

An Investigation into International Business Collaboration in Higher Education Organisations: A Case Study of International Partnerships in Four UK Leading Universities

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Abstract

Purpose- The purpose of this paper is to develop a comparative analysis of the main objectives of international institutional partnerships in four UK leading universities. Based on the presented case studies, the paper outlines a model for objectives and implementation of international partnership.

Methodology/ Approach- Using a multiple case study approach, the paper employs three sources of data: templates of international partnerships, actual agreements of international partnerships and interviews with senior and very senior managers concerned of internationalisation at the four universities. The analysis includes inter-university comparative analysis and templates-agreements-interviews comparative analysis for each of the four universities separately.

Findings- It is found that, for the four universities, the objectives of international partnerships are related to both students and staff with relative importance given to the student dimension. While the student dimension refers to any overseas partnerships where the core topic of the partnership is the student whether it is related to student exchange, collaborative programs, student recruitment, etc; the staff dimension refers to any overseas partnerships that are more related to the staff topic, such as joint research, collaborative teaching, staff exchange, etc.

Implications- The comparative analysis of templates- agreements-interviews show some gaps in international strategy design on one of the universities, and some gaps in international strategy implementation in the other three universities.

Practical implications- The comparative analysis is developed into a model for international strategy design and implementation. This model can assess university managers in running their international business.

Value of paper- The paper highlights the importance of adopting a realistic strategy by university managers. The realistic strategy is the strategy that gives equivalent attention to the two dimensions: the design and the implementation.

Keywords- Globalisation, strategy design, strategy implementation, UK universities, qualitative analysis, partnerships, case study.

Paper type- Research paper

Introduction

Since the 1990s, universities world-wide have become more internationally active through increased student mobility, staff exchange and the increasingly international dimension of the curricula. In UK universities and colleges there has been an expansion in international activities primarily represented by international partnerships. Internationalisation in UK higher education could be seen as the inevitable result of different factors. According to Rudzki (2000) these may include: changes in government policy concerning the status of foreign students; the need to undertake collaborative research; the introduction of the European Commission's ERASMUS mobility program; the search for additional funding that arose in consequence of reduced funding from the central government; and the pursuit of excellence. A survey done by CVCP (1998) shows that most universities in UK have

an international strategy; 73% of universities reported that their institutional missions included an international strategy. The survey found that for these strategies, the main priority over the next five years is the recruitment of international students.

There are now more international visits, attachments and exchanges, research collaborations, and cooperation or franchising agreements, and a more active international market in overseas student and staff recruitment (Craft et al, 1998). Green (1997) suggests that national education systems have been partially internationalised through increased student and staff mobility, through widespread policy borrowing and through attempts to enhance the international dimension of curricula in secondary and higher levels. Taylor et al (1997) argues that the likely role of international universities includes matters of pedagogy and curriculum, certification, decision-making and governance, the student body itself as well as policy making arenas.

Bowen (2000) argues that the post-Cold War world presents an ideal opportunity to make global education the glue of alliances, relationships, and trans-national dealings. Saffu and Mamman (1999) view strategic alliances as collaborative relationship between a local university and an overseas counterpart, which may be public or private, encompassing agreements to co-operate in joint activities such as the development of onshore or offshore offerings, teaching, research and consultancy, technology and, marketing new or existing courses to a new market. According to Chan (2004) universities today form linkages with each other in order to be able to compete. Massification and marketisation of higher education, as she suggests, have led to severe competition and globalisation, and has also led to more and more

strategic alliances among multiple partners across national borders. Karren (1998) argues that within the developing global knowledge economy, universities are now competing with each other and also with private sector training providers, and they are establishing new partnerships with other universities, both to pool expertise and develop critical mass to compete within an international arena.

Managers of the university through the approach of strategic management can play the main role of leading their institutions towards the international market. International strategic management involves creating and adopting a strategy of internationalisation for the university. The strategy of international partnerships in universities is built around the main strategic motivations and objectives the university is looking to achieve by implementing this strategy.

Objectives of international partnerships in universities have different forms. In a study of EU-US inter-university co-operation, Harper (1995) finds that the main objectives of this network are to develop a joint educational projects and joint degree program in international business and marketing, and this covers student exchanges, staff exchanges, curriculum development initiatives, joint educational projects and development in distance learning. In a study of overseas partnerships activities within Australian universities, Saffu & Mamman (2000) find that the universities surveyed listed study abroad and student exchange as very important, followed by collaboration in research and consultancy, twinning and staff exchange, and offshore programs. Smith (1985) thinks that co-operation between universities falls into three main categories: the movement of students from one European country to another; similar movements of academic staff for purposes of teaching and research; and a final range

of activities which one might characterize as institutional development and the sharing of resources and experience.

In a study of academic cooperation between UK and Brazil, Canto and Hannah (2001) find that the academic collaboration between UK and Brazil covers postgraduate levels, research projects, and staff exchange. They suggest that from the Brazilian perspective this alliance is an opportunity to establish joint research programs and other activities that moved beyond traditional forms of north-south cooperation to link academics from both countries in a genuine and mutually beneficial partnership. In the same context, Audenhove (1998) argues that institutions in the North consider entering linkages with a view to joint research; the possibilities of collecting data; the internationalisation of education; financial and personal considerations and international solidarity with developing countries. Institutions in the South may take part in linkage agreements for the sake of institutional development; joint research; and the support of courses; training of staff; pure financial or infrastructure support and the possibility of academic contacts. In a study to the nature of collaborative programs in the business subject, King (1994) finds that the main activities of the collaboration between Humberside University and Australian university are students exchange and curriculum matters, and research for business sector administrative cooperation. In a study of the international entrepreneurial activities that Australian universities and their faculties of business undertake. Poole (2001) finds that these activities include the traditional strategies of recruitment of fee-paying by international students and strategies of establishing full offshore campuses; distance education in partnership with overseas or local universities.

As cited in Beerkens (2002), an initial categorization of international arrangements comes from Neave (1992) who presents the different forms of cooperation as five stages in network development: monodisciplinary linkages; exchange partnerships; network partnerships; multidisciplinary networks and consortia. On the basis of a description of thirty seven European and fourteen international arrangements in the field of higher education, Wächter (2000) presents a categorisation of associations in higher education consisting of five groups: associations of higher education institutions; associations of associations from higher education; associations composed of individual members; regional associations and associations with members from outside and inside higher education (Beerkens, 2002). Pritchard (1993) suggests six major forms and objectives of linkage which have evolved in British Higher Education as follows: special purpose co-operation, affiliation between a major and a minor institution, franchising, accreditation and validation, access, joint research and joint teaching.

As cited in (Brown, 1997), the QAA has identified one or more of the following as characterising overseas collaborative provision in higher education: 1- The award of a degree or other qualification of the UK institution to students studying for all or part of their program through an overseas partner. 2- The provision by the overseas partner of all or part of the program of study franchised to it by the UK institution. 3- The provision of a program of study designed and taught by an overseas institution, which has been approved or validated by a UK institution. 4- Direct entry, or entry with advanced standing, of students at UK institutions by virtue of their satisfactory progress in approved programs in an overseas partner institution. 5- Preferential or non-preferential consideration of applicants to study at a UK institution by virtue of

their satisfactory completion of a preparatory or foundation course provided by an overseas partner. 6- The facilitation by an overseas partner of distance learning programs offered by the UK institutions. 7- Any other association which allows an overseas institution to use the name of a UK institution, or to refer to an award of that UK institution in any context.

The purpose of this paper is to make a comparative analysis of the main objectives of international business partnerships in four UK leading universities. The four universities are arbitrarily named A, B, C, and D in this paper in order to maintain objectivity of this research work. The four universities are members of Russell Group, a group of civic universities established in 1994. The four universities are very similar in size, research, teaching, reputation, total income and age. In terms of international activities, they have similar percentage of international students, market share of international students, and income from overseas operations. In terms of their international missions represented mainly by their missions' statements, the four universities are described to be similar in their international dimension highlighted in the mission statements (for more international characteristics describing each university see Table I).

Table (1): The main international characteristics of the four universities.

*Source: HESA (2000/2001), numbers are approximate to provide general comparative characteristic

	University (A)	University (B)	University (C)	University (D)
Approximate market share of overseas first year students *	1.1%	2.3%	1.5%	2.4 %
Overseas (non-EC) domicile approximate income from fees* (millions)	10	22	15	12
Total income* (millions)	19	24	22	17
% of overseas income to the total income (approximate)*	5%	9%	7%	7%
Total number of overseas students (non-European, thousands) *	1.5	3	2	2.7
Total number of higher education students (thousands)*	20	27	24	24
% of overseas (non-European) students*	7%	12%	9%	12%

The aim of the study is to define the main objectives of international institutional partnerships in UK universities. This aim has been investigated via the following five questions:

1. What are the objectives as they are mentioned in the international partnerships' agreements for each university?
2. What are these objectives as they are highlighted in the initial templates of international partnerships' agreements?
3. What are these objectives as the managers of the four universities suggest?
4. Is there a constructive alignment between agreements, templates, and interviews data?
5. Where does the main gap between strategy design and strategy implementation in the four universities exist?

The Methodology

This research work is based on data collected from four leading UK universities. For each case, the authors consider two main sources of data. The first source is the documentary data, and the second source of data is collected through semi-structured interviews. Documentary data is considered to be one of the best sources of data. Silverman (1999) argues that words are important simply as a jumping-off point for the real analysis; he suggests that where texts are analysed, they are usually presented as (official) or (common sense) versions of social phenomena. In relation to the phenomenon of international institutional partnerships, the authors divide documentary data into two kinds of documents: the first comprised a basic agreement style for each case (template); the second comprised copies of overseas institutional agreements. The agreements were in total count 435 overseas partnership agreements, approximately 115 from University B, ninety from University D, eighty from University A, and 150 from University C. The analysis of documentary and agreements data is found useful in order to get an initial understanding of the actual objectives of international partnerships for each University. It has been also helpful in defining the most appropriate managers at each level with whom to conduct the interviews for collecting further information and data.

The other source of data was the interviews with eight business managers, and with sixteen senior managers at the four universities. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way and lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. All interviews were transcribed, coded, and each code was given a number related to each case. Using a computer software, the codes were classified and divided into simple codes to situate them into a comparative position with the templates and the actual agreements.

The paper denotes any manager or senior officer who is responsible for the implementation of the international strategy as a business manager; including Head of International Marketing, Study Abroad Manager, Deputy of the Registrar, Regional Senior Officer. The senior managers' interviews dominate the whole source of interview data where the authors conducted sixteen interviews with very senior and senior managers in the four cases. Senior managers are managers who are responsible for forming and leading the international vision, mission, and strategy for each university, this in general includes the Vice Chancellor, the Pro Vice Chancellor for International Affairs, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Head of Student Recruitment, the International Office Director, and other senior managers in the case of University B. The International Office Director who was the key element in each case was considered as senior level manager rather than business manager level as mentioned before. For more information about the interviewees see Table (II).

Table (II): List of interviewees of each university

University	University (A)	University (B)	University (C)	University (D)
Title				
Vice Chancellor	√	√		
Deputy Vice Chancellor				√
Pro Vice Chancellor for International Affairs		√	√	
Other Pro Vice Chancellors	√	√√		
Former very senior manager		√		
Registrar		√		√
Deputy Registrar		√		
Head of Student Recruitment			√	
International Office Manager	√	√	√	√
Head of International Marketing and Recruitment	√	√		
Head of Study Abroad Programs	√	√	√	
Senior Officer in the International Office				√√

As shown in Table (II), the authors have interviewed senior and key managers with roles related to strategic management and international collaboration. On the implementation side, the contribution of faculty members and students has been recognised in the statistics obtained from each University. They are the subject of the process itself, so they can support the process in cooperation with the central management, and they can affect the sustainability of the internationalisation process. In this respect, the model drawn from the results in this paper is based on templates of international partnerships, the actual agreements, universities' statistics and the interviews of senior and key managers who are involved in the process on strategic

level. A comparative analysis for the data is performed within three steps: comparative analysis for templates' objectives; comparative analysis for agreements' objectives; and university managers' comparative analysis. The main aim of the comparative analysis is to reach the similarities and differences amongst the four universities. The comparative analysis helps to better understand each of the four universities' location in the binary model concluded in the discussion.

Results and Discussion

University (A)

The University (A) was founded in the 19th century as a University College, with very few staff and students, and was the first institution in the UK to offer places to women on the same footing as men. In the first decade of the 20th Century it joint with another College to become a University. In the Academic Year 2004/2005, the University achieved a total income of more than £250 million. University (A) has clear mission statement of becoming internationally competitive and profiled with collaborative work- locally, nationally and internationally. The international partnerships' agreements for the University (A) are available online on the university web site. By 2003 the university has signed eighty institutional partnerships' agreements with overseas educational and university partners. The university's first market is East Asia, in addition to other regions targeted from the university such as North America, Eastern Europe and South East Asia. Through agreements with twenty-five countries, the university covered all political regions of the world. Japan came in the top of the list followed by the USA. The university signed agreements

with approximately sixty partners, where according to the number of agreements signed with each partner, the most numerous came from Japan.

The international strategic goal of the university, as indicated in the agreements, is *'to promote advancement of international understanding dissemination of learning and strengthening cultural ties'*. To achieve this strategic aim, the university developed six specific objectives:

- Development and promotion of research collaboration in areas of mutual interest.
- Exchange of academic materials, which are made available by both parties.
- Development and promotion of curriculum and course design, including training programs.
- Exchange of staff in the course of academic development.
- Sponsoring co-operative seminars, workshops and other meetings on matters of mutual interest.
- Student exchange.

In spite of the fact that student exchange came low in the above list, agreements' investigation shows that most agreements were about student postgraduate and undergraduate exchanges and enrolment at the university, while few institutional agreements are about staff and research. The objectives of international institutional partnerships in this university, as indicated in the interviews, are also more students' oriented in comparison with the staff dimension. In general, within the student dimension, the interviewees refer generally to the student exchange as the core objective of these partnerships. One of the managers suggests:

“... in North America for example, we have got a long standing history of student mobility ... all of those agreements are actually very practical, and based on genuine desire for students to come this way, and for us to go that way...”

Recruiting students is another important objective of these partnerships, as indicated by one of the managers:

“... we worked out quite hard for ten years bringing fee-paying students ...”

A collaborative program is an objective indicated by some interviewees. One manager said:

“... we prefer to have some relationships with secondary colleges or territory colleges whereby the first year is done in the home country, and they come here for two years to finish of their undergraduate curriculum ...”

One of the objectives of international partnerships is joint research between staff. One manager indicates:

“... and the basis for that is collaborative research, because research these days is global, and also that collaborative research requires big facilities which may be one single institution does not have all of them, but a group can get together and make use of collaborative facilities...”

Teaching programs is another objective, as referred to by a manager:

“... so what we prefer to do, although it is in a very small scale is perhaps to send our staff to do some teaching in another country ...”

University (B)

The original university college was launched in the 19th century. Following the First World War, the college rapidly outgrew to be granted its Royal Charter in the middle of last century. The primary mission of the university is to sustain and improve the high quality of its provision as one of the leading research institutions in the UK. The commitment to all academic activities being research-led is complemented by an undertaking that the learning environment and teaching provided to all students should be of the highest quality. However, the University does not mention clearly international collaboration as part of its mission. The total income of the University (B) for the Academic Year 2004/2005 was more than £300 million.

The number of international institutional partnership agreements collected from the International Office at the University (B) is 115 agreements. Regarding the number of agreements counted for each political region, it is found that the first region for University (B) is East Asia, followed by South East Asia, Middle East, and North America respectively. However, the university covered all political regions (non-European) of the world through such overseas partnerships. The university is involved in partnerships with more than thirty-five countries where the most dedicated countries are Japan, China, and Thailand. The total number of overseas universities and educational partners is ninety, and according to the number of agreements counted for each partner, the most important ones came from Thailand, China, Japan, and Egypt.

The agreements in general highlight the strategic purposes of the partnership, which are represented by the following statement: *“To strengthen the ties between the two*

institutions which might lead in future to the establishment of one or more partnership agreements for exchange purposes, academic cooperation, or the delivery of a University ofjoint or dual awards”.

To achieve the previous aims, the University (B) defines the following objectives of the agreement:

- Learning and teaching including the development of a program leading to an award.
- Student mobility.
- Exchange of members of the universities.
- Exchange of documentation and exchange material.
- Cooperation through their respective offices in joint or collaborative research projects.

However, the actual document of the agreements indicate that the most activated objectives from the previous list are student recruitment at the University (B) and student exchanges, where both undergraduate and postgraduate are targeted in the partnerships.

Most interviewees at the University (B) give similar importance to the two dimensions of objectives (the staff and the student dimensions). The most important objectives, according to the interviews, are collaborative programs, especially in engineering subject, with overseas university, as indicated by a senior manager:

“... but there are examples of joint degrees, degrees of postgraduate spent half of the time there and half of the time here ... engineering is a degree subject which can more easily developed

joint degrees or 2+2, because studying engineering in another country can be very similar to studying it here ...”

Through overseas partnerships, the university is also looking for student recruitment from overseas universities, however as indicated from the interviewees, recruitment is more done at the individual level. A senior manager indicates:

“... in the area of student recruitment, they can have agreements with particular universities, or particular agencies to recruit students, but most students recruitment is done without partnerships, it is done through our offices, and our member of staff going out and promoting the university ...”

Regarding the staff dimension of objectives, the university aims to develop collaborative research, and to exchange staff. This depends on the partner’s needs, as indicated by a very senior manager:

“... sometimes countries want to develop their students or their staff, sometimes they want collaborative research, and sometimes they want to exchange staff ...”

Teaching programs is another objective as referred to by interviewees. However, teaching programs require more attention given to quality issues. One of the managers indicates:

“...so if you are developing a joint program, then you have to make sure that you have academic colleagues who are going to visit those partners, and make sure that they teach the program the way it says on the syllabus, and that the same discipline is covered in appropriate way ...”

University (C)

In the last decade of the 19th century, the University (C) was found as a University College which formed through the merger of several institutions. A few years later, the university was granted its Royal Charter as a University. The university defines its mission as to maintain the highest standards of excellence as a research-led institution, whose staff work at the frontiers of academic enquiry and educate students in a research environment. In the Academic Year 2004/2005, the total income of the University (C) was more than £300 million.

The average number of overseas institutional partnership agreements reviewed by the authors was 150 international partnership agreements with higher education institutions and universities. The first market for the University (C) is East Asia, while North America and South East Asia come in a second preference. According to the number of agreements with each country, Japan came in the top of list, and then USA. However, the University (C) covered all regions of the world through these international partnerships with approximately thirty-five overseas countries. In these countries, the University (C) has more than 110 educational non-European partners around the world. According to the number of agreements with each partner, the most dedicated partners came from Japan.

The international strategic aim for the University (C) is *“to promote interest in teaching and research activities of its respective universities, and to deepen the understanding of the economic social and cultural issues and traditions of respective countries, in acknowledgement of the educational benefits that each university can gain from the other”*.

To achieve these strategic aims, the university defines the following objectives for the agreement:

- Exchange of staff.
- Exchange of undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- Joint research and projects.
- Joint conferences.
- Joint cultural programs.

However, the signed agreements show that the university achieved high performance in the student exchange and student enrolment, where most of them in the undergraduate stage and some are in the postgraduate levels. However, there is still shortage in staff movement and exchanges.

Consistent with the University (B), the objectives of overseas partnerships are equally distributed across student and staff dimensions. The university mainly aims to exchange students, especially with Japan and North America, as indicated by a senior manager:

“... in Japan we have 14 agreements of exchanges ... because we exchange all together relatively large number of students every year and as a result, there is a lot of communication between our different respective unites, so in that sense they would be preferred for us ...”

Collaborative programs are another important objective of overseas partnerships, as stated by one manager:

“... the situation is slightly different in North Africa where we have masters in morphology in medicine which is delivered partly in that university, but there are two universities where we

had partial delivery of a program , it is one term, it is a one year master, where you do one term in that university ... “

The university also aims to develop joint research activities, and staff exchanges. One of the managers said:

“... we are intended to engage with international institutions from the perspective of engaging with their staff, so we are looking to establish research collaborations, which are, complement each one another when we engaged with that institution from that country ...”

Another manager indicates:

“ ... but the principle activities between UK and US, and that is a research based partnership and consortium, so one of the things that America offers is very high cash input into research, so it offers facilities and access to things, and activities that you want to be part of ...”

University (D)

University (D) received its Royal Charter during the sixties of the 20th century. The primary mission of the University (D) is to become a truly international university. It is research-led and is committed to the provision of teaching of the highest quality. It is distinctive amongst universities that have been rated in the top group in the HEFCE Research Assessment Exercise in giving high priority to improving access, to continuing and post-experience education and to close collaboration with its local and regional community. Its mission states that it will continue to add an international dimension to its work and in particular orient itself more closely to continental Europe, North American and China. By the end of the Academic Year 2004/2005, the University (D) achieved a total income of about £280 million.

Until 2003, the University (D) signed ninety overseas institutional partnership agreements with overseas educational and university partners. The most dedicated market for the University (D) is North America, while also the university is interested in the Asian market. From twenty-five countries, the first targeted countries for the university are USA and Japan. However, the university is targeting all political regions of the world through seventy university partners. According to the number of agreements signed with each partner, the most important partners came from USA and Japan.

The university defines its international strategic aim as “*to promote educational and academic exchange and cooperation between the university and its partner*”. To achieve the previous aim, the university defines the main objectives as:

- Exchange of academic staff and research scholars.
- Exchange of students.
- Exchange of materials and information.
- Joint research activities.

Even the university previous objectives focused on research and academic exchanges, the most active exchanges were student exchanges in addition to student enrolment at the university, where undergraduate students are the most targeted ones followed by postgraduate students.

In terms of student recruitment, the University (D) is considered as one of the main destination for overseas partners, as referred to by one of the managers:

“... but also as a destination for international students, so we are putting ourselves on the map essentially, and I think we have done that reasonably well, we are one of the highest percentage wise recruiters ...”

The university also aims to develop student exchanges, which can be initialised from the partner side, as stated by one manager:

“ ... and sometimes it is a link that starts off by students from abroad, saying they want to come and study, and then it develops from student exchanges ...”

Joint research is another important objective of overseas partnerships. One manager states:

“... I would say that our strategy is about promoting ourselves internationally, as both as a leading research university, and a university that is interesting in partnerships with other leading research universities around the world ...”

Another area of staff partnerships includes teaching partnerships. One of the managers indicates:

“... and in China’s case, partnerships gradually include the possibility of teaching partnerships, in fact we have already started as you may have seen from the agreements, we have already started teaching partnerships in China ...”

Comparative analysis

Most interviewees in the four universities highlight the importance of both student and staff dimensions with relative differences amongst them. While managers of both the University (B) and the University (C) give equal importance to both dimensions, the University (A) managers give more importance to the student dimension, and the

University (D) managers give more importance to the staff dimension compared with the student dimension. In general, according to the interviewees, the four universities aim to achieve six main objectives related to international partnership and collaborations with different relative importance as described in Table III.

Table (III): Comparison of relative importance given to each objective within the four universities.

Main objective	University (A)	University (B)	University (C)	University (D)
To exchange students	High	Low	Medium	Low
To develop collaborative programs and joint degrees	Low	Medium	Low	Low
To recruit fees-paying students	Low	Low	Low	Low
To develop joint research	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
To exchange staff	Low	Low	Low	Low
To develop overseas teaching programs	Low	Low	Low	Low

With regard to the two dimensions of objectives (The student and the staff), the twenty-four interviewees in the four universities highlight additional prove for most of the objectives mentioned in overseas partnership template in each case. However, the real agreements provide very different view of what it is really going on in each case, so an additional comparative analysis between the three sources of objectives data is needed.

The four universities use international partnership template as a guide in designing agreements of partnerships with overseas universities. The template includes the strategic aim and the objectives of the partnerships between the university and its partner. It highlights the international partnership strategy of the university through the strategic aims and objectives mentioned in the template. For the four universities,

the template highlights the relative importance given to both dimensions of objectives (the student and the staff). It is found that while most statements of the template in Universities (A) and (D) give more attention to the staff dimension, most template statements of Universities (B) and (C) highlight equally the importance of the ‘staff’ and the ‘student’ dimensions. However, the agreements analysis shows that for the four universities, the ‘student’ dimension is given more importance than the ‘staff’ dimension. This will pose two main problems, “objectives design problem” and “objectives implementation problem” as described in Table IV.

Table (IV): Comparison of (templates- interviews- agreements) objectives.

	University (A)	University (B)	University (C)	University (D)
Template	Staff oriented	Staff and students	Staff and students	Staff oriented
Interviews	Student oriented	Staff and students	Staff and students	Staff oriented
Agreements	Student oriented	Student oriented	Student oriented	Student oriented
Implementation problem or design problem?	Design problem	Implementation problem	Implementation problem	Implementation problem

In the case of University (A), the main problem is in international partnership objectives design. This result however was indicated by one of the managers, as she states:

“... as yet it is not published, I am not aware of that, our international strategy is still working document, so in a sense the mission that I have been working to, is not the mission that has been set formally by the institution ...”

In the other cases, the problem does not emerge from international partnership objectives design rather than from implementation and activation of their objectives. The previous results can also be represented in the following figure “take in Figure 1”.

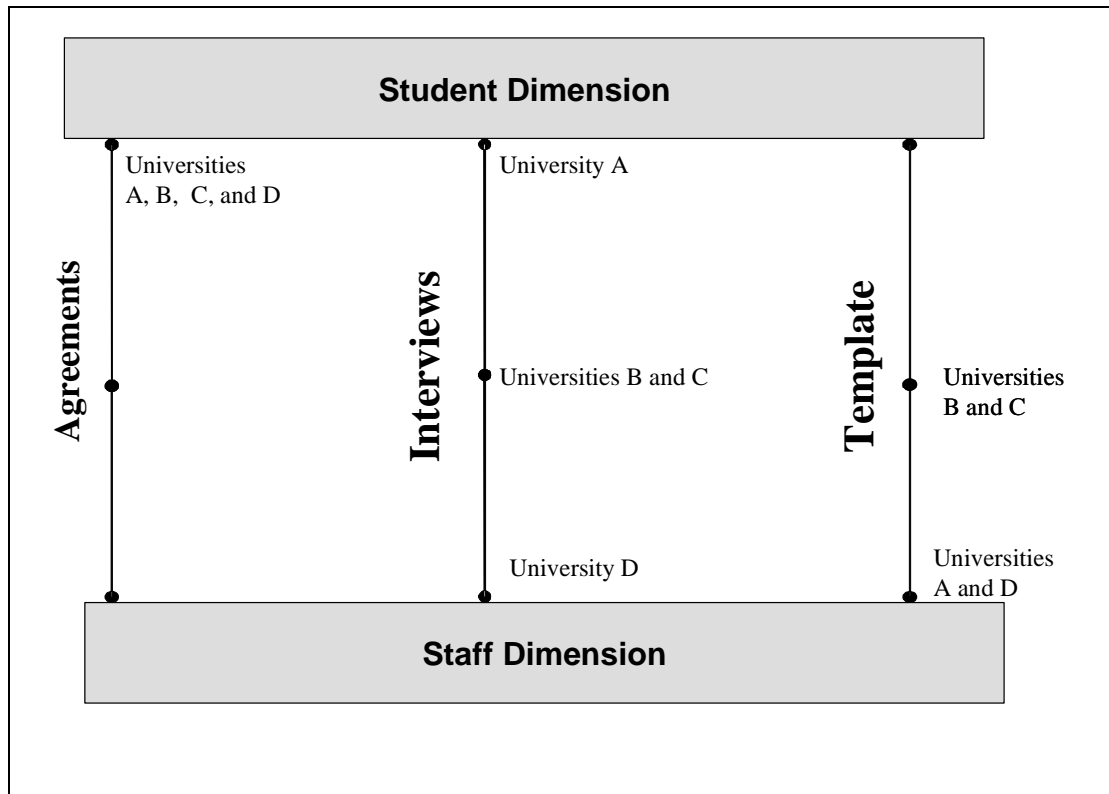


Figure 1: (Agreements-Interviews-Template) Comparative Analysis based on the four case studies.

As shown in Figure 1, there is a big gap in international partnership objectives’ design in the University (A) where the template gives more importance to the staff dimension, but the interviews and the agreements refer to the importance of the student dimension. Universities (B) and (C) have the same explanation, while there is no gap in international partnership objectives design; a gap can be noticed in the implementation. However, this considered the same in the University (D) with a big gap noticed in the implementation.

Discussion and conclusion

Universities are becoming increasingly business driven with continuous development in the international collaboration and partnerships. Most UK universities have collaboration and partnership objectives expressed in different means. However, the implementation for such objectives might be different from the initial objectives as this study shows. Both dimensions of the ‘objectives design’, represented by templates and interviews, and the ‘objectives implementation’, represented by agreements, in the authors’ opinion, both dimensions highlight four styles of strategic evaluation: realistic strategy; design-reconsideration style; implementation-reconsideration style; unrealistic strategy, as shown in Figure 2.

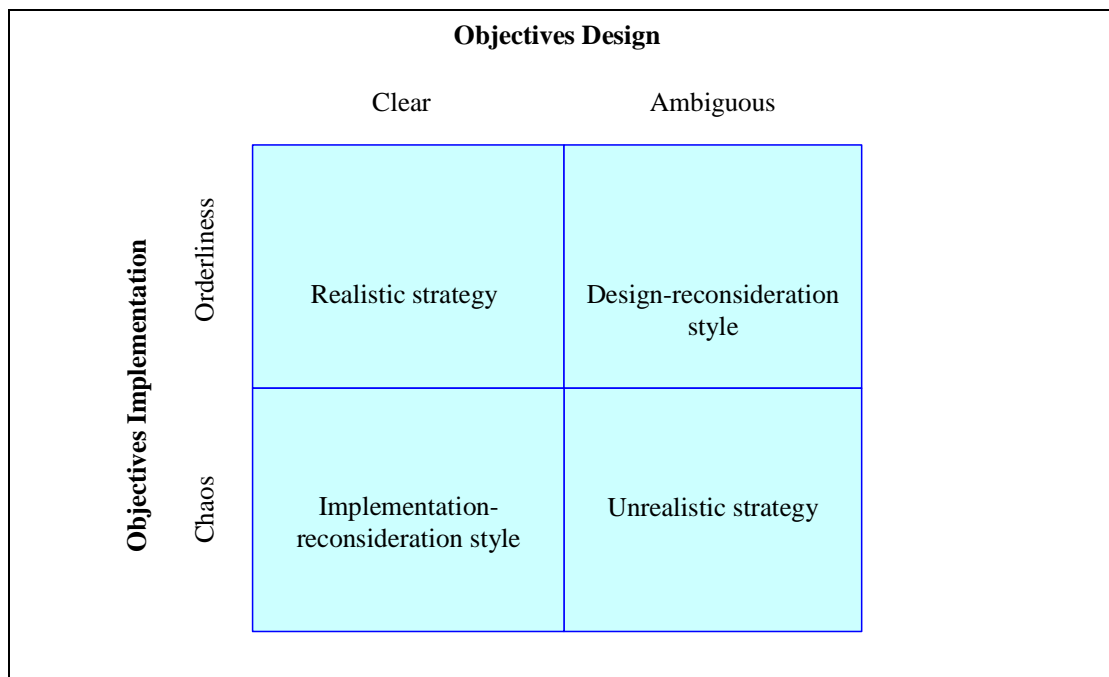


Figure 2: The (Objectives design/Objectives implementation) Matrix based on the four case studies.

1. *Realistic strategy*: if both ‘objectives design’ and ‘objectives implementation’ are clear and orderliness, the international strategy of partnerships is described to be more successful and realistic. None of the four universities is located in this style.
2. *Design- reconsideration style*: if objectives of international partnerships are less clarified and more ambiguous, and the implementation is more clarified and less ambiguous, this causes a gap between design and implementation, so in this style, the design of international strategy of partnerships should be reconsidered. University (A) is best located in this style.
3. *Implementation- reconsideration style*: in contrast to the previous style, if objectives are more clarified, and the implementation is less clarified, the implementation of international strategy of partnerships should be reconsidered. Universities (B), (C) and (D) can be best located in this style.
4. *Unrealistic strategy*: if both ‘objectives design’ and ‘objectives implementation’ are unclear, and ambiguous, the whole strategy of international partnerships should be reconsidered, and the strategy is described to be unrealistic. None of the four universities is located in this style.

The above model will assess university managers to locate their institutions in the most suitable box, and to decide the available options to move within the model. University managers can assess their performance in the international market of higher education by applying the above model to their strategy design of international partnerships, and the real implementation of this strategy. However, this model is based on data collected from four universities, and only three main sources of data. Faculty members and students are indirectly included in the study based on each university documentation and statistics. However, personal interviews with academic

staff, students, and other members of the university who are concerned in the internationalisation process could add another dimension to a similar study in the future. What universities' managers need to do is to collect enough data regarding their international strategy of partnerships, and investigate what they really did in the past period, and what they would like this strategy to be in the future. The process of international partnerships strategy should be seen as a continues process of design, implementation, and evaluation of such strategy.

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