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Business Process Modeling in Higher Education Institutions. Developing a Framework for Total Quality Management at Institutional Level

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Abstract

This article presents a stage of a quality management model in higher education institutions based on business process modelling. The paper points out the importance of graduates' satisfaction in assessing quality in universities and looks at a key development, that have shaped the idea of correlating the graduates' requirements regarding the developed specific and transversal competencies during the study with the required competences in the labor market. On the basis of the existing literature evidence and on the performed results, the paper proposes a business process management model by outlining the importance of understanding graduates' requirements, their needs and expectations.

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1. Introduction

The importance of education for the development of excellence and knowledge contributes directly to the social and economic development of a country. Ensuring the development in this direction involves understanding the mechanisms, which underlines the processes of strengthening academic quality assurance and improvement, but also the existence of a good strategy to achieve the performance. The aim of the research is on the one hand to identify the main characteristic issues of quality in higher education by highlighting the graduates' perception about the developed

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specific and transversal competencies during the study and their utility on the labor market and on the other hand to develop a framework for implementing a quality management model in higher education institutions based on business process management modeling. The success of a university depends on its ability to ensure the necessary resources to achieve the main objective, which refers to the provision of knowledge and skills embodied in people and technologies. The value of such knowledge is defined by the stakeholders of the universities in terms such as quality, relevance or utility.

2. Material and Method

The key component for the quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area is the evaluation and the accreditation process. There are two types of quality evaluation process in higher education institutions: the external and the internal evaluation. It is remarkable that, the external evaluation is based on the internal evaluation mechanisms and do not illustrate the aspects related to the students'/ graduates' feedback. The quality assessment through internal evaluation includes aspects regarding teaching and research quality, teachers' performance, students'/ graduates' competencies and abilities as well as the curriculums' structure and graduates' level of employability (Harvey, 2002).

This article presents the essential quality dimensions in higher education institutions by means of the internal evaluation made by the graduates. Understanding and promoting graduates' satisfaction brings numerous benefits for the universities (Hartman and Schmidt, 1995). There are several studies related to the graduates' satisfaction with their overall higher education experience. Palti et al (1993, quoted in Garcia –Aracil, 2009) examined the link between student retention and student satisfaction with the educational service facilities and performance. The authors illustrated that the career advice services could help student retention and graduates satisfaction. A study made by Stwine and Alves (2010) in Sweden and Portugal revealed that a big challenge seems to be how to meet expectations and demands on young adults, that have "invested" in tertiary education. Lafuente et al. (2012) analyzed the relationship between graduates' satisfaction with higher education and graduates' expectation regarding their employment status in Spain. The results showed that the less satisfied graduates were those who studied the longest and the ones showing less employment and job relatedness. The perception of quality performed by graduates is conditioned by the fulfillment of their own expectation regarding to what the higher education institution can provide to them (facilities, teaching) and on what they can acquire by themselves (academic performance, social contacts) (Lafuente et al., 2012). Analyzing the perception of quality by former students are a valuable feedback, because taking into account their experience in the higher education institution reveals the actual correlation between their acquired skills and the one needed to their job (Tam, 2001).

This paper highlights the graduates' satisfaction regarding the developed specific and transversal competencies during the study by correlating these with their utility on the labor market. Further, in order to asses a continuous development of the quality referring to the graduates' satisfaction with the provided knowledge and transversal competencies, the business process modeling is used. Business Process Management is actually form this point of view a provider of tools and techniques to efficiently manage business processes (Huang, 2011). Antune and Mourão (2011, quoted in Anand, Wamba and Gnanzou, 2013) admits that BPM is a collection of technologies capable of translating business process models into computer-supported activities, while Pyon, Woo, and Park (2011, quoted in Anand, Wamba and Gnanzou, 2013) illustrates BMP as being a system which supports business processes using methods, techniques, and software to design, enact, control and analyze operational processes involving humans, organization, applications, documents and other sources of information.

The adoption of business process improvement strategies and business process modelling in higher education institutions is a sign that universities want to perform functions and to develop procedures in order to fulfill the expectations of the customers. From this point of view, an identified, documented, standardized, managed and automatized business processes ensure them to stay competitive on the market and in the same time allows them to meet the customer requirements. Further, by using business process modeling in higher education institutions would help universities to develop a general framework for the continuous quality management model based on graduates' feedback seen as an output of the educational services, because increased competition in higher education sector determine universities to use the graduates' satisfaction as a quality sign.

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