

Quality Management in the Higher Education of the Republic of Moldova as a Framework for University Performance

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Abstract

This investigation is focused on two objectives: 1) explaining the relationship between quality management and performance management in higher education; 2) evaluating the existing quality management systems in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Moldova. In order to accomplish the first objective, a comparative theoretical analysis of the quality management and performance management was carried out in terms of common aspects and distinctive peculiarities. Consequently, it was reasoned that the performance management system of a higher education institution is created and functions on the basis of the quality management system by extending the area of the quality objectives to the level at which they will ensure performance or, in other terms, by moving towards excellence. In order to achieve the second objective, an opinion survey for the teaching and managerial staff from 6 universities was carried out. As a consequence of processing the obtained results, there were identified problems related to the functioning of the quality management systems. The investigation resulted in the formulation of a set of recommendations for the higher education institutions of the Republic of Moldova in order to increase the efficiency of the quality management systems functioning and thus to ensure an efficient management.

Keywords: higher education; performance management; quality management.

JEL classification: I12; M12.

1. INTRODUCTION

The higher education system in the Republic of Moldova is today deeply marked by drastically reduced number of students as a result of demographic phenomena, massive emigration of the population abroad, reduced absorption capacity of the labor market. In these conditions, the competition between educational institutions worsens, implying the need to promote effective management practices aimed at outcomes able to ensure competitiveness and, hence, sustainable development of each institution. In other words,

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at present, the university management needs more than ever to be turned into a university performance management.

Achieving the creation of effective systems of performance management is possible only based on a detailed examination and evaluation of the existing framework, including the functionality of the existing quality management systems.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

In order to achieve the expected objectives of the investigation, a theoretical input was made in the conceptual approaches of the quality management and performance management, the principles of functioning and the components of quality and performance management systems. As a result, their common and distinctive aspects have been identified, which allowed to formulate the reasoning regarding the relationship between the quality management system and performance management system within a higher education institution.

A survey was also carried out on a sample of 542 people, including 388 teachers and 154 representatives of the university management bodies from 6 universities, focused on identifying the problems related to knowing the objectives and content of the quality management system, organization of the quality management activities, level and quality of involvement of different actors. The systematization of survey results allowed to draw conclusions on the current situation of the quality management systems and, based on this, to make recommendations for the higher education institutions of the Republic of Moldova in order to increase the efficiency of the quality management systems' functioning.

We'd like to mention, as limits of the research, the inclusion in the survey of the teaching and managerial staff of only 6 state universities, which represents 35% of the total number of state universities in the Republic of Moldova and 19% of the total number of universities (31 universities activate at present in The Republic of Moldova, including 17 state and 14 private universities). Also, the survey did not involve all the teaching and managerial staff from those institutions, but only a part of them, with the aim of representing both staff categories (didactic and managerial), as well as different structural subdivisions. Based on the above-mentioned facts, we should point out that the conclusions and recommendations generally reveal the problems related to the quality management systems functioning, each higher education institution having to diagnose and assess more precisely the functioning deficiencies of its own quality management system and to determine the activities that should be implemented depending on each particular situation.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is impossible to understand the essence and meaning of the higher education management performance without penetrating into the nature of the performance management concept. In this context, we shall outline several approaches which, in our opinion, offer a knowledge gain on this subject.

[Mathis and Jackson \(2011\)](#) define performance management as a series of activities designed to ensure that the organization gets the performance it needs from employees. Similarly, focusing on the organization's final goals, performance management has also been examined by other authors. Thus, performance management is defined as a strategic and integrated approach to ensure lasting success in organizations' activities by improving the performance of the people working in them and by developing teams' and individuals'

capabilities (Bădescu *et al.*, 2008), as well as the amount of strategic interventions that influence the long-term work of the organization, leading to improved economic results (Neaşcu, 2009).

Other definitions highlight, as an important element, the correlation of individual objectives with the organizational ones. For example, according to Armstrong (2015) performance management represents the continuous process of improving performance by setting individual and team goals, which are aligned to the strategic goals of the organization, planning performance to achieve the goals, reviewing and assessing progress, and developing the knowledge, skills and abilities of people. Aguinis (2013) examines performance management as a continuous process of identifying, measuring and developing performance in organizations by linking each individual's performance and objectives to the organization's overall mission and goals. Forrester's approach (2011) stipulates that performance management can be regarded as a process that turns the mission, aims and values of an organization into individual objectives.

Originating in the private sector, performance management has subsequently been adapted by the public sector into an audit mechanism for improving the performance, productivity, accountability and transparency of public services (Forrester, 2011). In 1982, Great Britain was the first to implement performance management system in the public sector: the Audit Commission was created in the central administration in order to assess effectiveness and efficiency. This fact laid the basis of a new method of thinking in the public sector – “value for money”, which expresses the value created through the use of financial resources attracted in the management and implementation processes in public institutions (Gherghina *et al.*, 2009).

The implementation of performance management in university education has occurred in the context of the new management technologies set forth by Hood (1991) as New Public Management, which represents a set of broadly similar administrative doctrines, which dominated the bureaucratic reform agenda in many OECD countries since the late 1970s. Referring to NPM objectives, Broadbent (2007) mentioned the desire to achieve efficiency, accountability, to delegate responsibility to operational managers, to separate “rowing and steering”, to achieve transparency. As a result, although there is no consensus in defining university performance, most scientists associate it with the measurable results that express the quality of the allocated resources use. In this context we consider that Lindsay's approach (1982) is quite relevant as it examines the institutional performance as embodying components on two dimensions: effectiveness, which is concerned with the congruence between outputs and goals or other criteria, and efficiency, which links outputs with inputs.

Taking over the concept of performance management from the business activity into university management also involved “borrowing” and adapting it to the higher education specifics and to the performance measurement instruments such as the EFQM model (Davies, 2004; Spasos *et al.*, 2008; Ghosh and Das, 2013), Balanced Scorecard (C. Brown, 2012; Ghosh and Das, 2013) etc.

4. PREMISES OF THE EMERGENCE OF THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS WITHIN THE UNIVERSITIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Despite the fact that today university performance management is no longer a new aspect, being widely reflected in scientific publications, among Moldovan academic staff and even some university managers persists some vagueness in understanding the

significance of the performance management and, especially, its relationship with the quality management, this also having an impact on the correct perception of the operational side of performance management.

If we make a small foray into the history of the emergence and strengthening of quality management systems in the higher education systems of the Republic of Moldova, we can state that the concern for quality was caused by the tendency to connect to afferent European requirements. For Europe, the period around and after 1990 was challenging and inspiring. At that time, the fundamental changes in European geopolitical landscape, often summarized as “Fall of the Wall” in Berlin, have opened many new insights, challenges and opportunities. The position and the conditions of the universities have changed fundamentally. The opening up of the European university landscape and the impact of the rapidly developing globalization made it very clear that the European universities would soon have to cope with worldwide competition and national education systems and authorities would no longer be able to guarantee the quality - nor the global acceptance thereof - for each of the universities ([European University Association, 2014](#)).

Among the most relevant milestones in the expression of the European Union’s policy on higher education we can mention:

- Joint Declaration on the harmonization of the European system of higher education at Sorbonne, 25 May 1998;
- The Bologna Declaration on the definition of European higher education space of 19 June 1999;
- The Communiqué of the Conference of the Ministers responsible for higher education, held in Prague in 2001;
- The Communiqué of the Ministers responsible for higher education, held in Berlin in 2003 ([Popescu, 2004](#)).

The Bologna Declaration, signed on the 19th of June 1999, had a special significance in the initiation of creating quality management system in universities; among the major objectives, it was stipulated the need to promote European cooperation in quality, by developing comparable methodologies and criteria. Those ideas are raised in the Prague Communiqué of May 19, 2001, which reconfirmed the commitment to establish a common area of higher education. Implicitly, there was recognized the vital role of quality assurance systems in order to ensure high quality standards and to facilitate comparison of titles and qualifications in the European space ([Velişco, 2015](#)).

The Berlin Communiqué of September 19, 2003 focused primarily on implementing a system of quality assurance in higher education, noting: “The quality of higher education has proven to be the central element in the formation of the European Higher Education. The ministers are committed to supporting further development of quality at institutional, national and European levels. They have established the need to develop harmonized criteria and methodologies for quality assurance. For this reason, they have reached an agreement that by 2005 national quality assurance system must include:

- a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved;
- the evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessments, external assessments, students’ participation and results publication;
- a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures;
- participation, cooperation and operation in networks at international level” ([Popescu, 2004](#)).

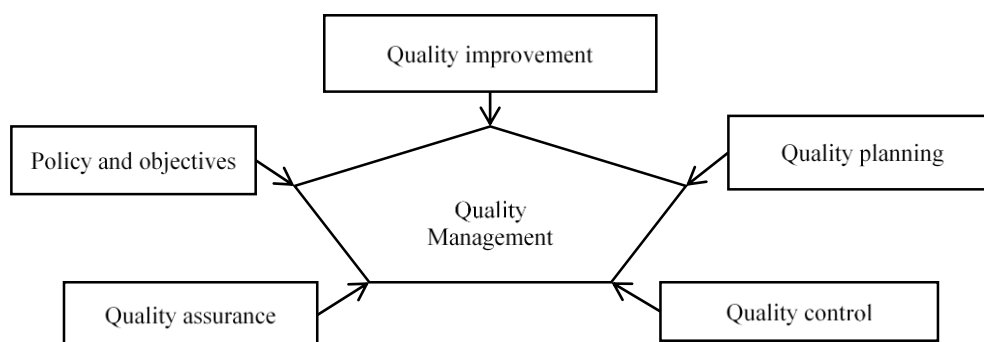
In the following period, the Republic of Moldova hold an intensive process of drafting normative instruments of assessment and accreditation of the educational institutions. Thus, the National Council for Academic Assessment and Accreditation was established, which was later replaced by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education. In accordance with the order of the Ministry of Education and Youth no. 734 of 24.04.2009 on the implementation and improvement of the quality management in higher education, in many higher education institutions there have been established quality management systems; the roles and duties of each component were specified; definite steps were made in order to trace strategic and respectively annual targets concerning quality. Moreover, some institutions even managed to successfully pass certification procedures, being subject to audits by international bodies.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE COMMON FEATURES AND DISTINCTIVE PECULIARITIES OF THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

In view of the above mentioned reasons, it can be stated that higher education institutions of the Republic of Moldova have already taken the first steps in creating the quality management systems. At the same time, the lack of clarity in perceiving quality management attributions, as well as the quality management relationship with performance management undeniably create impediments in applying effective activities for improving institutional performance and, on this way, for increasing the institutional competitiveness.

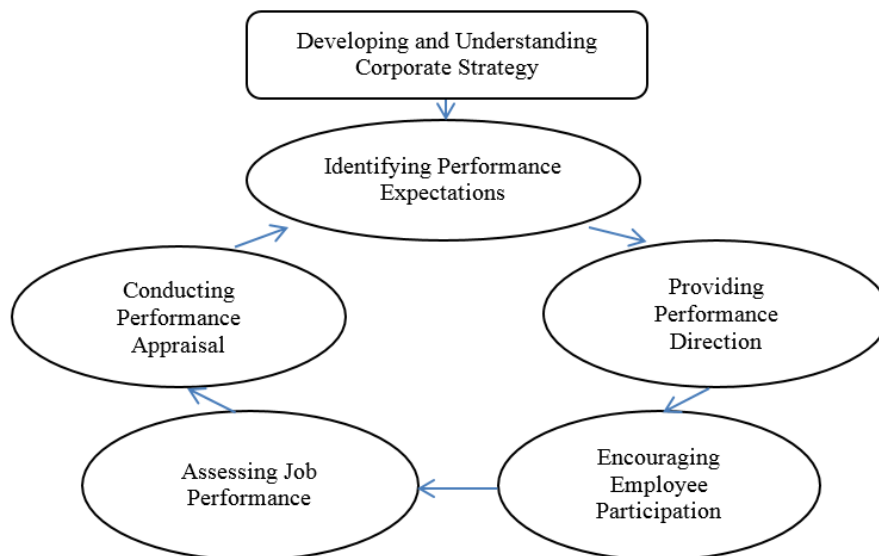
Through a deeper investigation of the theoretical approaches, we can conclude that quality management system and performance management system indeed have a series of common features. Among them, the most relevant are the following:

1) Both management systems consist of basically similar activities. Thus, each of the mentioned systems involves the focus on the organization's objectives and includes planning, monitoring and control activities (Figures no. 1 and no. 2).



Source: *Popescu and Costache (2004)*

Figure no. 1 - The component parts of quality management



Source: *Mathis and Jackson (2011)*

Figure no. 2 – The component parts of performance management

2) The operation of quality management and performance management system is based on a set of common principles. Thus, the principles of quality management are:

- customer focus;
- leadership;
- involvement of people;
- process approach;
- system approach to management;
- continual improvement;
- factual approach to decision making;
- mutually beneficial supplier relationships (*Hoyle, 2001*).

Referring to performance management, it is well known that, along with the marketization of higher education, customer focus became a necessity, being widely recognized as an important factor of the institutional competitiveness. The opportunity for users to decide where and how to study being considered as one of the features of pure market in relation to student education (*R. Brown, 2011*), therefore it becomes clear that in order to promote effective performance management and, as a result, to become more competitive, any education institution must put consumer's needs at the top of the priorities.

The need to promote an effective leadership is also a priority factor of the performance management system effectiveness. Thus, by examining the component parts of the performance management system exposed by *Mathis and Jackson (2011)*, we find that they, in their essence, represent management functions: planning (identifying performance expectations), organizing (providing performance direction), motivation (encouraging employees' participation) and assessment (assessing job performance, conducting performance appraisal). Leadership, in its turn, is the force that determines the level at which these functions are carried out.

Involving people is also a common principle of both management systems. It is sufficient to examine the approach of management systems in the view of various authors ([Armstrong, 2015](#); [Pulakos, 2004](#); [Mathis and Jackson, 2011](#)), and we can see that each of them indicates encouraging employee participation and actions related to it as inescapable components of the performance management system. Moreover, [Strebler et al. \(2001\)](#) set out some key roles of performance management focused on employees' engagement:

- performance management should be designed and implemented with appropriate employee involvement;
- it should be simple to understand and operate;
- it should allow employees a clear „line of sight” between their performance goals and those of the organization;
- it should focus on the role clarity and performance improvement.

The system and process approach to performance management is also well known, being primarily identified with the use of the term “system” or “series of activities” in conceptual approaches to the performance management ([Mathis and Jackson, 2011](#); [Armstrong, 2015](#); [Bădescu et al., 2008](#)), as well as confirmed in the large number of works devoted to the theoretical and empirical analysis of performance management systems ([Pulakos, 2004](#); [Armstrong, 2015](#); [Mathis and Jackson, 2011](#); [Broadbent, 2007](#)).

The necessity of focusing on continuous improvement in performance management is specified by [Strebler et al. \(2001\)](#) through the following rules: to focus on the clarity of performance role and improvement; to be regularly and openly reviewed against its success criteria, while [Mathis and Jackson \(2011\)](#) consider that an effective performance management system should identify areas of success and needed development.

The principle of factual approach in decision making, requiring that effective decisions are based on the analysis of data and information, underpins practically each stage of performance management. Thus, starting with identifying performance expectations, where the provisional decisions about goals and expected results are made, and ending with performance appraisal, that implies the decisions regarding developmental activities, a multiplicity of data and information is needed, as well as different sophisticated tools of processing that information.

There is no doubt that the last principle of the quality management „mutually beneficial supplier relationships” represents a pillar for the performance management, being a factor of the efficiency of institutional activity.

Besides the common aspects of the quality management and performance management highlighted above, the conviction of some representatives of Moldova's academic community that performance management falls precisely within the framework of the existing quality management system is “fueled” by the difficulty that, despite the existence of an impressive number of publications dedicated exclusively to the quality management and performance management systems in higher education, respectively, the relationship between these two systems is insufficiently investigated. Thus, if we refer to the effectiveness and efficiency of performed activities, referred to as dimensions of performance ([Lindsay, 1982](#)), we can also find them in the quality theories based on the value for money, which examine them as parameters of quality assessment through the prism of achieving high standards specification at reduced costs ([Garvin, 1988](#); [Harvey and Green, 1993](#)). In this context we will refer to Green's affirmation (1994), which states that „... a high quality institution is one that clearly states its mission (or purpose) and is efficient and effective in meeting the goals that it has set itself”. The situation is getting even more complicated because of the fact that performance

indicators are often examined as quality ratings, or, as noted by [Harvey and Green \(1993\)](#) „It is fashionable in education these days to talk in terms of performance indicators for measuring quality”. At the same time, we found out that there are essential controversies in the meaning of performance given by various authors in the context of quality. For example, while [Harvey and Green \(1993\)](#) are addressing performance indicators in the context of approaching the quality as value for money through the prism of efficiency and effectiveness, [Garvin \(1987\)](#) mentions performance as a quality dimension stating that in higher education it represents the abilities expected from the graduate. [Nenadal \(2016\)](#), in his turn, examining the mutual relationships among quality management system adequacy, suitability, efficiency and effectiveness, defines the performance of the quality management system as a result of the influence of these factors.

In order to bring clarity to this issue, we will refer to the essence of the term quality. Thus, quality is designated as the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfills a need or expectation that is stated, general implied or obligatory ([Hoyle, 2001](#)). Standards, in their turn, are examined as statements regarding an expected level of requirements and conditions against which quality is assessed or must be attained by higher education institutions and their programmes in order to be accredited or certified ([Vlăsceanu et al., 2007](#)). Based on the above-mentioned, we draw the idea that quality in higher education should be estimated through the prism of meeting the requirements of related standards, this affirmation being also confirmed by approaching quality control as a system to check whether the products produced or services provided have reached the pre-defined standards ([Tam, 2001](#)).

In the multitude of approaches to performance, we consider the definition offered by the explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language as the best one in helping to understand its essence that differ from the one of quality, where it is designated as a special achievement in one field of activity (*Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române*, [2017](#)). Besides, the meaning of accomplishing a task could be also found in other explanatory dictionaries, but we consider that its approach as a special achievement most accurately reflects its distinctive nature.

Therefore, as a result of approaching the term as in the explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language, performance is more than meeting a requirement (expressed by a standard). This reasoning is also confirmed by the assertion that an effective performance management system should identify areas of success and needed development ([Mathis and Jackson, 2011](#)), the success assuming a higher level than the one provided by a quality standard.

The performance indicators themselves, although they are used within the quality management operation, reflect only certain levels of quality, this statement being argued by their approach as statistical parameters representing a measure of the degree to which an educational institution or training programme performs on a specific dimension of quality ([Vlăsceanu et al., 2007](#)). Further on, we will refer to [Sousa et al. \(2010\)](#) who state that performance appraisal is fundamentally different from quality assessment, indicating, among the peculiarities of performance measurement, the need for benchmarking. Thus, we conclude that a result could be qualified as performance only by achieving a superior level to the results of other subjects included in the benchmarking.

On the basis of the above, we consider that it is of optimal relevance to define the performance as a special result obtained in the management, economic, commercial and other fields, implying efficiency, effectiveness and competitiveness of the companies as well as their procedural and structural behaviours ([Verboncu and Zalman, 2005](#)), as a state of

competitiveness of the economic entity achieved by a level of productivity and efficiency that ensures its sustainable presence on the market (Niculescu and Lavalette, 1999). Based on the above-mentioned definitions, we uncovered the idea that the competitiveness of an entity can be ensured by achieving certain levels of performance, competitiveness by itself implying higher levels of performance compared to competitors.

As a result, referring to the differences we claim to identify between quality management and performance management in a higher education institution, we can conclude that these consist primarily in the horizon of expectations of each system: while the quality management system of an institution has the task of monitoring compliance with predefined quality standards, thus forming the framework for the performance management system, the latter aim at achieving higher objectives, which would rank the institution on a more advantageous position than other similar institutions of the system, would make it more attractive for potential beneficiaries and, implicitly, would ensure its sustainability in the educational, scientific and innovation services market.

6. DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN THE OPERATION OF THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE UNIVERSITIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Based on the above mentioned, it is clear that the promotion of an effective performance management by higher education institutions is only possible when they ensure an effective quality management system. At present, despite some positive intermediate results mentioned above, there is a series of major problems in the functioning of quality management in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Moldova. Thus, the Moldovan Ministry of Education (2014) issued Recommendations on the implementation and improvement of the quality management in higher education institutions, which specify the following problems found in the operation of the quality management in the concerned institutions:

- shortage of needed skills in people involved in quality management;
- difficulties in exercising respective attributes by internal auditors though they are teachers with full teaching load;
- persistence of reactive mentalities, attitudes and behaviours instead of proactive ones;
- perception of the quality assurance and improvement activities as a “duty” exclusively of the executive staff;
- manifestation of a certain resistance by the staff and existing structures of the institutions to the processes of quality management integration; this fact requires a major intervention in the culture of the concerned institutions;
- the teaching staff keeps on limiting the quality of the teaching activities’ results;
- dominance in the organizational culture of a wrong strategy aimed at correcting mistakes instead of preventing possible errors;
- predominance of the quantitative targets and not of the qualitative ones in the assessment of the institutions’ activities;
- insufficient national opportunities (programmes, projects) of funding quality in education etc.

The existence of problems in the operation of the quality management in higher education system of the Republic of Moldova was also remarked by Dino Mujkic and Michaela Handke, Austrian specialists, who noted, after having participated in the TEMPUS project “Development of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Moldova”, that “the main obstacle to further development and full exploitation of quality assurance processes today is

very narrow understanding of the purpose of a quality assurance system, which is very often only based on monitoring instead of exploitation of results for development and improvement of higher education. This makes university management and staff afraid of the results of much needed evaluation and reflection processes. They fear that results will negatively affect their jobs, instead of thinking of ways to utilize the results for improvement and development of the university and its services" (Mujkic and Handke, 2016).

Based on the above-mentioned assessments, we conclude that quality management in the higher education institutions of the Republic of Moldova represents an area that requires increased attention and quick interventions. In order to contribute to solving this problem, a survey was conducted on a sample of 542 people, including 388 teachers and 154 representatives of the university management bodies from 6 universities. The questionnaire questions were focused on a series of issues regarding the level of knowledge of the quality objectives, tasks, indicators and main tools, as well as the beneficiaries of the educational institution; assessing the effectiveness of the quality management system in the light of improvements of activities carried out by the institution since its implementation; assessing the content and level of approach to quality issues within structural subdivisions and at various meetings; self-evaluation of the involvement level and contribution to the achievement of quality objectives; assessing the level of beneficiaries' involvement in the quality assurance process with the institution.

The results of the opinion survey are presented in [Table no. 1](#).

Table no. 1 – The results of the opinion survey

No.	Assessed aspect	Obtained results	
		Administrative staff	Teaching staff
1	The level of knowledge of the main objectives of the institutional quality management system	They had been identified correctly by 98% of respondents	They had been identified correctly by 85% of respondents
2	Knowledge of the basic quality indicators	They had been identified correctly by 79% of respondents	They had been identified correctly by 54% of respondents
3	Knowledge of quality management tools	They had been identified correctly by 98% of respondents	They had been identified correctly by 78% of respondents
4	Assessing the effectiveness of the institutional quality management system through the registration of quality improvements	It was appreciated at a high level by 87% of respondents	It was appreciated at a high level by 69% of respondents
5	Assessing the level of personal involvement in the operation of the quality management system	They selected the following ratings: „excellent” - 8%; „very good” - 52%; „good” – 39%; „sufficient” – 1%.	They selected the following ratings: „excellent” - 2%; „very good” - 42%; „good” –40%; „sufficient” –14%; „insufficient” – 2%.
6	Specifying personal contribution to the quality increase of the institution's activities	There had been selected activities focused on all important aspects of the quality management by 89% of respondents.	There had been selected activities focused on all important aspects of the quality management by 65% of respondents.

No.	Assessed aspect	Obtained results	
		Administrative staff	Teaching staff
7	Assessing the level of approach to quality issues at different meetings	They selected the following ratings: „excellent” - 10%; „very good” - 54%; „good” - 36%.	They selected the following ratings: „excellent” - 18%; „very good” - 49%; „good” - 28%; „sufficient” - 5%.
8	Assessing the level of approach to quality issues within structural subdivisions	They selected the following ratings: „excellent” - 9%; „very good” - 53%; „good” - 38%.	They selected the following ratings: „excellent” - 4%; „very good” - 42%; „good” - 48%; „sufficient” - 6%.
9	Specifying the quality-enhancing activities carried out within structural subdivisions	There have been indicated activities focused on all important aspects of the quality management by 56% of respondents.	There have been indicated activities focused on all important aspects of the quality management by 48% of respondents.
10	Identifying the beneficiaries of services provided by the institution	They had been identified correctly by 99% of respondents	They had been identified correctly by 71% of respondents
11	Assessing the level of involvement of beneficiaries in the quality assurance process within the institution	They selected the following ratings: „excellent” - 56%; „very good” - 41%; „good” - 3%.	They selected the following ratings: „excellent” - 34%; „very good” - 32%; „good” - 16%; „sufficient” - 18%.
12	Specifying the activities by which beneficiaries are involved in improving the quality system in the institution	There have been indicated activities regarding all important aspects of the institution activity by 54% of respondents.	There have been indicated activities regarding all important aspects of the institution activity by 31% of respondents.

By examining the data presented in Table no. 1, we note the existence of deficiencies in practically each investigated aspect of the quality management system functionality in the higher education institutions included in the study, which undoubtedly creates impediments to the implementation of a performance management, capable to accomplish the mission of increasing the competitiveness of those institutions. Even if 87% of the surveyed management staff and 69% of the surveyed teaching staff appreciated the effectiveness of institutional quality management systems at a high level, when examining the results obtained from the assessed issues, we distinguished a number of difficulties that reduce the effects of their functioning.

Further on, in this research, in order to establish the priorities for the educational institutions in applying specific measures to increase the efficiency of the quality management systems operation, there had been selected and grouped the results presented in Table no. 1 according to three general aspects:

- knowledge – the level of knowledge of objectives and contents of the quality management in educational institutions (aspects 1, 2, 3);
- organization – the level of organizing activities within the institutional quality management systems (aspects 7, 8, 9, 12);

- involvement – the level and quality of involvement of different actors in the operation of quality management systems (aspects 5, 6, 10, 11).

For each aspect, it was determined the share of the maximum appreciations as a simple arithmetic mean of the assessment share using the ratings “excellent” and “very good” and those that reveal ideal situations (for example, the share of respondents who correctly identified the quality objectives or indicated that they are involved in activities on all important aspects of the quality management). Thus, admitting that the maximum possible level to which we are aiming is 100% of assessments using “excellent” and “very good” for some aspects or those highlighting ideal situations in other aspects, we can identify the quality of accomplishing the quality management attributions compared to the optimum level to which they aspire.

The results of the systematization of survey data according to the above-mentioned aspects are shown in Figure no. 3.

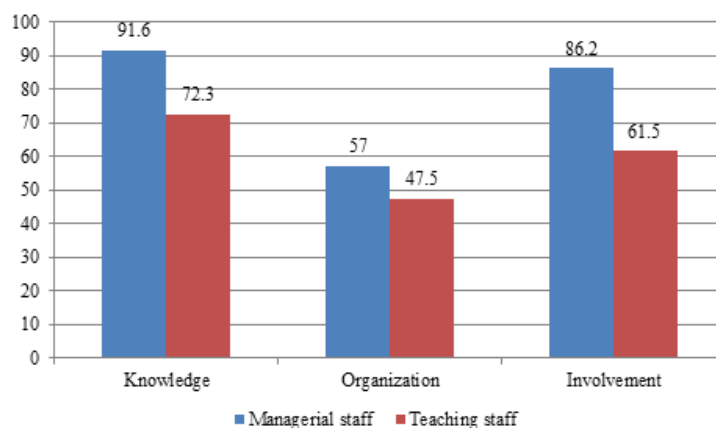


Figure no. 3 – Assessing the general aspects of operation of the institutional quality management systems

Based on Figure no. 3, we can conclude that the most vulnerable aspect of the three mentioned above is the organizational one, given that only 57% of the managerial staff and 47.5% of the teaching staff confirmed the accomplishment of respective activities at an optimal level. A deeper investigation, by examining each survey, also allowed to identify certain deficiencies that exist in the design of quality objectives as well as the monitoring and control-assessment of their achievement. Thus, if we refer to the activities indicated by the respondents as being carried out within the structural subdivisions, we find that only 35% of the surveyed managerial staff and 28% of the teaching staff also indicated activities related to the examination and implementation of the quality objectives, while the activities related to the analysis of the objectives achievement have been indicated by only 28% of the managerial staff and 27% of the teaching staff.

In addition to the already mentioned, we consider as a substantial impediment to reaching high quality levels, the problem of involving different actors in the quality management activities, the latter occupying the second position. In this context, we will refer in particular to the issue of communication with the beneficiaries and, implicitly, their involvement in quality monitoring. Even though the share of the managerial staff who correctly identified all the

categories of beneficiaries exceeds substantially the share of the teaching staff, the results of 1% of the university management representatives and 29% of the teachers who do not know all the current and potential categories of the educational institution beneficiaries indicate the idea that this aspect of activity, of vital importance under the current circumstances, requires urgent intervention. In this context, we note that the assessments made regarding the level of beneficiaries' involvement in quality assurance in institutions and the actions undertaken incorporate a heavy dose of subjectivism, since it is impossible to estimate the activity objectively, without knowing precisely who should perform it.

Referring to the third aspect - knowledge, we emphasize that, even if we recorded a better knowledge of the objectives, tasks, attributions and tools of the quality management by the managerial staff compared to the didactic staff, we consider that, in order to ensure a prosperous activity of the educational institution, it is inadmissible that at least one person in the managerial team of the institution does not know sufficiently the benchmarks of the quality management system operation. At the same time, the differences in the level of knowledge between the two investigated groups of staff show the insufficient circulation of quality information, which undoubtedly has a negative impact on the level and effectiveness of each teacher's involvement in quality-enhancing activities. As a consequence of the lack of knowledge and the communication problem, we must recognize the existence of a potential subjectivism also in the appreciation of the level of approach to quality issues within subdivisions and at various meetings as well as in estimating the level of personal involvement and contribution to increase the quality of the institution's activities.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In order to explain the relationship between performance management and quality management in higher education, we assert that by monitoring compliance with quality standards, the quality management system represents the framework for the performance management system, the latter being geared to higher objectives, which would make it possible to place the institution in more advantageous positions compared to other similar institutions in the system, make it more attractive for potential beneficiaries and, implicitly, ensure its sustainability in the educational, scientific and innovation services market. In other words, the performance management system of a higher education institution is created and operates on the basis of the quality management system by extending the area of quality objectives to the level at which they will express performance.

Even though the higher education institutions of the Republic of Moldova have already taken the first steps in implementing quality management systems, there is a series of problems in their functioning, which diminishes the contribution of the respective systems to achieving the performance objectives they aspire to. Those issues concern in particular:

- the persistence of a lack of knowledge related to the quality management objectives, tasks, tools, especially among teachers;
- the existence of problems in the design, organization, analysis of activities related to quality management, inadequate coverage of the quality problems in the area of attributions of the structural subdivisions in universities, as well as in the agenda of different meetings;
- partial valorization of the academic staff potential to solve quality problems;
- the existence of deficiencies in the involvement of beneficiaries in quality monitoring, noting their insufficient involvement in institutional strategic planning

activities, monitoring of the teaching-learning-evaluation processes, revision of study programmes.

Based on our findings, we consider that, in order to increase the effectiveness of quality management systems, higher education institutions of the Republic of Moldova should undertake the following actions:

- including the topics related to the quality management theory and practice, as well as the dissemination of good national and international practices in quality management in the meeting agenda of departments and other structural subdivisions in order to contribute to an increase of knowledge in the field of quality management;
- rationalization of the procedure for establishing quality objectives by direct involvement of each teacher and representative of the university management and setting of precise individual objectives for each one;
- concomitant establishment of criteria for assessing objectives achievement, as well as the calendar plan of the quality monitoring activities for each structural subdivision of the university;
- periodic evaluation of the results regarding the achievement of the quality objectives, including through internal and external audit, followed by the development of concrete improvement measures;
- identifying and implementing more efficient motivation tools (material and moral-spiritual) for the teaching and managerial staff for better achievements in the field of quality;
- active and multilateral involvement of the beneficiaries (internal and external) in the monitoring of the processes carried out within the institution beginning with their planning and ending with their tantalization and analysis. Promoting a culture of quality management opened to interventions coming from all categories of beneficiaries, being responsive to their requirements and flexible to change, as it is the only possible way to reach high quality levels and thereby achieve performance indicators that would ensure the competitiveness and, implicitly, the sustainability of higher education institutions.

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