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Internationalization in higher education: faculty tradeoffs under the social exchange theory

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Abstract

Purpose – Although faculty members are regarded as one of the main agents of internationalization in higher education (IHE), research has focused on the upper levels of analysis (e.g. country or educational institution) rather than the individual. The purpose of this paper is to draw from social exchange theory (SET) to examine how the perceptions of costs and expected rewards affect faculty members' choices of international activities.

Design/methodology/approach – This qualitative study adopted as main methods a review of the literature on IHE and in-depth interviews based on a semi-structured script with an international sample. A sample of 16 researches was selected for interview using the snowball technique of sample selection.

Findings – The authors verified that faculty may seek internationalization in search of job opportunities, greater social approval, greater autonomy and greater security. On the other hand, temporal, monetary, psychological and physical costs discourage faculty members from seeking international insertion. Based on these tradeoffs, our findings suggest that although the basic tenets of SET do apply, the theory does not explicitly address two issues: the fact that costs and rewards are intricately related, and the apparent mismatch between (short-term) costs and (long-term) expected rewards.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the IHE literature by highlighting the crucial role of faculty – that is, the level of analysis of the individual – which has been under-researched and by setting out the reasoning that supports the decision of faculty members to seek (higher) international insertion. Furthermore, this study extends SET as a plausible explanation for the self-internationalization decision by scholars.

Keywords Social exchange theory, International education, Internationalization of higher education, Faculty internationalization, Internationalization in higher education

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Recent decades, characterized by the spread of globalization, have witnessed a massive increase in international activity. This broad phenomenon has also been experienced in the academic environment and has fostered a growing interest in internationalization in higher education (IHE).

The phenomenon of IHE can be conceptualized at different levels of analysis – such as global, regional, national, sectorial, organizational (institutional), departmental or individual (Dewey and Duff, 2009; Elkin *et al.*, 2005; Gao, 2015; Knight, 1994, 2004; Maringe and Foskett, 2010; Paige, 2005; Sanderson, 2008); encompasses several (internationalization) activities, e.g., teaching, research, publication, hosting of or participation in scientific events that attract delegates from other countries, operating units abroad, formation of research groups with an international scope, adaptation of the curriculum to global standards, international fund raising, among others; and involves actors such as students, faculty and staff (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Cummings *et al.*, 2014; Knight, 2004; Rostan, Huang and Finkelstein, 2014; Van Damme, 2001).



Although faculty members are involved in most of the internationalization activities in higher education and may even be the main agents that propel the phenomenon (Dewey and Duff, 2009; Rostan, Ceravolo and Metcalfe, 2014), few studies have examined the influence of these individuals on IHE and, more specifically, on their educational institutions (Romani-Dias *et al.*, 2019). In fact, most of the studies that addressed the individual level of analysis have tended to focus on students as part of the IHE process (see Bryla, 2018; Guo and Guo, 2017; Jones, 2017; Kratz and Netz, 2018).

While we contend that each international activity performed by a faculty member leads, to some degree, to the internationalization of their higher education institution – for example, what the researcher publishes also takes the name of the institution – we will focus our attention on the individual level (researcher). Building from social exchange theory (SET), the following research question leads this study:

RQ1. How do the expectations of costs and of rewards drive faculty members into international activities?

This study contributes to the IHE literature by highlighting the crucial role of faculty – that is, the level of analysis of the individual – which has been under-researched and by setting out the reasoning that supports the decision of faculty members to seek (higher) international insertion. Furthermore, this study extends SET as a plausible explanation for the self-internationalization decision by scholars in two ways. We argue that the *ceteris paribus* conditions contained in the original propositions of the theory – although they help understand the logic of the arguments – do not occur in practice, since the attainment of (expected) benefits entails incurring the respective costs; therefore, everything else does not remain equal. Second, there may exist a temporal mismatch between the commitment of costs and the attainment of benefits, since the former occur in the present, whilst the latter (may) take place in the future.

In addition, Zhang *et al.* (2017) argue, using the SET approach, that individuals base their decisions essentially on expected economic rewards and their perceptions of self-efficacy, that is, “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (Bandura, 1997, p. 2). We will bring an additional theoretical contribution over the course of the article by showing that, from the perspective of faculty members, the costs and expected rewards go beyond economic returns and self-efficacy. From a theoretical perspective, certain peculiarities in these individuals are evident, for example, in relation to the motivators (or expected rewards) for internationalization. Thus, generally, researchers give great importance to their own social group and value the freedom of thought and expression it provides, as well as the type of social activity it involves; they also analyze the expected short- and long-term costs. These characteristics may contribute to the discussion of SET, which argues that individuals make their decisions in a rational way with the objective of maximizing positive experiences and minimizing negative experiences through social interactions (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Emerson, 1976).

While we base our reasoning on SET, a well-known theory, our objective lies more along the lines of phenomenon-based research, by taking “as a principal focus the ability to accurately and insightfully inform a real-world phenomenon” (Doh, 2015, p. 609), since we aim at providing empirical evidence about a particular object of analysis – the faculty – which has not been sufficiently investigated and may, therefore, help extend or reformulate current theory (ies). As argued by Hambrick (2007, p. 1346), we are presenting facts that may lack a full theoretical explanation by current theories, “but that, once reported, might stimulate the search for an explanation.” Besides, by focusing on the individual, we respond to the plea to bring micro-foundations to the studies on organizational strategy, that is, “to decompose macro-level constructs [e.g. internationalization of higher education institutions] in terms of the actions and interactions of lower level organizational members [e.g. faculty members]” (Foss and Pedersen, 2016, p. 1) in search of lower level explanations of macro-level phenomena (Coleman, 1990).

Literature review

Internationalization in higher education (IHE)

(IHE) occurs whenever any of its varied agents contributes, by means of different activities, to global education in different geographies across borders (Van der Wende, 1997). Despite this delineation, De Wit (2002), Knight (1994) and Teichler (2003) contend that the definition of IHE is quite heterogeneous since each institution tends to bring its own concepts and vision as to what internationalization means in the context of higher education. The meaning of IHE varies across authors (De Wit, 2002; Knight, 2004; Teichler, 2003), regardless of the level of analysis used, in part because IHE is quite a broad and multifaceted phenomenon. Moreover, some definitions encompass just certain aspects of it and in a narrow fashion. Table I presents some classic definitions of IHE.

Reference	Definition
Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC, 1993)	A set of activities aimed at providing an educational experience with an environment that is truly integrated with a global perspective
Arum and Van de Water (1992, p. 202)	"Multiple activities, programs and services related to international studies, international educational exchange and technical cooperation"
European Association of International Education – EAIIE, according to Knight (1994, p. 3)	"Internationalization is the process whereby higher education becomes less national and more internationally oriented"
Francis (1993, p. 8)	"[...] process that prepares the community for successful participation in an increasingly interdependent world [...]. The process should infuse all facets of the post-secondary education system, fostering global understanding and developing skills for effective living and working in a diverse world"
Knight (1994, p. 3)	"The internationalization of higher education is the process of integrating the international dimension with the teaching, research and services functions of an HEI. An international dimension means a perspective, activity or service which introduces or integrates an international/intercultural/global outlook into the major functions of an HEI"
Soderqvist (2002, p. 29)	"[...] a change process from a national HEI to an international HEI leading to the inclusion of an international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and research and to achieve the desired competencies"
Teichler (2003, p. 180)	"Internationalisation often is viewed as a growth of border-crossing activities while national systems persist, at least to a certain extent; thereby, internationalisation is often referred to when issues of cooperation and physical mobility, knowledge transfer as well as international education are addressed"
Teichler (2004, p. 22)	"[...] the totality of substantial changes in the context and inner life of higher education relative to an increasing frequency of border-crossing activities amidst a persistence of national systems, even though some signs of denationalization might be observed"
Van der Wende (1997, p. 18)	"Any systematic effort aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy and labour markets"

Source: Own elaboration

Table I.
Often-cited definitions
of internationalization
of higher education

The work of Knight (1994) represents a turning point to this literature, which started gaining momentum in the early 1980s. Knight's work, however, has been regarded as conceptually relevant but of little practical use (Eisenchlas and Trevaskes, 2003; Liddicoat, 2003; Sanderson, 2008) and not enough to bring clarification to researchers who wanted to internationalize their academic activities (Liddicoat, 2003).

The IHE phenomenon has been examined from diverse levels of analysis, including global (Stromquist, 2007; Teichler, 2004), regional (Enders, 2004; Kwiek, 2015; Teichler, 1999), national (Olmeda-Gómez *et al.*, 2009; Mertova, 2014), sectoral (Kato and Ando, 2013; Sarfati *et al.*, 2013), organizational/institutional (Knight, 2015; Maringe and Foskett, 2010), departmental (Diniz *et al.*, 2017; Leask, 2004) or individual (Holtbrügge and Engelhard, 2016; Welch, 1997; Xian, 2015). Sanderson (2008) was one of the first authors to highlight the individual level, without, however, underscoring the importance of faculty members in this process, even though faculty members eventually came to be pointed out as fundamental to IHE (Dewey and Duff, 2009; Rostan, Ceravolo and Metcalfe, 2014).

At the individual level, in particular from the standpoint of faculty, internationalization can be manifested by way of diverse activities, such as membership on editorial boards or review boards of international scientific journals or publishers, participation on dissertation or thesis defense committees, participation in or organization of international scientific events, publication of articles in international journals (or books), participation in international research groups as visiting professor from a foreign institution (Coates *et al.*, 2014; Dewey and Duff, 2009; Knight, 2004).

Social exchange theory (SET)

SET developed in the fields of sociology, social psychology and anthropology with Homans (1958) as its precursor; the theory held that social behavior is done through an exchange of goods, in a broad sense, that is, material and non-material goods. The latter could be interpreted as symbols of approval or prestige, for example. Building on this work, Blau (1968) found that with respect to relationships, there are two types of social exchange in the work environment: an economic one, which occurs in the short term and encompasses interactions between labor and respective financial rewards; and a social one, which takes place over a longer period of time and involves expected intangible rewards in terms of social approval or prestige among the peer group. In summary:

[SET comprises] the voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others [...]. Social exchange theory is based on a central premise: that the exchange of social and material resources is a fundamental form of human interaction Blau (1968, p. 452).

SET suggests that individuals, as part of social groups, make their decisions in a rational way in order to maximize positive experiences and minimize negative experiences through social interactions (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Emerson, 1976), thereby essentially pondering about the expected economic rewards vs the costs and their self-efficacy. As argued by Bandura (1997, p. 194), "efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the more active the efforts." Self-efficacy, for example, is enhanced when individuals feel confident about themselves by contributing their valuable knowledge to the team (Zhang *et al.*, 2017, p. 6).

Therefore, individuals are seen as rational decision makers who combine efforts in order to gain greater rewards and avoid costs in transactional relations, negotiations or simple exchanges (Emerson, 1976). In a similar vein, Weiss and Stevens (1993) maintain that human behavior is motivated by the desire to maximize positive experiences and minimize negative experiences through social interactions, and these interactions have rewards and

costs for the parties involved. Accordingly, rewards (such as money, awards, personal sense of well-being, gain in self-esteem and social status) are positive incentives for behavior, while costs (e.g. total time spent on activity, feelings of anxiety, failure and lack of ability to engage in other value activities), in turn, are negative incentives to behavior and serve as inhibitors (Weiss and Stevens, 1993). The mental account that an individual makes regarding the tradeoff between costs and (expected) rewards leads to the engagement/continuity or non-engagement/cessation of each given activity (Weiss and Stevens, 1993). This rational form of human thought in choices can be understood from the theoretical assumptions of SET, as presented in the below list.

Assumptions of the SET:

- A1: Human beings seek rewards and avoid costs to maximize their goodness of outcomes;
- A2: Costs being equal, individuals will choose the alternative which supplies or is expected to supply the most rewards;
- A3: Rewards being equal, individuals will choose the alternative which exacts the fewest costs;
- A4: Immediate outcomes being equal, individuals will choose those alternatives which promise better long-term outcomes;
- A5: Long-term outcomes being perceived as equal, individuals will choose alternatives providing better immediate outcomes;
- A6: Costs and other rewards being equal, individuals will choose the alternative which supplies or can be expected to supply the most social approval (Or they will choose the alternative which promises the least social disapproval);
- A7: Costs and other rewards being equal, individuals will choose statuses which provide the most autonomy;
- A8: Costs and other rewards remaining equal, individuals will choose activities and positions which provide the greatest financial remuneration and/or the smallest financial expenditures; and
- A9: Costs and other rewards being equal, individuals choose associates and friends with opinions and values which agree with their own and try to avoid those who consistently disagree with them.

Source: Nye (1978, p. 221)

The relevant unit of analysis in the SET is the individual and their interaction in social groups (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017).

Methodology

Research design and data source

One-on-one semi-structured interviews provide the primary data for this study. Our initial criteria to recruit the professors interviewed were: first, to act as a professor in a higher education institution with a Capes level 6 or 7 in the 2010–2012 triennial, in the area of business administration (Capes is the entity of the Brazilian government responsible for evaluating the quality of national master's and doctoral programs, as well as the internationalization of the programs; levels 6 and 7 are the highest levels that an institution can receive); second, to have published international scientific articles in the last five years; third, to have participated in international conferences and academic events; fourth, to have acted as a professor or as a visiting scholar in courses abroad. Thus, ten professors from

institutions with a Capes level 6 or 7 (Sao Paulo School of Business Administration (EAESP/FGV); School of Economics, Business and Accounting of the University of São Paulo (FEA/USP); and Brazilian School of Public and Business Administration (EBAPE/FGV)) and six other researchers (from Insper; HEC Montreal; and University of Georgia) with a notable international insertion and referred by the first ten were interviewed using the snowball method of sample selection. (A total of 16 interviews). All interviewees are Brazilian, work in the field of Management and are associate (9) or full professors (7), and most of them (12) also act as coordinators or academic directors. Three of the interviewees work concurrently in Brazil and abroad. The semi-structured script adopted for the interviews was organized to address the academic trajectory of the interviewees, their perceptions about internationalization (focusing on costs and rewards experienced) and the institutional context of which they are a part. The interviews took place in the first half of 2016. Each interview lasted approximately 50 min and was conducted in person (8), via Skype (7) or by telephone (1).

Following the qualitative research precepts of Miles and Huberman (1994), the technique of systematic coding of texts with the use of Atlas.ti software was adopted for the analysis of the data, starting from the interview transcripts recorded. Following the precepts of Guba and Lincoln (2005), we compared the major categories that emerged from coding with a guiding theory in order to form new analytical perspectives. For this, the definitions presented in the literature section (activities of IHE and SET) were used to analyze the data, together with our participant observation as professors who are also part of the phenomenon investigated.

As to our choice of field, we note that Brazil was chosen for the study because of its great potential for internationalization – the country has one of the ten largest economies in the world – and its current low participation in the global academic debate, of the order of 2 percent of total academic production (Unesco, 2015). This number, of an absolute nature, may be due to the very fact that Brazil is a “new” country in the academic environment; for example, in contrast to Western European countries and the USA, traditional Masters and PhD programs in Management in Brazil only began to emerge in the 1970s. However, the relative number of Brazilian researchers with international mobility is also low. Elsevier’s (2018) study shows that less than 40 percent of Brazilian researchers have international mobility and in places like the UK and Canada this number exceeds 70 percent. There is, therefore, a culture and a history of low internationalization of the Brazilian academy, which illustrates the need for the country to increase its international insertion in the scientific debate (Capes, 2010). Therefore, several initiatives will be necessary to increase the dialogue between Brazil and other nations in various fields of knowledge, including management. Due to this need of insertion, the national master’s and doctoral programs in management have sought – especially in the most recent decade – to increase their global participation. For this purpose, we believe that a study focusing on Brazilian professors who have been successful in this process is essential.

Trustworthiness

We use several methods to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. First, we conducted an analysis of documents of the Brazilian government entity responsible for evaluating higher education programs (Capes, 2010, 2013) to find out the internationalization criteria used to evaluate the programs and, consequently, to justify the choice of the higher education institutions initially contacted. We again emphasize that Capes only attributes a level of 6 and 7 to institutions that are considered highly internationalized. Second, we spent several months checking the CVs of the professors of these institutions in the databases of Google Scholar and Lattes (a Brazilian government platform that includes an academic CV database) in order to confirm their high-level international insertion (because not all

professors are active internationally and we needed to select professors knowledgeable about the subject). Third, we sought to obtain representatives from as many different higher education institutions as possible to get the broadest picture of the researched phenomenon, per the established selection criteria. Fourth, we also decided to conduct interviews with researchers who are not part of the initially investigated institutions (levels 6 and 7), but who have high international insertion; this was done using the snowball sampling technique. Fifth, we were careful about methodological rigor by triangulating the literature on IHE, the precepts of the SET and the interviews conducted (the latter done with the support of our participant observation as professors engaged in international activities).

Findings and discussion

Cropanzano *et al.* (2017) argue that SET is one of the most prominent conceptual perspectives in the field of management and is also widely used in sociology, social psychology and anthropology. Because SET gained acceptance in these fields, it is to be expected that the theory deals with social phenomena related to the individual level of analysis; thus, researchers often use SET to understand the choices of individuals in negotiation processes or in other situations in which social interactions exist. The social interaction chosen for this paper refers to the internationalization activities of researchers, which involve, in a broad sense, negotiations (or exchanges) between the researcher and the other audiences with which the researcher must relate in order to succeed in these activities. Table II shows examples of the internationalization activities carried out by the researchers and the main audiences with which they should interact and, in a broad sense, negotiate.

The process resulting from these internationalization activities involves rewards (expected by the researcher in carrying out the activity) and costs, as occurs in any situation of social interaction. Consequently, the researcher – according to the theoretical approach of the SET – will analyze their options as to whether or not to carry out the internationalization activity based on a cost-benefit analysis aiming at maximizing the occurrence of positive experiences and minimizing the occurrence of negative experiences.

Internationalization activities	Primary audience
1. Participation in international scientific events	As a regular participant: coauthors of the article (where applicable), article reviewers and coordinators involved in the process, staff of the event and peers present at the meeting; As organizer: other organizers, staff in general and peers who will regularly attend the event
2. Publication of an international scientific article (or book)	Co-authors of the article (where applicable), article reviewers, editors involved in the process and researchers reading the work
3. Participation as visiting researcher in foreign higher education institution	Foreign higher education institution staff, research supervisor to be developed (when applicable), foreign higher education institution students and teachers in general
4. Participation in international research group	Other researchers participating in the group, host institution (when applicable) and organizations/agencies involved in the project
5. Participation in masters or doctoral programs in foreign higher education institution	Foreign higher education institution professors, students involved in their work and foreign higher education institution staff in general
6. Participation as a member of international journal or scientific committee	Editor-in-chief, associate editors, reviewers, staff of the journal and readers of the journal

Source: Own elaboration

Table II.
Internationalization activities of the researcher and audiences

We identified that the most common expected costs for the researchers have a temporal aspect (the hours required to carry out the activities), a physical aspect (required travel concerning internationalization (when applicable)), a monetary aspect (necessary expenses of these activities) and a psychic aspect (mental wear and tear resulting from the complexity of these academic projects). Regarding the expected rewards, the researchers particularly highlight the emergence of new professional opportunities resulting from internationalization, the social approval of the academic group of which they are a part, the autonomy in relation to their choices (decision making) in their profession, and the security of their personal and professional futures. In order to obtain these results, we start with the group of respondents listed in Table III.

Below, we analyze the costs and the rewards expected by these researchers in relation to internationalization activities.

Costs perceived by faculty

According to the researchers, temporal costs are among the main disincentives in relation to involvement in international academic activities, especially research activities. In general, they believe that domestic activities, that is, those carried out within the home country, take less time than activities in foreign countries. Among other factors, this is because of the academic policies of the country of origin and the differences between the cultures. One factor that stands out is the fact that many professors, especially from Latin America, must devote much time to teaching, because of the requirements of the institutions in which they work. As a consequence, international research activities are curtailed, as illustrated in the following interviewee quotes:

The important thing is to have an institutional environment within the school that favors this type of (international) work. A professor who teaches 240 hours of classes per year will have trouble finding time to research internationally. (Jeff)

You have to spend a great deal of time to write an article, for example, for a top journal. A great deal of time and effort. And I do not think we researchers have to devote 100% of the time to it. Including because we make other contributions - contributions in terms of practice, with public policy, with other companies. These are also important things. (George)

No.	Name	Gender	Position	Institution	Capes level
1	John	Male	Full professor	Inspers	4
2	Paul	Male	Full professor	EBAPE	6
3	George	Male	Full professor	FEA – USP	7
4	Steve	Male	Full professor	EAESP	7
5	Jeff	Male	Associate professor	EBAPE	6
6	Michael	Male	Associate professor	HEC Montreal	Not applicable
7	Bruce	Male	Associate professor	Univ. of Georgia	Not applicable
8	Christie	Female	Full professor	FEA – USP	7
9	Jocelyn	Female	Full professor	EAESP	7
10	Arnold	Male	Associate professor	EAESP	7
11	Maya	Female	Associate professor	HEC Montreal	Not applicable
12	Donald	Male	Associate professor	FEA – USP	7
13	Philip	Male	Associate professor	Inspers	4
14	Arthur	Male	Associate professor	EAESP	7
15	Bob	Male	Full professor	Inspers	4
16	Frank	Male	Associate professor	EAESP	7

Table III.
Participant profile
(professors' names are
not their real names)

Source: Own elaboration

Time is very important! For many researchers, time is the scarcest resource of all! It is necessary to make exchanges. For example, in this period I will teach less in order to be able to carry out more studies internationally. (Michael)

The physical and psychic costs can be analyzed together when considering the internationalization of the researchers, because they are, according to the interviewees, highly related. Their reports emphasize concerns about barriers related to the difficulties of: first, displacement (in border-crossing activities) and a lack of appreciation of international activities on the part of some higher education institutions, second, family issues and, above all and, third, the intellectual disposition to generate scientific knowledge with international reach and credibility:

[...] there are several cases in which the researcher will travel to do a postdoctoral and spend two, three or four months off. This can be very difficult for the family (Bob).

Attending congresses is a burden these days. It sucks, takes me away from my family, it's an environment that is not so healthy. But congresses do encourage work. (John)

The great difficulty is for you to establish a dialog with the same level of understanding of the reality that you are dealing with normally. I mean, the effort to extend this dialog has a very high additional cost, right? Because you, in addition to understanding your own reality (of your country), have to broaden your understanding of a reality with which you are not accustomed. (Maya)

It is obvious that you have Brazilian educational institutions that hardly value this international career. In this case the researcher must carry out the effort singlehandedly, which makes the process very difficult. (Steve)

It is much more difficult to get published in a top international journal, for example. So, I'll make more effort to get the same reward. The only benefit I can get from this, as a researcher, is the intrinsic part. (Michael)

Finally, we have the monetary costs, highlighted by the interviewees as one of the main barriers to internationalization activities, especially those that require physical displacement (i.e. crossing international boundaries), such as participation in congresses and acting as visiting professor (or student in the training period) in foreign higher education institutions. Another point raised is that the monetary cost of internationalization activities seems to have decreased in recent decades, mainly due to the lower cost of transportation. This has enabled, albeit in modest numbers, the growth of border-crossing activities in relation to home-country activities:

The question of funding is also a problem, because when you have money to travel, to participate in congresses, you establish social relationships. But when you have to reach into your own pocket, it gets harder. Getting funds from a development agency in Brazil is very hard. We have to work on this. (Bruce)

The first time I had an article approved by the Academy of Management Annual Meeting was in 1999; but I did not go because I had no money, especially since it was the month of my daughter's birth. Today it is inconceivable to think of someone in the field of management who does not want to travel abroad. (Donald)

I remember that I saved for about five years to be able to be part of the overseas master's program. I did not have a scholarship; I had only my savings and it was really very expensive. It's not like today that you buy a ticket in installments. Back in 1990, salaries were much lower and we had to save a lot to travel. (Bob)

In contrast to the costs are the benefits (or rewards) that researchers hope to obtain from international activities, which are discussed next.

Rewards perceived by faculty

The first group that stands out concerns the professional opportunities acquired. The interviewees emphasize the importance of publishing good international articles as a way to open up paths abroad, the strategic aspect building international research networks and the view that – in some higher education institutions – internationalization is no longer optional and is a mandatory part of the academic activities to be performed by the professor:

Thanks to my (international) publications I had a proposal to go to the USA [...] I also had proposals from France. It's the publications that do this. They give you an option to travel abroad. (John)

[...] for many people it's important to keep your job in a graduate program. You have the question of survival. If you can get into a good school, you can develop your career. (Bob)

[...] when a researcher enters an international research network [...] they are participating in a certain international discussion space; they do research and studies; they have conversations [...] that becomes part of their patrimony. [...] this contributes to their career in a particular institution, and the more the institution values this international insertion, the more it will be rewarded for it. (Steve)

When you promote a professor, you should try to value those who seek a higher level of internationalization. (Christie)

Another reward expected by researchers is the increase in social approval within the academic group in which they work or, in some cases, in larger groups. In these reports, keywords such as respect, prestige and merit are included, and these are considered to be the intrinsic rewards of different internationalization activities, including participation in international forums, journals boards, scientific publications and the courses of fellow researchers:

[...] (reward) is you actually participate in some international forum, and are respected for it; you get published in foreign journals and then you're invited to forums and editorial boards. It is a question of prestige. (Bob)

[...] insertion within a greater capacity for influence. You perceive yourself as useful and relevant in relation to your job. I think the professor is looking for merit. Merit in the sense of ability to contribute to wider populations. [...] recognition, of contributory capacities. (Maya)

Having published in a top foreign journal is knowing that I'm being discussed, engaged, respected. [...] Your article may end up being used in some course by another researcher. So, this is the kind of intrinsic reward we get. (Michael)

Finally, the interviewees report greater autonomy in choice of career, greater job security, and, to some extent, greater personal security. Autonomy refers to the flexibility of time for conducting research abroad (as in sabbaticals) and for career choices in general; that is, internationalization seems to play a role in expanding the social network of the researcher and, thus, may generate more career options, movement-wise. Security, based on the perception of the interviewees, refers to a reasonable degree of career stability resulting from the international projects they have, especially the publication of scientific articles in international journals:

[...] support for sabbaticals. There are moments in the program where one, two or three professors leave for a sabbatical lasting six months to a year, outside Brazil. The professor is at an American, Canadian or British university and conducts research fulltime. (Paul)

Researchers can think in terms of a career goal. Because they are publishing internationally, they also become known; they stay in the market; their prestige in the market naturally increases. (George)

[...] internationalization in management is an important landmark, career-wise; therefore, this increases the internationalization of the home institution, because the individual knows that internationalization contributes to the advancement of the management faculty as a whole. (Christie)

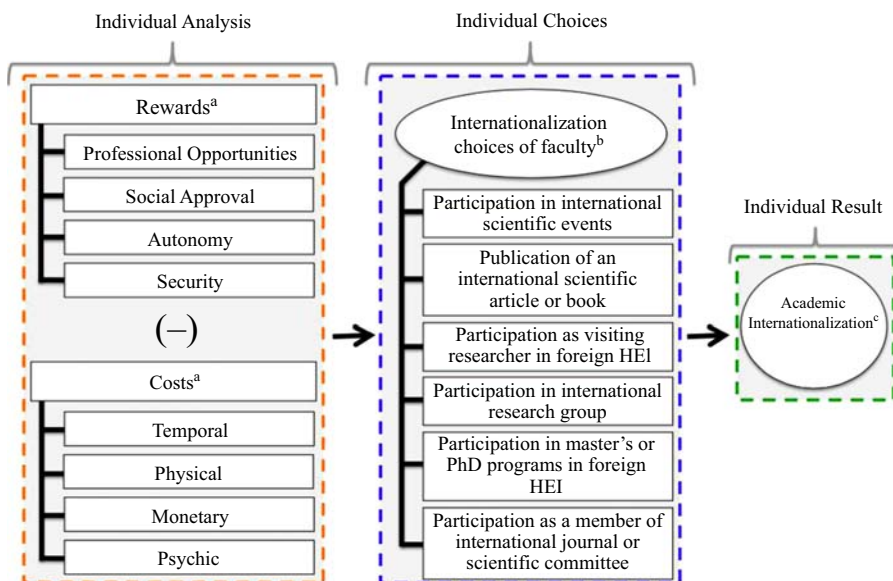
If you want to advance in your career there (referring to a higher education institution) you have to have a certain number of international articles, have a goal there that does not follow the national (Brazilian) standard, a goal that is much more rigorous. (John)

The main internationalization activities of researchers, as well as their main costs and perceived rewards, are outlined in the framework proposed in Figure 1.

In relation to the model, after the analysis of existing rewards and costs, the researcher will decide how (and whether) to perform each internationalization activity. In addition, the more activities performed, the greater will tend to be the internationalization of the researcher as well as the internationalization of the home-country institution, because, for all international activities mentioned, the professor's institutional affiliation is always accompanied by their names (e.g. the higher education institution earns international exhibition of its brand with every faculty participation/co-authorship in international congresses and academic articles, respectively. Through the work of the faculty member as foreign visitor and through participation in research groups, the brand also becomes better known in the international scenario).

Extension to social exchange theory

When we cross the interview data with the assumptions of SET, we note that researchers seem to make their pro-internationalization decisions when they have a long-term reward vision, despite the additional short-term costs inherent in this type of academic



Notes: ^aThe researcher's analysis occurs in the short and long term; ^bafter analyzing the tradeoff between rewards and costs; ^calso generates effects in the internationalization of the institution in which he/she operates

Source: Own elaboration

Figure 1. Framework on costs and rewards for the internationalization of researches

activity. As a result, researchers with a short-term career view would tend not to seek international insertion.

In this regard we propose a contribution to the SET, specifically in the argument of assumption number 4: "Immediate outcomes being equal, individuals will choose those alternatives that promise better long-term outcomes" (Nye, 1978, p. 221). Based on the results, we interpret that this theoretical proposition can be supplemented. Our central argument is that for certain groups of individuals, even if an activity "A" generates less reward today than an activity "B" (i.e. it does not have to be equal in the short term; it may even be worse), they can opt for activity "A" because they see that in the long run, "A" will outperform "B" in the ratio of rewards minus activity costs. Applying this concept to our study, we find that international academic activities are generally costlier for researchers than domestic academic activities. So why have the sample researchers chosen to internationalize? In our analysis, this is because they have optimistic expectations regarding the relation between the long-term rewards and costs of international activities; that is, they believe that in the long run the net "reward" will be considerably higher than that obtained from domestic activities. We conclude, therefore, that the theoretical assumption number 4 is not complete because it depends on the characteristics of the investigated group – the researchers interviewed have not preferred domestic activities, that is, academic activities that yield equal (or better) rewards in the short term. In this sense we intend to contribute to SET by suggesting the following new theoretical proposition: "For certain groups of individuals, even if the immediate outcomes are worse for a given activity, these individuals may opt for this activity because they expect better long-term outcomes, due to the positive expectations they have for the future."

Conclusion

Our main contribution to explaining the phenomenon of IHE was to focus on the micro-level of analysis (the faculty) – which has been somewhat neglected in this literature – and apply the rewards-costs framework of the SET to understand their decision process as regards the internationalization of their own academic activities. We analyzed the tradeoffs between rewards and costs perceived by 16 Brazilian researchers in their international activities. We found that faculty may seek internationalization in search of rewards such as job opportunities, greater social approval on the part of their academic group, greater autonomy in teaching and research activities and greater professional security. On the other hand, temporal, monetary, psychological and physical costs are among the factors that may discourage faculty members from seeking international insertion in their academic activity.

We found that researchers may sacrifice short-term rewards in expectation of obtaining greater future gains. Such finding may illuminate SET by incorporating a temporal gap between present sacrifices (costs) and future expected benefits (rewards). Additionally, and not surprisingly, we found an intricate connection between rewards and costs, since the attainment of (expected) benefits depends on additional costs; thereby, we argue that the *ceteris paribus* conditions expressed in the original propositions of the SET – although they help us understand the logic of the arguments – do not occur in practice since "everything else" does not remain equal.

Some limitations of the current study must be noted. First, collected data were restricted to researchers who work in Brazil, so generalization is not immediately warranted to other contexts. Second, although we focused mainly on their research activities, we acknowledge that teaching activities may also be considered part of the conceptual domain map of the "researcher internationalization" construct; therefore, the definition of this complex phenomenon (De Wit, 2002) may have to be revisited. However, while on the one hand this choice is a limitation of the study, on the other, it has allowed coherence between the research question and the data collection and findings.

As potential future research avenues, we suggest exploring the following questions: What are the (socio-demographic, psychological, behavioral) profiles of researchers who seek internationalization despite their assessment that costs may be greater than rewards in the short term? What are the respective outcomes of the internationalization of the IHE institution? How can higher education institutions foster the internationalization of their faculty? Additionally, how do the careers of “domestic” vs “internationalized” researchers differ?

As far as internationalization is concerned, such questions can be extended to other service industries, especially those where the internationalization of the firm is driven by the internationalization of their staff (e.g. people-based services, Clark *et al.*, 1996; Lovelock and Yip, 1996). This particular object of analysis – the faculty, who value freedom of thought and expression as well as status, prestige and a sense of belongingness that transcends the organization that hires them – can be of particular interest to studies in international human resource management. How to find and attract the right people, how to motivate them and how to leverage their personal, self-determined efforts to foster the internationalization of the organization appear to be fruitful avenues for future research.

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