

Improving Higher Education in Europe Through Main Managerial Laws – The Case of Greece

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Abstract

In this paper a comparative approach between the laws of the Greek state concerning higher education and main managerial laws is attempted, trying to examine whether they can be applied, but also contribute to the improvement of the existing structure in Greek universities. An analysis of Greek laws that came into force in the last 30 years in order to improve higher education in Greece is initially attempted. These laws were introduced so as to improve higher education in Greece, but also to harmonize, quantitatively as well as qualitatively, with the wishes and needs of the employees involved, i.e. professors, students and administrative staff. In parallel, Deming's theory is presented and examined as a one which focuses on improving business structures in companies and organizations.

Keywords: higher education, managerial law, Deming's theory, Greek university.

1. Introduction

Greek universities have become the field during the past decades, of a constant implementation of new laws which were adopted through these years by ministers and their staffs in order to change, partially or generally, many of the existing data and lead to minor or major changes in the way they operate. It is a fact that every organization, institution or enterprise must be adjusted to any new data of the era in which it operates, in order to improve and provide significantly improved services to citizens served by them.

The question is whether known management theories worldwide, those that have proved that they can actually help the improvement of many organizations – not only educational – are consciously adopted and ultimately help to improve the functioning of the institutions concerned. In the following lines the correlations between individual laws and the Deming's principles are examined.

The big question is whether these higher staffs know from the inside what is going on in Greek universities and if they can establish laws that really improve the functioning of these institutions. Often, higher staff who implements new laws does not know the Greek educational reality and simply implement what they are asked to do, by some leaders of some institutions or regions to which they belong (Nova-Kaltsouni, 2010: 153).

2. Methodology

Our first step was to read many scientific texts on the management and more specifically related to organization. We focused on the theory of Deming, because the principles contained therein have helped many countries and organizations to improve, up to a maximum level, their overall production process (Montana & Charnov, 2009: 347). We compared the content of the laws related to the changes of structures and services in Greek universities, with the aforementioned theory.

Along with research in law articles and sources, we studied articles of university professors in prestigious media, which offer a direct and timely analysis of the phenomena of Greek education, focusing on issues of quality of higher education. Some of them are former ministers, so their opinion is weighty (Kremastinos, 2013: A49).

Our analysis was based on two parameters. On the one hand, and at first, we studied all laws adopted by the Greek governments over the last 30 years, related to educational issues. We analyzed them in depth, in order to realize their objectives in relation to the desired result, but also to the existing social conditions.

Our third step was to attempt comparisons so that to see whether new laws are related directly or indirectly with it and the principles it contains. We wanted to see if the proposed laws include simply some nuggets from Deming's theory and if scientific theories about organization may ultimately help Greek education.

The last step in our methodological approach was to find and analyze whether these laws are related directly or indirectly to Deming's theory and the principles it contains. Since we broke the Deming's principles in four categories, we attempted to build four corresponding tables which facilitate and demonstrate those correlations. They were then analyzed and explained so as to draw a comprehensive and centralized result of our research.

2.1 *Basic aspects of improving quality in universities*

Every human activity concerning education at all levels should be characterized by a high degree of quality. The last word has several interpretations and any involved party of education system, from the smallest student to the relevant minister, interprets it as they want. By the term "quality" in education and by a common opinion, we mean optimal working conditions for teachers and administrators as well as the high degree of knowledge transfer to pupils and students.

These two cases (working conditions – high degree of knowledge transmission) are interlinked, because if the first is not at a high level, may adversely affect the latter, as well as *vice versa*. Saying "working conditions", we mean buildings and educational equipment, as well as the relationship between wages and hours of working.

The situation in Greek universities concerning high quality has always been – by the viewing of all ministers who have served it – an attempt to modify it, in order to improve it, according to what they thought about the concept of improvement. But often their ideas run completely contrary to the beliefs of all kinds of employees or professors in higher Institutions (Kremastinos, *op. cit.*: A49).

This controversy led to many dangerous rifts between the two sides, to the point of risking sometimes even the function of the institutions. The disagreements ranged from the fact that the top executives of the Ministry always have a technocratic opinion, while teachers, administrators and students a human-centered and more close to the situation within the institutions.

The laws enacted during all these years from behalf of these executives, had to do with three main issues: (1) the implement of rules related to the way of the central organization of universities, (2) the way and amounts of annual funding, and (3) about engagement and staff development (Kladis & Panousis, 2004: 113, 161, 179). In that way, more practical and serious problems were not examined such as the mode of instruction, examination methods, the degree of satisfaction of students by professors, especially the relationship between final knowledge and requirements of society. We must mention that the first two do not ever interest senior executives who enact laws.

These problems led us to a big question about what constitutes quality in higher education and if it can be calculated. Can we measure it based on some variables? For instance, can we delineate it based on degrees and publications of all levels of the professors themselves? Can we measure it by the number of graduate students, in which are also included doctoral students? Or maybe we should put as first criterion the quality of teaching within the university halls? (Kladis & Panousis, *op. cit.*: 161-163). Is it quantitative or rather qualitative the criteria of creativity and inspiration within universities? And how much these criteria are affected by technocratic economic theories about organization?

2.2 Basic management theories

A great amount of the action for quality, including specialized techniques to improve quality has been affected by W. Edwards Deming (Montana & Charnov, *op. cit.*: 395). He was an American economist who worked in several countries and offered a great contribution in improving production of goods and services in many public and private enterprises. He established a number of principles, which were adopted by many organizations, leading to a vast improvement of their productivity (Kotler, 2000).

Deming formulated certain principles which should be followed by managers to lead their organizations to a quality target. We found that no other economic theory is so close to the education and the specific conditions prevailing in this as the Deming's principles (Sarmaniotis, 2005: 329).

The same author felt that the "persistence in a purpose", combined with statistical quality control, will lead to a continuous quality improvement. Additionally he believed that the job board of high level administrative staff is to find and correct the causes of failure, more than to identify the mistakes and failures as they occur. Deming summarizes the philosophy on three basic principles:

- Insistence on quality;
- All in a group;
- Use of the scientific method.

The most important of these principles are:

- Get rid of the barriers that deprive employees the pride in their work;
- Open communications and break down barriers between different departments;
- Do not rely on mass inspection to detect defects. Instead, use the statistical checking to be sure that the quality is created through the services offered;
- Eliminate labor levels defining live numerical proportions;
- Adopt a new philosophy of quality without delay;
- Identify problems whether they consist of faulty systems or employees and correct them;

- Improve continually your services so that to improve the competitive position of your institution;
- Enhance and streamline the monitoring methods;
- Get rid of fear from the workplace so that everyone can work productively;
- Use modern methods of education and training over labor;
- Establish a dynamic training programme;
- Eliminate numerical goals, as a way of mobilizing the employees. Instead give them methods to achieve these goals.

2.3 *The legislation concerning Greek universities*

Legislative changes introduced in Greece after the fall of the dictatorship in 1973 (milestone year for the Greek society because it went from authoritarianism to democracy) and relating to the operation and improvement of the structures of higher education are the 1268/1982 (Kladis & Panousis, 2009), 2083/1992, 3549/2007 (Nova-Kaltsouni, *op. cit.*; Lakasas, 2012: 8) and 4009/2011 (FEK A' 195/6-9-11).

The fourth one has sparked great debates and conflicts among all actors of modern Greek education and is essentially the component and the effect of fermentation of all above mentioned laws.

All tried to change for the better the situation in Greek higher institutions, but they did not achieve many goals, because practice has shown that in a society that is constantly changing and transforming, education system can't adapt quickly and easily, even based on successive laws, voted for its own interest (Lakasas, *op. cit.*: 8). In just 30 years four (4) different laws were established and a large number of individual amendments to the three original, which complicated the data, rather than simplified. Some modifications are also contradictory to the previous laws, instead of improving or enhancing them (Filios, 2013).

Often the new Education Laws in Greece come not to improve standards in higher education, but to install new institutions or rules that simply facilitate their operation rather than improving it. Facilitating the function is an adaptive measure to the new state of affairs and not a one that improves quality.

The main achievement of recent laws (namely 4009/2011) is the foundation of ADIP (Archi DIasfalisis Piotitas – Quality Assurance Agency – Q.A.A), which is the instrument that controls the level of quality in higher education in Greece.

Specifically, all professors in higher education institutions in Greece are required to complete each year an identical form on the Internet, which contains the record of all their scientific works per year (G.O. A' 195/6-9-11). Their responses are transferred to a central network and are grouped in order to find, on one hand, the total number of all works classified by department and by institution, and also the average quantitative activity of professors.

Simultaneously, through the same system, it is required by all students to give their opinion about the quality of teaching, as well as about the services offered by the administrative staff. All these (student opinions – scientific studies of professors – administrative services) are couched in the form of Q.A.A. basically in a quantitative way, rather than qualitative. Results give an overview of each department, spherical and technocratic, rather than specific and in a human scale.

2.4 Managerial principles in the frame of Greek legislation

The first finding by the study and comparison attempted is that none of the higher administrative staff who elaborated respective laws, has ever mentioned publicly, even indirectly, any of the above names of international prestige economists associated to the improvement of management in various workplaces (according to the study and analysis of official notices in the press by representatives of the Greek Ministry of Education, 1998-2012). This proves that these officers either do not want to admit their ignorance on the principles of modern management, or do not reveal the fact that they actually resorted to these principles, even by simply reading them.

The second finding is that although some of the relevant laws have a small even relation compared to the Deming's principles, this is rather indirect or coincidental.

The following tables show the relationship between the Deming's principles to the above laws.

Table 1. Internal issues of quality

A. DEMING'S PRINCIPLES	B. CORRESPONDING LAWS	RELATION A - B
Adopt a new philosophy of quality without delay	4009/2011	great
Identify problems whether they consist of faulty systems or employees and correct them	4009/2011	average
Eliminate labor levels defining live numerical proportions	None	-
Open communications and break down barriers between different departments	1268/1982	small
Get rid of the barriers that deprive employees the pride in their work	None	-

Two laws dealt with internal quality issues, the last 30 years, and by the five principles of Deming mentioned above, only three are associated to these laws. And although the 4009 Law has large and middle relation with two corresponding Deming principles, the other, that of 1982, has a very small one.

The fact that no law was interested in numerical ratios and harmful working levels (even as a simple reference) shows that in the Greek universities prevails quantity at the expense of quality, and in parallel, the general interest is the mass production of graduates rather good knowledge provided to them. These references also concern the figures of professors and administrators.

Only two laws are related to issues of quality in education, that of 1982 and the one of 1992, but the relationship to the principles of Deming are from small to medium in size. As mentioned above, the training of professors pass only through participation in conferences and writing articles, not at all by improving their capacities within university halls.

Table 2. Training issues

A. DEMING'S PRINCIPLES	B. CORRESPONDING LAWS	RELATION A - B
Use modern methods of education and training over labor	2083/1992	small
Establish a dynamic training programme	1268/1982	average
Eliminate numerical goals, as a way of mobilizing the employees. Instead give them methods to achieve these goals	none	-

Improving quality of teaching can be realized thanks to attending seminars related to the transmission of knowledge and new pedagogical methods, particularly in regard to teacher-student relationships, both within auditoriums and academia in general, as well. But none of the above mentioned laws adopt something similar, so the quality of education remains low.

Table 3. Control Systems

A. DEMING'S PRINCIPLES	B. CORRESPONDING LAWS	RELATION A - B
Enhance and streamline the monitoring methods	3549/2007	great
Do not rely on mass inspection to detect defects. Instead, use the statistical checking to be sure that the quality is created through the services offered	4009/2011	average
Get rid of fear from the workplace so that everyone can work productively	None	-

As regards control systems, the beginning was in 2007 with the 3549 act and having great relation to the Deming's principles, but the effort was restricted in 2011 with a mid-sized relationship between law and Deming's principles. The statistical tests reported by him are not analyzed or supported by that law, who submits checks rather technocratic than in a human scale.

Fear, concerning the educational process, is not existing of course in the Greek Universities, but we find this concept in other levels, such as securing the jobs of administratives and, in a second hand, of professors. Many were the references in Greek media about these problems the last two years and many members of the academic community are now out of work because of the absence of relevant laws, those who knock fear and provide a certain level of security that will lead to an increase of quality work.

Only the latter act, the one of 2011 is attempting a correlation between the internal and external environment of universities, trying to give impetus to the improvement of all academic institutions, regarding their competitiveness with other institutions. However, here also the law does not use largely the Deming's correlative principle, leaving universities to compete themselves with others abroad, without clear results.

Table 4. Correlations with the external environment

A. DEMING' S PRINCIPLE	B. CORRESPONDING LAW	RELATION A – B
Improve continually your services so that to improve the competitive position of your institution	4009/2011	average

Competitiveness here does not mean that the universities within and outside the country will try to outbid each other in numerical level, but that they will be able to reach each other for scientific purposes only, in order to achieve exchanges of knowledge and experiences, which will lead to a better position in the Greek and the world map ranking quality of these institutions.

3. Conclusions

Known worldwide management theories have proven that they can actually help the improvement of many organizations – not only educational – but they finally are applied only minimally in the case of Greek higher education. The relationship between Deming’s principles and laws of the Greek state is infinitesimal or non-existent.

The careful reader of laws relating to the improvement of the situation in Greek universities can easily notice some small correlations with the principles of Deming, but also easily understand that this is rather random or relevant from a general academic knowledge of managers on the principles of management.

Greek state is trying at times to provide incentives for increased quality in the Greek educational institutions at all levels and for all involved in this, employees or students.

The quality is measured initially with some quantitative criteria (number of degrees before the intake, number of publications, etc.), but mostly with some endogenous factors, such as the quality level of teachers in the classroom, satisfaction of students from these, the relationship between final knowledge and social reality.

The fact that just in the year 2011 the Greek state reported quality issues and wanted to deal in depth with this, means that Greek education goes very slowly. The main reason for that is that the way it works is mechanistic and based on a formal, we would say, bureaucratic process.

The fact is that a broader and deeper knowledge of the Deming’s principles will allow a better implementation by the occasionally leaders of the Ministry of Education and would help in a more scientific approach to improve the quality of higher education in Greece, which will have a direct impact on the overall situation of society in this country.

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