

## Introduction

- ❖ **International relation office (IRO) staff** are among the main stakeholders responsible for university internationalization (Bulut-Sahin, 2023, Hudzik, 2011; Kirloskar & Inamdar, 2021).
- ❖ **Intercultural competences (ICC) of IRO practitioners are often considered as intrinsic abilities, skills and knowledge of the staff** and out of sight of the learning and development strategies of the universities.
- ❖ **Professional domain of IROs** is grounded on variety of educational and career backgrounds and experiences that aligns with the diversity of IRO functions for facilitating and leading the internationalization (Bulut-Sahin et al., 2023; Rumbley, 2015).
- ❖ **Advanced ICC and knowledge are required for IROs** to address the diversity of international students, supporting inclusion and cultural awareness on campus, facilitating institutional partnerships and networking, and ensuring the informed decision-making on internationalization of the strategic leadership.
- ❖ **Lack of necessary skills is one of the main obstacles to internationalization** (Beelen, 2017) that can be resolved by prioritizing international and intercultural learning and training of the university staff (Rumbley, 2015).
- ❖ **Knowledge and competence development can be supported by the university** through thoughtful **knowledge management (KM) practices** and organizational culture that fosters learning and collaboration.

**KM encompasses acquisition, documentation, transfer, creation and application of organizational knowledge** (Filius et al., 2000). In a broader sense it embraces all specific operational knowledge of IROs related to internationalization. In this poster we focus on **intercultural knowledge and competences of the IRO staff**.

## Objectives

Based on the empirical study on IRO staff knowledge management practices and organizational learning that embraced the core knowledge, skills and competences required for the IRO work, we addressed development of intercultural knowledge and competence through the KM practices of HEIs, and its fostering and hindering factors.

**The article is aimed at exploring:**

- ✓ Commitment of the IRO staff on different institutional levels to acquiring, creating and sharing professional knowledge, and revealing the fostering and hindering factors.
- ✓ Organizational learning culture and institutional dynamics that support or inhibit intercultural learning in IROs and across HEIs.
- ✓ The role of leadership and the institutional support of learning and development of the IRO staff at the universities.

## Methodology

**Mixed method research**, convergent-parallel design (Creswell, 2014)

- **Quantitative:** survey N=87 IRO staff of European universities from 22 countries, to explore how KM and organizational learning are integrated in their individual, team and institutional practices and support the IRO work (*Jan-May 2024*).
- **Qualitative:** semi-structured interview N=29 IRO staff members from 13 countries, to capture nuanced insights into their KM and learning experiences in the work settings, the most important competences required for their job, organizational learning culture and professional development activities that support their competences and professional knowledge (*Jan-March 2024*), thematic analysis.

**Without leadership commitment and funding internationalization is just a hobby.**

## References

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**You need to adopt this state of mind that you need to learn and share knowledge all the time. If you can't be confident about the now, how can you be confident about tomorrow?**

## Results and discussion

The core competences of the IRO staff:

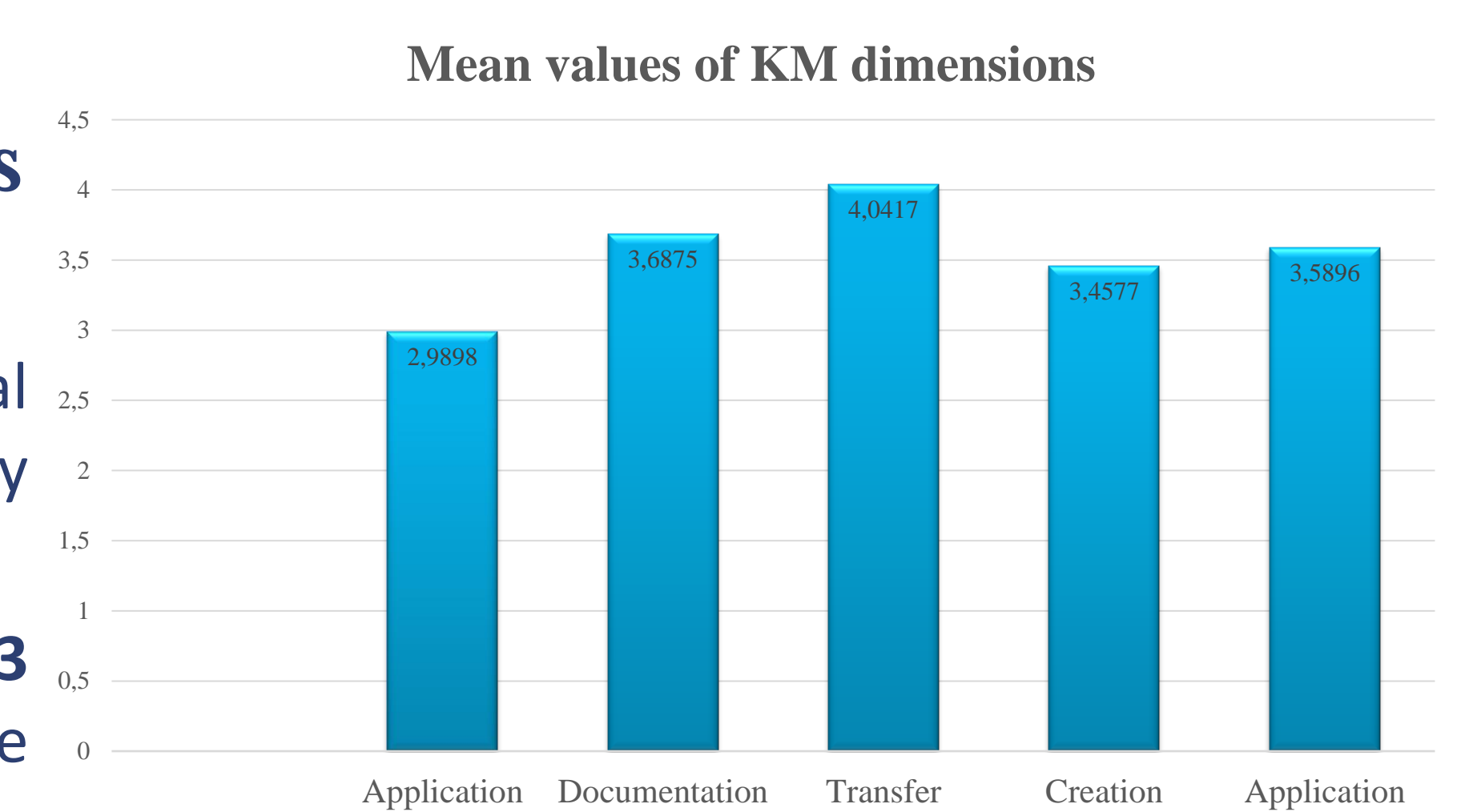


Importance of ICC and knowledge for IROs



Individual level: IRO staff participation in KM activities and intercultural learning

- **Small IROs** are less engaged in formal learning, networking and eventually knowledge sharing (KA and KT).
- **IRO staff with limited experience (1-3 years)** are less engaged in knowledge creation (KC).
- **Senior staff** (strategic and tactic leadership) are more engaged in knowledge creation (KC) comparing to operational level staff as it requires prior expertise and extensive networking.
- **Cultural agency of the IRO staff:** embracing students' cultural diversity or expect them to acculturate?



Organizational perspective on learning and KM activities

- **Organizational culture of learning based on trust, learning from mistakes, honest feedback and collaboration** among the IRO team and across the organization supported by the leadership fosters learning and KM.
- **Learning and generation of new knowledge (KA & KC)** are positively related to organizational recognition and rewarding, therefore can be facilitated by relevant institutional policy.
- **Team dynamics is a deficient factor for KM and learning in universities.** IRO work assessment based on collective performance and team contribution, and recognition of the collective behaviors can foster the sense of belonging and ownership of the staff.
- **Decentralized IROs: autonomy or separation? Require more attention to communication** to ensure knowledge circulation and organizational learning.
- **Two universes under one roof: communication gap between academic and non-academic staff** inhibits ICC learning and knowledge circulation.

Pillars of Organizational Learning and ICC Development



## Conclusion

- ✓ Effective organizational learning strategies need to leverage both formal and informal learning channels and create continuous learning opportunities for HEI staff.
- ✓ Organizational learning culture based on trust, collaboration, sense of belonging and ownership empower staff members and ensure their ICC development.
- ✓ Intercultural knowledge generated through formal trainings and formalized meetings are more transferable but less engaging.
- ✓ Experiential and informal ICC learning through networking, staff mobility, internal and external collaboration and even coffee breaks contribute to KM and need to be considered in the organizational learning strategy.
- ✓ Strategic planning of ICC trainings for IRO staff must be evidence-based, contextualized and require staff competence assessment.
- ✓ Commitment of leadership along with acknowledgement of individual learning efforts and team contribution are at the core of effective KM and organizational learning.

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