

# Validating competences of teachers and students involved in quality assurance - a step forward to quality culture

Mihai Adrian Vilcea\*

## Abstract

The article presents the perspective of validating competences acquired by teachers and students involved in quality assurance processes developed in a higher education institution. Being part of teams that are responsible of quality assurance processes at different levels – departments, faculty and institution – participants are exposed at informal and non-formal learning context and all the competences are not validated and recognize. Universities are facing now lack of motivation from bout group teachers and students, to be involved or develop new quality processes.

**Key words:** quality assurance, quality culture, competences

## Introduction

In order to be able to present a definition for Quality Assurance it is considered necessary to give a definition for quality. According to Joseph M. Juran, a very well-known character in the field of quality management, “quality means those features of products which meet customer needs and thereby provide customer satisfaction.” For Crosby quality means “conformity with requirements” and within the ISO 9000:2006 standard quality is defined as “the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements”. The scientific literature presents many definitions for this concept and there isn’t any definition that covers all the aspects involved, but even so, in a very broad way, it can be said that quality represents those characteristics of a product or service that meet the customer’s requirements.

For any organization, in order to achieve, maintain and improve its quality processes it is needed to have a quality management system, which is defined by the ISO 9000:2006 standard as “a set of co-ordinated activities to direct

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\* Phd student at West University of Timisoara

and control an organization in order to continually improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its performance". These activities that are part of the quality management system are materialized in 3 main categories:

- Quality assurance – represents a set of activities of a company, through which it assures the achievement of its planned objectives and the fulfillment of the requirements (both internal and external)
- Quality control represents the total of activities that are undertaken in order to verify the results in comparison to requirements and to highlight the differences identified.
- Quality improvement it is a continuous quality improvement of products and/or services of an organization, both internal and external, in the purpose of increasing the rate of requirements fulfillment.

According to some authors there is another category that appears before quality assurance and it is called quality planning and it involves the planning of the quality system (Rose, 2005).

For an untrained eye it might seem that there is no difference between quality control and quality assurance and in fact, there is little difference as both are intended to assure the quality of a product or service. The main difference it comes from their purpose, as for the quality control the main purpose is to serve those who are directly responsible for conducting operations – to help them regulate current operations. For quality assurance, the main purpose is to serve those who are not directly responsible for conducting operations but who have a need to know.(Juran)

Quality assurance is similar to insurance as they both involve spending a small sum of money in order to avoid a bigger loss (Juran, 1998).

In the higher education context, quality assurance has been defined by many authors in many manners, similar to the general quality assurance concept. One of the most comprehensive definition it was given in 1994 at the Hong Kong Baptist University (cited by Andrea Wilger in 1997) and it presents quality assurance in higher education as “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”. “Through its quality assurance arrangements the University is able to satisfy itself, its students and interested external persona or bodies that:

- Its courses meet the appropriate academic and professional standards,
- The objectives of its courses are appropriate,
- The means chosen and the resources available for delivering those objectives are appropriate and adequate
- It is striving continually to improve the quality of its courses”.

The definition makes a clear statement that quality is the responsibility of everyone in the organization. This is one of the main principles that is found in the majority of the quality management systems and philosophies defined in the

scientific literature. Basically, in order to achieve a high standard of quality it is needed for an organization to involve to the quality assurance processes all the stakeholders (for universities the main stakeholders are: teachers, administrative employees, students and researchers).

### **What means Quality Culture?**

As one of the 3 main components of a quality management system is the continuous improvement of the system, it can be considered that the purpose of an organization that invests in quality management is to develop a quality culture.

The quality culture “is defined as the overall attitude of an institution, which focuses on the concept of quality and applies it to all aspects of its activities. That is to say, an institution as a whole has embraced quality in every element of functionality that enhances continuous improvement. It is a learning culture in which all members of an institution are involved in a self-critical assessment and improving culture in which all of the workforce of the institution is fully engaged in all activities carried out by the institution (Rose as cited in Muresan, 2008; Trewin, 2003)..” (Rose as cited in Muresan, 2008; Trewin, 2003)).

Even if both the quality management system concept and models and the quality culture concept state the need to involve all stakeholders in the activities related to the quality management, the differences in cultural backgrounds around the world have made the universities to approach the matter of developing a quality cultures in different manners, mainly by excluding or minimizing the involvement of different stakeholders. Even if in Romania the law requires that students need to be actively involved in the quality assurance process, the percent of students that are actually involved is very low, mainly due to distrust in them and their capabilities for this jobs specifications.

The main issue that arises from this type of situation is the fact that the universities cannot develop a true quality culture and their institutions will suffer great losses in time compared to other organizations that understand what a quality culture means and needs and they undertake full responsibility. The loss is not the university's solely but it is also the society's loss as the students that graduate from a university generate added value in the society they live and work in.

### **Context**

In higher education, quality assurance is one of the main topic all over the world. Universities have to find proper people to be involved in quality assurance processes. As we mentioned quality culture means also involvement of all stakeholders: students, teachers, administrative stuff and also external stakeholders.

Nowadays universities have one of the biggest cultural diversity because here we can find not only the image of the local context but also we are facing the educational migration that increase this diversity. In Europe Erasmus

program has been a great success, not only for students but also for teachers. We can find now a significant group of students with a different cultural background. Now, more than ever, global development, the pervasive influence of modern information and communication technologies facilitate a new intensity in the application of knowledge to economic and social world development (Nedelcu, Iucu 2012).

Teachers and students involved in quality assurance at all levels, should have also cultural competences. Specific to program evaluation, cultural competence refers to an awareness, understanding, and appreciation for cultural context when framing an evaluation, developing methodology, interacting with stakeholders, and interpreting results (SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson, cited in Development and Validation of the Cultural Competence of Program Evaluators (CCPE) Self-Report Scale). The most common paradigm of cultural competence consists of the three components of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills (Figure nr. 3)

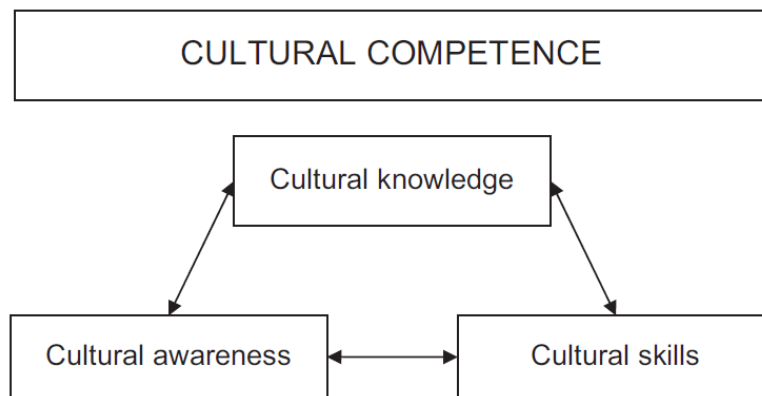


Figure 3 – Cultural Competence

According to Krystall, Jennifer and Bryan<sup>60</sup> cultural competence is important for three main reasons:

- all members of society develop and form a sense of self and others in the context of culture. The presence of cultural competence alters potentially inappropriate culturally bound perceptions (e.g., racism, sexism)

<sup>60</sup> Development and Validation of the Cultural Competence of Program Evaluators (CCPE) Self-Report Scale Krystall E. Dunaway, Jennifer A. Morrow and Bryan E. Porter American Journal of Evaluation 2012 33: 496 originally published online 2 May 2012 - The online version of this article can be found at: <http://aje.sagepub.com/content/33/4/496>

and prevents evaluators from considering their beliefs, customs, and behaviors as unique benchmarks by which to evaluate others.

- the questions participants are willing to answer, those with whom they are willing to share their perceptions, and the extent to which they are willing to participate throughout an evaluation are profoundly influenced by their perceptions of the evaluator
- cultural competence is a necessary and important skill for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. In other words, cultural competence should not just be a concern for those in the majority group.

## **Opportunities**

It is important to certify and formally get recognize competencies, knowledge and skills acquired on the job, in years of working with adults for educational purpose (Sava, Borca & Danciu, 2014), because working in quality assurance and quality culture means interaction with adults and is also a learning process curve with the main goal of improving educational activities and institutional management.

When we talking about validating the competencies of teachers and students involved in quality assurance processes we have some direct benefits that can be used by the universities to empower involvement like: motivation of participation, recognition of nonformal and informal learning, increase employability of students.

Until now a specific evaluation program to evaluate and validate competences acquired during quality assurance reviews and also during involvement in internal quality assurance processes is not developed although we have the context for that<sup>61</sup> (in Romania) and also the European Qualification Framework is an important instrument; the related national qualification frameworks are the guidelines for universities and other training providers to adapt their educational provision, for a better articulation with the labor market and with the formal frameworks of recognition (Sava, Borca, Danciu 2014) especially for students.

In general in a university is necessary to have responsible people at all levels: departments, faculty and also institutional level. When we speak about internal reviews we have different people involved, which increase the number.

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<sup>61</sup> In Romania, for instance, the development of around 300 occupational standards goes hand in hand with building a national system for validating non-formal and informal learning. A similar process can be observed in Estonia, where the development of professional standards has been linked to a method to attest an individual's professional qualifications (through either written / oral exams, test assignment, attestation on the basis of documents or a combination of these) – Maria Țoia, Validating the competences of migrant woman- The Forward approach

## Conclusions

Development of education in universities is also going from quality assurance to quality culture. This means changing of organizational culture, a very long process which takes many resources. According to Marian D. Ilie organizational change in universities has two different source – internal (students, teachers, administrative staff) and external, (society – which now is very dynamic and also very demanding). Quality culture involves all stakeholders in all the processes developed in the higher universities. In a diverse society, leadership development is more important than in a homogeneous society, because leaders are required to submit in new values, to mediate conflicts and create coalitions to support reform (Bibu, Mos, 2012). The participation of teachers and students is not well developed, and because of that offering recognition and validation of competences acquired, should be a motivation to be involved.

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