ecosystem for all parties, but some concrete measures are necessary to ensure such things as personal data protection and the quality of intermediaries. The international recruitment agency system is one area of specific concern. The sales agent-student-HEI relationship is a complex one and whilst HEIs can work successfully and transparently with sales agents validating their quality and regulating many of their actions, concerns are building across the industry over the use of sub-agents and agent aggregators. Here, reputable institutions should move with care and act with full transparency. An ethical approach to internationalisation also means that institutions should distance themselves from any form of mis-advertising or mis-selling, however competitive the landscape. Question marks exist over the ethicality of everything from pay-and-play rankings to the bamboozling of student buyers with claims around graduate employability rates often not fully informed by data on international student placement.





“”

International and intercultural awareness and sensitivity are more important than ever

Our STRIVE framework can be utilised to revisit existing practices and define future models and strategies. The key to this framework is its inherent transversality, both in terms of a comprehensive approach to internationalisation and the requirement for collaboration between different parts of the institution. Internationalisation should be ‘connective tissue’ cutting across activities, disciplines, and departments. Only through this transversal approach will the six elements come to life and deliver needed results.

The next edition of the workshop on Rethinking your International Strategy will take place in June 2024. More details can be found <https://events.efmdglobal.org/events/2024-re-thinking-internationalisation/>, or email Marketa Dvorackova at marketa.dvorackova@efmdglobal.org for further information.



Conclusion

We remain committed to the preservation of internationalisation within our business school activities. International and intercultural awareness and sensitivity are more important than ever. Nonetheless, yesterday’s practices need rethinking to ensure that tomorrow’s internationalisation addresses the grand challenges of our time and focuses on positive societal impact. The degree to which this constitutes a real and lasting paradigm shift (Internationalisation 2.0?) will reveal itself over time. It is at least encouraging to see the genuine efforts of our schools to be agents of positive change and to reimagine internationalisation.

gf

About the Authors

Julie Perrin-Halot is Associate Dean/Director Accreditations, Sustainability and Strategic Planning at Grenoble Ecole de Management, Grenoble, France.

Professor Simon Mercado is Executive Vice President and Dean for Global Affairs, ESCP Business School.

References:

- De Wit, H. and E. Jones (2018) *Inclusive Internationalization: Improving Access and Equity*, *International Higher Education*, 94, pp.16-18.
- Healey, N.M. (2023) *Reinventing International Higher Education for a Socially Just, Sustainable World*, *Perspectives: Policy & Practice in Higher Education*, 27(4) pp.169-178.
- Mercado, S.A. and J. Perrin-Halot (2019) *A Strategy for Business School Internationalisation*, *BGA/Business Impact*, issue 01 pp.26-29
- Mercado, S.A. and J. Perrin-Halot (2017) *Making International Collaboration Work*, *EFMD Global Focus*, 11(3) pp.42-45.