

**VERONICA ADRIANA POPESCU, GHEORGHE N. POPESCU, CRISTINA RALUCA POPESCU**

## **PROCESS MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITIES – RECENT PERSPECTIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT ORIENTED TOWARDS EXCELLENCE**

### **Abstract**

The paper aims at providing a survey of the latest trends that exist nowadays in higher education systems, with direct reference to Romania's experience. It seeks to study the results obtain in terms of higher education and the impact that these results have in respect to Romania's development, in the general framework of global crisis.

In order to analyze the development of higher education at an international and national level, a systematic literature review of journal articles mainly based on higher education processes is conducted. Furthermore, our interest mainly concerns the issues regarding process management in universities, seen as a recent perspective in the context of quality management oriented towards excellence. Standardization of process management in higher education, as well as quality management oriented towards excellence trends are shown to contribute to the society's future development, in this case in Romania.

By finding key trends in terms of higher education process a general framework is created. Moreover, due to the belief that education, in general, is the key issue in any developed society in order to show its robust figures in terms of economical and social strengths, the paper seeks to provide clear solution for future development. Clarity and transparency in terms of rules and regulations in the higher education in Romania is needed, as well as quality assurance in this respect.

In terms of research limitations and research implications, due to the fact that we performed a case study on only one university, as with every case study, the process of generalization of our findings is limited.

At a practical implication level, the case study can be useful to other academics and researchers' interested in topics such as education, in general, higher education, economical and social issues. Clear indications and useful solutions of how to achieve a qualitative and competitive higher education system are given.

The paper provides a clear definition of what process management in higher education, as well as quality management oriented towards excellence in higher education are and which its implications are in nowadays society, with a general overview on the Romanian experience.

**Keywords:** Process Management, Quality Management, Excellence in Higher Education, Development, Economic and Social trends, Romania's experience

### **Introduction**

Our research study suggestively entitled "*Process Management in Universities – Recent Perspectives in the Context of Quality Management Oriented towards Excellence*" focuses on the problems of education in the Romanian society, aiming at providing a survey of the latest trends that exist nowadays in higher education

systems, with direct reference to Romania's experience. It seeks to study the results obtain in terms of higher education and the impact that these results have in respect to Romania's development, in the general framework of global crisis.

Starting from the idea that higher education relies on the issue of lifelong learning, we strongly believe that lifelong learning represents the continuous building of skills and knowledge through the life of an individual; we believe that the process of continuous education is the key element that each and every society should be based on. For us, as professors and researchers, the idea of pursuing knowledge out of either personal or professional reasons, has always been a main trigger of our activity.

The subject of excellence in higher education and quality assurance are also very important in nowadays society, and due to this fact, we decided to focus also on them.

### **Literature review**

Initial information resources were generated by performing a literature review search through academic and research well known data bases, such as ISI Web of Knowledge, Scopus, EBSCO, EconLit, REPEC, DOAJ, Cabell's, JSTORE, Science Direct, SpringerLink, ProQuest. Bibliographies were collected from a number of leading national and international specialists on the topic of education and lifelong learning. The primary source in terms of literature review was professional journals. It should be noted that the literature search focused on studies measuring the impact of lifelong learning and education system improvement mainly on students at the universities. Also, we focused on papers published in international conference proceedings, which took into account the topic of education and lifelong learning.

### **Process Management Analysis and Quality Management Oriented towards Excellence in Universities**

#### ***Process Management Analysis***

In contemporary society, business processes must be analyzed taking into account a few basic concepts, such as: (1) the definition of product and service quality, (2) process management, which is based on the element of "process", and (3) quality management and quality management system, characterized by elements such as: (a) quality assurance, (b) controlling quality, and (c) improving quality.

According to specialists' opinion, the term "process" means all the activities interrelated or the interacting activities which transform elements in input - output elements, as follows: the output of a process are inputs of other processes; processes an organization should be planned and should be carried out in controlled conditions to add value. However, the "process" is a sequence of interdependent and linked procedures which, at each stage, consume one or more resources (such as resources of time, energy, equipment, financial resources, and so on), in order to transform inputs (such as data, materials, components, and so on) into outputs. Outputs, in turn, are then input to the next stage until a predetermined goal or end result is reached (<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/process.html>).

Moreover, the "process" is defined as having inputs, outputs and energy needed to transform inputs into outputs. A process takes time to realize the action is

associated. A process also requires a certain space for inputs and outputs and also for transformation of inputs into outputs (Dawis, Dawis & Koo, 2001).

Below we have presented the way of defining quality products and services, in order to understand the role and place of business process management under the guidance alone to generate performance in the organization (adapted from concepts belonging to David A. Garvin, 1984):

1. Orientation to perfection:
  - (a) Quality is a timeless entity, “absolute”, as perceived subjectively by each individual (Platon’s idealism);
  - (b) Quality cannot be measured.
2. Oriented to product or service:
  - (a) Overall quality is the quality characteristics of the product or service;
  - (b) Quality can be measured exactly;
  - (c) Quality is directly proportional to the cost.
3. Orientation process:
  - (a) Quality from the perspective of the organization;
  - (b) Quality is “compliance with specified requirements” (or “conformance to requirements” in the sense of Philip B. Crosby, see Crosby).
4. Cost orientation:
  - (a) Quality means performance at an acceptable cost.
5. User oriented:
  - (a) Quality is the property of being suitable for use (or “fitness for use” in the sense of J. M. Juran, see Bacivarov & Stoichițoiu, 2004).

Management processes can be analyzed, in general, two ways, as follows:

- The first point of view was that the entire business process management is planning and performance monitoring process. This term refers usually to the management of business processes and manufacturing (Becker, Kugeler & Rosemann, 2003).
- The second point of view was that the management processes are involved in the application of knowledge, skills, tools, techniques and systems to define, visualize, measure, control, report and improve processes in order to meet customers' requirements a profitable way (Thom, 2009).

### ***Quality Management Oriented towards Excellence***

The quality management is regarded as the process of coordinating all activities which directs and control the organization in terms of quality, which generally involves:

- ❖ Establishing the quality policy;
- ❖ Setting quality objectives;
- ❖ Quality planning;
- ❖ Controlling quality;
- ❖ Quality assurance;
- ❖ Improve quality.

Quality management means all management functions and activities involved in establishing the quality policy and its implementation through methods such as quality planning and quality assurance (including quality control). Quality

management system is a system which directs and controls the organization in terms of quality (Filip, 2005).

Taking into account the aspect of Total Quality Management (TQM), we can state below the quality management functions:

- ❖ Quality planning;
- ❖ Organization of the quality;
- ❖ The coordination of quality;
- ❖ Training of staff for the quality;
- ❖ Quality is controlling all process conducting surveillance activities and outcomes in quality assessment, the objectives and established standards in order to eliminate deficiencies and prevent their occurrence in subsequent processes;
- ❖ Quality assurance represents all predetermined and systematic activities carried out in order to give adequate confidence that an organization will meet the quality requirements:
  - Internal quality assurance;
  - External quality assurance;
- ❖ Improving quality refers to actions throughout the organization to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of activities and processes in order to achieve greater benefits for both the organization and its customers part of quality management focused on increasing the organization's ability to meet the quality:
  - Effectiveness: the extent to which planned activities are realized and planned results are achieved;
  - Efficiency: the ratio between results and resources used;
  - Traceability: the ability to retrieve the history, application or location of that which is taken into account.

Current guidelines on quality management systems refer to:

- a) Orientation techno-managerial:
  - Responsibility for quality lies primarily, leadership is important to improve processes;
  - “14 point program” of Deming, for example: models of quality management systems ISO 9000.
- b) Orientation rationalist – accountable:
  - Emphasis is on the individual responsibility of employees, their awareness;
  - Promotion of “zero deviation”;
  - Rationalist vision integration in individual behaviour, for example: Models of TQM quality management systems.

## Discussion

Taking into account the notion of quality in higher education, we will state below a few relevant definitions, such as the following ones:

- Quality in higher education is able to describe the extent to which universities are capable of meet their standards and to fulfil their mission.

- Quality in higher education provides the possibility of calculating a series of indicators such as: drop-out rate, the ratio between the number of students and of teaching staff, etc.
- Quality in higher education implicates the idea of excellence, or maintaining the highest standards.
- Quality in higher educational process means creating a “good quality product”, obtained by defining a set of minimal standards.
- Quality in higher educational automatically implicates continuous transformation, as an increase in student skills.
- Quality in higher educational creates a link between the university and the society itself.

The main ideas concerning excellence in higher education and quality assurance in Romania are as follows:

- In the domain of educational services in higher education, there are many inconsistencies concerning the idea of quality, on performance standards and indicators.
- Quality culture refers to tasks, standards and responsibilities of individuals.
- Quality culture is strongly connected with excellence in higher education and should be analyzed as such.
- Competition among universities should be primarily based on the learning outcomes guaranteed by the programme curriculum, in concordance with students’ results.
- The content of university syllabi shows the consistency of the learning programs and provides a clear image on the potential learning outcomes.
- Due to the facts that in the higher education process students gain skills and personal competences, excellence in higher education and quality assurance are extremely important.
- Teaching staff’s training and high quality ensures the professional standards and the internationally competitive factors.
- The learning resources of the universities are very important.
- Another key issue is to attract representative employers or professional associations in the programme, in order to give students the possibility to be recruited during the studies they are currently performing.
- Internships are a crucial component of the curriculum and they are able to demonstrate the students’ skills and gained knowledge in the labour market.
- Universities have a variety of education forms applied in their programs, which also represents a success factor.

## Conclusions

In terms of results, we feel confident enough in stating that Romania is ended on the right track, and can be considered nowadays ready to adapt itself to the lifelong learning requirements of the European Union’s programs. As arguments, the most frequent ones where related to the assumption that Romania, being part of the European Union, will be mainly forced to focus on the general requirements of an already opened and free labour market place.

Moreover, we strongly believe that Romania does not really invest in the young generation. The main arguments that we can bring into discussion are connected to

the ideas that by law the budget places are less and less each year (in the state education system), compared with the tax places, which clearly restricts access to university education for some individuals. In addition, the foreign exchange programs for students are more and more restrictive, and due to a limited and insufficient budget right from the start, only some students have access to these programs, and not in all cases the best of them; the normal scholarship and the merit scholarship provide a symbolic sum of money to real talented and hardworking students, meanwhile a student that has chosen in turn a part time job is clearly more advantaged, both in terms of money and in terms of future options for getting a better job in the future.

Another key issue that we believe is that Romania can be considered a lifelong learning continuously adapting society. In this matter, we still express a great concern while referring to the fact that Romania cannot be considered in their opinion a secure environment in terms of almost any law continuity, economic and business trends, education agenda and curricula, financial and labour market and the list can easily continue.

### Acknowledgement

Cristina Raluca Popescu is currently Lecturer PhD. at the University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania and PhD. student at her second PhD. in Management at The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania. For Cristina Raluca Popescu the contribution to this paper is the result of the work done during the Doctoral School of The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania, in the field of Management.

### References

- Bacivarov, I. C. & Stoichițoiu, D. G. (2004): Joseph M. Juran – o viață onchinată calității. *Asigurarea Calității*, octombrie – decembrie 2004, Anul X, numărul 40, pp. 1-9.
- Becker, J., Kugeler, M. & Rosemann, M. (Eds.) (2003): *Process Management. A guide for the Design of Business Process*. Springer Verlag.
- Crosby, Ph. B. *Quality Management: The real thing*. Philip Crosby Associates II, Inc., pp. 1-3, link: <http://www.wppl.org/wphistory/philipcrosby/QualityManagementTheRealThing.pdf>, Assessed on 03.11.2012
- Dawis, E. P., Dawis, J. F. & W.-P. Koo (2001): Architecture of Computer-based Systems using Dualistic Petri Nets. *Systems, Man, and Cybernetics*. 2001 IEEE International Conference, Vol. 3, 2001, pp. 1554-1558, Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Process\\_architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Process_architecture)
- Filip, Gh. (2005): *Decizie asistată de calculator*. Ediția a II-a, Editura Tehnică, București.
- Garvin, D. A. (1984): What does product quality really mean? *Sloan Management Review*, Fall 1984, pp. 25-43.
- Thom, W. (2009): *People, Process, and Performance Management in Project Management*. <http://www.pmhut.com/people-process-and-performance-management-inproject-management>
- \*\*\* <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/process.html>

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Veronica Adriana Popescu  
Commercial Academy of Satu-Mare, Satu-Mare  
The Bucharest University of Economic Studies  
Bucharest, Romania

Prof. Dr. Gheorghe N. Popescu  
The Bucharest University of Economic Studies  
Bucharest, Romania  
popescu\_gh\_cafr@yahoo.com

Lecturer Dr. Cristina Raluca Popescu  
The Bucharest University of Economic Studies  
Bucharest, Romania