

# QUALITY- A CHANGE GENERATOR FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *Changes occurred in technology and society demands induced change in traditional higher education, quality being seen as a change generator in academia nowadays. Accounting for changing conditions of higher education our paper focuses on important role of knowledge transfer within Quality Culture Project of EUA for developing an action framework for the enhancement of Quality Assurance around participants within Bologna Process. The relevant issues related to knowledge transfer of Quality in the Bologna Process of reforming the European universities are covered in our paper are commented based on lessons learned of the recent projec dealing with this sensitive concept on Quality management in Higher Education.*

Keywords: Quality, Transferable Knowledge, Bologna Reforming Process

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The university is one of that organisation which, over the centuries, have long defended the thorough but slow academic decision-making process which enables change. For the last two centuries of functioning within the old Europe and later one in the new continents the „new” programs have been built up almost in archaeological layers. But we are now no longer in the position to afford the luxury of uncritical preservation . It is the time of change! The university is facing now a real storm of **CHANGE** due to the world wide context of globalisation and internationalisation and the exceptional development of Emerging Informational Technologies. The knowldge driven economy and the fact of facing a period of dramatic social change had as consequences the life in an **breath-taking and accelerating change**. This reality is facing the university of the 21st century, simultaneously with its environment. The most predictable feature of modern society is its unpredictability. Universities, as modern learning organisations, have to find the right patterns to sustain their core values while identifying new ways of synergy with the challenging demands of a rapid evolving word.

The higher education sector world wide is challenged by hard and soft problems.Among hard issues the global and continental competition in offering educational services, the shortage of state funding the decrease of young population in each country have to be mentioned. In this context world wide the education became a “public good” which led to new concept for university governance in which the Quality is seen as a garantie for university emblema.

Within this new environment for the academic organisation of 21st century, a fundamental question arises. Which should be the most appropriate concept for

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defining the Quality and how should be identified the instruments for strategic planning, implementation and monitoring of any quality approach in an university?

In the fact there are more questions of this broad topic of quality in higher education. Some of the answer to these questions on quality including the practical wazs for implementing and developing quality could be identified within the knowledge transfer realised by the learning lessons of Quality Culture project conceived and monitore by European Universities Association (EUA).

## 2. KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER ON QUALITY WITHIN BOLOGNA PROCESS

Before touching the knowledge transfer on quality in higher education, we have to identify the mission of that university since the quality problem is an essential part of the strategic management of the higher education enterprise. The idea expressed recently by the EUA president (Winkler, G., 2006) is that actually, a modern university organisation should be not different from the organisation of advanced economies. For this organisation the internal sequence of organisation as is illustrated in Fig.1.

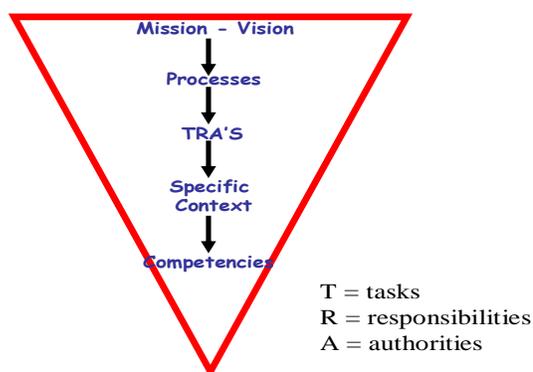


Fig.1. Sequence of internal organisation of a modern university

Concerning its mission, the university of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millenium, thought as a learning organisation, have to produce and transfer knowledge in a dynamic change drieve society. After James Duderstadt (Duderstadt, J., 2000) there are four categories of forces driving change, respectively: financial imperatives, changing social needs, technology drivers and market forces. In his book, James Duderstadt, (3) is proposing even a definition for the modern university: ***“A place of learning where human potential is transformed and shaped, the wisdom of our culture is passed from one generation to the next and the new knowledge is produced”***.

Despite of many studies and research in the field of strategic management of the university focusing teh quality topic in higher education the appropriate patterns to enhance or to build a new dimension for organizational culture are still insufficiently clarified. The most common approach concerning the quality in higher education is approached carefully in terms of „good practices” and „lesson learned”, remaining still a sensitive and fascinating subject.

It is obvious that the university of 21st century, recognised almost around the world that a new entreprise dealing with knowledge transfer, is challenged by new important issues, as never before. In such a complex higher education entreprise

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quality assurance has an important role of maintaining the balance between the autonomy and its accountability of the university to various stakeholders as governmental bodies, students and their family and society as a whole.

The university of 21st century, as any organization are characterised by two distinct levels of knowledge: individual knowledge and organizational knowledge. Individual knowledge belongs to each organization member and it can be accessed only with the individual acceptance. Individual knowledge is composed of *tacit* knowledge and *explicit* knowledge. Tacit knowledge can be obtained from the direct individual experience and it is stored within the unconscious zone of the brain.

Being aware of the important role of quality for the university of 21st century, the European Association of Universities (EUA) built up in the last years a set of megaprojects dealing with Quality Culture in Higher Education accross Europa. A survey of the latest rounds of activities identifies, after 2002, our project, developed in 3 rounds, inspired called „Quality Culture”, with details at <http://www.eua.be>, (4). In its latest Round III, a number of 9 universities located geographical very different accross the Europe have been selected to work together and share experience concerning quality issues in implementing Bologna reform, (Atanasiu G.M., et.al, 2006) within the above mentioned project.

The project itself had important strengths, which allowed a smooth implementation within our network of participants. Some of these strengths are mentioned bellow:

- **A ballanced composition an diverse from organisational culture point of view of the team composed of 9 universities:** „Gh. Asachi” Technical University of Iasi, (TULasi), Romania; The Athens University of Economics and Business (AUEB) Greece, Mersin University (MU), Turkey, St. Petersburg State University, (...) Russia; Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Ireland; Åbo Akademi (ABO), Finland; The University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences of Vienna (BOKU), Austria; Technical University of Koszalin (TUK), Poland and The University of Prishtina, Kosovo. Their location and students number can be identified from Fig.2;



Fig. 2. The European location of universities participating in network NW3

- **The motivation of all participants** for sharing and learning from each other experience, which lead finally to a fluent knowledge transfer on efficient quality procedures implementation;
- **A Good Timing for project start**, just before Bergen Conference, which determined an intensification of activities in implementing Bologna reform;
- **Good facilitators and the coherent Guideline** of the project, conceived by EUA management team.

Some weaknesses could be also identified. The reduced number of „face to face” meetings influences negatively the real interaction among team members. Also, a certain less inspired Time Management concerning the scheduling of meetings, pre-established by the Guideline, lack of practical suggestions for an effective financing management and also the under-estimation of some mobility problems for Non Socrates countries could be mentioned as week points.

Besides the real intellectual debates occurred during project implementation in our network, the most important thing was, maybe, the fact that **we learned from each other** not only on history of each participant institution, but also on the current state of reforms, the major difficulties in running the university, the existing gap in mentalities in management of higher education institutions across Europe, the lack of communications among different stakeholders and decision level of university in countries especially located in South Eastern and Eastern of Europe, and different attitudes regarding the new role of the university in 21<sup>st</sup> century in Europe. Actually the real gain of the project was the smooth transfer on quality knowledge among the participants of our Network 3 in EUA Quality Culture Project Round III, illustrated especially by a critical presentations on the perception on quality in each university of our network. Although the definition on Quality was a subject of big debate, we agree finally on the main core of its and a valuable knowledge on quality could be transferred in our meetings, especially from universities with a remarkable experience as Dublin institute of Technology, Ireland and Abo Academy of Turku, Finland.

Some of them are summarised bellow:

- *concerning the Quality management at institutional level:*
  - Quality model chosed in our university illustrates the level of the university organisational development, being determined by our cultural tradition roots, distance to power in the society, state of the art on quality knowledge, and especially the leadership motivation;
  - The adoption of a specific quality model in our university, as a component of strategic management, have to be in accordance with current running state of university governance and the level of funding;
  - The corresponding implementation of the chosed model for quality at institutional level of the university is a sensitive process, which have to run smoothly, by identifying and monitore the right patterns for a minimum risk. The process of Quality implementation have to be supported by leadeship and contribution of knowledgeable people from that organization, able to minimise the resistance and tension within organisation, in a transparent scheme of responsibilities for Quality.
  - The synergies of external strategy, respectvelly European, with national top - down strategies and internal policies are considered to offer the appropriate framework for the implementation of quality management at the level of the university;
  - For an efficient Quality management implementation at institutional level of the university, the set-up of a Quality Department, can be an

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asset if its role is well defined within the top -down strategies for quality enhancement at institutional level;

- The transparency of leadership management and a coherent policy concerning the Quality Management at institutional level of the university is one of the key factor of creating a favourable environment for changes needed within the development of Bologna reforms.

The EUA Quality Culture project allowed a succesfull transfer of knowledge and know-how of advanced practices in Quality Assurance. The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Ireland, Åbo Akademi (ABO), Finland and The University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences of Vienna (BOKU), Austria shared within the team their experience dealing with quality issues. We had also to learn from difficulties reported by the other partners, from Greece, Poland, Romania, Russia and Kosovo in the matter of quality perception in each participant country.

Based on participants opinion, our network identified a certain message to whole European academic community. This message is related to the issue of Bologna Reforms implementation and of corresponding quality procedures for planning the new BA-MA structures and PhD programs. Some ideas of our message are summarised here, as follows:

- *concerning the planning of study programs in our universities within full development of Bologna Process:*
  - The planning of our Program Core Curricula should be a process based on **Program Mission**, developed against standards of evaluation and accreditation criteria common for European Higher Education Area and national requirements;
  - The planning of these Core Curricula should conceived as an open process for input and especially output of whole academic community of staff and students, stakeholders and local community, aswell as former graduates with a growing role of future employers.
  - The need to increase the study programme flexibility and its openness to community needs, in terms of mission, core content, syllabus, work load, courses content, etc. Regarding to program duration it is suggested to allow 3-4 years for Bachelor, 2 years for Master, and 4-5 years for PhD programs, adopted function of field specificity. Also, in individual cases, there must be a possibility of granting a leave to interrupt studies in agreement with the implementation of life long learning education.
- *concerning the enhancement of system feedback to improve quality of our study programs, our project identified:*
  - The need for an increased financial support for reinforcement of institutional Human Resources policies in higher education European institutions, along with the infrastructure policies to enable a sustainable development of European higher education in accordance with Lisbon strategy;
  - The need of a legal system for European qualifications, needed for the European Labour Market;
  - The enhancement of professional association participation in planning our graduates in post graduates programs which will allow a future smooth insertion of graduates within European labour market.

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- *concerning the knowledge transfer on quality in higher education within Europe wide, our project team considered that some actions need to be undertaken, in order to obtain:*
  - The improvement of students mobility number going for one semester abroad or in industry, in terms of a real balance between the number of outgoing students and staff going from West to East or from English-speaking countries with the incoming students and staff from non-English-speaking countries;
  - The increase of financial support for students mobility, which is less attractive right now;
  - The continuous development of training schemes for academic leadership and administration staff in Quality Management in higher education but also in other important issues as intellectual property, communication, entrepreneurial skills, to speed up the Bologna Process in Europe toward a Knowledge based Europe;
  - The elaboration of an European Qualifications Framework which shall increase the transparency and comparability of certificates and awards, avoiding the fatigue of conversion for countries which have already, and being an opportunity for those countries not having one yet;
  - The increase of financial support for institutions willing to undergo an EUA conducted Institutional Evaluation and identification of different financial resources within European Framework of programs for modernisation processes and quality improvement in our university.

### 3. SOME FINAL REMARKS

The year of 2010 appears to be one of deadline, visible in almost all documents concerning the strategy and policies for **Building the European most competitive and dynamic knowledge -based economy in the world**. In this task, the European intellectual community incorporating academics, practitioners, businessman and students have responsibilities and rights to find innovative and qualitative ways of thinking in order to contribute to the development of the knowledge-based society which Europe needs to power a dynamic economy. As it written in official documents of European Commission: *“The search for knowledge has always been at the heart of the European adventure. It has helped to define our identity and our values, and it is the driving force behind our future competitiveness”*.<sup>1</sup>

In 2010 we will be able to celebrate 200 years from the date of 1810, when Wilhelm von Humboldt drew his plan for the renewal of the universities by introduced the concept of “Research University”.

Coincidence or not we will need to adresse at least a part of themes of the higher education entreprise of 21st century and the best way to be prepared for that moment is to participate in Knowledge Transfer projects as the mentioned EUA Quality project Round III with the condition, of course, to be able to turn out in practice the know-how and the experience gained.

Together with the growing need in higher education programs for Leadership, Liberal Arts and Ethics Education each study program in each university should take into account first of all we **“offer programs today ”** but for the **“Graduates of Tomorrow”**.

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<sup>1</sup> Mid-Term Review of the Lisbon Strategy - COM(2005) 24, 2.2.2005 (§ 3.3.2)

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