J.G. Wissema

Towards the Third Generation University

Managing the University in Transition

Today, the international higher education system is in a state of upheaval. Along with the Bologna process in Europe, a significant debate was sparked about the structure and purpose of the conventional university. Basic education principles have been called into question. Supporters of the old Humboldt ideal of free and non-goal-oriented research predict a universal capitalist take-over while opponents claim that the commercialisation of research is a necessity for further scientific advancements. Regardless, it is obvious that the Bologna process irrevocably catalyzed change.

J.G. Wissema is one of the supporters of the change towards the commercialisation of research. He is Professor Emeritus of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands, and Managing Director of J.G. Wissema Associates bv. Wissema argues that there is no chance of survival for the old system, as outlined in his book, which is essentially a manual for understanding and managing the transition from the current form of university to what Wissema calls the Third Generation University (3GU). It was written for university leaders as well as university partners to help them acknowledge and subsequently implement the current changes in the international university system. As his company offers management consulting, the book evolved out of the Wissema’s interest to deal with university management and is very well illustrated with charts and boxes as well as examples for successful implementation.

The book’s central message is that the university we know today is a dying model, and we are currently in a transition period towards the Third Generation University. The main differences between the first (medieval), the second (Humboldt model), and the third (current and coming) university systems are the underlying objectives. In medieval times the focus was on education and the memorization of material. Gradually, a focus on research emerged, and in today’s world universities will not survive without the commercialisation of research as a third objective. Wissema describes modern research as tech-business: technology as a tool for realizing profit, because research is business. He names the concept of open innovation and external developments as important steps for creating know-how and encourages the establishment of new companies (“Technostarters”) as tools for its exploitation.

Characteristics of the Third Generation University

‘Towards the Third Generation University’ is divided into three parts. Wissema starts part one by tracing the history of university development. At first, they were national institutions with dean-led faculties and little competition due to limited mobility. Then, from the 1960s onwards, there was a student explosion that led to mass education and government regulations. These produced funding difficulties and the first collaborations with industry. Globalisation ultimately led to interdisciplinarity and the formation of research institutes. Wissema ends the development at Cambridge, which to him is the prime example for the new type of university. The Third Generation University has seven characteristics: it is a multicultural, interdisciplinary and cosmopolitan network organisation in an internationally competitive market that offers all courses in English as new lingua franca and names the exploitation of know-how or commercialisation of research

recommendation

A great deal of practical advice; it can be seen as a manual for understanding and managing the transition towards a Third Generation University.
as its third objective, which in turn makes it less dependent on state regulations. Two case studies from around the world about the implementation of the systematic changes complete the chapter.

The second part deals with the crucial difference between the second and the third generation university: the commercialisation of research. Entrepreneurship in universities is portrayed as the new objective for universities. They can no longer rely solely on scientific research and education anymore; they have to successfully exploit the know-how created by their researchers. Wissema explains this phenomenon and offers advice on how to facilitate the commercialisation of research. He names technology-based enterprises, technostarters and the financiers of new firms as most important partners for universities and claims that in today’s world technostarters are an ‘invaluable part of the know-how carousel of which leading universities are the centre’.

The extensive appendices about ‘Understanding Innovation’ and ‘Educating Technostarters’ emphasize the importance of the exploitation of know-how.

**Management of the transition**

The book concludes with a chapter about organising and managing the necessary transition. It is divided into guidelines for the organisational structure of the university, organising cooperation and change management. According to Wissema, the old discipline-based structure of the university is to be replaced by subject-based research and education, with a board of management as the only super ordinate structure. He posits that this structure is more effective in fostering ‘coopetition’: institutes that cooperate and compete internationally. Hence institutes become the most important organisational elements within a university.

**Critical annotations**

However, since he is so convinced of the Third Generation University model, he shows the development described as inevitable and leaves any doubts or concerns unaddressed. One example is his prerequisite that all courses at the university should be taught in English as the new lingua franca. Especially for the humanities this development could be devastating. Additionally, what would happen to other national languages when they are banned from the academic profession?

In the current debate about the changing international university system, this book urges abandonment of the discussion, because the path has already been decided. It calls upon university leaders as well as politicians and researchers to start acting accordingly, as change can only be successful when people are motivated and willing to adapt. Overall, it is a very helpful guide for what could ultimately be a difficult transition process.