



Can QA and Cultural Norms Coexist?

Al-Hajj, A.¹⁾, Zedan, H.²⁾

- 1) Vice President for Academic Affairs and Development
Applied Science University
- 2) Emeritus Professor, De Montfort University, UK

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Introduction

- Remarkable progress has been made in Quality Assurance (QA), and most of HEIs have fundamental policies, structures and processes in place.
- Most HEIs nowadays have QA processes with full implementation support (e.g. pedagogical innovation and staff development)
- Policy and associated procedures
- Institutional leadership in demonstrating commitment to quality has been taken on board by most Higher Education Institutions, which have their senior leadership involved in one way or another in QA processes.
- ***IS THIS ENOUGH TO ACHIEVE INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY?***
- ***IS THIS THE ULTIMATE GOAL?***
- Institutions' quality culture and norms i.e. attitudes, **expected** behaviours and values that impact and contribute to how the institution operates. ***ROLE!***
- Ultimate quality can only be achieved finding the right way to make culture norms and QA co-exist as 'soul and body'

Quality Culture vs Quality Assurance

QUALITY CULTURE NORMS

- Dedication and attention to ***development-oriented and value-based aspects e.g.***
 - Beliefs
 - Attitude
 - Behaviour
 - Values
 - Commitment
 - Way institutes operate
 - Shared practices

QUALITY ASSURANCE

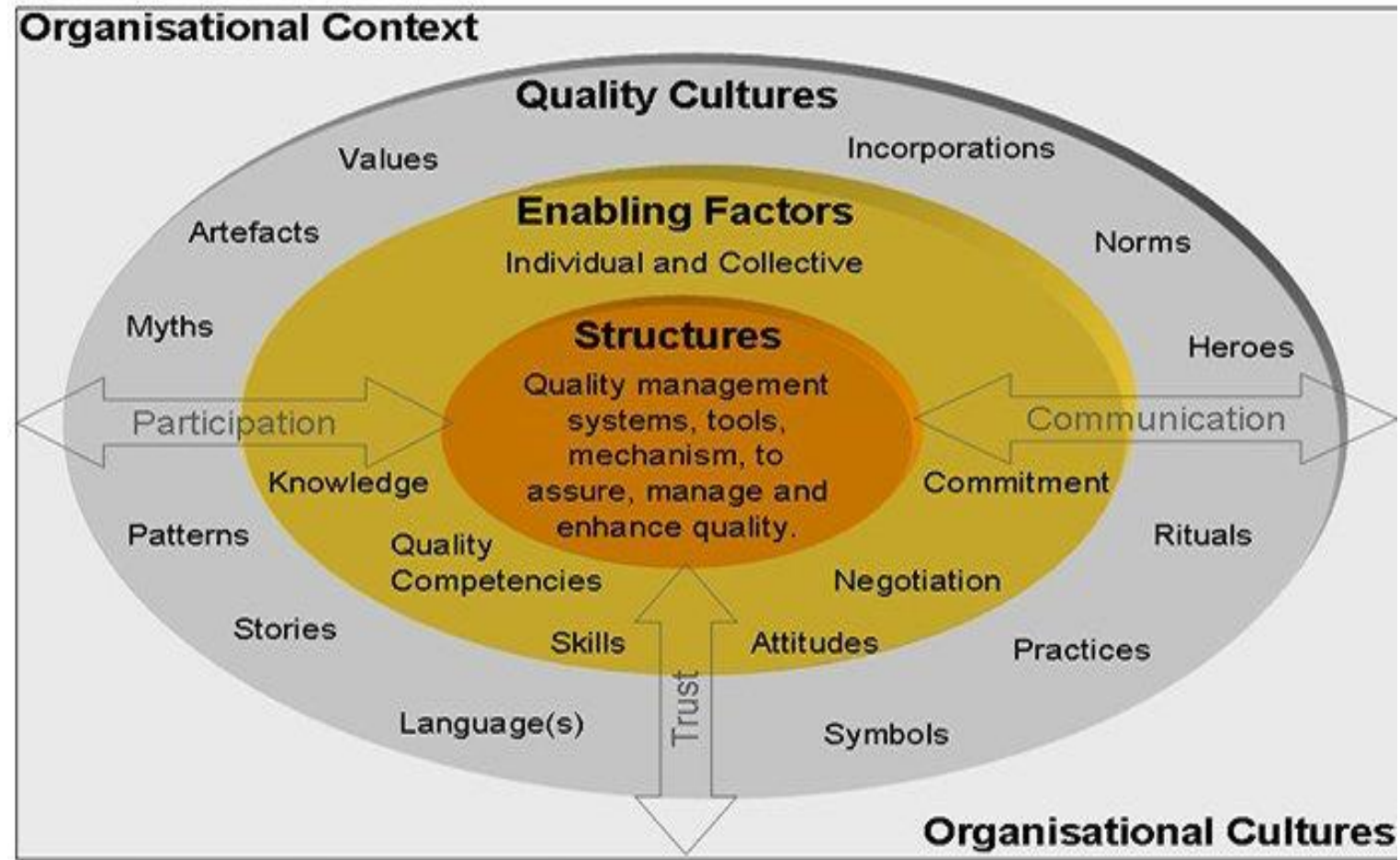
- Activities related to a framework defining, assuring and enhancing the quality of HEI derived from institutions' own strategic goals, fitting into their internal quality culture, while fulfilling the external requirements for QA. e.g.
 - Standards, Systems, Policies, Procedures, Tools
 - Internal and External reviews
 - Evaluation, Measurement and Control
 - Committees
 - Feedback (closing the loop)
 - Involvement of external stakeholders: employers, alumni, ..

It is crucial to distinguish culture norms and quality culture from quality assurance (QA) processes, which are part of the structural element.

Quality Culture Framework

In the quality culture perspective:

- Quality is not achieved solely via a process of **evaluation and measurement procedures**, but also as **values and practices, that are shared by the institutional community and that have to be nurtured and enriched** on many levels
- A quality culture cannot be implemented from above
- A strong leadership may be necessary for starting and promoting the process in the first place
- The leadership should provide a coherent framework within which these; sub-cultures can be linked and not unified. Combining and unifying sub-cultures are hard. The danger of unification here is that it may lead to losing the benefits gaining from the individual sub-cultures.



Ehlers, U.-D. (2009): **Understanding Quality Culture**. In: International Journal for Quality Assurance in Education. Emerald

Difficulties and Challenges for Co-Existence

- Organisational culture and strategic goals
- Resistance to change existing norms, attitudes, behaviour, etc.
- Transparency
- Measuring success
- Maturity in the organisation and systems
- Commitment to quality culture
- Time scale
- Long term strategy
- Stability
- Measuring conduct
- Closing the loop on processes
- Thinking out of the box

Conclusions

- Quality has to be contextualised
- A cultural norm plays a central role in defining quality context
- Understanding of quality is crucial to a successful outcome
- Culture is not fixed and stable, but can be regarded as a dynamic phenomena resulting in several complex multiple interactions, involving all participants (sub-cultures)
- Quality notions differ remarkably between various groups of actors: university management, academic staff, administrative staff, students etc.
- Should a quality culture be sustained by the whole organisation, its basic principles have to be largely shared or at least accepted
- Linkage between heterogeneous sub-cultures must be established