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Managerial actions for achieving continuity and interconnection between cycles of higher education

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Abstract

In the given article some theoretical and methodological aspects of redimensioning the institutional university management are grounded in order to ensure continuity and interconnection between higher education cycles addressing them in the context of postmodernity and changes in the internal and external environment of the higher education institutions. Based on them, some concepts/provisions for managerial framework are formulated in order to achieve continuity and interconnection between the cycles of higher education. Also, the current state of achieving continuity and interconnection between higher education cycles is shown on the basis of analysing the opinions of institutional managers and teachers concerning the efficiency of achieving continuity between the cycles of higher education on different dimensions.

Keywords: cycles of higher education, Licentiate studies, Master's studies, Doctoral studies, connection, interconnection, educational management, academic management.

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions represent a system in which some elements and processes that are part of it interact efficiently or less efficiently.

It is necessary to conceive that each university presents itself as a system, regardless of whether its staff is aware or not of the basic features, functioning laws, regulatory documents, and vital processes taking place in the given institution.

The management paradigm represents the institutional framework where the managerial processes of designing, organizing/implementing, monitoring, evaluating, communicating, decision making, reverse connection realizing, motivating, etc. take place.

The management system constitutes an ensemble of correlated or interacting elements through which are established the policy, objectives and modalities by which these objectives are achieved.

A university management system may include more components and, namely, Licentiate studies management subsystem, Master's studies subsystem, and Doctoral studies subsystem.

In this context we note the existance of some discrepancies between the cycles of higher education on different lines and aspects of interconnection:

- *University framework:* incoherence of outcomes, duplication/repetition of study topics, lack of adequate correlation with the National Qualifications Framework, etc.
- *Organizational framework:* management of higher education cycles functioning is carried out by different

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institutional managerial structures; cycle III - Doctoral studies - is managed by structures that coordinate the "research".

- *Motivational framework:* lack of some motivational and career guidance policies for students in relation to the specificity of each higher education cycle.

2. Concept and Managerial Actions

The higher education institution is an organization that can and must develop in the context of postmodernism, changes in the internal and external environment.

In general, we need to point out that in the definition and analysis of organizations there are identified three perspectives: *rational system; natural system; open system* (Scott, 1998). The approach to an organization as a rational system refers to the classical image of organization considered as a social entity with the purpose of achieving specific objectives based on the principle of efficiency. It provides for the rationalization of both management and executors' activity through a "scientific" organization of work and leadership oriented towards efficiency, optimization, rationalization, and formalization based on authority, constraints, rules, directives, etc. As Scott remarks (1998): "*... by concentrating on the normative structure, the rational system analysts overlooked the behavioral structure of organizations. The structure is celebrated, the action is ignored*" (Scott, 1998).

When dealing with organizations as natural systems, they present themselves as social organisms or collectives, survival organizations. The promoters of this perspective (E.Mayo, C.Barnard, P.Selznick) give preference to informal structures and cooperation in achieving the common goal (Mayo, 1948; Barnard, 1938; Selznick, 1949). P.Selznick, who laid the foundations of the institutionalist approach to organizations, introduces notions of distinctive competence that is a specific and unique characteristics which distinguishes one organization from another and the organizational personality (in the actual sense of organizational culture), thus, carries out their institutionalization and social integration (Selznick, 1949).

As accepted by Joel A.C. Baum and Tim J.Rowley *"... all contemporary perspectives on organizations invariably adopt the image of an open system, combining it either with a rational system orientation or a natural one*" (Baum & Rowley, 2008). These perspectives must be in concordance with the management objectives, especially in the era of changes, when "*managers build, rearrange, select and demolish many environmental aspects (objectives)*" (Baum & Rowley, 2008). They denote that the suitability mode of the open system to the internal characteristics of organizations and the requirements of the environment will determine their own capacity of adaptation. Thus, in accordance with the environment, organizations need to develop the structures which will be contingent with the varying requirements of different environments. As a result, the organization's performance will be optimal when the processual system is associated with a stable environment, and the organic system - with a dynamic one. Such situation is characteristic for the educational organization whose members play an active role in creating, defining, interpreting and influencing the environment (Cojocaru, 2007).

In the context of these approaches the organizational structure represents a unitary construct of the managed and managing subsystems. They are in permanent connection and interpenetration in relation to the functions of each element of the institutional managerial process.

From the perspective of this concept of an organization/university we can identify and argue the possible opportunities for realization of the connections between the higher education cycles as subsystems, the focus being placed on the managerial dimension.

In this respect, we formulate the following provisions for a managerial framework regarding the realization of continuity and interconnection between higher education cycles:

1. The elements as functional entities do not constitute the essence of the whole/system, but, vice versa, the whole/system conceives as a result of its components' discrimination. The university represents a complex system consisting of the interconnected components' assembly. This means that, first of all, the university should be approached as a whole, and then its components/constituents.
2. The sum of the characteristics/parameters or a separate parameter of the system is not equal to the sum of parameters/characteristics of the system components.

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The efficient functioning of some system's components does not necessarily ensure the efficiency of the system. There may be contexts/situations when the objectives of the system/organization do not coincide with those of the constituent components. For example, the university as a system needs an integration of components/faculties, the need being dictated by real contexts; but components/faculties intend to remain intact, to keep a *status-kwo*, even if it is detrimental to quality.

- The number of system's components must be minimal but also sufficient to accomplish the mission and its corresponding objectives.

In this sense, the organizational structure of university represents a connection of the educational, research, economic, managerial, financial structures, etc.

In this context, it should be noted that the functioning of three higher education cycles does not necessarily imply also the increase of managerial structures.

- The structure of the system should function in such a way that the changes/modifications of the vertical interconnections do not affect the functioning of the entire system, but also of the constituent components.

Changing the institution's leadership, replacing some heads of institutional departments must not affect the efficiency of the system's and the subsystems' functioning.

- The autonomy of the university has effects on all participants of the system and is established through the institutional regulations, elaborated transparently and based on consensus.
- In order to elaborate the development strategy of the system and its constituent components, it is necessary to establish the objectives tree and also the dominant and priority aspects for a period of time.
- From all possible objectives the priority must be provided to the quality of process, outcome, conditions, etc.
- In formation/development of the managerial and organizational structure, it must be taken in consideration that all processes in the university system have a continuous and interconnected character. The system exists as long as it functions and develops.
- Institutional university management should take into account the following issues: provision of alternative ways for functioning and development; necessity to operate on the basis of norms and corresponding standards; need to produce and implement innovations/changes.
- The interconnection and continuity between the cycles of higher education from a managerial perspective are done vertically and horizontally.

Applying the managerial dimension in the framework of achieving continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles has a double concentric character: at organizational system level and at subsystems level (higher education cycles, faculties, departments, etc.) (Guțu et all., 2013).

The double concentric approach to the achievement of managerial actions ensures the achievement of interconnection between and within the cycles of higher education.

If the managerial actions are the same both at the level of system and subsystem, then the educational dimension is a specific one both for each subsystem and for each managerial action. For example, the managerial action of *projecting* is a constant one, and the pedagogical action is different: projecting the functioning of education cycles, projecting the curriculum, projecting the didactic process, projecting the university course/seminar, etc.

At the same time pedagogical actions are in coherence with the cycles of higher education determined by the mission of the cycle, the objectives and the qualifications obtained within them.

In this context, universitary autonomy and organizational functioning laws allow each higher education institution to establish structures and their responsibility in order to achieve interconnection and continuity between the cycles of higher education (subsystems) from a managerial perspective (*see* Table 1).

Table 1. Management of Achieving Continuity and Interconnection Between Higher Education Cycles

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Institutional Structures Higher Education Cycles	Studies/ Curriculum Development Department	Research Department	Quality Assurance Committees	Departments/ Chairs
Function: Analytical-Informational/Diagnostic				
General Competencies	- Proposes a unique mechanism for diagnosing, collecting and interpreting data on functionality of cycles 1, 2, 3. - Forms a database on the functionality of higher education cycles. - Analyzes data on cycles in a comparative plan.	- Proposes a unique mechanism for diagnosing, collecting and interpreting data on research activity within cycles 1, 2, 3. - Forms a database on the state of research activity within higher education cycles. - Analyzes and presents data on cycles in a comparative plan.	- Organize and process data of functionality diagnostics of higher education cycles. - Propose the suggestions for improving the functionality of higher education cycles. - Ensure and carry out the interpretation of data on cycles in a comparative plan.	- Organize and process data on functionality of cycles in a specific specialty, domain. - Provide the institutional departments and quality assurance committees with the corresponding data and necessary suggestions. - Ensure and carry out the interpretation of data on cycles in a comparative plan.
Function: Motivational				
General Competencies	- Analyzes and proposes solutions for the manifestation of social, professional and cognitive motives by students in higher education cycles.	- Ensures and promotes the scientific researches on students' motivational peculiarities in the respective higher education cycles.	- Appreciate the level of social, professional and cognitive motivation of students in cycle 1, 2, 3 of higher education.	- Establish the system of motive-documents for cycles of higher education. - Develop the spectrum of reasons from one cycle to the other. - Provide the students' motivation through different forms and means, ensuring continuity by redimensioning the outcomes and didactic strategies.
Function: Projecting/Forecasting				
General Competencies	- Establishes the problems connected with continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles. - Formulates the institutional policies for achieving continuity and interconnection between higher education cycles as guidelines in planning the activities of faculties and departments.	- Proposes the mechanism for projecting the achievement of continuity between the cycles of higher education. - Organizes express researches on the effectiveness of continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles. - Stimulates the projects	- Evaluate and appreciate the quality of projects/ programs for achieving continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles. - Propose the suggestions for improving the corresponding projects/ programs.	- Project the activity aimed at efficient achievement of continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles on different dimensions: outcomes, contributions, processes, relations, etc.

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	- Manages the process of projecting at institutional level.	of broader researches of the problem.		
Function: Organization /Coordination /Implementation				
General Competencies	- Coordinates at institutional level the achievement of continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles.	- Coordinates at institutional level the achievement of continuity and interconnection in the research domain between the higher education cycles.	- Monitor and evaluate the quality of managing the products for achieving continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles at institutional and faculty level.	- Ensure and carry out the coordination/ implementation of projects on continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles at the faculty/ department level.
Function: Monitoring and Adjustment				
General Competencies	- Ensures the effective monitoring and evaluation of achieving continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles at institutional level. - Proposes the suggestions and mechanisms for regulation and improvement of this process.	- Ensures effective monitoring and evaluation of achieving the continuity and interconnection between the cycles of higher education on the dimension of research and innovation.	- Appreciate the quality of monitoring and evaluation of achieving continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles. - Propose suggestions for adjustment and improvement of this process.	- Perform self-evaluation of the efficiency of continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles. - Introduce the necessary changes for achieving continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles.

In the context of these functions and managerial actions, communication plays an important role in achieving continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles. Other managerial approaches are valued namely through communication as a managerial tool, taking into account the specifics of the higher education cycles.

3. Current State in Achieving Continuity and Interconnection Between Higher Education Cycles

In order to establish the real state of the efficiency of achieving the continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles on the managerial dimension, a broad research of institutional policy documents, normative and regulatory documents, curricular products, etc. is needed.

The purpose of the present article is narrower - to analyze the opinion of institutional managers and professors regarding the effectiveness of achieving continuity between the cycles of higher education on different dimensions.

A group of managers (specialists from the Studies Department, Research and Innovation Department, Quality Assurance Commissions) and professors from different faculties of Moldova State University were interviewed.

The results of the interviews are as follows (*see* Table 2):

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Table 2. Opinions of Managers and Professors Regarding Effectiveness of Achieving Continuity and interconnection Between Higher Education Cycles

Nr. crt.	Indicators		Answers in Points	
			Managers	Professors
	Do you think that the continuity between the cycles of higher education is generally achieved?			
1.	A.	*At high level*	2%	0%
	B.	*At satisfactory level*	51%	36%
	C.	*At low level*	47%	64%
	Do you think that the cycles' syllabuses and disciplines' curricula the cycles ensure the continuity between the cycles of higher education?			
2.	A.	*To a great extent*	5%	8%
	B.	*To a medium extent*	88%	70%
	C.	*To a small extent*	7%	22%
	Do you think that the studies within the educational cycles ensure their specificity and necessity?			
3.	A.	*To a great extent*	35%	22%
	B.	*To a medium extent*	54%	33%
	C.	*To a small extent*	11%	55%
	Do you think that the institutional management have ensured the efficient achievement of continuity between the cycles of higher education?			
4.	A.	*To a great extent*	39%	3%
	B.	*To a medium extent*	55%	34%
	C.	*To a small extent*	6%	63%

The analysis of the managers' and professors' responses allows us to identify and conclude the following:

1. Both groups of respondents indicated that achieving continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles in general, and also on certain dimensions being the same, is largely inefficient or not effective enough.
2. The professors are more critical with regard to the managerial aspect of achieving continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles, and the institutional managers - more critical regarding the curricular and processual aspect.
3. The institutional managers also noted that in the structure of functions of their professional duties, the managing of achieving the continuity and interconnection between the cycles was not a prioritary one, and in the first place it refers to the third cycle – the doctoral studies.
4. The professors, in their turn, noted that they had not been clearly oriented: how and through which means the continuity and interconnection between the cycles of higher education must be achieved (i.e. they refer to a clear theoretical concept).

In this context, both managers and professors indicated the existence of the problem of achieving the continuity and interconnection between the cycles of higher education and searching the approaches and solutions to ensure the corresponding continuity and interconnection across the whole academic and managerial spectrum.

4. Conclusions

Ensuring continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles can and must be a priority dimension of institutional administrative structures based on a system of principles and rules determined by the following issues: the functioning specifics of higher education institutions (theory of organizers), the specifics of managerial actions (organization theory), the specifics of curriculum and educational process (theory of curriculum and training), and the

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specifics of labor market (National Qualifications Framework).

Effective achievement of continuity and interconnection between the higher education cycles is a determinant factor in ensuring the quality of training of highly qualified specialists.

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