

ELEMENTS OF STRATEGY IN THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF THE ROMANIAN INSTITUTIONS OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Vasile Puiu, Catalina Puiu, Florin Macarie, Catalin Drob
University of Bacau
Bacau
Romania

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ABSTRACT:

The investigation of the quality of a university and its educational services requires defining and construing its concepts of operation. The organizational quality of a university is established by the quality of the operational processes and services being offered.

This work is approaching the fundamental concepts of strategy in the management of the academic quality, the evaluation of changes in this context and quality management policies in terms of customer's satisfaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Problems in Romanian higher education can be directly attributed to a lack of vision, insight, and skill on the part of many administrators who have failed to receive any formal, or even informal, management training. During the rapid growth of higher education in the 1960s and '70s, unskilled or inefficient managers set the stage for long-term problems now associated with planning and development, budget management, personnel administration, and the perceived decline in quality among university graduates [1].

Some examples of the lack of quality:

- outmoded instructional techniques
- poor staff morale
- weak teacher preparation
- inefficient budgets
- poorly prepared professionals
- inadequate skills in new students

Traditionally, there has always been a fear of changing systems by which value or worth is measured. Only when change has been forced by the need to survive have institutions like industry, banking, government, and education discovered new ways to measure worth. But complacency in a globally competitive environment will only lead to further decline

2. ELEMENTS OF STRATEGY

Starting again from the perspective of resource-dependence theory a basic premise of this model is that decisions are made within institutions. The decisions deal with environmental conditions faced by the universities. The approach emphasises the importance of sub-units (faculties, departments), and their role in organizational change process to understand how a university react and interact with their environments. Each sub-unit will try to improve its situation by trying to manipulate the „subjective“ resource dependence, e.g. the definition of which resources are important for a university.

At the same time, for a higher education institution as a whole it is important aspect whether the newly introduced quality mechanism is evaluated by outsiders or not has to compete with other organisations or not (e.g. not direct fund from government but tenders, ranking lists about universities or courses). Institutional responses to external demand can be seen as a strategic reaction to external constraint that is dependent upon the sanctioning capacity of environmental actors. The resource dependence approach also highlights the ‘structure’ of sanctions and rewards, and in particular the extent to which sanctions are issued by an environmental actor who controls key resources. This implies the combination of a focus on external control and dependencies and internal power and control relations is proposed to be the key to understand and specifying the reactions to environmental effects. But for understanding institutional change – or stability - it is necessary to examine the way organisations perceive their environment, how they control dependencies, the role of organisational leadership in these processes, as well as the role of institutional internal standard operating processes.

The higher education establishments are treated as loosely coupled arrays of standardised elements, “rules are often violated, decisions are often unimplemented”, or implemented only formally. However, institution’s standardised components are loosely coupled, often displaying minimal functional integration. So, being institutionalised organizations universities are regarded as being more than rational tools for reaching goals; they are entities that take on a distinctive character of their own. This theory rejects a view of institutional behaviour as merely the sum of individual actions but stresses the routine, taken for granted nature of most individual behaviour and views actors as constituted by institutions. Power of decision makers consists of at least three elements: bargaining advantages, skill and wish in using bargaining advantages, and other players’ perceptions of the first two components. The stress “the source of bargaining advantages include formal authority and responsibility; actual control over resources necessary to carry out action; expertise and control over information that enables one to define the problem, identify options, and estimate feasibilities; control over information that enables leaders to determine whether and in what form decisions are being implemented; the ability to affect other players’ objectives in other games; and access to and persuasiveness with players who have bargaining advantages drawn from the above”.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of a quality mechanism is a long process it could take 1-2 to 4-5 years. Moreover, the control of implementation could be becoming very difficult in case of occurring far from public view within educational establishments, involving hundreds of incremental and technical decisions, and being the propensity for secrecy, particularly if the quality mechanism is not going well or if the institution has other reasons for wanting to make sure that only the ‘official’ version becomes known - whereof we have seen numerous examples apropos of Romanian higher education establishments.

- Successful implementation of quality mechanism is set back by the lack of objective, based on analyses of empirical data examples concerning to the successful adaptation of new mechanism. This factor is important for two reasons. First, prior successful implementation of quality mechanism can eliminate the opportunity of quasi implementation to the effect that if an other institution could implement the mechanism successfully we also cannot say that we will only smatter it. Second, successful implementation in another institution can help in benchmarking activity where the two systems can be compared for improving our system[2, 3].
- In addition, in case of lack of prior successful implementation of quality mechanism in higher education establishment universities can say that the new mechanism itself may have been based on invalid premises - e.g. it works in business sector but not in higher education, so the successful implementation was either highly improbable or impossible.
- Implementation depends on the amount of control of the Ministry of Education and Reseach over universities, although, it must say that Ministry of Education and Reseach have only limited means of controlling behaviour of universities, even less that of faculties and departments, and practically no influence over individual academics.
- It is often form of resistance against the factual implementation that the changes are simply and solely not noticed. This works quite well in higher education institutions because the whole ICT system has not been built up yet and the information flow - still in written form - sticks several times, therefore, we cannot expect from anybody that they should know the content of documents concerning to the issues of implementation.
- The traditional universities have especially big experiences in “sweating out” of changes.

4. THE ECONOMIC VIEW

Economists view reputations as either traits or signals. Game theorists describe reputations as character traits that distinguish among types of organisations and can explain their strategic behaviour. For game theorists, reputations are functional: they generate perceptions among employees, customers, investors, competitors, and the general public about what an institution is, what it does, what it stands for. These perceptions stabilise interaction between an organisation and its public.

Signalling theorists call our attention to the informational content of reputations. Since many features of an institution and its services are hidden from view, reputations are information signals that increase an observer’s confidence in the university’s products and services. Both game and signalling theorists acknowledge that reputations are actually perceptions of institutions held by external observers.

A thorough analysis of Romanian higher education in the latest ten years has evinced some major features for the development strategy to be adopted in concord with the five objectives of the educational reform[2]:

- strategic management of the universities;
- decentralization and institutional autonomy
- mechanisms for implementing global budgeting of the higher education institutions;
- broadening of international academic interconnectedness;
- implementing of quality assurance and quality management;

The major development objectives for the Romanian higher education system are:

- developing the network of state higher education institutions by establishing new universities, faculties, programmes of studies;
- developing the network of private higher education institutions by establishing new universities, faculties, programmes of studies;
- developing and expanding the network of short-cycle higher education institutions;
- developing of life time learning and distance open learning
- implementing and developing modules of studies and modular schemes;
- developing new networks, ways and means for international academic interconnectedness;
- further development of academic autonomy and organization management;
- restructuring a coherent policy of universities in order to make up for the lack of young
- members of academic staff and an unattractive offer of programmes of studies;
- identifying new financial resources to compensate the poor state funding of higher
- education institutions;
- implementing new policies for extending universities outreach in the community and
- the labour market;
- creating and disseminating an “institutional culture” for promoting quality in all fields of academic life.

The European policies and tendencies regarding the role of higher education institutions and their impact in the social and economic environment have evinced the following:

- dramatic and rapid changes in the economy, the information technologies and communication;
- impact of economic globalization in the globalization of the educational market;
- increasing international competition in the educational offer;
- lower state subsidized funding of universities and the need for other financial resources tends to turn universities into business organizations;
- central and East-European countries are in the process of pre-accession or negotiating accession to European Union;

5. REFERENCES

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