

Chapter 80

Building a Culture of Trust in Higher Education Institutions: Challenges for a New Type of Quality Management

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions worldwide are evolving in a so-called quality assurance era in which quality standards are defined and implemented. Quality assurance has, in fact, two sides: one declarative, or formal, reflected into documents, proofs, and even statistics well prepared, and one practical, or informal, that behind all legal issues, the quality of processes is real. The contradiction between the two sides of the quality assurance contributes a false perception of quality and unethical institutional behavior. Higher education institutions can become ethical or more ethical through their people—management, academics, students, alumni, researchers. In other words, the culture of quality needs to be rebuilt towards trust. The objective of this chapter is to provide a clear insight to the contemporary state of higher education institutions' behavior and context to contribute to the building up of new quality management based on a trust in the area of education, research, and social development.

INTRODUCTION: HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE – BASED CONTEXT AND ETHICAL NEEDS

The current context of higher education is a difficult one, the main characteristics being its dynamism. External factors coming from macro-environment change, such as legislation, ministerial methodologies, funding, demographical elements, information, and technology contribute to a change in higher education institutions (HEIs) not only to be aware but to be proactive. Internal determinants create an institutional climate and culture that are influenced by external stimuli, but, nevertheless have the power of making the institution a sustainable or a survival one. In other words, an efficient academic leadership drives

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the institution towards achieving its objectives by confronting the same challenges like its competitors with a different set of reactions, meaning behaviors, actions, strategies, policies.

HEIs in all countries try to develop in a quality assurance context in which they are accredited institutions certified by specialized entities, in which all their study programs must be either temporary authorized or accredited, in which quality standards are defined and implemented at least at their minimum values, in which strategies are well done, but not so well put into practice and so on. On the one hand, quality assurance is declarative, or formal, meaning that documents, evidence or statistics are essential, while on the other hand quality assurance is effective, or informal which reflect the real quality of processes. The difference between the two sides of the quality assurance allows poor institutional behaviors and false perception of quality to be more or less observed. When such a distinction is produced, an unethical action takes place from an institutional and managerial point of view. The higher this gap is, the more negative impact on the society is got. Gulcan (2015) describes merely the difference between theoretical ethics based on normative, descriptive and Metaethics and practical or applied ethics, referring to professional issues in the field; therefore, this is the difference between actions, meanings, and facts that are wrong or right and concrete standards and codes which generate professional guidance to employees.

Many strategies of HEIs show that building a quality culture or consolidating it is a priority for the management team, but this does not always include both sides of the quality assurance. In fact, the contemporary meaning of the quality culture can be described through all the internal actions imposed by the context of standards and legislation. Since the national framework is based on indicators, institutions behave as if achieving proper values to so-called quality indicators is their real objective. This is wrong. The indicators values are results of their activities and not objective. A quality culture cannot be built on strategies having the increasing of the indicators values as objectives. This happens in the case of an unethical institution in which wrong understanding of quality culture changes the whole way of thinking projects, actions, decisions. In other words, strategic thinking is needed by HEIs to be able to express their mission, objectives, activities clearly, to connect these with the resources and to identify their competitive advantage. Strategic thinking in HEIs is seen as the proper way of acting and changing from short-term strategies to longer-term ones. Bratianu & Bolisani (2015) explain that operational thought is no longer enough in a general competitive context, and describe strategic thinking as a solution to create and implement winning strategies. They also provide a clear understanding of the several models that generate strategic thinking: a model based on entropic reasoning, meaning that decisions are time focused, a model based on nonlinear thinking, in which complexity is considered as the most critical dimension and a model of probabilistic reasoning, where uncertain events count.

The current context of higher education and quality assurance procedures reveal the fact that up to a very high level, many HEIs at a national comparison, are quite similar. Differentiation is possible even if the quality assurance system might also impose the list of the subjects to be studied at a specific program as compulsory, optional or elective subjects. Therefore, building a quality culture is connected to developing strategic thinking for the leadership. An objective that is not realistic, or achievable proves weaknesses of the strategic thinking of the leadership. Combined with falsity, it goes again to unethical behavior. Many HEIs have described what is ethical or unethical mean according to their institutional concepts and provided transparent clarification. Academic Integrity at Princeton (2017) is a publication in which not only what is wrong in terms of unethical behavior is described, but also, solutions and recommendations are provided for the members of the academic community. Therefore, on one side, the university is defined as an intellectual community where trust is a central concept related to the idea circulation within the university; examples of plagiarism are explained, as well as misrepresenting

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