

**POTENTIALS FOR INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN MANAGERIAL
SUBJECTS AT THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

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The challenges towards higher education in the last decade very clearly outline:

- The necessity of formation of practical and applied knowledge, skills and competences in the students, directed at increasing their professional suitability and their more successful inclusion in the labor market.
- The obligation of the educational institutions to constantly increase the quality of their educational product, which is supposed to be offered in correspondence to the business and educational necessities.
- The calling of the educational institutions is to form and develop in students the so called “soft skills”, including the skill for complex and integrated application in practice of knowledge, acquired by the learning of different educational subjects.

Namely those are the arguments that support the actuality and the objective of the proposed topic of the present article – to synthesize an approach for integrated education in managerial subjects, which allows and supports the formation of practical and applied knowledge and skills in the students and develops their creative thinking.

Object of research is the content range of two managerial subjects – “Strategic Management” and “Outsourcing”, in the part that allows integration of knowledge for development of learners` skills for practical application of scientific achievements from the scope of the two subjects into the practice of business organizations.

Subject of research is the opportunity for integrated educational approach, including a joint scientific and research task, which unites applied tools from both of the above clarified disciplines.

Key words: strategic management, outsourcing, integrated education, scientific and research tasks, scientific and research projects, educational institution, strategic process, strategic planning.

In the Strategy for development of the higher education it is clearly defined, that one of the priority areas for its future development is it to be “social and individual welfare”, contributing to the overall development of personality and society and preparing the students for their professional realization ...” [2, p. 6]

In connection to the purposes of the present paper of importance are as well the problematic fields, introduces in the same document, and namely:

- Relatively unsatisfactory research and development activity during studying, which is often provoked by non-actual educational content and syllabuses, included in the curricula of students.
- Lagging behind of teaching methods, which is often accompanied by demotivation of the academic staff.

More and more tangible is the deficit between the acquired during education knowledge, skills and competences and the necessities and expectations of employers – public and business organizations. The overcoming of the

commented deficit arguments the challenges towards higher education, as well, which has to cope also with:

- Inconsistency between demand and supply of fitting workers, as well as the structural deficits of employees (lack of workers for definite professions).
- The dissonances in the relation “educational content – formed competences – practical preparation – potential for successful professional realization”.

The trend for involvement of students into scientific and research projects (SRP) and scientific and research tasks (SRT) increases in actuality, as well as the trend for integrating the results of scientific and research activity into the educational process and for generating scientific knowledge during education.

For the purposes of the present paper of importance are the following objectives, set in the Strategy: [2, p. 32, 38]

- Incentivizing the inclusion of students in scientific and research, project and consultancy teams.
- Adapting of syllabuses according to the specifics of the individual profile and educational necessities of trainees.
- Improving the educational forms and evaluation methods with the purpose of establishing creative and flexible educational environment.

Those objectives are fully harmonizing with the objectives, formulated by the Council of Europe in its conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (‘ET 2020’), and namely: improving the quality and efficiency of education and training and enhancing innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.[3, p. 8, 9]

Focus in the Strategy for development of higher education is set on the indispensability for development of personalities with creative thinking, who are also able to successful realization in a field, chosen by them. This presupposes a new quality of the educational process, in which are to be incorporated actively appropriate teaching methods and approaches, including integrated interdisciplinary education, scientific and research activity, invitation of experts from the practice and conduction of trainings, devoted to forming the so called “soft skills”.

Another basic document that justifies the challenges and necessity of revising the educational content and approaches is the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Bulgaria [4, p. 12], according to which the trainee is expected to:

- be able to apply diverse methods and tools in order to solve complicated tasks, including to be able to demonstrate logical and innovative thinking, creative approach and self-dependence by the solvation of problems;
- has managerial skills for complicated professional activities, including management of teams and resources, decision taking, flexibility and adaptability under the conditions of dynamic environment and information deficit;
- demonstrate analytical and critical thinking in the professional area and in interdisciplinary context, including knows and applies into practice new strategic approaches in working environment.

As a good practice in the context of the outlined strategical objectives, priorities and challenges towards increasing the quality of higher education can be pointed out and discussed the integrated educational approach for teaching of the basic managerial subjects “Strategic management” and “Outsourcing”, which

incorporates scientific and research activity of students, as well. Those subjects are part of the fundamentals block of courses in the curriculum of the “Business Administration and Management” Bachelor’s programme in the professional field “Administration and Management”. Description of the approach is proposed in Table 1.

Table 1. Methodological reference framework of the approach

| № | Basic settings | Description |
|----------|---|---|
| 1 | Necessary conditions for implementing the approach: | Identification of appropriate topics/areas for delivery of integrated education, incl. number of topics; coordination the timetable for conduction of lectures and classes in the integrated subjects in the context of formation of the necessary knowledge and skills in students for the implementation of the integrated assignment; working out of an exemplary assignment and methodological guidelines for its implementation. |
| 2 | Areas of integration of educational content: | Contents of the subject “Strategic management”: strategic management, strategic planning, strategies, strategic analyses. Contents of the subject “Outsourcing”: essence of the outsourcing, types of outsourcing, advantages, disadvantages, risks, outsourcing rollout plan, evaluation of appropriate for outsourcing activities. |
| 3 | Topic of the assignment: | Applied aspects of outsourcing in the strategic management of business organizations |
| 4 | Purpose of the assignment: | As a result from their education on the integrated subjects the students to develop an integrated scientific and research project, directed to identification of opportunities for application of outsourcing in order to increase the resultfulness of a chosen strategy of a concrete business organization. |
| 5 | Limitations for the implementation of the approach: | Work in teams of two students or individually; work during the semester as part of out-of-class workload in both of the integrated disciplines; public defense of the developed projects; the development of the project is part of the ongoing evaluation on both of the subjects and the grade that each student will receive participates in the formation |

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| | | of the final (complex) evaluation on each of the disciplines; common (technical) and methodological guidelines (information about: the technical composition of the project, the scientific and applied tools that the students will have to use in order to develop the project, as well as how to work with them; criteria for evaluation of the developed projects; empirically formed structure of the assignment). |
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Source: developed by the authors

The results from the application of the integrated educational approach can be summarized as follows:

- 85% of the total numbers of students enrolled in the courses have actively participated in the teaching process.
- 55% of the develop projects are result of individual work of students and 40% are result of teamwork.

Reported (according to feedback from the students) is an increased interest on the implementation of the integrated assignment. The generated performance results of the implemented assignments are measurable with the expectations of the mentoring lecturers. 70% of the results are "Excellent", 20% - „Very good“ and 10 % are „Good“. No other results were recorded. Overall satisfaction with the integration of topics and assignments on the educational subjects, as well as increased motivation of students for interdisciplinary education are registered.

For the multiplication and unification of the presented integrated approach are necessary the following basic starting conditions:

- availability of at least one common or close thematic area between one or more educational subjects, which gives an additional knowledge and in which to be realized the integration of the education;
- the educational subjects have to be taught in a common educational period (semester), as far as by consecutive but not parallel education

supplementing and/or upgrading of the acquired knowledge can be measures as a result, but the integration between the subjects will not be applicable;

- in the syllabuses of the educational subjects have to be clearly outlined the potential areas for integration.

Potential risks, difficulties and barriers towards the application of integrated education in managerial subjects:

- The freedom of choice to attend or not lectures and seminars can lead to worsened results because of the potentially reduced audience activity of students. This problem could arise when there is unequal engagement of student to the subjects, included in the integrated educational process.
- Of importance are the teamwork skills of the mentoring lecturers, who are realizing the integrated education, including the methodological guidance of students – each of them should be teaching and mentoring in its own problematic area (educational subject), but they should act unitedly what concerns the integrated part.
- Insufficient level of students` skills of for complex thinking and integration of knowledge. The integrated education approach requires analytical and critical thinking capability, skills for analysis, synthesis and complex processing of information.
- Need for harmonization of educational content in the following levels: on level “syllabuses” it is necessary to coordinate the educational content in the appropriate for integration topics, to reorder the topics where applicable, to develop integrated topic and/or assignments for the students; on the level “curriculum” it is necessary to reorder educational subjects (where applicable), with the purpose to ensure the defined

above basic setting for integrated education and namely that the integrated subjects are taught at one and the same time (semester).

Instead of Conclusion:

Potential benefits of the implementation of an integrated approach for education in managerial subjects:

- Formation of “soft skills” in students on every stage of their education life cycle, including communication, digital and teamwork skills (depending on the nature of the interdisciplinary problem/topic and/or assignment).
- Acquiring of transferable knowledge, skills and competences, not only in the concrete area of each of the taught subjects, but also in their mutual interdependence and complexity.
- Acquiring of practical and applied knowledge as a result of the integrated education and/or of the implementation of the integrated assignment.
- Enriching of the methodological instruments for education and training.
- Development of the teamwork skills of the engaged mentoring lecturers.
- Increasing of motivation and engagement of learners to the educational process.

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