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Quality Culture In Universities And Influences On Formal And Non-Formal Education

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Abstract

Quality culture in higher education is a complex concept and until now it is hard to establish a generally accepted approach. European University Association affirmed in 2006 that quality culture is understood as a set of elements: shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment toward quality. The article aims to identify influences driven by institutional quality culture on non-formal and formal education in universities. Preparing organizational culture for change involves various activities: generating organizational attitudes and practices, creating a climate of mutual trust and support, creating a participative environment that includes all stakeholders, empowering members to self-manage and continually improve processes.

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Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions is a wide subject and, during the last decade, it has been given great attention. Since the implementation of the Bologna Process (1999), quality assurance has been one of the main concerns in higher education.

Quality Culture is a term still difficult to define. Searching throughout literature, we discover that a unanimously accepted notion of this term has not yet been given. According to ESU (former ESIB) Quality Culture is an organic internal rather legislated external approach by institutions and departments towards dealing with the delivery of quality courses. Quality Culture is based on an internal system of continuous quality which seeks to establish quality in higher education through a holistic approach on a day to day basis.

Organizational culture is a well-known concept and we can find many types of approach in the literature. Higher education institutions are a specific type of organizations and they also have a specific organizational culture. Universities are facing two different challenges: satisfaction of internal and external stakeholders:

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- Internal stakeholders: students, teachers and staff
- External stakeholders: government, quality assurance agencies, employers, parents; we can summarize all those as society, in general.

Starting from the very beginning of defining culture, as Taylor made it in 1871, we are facing”a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” and going forward with Edgar Schein, many papers already synthesized different approaches on organizational culture for this type of organization:

Table 1. Different approaches to organizational culture (Ehlers, 2009)

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 Ruegg- Sturm (2002)	Culture is comparable with grammar rules and semantic regulations of a language.	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 actions without them noticing it explicitly	Value Knowledge Belief Legislation Rituals

The notion of quality culture is understood as comprising two distinct sets of elements: “shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitments towards quality” and “a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating efforts” (EUA, 2006). As we can see, many elements are similar to a cultural approach on an organization.

Although a broad consensus has been reached about the importance of quality culture, for the concept of quality culture in universities it is difficult to establish a generally accepted approach. We could identify many developed models:

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