

## **Book review**

The Review on *Leveraging Success of Young Scholars in Business Discipline* edited by Maciej Mitreęa, CeDeWu, Warszawa 2014.

Reviewed by Peter Kovacs\*

### **1. Introduction**

The study aims to give a comprehensive review of young business scholars in the Visegrad countries (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary), describing their scientific performance, prospects and possibilities. The study provides a detailed analysis of the specific situation of the Visegrad countries through examining young scholars facing the challenge of ‘publish or perish’ in a changing academic world. Contrary to natural sciences or arts, in the field of business studies these countries have been able to be involved substantively in the international academic life for slightly more than 20 years. As a result, the academic career already full of challenges is even more difficult in the field of business studies, as the initial competitive disadvantage has still not been managed to overcome completely. In view of this, I believe it is a gap-filling work, which addresses topical issues such as: How can being a scholar be a career? Can a business scholar position be competitive against a job in a for-profit company? What distinguishes successful young business scholars from their less successful fellows?

### **2. The general situation of young business scholars in the V4 countries**

The first part of the study provides a thorough review of the situation of academic studies in business in all four Visegrad countries and the prospects of scholars active in this field, with particular regard to young scholars. This section reveals that each country is characterized by fairly different motivation systems. The pressure of publication on the young business scholars of the V4 countries is growing, academic promotion is increasingly linked to prestigious international publications, yet the necessary conditions, such as attending international conferences or developing language and writing skills, are only limitedly available. In general, academic promotion criteria have retained several post-

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socialist characteristics, and the publication requirements adopted from the western model have been added to these bases. A clear example of this is that the institution of habilitation, which is one of the stages in the path between a doctoral degree and full professorship, still exists in all V4 countries (in Hungary, for example, it is a criterion for an associate professor appointment). However, the regulations of habilitation are mostly defined at faculty level and impose very flexible conditions on the candidates. This combination may result in an environment that is particularly difficult to predict, where young business scholars' way up on the career ladder is far from direct.

### **3. The results of the primary research**

The second large part unfolds the situation of the young business scholars of the examined countries through primary research. As the first step of the primary research, 19 young (not older than 35 years) successful scholars in four countries were asked about the factors affecting their research activities with a qualitative method. The research aimed to identify the factors that may affect the success of scholars. In the course of snowball sampling, interviews were made specifically with scholars who had already published in renowned foreign journals, thus they could be considered particularly successful in this respect. The results partly confirmed the findings of the secondary research, i.e. the previously assumed main factors (personal abilities, international network of relations, language skills) have an impact on the success of scholars, and on the other hand, they also pointed out correlations between each factor. The main finding of the qualitative research is that the factors affecting the success of young business scholars have a close correlation, thus they can be understood only in a systematic approach. Successful scholars attributed their success mainly to their international embeddedness, whose development, in turn, necessitated certain personal skills and competences (open-mindedness, proactive networking, language skills, etc.). Their competences therefore made them suitable to build international partnerships, and these partnerships strengthened their skills (especially in terms of language skills and writing scientific publications), and opened the way for them to new relations and further international publications. It was then easier for internationally well-embedded scholars to submit publications in renowned journals, which made them more attractive to further international partners. Overall, the qualitative research revealed a very complex system of relationships, whose focus may be personal skills and competences, but these abilities become actually productive through an international network.

The authors compiled the questionnaire used in the quantitative research based on the findings of the qualitative research and the review of related literature, with which they aimed to define the factors having an impact on the success of young business scholars in the V4 countries. In the course of the analysis, they studied the impact of the following factors: professional competences and personality factors (1), organizational resources and organizational culture (2), network resources and academic teamwork (3) and demographic features (4). In order to assess scholar performance, they examined the number of publications amongst the respondents, with particular regard to publications in acknowledged, indexed journals. Sampling was not random (the questionnaire was distributed on social sites via personal networks). The final sample size consisted of 415 young business scholars (101 Polish, 100 Hungarian, 109 Czech, and 105 Slovak). The sample included 252 women and 163 men. The majority of the sample (330 persons) comprised PhD students and assistant lecturers, but the number of assistant professors (81 persons) was also considerable, and a few young associate professors were also available.

The results of the quantitative research overall paint more of a negative picture of the situation of young business scholars in the V4 countries, although there are a few positive signs.

The respondents generally assessed their own competences as good, particularly in terms of preparedness, scholar competence and work performance. However, they need support in terms of teaching methodology and language skills development. Since one of the greatest impacts on their activities is exerted by their supervisors, the competences and international networks they have – or lack – represent a simultaneous opportunity and limit for PhD students.

Relying on faculty resources is important for academic promotion, and the respondents indicated several deficiencies in this respect. On the one hand, sources available for attending international conferences are limited, and, on the other hand, they have less access to scholarships and application funds. In respect of the former it was the Czech Republic and in respect of the latter it was Hungary that positively differed from other V4 countries.

In terms of young scholars' performance, we find that the respondents are, as it were, already on the map, i.e. only 7% of them do not have a publication, but over a quarter of them have more than 10 listed publications. In general, scientific activities depend largely on academic ranks, which is not particularly surprising since, on the one hand, scholars acquire the knowledge required for appropriate publication in the course of academic promotion and, on the other hand, their network of relations grows in such way, which may help them in publications. The main publication performance amongst PhD students/assistant

lecturers is represented mostly by conference presentations, and they have less journal articles and even less books. Academic performance was also connected with age. It was an interesting finding in this respect that the age of 30 seemed to be a milestone in several cases, as the performance of scholars at the age of 30-35 dramatically increased compared to the previous age groups. This indicates that it takes about 5-8 years of research work to develop the competences and collect experience that can do considerable service in academic activities.

Books and monographs are prepared at a low rate not only by PhD students/assistant lecturers, but by the respondents in general – the only exception was Polish scholars, where this rate was higher. Journal publications are much more common; however, younger scholars often have only 1 or 2 listed articles. It was especially embittering in the case of international journal publications. Not only the fact that on average only every 7<sup>th</sup> respondent has an article published in an ISI journal was depressing, but also that only 27% of them made an attempt to publish in these basic platforms of international scientific public life. The biggest gap, however, was found by the authors not in terms of publication performance but that of involvement in scientific public life. Only a limited percentage of the respondents are members of the editorial board of any journals, and only 5 of them do so for an ISI journal. Overall, the picture outlined for the reader is that for now young scholars of the Visegrad countries are only marginal actors of the international scientific public life of business studies.

Hungarian scholars received scholarships with outstanding success in general, while Polish, and, to a smaller proportion, Czech scholars performed well in terms of gaining business scholarships. In Slovakia, business scholarships were almost completely absent, but scholars were involved in state and EU scholarships at appropriate rates. Overall, we can establish that the performance was acceptable in this respect, and although it can still be improved, it supports that really talented and ambitious scholars also have financial resources to develop their research activities.

It can be considered the most significant finding of our research that out of the numerous examined variables, the same narrow group of factors correlated with scientific findings in the case of almost every performance indicator, namely the group of factors characterising academic network. Local partnerships also proved to be significant, but it is the international network that makes a great difference. The most successful scholars had extensive professional – and mostly international – networks in almost every case.

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#### 4. Discussion

The study entitled *Leveraging Success of Young Scholars in Business Discipline* provides a particularly thorough review of the situation of young business scholars in the V4 countries. The work includes findings properly confirmed by both the literature and the primary research. I consider pointing out the significance of international networks in terms of scholar success as the most important contribution. It is thought-provoking because it is not about a personal competence or an institutional capacity, but an on-going activity, as well as a mind-set in general. This mind-set means that scholars need to be encouraged to search for partnerships and expand networks right from the beginning, and instead of condemning PhD students to an independent absorption in their own topic and being a lonely scholar, they much rather need to be encouraged to attend international events and thereby to get involved in international academic circulation. It is an efficient method not only because young scholars learn more quickly and perform more effectively through joint publications, but also because the entire academic career path becomes more attractive for them as a part of the community and it presumably decreases the intention of career leaving. This, of course, requires changing the decision points of motivation, promotion and financing systems at the level of policy making. In my opinion, having read the study of Maciej Mitreęa et al., the necessity for changes in this direction will become clear for decision-makers as well. If this work can contribute to facilitating these changes in any way, we can state that the authors have created a real value for the business academic sphere.

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