

Concept Paper

Global Strategic Partnerships – A New Paradigm for Academic Institution

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Introduction

- Spur in the demand for education particularly in BRIC and MINT countries has expanded the global educational market.
- According to OECD findings, number of students enrolled into higher education outside of their country of residence has doubled since the year 2000 and aforesaid countries have been exceptionally successful in attracting foreign students, increase being 241% in Asia, and 279% in Oceania.
- Technology has made it easier for the students to explore, discover and apply for international opportunities and benefit from them at home as well.

Introduction (Contd..)

- To meet increasing aspirations of students, the institutions of higher learning are establishing strategic partnerships with academic institutions in different geographical regions of the globe.
- Thus an important issue is 'how do we identify appropriate partners'?
- Another important element is 'how do we make these partnerships strategic'?
- Typically, an institution in one country aims to collaborate in many academic and non-academic fields with a single institution or highly selected group of institutions to achieve mutually beneficial objectives.

Introduction (Contd..)

- Objectives might be enhancing research, develop joint curriculum and teaching programs, or just exchanging best practices of management.
- Strategically, the institutes collaborate with highly reputed international partners, thus making them more international.
- However, non-strategic partnerships are as essential as the strategic ones in defining an institution's international stature.
- However, such partnerships are rarely considered as illustrating international quality.

Introduction (Contd..)

- Non-strategic partnership initially are useful to various departments individually and the institution as a whole
- Non strategic partnerships act as a stepping stone to internationality and act as a pool out of which the next level of strategic partnerships are derived.
- Strategic partnerships drive a rising need for innovations in branding, standing out in order to be an attractive destination for partners and students in the crowded global education market.
- Traditionally institutes with strong brands and international rankings have been the winners, while institutes outside this sphere remain fairly unknown on the international scene.

How do we define strategic partnerships?

- The term ‘strategic partnership’ suggests similar motives exist among participants for initiating the partnerships.
- A partnership is usually labeled with the adjective “strategic” if it covers more areas of cooperation or reaches a certain level of depth or performance track.
- However, it camouflages the details of an institution’s strategy as to what exactly one hopes to achieve with international partnerships beyond publicity and in which specific areas it wants to cooperate.

How do we define strategic partnerships? (Contd..)

- Ambiguities in understanding 'strategic partnership' act as a hindrance for measuring success and inhibits creativity thereby leading to stagnancy on one hand and potentiality on the other.
- Quite often the so called 'strategic partners' are intimately connected to one's own institution- the ones who have worked with for some time.
- Overemphasizing one's own interests and not taking the potential difference of purposes into cognizance can be detrimental to the relationship as a whole.

How do we define strategic partnerships? (Contd..)

- Yet all these concerns may remain unspoken and hence unattended.
- Without clarity on strategic partnerships it becomes difficult to motivate institutions to engage in them.
- Nonetheless, not many institutions are able to measure the success or failure of strategic partnerships as the above-mentioned multi-faceted situation presents quite a complex picture.

Selecting and Managing Partnerships

- Finding the right strategic partner is challenging for institutions/universities of any size, but this can be particularly significant for smaller institutions/universities.
- Once the international relations department of an institute identifies potential partners that share common academic programmes and international goals, it becomes important to identify key faculty and personnel who will spearhead the proposed international initiatives.

Selecting and Managing Partnerships (Contd...)

- Prospective partners must share a mutually agreed vision and purpose of their cooperation.
- Partners need to have a similar profile in terms of research and education portfolio and should aspire to add up to their capacities to get better and international results.
- “Diversity is delightful” principle could be a driving force of forming strategic partnership.

Selecting and Managing Partnerships (Contd...)

- Partners should complement each other's different portfolio and capacities - enabling synergy and innovation.
- The compatibility of the size and culture of the two institutions must also be assessed.
- Knowing the number of students and employees as well as class size at each institution is helpful.
- If these numbers vary greatly, the partnership can still work, but it might be challenging.

Selecting and Managing Partnerships (Contd...)

- For instance, 'Are the students used to being one of the hundred students in a large lecture hall, or are they used to small interactive classes'?
- How mobile and independent are the students and faculty at each institution?
- Are they located in a city or country that your students and faculty would find interesting?
- A large institute in a large city might not be the best match for a small institute in a small town because it might be difficult to maintain a reciprocal partnership.

Selecting and Managing Partnerships (Contd...)

- Students and faculty from smaller institutes are also accustomed to having a great deal of personal attention and knowing exactly whom in their institute they can reach out to if they have a particular question or problem.
- In addition, if students of smaller institutions are accustomed to living on or very near their institute's campus, larger institutions can address concerns of accommodation to the students by clearly explaining what housing arrangements are available, preferably with photographs, how much will it cost and what is included in that cost.

Guidelines for making partnerships successful

- After ensuring that the two institutes' cultures and goals mesh, potential partners can begin discussing about their 'study abroad programs', types of programs and courses that they would like to offer, faculty research interests, and expected outcomes for study, teaching, and research abroad.
- There needs to be a good match between these interests and expected outcomes.

Guidelines for making partnerships successful (Contd..)

- It is also essential to ask the potential partner as to how many current active international partnerships they have and how much time and other resources they are able and willing to invest in developing a partnership with your institute.
- Many times it is observed that after going through an extensive task of formulating an agreement, it is found that your institute's partnership is not a priority.

Guidelines for making partnerships successful (Contd..)

- To begin with, undertaking small projects jointly can be an important consideration.
- Even if your mid-term objective is a more grandiose one, for example a joint degree program.
- Once the small-scale programs have been initiated and assessed, for instance a joint certificate program, the partnership can develop into full-semester or year-long exchanges, faculty research projects, and more.

Guidelines for making partnerships successful (Contd..)

- Developing strong personal relationships between the individuals involved in partnership will also help the programs to continue as there will be a lot of understanding and mutual support for each other as well as dedication to the program.
- It is also essential to have the personal commitment of top management.
- At the end of the day they are the one to provide funding, human resources and sometimes to break through walls ensuring the joint projects' success.

Guidelines for making partnerships successful (Contd..)

- Successful partnerships involve different stakeholders from their environment.
- Higher education institutions do not function in a vacuum, they are in constant interaction with the local and regional society, economy and business, sometimes even with politics.
- These actors should be invited to have an insight and contribute to the significant activities of a strategic partnership.

Guidelines for making partnerships successful (Contd..)

- Let's say partner higher education institutions consult prospective regional employers about qualification requirements of a new dual degree program; promise interns to NGOs, invite executives and opinion leaders to hold lectures, etc.
- It is crucial for international relations managers to meet frequently faculty champions committed to the international program's success and to maintain consistent communication with the team.

Guidelines for making partnerships successful (Contd..)

- It may involve tremendous traveling and accommodation expenses, thus there is a need for strategic partners to use highly developed ICT techniques to bridge communication gap.
- E-learning and other solutions are also getting more and more popular in teaching as well.
- If institutions do their homework and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the partner institutions, it can result into very productive partnerships.

Guidelines for making partnerships successful (Contd..)

- It is also important to be patient and stay positive.
- Just because a program does not run as expected during one semester does not mean that it will not succeed at all.
- It is important that the institution plans program reciprocity and perform continual assessments and adjustments to make the partnership sustainable.

How do we measure the success rate?

- It is important to have more quantified data about the benefits of partnerships and more indicators defining how they help realize an institute's missions
- The research indicates that very few institutions actually are able to collate information useful in measuring the contribution of international partnerships.
- If we invest time, personnel, and money into strategic partnerships and expect success, we must measure them more effectively and be able to analyze the results.
- It is important to have a yardstick to measure and document success or failure of internationalization.

How do we measure the success rate?

(Contd..)

- Various criteria might be measured among the following activities: increased mobility of scholars and students, number of joint publications, workshops and summer schools involving scholars and students, shared research projects, additional third-party research funding, joint degrees, conferences at student and scholar levels, internships, shared language training, staff exchanges, as well as co- and e- teaching activities.
- The simultaneous presence of many of these international modes of cooperation is an indicator that it is a special partner or a group of partners with which it will be advantageous to develop more possibilities.

How do we measure the success rate?

(Contd..)

- At the end of every year we should reach the agreed numbers instead of only looking at the numbers exchanged and summer schools held. This is what defines the success of strategic partnerships.
- A fair indicator system of internationalization helps support the strategy and measures contribution to individual and institutional success.
- It makes the teaching staff feel that they have the opportunity to develop their own career in terms of publications, academic excellence, while maybe having a good time as well.

How do we measure the success rate?

(Contd..)

- It also gets reflected in the institution getting more attractive for prospective students and employers.
- Internationally its reputation increases by way of ranking, attracting better quality students, meeting national or international program accreditation criteria etc.

Is success a relative term?

- Apparently, success seems to be relative term that is variable only to a particular institute.
- One can maneuver between several international variables such as extent of students and faculty mobility, research workshops, projects, rankings etc.
- There are stories of internationalization describing complex projects of cooperation including what may be called as 'event internationalization'-the production of highly publicized one-time international event using public relations as a means to demonstrate the university's international quality though on an ad-hoc basis.

Is success a relative term? (Contd..)

- Academic institutes focusing more on students' activities will emphasize on students' mobility and joint degrees whereas those more focused on research excellence will showcase joint research activities with international partners, research based guest scholars and the like.
- Therefore, in measuring the quality of strategic partnerships, two variations of the identical activities will be encountered.
- It may happen that one partner considers the partnership successful while the other does not consider so, depending on the context of the criteria they are applying.

Are partnerships shortcuts to success?

- In view of the multi-faceted and complex situation, why do academic institutions enter into strategic partnerships?
- There are a number of well-defined motives other than the fact that having a strategic partner seems to provide a defined path to every university or an institute's official international stance.
- One of the most common reasons for engaging in strategic partnerships is that institutions enhance their reputation and credibility in the glory of their partner's reputation and credibility.

Are partnerships shortcuts to success?

(Contd..)

- Moreover, as the need for research necessitates the engagement of scholars from multiple disciplines and academic institutions, it is felt that the academic institutions can co-create scholarly experience by joining learning and research resources with international partners.
- The idea of partnering is also seen as a method of optimizing one's institute's use of third party financial resources for funding research projects.

Are partnerships shortcuts to success?

(Contd..)

- However, many academic institutions use strategic partnerships as shortcuts in communicating their strategy for internationalization.
- The strategic partnership becomes the figurehead for international partnership that is assumed but does not necessarily get exhibited.

Ease of Funding

- A strategic partnership may also be used as a way to focus faculty interest on certain institutes only especially if the partners allocate certain funds for sustaining collaborations.
- It is observed that with such alliances firmly in place funding becomes readily available.
- For instance, the European Union in the framework of the new ERASMUS+ program created two instruments within Key Action 2, which are dedicated to support international cooperation of HEIs.

Ease of Funding (Contd..)

- In this context “Strategic partnership” instrument provides funding for consortia of at least three HEIs from the EU member states to develop innovative quality educational programs equipped with new learning and teaching methods.
- By the year 2020 the target is to involve at least 125,000 institutions into the program.
- “Capacity building” instrument gives incentives to European HEIs to create consortia with HEIs of developing countries and assist them in modernization of their curriculum and administrative capacity.

Ease of Funding (Contd..)

- This initiative has a budget of 125 million Euros to support these activities in the next 7 years.
- In addition to the European way of thinking, national governments also believe that internationalization is in favor of enhancing quality of education.
- For example, Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (OeAD-GmbH) has a funding mechanism which focuses on the development of strategic partnerships.

Transparency-An important prerequisite

- In order to get the maximum mileage out of strategic partnerships, it is important for the partners to define what they propose to get out of the partnership.
- The willingness to engage and the financial investment are no substitute for projecting possible advantages both in research and in teaching cooperation.
- Quite often, there are ambiguities in the agreement and assumptions are made on both sides, hindering close cooperation.
- For instance, the need for providing tuition waivers by the host institution for the students coming from partner institution can create unforeseen problems if one does not negotiate around this fact.

Benefits and Pay-offs

- Clarity about the expectations and realization that there will not be any significant pay-offs in the short-term are essential preconditions to entering into strategic partnerships.
- Though these partnerships will increase the international visibility of an institution but the main benefits will only become clear in the long term, and require investment.
- To view strategic partnerships as experiments at all levels of interaction is the most useful stand an institution can take and it will involve having administrators, scholars, and students who will act as a catalyst in pushing the partnership forward.

Benefits and Pay-offs (Contd..)

- It will also involve reviewing the development on a regular basis and being willing to readjust the focus of the relationship.
- Such experimentations on an ongoing basis and flexible attitudes will certainly make measuring results more difficult, but it is necessary if the institutions want to avoid wasting their resources.

Conclusion

- Institutions around the world have been partnering with each other since quite some time but what is different today is the increasing pressure to invest in mutually beneficial and sustainable partnerships.
- The future belongs to those institutions, who are capable of establishing state-of-art alliances, and not to those, who wish to reach excellency on their own and store their knowledge within an elephant bone tower.
- Institutions are looking to do it right and well. Gone are the days of fruitless, inactive agreements and superficial handshakes.

Conclusion (Contd..)

- Today's partners focus on strategy, intentionality, and results, often requiring specific expertise in navigating through collaborative agreements.
- The interest in increased student and faculty mobility continues to be the driving force behind initiating higher education partnerships.
- Notwithstanding the same, institutions are now identifying many new areas and frameworks for international research collaborations.
- One of the more complex forms of international collaboration is emerging trend of joint and double degree programmes.

Conclusion (Contd..)

- While many institutions find it challenging to organize, the collaborative degree programs continue to gain traction around the world partly because they offer opportunities to build strong academic and institutional partnerships.
- Strategic international partners share best practices and align their goals across campuses so that the experiences of students, faculty, staff and administrators are interwoven and share a common international fiber.
- Most of all, these partnerships act as a catalyst for internationalizing the campus, projecting institutions onto global stage through study abroad programs, faculty exchanges, joint research, dual degrees, and other collaborative activities.

Conclusion (Contd..)

- With increased interest, research and awareness about the ever growing phenomenon of international partnership, one can expect to see many more fruitful, mutually beneficial international partnerships and sustained educational relationships across national boundaries.
- Further, international collaborations can incredibly be enriching for the institutions provided cultural differences are clearly acknowledged and agreements are made about how to work around ethical issues that affect collaboration between institutions, failing which certain crucial issues can arise.

Conclusion (Contd..)

- What happens when one partner's cultural customs or operating procedures conflict with practices, values, ethical principles, and/or laws of the other?
- For instance, if one partner believes that women should not be admitted to a joint program, or certain ethnic groups should not have access, should local customs be honored?
- Finally, awareness of cultural differences while offering clarity about one's ethical position makes for successful cultural interaction that helps sustain partnerships over time.

Q & A

Thank You