

Concept of quality in higher education

Концепция качества в высшем образовании

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Аннотация

В результате изменения взглядов различных заинтересованных сторон на развитие высшего образования университеты переходят в новую эру развития. Увеличиваются ожидания высокого качества как преподавания и исследования, так и производства компетентных выпускников. Модели качества высшего образования важны для повышения общей производительности и качества услуг. Так, лидеры университетов создают академическую среду, в которой все заинтересованные лица несут ответственность за свою работу, а также имеют право изменять эту среду. В статье рассматриваются вопросы качества высшего образования, его важность, подходы к оценке и возможные измерения. Рассматриваются отличия оценки качества и культуры качества, а также предпринимается попытка обосновать, что культура качества является доминирующим признаком, который способствует созданию среды для успешного партнерства. Кроме того, статья является источником идей об улучшении качества восприятия культуры в университетах.

Ключевые слова: высшее образование, качество образования, модели качества, улучшение качества.

Abstract

Higher Education Institutions face a new era as a result of changes in the way different stakeholders view universities. Expectations for high quality in terms of teaching, researching and producing competent graduates are increasing. Quality models for higher education are important to improve overall performance and enhance quality services. University leaders must create a quality environment where all university actors take joy and pride in their work and are empowered to make changes. This paper reviews the issue of quality in higher education; its importance, approaches, concepts and dimensions. It differentiates among quality assurance and quality culture in an attempt to validate quality culture as a dominant hallmark that generates commitment environment and partnership. In addition, it is the authors' intent that the paper be a source for ideas about improving quality culture adoption in universities.

Keywords: higher education, quality of education, quality models, improving quality.

Поступила в редакцию / Received: 22.12.2015

Web: <http://elibrary.miu.by/journals/item.iot/issue.44/article.8.html>

The article contains materials of research «Ensuring the competitiveness of the business entity in the innovation economy», SR 20112937.

В статью вошли материалы, полученные в результате выполнения НИР «Обеспечение конкурентоспособности субъекта хозяйственной деятельности в условиях инновационной экономики», ГР 20112937.

Introduction

Quality issues dominate the higher education debate in many countries, as ministers, bureaucrats, employers and business interests become increasingly concerned about the outputs of higher education institutions and the suitability of graduates to meet the needs of employers. Many people question whether their societies are getting real value for their massive investment in higher education and urge the adoption by governments of mechanisms to achieve more control over the work that higher education institutions do. Quality and accountability thus have become key elements in the efforts of many countries to become and remain internationally competitive in a world where interdependence in trade is rapidly growing. As Craft [1] points out: "globalization and international migration mean that academic and professional qualifications need to be 'portable' across national borders, and so both institutions and nation states are keen to learn more about each other's procedures for assuring the quality of tertiary education provision" [2].

The quality of teaching and learning, interaction between students and educational professionals in higher education is influenced by a variety of factors, including attitudes and skills of teachers, abilities and motivation of learners, organisational backgrounds, contexts and values and the existing structures, such as rules, regulations, legislation and alike. The majority of approaches to assess, assure, manage or develop quality, however, is directed towards improvement or regulation of organizational processes (process oriented quality management approaches), the assessment of the outcomes of activities (assurance or evaluations approaches) or on development of individual abilities (quality development through professional training approaches) [3].

The divers notions on quality, quality assurance and quality culture, the varying approaches to quality and

quality dimensions in higher education has drawn the author's attention to delineate the thin borders among quality concepts in higher education. The purpose of this study is to highlight the issue of quality in higher education, distinguish among externally oriented quality assurance mechanisms and adoption based quality initiatives and validates quality culture as a dominant feature of modern institutions.

Literature review

1. Quality in higher education

Defining quality in higher education is faced by many difficulties. Scott stated that: "No authoritative definition of quality in higher education is possible" [4], that was reaffirmed by Westerheidjen, who referenced the "Lack of theory of quality in higher education literature" [5].

Harvey and Knight [6] identified the following five aspects of quality as:

Exceptional: (exceptionally high standards of academic achievement).

Perfection: focuses on processes and their specifications, quality culture, and is related to absence of defects.

Fitness for purpose: judges the quality in terms of the extent to which its stated purpose defined either as meeting customer specifications, or in conformity with the institutional mission.

Value for money: assesses quality in terms of return on investment or expenditure.

Transformation: defines quality as a process of qualitative change with emphasis on adding value to students' knowledge and expertise.

The transformative notion of quality presupposes a fundamental purpose of higher education, assuming that higher education must concern itself with transforming the life experiences of students, by enhancing or empowering them [7].

Likewise Bogue [8] highlights among the three "perspectives" of quality common to institutions of higher education the *value-added*, or *quality in results*, defined by Astin [9] as the impact "on the student's knowledge and personal development and on the faculty member's scholarly and pedagogical ability and productivity".

O'Sullivan states that quality can be perceived differently depending on who defines it. For an academic institution it may mean 'perfection in developing students' intelligence, creativity and skills', and for the employer 'a degree of a graduate's preparation for the realization of professional tasks' [10].

Newton encapsulated the contrast between the dominant formal meanings of 'quality' which emerged in the early 1990s, and the situated perceptions of 'quality' (of front-line academics) which were becoming apparent later (see Table 1).

Middlehurst identifies four different approaches to the term of quality in higher education [12]:

1. Quality as a defining characteristic or attribute;
2. Quality as a grade of achievement;
3. Quality as a particularly high level of performance or achievement;
4. Quality as fitness for purpose through performance that meets specifications.

Lindsay [13] identified two distinct approaches to discussions of quality in higher education. The first *production-measurement* approach treats quality as a synonym for performance and accordingly demands to measure resources and outcomes. The second *stakeholder judgement* approach is based on assessments by various key actors involved in higher education.

Ehlers [3] proposes an understanding of quality in higher education under a holistic perspective, taking into account all factors influencing quality, like attitudes and skills of teachers, abilities and motivation of learners, organizational backgrounds, contexts and values and the existing structures, such as rules, regulations, legislation and alike – as the "constitution, measured against the needs and expectations of the stakeholder groups" [14]. It has at least two sides: the side of *structural systems* (quality management handbooks, process definitions, instruments, tools) and the side of the value based *culture* of an organization (relating to the commitment of its members, the underlying values, skills and attitudes).

One more way of thinking about quality relates to a stakeholder-specific meaning. Here quality is considered, having regard to a variety of stakeholders with an interest in higher education, each having the potential to think about quality in different ways. In particular, the early works of Vroeijenstijn [15], Middlehurst [12] and Harvey and Green [16] highlight the importance and value of considering quality from a variety of stakeholder perspectives [17].

Besides, there are definitions of quality related to conformity with established standards and stated objectives. Thus Newton [18] cautions that it is important to be clear that whereas 'quality' relates to process (for example, the quality of the educational process experienced by students), 'standards' refers to outcomes, or achievement. In education standards relate to three areas of activity:

Table 1 – Meanings of quality in the early 1990s and post-1990s

Dominant formal meanings of 'quality' in the early 1990s	Situated perceptions of 'quality' of front-line academics: post-1990s
Quality as 'perfection' or 'consistency'	Quality as 'failure to close the loop'
Quality as 'value for money'	Quality as 'burden'
Quality as 'total quality'	Quality as 'lack of mutual trust'
Quality as 'management commitment'	Quality as 'suspicion of management motives'
Quality as 'culture change'	Quality as 'culture of getting by'
Quality as 'peer review'	Quality as 'impression management' and 'game playing'
Quality as 'transforming the learner'	Quality as 'constraints on teamwork'
Quality as 'fitness for purpose'	Quality as 'discipline and technology'
Quality as 'exceptional' or 'excellence'	Quality as 'ritualism and tokenism'
Quality as 'customer satisfaction'	Quality as 'front-line resistance'

Source: Newton, 2002 [11]

academic standards measure ability to meet a specified level of academic attainment; service standards assess service provided; while quality standards can be described as norms or expectations expressed in formal statements about desired practice.

Quality in the context of higher education can be defined as a judgement about the level of goal achievement and the value and worth of that achievement. It is also a judgement about the degree to which activities or outputs have desirable characteristics, according to some norm or against particular specified criteria or objectives [2].

Approaches

In the academic world quality assessment has traditionally assumed two apparently contradictory objectives: quality improvement and accountability. Universities mostly emphasize quality improvement, which has been a concern for higher education institutions since the Middle Ages [19], while the government pays special attention to accountability, aiming at guaranteeing the quality of the services provided to society by higher education institutions. Therefore, the government forces institutions to adapt their behavior to government objectives by using an increasing number of mechanisms such as extensive arrays of performance indicators and measures of academic quality, whether quality assurance or accreditation [20].

Kis [17] distinguished three main approaches to quality; accreditation, assessment and audit. Accreditation and evaluation (which includes assessment and audit) differ in their perspectives. Both accreditation and assessment monitor the quality of teaching and learning, while audit focuses on internal procedures adopted by a HEI in order to achieve its objectives.

Wirth suggests a simple but effective method to categorize different quality approaches and instruments into 4 fields [21]:

Field 1 represents large international organizations, which drive standardization and development of generic quality management approaches [22, 23, 24]. Their transferability to the educational sector is still discussed controversially. Therefore three developments have been initiated (ISO 10015, DIN PAS 1032, DIN PAS 1037), which were focused specifically on the educational context.

In *field 2* recommendations, guidelines or criteria catalogues and checklists are listed.

Field 3 represents accreditation and certification approaches which focus on different educational aspects and levels.

In *field 4* awards and prizes are summarized.

Yet Ehlers [25, 26, 27] concludes, that many quality management approaches follow the implicit logic that the quality of educational processes – such as teaching and learning – is the direct result of the quality of the previously accomplished preparation and planning processes, often ignoring or neglecting the fact that educational quality is established in a co-production process in the actual learning situation.

The following principles could provide a framework for development of all quality improvement processes in HEIs [28]:

1. Internal quality management should complement external accreditation expectations.
2. Quality management decisions, especially the identification of quality objectives, should be linked to the institutional strategic plan.
3. Quality improvement will be most successful if the higher education institution culture is open to change and improvement: transparency, openness, responsiveness and creativity should form the bases of the ideal culture for quality improvement in higher education institutions.

4. A quality management plan of a higher education institution should be comprehensive: its concern is equally with the physical campus, the quality of student life, the attitudes of faculty and staff, the satisfaction levels of faculty and staff, the interaction and the service to external constituencies.
5. A quality management plan needs to be supported by accurate factual information.
6. Quality management procedures should be concerned with both formative and summative evaluation and finding the correct balance of these for institutional quality improvement. A summative conclusion that identifies areas of concern should result in major recommendations for change and improvement. A formative evaluation, on the other hand, is feedback that leads to re-evaluation and change in a situation where immediate changes are possible and may correct identified issues of concern.
7. Senior Administration should be responsible for both performing a strong quality management plan and operating effectively. Whereas managing the process of quality improvement should be the responsibility of all faculty and staff.
8. The quality improvement cycle should be a continuous process, which starts with evaluation of the present, then sets goals for the future, implements plans and then after a reasonable period of time, evaluates the effectiveness of the implementation, draws appropriate conclusions and takes appropriate actions. Then the cycle starts again.
9. Excessive formalization in the implementation of the quality improvement process should be avoided.

Dimensions

Owlia and Aspinwall [29], basing on a review of product and quality dimensions, present a comprehensive list with their interpretations for higher education (Tables 2 and 3), as well as list of quality dimensions in higher education as a whole (Table 5).

Besides it makes sense to measure the quality of individual training programs. Table 5 summarizes the quality measures and indicators for quality according to the goals set for a joint programme.

2. Quality Assurance in higher education

Definitions and purposes

Quality assurance slowly but steadily became an integrated part of higher education. From being a novelty a couple

of decades ago with much emphasis on how to design and set up quality assurance systems and procedures [31], then methodological issues were drawn to the human factor [32]; how interest in quality may be stimulated by leadership, and the ways to stimulate staff and student involvement and ownership [33].

Quality assurance in higher education is defined as systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by a higher education institution or system to monitor performance and to ensure achievement of quality outputs or improved quality. Quality assurance aims to give stakeholders confidence about the management of quality and the outcomes achieved [2].

The term quality assurance has come into the higher education vocabulary only over the past two decades or so. While there are many definitions of quality assurance in the literature (e.g., see Ball [34]; Birnbaum [35]; Lindsay [13]; van Vught and Westerheijden [36]), some authors (e.g. Brennan [37]) prefer to use the term quality assessment instead of term quality assurance. However, quality assurance is thought of as a broader term, which embraces not only assessment but also other activities.

Moreover there are a number of related concepts used when talking about quality assurance. Based on the foregoing, we take them as components of a quality assurance:

Quality control: refers to evaluating and guaranteeing standards.

Quality audit: refers to the processes of external scrutiny used to provide guarantees about the *quality control*: mechanisms in place.

Quality assessment: means a review or systematic examination, usually conducted externally, to determine whether quality activities comply with planned arrangements and whether the educational process is implemented effectively and is suitable for achieving the stated objectives.

Quality management: refers to the management of quality control and quality improvement, and to those aspects of the overall management functions that determine and implement the quality policy [36].

The term *self-study* has come from the work of American accreditation agencies and refers to the internal preparation of detailed evaluation document to be presented to an outside review panel who will visit the institution and provide a written report. Many quality assurance approaches put a major emphasis on a self-study or self-evaluation [2].

Thus, quality assurance is reasonable to consider as a system. According to HEQC [38] such system:

Table 2 – Product dimensions of quality in higher education

Dimensions	Definition in higher education
Performance	Primary knowledge/skills required for graduates
Features	Secondary/supplementary knowledge and skills
Reliability	The extent to which knowledge/skills learned is correct, accurate and up to date
Conformance	The degree to which an institutional programme/course meets established standards, plans and promises
Durability	How well an institution handles customers' complaints?

Source: Owlia and Aspinwall [29]

Table 3 – Service Quality dimensions in higher education

Dimensions	Definition in higher education
Reliability	The degree to which education is correct, accurate and up to date. How well an institution keeps its promises? The degree of consistency in educational process.
Responsiveness	Willingness and readiness of staff to help students.
Understanding customers	Understanding students and their needs.
Access	The extent to which staff are available for guidance and advice.
Competence	The theoretical and practical knowledge of staff as well as other presentation skills.
Courtesy	Emotive and positive attitude towards students.
Communication	How well lecturers and students communicate in the classroom?
Credibility	The degree of trustworthiness of the institution.
Security	Confidentiality of information.
Tangible	State, sufficiency and availability of equipment and facilities.
Performance	Primary knowledge/skills required for students.
Completeness	Supplementary knowledge and skills, use of computer.
Flexibility	The degree to which knowledge/skills learned is applicable to other fields.
Redress	How well an institution handles customers' complaints and solves problems?

Source: Owlia and Aspinwall [29]

Table 4 – Quality dimensions in higher education

Dimensions	Characteristics
Tangibles	Sufficient equipment/facilities; Modern equipment/facilities; Ease of access; Visually appealing environment; Support services (accommodation, sports...)
Competence	Sufficient (academic) staff; Theoretical knowledge, qualifications; Practical knowledge; Up to date; Teaching expertise, communication
Attitude	Understanding students' needs; Willingness to help; Availability for guidance and advice; Giving personal attention; Emotional, courtesy
Content	Relevance of curriculum to the future jobs of students; Effectiveness; Containing primary knowledge/skills; Completeness, use of computers; Communication skills and team working; Flexibility of knowledge, being cross-disciplinary
Delivery	Effective presentation; Sequencing, timeliness; Consistency Fairness of examinations; Feedback from students; Encouraging students
Reliability	Trustworthiness; Giving valid award; Keeping promises, match to the goals; Handling complaints, solving problems

Source: Owlia and Aspinwall [29]

Table 5 – Quality measures and indicators for joint programmes according to goals

Goals	Indicators	Quality measures
Attract appropriate students	Numbers of applicants and students 'Quality' of applicants, new students, and graduates	Regular and formal evaluation and improvement of information policy towards prospective students; Surveys on student satisfaction and motivation
Increased reputation of institution	Increasing number of applicants; Ability to raise funds	Information to internal or external media
High-quality education and service	Marks of students; Low drop-out rates; Short study duration; Student satisfaction	Human Resource development offered to staff; Surveys on student satisfaction
High quality graduates	Student accomplishments; Employability; Additional competences of students developed due to speciality of joint programme	Tracer studies; Marketing of students to industry; Survey on industry's expectations
Extension of alliances of institutions of higher education	Number of international projects; Overall financial volume of international projects	Evaluation of international activities
International alumni activities	Number of active alumni Results of alumni activity	Alumni surveys; Subscription of alumni to offers of former institution
To share resources	Financial reports	Monitor economic benefit of co-operation
Innovation	Novelty of programme; Special accomplishments; Positive feedback from industry and other stakeholders	Monitor accomplishments and feedback
Human resource development	New competences earned (e.g. language skills, intercultural competences)	Human resource development offers; Monitor specific needs of staff for competence development
To share experience	Increase in co-operation on different levels	Guidelines etc. developed

Source: Hunger and Skalbergs [30]

is clear specification of roles, responsibilities and procedures, enables institutional aims and objectives to be achieved, informs decision making, is free from individual bias, is repeatable over time, involves all staff, includes the specification of standards and acceptable evidence and prompts continuous improvement.

Loder [39] considers that "quality assurance mechanisms must be explicit rather than implicit ... institutions should be able to demonstrate their commitment to maintaining and raising the quality of their work in a manner consistent with their recognized objectives". Burke [40] highlights four basic activities within the quality assurance in higher education institutions: accreditation, audit, assessment and external examination.

One of the definitions of quality assurance in higher education comes from a quality assurance handbook from Hong Kong Baptist University: "Quality assurance is a collective process by which the university as an academic institution ensures that the quality of educational process is maintained to the standards it has set itself.

This definition includes several key dimensions of quality assurance in higher education. First, quality assurance focuses on process; it seeks to convince both internal and external constituents that an institution has processes that produce high quality outcomes. Second, quality assurance makes explicit accountability for quality at various points within an institution. Quality is the responsibility of everyone in the organization. Third, quality assurance is a continuous, active, and responsive process which includes strong evaluation and feedback loops [41].

Stensaker [42] called 2000s as the end of an era associated with enthusiasm and the beginning of an era more characterized by realism in the field. While quality in the past were seen as the dominant organizational variable for higher education [43], discussions about quality in 2000s were often more related to downsizing issues, linking quality to more targeted strategic priorities, or developing sustainable schemes [44].

Quality assurance programs serve a variety of purposes but generally their primary purposes are a combination of public accountability, efforts to ensure credibility,

improvement and renewal. In some cases, there is a gap between stated purposes and actual purposes, and frequently there is tension between accountability and improvement purposes [2].

So in process of time national quality assurance programs established their priorities to support and enhance HEIs quality assurance activities rather than evaluate and control quality [45]. For example, the system of quality assurance in the Netherlands was clearly linked to a new philosophy about the relationship between the state and higher education institutions and on a belief that the assessment process should be as non-evasive as possible [46].

3. Quality Culture in higher education

Definitions, approaches, elements

Organizational culture, and thus quality culture, has been defined according to a functionalist paradigm, which assumes that similar levels and functions of culture are documented in all organizations. It implies defining an analytical framework before stepping foot into the organization to be studied. Functionalist analysis is conducted by filling in predefined variables and mapping the casual relations between them. Thus, the culture is added to such explanatory organizational variables as strategy, technology, environment [47].

Quality culture is embedded into the organizational context and the organizational cultures. Organizational culture is not something which an organization has or has not but it is an element of every organization – be it consciously perceived or not. Organizational culture can be supported and further developed but does not have to be developed or established from scratch. The distinction between different types or kinds of organizational cultures should, however, not be seen too fundamental: Describing a quality culture of an organization is strongly connected to analyzing also other “types” of culture, like management culture, communication culture, the organizational culture as a whole. A good way of finding an analytic approach to different types of cultures is suggested by Schein [48] who states that an organizations culture is the answer to the challenge an organization has in a certain field [3].

EUA's Quality Culture project [49] provided the definition of quality culture as referring to an organizational culture characterized by a cultural/psychological element on the one hand, and a structural/managerial element on the other hand. It is crucial, in the authors' minds, to distinguish quality culture from quality assurance processes, which are part of the structural element [50].

Rapp [51] states that “The notion of quality culture is understood here as comprising

1. shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitments toward quality
2. that are supported by structural and managerial elements and processes that enhance quality”.

And proceeds that quality culture is important “because it is the most effective and meaningful way that quality assurance mechanisms can ensure and improve quality levels and support a dynamic of change in universities”.

In HEQC [38] is figured out that the development of a quality culture to underpin a successful quality system requires:

- An open and active commitment to quality at all levels;
- A willingness to engage in self-evaluation;
- A firm regulatory framework; clarity and consistency of procedures;
- Explicit responsibilities for quality control and quality assurance;
- An emphasis on obtaining feedback, from a range of constituencies;
- A clear commitment to identifying and disseminating good practice;
- Prompt, appropriate, and sensitive managerial action to redress problems, supported by adequate information.

Thus we can see that quality culture must be based on willingness and commitment of stakeholders.

Quality culture takes a specific perspective on higher education quality. As part of the overall organizational culture it is not something which exists or not exists but rather something which is always there, even though existing in different shapes [3].

Vettori, Lueger and Knassmüller [52] supposed that university's culture had to be comprehended as a historically grown social phenomenon that was very likely differentiated into several subcultures, but without guaranteeing that the participants were completely aware of the single components.

It must be underlined that in studies of the quality culture with respect to HEIs, this concept is perceived mainly in terms of TQM (Total Quality Management) philosophy [53], which reveals the role of leadership (personal example and the upper management's engagement) in creating the culture based on the constant need for improvement, team work, participation of all in the process making decisions, individual responsibility, etc.

Quality culture is a set of values based on Deming's rules of quality [54]. The studies of quality culture in

HEIs had been summarized by Detert et al. [55], who noticed that most of the authors either concentrated on the elements connected to the use of TQM, and not on the values of quality culture, or attempted to measure the values determining TQM, applying the tools related to organisational culture in general and not quality culture. What followed from the conclusion was the need for the search of values crucial for developing quality culture, especially in a narrower sense, i.e. those which are the most important for quality of teaching, although this is only one of the three fundamental aims of a university [56].

Vlăsceanu et al. [57] state that quality culture refers to a set of shared, accepted, and integrated patterns of quality (often called principles of quality) to be found in the organizational cultures and the management systems of institutions. Awareness of and commitment to the quality of higher education, in conjunction with a solid culture of evidence and with the efficient management of this quality (through quality assurance procedures) are the ingredients of a quality culture. As quality elements change and evolve over time, then the integrated system of quality supportive attitudes and arrangements (quality culture) change to support new quality paradigms in higher education.

Berings et al. [58] state that the Flemish Bologna Expert Team had a working definition as follows: “quality culture is an organizational culture which contributes to the development of effective and efficient care for quality”. But furthermore argue that by using the concept ‘care for quality’ and not ‘quality management’ or ‘quality assurance’ the Bologna experts’ ... definition leaves a sufficient degree of freedom for proponents as well as for opponents of the managerial approach of quality in higher education [59, 60]. Moreover it can stimulate a fruitful debate about the relation between the system and cultural approach and the dialectic nature of quality culture in itself [61]. Such a dialectical approach is also the core principle of the conceptual framework of Berings [62, 63] that is inspired by the work of Quinn and his colleagues on competing values (Cameron [64]; Cameron & Quinn [65]; Quinn [66]).

Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen [67] expresses culture of quality in four key values:

- 1) individual development,
- 2) respect and ‘active tolerance’,
- 3) an entrepreneurial spirit and
- 4) responsibility.

The Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment, Thailand [68] considers that quality culture includes thinking processes, communication, action, and decision-making, which will lead to a better quality of the educational system and organization.

A paper by Harvey and Stensaker [61] offers the following taxonomy which may be useful as a way for institutions to recognize, reflect on and discuss their own cultures: *responsive* quality culture, *reactive* quality culture, *regenerative* quality culture and *reproductive* quality culture.

Following Schein [48], a three levelled structure of organizational culture was accepted: deeply hidden assumptions, partially conscious values, and easily observable, although difficult to interpret, elements.

Table 6 shows a summary of all elements which could be identified as important in the different approaches to organizational cultures.

The described approaches have some elements in common and can be compared in the following dimensions [3]:

- Quality culture is part of the overall organizational culture. Different subcultures can be observed in organizations, like communication cultures, management cultures, and quality cultures.
- Organizational culture is a multifactor phenomenon and consists of several elements (depending on the approach chosen) which can be described and identified. Quality culture builds on these elements and represents configurations of these elements under the focus of organizational quality enhancement.
- Considering the above described approaches some common elements of culture can be identified and used in a quality culture model: All approaches are emphasizing shared values as a central element for organizational a culture. Most of them consider shared basic and underlying assumptions and shared beliefs and symbols, rituals and patterns as important. Quality culture is a socially mediated and negotiated phenomenon leading to shared results of meaning construction which is largely unconscious and only in some elements directly visible to the outside.
- Quality cultures have tangible and intangible, visible and invisible parts. A culture of quality can be further developed best when tangible, structural elements, like quality management mechanisms, tools and instruments are developing in parallel with intangible elements like commitment, values, rituals and symbols.

It is crucial to distinguish two concepts: quality culture and quality assurance. Whereas quality assurance processes are something tangible and manageable by institutional decisions, the cultural aspect of quality culture – shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment – is far more difficult to change [69].

Table 6 – Approaches and elements of organizational culture

Author	Approach	Cultural Elements
Edgar Schein (1992)	Culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid	Values Artefacts Assumptions
Gerent Hofstede (1991)	Culture is mental coding which allows acting coherently; it can be described according to symbols, heroes, values and rituals.	Symbols Heroes Rituals Values
Johannes Ruuegg Stuerem (2002)	Culture is comparable with grammar rules and semantic regulations of a language, resp. a community.	Norms and values Opinions and attitudes Stories and myths Patterns of thought Language habits Collective expectations
Gareth Morgan (2002)	Culture is a social and collective phenomenon which refers to the ideas and values of a social group and is influencing their action without them noticing it explicitly.	Values Knowledge Belief Legislation Rituals

Source: Ehlers [3]

In contrast with formal quality assurance processes based on tools for defining, measuring, evaluating, assuring, and enhancing quality, quality culture is based on quality commitment, applying to cultural elements. Moreover both quality assurance and quality culture must be based on communication, participation, trust of stakeholders.

Considering higher education it is important to understand that quality culture of HEI strongly depends on quality of teaching. Kowalkiewicz [56] distinguished and analyzed 25 academic values. Among the values which positive effect was confirmed there were six: Reliability, Truth, Responsibility, Kindness, Justice and Independence. Most of them showed a strong correlation with quality of teaching, which means that, in spite of market pressures, deeply-rooted traditional values which constitute the basis of university culture, remain significant.

Model of quality culture in higher education

Ehlers [3] proposed a model of quality culture for education with the different components of quality culture. It takes into account existing research and models and further develops them with a strong focus on quality and education. It is a conceptual and structural model which identifies the structure and different components of the concept quality culture and relates them to each other. However, it is not giving a clear direction of impacts or effects the different components have in their interdependency, thus it is not a flow graph.

Staff involvement in quality culture

As it was mentioned earlier the whole quality process has to be accompanied by trust and confidence-building actions. Adopting a quality culture approach requires two strategic decisions that do not accord with traditional (quality) management approaches. Firstly, it is necessary to *empower* all actor groups that hold a stake in the teaching and learning processes (stakeholder-orientation), enabling them to develop their own quality goals, initiatives and measures (within the overall framework defined by the institutional mission) and making productive use of the actors' self-organizational abilities [70]. Secondly, this depends on a huge amount of trust that these groups are willing and able to support such an endeavour. This means that all members of the university are held responsible for the organizational developments (cf. the qualitative approaches of e.g. Patton [71] or Shaw [72]).

Admittedly, such strategies are not without risk, especially for the university management. It means giving up at least part of the control, even though external stakeholders would rather see a tighter control. And, since there is no guarantee of success, the decision becomes even more difficult, for, paradoxically, in the end the management could be held responsible even for handing over responsibility. However, such risks can be minimized to a certain degree, if the quality culture concept finds its way into areas of daily and practical relevance and attracts interest and acceptance, internally as well as externally [52].



Figure 1 – Model of quality culture

However, such a strategy contains certain risk: to give up at least some control, although external stakeholders would like to see tighter controls. However, such risks can be minimized to some extent, when the concept of quality culture finds its practical importance and attracts the interest and both internal and external recognition.

Moreover teachers should be able to trust in their commitment, and to feel that their contributions are not devalued. As well as students should have opportunities to try and test their new knowledge, skills and competences in a fault-tolerant environment. In this context, mutual trust exists based on the assumption that development cannot be controlled in exactly the right way, but it's safe to rely on the efforts of all participants in the process.

Summary

Quality culture for as a concept higher education has not yet received a lot of attention from research or management literature. The concept of quality culture is developed as one particular concept based on organizational culture. Through analyzing the specific particularities of different culture concepts from literature the basis for a concept of quality culture has been laid. It is important to emphasize that viewing quality in the light of an organizational cultural perspective means to take on a holistic view: Quality culture combines cultural elements, structural dimensions and competences into one holistic framework, supporting stakeholders to develop visions, shared values and beliefs. Communication, participation and the combination of top-down and bottom-up interaction is of key importance to the success of a quality culture [3].

The following features emerged as indicative of a quality culture in higher education [73]:

- There is academic ownership of quality.
- There is a recognition by academics and administrators of need for a system of quality monitoring to ensure accountability (and compliance where required) and to facilitate improvement. However, this should not be a bureaucratic system.
- Quality culture is primarily about the behavior of stakeholders rather than the operation of a quality system.
- The quality system needs to have a clear purpose, which articulates with the quality culture.
- A quality culture places students at the centre.

A quality culture is about partnership and co-operation, sharing of experiences and team working.

- A quality culture is about supporting the individual as an autonomous scholar but not at the expense of the learning community; there is a symbiotic relationship between individual and community.
- Leadership in a quality culture is inspirational rather than dictatorial. Leadership is at all levels in the institution and does not refer to just senior managers.
- A quality culture welcomes external critical evaluation from a variety of sources including formal external evaluations, external peers acting as critical friends, and internal peer review and support.

- At heart a quality culture is about facilitating and encouraging reflexivity and praxis; self-reflection, developing improvement initiatives and implementing them.

The benefits of a quality culture are that it increases co-operation, gives students a voice that is heard, provides a strong front for an institution in a competitive higher education world and provides a context for change. However, even a strong quality culture can be characterised by lack of risk taking where the external quality evaluations are 'high stakes' activities and where they encourage compliance rather than improvement. The development of a quality culture can also be inhibited in a situation of heterogeneous departmental structures and practices, although that is not to suggest complete uniformity of quality culture across an institution. A quality culture will also be difficult to establish if there is a lack of consistency in policy and strategy and if implementation procedures keep changing [73].

A degree of autonomy is necessary for the development of a good quality culture that embraces the internal quality processes. There is a suggestion that if there is a strong quality culture in the institution this provides the basis for improvement and external quality assurance becomes redundant. Along there is a view that some countries have had too much external evaluation. Therefore it is important that there is strong mutual trust at all interfaces, within the institution and between the institution and the external reviewers and agencies.

There is also a suggestion that employers could be involved more in quality processes and that they can add effectively to the quality culture by providing external experiences that feed into quality enhancement. In many respects, employers appear to be an under-used resource, particularly in professional and applied areas where they could potentially have a useful role.

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