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How does Quality Assurance Make a Difference?

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Title: Organizing Quality Assurance for Multiple Programs in a Decentralized Organizational Setting – the Case of Copenhagen Business School

Abstract:

Program QA at Copenhagen Business School (CBS) faces two major challenges; (1) large number of different programs, and (2) decentralized organisation of the program area. CBS has more than 60 programs in the portfolio, each managed by an autonomous Study Board. The paper demonstrates how CBS has addressed these challenges in a quality policy based on two main elements. Standards and Guidelines for day to day quality operations are combined with recurrent 5 year cycle peer reviews of every program. It is demonstrated how optimal use of existing information from various sources can be combined to provide a parsimonious picture of program performance, without putting too much burden on program managers. Both external and internal peer reviewers are used in order to create dialogue, mutual inspiration, increased alignment across programs, and balance between formative development and summative assessment. Early experiences with implementation of the QA system are discussed.

Text of paper:

Introduction

CBS' Program Quality Policy takes its point of departure in the European Standards and Guidelines, and in a comprehensive national legislation for university education in Denmark. Aligned with these external frameworks, CBS' Quality Policy seeks to find the balance between formative support of CBS' entrepreneurial culture and summative assessment of performance and efficiency. CBS' quality policy consists of two different components.

1. Continuous quality monitoring takes place as part of the program operations. Program management is responsible for this component, which must follow guidelines specified in CBS Program Quality Policy.



2. Recurrent program peer reviews, including all aspects of a program’s quality. This component is organized by CBS Evaluation Unit, holding arm’s length to the program management. Together, these two components assure that programs are under constant development and critical assessment.

1. Continuous Quality Monitoring – CBS’ 4 columns of Quality

A cornerstone of Copenhagen Business School's ongoing quality assurance is to create conditions for fact-based dialogue, evaluation, and continuous development. CBS' Quality Policy has four columns: Quality Assurance, Knowledge Sharing, Evaluation, and Learning.

Each column includes a number of formal activities detailing what to do, how to do it, who should do it and how results are used. The activities are going to ensure the same high level of quality across all of CBS' study programs while maintaining decentralized responsibility and ownership to the quality policy.

An overview of the activities of each of the 4 columns of quality is presented below.

Quality Assurance	Knowledge Sharing	Evaluation	Learning
Program regulations	Business Intelligence	Student feedback	Faculty development
Student admission	Benchmarking	Alumni feedback	Staff development
Student assessment (plagiarism, appeals)	Accreditation	Examiner feedback	Student support
QA of administration	Ranking	Employer feedback	Extracurricular activities

The Quality Assurance Column aims to ensure common high quality of CBS' comprehensive portfolio of study programs. This is done via standard formats for program regulations presenting learning goals, academic and didactic content of the programs, admission requirements, student assessment, and administrative performance. The goal of the quality assurance is to adopt common quality standards while maintaining a culture of continuous improvement at individual program level. It is CBS' ambition to use resources to develop teaching quality and content rather than control and sanctions.

The Knowledge Sharing Column is a communications structure that systematically supports and develops dialogue, cooperation and knowledge sharing across programs. Activities of this column are focused on sources to stimulate fact-based dialogue. Such sources include CBS’ internal Business Intelligence, internal and external benchmarking, ranking and international accreditation.

The Evaluation Column represents feedback from CBS’ major program stakeholders, students, alumni, external examiners, and employers. Evaluation can contribute to the work on quality by insisting on dialogue with external stakeholders, the market, and society at large, and thus assuring satisfaction and relevance of CBS’ program portfolio.

The Learning Column outlines the principles for design and implementation of training and teaching activities at CBS. The learning philosophy is part of CBS’ cultural DNA, which has been developed in close collaboration between CBS management, program directors, heads of departments, and teaching and administrative staff.



The 4 columns of CBS' Quality Policy correspond with the 7 European Standards and Guidelines for internal quality assurance in the following way.

European Standards and Guidelines	Quality Assurance	Knowledge Sharing	Evaluation	Learning
1. Policies and procedures for quality assurance	X	X	X	X
2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programs and awards	X	X	X	
3. Assessment of students	X			
4. Quality assurance of teaching staff			X	X
5. Learning resources and student support	X			X
6. Information systems		X		
7. Public information			X	

Processes for Implementing CBS' Program Quality Policy

In order to integrate all the quality activities CBS has developed well established structures and roles of the various participants involved in the programs, and systematic processes that ensure dialogue, mutual understanding, learning, and ongoing development. This section describes how the above quality policy is implemented at CBS.

The stakeholders of the programs are the Dean of Education, the Program Directors, the Study Boards, Course Coordinators, Administrative Staff, Teachers, Students, Examiners, Censors and Employers. Each of these stakeholders is a part of a well-defined structure, and takes on different roles, which are described below.

The Dean of Education

The Dean of Education has overall responsibility for CBS' program portfolio, both in terms of quality and finances. It is his responsibility that all courses meet the framework and policies (Strategy, Development Contract, Quality Policy) adopted by CBS management.

Study Boards and Program Directors

Each program has an elected Study Board which has the overall responsibility for the professional and pedagogical organization of the program and to ensure the relation to adopted institutional strategies and policies. The study program is headed by an academic Program Director, who is responsible for the implementation of the decisions made by the Study Board.

Program Regulations and Course Descriptions

The structure of the study program is outlined in the program regulations which is the primary and unifying legal document which describes the profile of the program. The program regulations also constitute the learning goals, pedagogy, and exam requirements. The program regulations are accompanied by course descriptions and descriptions of curriculum made in collaboration with the course coordinators from CBS' departments. The program regulations and the course descriptions constitute the



primary planning tools of the Study Board.

In order to monitor the quality of the program the Study Board gets information from students, potential employers, graduates, external examiners as well as KPIs for the operation of the program, and on this basis the study board conducts assessments of the need for pedagogical, didactic and structural measures and adjustments.

Course Coordinators

Study Boards appoint course coordinators among the academic staff in collaboration with the departments. The Course Coordinator formulates the purpose and the learning goals of the subject, the content and literature, the pedagogy and structure and the exam form and unfolds it in a course description. The course description must be approved by the Study Board. The course coordinator ensures that the intentions of the course description are converted into teaching and coordinates and instructs the other teachers.

Teaching and Examination

Teachers and students are jointly responsible for implementing the planned activities on the subject/course. It is the teacher's task to help students achieve the learning objectives. It is the students' task to achieve the learning goals. The teacher's professional and pedagogical responsibilities include organizing the individual activities in the course description, committed presence and to gather information on student learning outcomes during the course. The students' responsibilities include active participation in educational activities, including preparation and committed presence.

Annual Report by Program Directors

Program director submits an annual report of program performance. The report serves as basis for the continued dialogue between the dean of education and the program director. The annual report relates to the achievement of objectives in institutional strategies and policies relevant to the study program and identifies challenges and suggests possible solutions. The program director comments on KPIs and quality issues.

Study Programs/Meeting with the Dean

The annual report is discussed at an annual evaluation meeting between the Program Director and the Dean of Education. Any major developments that would change the overall profile will be included in the curriculum and/or course descriptions.

Communication and Dialogue

CBS 'quality work is based not only on well-defined structures and roles of various actors, but equally important on establishing processes that ensure dialogue and common understanding, share best practice, create mutual learning and ongoing development of teaching quality across programs. The dialogue has been formalized in a series of forums at different levels of the organization.

Forums primarily for dialogue on **strategic program management, institutional strategies and policies**

- Board Meetings
- Management meetings
- Academic Council meetings

Forums primarily for **continuous program quality development** under the auspices of the Dean of Education:



- a. Program Directors' seminars
- b. Program administrators' meetings
- c. Program management seminars (Program Directors and program administrators)

2. Recurrent Program Peer Review

The second component of CBS' Program Quality Policy is the implementation of for 5-year cycle peer reviews of all programs. In order to manage such peer reviews for more than 50 programs, it was necessary to develop a highly standardized model. Several considerations needed to be addressed. Self evaluation reports for the peer reviews must be short, yet comprehensive, fact based, make use of existing data as much as possible, be as little a burden to Program Directors and –administrators as possible, and follow a standardized format in order to allow benchmarking across programs.

The template for the self evaluation report consists of 15 standard tables, organized in five sections:

- A. Applicants, graduates, completion and dropout
- B. Student Evaluations and Exam Performance
- C. Program Structure, Pedagogical Model, Research Base, Learning Goals, and Internal Course Alignment
- D. Employment, Salary, and Alumni Feedback
- E. Employer and External Examiner Feedback

Data are delivered from CBS student and program management systems. Sources of the information are Program Regulations for the relevant program, student data from CBS Business Intelligence, student evaluation of program and courses from CBS Evaluation and Accreditation Unit, information on exam grading and failure statistics, course coordinators, department influence, class sizes, contact hours and teacher qualifications from program administrator's office, program learning goals and course learning objectives from Program Regulations, employment rate, average salary after 6-12 months from official statistics, alumni and employer feedback from regular surveys, and feedback from external examiners based on censor reports.

To illustrate the information included in the self evaluation report subsets of 3 different tables are presented below. Table 9 illustrates relations between assessment type, grade results, failure rates and student satisfaction. In one glance it is possible to see interesting patterns. In table 9 Micro Economics stands out with extremely low grading, high failure, but high student satisfaction. One explanation for this pattern could be the assessment type (2 hour exam). More time at the exam might correct this.

Table 9 Type of Assessment, Average Grading, Failure Rate, Student Satisfaction

COURSE	SEMESTER	TYPE OF ASSESSMENT	AVERAGE GRADING	FAILURE RATE	STUDENT SATISFACTION
Marketing	1. semester	Written, 4 hour	6.98	0 %	3.1
Managerial Economics	1. semester	Written, 2 hour	3.40	32 %	3.7
Micro Economics	2. semester	Written, 2 hour	2.75	38 %	4.0
Functions of two Variables and	1. semester	Written, 2 hour	1) 10.30 2) 9.71	1 % 0 %	4.4

Matrix Algebra			3) 3.74	15 %	
Linear Projections and Functions of Several Variables	2. semester	Written, 3 hour	5.28	21 %	4.2
Informatics	2. semester	Written home assignment 2 weeks	7.01	4 %	3.6

Table 10 highlights the research base of the courses. We see that the Department of Economics is responsible for the course in macro economics, but also notice that the course responsible is a part time lecturer. This might also add to an explanation of the poor grade results seen in table 9.

Table 10 Department and Research Base of Courses

COURSE	SEMESTER	COURSE RESPONSIBLE	POSITION	DEPARTMENT	CLASS SIZES LECT/TUT	CONTACT HOURS LECT/TUT	TEACHERS
Marketing	1. semester	Flemming Cumberland	Assoc. prof.	MAR	106/ 53	8/24	Several part time
Managerial Economics	1. semester	Leslie Christensen	Assoc. prof.	ECO	106/ 53	48/20	Jan Helmer Rasmussen
Micro Economics	2. semester	Michael B Andersen	Part time	ECO	111/ 55	48/20	
Functions of two Variables and Matrix Algebra	1. semester	Dorte Kronborg	Assoc. prof.	FI/ MES	106/ 53	28/65	Jens Corfitzen & Per Rosenqvist
Linear Projections and Functions of Several Variables	2. semester	Dorte Kronborg	Assoc. prof.	FI/ MES	111/ 55	28/65	Jens Corfitzen & Per Rosenqvist
Informatics	1/2. semester	Dorte Kronborg	Assoc. prof.	FI/ MES	106/ 53 & 111/ 55	48/90	H C Pederesen

Table 11 provides an overview of links between program learning goals and course learning objectives. By following each row one can see which program learning goals a given course is supposed to support, and the columns illustrates which courses support a given program learning goal. If a row is empty, that course doesn't serve any program learning goal (and can be removed). If on the other hand a column is empty the course



portfolio must be reviewed, either by including new courses, or by redefining course learning objectives of some of the courses.

Table 11 Program Learning Goals and Course Learning Objectives

Program Learning Goal	Economic Problems in a Societal Perspective	Organizational and Management strategies	Solve Company Specific Problems	Formulate and analyze mathematical/statistical models	Model and analyze complex decision problems	Understand and handle formal models and conflicts between several goals and stakeholders groups	Apply programming language and mathematical/statistical program packages	Apply mathematics, statistics, informatics and operations research to conduct concrete economic analysis
Course								
Marketing								
Managerial Economics								
Micro Economics								
Functions of two Variables and Matrix Algebra								
Linear Projections and functions of several variables								
Informatics								

The entire Self Evaluation Report, containing 15 tables that summarize the data of the five sections, has a length of about 15 pages. For each of the five sections, the Program Director is asked to provide short comments to the data in order to clarify unexpected patterns, but more important to suggest development initiatives to meet observed challenges.

The self evaluation report is sent to one internal reviewer (a colleague Program Director) and one external reviewer from another Danish or foreign university. Each reviewer is asked to make a formative assessment of the program based on the data and Program Director's comments. The entire material is basis for a program review and development seminar with attendance of the Dean of Education, Peer Reviewers, Program Director, Study Board members, Program administrator, a Head of Department, and representatives from the Dean's office and CBS Evaluation and Accreditation Unit. The expected outcome of the seminar is a development plan for the program. Program Director reports on progress in the development plan in his annual report to the Dean of Education.



Each semester a number of 6-8 programs are reviewed, and an evaluation conference is held to share experiences and initiate joint initiatives based on the most recent peer reviews.

Discussion

CBS' Program Quality Policy was recently redesigned to meet requirements to be expected in the new Danish legislation on institutional accreditation, forthcoming in 2013 or 2014. The basic principles of daily QA are unchanged (although formalized and 'streamlined'), but the 5-year cycle program peer review model is a new element that has been introduced. A pilot review took place during spring 2012, and the preliminary results are promising both in terms of time efficiency and in terms of a systematic formative evaluation based on reviewers' comments. It was possible to produce the self evaluation report in two weeks (one week to collect and present data, and one week for the Program Director to make comments). But some work still remains in producing guidelines for comments, both from director and reviewers. Also, it remains to be seen if usable development plans can be produced based on the reviews. However, the self evaluation tables provide interesting information just by combining already existing information from different sources and present them in new formats. In this respect the project has already proven its worth to meet the increasing societal pressure towards accountability and efficiency.

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Questions for discussion:

- **Decentralized versus Centralized Quality Assurance – pros and cons?**
- **What are the most important elements of an internal QA System?**
- **How to create alignment between internal and external QA to obtain synergy and avoid double work?**
- **What are the early experiences with the recurrent peer review system?**