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How can an institution of higher education become lean? Methods of higher school restructuring

Introduction

In the end of the XXth century the common governance model in most of the continental European universities was a combination of academic self-governance and high level of state regulation and control. New public management initiatives had aimed for less state regulations and more “quasi-market” elements (Schneider, Sadowski 2010). Amendments of the higher education bill (Higher Education Act 2011) first of all focused on effective management model of higher education in Poland, university’s curricula autonomy and education quality. There was expectation that universities with autonomy in internal affairs and managerial hierarchy would master the competition more effectively. The basic aim became quality of educational services, effectiveness and efficiency (including financial one) of university activities (Bell, Warwick & Kennedy 2009). In order to improve quality, increase effectiveness and reduce costs the higher education sector has been going through restructuring along the lines of marketisation, privatisation and decentralisation.

Introduction of restructuring methods and ways of using them at universities in Poland is the aim of this article.

Theoretical background

In accordance with Porter the basic source of competitive superiority are effectiveness and efficiency of processes undertaken by an organisation, delivering its product on the market (Kozłowski, Piotrowski (ed.) 2004). It becomes necessary to use a process-driven approach in order to identify and incorporate into the management system important activities conditioning educational service quality. One points out in the process-driven approach that processes and activities make up the core of an organisation and are the essence of value creation for customers and school stockholders – the process becomes a chain of value (Makkar, Gabriel, Tripathi 2008). The quality of educational service is conditioned by effectiveness and efficiency of processes realised at the school (ISO 9000:2005). Matching requirements in scope of educational services quality forces to redesign and restructure the processes. The aim is to eliminate actions and activities which do not create value for the customer.

Restructuring should be of continuous and complex character, encompass strategic, operating and financial restructuring (Bitkowska ed. 2010).

One can use following methods in the process-driven restructuring of universities:

- *Total Quality Management*
- *Lean Management*,
- *Outsourcing*
- *Benchmarking*.

The tool to implement the TQM concept in organisations is a quality management system compliant with ISO series 9000 norms requirements. In order to build a quality management system based on the ISO 9001:2008 standard, the requirements that had to be met were especially (ISO 9001:2008; Dalt et al 2010):

- to use a ‘process management approach’, which means managing the education programme as a series of interlinked processes;
- to plan product realisation processes and control them, measure, analyse and improve their way of functioning.

The quality management system confirmed by the compliance certificate with ISO 9001:2008 gives possibilities to supply documentary evidence of quality still before delivering the service, which strengthens a school’s market position considerably, assures savings (lower costs), improves effectiveness and efficiency and suitably motivates the workers.

Lean Management is a modern management method aiming to „make the organisation lose weight” through elimination of these of processes which do not add value to the service. School slimming consists in limitation of losses in materials, time, manhours, skill or time designed for the service in order to create service operations rhythm (Tyagi, Gupta 2010, Bogumił 2009). *Lean Management* allows to utilise organisation’s human, financial and material resources in more thrifty way in order to realise set targets more effectively.

Outsourcing is based on distinguishing a group of activities, processes and functions not connected with the basic activity of the school and their delivery to a specialised supplier to be realised outside (Kowalczewski, Nazarko ed. 2006, Bogumił 2009, Bekurs 2007). The use of *Outsourcing* is a complex activity dictated by economic calculations conducted in reference to function, activities and processes of the organisation, property resources and employees. The aim is to improve quality of services, enlarge school profitability and competitiveness through simplification of the organisation’s structure and improve processes being realised.

Benchmarking is a universal technique of university validation consisting in continuous comparison of function, processes and school management systems with found on purpose and applied by the best schools or the groups of schools solution (Nazarko et al 2009). The use of *benchmarking* at universities results both from premises of political and market nature. (Woźnicki ed. 2007). *Benchmarking* creates wide possibilities of use at universities and can become a useful technique in competitive fight (Hamalainen et al. 2003).

Methods

The researches were conducted in 6 academies of physical education in Poland. The aim of researches was to determine methods and scope of process - driven restructuring. The investigative hypothesis was as follows: studied universities use the methods of process restructuring in small scope. Information on the subject was obtained by the means of reviewing web pages of the universities and chancellors questionnaire investigation.

Results

Following results were obtained:

- Universities use principally for process – driven restructuring the *Outsourcing* method, commissioning outside services in scope of: protection of university properties 83%, cleaning, caretaking activities (door-keeper's lodges, receptions) at the university 67%, technical maintenance, small repairs 50% of universities, IT services 33% of universities.
- Use of the *Lean Management* method is realised mainly through application of computer systems of management in the area of didactic process service and library activity.
- Use of the *Benchmarking* restrains to taking part in rankings of universities kept by popular periodicals.
- None of the universities possesses a certificate confirming compliance with the requirements of the ISO 9001:2008 norm.

Studied universities in small scope use well-known and applied commonly in business methods of enhancing effectiveness and efficiency of organisation's activities. The restructuring at Polish universities is realised by undertaking activities mainly in operating and financial zones (*Outsourcing, Lean Management*). One observes small quantity of activities of strategic character (ISO 9001).

Problems of a university's process – driven restructuring are real and important, require further scientific and applicable studies. The universities has to unceasingly be customer – oriented and react to changing requirements flexibility. This requires utilisation of modern methods of process-driven restructuring.

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