

HIGHER EDUCATION VALUES THAT CAN LEAD TO EXCELLENCE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Education is an important subject and over the years there have been many discussions surrounding the concept. As society evolves, each university and college adapt and aligns to their environment, taking into consideration the pedagogical new approaches, technological advancements, and societal shifting demands. Just as in other organizations, the culture of each university is formed by the beliefs, values, and attitudes of their employees, causing a shift in the environment-based morals and actions taken by these employees. This article begins by examining the importance of values and factors that can lead to different outcomes and values promoted and presented by universities and colleges based on the environment they are part of. The list of best universities was obtained after combining the ranks from three different sites that provide a detailed look and enable the identification of the best universities. The values assumed and promoted by the best universities in Europe and Romania were identified on websites (if the site had a section entitled "Mission, Vision and Values") or documents, also available on sites (such as Strategic Plans and University Charter). The article aims to identify, compare, and analyze the values promoted and upheld by European best universities along with Romanian best universities, and lastly to use Artificial Intelligence that has become more present and used in current times to find out the answer to the question "What are the higher education values?"

KEYWORDS: *educational values, European values; higher education; university ranking, value analysis;*

DOI: 10.24818/IMC/2023/02.07

1. INTRODUCTION

The correlation between individual and organizational values has a long history and has been discussed for a long time. In 1994 Kenny proposed that human communities have a value system and that organizations are no different than communities, having a value system of their own (Kenny, 1994). Gorenak and Kosir (2012) studied the correlation between how organizational values are stated within the organization and if they influence performance, the results obtained showed a weak correlation but the authors believe that this correlation could be more significant if they had used actual data regarding the organizational performance in the analysis (in that analysis they used companies that they had researched in).

Values are an essential component of the organizational culture, according to Geert Hofstede differences are more apparent in the values between national cultures and this can be identified even between organizations within the same nation (The Culture Factor, n.d.). In 2018 Hoffman & Schipper identified the core values of high-performing employee-owned enterprises as being

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honesty/fairness (accountability/merit), autonomy/freedom (community), empowerment (transparency), and egalitarianism (sustainability) (Hoffman & Shipper, 2018).

Higher education values have also been a subject of interest, in 1997 Mary Henkel concluded in her article that *"higher education in Britain is going through a process of fundamental change that it is now making a decisive transition from an elite to a mass system..... institutional leaders responding to the insinuation of new values: performance, efficiency, competition in the emerging markets."* She continued by adding a few more values to her count such as equality, community, academic/individual autonomy, and collective responsibility (Henkel, 1997). In 2004 Ferrari & Cowman mentioned in their article that the university's goal they made their study was to actualize the students' values of diversity, personalism, and engagement in civic service (these were the core values of the university) (Ferrari & Cowman, 2004). In 2023 the authors Johinke, Cummings, and Di Lauro mentioned in their article that *"the technologies of digital writing can be harnessed to reflect the values of education – openness, individual autonomy, and the power of knowledge – but only when the practitioners of digital writing pedagogy understand and access digital writing tools"* (Johinke et al., 2023).

If we use Artificial Intelligence (AI) such as ChatGPT to see what the higher education values are the results obtained are similar to what other authors identified before. The answer offered by AI to the question "What are the higher education values?" is to explain what the higher education values are and how they help shape the mission and culture of the universities and to offer a list of values (*Academic Excellence, Access and Equity, Intellectual Freedom, Critical Thinking, Diversity and Inclusion, Personal Growth, Research and Scholarship, Community Engagement, Ethical Conduct, Global Awareness, Student Success, Lifelong Learning, Professionalism, Sustainability, Innovation*) plus a short explanation followed by a disclaimer related to how the values can be influenced by *"mission statement, policies, curriculum, and the behaviors and attitudes of its faculty, staff, and students"* (the entire answer can be consulted in Appendix 2).

The values that were promoted by organizations have changed with time and society's evolution but the fundamental goal remained along the same lines of ethics, openness and transparency, diversity, and autonomy. Higher education institutions are no different and promote the same values in their pursuit of excellence, instilling them in the next generations of responsible and professional citizens. After a period of instability and challenges offered by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is interesting to study if the organizational values of the universities in Europe have changed.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study has a qualitative approach and aims to see how the values of higher education changed over time. The main objectives are to (1) identify the values promoted by top universities in Europe (EU) and Romania (RO), (2) identify the correlation between the universities and countries (separated for top EU countries and RO countries, and a collective analysis), (3) conduct a short analysis based on the score indicators provided by QS World University Rankings site.

To identify the best universities in Romania and Europe university ranking sites were accessed, 3 sites presented slightly different top 10 universities in Europe and Romania taking into consideration the methodology used by each in obtaining the lists. The initial list of universities with their source that was the base of the lists of top European and Romanian universities presented in the results section can be consulted in Appendix 1.

The primary data collection method utilized in this research is a content analysis of official university documents or the website section "Mission, Vision and Values". The collected information was analyzed in NVIVO soft and generated 2 main results according to this study's main objectives, (1) the word cloud that points out the common values shared by universities (for EU and RO) and (2) the items clustered by word similarity that indicated the correlation between

the universities and countries that promote the same values (separate for EU and RO and a collective analysis).

For the 3rd objective of the study, the information was provided by QS World University Rankings site and presented in a table (one for EU and one for RO) which is presented in section 3.4. of this article.

3. RESULTS

The results obtained based on the methodology presented above are presented in this section as follows: (1) EU top universities and their values plus the correlation between universities/countries, (2) RO top universities and their values plus the correlation between universities/countries, (3) Coloration between all universities mention in this study and (4) the indicators analysis provided by QS World University Rankings site.

3.1. European top universities and their values

The best universities in Europe according to the sources SCIMAGO Institutions Rankings 2023 (*The SCImago Institutions Rankings (SIR) is a classification of academic and research-related institutions ranked by a composite indicator that combines three different sets of indicators based on research performance, innovation outputs, and societal impact measured by their web visibility (SIR, n.d.)*), QS World University Rankings 2023 (*QS World University Rankings features 1,500 institutions across 104 locations and is the only ranking of its kind to emphasize employability and sustainability (QS TOP UNIVERSITIES, n.d.)*), and U.S. News 2023 (*These institutions from the U.S. and more than 90 other countries have been ranked based on 13 indicators that measure their academic research performance and their global and regional reputation sites (U.S.News, n.d.)*) are as follows:

1. University of Oxford
2. University of Cambridge
3. University College London
4. Imperial College London
5. Sorbonne Universite
6. University of Amsterdam
7. Swiss Federal Institute of Technology
8. ETH Zurich
9. University of Edinburgh
10. EPFL Lausanne, Switzerland
11. King's College London
12. Universite de Paris Cite
13. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
14. University of Manchester
15. University of Copenhagen
16. Utrecht University
17. Universite Paris-Saclay

After this list was obtained the next step was to search the values promoted by each of them. A part of the universities had a section on their websites entitled "Mission, vision and values" and allowed an easy identification, some included the values promoted by them in the document entitled "Strategic plan" for the next 4 or 5 years. After all the values from all universities had been identified NVIVO soft was used to do the qualitative analysis of the data obtained. The results of the analysis are presented in the word cloud (Figure 1) generated by the soft which points out the

Figure 2 was obtained in NVIVO soft and shows us the similarity of values promoted by the best European universities. The proximity of two universities that have the same color in the figure indicates the similitude of their promoted values. The results indicate that a higher similitude was identified between (1) ETH Zurich, Swiss Institute of Technology, Sorbonne University, University de Paris Cite and University of Cambridge, (2) University College London and Imperial College London, (3) University of Amsterdam and University of Copenhagen, and (4) Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Kings College London and University of Edinburgh. In the first match Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and France universities promote the same values. The second match is between 2 universities from the United Kingdom this being the single match between two universities from the same country. The 3rd match is between universities from Denmark and the Netherlands followed by the 4th group with 2 universities from the United Kingdom plus one from the Netherlands.

3.2. Romanian top universities and their values

The best universities in Romania according to the sources SCIMAGO Institutions Rankings 2023, QS World University Rankings 2023, and U.S. News 2023 are as follows:

1. Babes-Bolyai University
2. Politehnica University of Bucharest
3. Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy Cluj Napoca
4. University of Bucharest
5. Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy
6. Transilvania University of Brasov
7. Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi
8. University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca
9. University of Oradea
10. Technical University of Cluj-Napoca
11. Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu
12. Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava
13. "Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iasi
14. West University of Timisoara

The same steps were followed to obtain the Romanian values promoted by the universities. In their case, we observed that the universities in Romania have their values more included in the University Charter, only a few had on their site a page entitled "Mission, vision and values" and some had only the "Mission and vision" webpage that doesn't include the values. Another aspect is that some universities use the principles mentioned in the National Educational Law and say their activity is based on them, while others present the principles as values promoted by the university (for the universities where values were not identified we used the principles as their values).

Figure 3 presents the results after the analysis of values was done in NVIVO soft and the most mentioned values by top universities in Romania are responsibility, freedom, and transparency (bold red) followed by meritocracy, professionalism, respect, equality, autonomy, tolerance, honesty, and excellence (bold black).

Figure 4 shows us the similarity of values promoted by the Romanian universities. The proximity of two universities that have the same color in the figure indicates the similitude of their promoted values. The results indicate that a higher similitude was identified between (1) Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi and Polytechnic University of Bucharest, (2) University of Agricultural Science and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca and Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, (3) Gheorghe Asachi Technical University of Iasi and University of Oradea and (4) Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Bucharest and University of Bucharest. The important aspect that needs

to be mentioned is that the similitude passed the country regions and the matches are formed by universities from different regions the exceptions being the 4th match between the universities that are both from Bucharest.



Figure 3 Higher education values promoted by Romanian top universities

Source: Made by authors

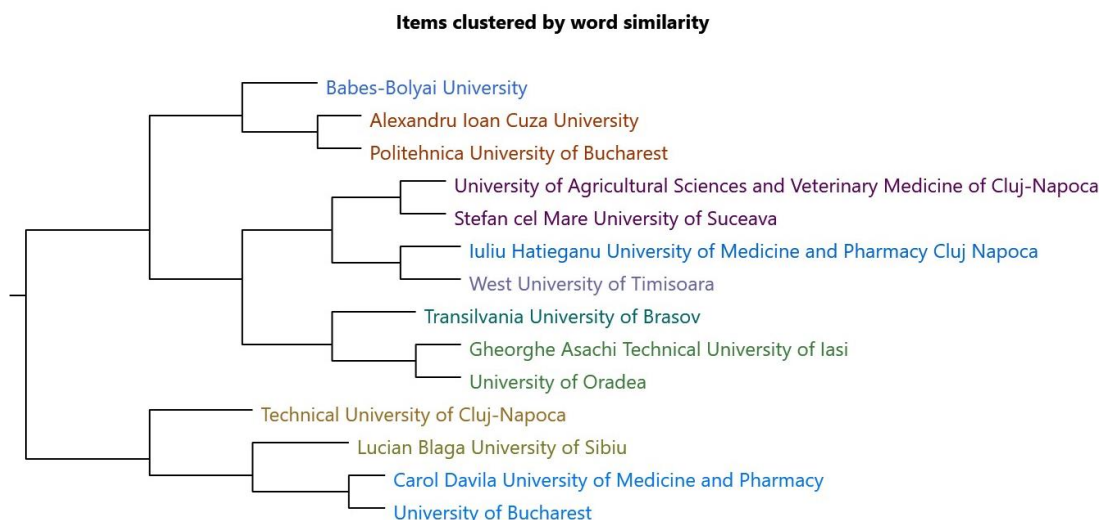


Figure 4 Values similarity between Romanian top universities

Source: Made by authors

3.3. Similitude Analysis of Values

To be able to identify the similitude of values for all universities mentioned in this study we used the items clustered by word similarity analysis offered by NVIVO and the results are presented in Figure 5.

From the items clustered by word similarity resulted 5 main groups that have a higher similitude of the values promoted on the university website as follows group 1 has only universities from Romania, group 2 has universities from Switzerland, Romania, and the United Kingdom, group 3 has universities from United Kingdom and Netherlands, group 4 has universities from Romania, Netherlands and France and group 5 has universities from Romania, France, United Kingdom, and Switzerland.

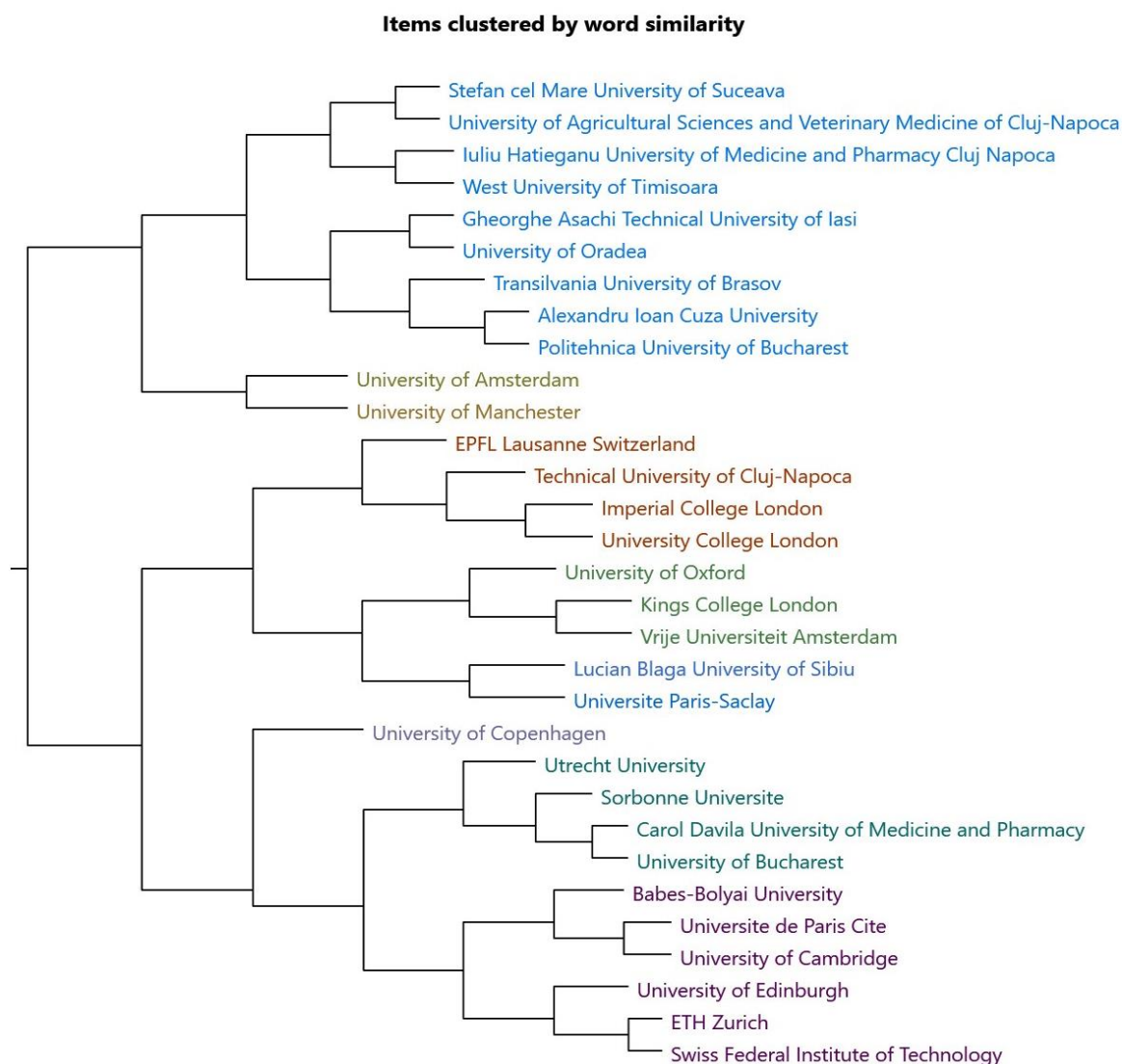


Figure 5. Values similarity between European and Romanian universities

Source: Made by authors with NVIVO

3.4. Indicators score for best European universities

In this section, we presented (1) the Academic reputation of the universities presented in this study analyzed (2) the impact that universities have over Europe's research, (3) how much they collaborate with other countries to pursue problem-solving and (4) how easy students find a job after finishing studies at the EU level.

Indicator **Academic Reputation Index** score takes into consideration a lot of factors such as (1) the institution's research, (2) the approach to academic partnerships, (3) the strategic impact, (4) the educational innovativeness, (5) the impact they have made on education and society at large .

The **Citations per Faculty** score measures the intensity and volume of research being done at an institute (taking into account institute size).

The **International Research Network** score measures global engagement and how institutions create research partnerships and how they sustain them in order to result in internationally co-authored publications with international institutions that can lead to solving the world's challenges and disseminate vital research to wider audiences.

Indicator **Employment Outcomes** was designed to present the ability of institutions to ensure a high rate of employability, while also nurturing in their graduate’s future leaders who will be able to make an impact in the fields they studied.

Table 1. Indicators score for top European universities

University	Academic reputation		Citations per Faculty/paper		International Research Network		Employment Outcomes	
	Global	EU	Global	EU	Global	EU	Global	EU
University of Oxford	100	100	90	99	99.9	100	100	100
University of Cambridge	100	100	92.3	99.7	99.9	99,4	100	100
University College London	99.4	100	77	99.1	100	99.9	90.3	94
Imperial College London	98.3	100	86.5	99.8	98.1	95.4	88.8	99.7
Sorbonne Universite	90	98.8	86.3	88.2	99.6	99.7	60.9	85
University of Amsterdam	82.7	97.8	42.3	100	97.2	96	51.4	91.6
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology	84.6	07.9	98	99.9	65.6	74	19.4	47
ETH Zurich	98,6	100	99.2	99.8	96.2	94.7	91.1	99.4
University of Edinburgh	98	100	70.1	98	98.7	98.8	54.3	99.8
King's College London	88.8	99.1	60.5	90.9	99.3	98.3	56.9	80
Universite de Paris Cite	34.7	57	91.5	87.5	99.4	98.9	2.5	26.5
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	39.7	67	70	94.8	89.8	76.8	19	51.4
University of Manchester	95.1	99.8	59	93.2	98.9	99	66.4	99
University of Copenhagen	72,8	94.3	26	88.7	99.1	96.9	58.2	95.8
Utrecht University	65.8	90.4	79.6	96.2	94.7	93.8	42.5	65.1
Universite Paris-Saclay	57,2	85.6	49.5	76	97.1	97.5	7.8	77.3

Source: adapted from (QS TOP UNIVERSITIES, n.d.)

Analyzing the indicators score for the top EU universities we can see that the most of them have a score over 70 for the Academic Reputation both at global and EU level. The scores also indicates that there is a strong Network for International Research that can lead to the higher score of the citation per faculty/paper indicator. Taking into consideration that this universities are globally known and every year a lot of students try to get a spot and study, the high level of employment outcome is no surprise and only improves the Academic reputation of this universities.

In the 2023 Country Report for Romania realized by European Commission, one of the future lines of improvements mentioned is “*raising the quality of education depends on improving the policies related to the teaching profession*” (European Commission, 2023). Taking into account the

improvements that were made over the years the fact that Romanian universities are present even with a low score at the global level is an accomplishment. The score at the EU level is usually higher than on the global level this being something predictable since we are more known at the EU level.

Table 2. Indicators score for Romanian universities

University	Academic reputation		Citations per Faculty/paper		International Research Network		Employment Outcomes	
	Global	EU	Global	EU	Global	EU	Global	EU
Babes-Bolyai University	15.6	33.4	11.8	2.6	81.8	58,6	28.9	59,1
Politehnica University of Bucharest	5.7	12.8	6.4	1.1	56.6	37.7	8.2	9.1
Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy Cluj Napoca								
University of Bucharest	14,6	31.6	4.1	1.7	66.3	47.9	37.8	78.4
Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy								
Transilvania University of Brasov	4.5	13.4	3.1	1.7	38.2	15.1	9.3	8.9
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University	7.1	17.4	3.2	1.2	26.5	9.5	8.6	11.3
University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca								
University of Oradea	4	11.3	1.5	1.5	16.6	9.6	9.7	6.6
Technical University of Cluj-Napoca	4.5	11.2	3.5	1.1	31	13.5	9.1	11.3
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu	3.1	8.6	1.7	1	7.4	63.8	13	9.9
Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava	3.3	8.8	3.8	2.9	16.6	25.7	13.9	9.4
The "Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iasi	5.3	13.3	5.7	1.1	23.4	11.2	9.6	9.1
West University of Timisoara	8.8	20.5	2.8	1.2	22	4.1	16.9	15

Source: adapted from QS TOP UNIVERSITIES (n.d.)

4. VALUE BASED MANAGEMENT (VBM)

Practitioners of value-based management take values into consideration in the planning, physical treatments, and public interpretation of efforts when in theory if it's applied right will conduct to a democratic and inclusive interpretation of the values identified from all the stakeholders (Jameson, 2008). In 2016 Kumar mentioned that value-based management is focused on the application of valuation principles and that the components of the employees' work need to be connected to the profitability, growth, and capital intensity that should be a reward for the actual performance that is measured and evaluated (Kumar, 2016).

In a very detailed literature review written by Ameels, Bruggeman, and Scheipers (2002) the authors defined VBM as being the integrated management control system that will help to measure, encourage, and support the creation of net worth. The main concepts identified in the paper are presented below:

- Stakeholder approach and perception,
- Market value added (MVA)
- Single period metrics (Economic value added (EVA), Equity spread approach),
- Multi-period metrics(Cash flow return on investment, Shareholder value added),
- Management focus,
- Value creation,
- Strategy development and deployment,
- Investment decisions,
- Resource allocation,
- Performance management and target setting,
- Reward system, training and education,
- Benchmarking (based on EVA).

Corazza (2020) published an article that included the six steps for a correct BM system implementation which are presented in the figure 6.

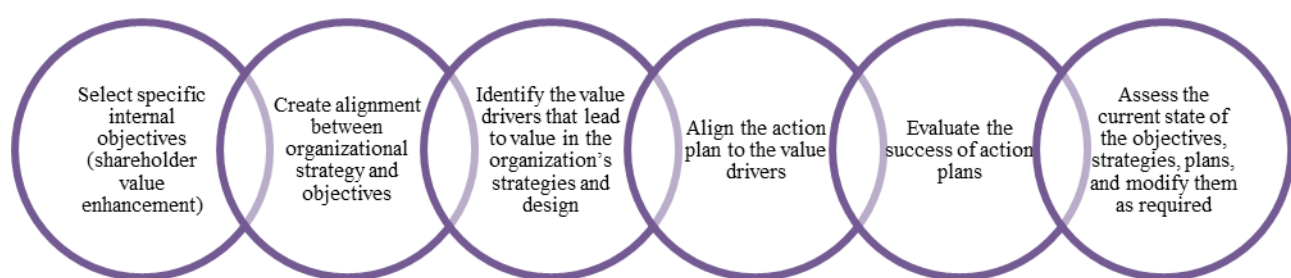


Figure 6 Six steps implementation of a VBM system

Source: adapted after Corazza (2020)

The author Beck (2014) studied the effects of the implementation of value-based management and presented a list of advantages promoted by valuebasedmanagement.net which is presented in the figure 7.

Value based management is important and sustains the organizations to incorporate the values into leadership and this can help individuals to identify and be more involved in routine activities.

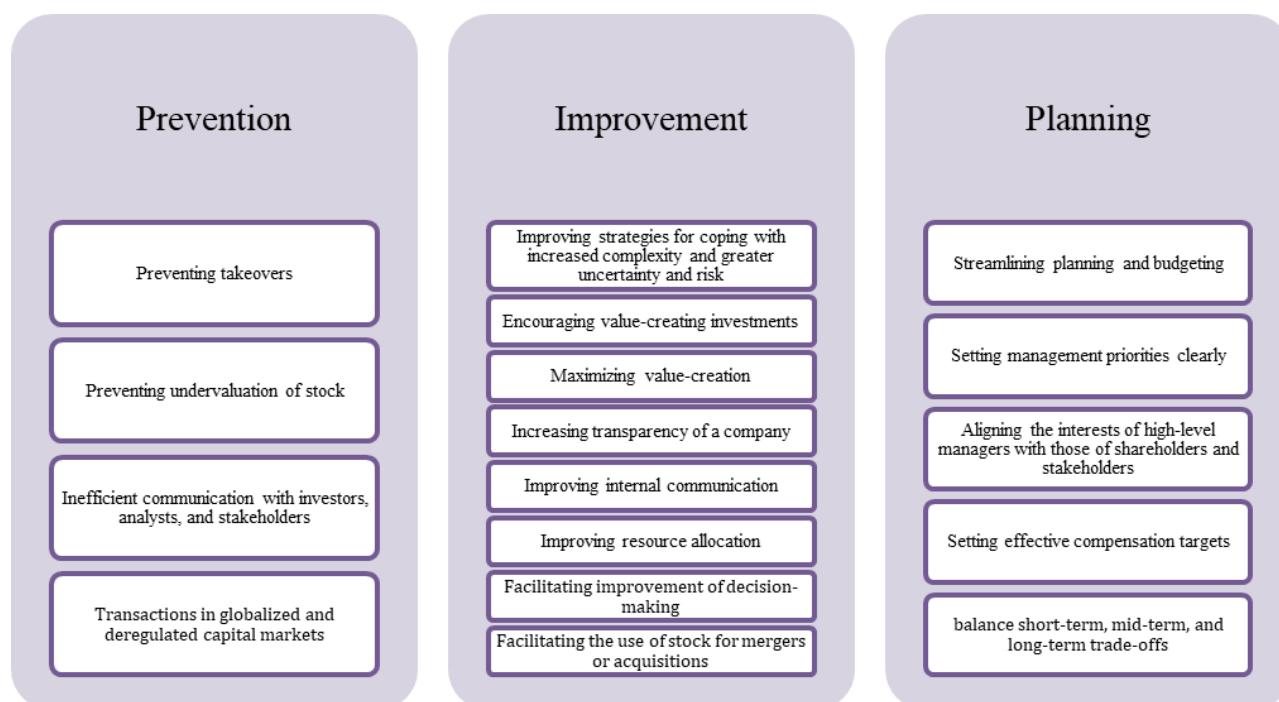


Figure 7. VBM advantages
 Source: adapted after Beck (2014)

5. CONCLUSIONS

Values are a part of the organizational culture that leads to the way individuals act and interact at work. Educational values are important because they shape the future citizens of society, as mentioned in the introduction it is possible that some universities will want to transfer the values promoted by them to their students. Artificial intelligence as Chat GPT is used more frequently as support in many domains but sometimes the answers offered are not accurate. To our question "What are the higher education values?" AI answered academic excellence, access and equity, intellectual freedom, critical thinking, diversity and inclusion, personal growth, research and scholarship, community engagement, ethical conduct, global awareness, student success, lifelong learning, professionalism, sustainability, and innovation. We can confirm that the values were promoted by some universities on their website but the most mentioned values are excellence, respect, openness, diversity, and integrity. These values are certainly included in the management of higher education management since universities want to have excellence and respect in teaching, research, and project activities. Most universities wish that the transfer of knowledge from university to market to be done fast and this leads to openness, integrity, and transparency in research to allow access to information to be an easy process for everyone. As mentioned before, value-based management is focused on the application of valuation principles and the components of the employees' work and the results will be rewarded for the actual performance. After identification, the values are introduced in the management to sustain the organization with a series of advantages that aim to prevent, improve, and sustain better planning. The values identified in higher education by the best universities in Europe are introduced in the management process and transmitted to the students who are appreciated and "hunted" by private companies.

A few of the Romanian top higher universities are blended with the top universities identified at the European level in the analysis of items clustered by word similarity. This is a sign that Romanian higher education is improving and implementing good strategies that in the long term will bring better positions in the world and European tops created for education.

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Appendix 1

Rank	Romania		
	SCIMAGO Institutions Rankings	QS World University Rankings	U.S. news
1	Babes-Bolyai University	Babes-Bolyai University	Transylvania University of Brasov
2	Politehnica University of Bucharest	University of Bucharest	Babes Bolyai University from Cluj
3	Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy Cluj Napoca	Alexandru Ioan Cuza University	West University of Timisoara
4	University of Bucharest	Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu	Carol Davila University of Medicine & Pharmacy
5	Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy	Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava	Polytechnic University of Bucharest
6	Transilvania University of Brasov	Technical University of Cluj-Napoca	University of Bucharest
7	University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca	The "Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iasi	Alexandru Ioan Cuza University
8	Alexandru Ioan Cuza University	Transilvania University of Brasov	Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine & Pharmacy
9	University of Oradea	Universitatea de Vest din Timisoara / West University of Timisoara	Technical University of Cluj Napoca
10	Technical University of Cluj-Napoca	University POLITEHNICA of Bucharest	GH Asachi Technical University

Source:

<https://www.scimagoir.com/rankings.php?sector=Higher+educ.&country=Western%20Europe>
<https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2023?®ion=Europe&countries=ro>
<https://www.usnews.com/education/best-global-universities/search?region=europe&country=romania>

Rank	Europe		
	SCIMAGO Institutions Rankings	QS World University Rankings	U.S.news
1	University of Oxford	University of Cambridge	University Of Oxford
2	University College London	University Of Oxford	University of Cambridge
3	University of Cambridge	Imperial College London	University College London
4	Imperial College London	University College London	Imperial College London

5	Sorbonne Universite	Eth Zurich	Eth Zurich
6	University of Amsterdam	The University of Edinburgh	King's College London
7	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology	Epfl Lausanne, Switzerland	University of Edinburgh
8	Universite de Paris Cite	Université Psl	University of Amsterdam
9	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	The University of Manchester	University of Copenhagen
10	Universite Paris-Saclay	King's College London	Utrecht University

Source:

<https://www.scimagoir.com/rankings.php?sector=Higher+educ.&country=Western%20Europe>
<https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2023?®ion=Europe>
<https://www.usnews.com/education/best-global-universities/europe>

Appendix 2

Higher education values are the principles and ideals that guide the goals and priorities of institutions of higher learning, as well as the expectations and behaviors of students and faculty members. These values help shape the mission and culture of universities and colleges. While higher education values may vary from one institution to another and evolve over time, some common higher education values include:

1. *Academic Excellence: Institutions of higher education strive to provide a high-quality education, rigorous academic programs, and opportunities for intellectual growth and achievement.*
2. *Access and Equity: Ensuring that education is accessible to a diverse range of students and promoting equity in educational opportunities are fundamental values. This includes efforts to increase access for underrepresented groups.*
3. *Intellectual Freedom: The principle of intellectual freedom encourages the pursuit of knowledge, free expression of ideas, and the open exchange of information and viewpoints, even when controversial.*
4. *Critical Thinking: Higher education promotes critical thinking skills, encouraging students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to make informed decisions and solve complex problems.*
5. *Diversity and Inclusion: Creating an inclusive and diverse learning environment fosters a rich exchange of ideas, experiences, and perspectives among students and faculty.*
6. *Personal Growth: Higher education values personal growth and development, not just academically but also in terms of character, ethics, and civic responsibility.*
7. *Research and Scholarship: Universities often prioritize research and scholarship, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in various fields.*
8. *Community Engagement: Many institutions emphasize community engagement, encouraging students and faculty to participate in civic activities and contribute to the betterment of society.*
9. *Ethical Conduct: Upholding ethical standards and promoting integrity in teaching, research, and all aspects of university life is a core value.*
10. *Global Awareness: Recognizing the interconnectedness of the world, higher education values global awareness and often promotes international experiences and perspectives.*

11. *Student Success: Higher education institutions aim to support students in achieving their educational and career goals, providing resources and services to facilitate success.*
12. *Lifelong Learning: Encouraging a love for learning beyond the classroom and promoting lifelong learning is a fundamental value.*
13. *Professionalism: Preparing students for their future careers and instilling professionalism and ethical conduct in their chosen fields are important values.*
14. *Sustainability: Many institutions prioritize sustainability, both in terms of environmental responsibility and in fostering a sustainable future for society.*
15. *Innovation: Higher education values innovation in teaching methods, research, and technology, aiming to stay at the forefront of knowledge and practice.*

These values may be expressed through a university's mission statement, policies, curriculum, and the behaviors and attitudes of its faculty, staff, and students. It's important to note that different institutions may emphasize these values to varying degrees, depending on their unique goals and contexts. Additionally, the higher education landscape is dynamic, and values can evolve over time in response to societal changes and educational trends.