

Dear Colleagues, Dear Guests,

As the International Hellenic University emerges in the unified space of Greek Higher Education, after the merger of its former constituent Institutions, there is an urgent need to harmonize strategies, homogenize procedures and boost its competitive advantages in order to benefit from the rising opportunities, especially in the areas of research and innovation. The University has grown larger, with different teams and sectors, covering a variety of disciplines and thus, communication across the board has become harder. Likewise, keeping everyone working together, motivated and aligned with University culture becomes more difficult. Therefore, before starting to notice people pulling in different directions or noticing changes ahead that everyone needs to know about, we thought it was time to consider organizing this Internal University Conference. Building and operating such a modern University is a challenging task: the pace of delivery should be rapid; the opportunities (and threats) from a global, web-connected population are immense; and we need to draw on a wide range of skills and experience in a coordinated, joined-up way. The world of work is now highly complex, meaning that instead of streamlining the University to continue producing the same output more efficiently *ad infinitum*, we need to enable it to be agile, to respond to constant change around it.

The proposed Internal University Conference can help us build relationships amongst us and discover more about things that are going on, in a friendly, inspiring environment and non-threatening context. An event like this may have many immediate, measurable benefits, as well as some hidden, long term ones. One major goal is to shape and promote a common culture where people are encouraged to challenge the *status quo*, to get excited about new possibilities by having the space to experiment without the fear of failure. Psychologically, people are braver when surrounded by people they know and trust. Building trust is a major issue in newly merged institutions; this Internal Conference aims to bring people together - help them to get to know each other in an open context, allowing opinions to flow and ideas to happen in a smooth collaborating environment.

We intentionally focus on research and innovation. Universities that are able to build a culture of innovation are more likely to develop and maintain a high-class status than those institutions that use the past as a guide to the future. However, innovation does not just automatically occur; instead it needs to be built into the culture of the organization. Barriers exist that need to be overcome, and we need to think about ways to create processes and procedures that reward risk taking. The aim of our University should be to build collaborative environments based on stable goals where individuals have the autonomy to pursue experiments that ultimately will improve it. We should seek to create an opportunity to make connections between teams, learning together to increase communication and innovation. Ideally, this would result to better team working practices, increased engagement, happier staff, stronger communication, and ultimately improved job satisfaction; productivity and efficiency. Additionally, sharing information and teambuilding would facilitate decision making and the creation of solutions. Moreover, we would benefit from the resulting agglomeration of externalities, economies of scale, economies of scope and possible local spillovers.

Obviously, one may notice a slight contradiction in terms: having invited a number of external experts as you may see in the program, both from the academia, the state and the business world, it seems that this is a highly externally focused - internal conference. It aims at opening our organization to the world by utilizing our strengths in harnessing new opportunities.

Hoping that this Internal Conference would serve its purpose, we wish you to have great results!

On behalf of the Organizing Committee

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