

Chapter 5

Convergence of Quality Management Approaches: Self-Development Process

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ABSTRACT

In all evaluations of universities, either of programs, schools, or the institution as a whole body, the starting point is the self-evaluation report. Its importance is crucial since all the recommendations and conclusions are based on its content. The purpose of this chapter is to reveal the importance of the self-development process as part of the self-management strategies that need to be implemented in higher education universities, in the context of the quality assessment procedures. In the contemporary context, the process of university development has to be understood as a self-development process, taking into consideration all the reforms and changes generated since the Bologna Declaration (1999). Therefore, it is important to reveal the characteristics of the process of self-development for the higher education institution, to identify most relevant methods of management development, and to explain how self-management strategies can be supported for universities to become better off. In addition, the concept of quality convergence is expressed on the basis of the self-development process.

INTRODUCTION

The current social-economic environment is more complex than ever. It is based on a strong competition in all domains, including the educational arena. Universities have been considered as learning organizations, able to support and to promote change towards excellence. What defines an organizational structure is its mission, which expresses the reason for the institution to be. In

fact, many universities have more or less, a similar description of their mission – education, research and involvement in social development. Nevertheless, what differentiate the universities are the results achieved and more than this, the way of doing. In other words, there may be universities which start from the same objectives, but how they get things done and what they really achieve is definitely different.

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Convergence of Quality Management Approaches

In order to understand the path towards excellence, comparative studies are relevant. In many cases, universities are subject to take part at different associations or networking groups on the basis of their similarities, while in other cases, they are involved in national and international benchmarking studies or ranks, being revealed differentiations in specific indicators. Such studies always connect university change to quality assurance which is a complex process and more actual than ever.

The utility of the quality evaluation for the improvement of the institutional strategies is important, but the self-development of the universities is a dynamic process which takes into consideration the internal capacity for change. In order to promote the change, universities need to clearly understand the internal processes, to be open to explain the measures and to develop management strategies accordingly. An open management promotes change toward excellence, gives credit to the external assessment and international ranks and decides how fast or intensive the change can be.

At present, quality assurance is part of the activity of national and international agencies. Their criteria, indicators and standards start from the same principles and introduce some specific regional or national elements according to the context. All evaluations on quality assurance are based on self – evaluation, which means that the report of the experts starts from the reading and understanding the self – report. The purpose of the quality assurance is the same: to help the institutions to better develop and to support the beneficiaries of the educational services to better identify the university that best corresponds to his or her needs.

There is no expert team in the quality assurance systems that can substitute the internal efforts for institutional improvement process, no matter how clear or concrete conclusions and recommendations they might have delivered to the management. Self – development is always carried out by the

institution management, which has to understand the institution itself as a system which combines different resources - human resources, equipment, informational resources etc. The process of self – development within the universities, even when it is clear understood, implement strategies that are specific and, accordingly, the performance achieved is different.

The examples of good practice are a good support for the higher education institutions which face the same difficulties or concerns and which have a flexible management to adapt the possible solutions or to create better strategies. Living in a global world is a challenge for companies and individuals. Higher education institutions perform when they become able to change the idea of competition in powerful partnerships and to self – development continuously. Once the evaluation is carried out, the most important part starts for universities – the development according to the standards and to exceed towards excellence. Therefore, the quality assurance management never ends. The top management should understand the need of being different and promote a competitive advantage as part of the differentiation strategy. In addition, being part of national and international classifications and rankings, universities are part of benchmarking studies which cannot be carried out in the absence of convergence.

The objectives of the chapter are the following:

- To describe the similarities in understanding the role of the self – development process as part of the institution development toward performance, according to the changes generated by the implementation of the Bologna process
- To explain the process of self – development process considering the development needs and the context requirements
- To define the quality concept convergence on the basis of the self- development process.

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