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Impact Analysis of EQA Processes in HEIs.

Pluralistic Methodology and Application of a Formative Transdisciplinary Impact Evaluation

Grant co-funded by EACEA /EC (LLP Erasmus Multilateral Projects)

Priority 5: Improving Governance and Funding

IMPALA European Seminar in Cooperation with ENQA

Impact Analysis of External Quality Assurance in HEIs: Methodology and Its Relevance for Higher Education Policy

evalag, Mannheim, May 19-20, 2014

IMPALA project plan – Broad overview

ACTIVITY	TIMEFRAME & LOCATION
1 st project meeting (kick-off)	November 05-06, 2013; Mannheim (evalag)
Two papers on general methodological questions of impact analysis	Spring/summer 2014 (published/in press)
2 nd project meeting	April 10-11, 2014; Bucharest (ARACIS)
European conference seminar (in collaboration with ENQA)	May 19-20, 2014; Mannheim (evalag)
IMPALA methodology paper	Summer/autumn 2014 (in preparation)
BASELINE STUDIES	July – September 2014; each HEI
3 rd project meeting	October 9-10, 2014; Helsinki (FINHEEC)
MIDLINE STUDIES	Winter/spring 2014/15; each HEI
4 th project meeting	Jan – March 2015; Barcelona (AQU Cat)
Progress report	March – April 2015
ENDLINE STUDIES	November 2015; each HEI
5 th project meeting	December 2015; Bucharest (ARACIS)
Analysis of data	Feb – March 2016
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE (in collaboration with ENQA)	April 2016; Barcelona (AQU)
Project publication	(June –) Sept 2016
Euro-Region training workshops	Sept 2016; Germany/ Spain/ Romania/ Finland
Final report	Sept 2016

Evaluation of the Success or Failure of EQA in HEIs: Theory and Practice

- Our knowledge about the successes & failures of QA in HE is rudimentary
- Outline of methodology, design & potential benefits of impact evaluation
- Impact evaluation simultaneously with ongoing QA procedures (thus not solely dependent on ex-post information)
- More integration of more stakeholder groups

Contribute to impact evaluation as cornerstone of strategic QA in HE (in EHEA)

Basic considerations for development of IMPALA methodology

- **METHODOLOGICAL OPTIONS** of impact analysis in general and in HE
- **CAUSALITY** in social dynamical systems
- **AIMS** of impact analysis & IMPALA (e.g., **GENERIC** instrument; usability)
- **Current impact analysis**
 - **TYPES OF INFORMATION COLLECTION**
 - **CHOICE OF FOCI** of EQA and its **EFFECTS**
 - **RELEVANT STAKEHOLDER GROUPS** & their appropriate integration
 - **COMMON & GENERIC FEATURES** of EQA processes (in the project)
- **Further theoretical/methodological options & PERSPECTIVES**
- **EQA GENERIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

METHODOLOGICAL OPTIONS of impact analysis in general & in HE

- **EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN** – repeatability → unfeasible for impact analysis of QA in HEIs
- **CONTROL GROUP DESIGN** – define control system (with intervention vs. without) → unfeasible for impact analysis of QA in HEIs
- **BEFORE-AFTER COMPARISON DESIGN** – Compare system after intervention with system before (baseline)
- **EX-POST ANALYSIS**

Further general **METHODOLOGICAL ELEMENTS** (used in IMPALA)

- **ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENTS and DATA COLLECTIONS**
- **HYPOTHESES ABOUT CAUSE-EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS (CAUSAL SOCIAL MECHANISMS)**
- **ASSESSMENTS/ESTIMATIONS of intervention effects BY PARTICIPANTS and KEY INFORMANTS**
- **COUNTERFACTUAL SELF-ESTIMATION OF PARTICIPANTS**
- **COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES**

CAUSALITY on social dynamical systems

- **ATTRIBUTION PROBLEM:** Multiplicity of factors; Influences and correlated changes interact, overlap, work against each other
- “**CAUSATION** is one of the most important and contentious issues in social science. Any aspiration for a better social world, whether they concern the alleviation of inequities or the promotion of wealth, must explicitly or implicitly rely on beliefs about the causes and effects of government policies, social institutions, norms, or other phenomena that fall within the purview of social science” (Steel 2011, p. 288).

AIMS of impact analysis & IMPALA

- **GENERIC instrument(s)** → ... → ... →

TESTED prototype MODEL of QUESTIONNAIRE(s)
for, e.g., ENQA website ...

- **USABILITY of instruments**
(evaluation standards: utility; feasibility; propriety; accuracy)

AIMS of impact analysis & IMPALA (continued)

- Improve QA agencies' & HEIs' abilities & achievements:
 - Identification and **measurement of effects** of QA measures
 - Contribute to understanding of **relationship between QA and organisational change** (of HEIs)
 - Contribute to more systematic, valid and reliable answers to the questions:
 - Do **different QA procedures** have significantly **different impacts** in HEIs, or not?
 - **How** do different **stakeholders** inside (and outside) HEIs **perceive** and **value impact of QA (and QA)**?
 - What role do **QA procedures** play in higher education with respect, e.g., to **change of organisational practices and processes**, to the **achievements** in different core areas, and to the establishment of **quality culture**?

AIMS of impact analysis & IMPALA (continued)

Thus, **impact studies of QA in HE** could well make **valuable contributions** to **further improve**

- **Systematic & strategic quality development in HEIs**
- **Effectivity & efficiency of external QA in HEIs**
- **Methods & instruments of QA agencies**
- **Effectivity & efficiency of internal QA in HEIs**
- Establishment of **evidence-based & research-informed HEI governance** models, HEI quality policy, and national and European HE policy

AIMS of impact analysis & IMPALA (continued)

Summary: systematic **proof of effects of QA** procedures would constitute a **methodological improvement** because it would lead to a deeper and more comprehensive **understanding** of the interaction and interdependency of the participating **stakeholder actors and bodies** and the involved **organisational structures and processes**

Goes without saying that all these aims are **declared goals of the EHEA**, subsumable under the labels of

- **Adequate quality assurance & accounting**
- **Supporting HEI autonomy**
- **Fostering students participation**
- **Rise of quality culture**

TYPES OF INFORMATION COLLECTION

Mixed methods: Various types, quantitative data & qualitative information

- **ONLINE SURVEYS (mixed closed & open questions)**
- **STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**
- Intensive interviews
- **Data analysis**
- **Document analysis**

CHOICE OF FOCI of current impact analysis

- Interesting effect areas (focus of most EQA and of IMPALA partners)
 - Learning and teaching
 - Institutional management (of L&T)

RELEVANT STAKEHOLDER GROUPS & their appropriate integration

Selected focus groups of engaged representatives of

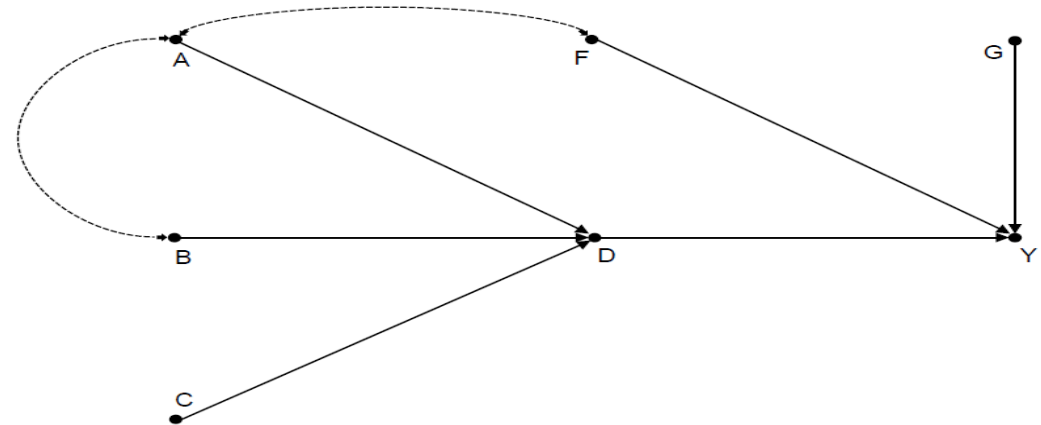
(1) Students; (2) Academic Staff; (3) HEI Leadership; (4) QA Managers

COMMON & GENERIC FEATURES of EQA processes

- **Program accreditation & Institutional accreditation**
- **Generic procedural elements**
- **List of common intended aims – demonstrated by questionnaire questions**
 - Effectiveness of learning & teaching processes
 - Achievement of learning outcomes
 - Effectiveness of internal QA
- **ESG orientation – demonstrated by questionnaire questions**
 - Assessment methods
 - Matching EQF
 - Involvement of external stakeholders

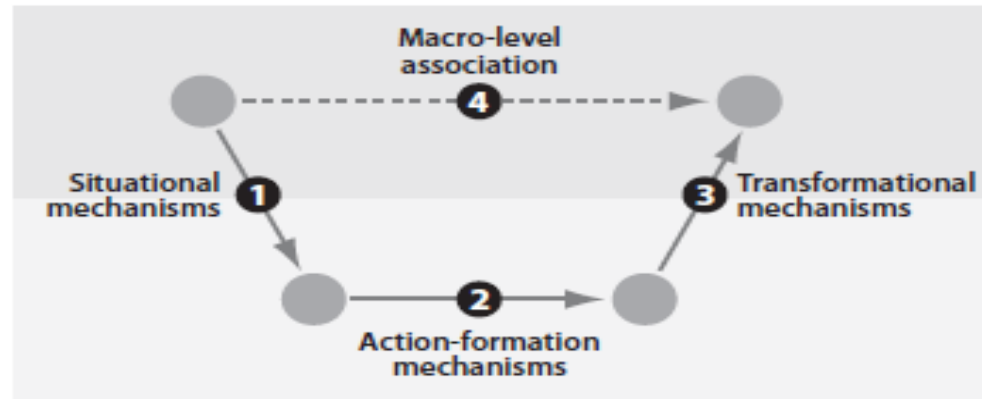
Further theoretical/methodological options & PERSPECTIVES

- Causal network graphs



- Cross-impact matrix approach

- Causal social mechanism (Coleman's boat)



EQA GENERIC QUESTIONNAIRE(s) – Some further features

- **Most probably separate questionnaire for students**
- **Module-like character, e.g., further/other questions, achievement areas, stakeholder groups, QA procedures, ...**
- **“Work in progress”**

Theme of Monday afternoon WGs ...

Guiding questions of Monday afternoon WGs – EQA GENERIC QUESTIONNAIRE(s)

- Questionnaire long enough?
- Questionnaire difficult enough?
- Relevance and importance of questions?
- Questions univocal?
- Pilot/test study? (a first one NOW ...)
- Choice of participants in the “interviewed” focus groups/ sample?
Statistical relevance? ...
- Do not know / Cannot answer / Do not want to answer ...

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