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# DEVELOPING QUALITY CULTURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

*The purpose of this article is to conceptualise quality culture development as a strategic communication process in a higher education institution. Literature review integrates material from recent quality culture development and quality management studies and provides a conceptual framework for the study of quality culture development. The theoretical areas of the concept of quality and quality culture dimensions were proposed.*

During the last several decades, the ideology of quality has become one of the most important and ambitious directions of activity for institutions of higher education. The actualisations of quality are presupposed by the changes that occur in the external environment of an institution of higher education, i.e. implementation of a market model, globalisation and internationalisation, the change of the needs of external social shareholders and the labour market. A large amount of changes is determined by the general principles of the development of the European higher education space, international agreements and directives. The formation of the concept of quality within the context of internal and external conditions and changes is a complex process for every institution of higher education. The concept of quality in an institution of higher education is not a self-driven or predetermined phenomenon; in order to form it and develop quality culture, certain conditions and an active management system are needed.

Analysing various points of view towards quality in higher education, the classification of conceptions suggested by Harvey and Green is the most frequent basis: *Quality as exceptional, Quality as perfection or consistency, Quality as fitness for purpose, Quality as value for money, Quality as transformation* (Harvey, Green, 1993; Harvey, Stensaker, 2008). This is mostly an abstracted classification of the concepts of quality according to the actualised projection of the idea of quality based on analogies (Vettori, 2012) without emphasising definite scientific direction or access. One comparative component cannot be distinguished, i.e. certain concepts are grouped according to the expression of the idea of quality within the management structure of an institution of higher education, whereas other concepts are grouped according to the goals if quality processes or the interests of interested parties.

The *dynamics*, *subjectivity and multidimensionality* of the conception of quality presuppose its expression in different contexts based on different interests (practical, scientific). According to Tam (2001), stakeholders of the higher education institution have different outlooks towards quality; each of the outlooks towards quality is determined by interests that direct towards higher education.

Summing up the theoretical analysis of the conception of quality, the content of the conception of quality depends on the following aspects (Fig. 1): 1) The needs (encompassing expectations) of a subject – stakeholder – that creates perception of quality and defines the content of quality; 2) Circumstances/contexts in which the content of the conception of quality is defined (study quality, teaching quality, scientific research quality, administration activity quality); 3) International and national levels that reveal the expression of institutionalised conception of quality in the context of wider quality ensuring processes.

Scientists and practitioners have recognised the importance of the organisational culture for the quality management practice: the role of culture is analysed in the quality management. Quality culture paradigm does not restrict culture with criteria and assessment and measurement procedures. Adaptation of any model, process or research is not sufficient to create or support quality culture (Hodgkinson, Kelly, 2007). Quality control reflects not only the orientation to the interested parties but also the direction to the internal environment, attention to personnel and leadership in the organisation. Cultural viewpoint in cultural analysis of quality of higher education institutions was actualised by Ehlers

(2009). The key Ehlers' position, which determines cultural quality research direction, is that 'development of quality requires organisational culture based on common values, essential competences and professionalism' (Ehlers, 2009, p. 343). He prepared a conceptual quality culture model of higher education institutions which is based on organisational culture dimensions: structural elements, enabling factors, cultural factors, and connective elements.

Fig. 1
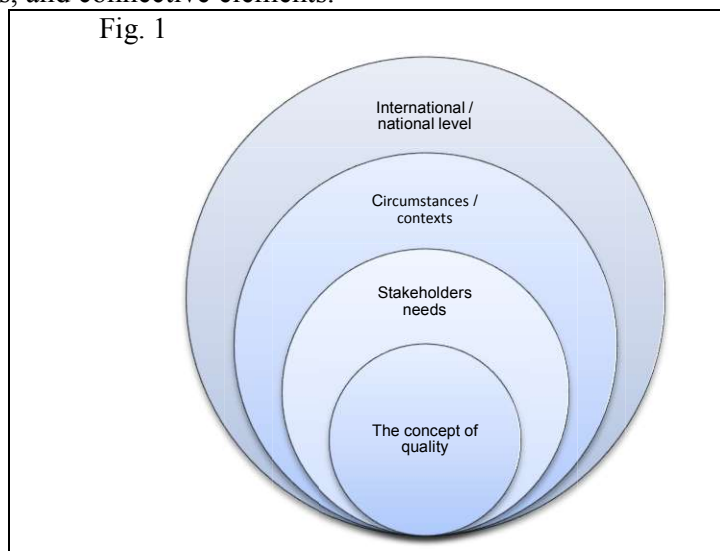


The dimensions of quality culture cover **the main quality dimensions**: leadership (including the involvement and commitment of the personnel), the organisation targets, the needs of the parties concerned (including the results and their monitoring), culture and values. Each of these dimensions reflects the main principles of the quality culture development and functions of a strategic communication. The **functions of a strategic communication** (information, persuasion, development of connections and dialogue) through the implementation of the **principles of a quality culture development** (public participation, responsibilities, learning and cooperation) reveal the potential of the constructing of the conception of quality and developing quality culture.

**Conclusions**

The essential theoretical support, providing the direction for methodological searches of quality culture development, can be formulated in two statements: 1) Every institution of higher education *establishes* its own quality conception (there is no single definition of quality); 2) Quality conception (*agreement* on quality) is the base of quality culture development. Quality culture is generally understood rather as a technocratic process (the prevailing attitude that quality management system is a bureaucratic documentary process), studies directed at the effectiveness of quality management system (identifying the factors that influence efficiency), but the constitutive (content, creation of meaning) quality culture potential (discursive strategic paradigm) is not disclosed.

Communicative perspective is revealed through the paradigm *as a value creation* of communication - what creates the conception of quality in an institution (strategic level - the role of leadership, leadership), how creates the conception of quality and through which texts (documents, lessons learned). Together with quality culture theme there appears the conception of quality culture *development* (quality culture development imperative is particularly vivid in strategic documents of higher education).

**References**
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