

# **Improving Undergraduate Business Student Satisfaction in a Branch of Lebanese Higher Education Sector: The Case of University X**

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## **Abstract**

This article is concerned with improving student satisfaction and creating a favorable academic environment in a private Lebanese university. Taking the voice of students into consideration and maintaining a close relationship with them is of paramount importance. Socio-Economic Approach to Management was used to help University X better balance between its external and internal environments. This intervention research focused on enhancing the management and quality of services to achieve higher sustainability and improve organizational performance by transforming hidden costs into added value.

**Keywords:** Socio-Economic Approach to Management, Higher Education, Student Satisfaction, Quality of Services, Hidden Costs.

## **Lebanon's Higher Education Context**

In the Lebanese academic environment, where students have many options available to them, one of the critical challenges that educational institutions are facing is to offer satisfactory learning outcomes. Thus, to remain agile in today's fast changing market and gain a competitive edge in the future, the higher education institutions (HEIs) should place a greater emphasis on developing strategies of success to focus more on meeting if not exceeding the needs and expectations of their stakeholders mainly students. Nevertheless, this development is being highly restricted by competitive forces and intensity between existing institutional players.

In this context, Lebanon's higher education (HE) is considered to be a fast-growing service industry. The competition among universities has been rapidly manifested due to several reasons: (a) the rapid development of information technology, (b) the growing number of educational institutions over the past twenty years, and (c) the increased students' mobility which has facilitated students' transfer from one university to another. From this prospective, universities found themselves facing many pressures in implementing effective measures and give a considerable attention to quality as a distinctive feature for better institution's ranking. Excellence in the quality of services as well as the quality of administrative processes became essential in the Lebanese environment. Accordingly, measuring student satisfaction as part of the HE marketing strategies became vital for universities in order to stay competitive.

## **Students' Dissatisfaction with Quality of Services at University X**

In the era of globalization, privatization and liberalization of HE, significant changes occurred in the educational environment, thus redefining the metrics of excellence for HE. In this context, universities gradually started to accord more importance to the marketization of education, which lead to the repositioning of HE as a global commodity. Accordingly, the market orientation concept typical to the lucrative business sphere has been adopted by institutions to better deal with the challenges of the educational world.

Many reforms have been introduced to the educational industry where the center of gravity shifted from qualitative to quantitative, therefore transforming the elite model *into* a mass education system. This being said, University X's mission is to provide accessible and affordable HE to all in excellence and quality of first order. While the idea of making educational services more affordable and increasing the chances of gaining admissions to HE sounds admirable, these two facilitators are not without drawbacks. Being a tuition-driven university, a strategy of reducing costs per student based on increasing the acceptance rate of new applicants outweigh quantity over quality.

As a result of the lower tuition fees, enrollment standards have regressed. The lax policy that gives any student who has completed high school or technical school the opportunity to pursue HE, where no minimum requirements for admission exist, lies at the core of education quality deterioration (Bok & Derek, 2007).

Consequently, the academic follow-up, soft skills teaching, and post-graduation assistance are being negatively affected by declining educational standards, quality assurance fulfillment, and university branding strategies. Academic standards and the average quality and adequacy of students' and university teachers' preparation, especially the newly recruited ones have decreased. More appealing and colorful advertisements are designed as a means to attract a bigger number of students and more importance was accorded to the admission and student aid offices creating an oversupply of low caliber products in the market. Adopting a strategic orientation which focuses on attracting students rather than satisfying them clearly weakens the quality accountability, hence, causing a conflict between administrators and academics. Such strategic misalignment impacts the quality assurance's purpose of yielding a favorable academic environment.

### **Improving the Business School Undergraduate Student Satisfaction Level**

As the competition grows, HE organizations in Lebanon are experiencing a gradual change in their management style. In this context, the objective of this article is to carry out the intervention research in a private Lebanese University branch using the Socio-Economic Approach to Management (SEAM) methodology so as to improve service and education quality.

This study aimed to help University X (a) deliver a fulfilling academic environment and build the University's reputation; (b) improve the students' learning and quality of services; (c) generate satisfaction and maintain current students within the school of business; (d) create a better balance between teaching and administrative tasks; (e) and ensure a better strategic alignment between the school's mission and the accreditation standards for Business School.

As a result, the overall educational experience was diagnosed. Moreover, relevant instruments used to detect dysfunctions and their resulting hidden costs that the remote campus is facing were identified. Finally, suggested projects were formulated so as to come up with creation of potential.

## **Overview of University X**

University X is a Private Lebanese University; it has five faculties: School of Arts and Sciences, School of Engineering, School of Pharmacy, School of Education and School of Business and Management. The latter is composed from six departments and offers Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

### **Relevance of Student Satisfaction and Service Quality Perception in the Literature**

As following section will highlight, the importance of student satisfaction has been a subject of great interest in the literature due to its significant impact on loyalty. Moreover, service quality will be looked at as an important determinant of student satisfaction; it is so because many empirical studies have pointed out that delivering superior service quality leads to a high level of satisfaction and to greater loyalty (Agypong & Boohene, 2011; Bowen & Chen, 2001; Dado et al., 2102; De Ruyter et al., 1998; Hallowell, 1996; Kandampuly & Suhartanto; Mittal & Lassar, 1996; Olorunniwo et al., 2006; Serenko & Ture, 2006).

### **Student Satisfaction**

Satisfying student's concerns are the overall focus and the cause of existence for all HEIs. Seeking to maximize student satisfaction is pivotal since it forms the cornerstone of the marketing concept and is at the center of total quality management philosophy (Qureshi et al., 2010).

Student satisfaction has been positioned as a central issue in the literature and is considered to be an important educational outcome. Striving to deliver high quality service standards would assist the universities to build and maintain reputation. It has been recognized that students' satisfaction constitutes a main source of competitive advantage and is one of the core factors that may result in retention, loyalty and attraction of new applicants at lower marketing costs through a positive word of mouth (Arambewela & Hall, 2009).

### **Students as Primary Stakeholders**

Achieving student satisfaction is crucial since they are perceived as "*primary customers or service recipients*" of HEI (Hill, 1995; Qureshi et al., 2010). This highlights the importance of stressing the need on placing greater emphasis to meet students' needs and deliver high quality of services (Gruber et al., 2010).

## **Perceived Service Quality in HE**

A factor that should be considered while studying student satisfaction is service quality. This latter became not only a strategic option but also a critical component for the organizational success around the world (Landrum et al. 2007). Approaches to improve perceived service quality and customer satisfaction, which are usually implemented in other service industries, have not only triggered the interest of HE but have also evolved to get a considerable attention (Ford et al., 1999).

According to Alnazer and Dib (2013), universities that aim to achieve a competitive advantage through student satisfaction should accord importance to service quality to narrow the gap between the students' expectations and perceptions. The perception of service quality is vital for organizations because of its influence on the post-enrolment communication behavior for students (Marilyn, 2005). As a result, spreading positive word of mouth and recommendations are consequential behavior of highly satisfied students, for they play a large role in students' decision to select their university. Consequently, attaining quality became a main goal for most educational institutions (Abdullah, 2006a), in view of its effect on institutional sustainability (Canic & McCarthy, 2000). From here, managers should allocate substantial resources for monitoring quality so as to generate satisfaction and maintain current students (Nadiri et al., 2009).

## **Determinants of Student Perceived Service Quality**

Several factors are considered to be essential determinants of students' satisfaction: Offering good quality instructors (Husain et al., 2009; Mai 2005; Purgailis & Zaksa, 2012; Walkre 1995), a meaningful and clear curriculum (Hill, 1995; Knight, 2002; Navaro et al., 2005; Purgailis & Zaksa, 2012), diverse extra-curricular activities (Athiyaman, 1997; Joseph et al., 2005), a proper academic and career advising (Parasuraman et al., 1986), appropriate infrastructural facilities (Helgesen, 2007) and a quality of teaching (DeBourgh, 2003;Urda & Weggen, 2000).

## **Socio-Economic Approach to Management Methodology**

This study focuses on *Qualimetrics Intervention-Research* that involves qualitative, quantitative and financial impacts. The financial indicators represent hidden costs, which are the result of dysfunctions. Accordingly, the financial indicators are vital to management control and economics, which is designed to report to all the actors (Savall et al., 2012).

It is of note that the intervention research was a methodology called *Socio-Economic Approach to Management* which was created by Henri Savall and ISEOR team in the late 1970's with the objective of improving the traditional management approaches (Conbere et al., 2011; Conbere & Heorhiadi, 2015; Savall, 2003). SEAM uses a participative and transformative process to improve decision making and enhance the level of engagement in the change process. The SEAM approach is based on the premise that there is an interaction between "social" and "economic" factors, between behavior and structure, between the quality of functioning and the economic performance referred to as *socio-economic principle*.

SEAM aims to understand the interactions between the organization and its employees and clearly identify the friction that exists within the organization (Savall, 2003). SEAM engages all the members in the consulting process with the aim of improving the organizational effectiveness (Savall, 2007). This methodology is based on interviews that were carried out in an organization. At this stage, the researcher-intervener involves the whole system through an “*Horivert Process*”. During the horizontal phase, the consultant gets in touch with the upper organizational layer that composes the leadership team; whilst at the vertical stage the information is cascaded all way down throughout the whole organization (Conbere & Heorhiadi, 2011). A SEAM intervention flows two ways; it is a blend of top-down and bottom-up actions. Top-down takes place when the leader initiates and supports the introduced change; whilst the bottom-up occurs when all participants are involved in identifying and reducing hidden costs and performance issues. Accordingly, the socio-economic approach revolves around building an environment to identify dysfunctions and associated hidden costs.

## **SEAM Intervention and its Findings**

### **Data Collection**

At the diagnostic phase, interviews centered on organizational dysfunctions were conducted over a period of six months from January 2017 till July 2017. Data was collected and used to gain a better understanding and insight into the research problem and the underlying root causes. Initially, the diagnostic tools of the SEAM approach relied heavily on interview data from all levels of the organization. The process started with face-to-face in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews.

It is of note that the first part of the diagnostic phase was comprised of two main phases. At the first level *horizontal level*, the intervention covered the organization in a holistic way; general dysfunctions were tackled at all levels. Six interviews were first completed and analyzed by July 2017; the interviewed actors have been divided as follows: President, Vice-President, Dean, 2 Academic Directors and Career Management.

At the second level *vertical level*, the intervention took place on a smaller scale. It focused on a specific area of University X and more specifically on the Business Faculty of a remote campus which was composed from 6 different departments: Marketing department, Management department, Finance department, Accounting department, IT department and Economics department. It involved all the categories of actors at the Business School of the remote campus: students, instructors, Assistant Dean, Administrative Director in addition to some of the Top Managers. Besides the chosen faculty, some related departments were tackled as well; admission office and head of marketing and career development were a case in point. In addition to the 20 interviews, focus group interviews and a survey research instrument were conducted as an additional mean to collect qualitative data and dysfunctions. 10 focus groups of 4 to 5 students were carried out where the discussion lasted between 30 minutes to one hour.

Additionally to the dysfunctions which were shaped by the qualitative character of the information and gathered during interviews, three hidden costs interviews were carried out with the head of the remote campus and the accountant at the second part of the diagnostic phase where the qualitative data have been quantified and converted to a numerical form by counting the frequency of occurrence of hidden costs. When compared to qualitative interviews, a hidden

cost evaluation is perceived as having a more objective analysis. The financial language used in the evaluation of hidden costs allows top and middle managers to be better informed as to financial indicators on a daily basis.

Afterwards, four focus groups sessions were spread over a period of four months. The top manager piloted the project and encouraged key strategic decisions. It is of note that the meetings were organized on a monthly basis where major constraints and objectives were brought into light. The focus group mission was to develop cooperative solutions under the supervision of the remote campus head; five recommendations were formulated as a result of summing-up the dysfunctions expressed by the members of the Business Faculty.

### Data Treatment

In order to have the interview data captured more effectively, notes were taken during the conducted interviews with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim. Afterward, transcripts have been analyzed; fieldnote quotes reflecting the dysfunctions at University X and more concretely in the Business Faculty of the remote campus were highlighted using a coding-categorizing technique. Accordingly, an analysis was produced bringing together these fieldnote quotes as subthemes that were in turn arranged into categories sorted by six main dysfunctions “themes” (working conditions, work organization, communication-coordination-cooperation, time management, integrated training, and strategic implementation). The main purpose of this process was to highlight the principal dysfunctions inhibiting the quality of services.

**Table 1**

*Frequency of Horizontal Dysfunctions*

| Nr. of Interviews   | Dysfunctions             | Fieldnote Quotes | Relative Frequency | Sub-Themes |
|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------|
| <b>6 Interviews</b> | Working Conditions       | 5                | 12%                | 3          |
|                     | 3 Cs                     | 2                | 5%                 | 2          |
|                     | Integrated Training      | 3                | 7%                 | 2          |
|                     | Strategic Implementation | 32               | 76%                | 6          |

The horizontal diagnosis consisted of President, Vice-President, Dean, 2 Academic Directors and Career Manager. Based on the conducted interviews, we can observe that strategic implementation domain has the highest negative impact on students’ satisfaction.

This being said, administrators were looking to enlarge class sizes because it is more efficient financially. Accordingly, the philosophy of active learning requiring that the number of students within the classroom settings does not exceed thirty students is not being applied anymore; teaching standards are being lowered. The question that can be raised here is where do administrative people and academics meet?

**Table 2***Frequency of Vertical Dysfunctions*

| Nr. of Interviews and Focus Groups       | Dysfunctions             | Fieldnote Quotes | Relative Frequency | Sub-Themes |
|--|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------|
| <b>14 Interviews and 10 focus groups</b> | Working Conditions       | 52               | 31.50%             | 20         |
|  | 3 Cs                     | 18               | 11%                | 5          |
|  | Time Management          | 6                | 4%                 | 5          |
|  | Integrated Training      | 19               | 11.50%             | 5          |
|  | Strategic Implementation | 70               | 42%                | 10         |

As for the vertical level, the intervention took place on a smaller scale. It focused on a specific area of University X, more specifically on the Business Faculty of a remote campus. Two Academic Directors, an Administrative Director, an Assistant Dean and 6 Chairmen were interviewed. In addition to the chosen faculty, some related departments were tackled as well; Admission office and Marketing department are a case in point.

Too many dysfunctions were negatively affecting the quality of services because they were left untreated; when interviewed, the participants revealed the following:

***Misuse of time***

Disproportion in time allocation whereby 80% of chairmen's time resource is dedicated to the administrative tasks whilst only 20% is allocated to the academic activities.

Such disproportionate allocation is at the heart of the deterioration of quality of education (*poor time management*). Subsequently, some of the chairpersons' tasks need to be reduced through delegation. For the delegation to take place, coordinators and full-timers need to be trained to better handle these various tasks. Hence, a better balance between teaching and administrative tasks would imply a better focus on the academic areas that need improvement. This would (a) enhance the quality of education; (b) improve student's satisfaction; (c) empower the chairpersons (d) foster the communication-coordination-cooperation between campus leaders and more specifically between top and middle managers; and (e) improve strategic synchronization and alignment in goals between those actors belonging to different channels.

***Lack of existence of full-timers and highly qualified instructors***

The quality of teaching was being negatively affected due to geographical constraints, lack of training and poorly perceived strategic orientation.

**Geographical constraints (poor working conditions).** The remote campus suffers from lack of existence of full-timers and highly qualified instructors. Most of high caliber people have moved away to Tripoli or even to Beirut region. It is of note that the road conditions and the

existence of the campus in a politically delicate and non-privileged area constitute the major reasons behind pushing away highly qualified people. As a result, the quality of teaching is being compromised. Subsequently, some of the business instructors have been recruited based on their availability rather than on their competencies.

**Instructors' lack of training (integrated training).** In addition to geographical constraints, the lack of training constitutes another factor affecting the quality of the recruited teachers. The dilemma of the university resides in not providing enough training, workshops, and seminars for educational purposes and leaning towards a more business-oriented environment. University X has never trained its instructors after they get on board to improve the quality of education. In addition to class management difficulties which lead to waste of class time, some business instructors just lecture the material; they do not act as positive speakers. We are not focusing enough on how to approach a classroom. Students are not being engaged in the learning process; setting-up instructors' training is a must.

**Poorly perceived strategic orientation (poor strategic implementation).** Instructors' recruitment process needs to be more efficient and less biased; a better screening process should be established.

### ***Poor quality of the administrative procedures***

The shortage of human resources and the inappropriate roles distribution are affecting the quality of the administrative procedures:

*Shortage of human resources and non-existence of some entities.* The human structure of the remote campus has not been completed yet due to shortage of human resources:

- Non presence of Dean for students' affairs in the organizational structure.
- Lack of existence of students' affair office at the remote campus.

*Harsh and frequent operations handling (poor working conditions).* The administrative and the academic staffs of the remote campus are being overloaded:

- The registrar office handled too many tasks; some of them are not even related to the job description; students' affairs duties are a case in point. This has resulted in late submission of documents and paperwork to the main campus; delay in responsiveness to the students' needs, non-constant availability of the administrative staffs to host the students.
- The staff accountant handled school orientation and events management activities in addition to her daily responsibilities.
- The career management staffs at Beirut campus worked for marketing and career development entities.
- The Administrative Director had no choice but to interfere in the academic zone due to lack of presence of the Academic Director Position at the remote campus. As a result of excess of work, some decisions lacked thoroughness especially when the situation begged for quick decisions.



**Training integrated to the real needs of work was insufficient (integrated training).** The administrative staffs of the remote campus suffered from lack of expertise in certain areas; setting-up training should be established. The intervener-researcher concluded that the insufficient training and the physical exertion resulting from harsh operations handling hurt the quality of procedures. Administrative staff were being demotivated and dissatisfied which only reduces their productivity. As a result, delay in accomplishing tasks, decreased quality of work and lack of efficiency were impacting student satisfaction.

**Lack of job opportunities and adaptation of curriculum design to current market needs.** The curriculum design was being negatively affected due to poorly perceived strategic orientation, lack of internship programs and lack of proper counseling and orientation services.

**Poorly perceived strategic orientation (poor strategic orientation).** The current and background status of students was influencing the perceptions of HE quality of University X. As a result, the employability was being negatively affected; the School of Business is expected to assure better employability for its graduated students.

**Lack of internship programs (poor strategic orientation).** There was no internship Program so the students could not acquire certain hands-on experience before they graduate. Students were not being well equipped to face the challenges of the outside world and better fit the qualifications required by potential employers.

**Lack of proper counseling and orientation services (poor strategic orientation).** There was no clear communication line between students and program developers. Students' needs analyses and their expectations regarding University X were not being deeply analyzed due to lack of student satisfaction survey tool (*Strategic Implementation*).

Being poorly informed about the majors constituted an important setback for students; their expectations were not being well formed. Students were not being assisted in choosing the appropriate courses sequentially wise. Furthermore, some of them were graduating late due to non-creation of awareness of the way the business courses are spread over the semesters. As a result, students' performance and their feeling of academic security were definitely being affected leading to loss in attracting prospective students.

It is of note that advising staff performance was considered to be a core service and one of the most important factors that optimize students overall experience and impact their satisfaction with the university environment; this, in turn, contributed to student intentions to stay and complete a bachelor's, masters', or doctoral degree.

**Lack of integration of accreditation standards.** The educational institution should provide an education corresponding to the requirements of the accreditation on one hand and it must provide practical skills for a managerial career on the other hand. An adequate balance between academic quality and managerial relevance should be one of the fundamental principles of education. The original purpose of education was being defeated and was becoming business oriented. The commercialization of education became more evident and the need for using promotional tools increased accordingly.

As such, majors were being advertised through instructors upon some chairmen request in order to attract a bigger number of students. Instructors often find themselves being pressured to influence their students' choices without taking their interest into consideration, thus, biasing the entire selection process.

Post-graduation employability of students was negatively affected by declining standards in student recruitment, quality assurance fulfillment, and university branding strategies. Within the traditional fields the surrounding universities had a higher caliber in standards.

The existence of strong institutional connections with the corporate world is essential. A structured and effective relationship with the professional world was seen as a necessary service to students individually and to society collectively.

Finally, the School of Business was the biggest school in all the campuses except for the remote campus. This school was facing a challenge in attracting new students due to cultural economic effect. On one hand, people sought other means for their career; engaging in family businesses at early ages is a case in point. On the other hand, the rural mindset of the area where parents push their children toward more prestigious majors explained why the number of business students was smaller than the engineering ones at the remote campus.

**Educators lack productivity and motivation due to inappropriate working conditions and incentives.** Instructors' motivation was negatively affected by the lack of fair rewards, neglect of instructors' seniority for financial objectives, no career advancement; lack of empowerment and trust, low quality of students, underpayment and excessive continuous administrative monitoring (*poor strategic orientation*) and, finally, work overload and stress (*poor working conditions*).

### **Hidden Costs Calculation**

The interdependence of student satisfaction and quality of services provided has not only been viewed from the context of visible costs but also from that of hidden costs. The term *hidden cost* is used when the cost does not appear on the organization budget or balance statement (Savall & Zardet, 2008).

The analysis of hidden costs is directly related to the dysfunctions and every dysfunction corresponds to a financial value (Savall, 2008). The existing gap between students' expectations and University X's service provision was leading to strategic misalignment which only contributes in increasing the dysfunctions faced by this educational organization.

According to the diagnosis undergone at the remote campus, University X spawned a level of hidden costs which amounted to \$1,841,200 per year (see Table 3). The main purpose of calculating the latter amount was to highlight the principal dysfunctions inhibiting the quality of services – these include academic follow-up, post-graduation assistance, soft skills teaching, and administration support – on one hand and to assist the HEI in creating an image of the possible savings that could help the organization's development on the other. It is of note that the most significant hidden costs pertained to non-quality and direct productivity gaps.

- Non-quality: Administrative staff qualifications insufficiency, student caliber deterioration, service quality shortages, and a weak analysis of student needs.
- Direct productivity gap: Employee working conditions dissatisfaction and a reduced number of enrolled students.

**Table 3**

*Overview Table of Hidden Costs by Indicator and Component*

|                                | <b>Overtime</b> | <b>Non-Production</b> | <b>Non-Creation of Potential</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Absenteeism</b>             |                 | \$167,000             |                                  | \$167,000    |
| <b>Non- Quality</b>            | \$43,700        | \$ 920,000            | \$690,000                        | \$1,653,700  |
| <b>Direct Productivity Gap</b> | \$7,500         | \$ 27,000             |                                  | \$34,500     |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                   | \$51,200        | \$1,100,000           | \$690,000                        | \$1,841,200  |

The above table demonstrates the total of the hidden costs generated from the dysfunctions.

The highest cost related to the absenteeism rate's effect at the remote campus of University X was on the non-production recorded at \$167,000. It is so because the administrative staffs of the remote campus were overloaded, they handled too many tasks. This resulted in lack of proper working conditions (*poor working condition*). Participants reported that staff were getting late 8 minutes on their working schedule on a daily basis; two employees were absent for a total of 16 hours per month; and, instructors were arriving late 10 minutes per session as an average.

The highest cost related to the non-quality rate's effect was on non-creation of potential. The quality of students was overridden by the application of quantitative methods poor (*strategic implementation*). Attracting students through financial aid is a hidden cost in itself; it is so because the aid is being granted to compensate the dysfunctions resulted from lack of providing the students with proper employability opportunities. It is important to note that providing better quality of services would have allowed the university to lower the granted financial aid by 10% and more concretely from a 50 to 40%. Consequently, loss in earnings was a result of the tuition-driven strategic orientation.

The highest cost related to the direct productivity gap rate's effect at the remote campus of University X is on the non-production. The Business Faculty at the remote campus needs to be properly marketed to attract a higher number of students. The current number of bachelor business students is around 85 while the expected number should be around 500 (*poor strategic implementation*). The rate of missed production is approximately 80% compared to the expected productivity.

### Divergence Table

The result of SEAM diagnosis and more specifically the divergence table echoes the importance of strengthening the cohesion between different actors to provide students with better quality of services. A closer alignment between school's mission and the accreditation standards for Business School should be established to better respond to students' satisfaction. It is of note that the below table shows a lack of aligned vision among the organizational actors; such a misalignment in goals and perspectives only contributes in increasing the dysfunctions faced by this educational organization. From here, the divergence columns list the problems affecting the student's satisfaction.

**Table 4**

*Section A*

| THEME   | Communication-Coordination-Cooperation   |   |
|---|--|---|
| Sub-Themes  | Divergences  |   |
|   | Middle Managers  | Middle Managers   |
| Communication-Coordination-Cooperation at the Top Manager level | Instructors were being encouraged to advertise their major so as to attract a substantial quantity of students | A conflict existed between program developers. Promoting majors constituted a point of disagreement between the chairpersons of the Faculty of Business |

### Literature extracts supporting Table 4

Trends toward accreditation and quality assurance are related to the emergence of market orientation concept in the HE sector. As a response to massification system, institutions were pressured to pay more attention to quality issues in education. The primary aim of the contemporary HEIs is to gain accountability and credibility in front of their stakeholders. The turbulent environment related to the demographic and economic changes have propelled the universities to give a primordial importance to the accreditation status. From this angle, HEIs have admitted that accreditation is their legal means to provide assurance to the community and to demonstrate their high-quality education and reputation (Akonkwa, 2009).

Accreditation is one of the most outstanding phenomena in the HE sector to improve quality and maintain sustainability; it increases students' enrollment and help them get better career prospects. From this prospective, policymakers and stakeholders are concerned more than ever before with outputs of their investments and assurance of quality for better institution's ranking. The aim of systems of accreditation and quality assurance is to synchronize and coordinate the management of heterogeneous institutions and promote a culture of information, compliance, responsibility, and transparency. Quality assurance mechanisms should be set-up by the educational institutions for internal steering purposes (Gonzalez & Wagenaar, 2003a, b).

To provide *quality* for HE, *quality culture* should be aligned with the university's mission and core goal on one hand and linked to the organizational performance on the other; it should be embedded in the institutional culture (Newby, 1999). Undoubtedly, a successful implementation of quality assurance requires the engagement of all organization's actors (Kanji et al., 1999; Witcher, 1990); it should be the strategic direction for the whole university (Lines & Patrick, 2004).

**Table 5**

*Section B*

| <b>DYSFUNCTION</b>  | <b>Work Organization</b>  |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Sub-Themes</b>   | <b>Divergences</b>  |  |
|   | <b>Administrative staff</b>   | <b>Academic Staff</b>  |
| Strategic Misalignment between Administrators and Academics | The administrators look to enlarge class sizes because it is more efficient financially | The academic staff believe that a cap on the number of students should be established to deliver quality of teaching |

**Literature review supporting Table 5**

The move to the entrepreneurial university as a result of a rise in academic capitalism has caused harm to the traditional academic culture. HEI had no choice but to abandon their social wide missions and their professional values undertaken traditionally (Greenwood & Levis, 2003; Hoolbrook & Hulbert, 2002) to the benefit of the commercial enterprise culture. As a result, universities became more reliant on using marketing tactics to promote their educational services (Gibbs & Murphy, 2009), and deliver these in a customer-oriented way.

Many universities are luring students through skillful branding campaigns that advertise high quality education even when in reality the quality is low. Bok and Derek have stated that the commercialization brought damages to the academic standards, academic community, and academic reputation of universities (Bok & Derek, 2007). In view of that, the acceptance of low

standard students has decreased the prestige of institutions in the public opinion causing a conflict between the advocates struggling for traditional academic duties and their counterparts.

Teaching large numbers has replaced the traditional teaching methods that used to prevail in the past (Yadgar, 2007). Accordingly, career counseling services should be provided to better prepare the students for job interviews. It has been argued that advising staff performance is considered to be a core service and one of the most important factors that impact students' satisfaction and optimize their overall experience (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Hemwall & Trachte, 2003; Light, 2001; Propp & Rhodes, 2006).

**Table 6**

*Section C*

| THEME                   | Integrated Training  |  |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Sub-Themes              | Divergences  |  |
|                         | Top Managers   | Middle Managers  |
| Training-Job Adjustment | The Vice-President established a clear chain of command which cancelled the direct communication with the 6 chairmen of Business Faculty | The requirements of chairmen related to students' orientation were not always being taken into consideration due to a lack of direct communication with the Vice-President |

**Literature extracts supporting Table 6**

Campus leaders need to cooperate with each other to foster a culture where opposing viewpoints are accepted, where conflicts are managed, and where employees and students can freely express their different opinions (Coffman, 2005). It is of note that the institutional fabric is to blame. "Some campuses are by nature more collegial than others" (Birnbaum, 1991, p.15). A solid team not only brings varying perspectives into the mix but also reinforces mutual respect and trust.

As soon as one of the concerned parties believes the other has a lesser degree of respect for their rights, problems are more likely to occur when making decisions (Coffman, 2005). Lack of harmony, uncomfortable alliance (Guffey & Rampp, 1998) and conflict of interests (Dill, 1991) have often characterized the existing nature of the relationship between those groups (Leslie, 2003). Conflicts may stem from perspective differences (Cheldelin & Lucas, 2004; Del Favero, 2004; Gross & Grambsch, 1968; Higgerson, 1998; Holton, 1998; Richman and Farmer, 1974).

**Table 7**

*Section D*

| Sub-Themes            | Divergences  |  |
|-----------------------|--|--|
|                       | Top Managers   | Students   |
| Strategic Orientation | The school's mission is to make HE affordable and accessible to all, at the expense of the quality of services | Students are being dissatisfied with the provided services in term of career and counseling services |

**Literature extracts supporting Table 7**

With the increasing diversity of students attending university, there has been a growing interest in one-to-one relationship between student and advisor. Perceiving and treating students as partners is fundamental to enhance their experience from enrollment to graduation (Fox & Kotler, 1995). Hunter & White (2004) stated that academic advising is designed to help students shape a meaningful learning experience and encourage the achievement of immediate and long-term educational and career goals. Engagement and persistence in the program are the main aims behind the advisor-student relationship. Nutt (2003) contended that academic advising is vital to student's success because of the developed skills and acquired knowledge; after all, procuring an environment that provides clear and consistent information about institutional requirements encourages students to stay and complete their degrees (Tinto, 2007).

Career centers with a wide range of services should be organized to help graduates enter the world of work. Career coaching should comprise information on the labor market, on events, namely - seminars and fairs -, on job offers and conducted training where competence levels and employment opportunities of graduates can be determined.

**Table 8**

Section E

| Sub-Themes           | Divergences  |  |
|----------------------|--|--|
|                      | Administrators   | Instructors  |
| Personnel Management | Seniority is being neglected by executives for financial objectives. Egalitarian method that does not distinguish the competence of professionals or beginners are being applied | Instructors are being demotivated due to underpayment, neglect of seniority, lack of career advancement and empowerment which is affecting the quality of teaching |

**Literature extracts supporting Table 8**

The literature has been calling for nurturing a climate that fosters relationships marked by joint effort, bridged activities and mutual respect between faculty and administrators. However, the consideration of those aspects which are the constituents of the quality of shared governance is quite challenging. Given the differences in the ways they pursue their goals, achieving harmony and collaboration between administrators and academics has been often difficult to reach (Birnbaum, 1988; Borland, 2003; Minor, 2004; Weingartner, 1996; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003).

The existing dynamics of the faculty-administrator relationship should receive a considerable attention in view of the fact that those parties have very different vision of how their institutions should function (Bensimon, 1991; Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Peterson & White, 1992).

A positive conflict will only ensue in improved synergy, increased engagement and understanding; after all, a successful way of dealing with previous conflicts will only encourage the colleagues to resolve issues as they occur, rather than waiting until a crisis explodes (Holton, 1998, p.1).

**Suggested Projects for the Improvement of Student Satisfaction**

The suggested projects were formulated by the members of the Business Faculty Board comprised of the Vice-President, Dean, Assistant Dean, the two Academic Directors, the Administrative Director of the remote campus and the 6 Chairmen.

The aim was to reduce the identified dysfunctions and their resulting hidden costs that the remote campus was facing during the diagnostic phase so as to come up with creation of potential



(Buono & Savall, 2007; Conbere & Heorhiadi, 2014). The implementation of the suggested solutions would result in the following strategic organizational improvements:

*Suggested project Nr. 1: Providing better incentives to attract more qualified instructors*

Providing instructors with better incentives would have compensated for the drawbacks resulting from road conditions and the remote campus being in a politically delicate and unprivileged area. Doubling the transportation benefits on a monthly basis for the educators that travel to the remote campus would have attracted more qualified ones. Hiring better qualified instructors would have improved education quality and increased students' satisfaction. It is of note that by attracting better instructors, the remote campus would have saved at least one third of the hidden costs estimated at \$2,444.16 related to poor class management and non-production in classes.

*Suggested project Nr. 2: Integrated training to the personnel*

A number of potential benefits could occur as a result of employee training; these include improved performance, improved satisfaction and morale, and increased productivity. Furthermore, enhancing the working conditions of the employees in term of a schedule would have recorded significant behavioral change through: Compliance with the work schedule, enhanced productivity, better responsiveness to student' needs, improved employee morale and engagement.

*Suggested project Nr.3: Providing existing instructors with better incentives*

Providing instructors with better financial incentives, promising career advancement, and reduced physical exertion could significantly improve quality of teaching. Rewarding instructors could allow the remote campus to save at least one third of the hidden costs recorded at \$11,633.66 related to absenteeism. By providing employees with better incentives, the remote campus could end-up saving at least one third of hidden costs estimated at \$76,534.98. Lower absent days, minimized overtime costs, better responsiveness to students' needs would have resulted; hence, ensuring the delivery of better quality of administrative procedures. the last 2 sentences did not belong in the previous section. Now however some editing is needed.

*Suggested project Nr. 4: Providing students with better counseling and orientation services*

To enhance the counseling and orientation services at the remote campus, the following was recommended: conducting training workshops on campus to instructors, visiting the remote campus on a semester basis from the 6 Chairpersons' end to better assist and orient the students and the full- presence of the Assistant Dean on a single campus.

The implementation of the following actions could have enhance the follow-up on students' needs, assured better coordinated efforts between the campuses, improved the communication-coordination-cooperation between program developers and students, and, finally, would have provided a better quality of teaching.

Providing better counseling and orientation services would have attracted more prospective students. This could enable the remote campus to save at least one third of hidden costs related to non-quality of teaching and loss in attracting potential students.

*Suggested project Nr. 5: Creating a coherent environment with all the academic and structural facilities*

Providing better job opportunities and better relevance of curricula to the accreditation requirements could enable the campus to save at least one third of hidden costs related to financial aid grant. It should be noted that the quality of the curriculum was among the most important determinants of student perceived service quality. Accordingly, University X needed to implement the following recommendations: increasing the quality of students by initiating a screening process, creating a sustainable network connection with corporate institutions, providing career counseling services, establishing an alumni association.

Accordingly, University X needed to implement the following: Increasing the quality of students by initiating a screening process, creating a sustainable network connection with corporate institutions, providing career counseling services and establishing an alumni association.

## **Discussion**

The remote campus did not have a strong business network. More effective branding and image strategies should be established. Pull marketing attempts should be created to better attract companies to University X. Relying on students' engagement in word of mouth is not enough, more proactive tactics should be undertaken. It is of note that well-established universities take advantage of their reputation while the newness of University X presents a limitation.

Moreover, there was a disproportionate increase in the number of students relative to the existing number of instructors. As a matter of fact, the findings show that the number of business students at the remote campus which was 53 in 2015 has increased to 68 at 2016, to reach the number of 84 in 2017. Thus, we can infer that the number of students has been growing by 10% annually while that of the instructors has remained constant over the same period; this disproportionate growth can but have negative repercussions on the quality of education.

We can depict a distinction between the academic standards – those aspects concerned with student numbers - and administration standards. Thus, how does the school's overall strategy fit the accreditation? How can quality assurance be properly delivered if the involved actors do not envisage the same goal they want to reach together through accreditation?

Decline in teaching standards are by no means a phenomenon of administrators' interference, causing a conflict between the latter and the academics. Such a misalignment in goals and perspectives only contributes in widening the existing gap, making it hard to understand why anyone would want to cross over the divide.

Positive involvement is not being applied. The cohesion between these two major groups should be strengthened to (a) better meet the accreditation requirements, (b) gain credibility in front of the stakeholders, and (c) reach a better institution's ranking. Furthermore, the cohesion is

essential for the improvement of the educational environment which, in turn, positively affects student perception and satisfaction. Steering towards students' centered strategies with main focus on student satisfaction is pivotal to the organizational sustainability.

Integrating and developing a quality culture and enhancing the quality of education require a synergy between professors and university's administration. The value of having a mutual understanding between those two key constituent groups, academics vs. administrators, is self-evident.

It is of note that the above suggested projects were met with resistance to change even in the face of a dynamic environment. It is so because the organizational rigid culture of University X is characterized by formalities and bureaucracy associated with centralized decision making.

This being said and despite its importance as noted, why did I not dwell on the need for cohesion and increased engagement matters further in the suggested projects' part? Despite my sensing the need for cohesion, I didn't emphasize on it for several reasons which will be elaborated next.

I was overwhelmed with the whole process and having a hard time given the fact I was new in the field and had never consulted before. Being the only intervener and having no active partner(s) to process the information with, was one of the biggest challenges that I faced especially since the education environment is highly demanding.

## **Study Contribution**

Theoretical and institutional contributions are presented in this section.

### **Contribution of Study to literature**

The majority of studies concerning student satisfaction has been formed from an ethnocentric, US perspective; whilst developing countries, and more specifically Lebanon, have largely been neglected from such research (Dib & Alnazer, 2013).

Satisfaction has been found to be a strong predictor of long-term relationships and a key component of improved organizational performance. Based on the extant literature, researchers have highlighted the importance of gaining better insights on how students' perception about the quality of service delivered is formed to create an educational environment that better suits their needs.

This paper emphasizes the importance of strengthening the cohesion and achieving harmony and collaboration between administrators and academics to better meet the accreditation requirements and elevate the universities' image.

It has shown that teaching and curriculum quality along with academic and career counseling services constitute important determinants of perceived service quality and the influence of the latter construct over student satisfaction.

It is of note that the theoretical contribution of this study resides in showing that the impact of quality of the administrative procedures on student satisfaction has not been supported by the current literature review which paves the way for future research on the matter.

Finally, the findings of this study will help the higher education sector better make decisions on how to satisfy and better retain existing students.

### **Contribution of Study to University X**

This study contribution's to University X resides in measuring the quality of services from various stakeholders' points of view. The focus was not limited to student perceptions; it involved academic and administrative staff as well.

In addition, this paper can give insights for higher education institutions managers on various managerial strategies and substantial resources to be allocated so as to develop quality improvement programs to retain existing students rather than just attracting them. Accordingly, structural changes have been suggested through looking for the untapped potential and creating processes that promote a culture of integral quality.

Finally, the study's findings could be generalized to other similar private Lebanese institutions. It is so because according to the Lebanese Ministry of Education, there are similarities among different private universities in Lebanon when it comes to curriculum, teaching methods, number of faculties, and administration.

### **Conclusion**

A gradual change in the Lebanese HEI management style has been witnessed. Adopting cost cutting measures from the administrators' end has often reduced the quality of services and caused a conflict between administrators and academics. Based on the aforementioned, it is crucial for HEIs to take into account the ethical implications of their marketing efforts (Gibbs & Murphy, 2009).

Universities found themselves facing many pressures in implementing effective measures and give a considerable attention to quality as a distinctive feature for better institution's ranking. Excellence in the quality of services as well as the quality of administrative processes became essential in the Lebanese environment.

In this context, the intervener aimed at engaging University X on the path of socio-economic management to improve the quality of services. Introducing SEAM is relevant since it can work in any context and in any environment. As a matter of fact, the changing nature of the HE sector, along with the challenges impacting this industry, makes the need for leadership and managerial skills more important than ever.

To provide "*quality*" for HE, "*quality culture*" should be part of the institutional culture, match the university's mission and have ties with the organizational performance. Noticeably, a match between the system and players behavior facilitates the institutional transformation. It is of note that introducing good management practices necessitates a culture that drives organizational

agility. Such culture would recognize the power of the external environment and promotes effective changes where organizational actors share the same vision.

Furthermore, a similar culture would yield favorable conditions for the realization of an alignment between academic and administrative standards and, accordingly, would better cater to students' needs to ensure a sustainable organizational development. The cohesion should be strengthened to provide better quality consistency among different campuses. Universities should embed managerial practices that highlight the importance of meeting students' expectations.

Satisfying student's needs is the main focal point of HEIs. Maintaining long-term relationships with students who are demanding more quality is of much concern. It has been recognized that students' satisfaction constitutes a main source of competitive advantage and is one of the core factors that may result in retention, loyalty, attraction for new applicants at lower marketing costs as well as positive word of mouth communication (Arambewela & Hall, 2009).

The importance of students' HE experience is important since it is a key element to measure students' satisfaction with their learning experiences (Byrne & Flood, 2003; Grace et al., 2012; Griffin et al., 2003; Ramsden, 1991; Yin et al., 2014).

This study showed the potential for significant gains in providing education of higher quality for students and a more fruitful work life for faculty and administrators. The difficulty is faculty and administrations have to cooperate to provide quality education. Until they do, students will have a poorer experience, costs will be higher than they need to be, and faculty and administrators will probably have a much more unpleasant experience environment at work.

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