

Navigating from quality management to quality culture

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Impact addendum

In this addendum, a reflection is provided on the societal and scientific impact that the performed studies have had, and are further expected to have in the future. This impact relates both to the way in which the research questions were addressed, as well as to the implications and follow-up of the main findings. Throughout the addendum, references are made to the way in which multiple target groups benefit from the results. The addendum concludes by elaborating on past and future activities to disseminate and valorise the findings.

Societal impact

The attention to the quality of higher education is growing in countries across Europe and beyond. This development fits in with the increased importance that is attributed to higher education because of its potential to contribute to national economies. Moreover, higher education receives a great deal of societal attention because it concerns both personal and population-wide aspirations for optimal talent development. In attempts to answer the question how the quality of education can best be assured *and* improved, the concept of quality culture is used more and more often.

Despite of the popularity of the concept, an in-depth understanding of what a quality culture exactly entails has been lacking so far. Insights are needed in what the key features of a quality culture are. Then, in a next step, approaches can be developed through which these positive quality culture features can be nurtured. The studies in this dissertation deal with this exploration and potential enhancement of quality culture. Specific attention is spent to ways in which higher education institutions can promote continuous educational improvement, which is characterised by flexibility, openness, a collective commitment and motivation to change, and a promotion of shared educational values. A quality culture resonates with staff and student opinions on how to improve and is assumed to lead to more positive effects than cultures that overemphasise standardisation and bureaucratic control measures. The dissertation's outcomes are relevant on three levels, which involve multiple stakeholders:

(Inter) national policy level: towards a shift in governing higher education quality

The significance of developing a quality culture in higher education institutions has often been stressed in politics and is also often referred to in (inter)national policy documents. In the Netherlands' Strategic Agenda for Higher Education and Research 2015-2025, one can for instance read that the government aims to change its steering philosophy: instead of focusing on inspection and control of higher education quality, investments are deemed required in a quality culture that is characterised by trust between different stakeholders, transparency, and room for institutions to set their own improvement agendas.¹ Especially the literature review included in this dissertation (Chapter II) has contributed to policy debates on the conceptualisation of quality culture. The literature synthesis and developed quality culture framework have served as input for various policy publications that support investments in quality culture

development.^{e.g. 2,3,4} Also internationally, our review study is regularly referred to in publications that address current governance policies and advocate for a shift (e.g. in external review procedures) toward a larger emphasis on the evaluation and development of institutional quality culture(s).⁵⁻⁷

Institutional level: nurturing preconditions for quality culture enhancement

Higher Education Institutions can influence the preconditions for developing a quality culture in several ways. The results of our studies provide multiple insights in this respect. The institution's Human Resource Management could for instance focus more on reward and recognition of education, e.g. by implementing career tracks based on achievements in education. Staff networks (referred to in this dissertation as 'communities of practice') could promote opportunities for individual and collective staff learning, can help staff members to gain a broader perspective on ongoing developments in education, and can contribute to a better alignment between courses in a programme. A quality culture builds on an increased involvement of stakeholders (staff and students) in decision-making procedures, and highlights the added value of exchanging good practices that fuel innovation. By focusing on networking, communication, and coalition building, leaders can stimulate quality culture development. Faculty development programmes are suggested to focus on learning leadership 'on the job', with room for reflection on personal experiences and competencies. Leaders should be trained to: articulate inspiring visions for the future, stimulate new ways of thinking, attend to staff needs & concerns, and act both as collaborator and role model.

The dissertation outcomes can also be used by Higher Education Institutions that want to incorporate the quality culture concept into educational evaluation and improvement policies. For example, informed by our research, the Royal Academy of Music in the Hague developed a quality culture approach in which links between internal and external quality assurance, educational quality performance standards, and the Plan-Do-Check-Act phases are enhanced.⁸ The Catholic University of Leuven also translated quality culture insights into its institution-wide approach for quality evaluation and improvement (our studies contributed to these insights, as became clear in a review of KU Leuven's institutional quality policy in which the author participated).⁹ Also in Maastricht University's position paper "The do's, don'ts and don't knows of teaching and learning", several references are made to our work, indicating its relevance to the university community.¹⁰ Furthermore, our study findings served as input for ongoing discussions at UM on altering educational recognition and reward approaches.

Study programme level: implications for teaching staff and students

The studies in this dissertation voice the opinion of faculty and students that standard approaches for educational quality improvement should be complemented by insights derived from the quality culture concept. The study findings imply that a shift is needed from quality

improvement approaches that emphasise control and accountability toward more open approaches with more room for professional autonomy and staff-student community building. The research findings highlight that continuous quality improvement requires a stronger focus on the valuing of teaching and learning, the job satisfaction and motivation of teaching staff members, and student personal, academic, and professional development. These aspects should ideally be incorporated in educational (re)design approaches and become embedded in daily procedures that relate to educational quality improvement.

Scientific impact

A google scholar search with the terms 'quality culture' and 'higher education' learns that the scientific attention to the topics covered in this dissertation is mounting. The search (performed in November 2020) returned 426 hits for the period 1991-2000, increasing to 2320 hits for the period 2001-2010, and growing to even 6650 hits for 2011-2020. Despite this indication of an increased scholarly attention, the systematic literature review that we conducted in 2017 revealed that studies on quality culture which are based on gathered, analysed, and interpreted data (e.g. interviews, questionnaires) are still scarce. The innovative character of this dissertation is grounded in the fact that we were among the first to conduct a series of data-based studies on quality culture. Additionally, our studies have contributed to the theoretical development of the quality culture construct by combining insights from the organisational sciences, organisational psychology, and (quality) management sciences. The use of methods such as a 'realist review' (Chapter II) and 'appreciative inquiry' (Chapter IV) are still relatively rare in higher education and could serve as examples to other researchers.^{11,12}

Other dissemination and valorisation activities

The four studies from this dissertation are available as published manuscripts in journals that address a broad audience in the field of higher (medical and health sciences) education. Over the past years (in 2013, 2017 and 2018), the visibility of several of our studies has been enhanced by presentations and workshops provided at the largest platform for discussion, professional development and exchange of experiences in quality assurance in Europe (the European Quality Assurance Forum, EQAF). This forum is attended by rectors and vice-rectors responsible for quality assurance, quality assurance officers, students, quality assurance agency staff and researchers working on higher education or the quality assurance field. Moreover, several paper presentations and workshops were provided at (medical) education conferences: the conferences of the Association for Medical Education in Europe, AMEE (in 2016 and 2019), conferences of the Netherlands Association for Medical Education (NVMO, in 2015 and 2019), the Educational Research Days (2017), and the Higher Education Conference (2019). The realist review approach was highlighted in a workshop facilitated by GB at the annual conference of the NVMO in 2017. For an overview of peer-reviewed conference papers please refer to the author's biography.

Future dissemination and valorisation activities are projected in several areas: a) the author will be involved in the writing of an AMEE guide on quality assurance and quality culture development, b) he is furthermore working on a follow-up publication that targets at bringing the subject of quality culture under the further attention of those involved in medical education, c) as part of a general practitioner training programme of the School for Health Professions Education, GB will participate in organising a training in quality assurance, d) contributions to workshops and educational programmes are foreseen in several areas that the quality culture construct addresses (e.g. institutional quality culture reflection exercises that make use of competing values instruments, and leadership development programmes).

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