ALANYAZIN
Eğitim Bilimleri Eleştirel İnceleme Dergisi
CRES Journal Critical Reviews in Educational Sciences

Corporate communication as a substantial function in higher education management

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Abstract: This study aims to reveal the benefits of corporate communication for higher education institutions. Within this scope, we address the areas that higher education systems are currently struggling with and discuss the factors that force institutions to change in light of the literature. In these circumstances that force higher education systems to change, we analyzed the need for well-planned communication studies for higher education institutions. We present evaluations on the potential impact of corporate communication efforts on the performance and success of higher education institutions, which have a wide stakeholder ecosystem. We determined the advantages that corporate communication provide to higher education management in the dimensions of basic management processes such as decision making, planning, organization, coordination, control, and evaluation.

Keywords: Education, educational administration, higher education, higher education administration, corporate communication.

Yükseköğretim yönetiminde önemli bir fonksiyon olarak kurumsal iletişim

Özet: Bu çalışmada kurumsal iletişimin yükseköğretim kurumları açısından faydalarının ortaya konması amaçlanmaktadır. Bu kapsamda yükseköğretim sistemlerinin mevcut mücadele alanlarına değinilmiş, kurumları değişime zorlayan faktörler literatür ışığında ele alınmıştır. Yükseköğretim kurumları için plan ve program dahilinde yürütülecek iletişim çalışmalarına yükseköğretim sistemlerini değişime zorlayan bu şartlarda ne denli ihtiyaç olduğunun tahlili yapılmaya çalışılmıştır. Kurumsal iletişim çalışmalarının çok geniş paydaş çevrelerine sahip olan yükseköğretim kurumlarının performans ve başarısı üzerinde potansiyel etkisi üzerine değerlendirmelerde bulunulmuştur. Temel yönetim süreçlerinden karar verme, planlama, örgütleme, eşgüdüm, kontrol ve değerlendirme boyutlarıyla kurumsal iletişimin yükseköğretim yönetimine sağladığı avantajlar belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eğitim, eğitim yönetimi, yükseköğretim, yükseköğretim yönetimi, kurumsal iletişim.

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This study was prepared based on the dissertation of the responsible author.

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Introduction

Higher education institutions basically operate in three responsibility areas: education, research and public service (Arslan, 2019, p.4). Higher education institutions shape societies as producers and carriers of knowledge by means of these functions. While these institutions yield academic and intellectual knowledge to increase the qualifications of human resources, they also function as a bridge between labor demands and labor supply. Having an important place in national as well as regional development, higher education institutions determine the welfare level of countries. Therefore, both individual and social expectations from higher education are quite high. Thus, the demand for higher education is increasing every day. Today, while the reasons forcing all organizations to change increase in number and complexity, these demands and expectations of both internal and external stakeholders within the higher education system are changing in relation to world conditions. Globalization, neoliberalism and digitalization shape the current policies, which hegemonize all sectors, including the field of education.

While modern universities were designed as a political product of nation-state ideologies, they started to serve wider masses and became universal since the middle of the 20th century. Offering lifelong learning opportunities for anyone who wishes, these institutions started to adopt a universal model of participation. Since higher education institutions gradually deviated from the nation-state orientation, there was a need for an ontological reinterpretation of these institutions and a revision of their social and civic roles (Kwiek, 2002, p.134). In this context, as higher education is among the sectors shaped under the influence of the neoliberal paradigm, we state that it cannot benefit from the protection and financing of the state as much as before (Keller, 2007, p.231). Higher education institutions have limited opportunities to benefit from state funds. For this reason, they have to take action in order to carry out their activities on a sustainable basis. Higher education systems have to act with a corporate approach, so to speak, in order to survive in this environment.

Another factor that leads to change of dynamics in the field of higher education is the establishment of foundations and private institutions that do not use public funds. The opening of private higher education institutions in many countries can be seen as both the cause and the result of the increasing number of higher education students. There are cases where some private higher education institutions start to attract more students than state institutions. While private initiatives try to get ahead of their competitors in order to attract students, they diversify higher education systems by incorporating students from different socioeconomic and sociodemographic groups (OECD, 2020, p.22). Therefore, the participation of a large number of students in higher education, forces university administrations to develop institutional strategies that take into account students' infrastructure, readiness, various needs, and expectations. Universities are under pressure to formulate and finance processes that are sensitive to stakeholders, especially students, in all academic and administrative activities (McInnis, 1998, pp.29-30; Keller, 2007, s.s249).

On the other hand, information technologies provide affordances that enable scientific authorities to be cognizant of and interact with each other. Universities and academics have transformed into an interconnected transnational

community that is independent of national borders (Kwiek, 2002, p.134). The products and services that emerge through transnational relations developed by higher education institutions and academics have the potential to provide benefits on a global scale rather than just solving local issues. Therefore, it is no longer sufficient for higher education institutions to simply review their civic and social roles within their local communities.

Today's higher education institutions determine their mission, vision and values by adopting standards that will come to the fore in the international arena (McCaffery, 2018, p.500). This fact encourages the circulation of human resources and especially the mobility of qualified minds, and in turn, drives higher education policies to be built on an international basis. This situation paves the way for a competitive environment or another area of struggle for higher education institutions, as they try to attract the most successful students and the most respected academics in the "market". As the sector is becoming increasingly globalized for students and academic staff, higher education institutions are both collaborating and competing. Students and academic staff generally move from south to north, and east to west with the motivation to find better opportunities and infrastructure in this cooperative and competitive environment (OECD, 2020, p.23). In order to employ qualified human resources locally and to prevent brain drain, the source countries implement incentives and investment-oriented policies.

Although the decrease in the ratio of young population to the total population in developed countries seems to be a threat for higher education institutions, they are still attractive with their various programs and training, because the skills and qualifications required by the markets are rapidly changing. Higher education institutions try to prove that they meet this need in the best way with distance education and lifelong learning centers (Atchoarena, 2021, p.312).

These current issues that challenge higher education institutions and their management vary considerably. To summarize, these include society and stakeholders' ever-increasing demands that are becoming more diversified, the development of research and education-training approaches, and changes in methods and tools. Political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal changes also have direct and indirect effects on higher education institutions. In this respect, frequently mentioned concepts such as governance, autonomy, transparency, quality, accountability, internationalization and digitalization have determined the agenda of higher education systems in recent years (Erdoğmuş, 2019, p.6).

Communication in Higher Education Institutions

Higher education institutions have to be in constant interaction with society and different stakeholder groups, since this is necessitated by their basic functions. Their institutional structure and wide organizational charts require a systematic organization of communication activities. Effective communication is important for all education levels in general, and for higher education in particular, in order to ensure efficiency in academic and administrative activities, and to achieve harmony between units and departments.

As globalization, internationalization, attraction of student candidates, competition for funding, reputation and crisis management determine the

agenda of higher education systems, it is obvious that higher education institutions need to give more weight to communication activities. In addition, factors such as growth in the quantitative and qualitative capacities of universities, increased demand for higher education and for transparency and accountability, as well as stakeholder expectations and competition create intense pressure on higher education institutions (Mohamad, Bakar, & Rahman, 2007, p.81-83). In these circumstances, Başkan (2001, p.28) emphasizes that universities have become institutions that are expected to work efficiently like businesses. Therefore, higher education institutions, like organizations in many for-profit sectors, aim to structure their communication processes at an institutional level and to share more positive and functional messages with their stakeholders and environment.

Higher education institutions should carry out an integrated communication process among the units, establish appropriate communication channels, convey clear, unambiguous and understandable messages, and meet the needs and expectations of stakeholders, especially students. For this purpose, the communication mechanism to be developed should assume a function that will ensure positive interaction at national and international levels (Iordache-Platis & Josan, 2009, p.56). Strategic management of communication processes is a feature of organizations operating internationally. While the 21st century offers a complex and dynamic environment, it also requires communication management in all sectors and the training and employment of competitive communication professionals who will work in this field (Jeffrey & Brunton, 2011, p.57). The experts examine future scenarios for higher education systems and put forward suggestions to manage change correctly in the context of possible scenarios. As a management function, corporate communication are expected to contribute more to the institutions in determining and realizing their goals in the coming years, and will also have a pivotal role for updating their values. Some foresee that the theoretical and practical elements of corporate communication will be leveraged more, in order to ensure continuity and consistency in institutional or organizational activities (KID, 2021, p.22). In this respect, we conclude that corporate communication units in higher education should be designed to meet an important need that requires professionalism.

Multimedia tools are becoming more widespread and developing in relation to each other. Adaptation of these tools has become a necessity rather than a choice for organizations that want to maintain their existence. Because in our age, it is not possible to be isolated from technology and the use of digital tools. People are experiencing a period of time in which they are not only information consumers, but also they can convey their feelings and thoughts through these tools, and enter correct or incorrect information into the system (Wanler & Blessinger, 2013, p.4). In order for business sectors to adopt digital and data-based approaches and to adapt to the expectations of the young generation -digital natives-, higher education needs professional teams who can analyze this transformation and audience, and who can organize internal and external communication processes in line with the strategic goals of the institution (KID, 2021, p.7). In this context, understanding the dynamics of new media tools and analyzing the trends of the target audience is on the agenda of higher education institutions as a serious field of study. Being under the responsibility

of corporate communication units, these studies provide considerable data to higher education administrations and advantages in managerial decision-making processes.

Media and communication tools are used in marketing, advertising and public relations endeavors as strategic tools by institutions and organizations (Ün & Türkal, 2018, p.2821). Higher education is perceived to have a "market" feature as a result of competition, and this drives universities to engage in marketing communication efforts in order to attract bright students and academicians. Higher education institutions try to find new communication strategies in order to attract more potential students (Schüller & Chalupský, 2012, p.61).

Given these motives, when we examine the current vision, mission and values of the corporate communication units established by the higher education institutions, the following points come to the fore;

• Establishment of communication channels between institution units, as well as academic and administrative personnel; providing coordination and increasing the effectiveness of communication processes

• Development of strategies to work faster and more effectively,

• Conducting the interactions of the institution with the outside world within a plan and program,

• Learning the demands and expectations of the stakeholder groups, measuring and analyzing their satisfaction levels,

• Improving interaction by acting as a bridge between internal and external stakeholders

• To initiate partnerships and collaborations,

• Working to gain the trust and respect of potential and existing sponsors,

• Carrying out studies to be recognized as a respected institution in the eyes of the public,

• Developing appropriate messages for the target audience in line with the strategic goals of the institution,

• Announcing and disseminating the scientific and academic studies produced within the institution and thus making its national and international contribution visible,

• Ensuring integration with society,

• Developing intangible capital such as corporate culture, corporate identity, brand value, reputation, recognition, and visibility

• Working to become a more preferred institution for academicians and students at both national and international levels,

• Informing stakeholders and the public with fast, transparent and clear official messages in cases of uncertainty and crisis,

• Ensuring that the institutional management is aware of the target audience and its trends,

- Presenting data-based references for strategic decisions in the process of stakeholder management,

- Working to become an institution that differs from competitors with its unique aspects,

- Adapting to the internationalization process, addressing real and legal persons from different languages and cultures with universal messages,

- Being informed about public opinion, following the news and developments that may be of interest to the university and providing information to the administrators

- Contributing to the identification of social responsibility areas and announcement of the projects to be developed

As can be seen, these issues have serious contributions to higher education institutions. We deem appropriate to discuss the benefits of corporate communication for higher education management under an individual title here.

Contributions of Corporate Communication to Higher Education Administration

Management is crucial for the survival of an organization. Management and managers are primarily responsible for the success or failure of an organization. Higher education institutions face management challenges due to changing environmental conditions, fierce global competition and the need to respond to markets around the world. For this reason, educational administrators try to implement practices and innovations to improve their activities and make them sustainable (Sauphayana, 2021, p.163-165). As a part of these efforts, corporate communication significantly contributes to higher education management. By creating a positive image through corporate communication, higher education institutions have the opportunity to create positive relations with their stakeholders and to ultimately develop a good recognition and reputation among their stakeholders (Melewar, Foroudi, Dinnie, & Nguyen, 2018, p.16). However, there are also other contributions of corporate communication to higher education management. When considered in the context of classical management processes, we can say that corporate communication efforts provide important direct or indirect advantages to corporate management. Because the effectiveness of communication processes in universities has a direct impact on the efficiency of the institution (Gizir, 2002, p.220).

When we consider the dimension of decision-making in the management processes, corporate communication of higher education institutions mediates the participation in decision-making, and ensures that the decisions taken are communicated to internal and external stakeholders. Since managers are aware of the wishes, expectations and tendencies of internal and external stakeholders, they can take decisions that will increase satisfaction. In matters related to planning, corporate communication plays a role in informing the stakeholders about the future of the institution in the short, medium and long term. In particular, it is important that institutional units communicate with each other when creating the academic calendar, which enables a more clear

institutional calendar, and harmonious execution of the planned administrative and academic affairs. Planning relieves from the discomfort of uncertainty and helps staff and students to fulfill their daily responsibilities more willfully. In this way, future anxiety and possible negative consequences are eliminated to a certain extent. If the people in the institutions have specific roles and communication channels, they are better prepared for extraordinary situations and times of crisis.

Institutional culture largely shapes where, how and in what way work is done in organizations. As an important theoretical and practical component of corporate communication studies, the conveyance and development of corporate culture gains an important function in the organizational dimension of higher education institution management. We can say that the corporate communication unit provides convenience to higher education administrators, especially in internal stakeholder management by conveying the elements of institutional culture such as behaviors and rituals. This unit provides the means for working and managing with high quality interaction as well as coordination and harmony between the units of higher education institutions with various administrative units, in addition to academic units such as faculties, institutes and application centers. At this point, the corporate communication unit has the responsibility to increase the quality of communication between the units. The methods and applications to be established by the corporate communication unit in order to ensure the rapid flow of information, allow coordination among the complex organizational chart and the large number of staff. In terms of external stakeholders, corporate communication work contributes considerably to the smooth progress of partnerships, activities, and the constant communication with the press, media, sponsors, and non-governmental organizations.

Higher education institutions have complex organizational charts and some units consist of a large number of administrative and academic staff. Corporate communication units can work to bring the system closer to horizontal communication, in order to alleviate the disadvantages created by this structure which allows rather vertical communication between superiors and subordinates. Opting for the management communication approaches suggested by corporate communication professionals will have positive outcomes such as closer interactions between top managers and personnel, and higher awareness by the managers about their personnel. Providing the work instructions, which the staff can regard cold and formal, in a more sincere way will enable them to be motivated and willful in the fulfillment of their responsibilities. One should not ignore the role of corporate communication in the effective and efficient operation of formal and informal communication channels that are developed for managing human resources.

Finally, corporate communication can provide benefits to the higher education management in terms of evaluation processes. As a matter of fact, corporate communication units constantly track the opinions of stakeholder groups. The data emerging from this process provide references for higher education administrators to evaluate their situation. Therefore, the reports and observations of the corporate communication unit makes it possible to develop the strategies needed for stakeholder management.

Current Situation of Corporate Communication Units in Higher Education Institutions

In parallel with the increasing importance of corporate communication activities in universities, it is seen that various researches related to the field are carried out around the world and in Turkey. In the study of Sezgin (2016, pp.438-439), which examines the institutional communication units of higher education institutions, it is stated that the units that regulate communication activities in higher education institutions carry out their activities under different names. While names such as bureau, unit, directorate, department or consultancy and units responsible for corporate communication are included in the organizational chart, it has been observed that these units, which work directly under the rectorate in some universities, carry out their duties under the general secretariat of some universities. It is stated that the elements that are frequently emphasized in the job descriptions of these units consist of activities that can be handled under the public relations studies in general. In another study conducted on the importance of the corporate communication unit in state and private higher education institutions, it is seen that approximately ninety percent of the participants stated that the unit that carries out corporate communication applications is indispensable. Although their rates are close to state universities, it has been found that participants in foundation/private universities attach more importance to corporate communication (Anabal, 2019, p.71).

When the relevant literature is examined, it is noteworthy that the number of studies focusing on the direct institutional communication of higher education institutions is very limited. The breadth of application areas of corporate communication seems to have directed researchers to work in the field by focusing on parts rather than the whole. It is seen that higher education institutions work more in the context of corporate identity, corporate image, corporate reputation and corporate brand. It can be said that higher education institutions are specifically focused on these areas, which we consider (it as) the theory and practical components of corporate communication.

Conclusion and Discussion

Higher education institutions play a major role in human and economic development by improving the human resources of countries. Higher education institutions meet various social expectations, protect and transfer cultural heritage, encourage social welfare, and increase the efficiency of institutions (Chhun, 2021, p.65). However, as the current conditions affect all the sectors, institutions in the field of higher education also take on various challenges. Higher education institutions have to find new ways, adapt to the conditions of the age, and compete with other institutions in order to gain their legitimacy and continue their activities on a sustainable basis (Manov, Mujkić, Husić-Mehmedović, 2020, p.265). It is not possible for higher education administrations to overcome these difficulties if they are isolated from society and higher education stakeholders. As institutions at the center of interactions, higher education institutions should organize their communication processes within a certain plan and program, and make the most of corporate communication efforts.

Corporate communication refers to the execution of a dynamic process based on mutual interaction rather than a unilateral communication activity. The quality of the interactions with various stakeholder groups is a predictor of the respectability of higher education institutions (Gökler and Onay, 2020, p.311). In this context, one should not ignore the benefits of corporate communication endeavors to higher education management. Compared to the last 20-30 years, university management requires more professionalism today. (Gabrialla, 2011, p.1). Corporate communication units currently make a significant contribution to higher education management, and they will likely continue to do so in terms of the changes that are expected to take place in the field of higher education in the coming years. We can say that increasing the material and human resource capacities of corporate communication units in higher education institutions will provide serious benefits to institutions in the short and long term, and will considerably contribute to the achievement of their vision, mission and strategic goals.

According to the widespread opinion in the literature, corporate communication should be considered as a management function. In this respect, it is important to conduct academic studies on the corporate communication units in the context of education management in general and the management of educational institutions in particular, as these units are becoming more common day by day in educational institutions. Considering the lack of studies by educational researchers on this subject, the field would benefit from studies that can meet the theoretical and practical needs on the subject.

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