

**Special Issue**  
**Higher education: A fundamental intangible capital  
towards a sustainable future**

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Education has become an intangible capital of vital importance in a changing context due to increasing complexity, uncertainty, accelerating globalisation and competitive rivalry. Likewise, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes as one of its core goals (SDG 4) to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". To this end, it focuses on the need to acquire a set of crucial transversal competencies applicable to different contexts and purposes throughout life, including not only formal (primary, secondary, university) but also non-formal education.

Focusing on higher education, this special issue addresses in a multidisciplinary way the different theoretical and empirical approaches that bring together innovative topics such as teaching innovation, graduates and job expectations, competence acquisition, digitalisation and technologies. The first three articles revolve around the importance of acquiring sustainable and intangible knowledge based on the acquisition of skills that helps students adapt to a changing and uncertain future of work while understanding and cooperating with their social environment to promote greater social justice. The last two articles are a clear example of the progress made in learning methodologies and the application of technology to improve the academic performance of university students.

The first paper, written by Rocío Samino García, shows the application of service-learning at the university level as a proper learning strategy to foster students' training acquisition, promoting cooperation with social actors and the social community, under the premise of social justice and sustainable development. This educational practice, in which more and more universities are immersed, is a magnificent example of how collaborations between universities and external stakeholders help to increase the acquisition of intangible knowledge that reverts to the community itself. The article analyses the strengths and weaknesses of service-learning, its challenges in their application, the educational possibilities of service-learning and the impact on students. Through an observational case study model, this study shows how students take action in response to social problems by a critical perspective and employing the professional competencies skills of their university degree. The case exposes the phases carried out, the methodological tools used and the perception/satisfaction of the students. The paper might be a guide to begin or improve service-learning projects in higher education.

Sonia Martín Gómez, Ángel Bartolomé Muñoz de Luna and María Jesús Lago Ávila analyse the importance of developing transversal skills as a fundamental tool for success in future employment. As proposed in Bologna and the OECD Competencies Report (2019), universities must move away from an exclusively vocational or professionalised approach towards one that helps provide graduates with personal resources and transversal competencies, which brings them to connect with the current labour environment and its professional future. The study combines the information obtained from two social actors involved in the learning process: students and employers. A survey is carried out on students about how they perceive and value transversal skills. Interviews with employers are conducted, analysing what deficiencies exist in the current university degrees. The

results show that soft skills are essential for students' professional future and their understanding of their value. Likewise, the authors highlight the importance of establishing a standard system of certified recognition of these competencies and consider that universities must develop instruments that facilitate their accreditation in the workplace through digital badges.

The third article written by Mar Cárdenas and Juan Ramón Campos-Blázquez develops the concept of job crafting, which will be essential for navigating in the uncertain future that comes. The unexpected and adverse situations of recent years suggest that in the future, professionals must have the necessary skills, attitudes and aptitudes to adapt to the continuous changes expected to ensure the sustainability of their jobs. At the same time, organisations need to identify what competencies and skills employees will require to align the person with their job. In this context, training becomes an intangible asset of extreme importance together with an employees' proactive attitude. Precisely this proactivity is what it is framed under the term job crafting. The authors point out that the study of the concept of job crafting has increased significantly in the recent years, but there is a lack of consensus to reach a single definition due to its complex nature. This paper aims at providing a comprehensive definition to describe the term "job crafting". For this, an intensive systematic review of the literature is carried out, with a systematic analysis of its definitions, to extract the common elements that characterise the definitions of job crafting. As a result, Cardenas and Campos offer a definition which includes the common traits shared by the different definitions of the previous authors based on three key elements: the employee's proactivity, the impact on the environment and the context in which the activity is carried out, adding the newly emerging working environments, such as hybrids (face-to-face and remote) and the embryonic metaverse.

The application of new pedagogical methodologies, synchronic or asynchronous teaching and the use of technological tools in the remote classroom are the subjects of the last two articles of the special issue. In this regard, the study by Raquel Garrido-Abia, Desiré García-Lázaro and Miguel Angel Marcos-Calvo dives deeper into the changes brought by the pandemic. Covid-19 supposed a radical change and a compulsory adaptation of in-person teaching towards remote and later hybrid training, which caused the removal of all the pillars of the pedagogic system. The educational community took on diverse challenges, from the lack of physical resources and the poor training of many teachers, who lack the necessary and adequate digital skills. Also, professors have to ensure that students change their way of learning, replacing physical contact with their teacher with a virtual learning system, and not become demotivated, fall behind and minimise the possible risk of students dropping out of the course. The study analyses how the change from face-to-face university teaching to online teaching has been conducted during COVID-19 by applying the TPACK model (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) in quantitative subjects. Moreover, the study analyses university students' perceptions of the new teaching methodology. The survey results highlighted the positive assessment of the method and the tools used to stand out.

The last article in this special issue is authored by Niurka Guevara-Otero, Susana Diaz-Iglesias and Elena Cuevas-Molano, and includes an experience that illustrates an active teaching-learning methodology (flipped classroom) and the analysis of the impact of synchronous and asynchronous teaching. Flipped classroom is a pedagogical approach that makes the student the protagonist of his or her learning, promoting the consolidation of the acquisition of theoretical-practical knowledge. The objective of this work is to investigate the effect of this approach on the academic performance of university students. For this purpose, the academic results and the students' and teachers' involvement and motivation in the different learning methodologies are analysed. The study compares students' perception of the effectiveness of the flipped classroom with the face-to-face classroom and online methodologies with the traditional learning methodology. The analysis of the results provides evidence of the positive impact on synchronous and asynchronous academic performance with the flipped classroom.

In conclusion, this special issue invites us to reconsider our point of view towards "the future of work" (WEF, 2020), identifying the competencies, abilities, aptitudes, and attitudes that will be necessary for a context as complex as the current one, and through innovation and the complicity of society. Five studies manifest the concern of their authors for the success of our students and professionals in the uncertain future that requires universities taking a prominent leadership role.

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