Supporting Higher Education Marketing with Results of Graduate Career Track System

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Abstract: Marketing, a supportive process embedded in a network of interrelationships, can support the goals of the organization. Managing the organizational marketing requires that the relevant facts should be collected and their effects and resource needs controlled. Important aims of quality management are to evaluate process characteristics and to use the data for process development. In our research we present the assessment and improvement processes of the graduate carrier track system (GCTS) by connecting marketing activities in a conscious way.
In practice, we used for our statements the results of GTCS which was carried out in recent years.

Keywords: higher education, marketing, goal setting, development, graduate carrier track system

1   Introduction

We have carried out conscious quality development in our institution to maintain the values of earlier decades. Our institution is ISO 9001 certified, which provided the opportunity and the background for the developments. Today our institution operates a TQM-based management system adapted to the education environment. The basis of quality development is a multi-cycle assessment system. The internal surveys have provided us with information for several years. Besides that, our institution won an application which allowed us develop a new career track system (CTS) for graduates. [1]

The measurements are implemented at different points of the education lifecycle to receive proper feedback. The results of the different surveys are meaningful also on their own, but their relationships also convey useful information. The measurement and the acknowledgement through feedback of constant changes in student needs can result in considerable success. The surveys are implemented at

different points of the four-cycle evaluation model, differing primarily in the perspective of the participants.

The first element of the hierarchical examination system, and an important output of student satisfaction and marketing efficiency, is to understand student's ideas about the PR processes. Besides their satisfaction, it is worth asking students' opinion about the importance of certain elements. Similarly to a satisfaction scale, importance can be demonstrated on an importance scale. [4]
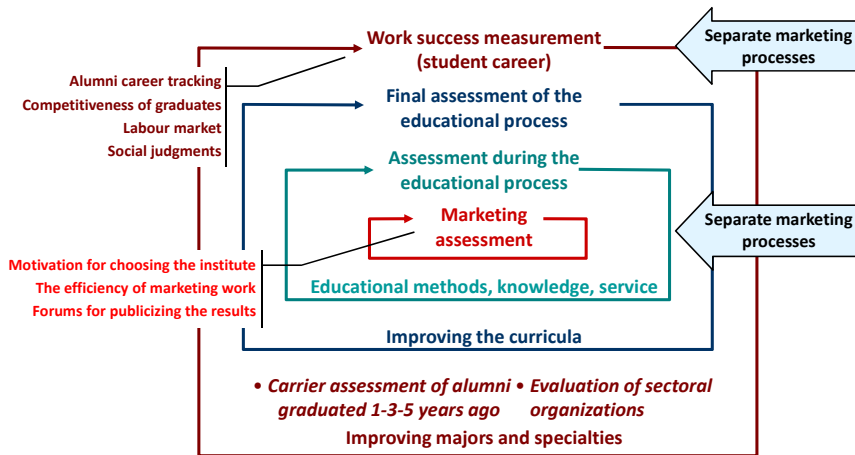
Figure 1

The place of marketing assessments and GCTS in the four-cycle assessment model

It is worth building marketing components into the student lifecycle. The ideas and labour market status of graduates, however, should be surveyed in a separate process. Graduates can be supported on the basis of the results, improving their labour market success. In our institution, we compare the knowledge of our graduates to that of their competitors in the profession. Our surveys show their strengths, which convinces them that their educational institution deserved their trust. Their weaknesses, on the other hand, provide us with information, on the basis of which we offer further specialization courses for the alumni and keep contact with them. The marketing of this can be planned on the basis of a graduate career track system (GCTS). [4]

2   Quality Planning of the Content of Marketing Processes

A practical methodology can be developed as part of policy deployment for a more conscious goal setting. The basis of that is to search for the goals of certain supportive processes in a hierarchical system. The organization can reach its actual strategic aims through activities defined on certain process levels. The management can raise efficiency by arranging the elements in a cause-and-effect system, even though these elements are sometimes antagonistic, and/or against the organizational interests.
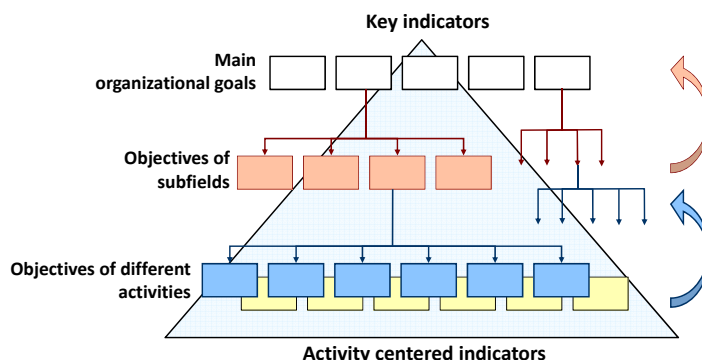

Figure 2
Policy deployment

Marketing activities can be implemented as independent processes, but other activities, seemingly irrelevant to marketing, might also have significant marketing impact. Managing the organizational marketing requires that the relevant facts should be collected and their effects and resource needs controlled.

The different activities of different periods can be mapped, and by weighting them we can measure to what extend they serve the organizational values. We can provide an order of values by weighting each value to be conveyed the marketing. The individual activities will not reflect the same order. Some elements will gain more emphasis, and some will turn out to be of less importance. It would be a problem if the marketing activities of an institute, boasting the scientific approach, could only reflect the enthusiastic student community. If this happens, we should eliminate the problem with supplementary actions. [2]
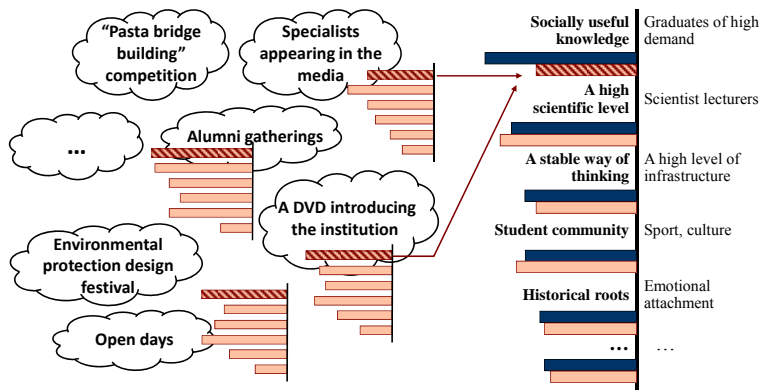
Figure 3

Institutional goals on the map of marketing activities

2 Using gcts data in marketing processes

We used a questionnaire for the survey. Ensuring the representative sample of respondents constituted a problem – we continuously work on solving this issue, based on our first experiences. The questions collect data in a system for the above mentioned aims. It was important for the evaluation that a large-scale survey about graduates' status (obtaining their degrees in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010) has been carried out on a national level in Hungary.

More data will be available from these surveys in the forthcoming years. At the end of this year's survey, we will have enough data for a thorough evaluation. We plan the first supportive analysis for this time as well. Besides analysing the fact, we would give practical support in self-positioning and in defining what types of specialization courses would be necessary in the future. For this, a proper marketing plan should be made.

2.1 Response rates and representativeness

Students with active student status participated in our student motivation survey. The survey ranged over every university year and every major. Students received a message via the Neptun system about the survey, asking them to fill in an online questionnaire. The survey was implemented in May 2011. Students received a message before closing down the survey.

We received 2756 evaluable answers This means a response rate of 28 per cent (total number of students is 9849).
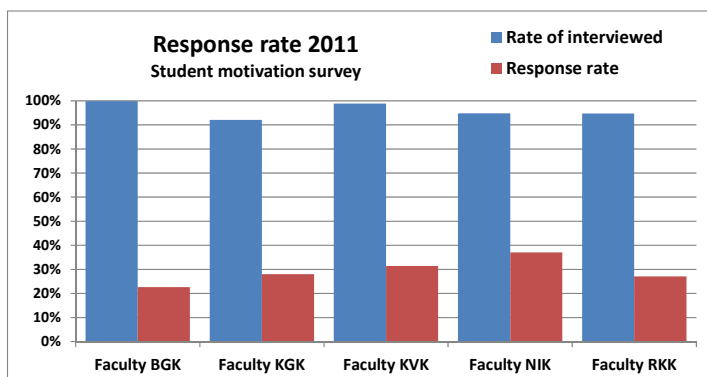
Figure 4

Response rate in BA/BSc and MA/MSc education (active students)

Considering the specific indices and the distribution, the survey can be considered representative. The results allow us to draw conclusions mainly about full time education. The rate of students and graduates in different groups, which were segmented by our factors, do not significantly differ from the rate of responses received from the different segments.

We collected data about graduates years before making the present survey: we asked them to participate in a career track system when they were taking their final exams. As part of the survey, we asked graduates in an email to fill in an online questionnaire. Response rate was lower then expected, presumable because graduates were busy finding their place in the labour market. We received 513 evaluable answers (graduated in 2008 and 10). This means a response rate of 14,5 per cent (total number of students is 2613). Response rate can be considered representative only in case of some majors.
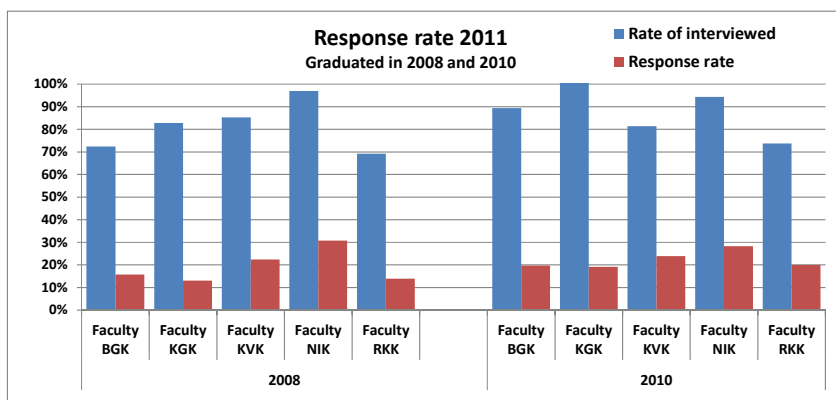

Figure 5

Response rate in BA/BSc and MA/MSc education (graduates)

Based on the results, our main objective throughout the survey development is to increase response rate. For this we announce a competition between the faculties, and expect that the competitive attitude which characterized the graduates when they were still active students will constitute a strong motivation force. The winner of the competition will receive support for organizing alumni events, and we can use quality feedback to improve our results.

2.2 Evaluating plans about further education

As part of the student motivation survey, we also asked participants about their plans about further education.
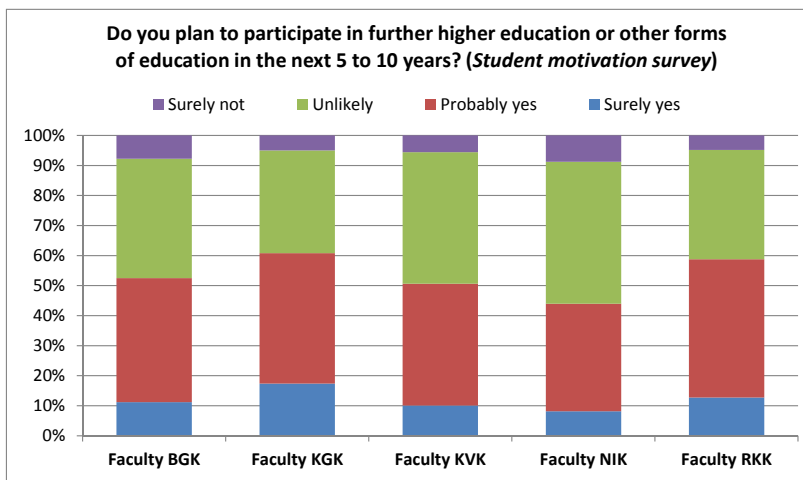

Figure 6
Participating in further education (Student motivation survey 2011)

The most common idea for those who expressed their wish to continue education was to enter MSc courses, company trainings and specialty education. Those planning to participate in the doctoral programs were considerably high in both groups.
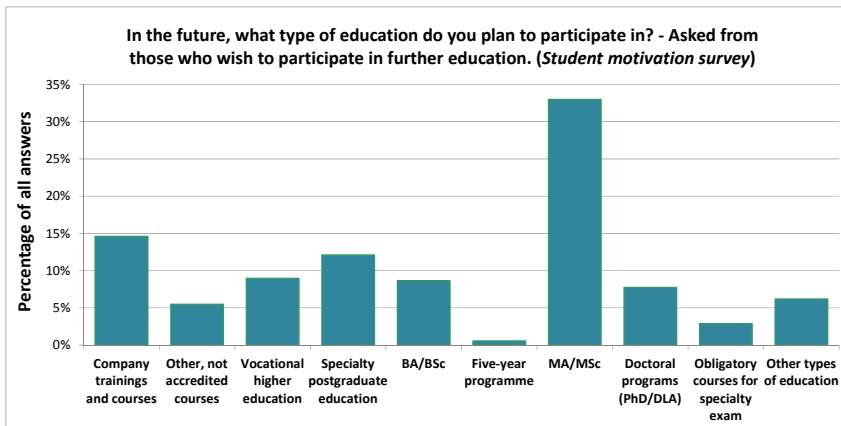
In the future, what type of education do you plan to participate in? - Asked from those who wish to participate in further education. (*Student motivation survey*)

Figure 7

Active students' plans about their further education (2011)

Needs concerning adult education

We also asked graduates about different fields of their profession. The responses reflect two important aspects: the answers reflect both the needs for further education and the actual level of knowledge.

ABILITIES, SKILLS - needs and results

— Required abilities, skills for labor market
— Performance evaluation by graduates (20008, 2010)
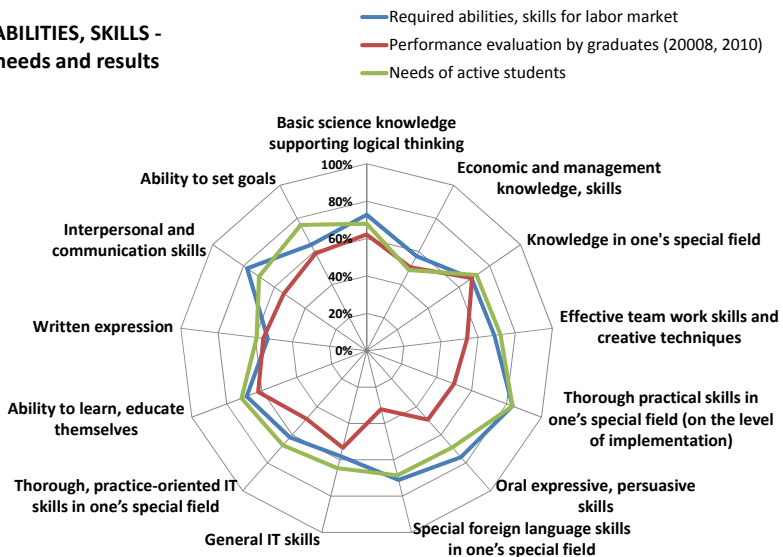— Needs of active students

Figure 8

First results of the GCT system showing what knowledge types graduates consider important (2011)

The results serve as an important input for the institution's adult education development plans. The needs concerning the length of the courses are useful in the development the content and form of education. Based on the results, the most important are: the standardization of education forms, the development of the modular system and the acknowledgement of personal needs.
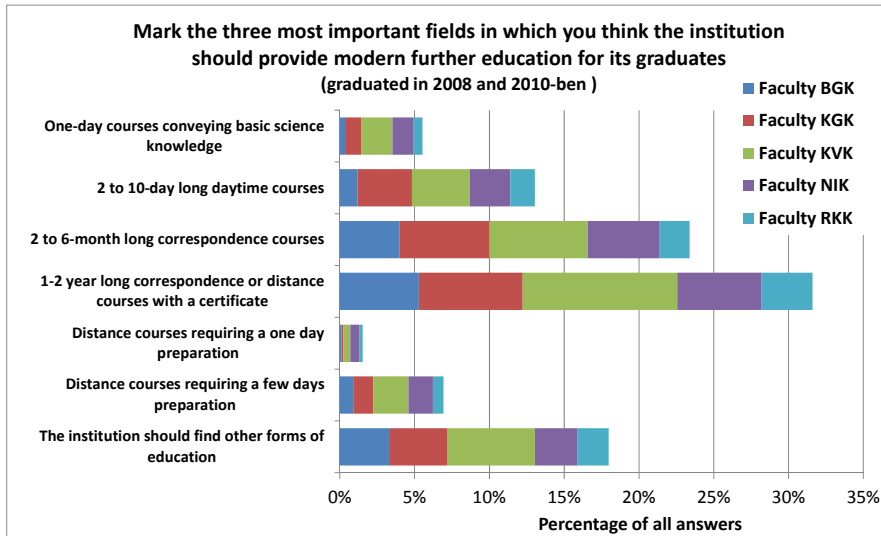

Figure 9

Needs for further education II (Graduate career track 2011)

We expect to provide improved results on the following fields in the future:
- improve marketing efficiency in accordance with the strategic aims of the university
- improve the results of the GCTS by connecting processes and marketing activities in a conscious way
- we would like to improve respondent rate and the efficiency of GCTS processes.

Conclusions

The analysis of career track data allows a critical view of the system, and serves as the basis for improvement. In the next phases of our research we will make corrections both in the contents and the format of the surveys in order to support more efficient institutional developments. We wish to improve response rate by using powerful motivating tools. The first phase of data collection and analysis was successful, but there are several points where further improvements are necessary. We started using the data in several ways, but there are some areas where we need to collect more information. We can conclude, however, that the surveys represent new opportunities in regulating the higher education system.

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