Chapter 7

Overcoming Complacency Through Quality Intelligence in Greek Higher Education:
The Critical Role of Academic Leadership

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ABSTRACT

During the last decade, an intensification of evaluation at the Greek universities has been noted, encouraged by the state and institutional initiatives aiming to reform, modernize, and cultivate a culture of excellence. The progress that has been reported was facilitated by global developments that gradually strengthened the cultural and scientific foundations of university performance evaluation and set the foundations for continuous institutional improvement and transformation. However, the role of academic leadership is crucial if universities wish to fully embrace the concept of excellence in their operations and services not from an obligatory, but from an evolutionary perspective that would allow them to learn and improve. As Greek universities are currently in the process of quality accreditation, the chapter briefly presents the framework for quality accreditation in Greek universities and underlines the critical role of academic leadership for achieving accreditation and establishing a culture for sustainable excellence.

INTRODUCTION

University institutions nowadays are being reorganized to respond effectively to several challenges such as global competition in the dawn of the 4th industrial revolution, the mass character of higher education, the appearance of new higher education providers, the multiplicity of customers (receivers of educational services), and the issue of accountability to state and society and the assurance of quality. These challenges along with the pursuit of excellence in mission attainment mark out quality as a basic goal, a reference criterion and a seal of efficient and effective university management and operation.

The effective management of higher education presupposes evaluation of achieved results at the institutional, departmental and study program level (undergraduate and postgraduate). The academic and organizational pillars of universities should be evaluated, in order to unveil potential weaknesses and deviations regarding goal achievements and mission and formulate the basis for continuous quality improvement. University performance evaluation offers objective data and criteria for state financing, teaching and research staffing and allows the comparison of performance (with similar institutions). This process is also a helpful instrument in the hands of students that helps them in making the right decisions for their studies. In addition, the process of university performance evaluation additionally facilitates the proper alignment and coordination among the higher education system and the job market. When evaluation is scientifically correct and is conducted systematically, it can contribute to noble competition among institutions and excellence.

Evaluation, in general, is a term used to denote the value, performance of something/someone based on specific criteria. It is a systematic process of critical analysis which allows the extraction of conclusions regarding the quality of the evaluated subject/object (Beywl, 2003, p.5), based on quantitative and qualitative evidence. In the context of higher education, performance evaluation should not be considered as a management fad, but as a necessary element in the management of any institution. The existence of an evaluation system/framework in higher education presupposes solid scientific foundations, organizational ability and institutional commitment for implementation, assurance of transparency and objectivity, publication of results and a dynamic design, so that the system can transform itself and thus adapt to changing circumstances (Anninos, 2010, p.235).

The comprehensive performance evaluation of higher education institutions is an issue of high significance and difficulty. The various evaluation objectives, the interactions among the performance constituents, the complexity and particularity of the educational environment and the unique character of each institution have contributed in the development of a variety of evaluation approaches and systems that can be implemented. The great challenge for scholars is the evaluation of suitability, compatibility and reliability of the suggested approaches and systems with reference to the achievement of their main purpose, which should be continuous improvement of institutional quality and provision of relevant information to stakeholders. According to literature, university performance evaluation is achieved through (Anninos, 2010, p.235):

1. **Typical Evaluation** that focuses on (Danish Evaluation Institute,2003, p.8):
   a. the quality of a subject in all study programs that the subject is taught (for example, the subject "total quality management" in a business administration study program)
   b. the study program itself
   c. the quality of an institution in every aspect of each operation (for example, educational or organizational) and
   d. the quality of a specific practice (e.g. internship programs)
2. **Accreditation** which refers to the procedure by which an independent agency/actor evaluates the quality of an institution or a study program in order to certify that it meets specific and pre-defined standards (Vlasceanu, Grunberg & Parlea, 2007, p.25)
3. **Audit**, which is the process by which the performance of institutional quality assurance systems and quality monitoring procedures is evaluated (Vlasceanu *et al.*,2007, p.31)

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