

# The prospective potential of quality assurance in Latin America

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# **LATIN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: TRENDS, CHARACTERISTICS**



# Main trends in Latin American higher education

- Continuing enrolment growth, essentially dealing with traditionally excluded students (lower income, different/less cultural capital, adults) → different needs and interests
- Diversification of higher education (different institutional types, teaching/learning modes, student characteristics) normally not taken into account in QA processes
- Significant presence of private sector
- Strong influence of the market, both on public and institutional policies (regulation, funding, governance, management)



# Special features of Latin America higher education

- Strong definition of institutional autonomy, with little or no regulation by governments. No public capacity to define mid- or long term policies and priorities.
- Segregated national higher education spaces, where different institutional types do not talk to each other (public / private, university / non university, research / teaching, traditional / innovative)

→ Impossible to think about a Latin American Higher Education Space without national higher education systems



# **A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF LATIN AMERICAN QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES**



## Development of national QA mechanisms:

- Early emergence (1990s)
- In a wide range of modes:
  - Ownership (government, public, private, institutional)
  - Purposes (quality control, accountability, improvement)
  - Focus (institutions, programs, both)
  - Character (compulsory, voluntary)
  - Degree of consolidation

## Establishment of a regional network: RIACES

→ In general, highly successful (legitimized, accepted, validated)

## Perceived impact of QA on HEI:

General consensus about its positive impact

### At the global (national) level:

- It is perceived as an effective regulatory mechanism, which sometimes goes beyond its mandate
- It has made explicit the expectations about quality in HE
- However, some complaints: lack of recognition of diversity (the same standards apply to very different HEI); increased bureaucratization of procedures, which tend to focus on formal aspects, rather than on significant aspects related to quality

## At the level of institutional management:

- Changes in organizational structure to accommodate QA requirements
- Development of information systems, and increased use of information for decision making
- Changes in management practices:
  - Managerialism, as a means to enhance the capacity of HEI to adapt to the demands of the market, with a managerial approach
  - Quality management, focused on achieving institutional purposes taking into account both external requirements and the principles and priorities emerging from its mission statement



## At the teaching and learning process:

- Growing recognition of the central role of teaching and learning, albeit not yet translated in management policies
- Improved follow up of student progression and of graduates
- Improvement of the definition of ELO, curricular updating, improved teaching practices, more and better resources



**ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED  
– ONLY IN LATIN AMERICA?**



- QA is a victim of its own success: need to revise QA to make it relevant for a second generation of QA
  - How to focus both on quality control and quality improvement, without endangering either
  - Need to strengthen institutional quality management processes
  - Need to develop institutional research capacities
- Governments tend to see QA as a regulatory mechanism, with emphasis on control
  - Policies that clearly separate quality control from quality improvement
  - Risk of using QA instead of consistent national policies or guidelines

- Diversity tends to be seen as differences of quality, not the emergence of valid and valuable modes of HE
  - What is HE and where are its boundaries? What must be required from a university? Un-asked question – the elephant in the room!
  - Rhetoric that values diversity, policies that promote convergence
- Need for a more professionalized approach to governance and management in HE
  - Managerialism (following a market centered, corporate model)
  - Quality management (focusing on institutional misión and effective response to requirements of significant environment)



# **HOW TO PROMOTE QUALITY MANAGEMENT**



# The challenge of quality

Quality can be defined with a double dimension:

**Internal consistency:** Consideration of institutional principles and priorities to identify its relevant environment and define its social commitments

→ institutional identity

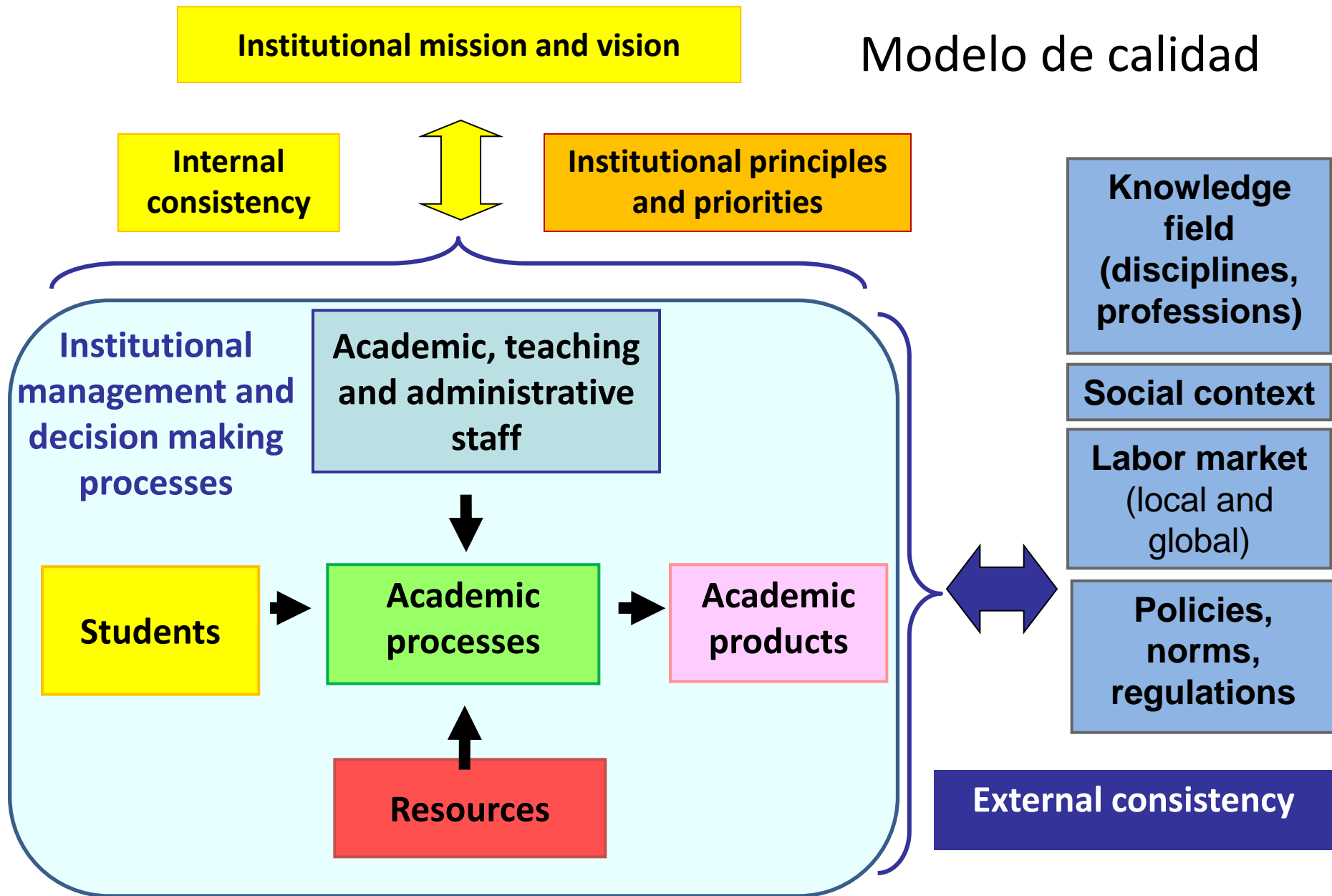
**External consistency:** Consideration of the requirements or expectations of the relevant environment

→ clear and relevant purposes

**Quality management: Alignment of institutional components to achieve purposes**



# Modelo de calidad



# Quality management: requirements at the institutional level

- Strong links between institutional mission and quality, in a context of social relevance
- Clear definition of institutional purposes, easily interpreted at the different levels of the HEI
- Mechanisms for monitoring institutional performance at all levels
- Assessment of resources, the effectiveness of actions, the relevance of results, the institutional context
- Strong links between evaluation and planning
- Follow up of improvement plans



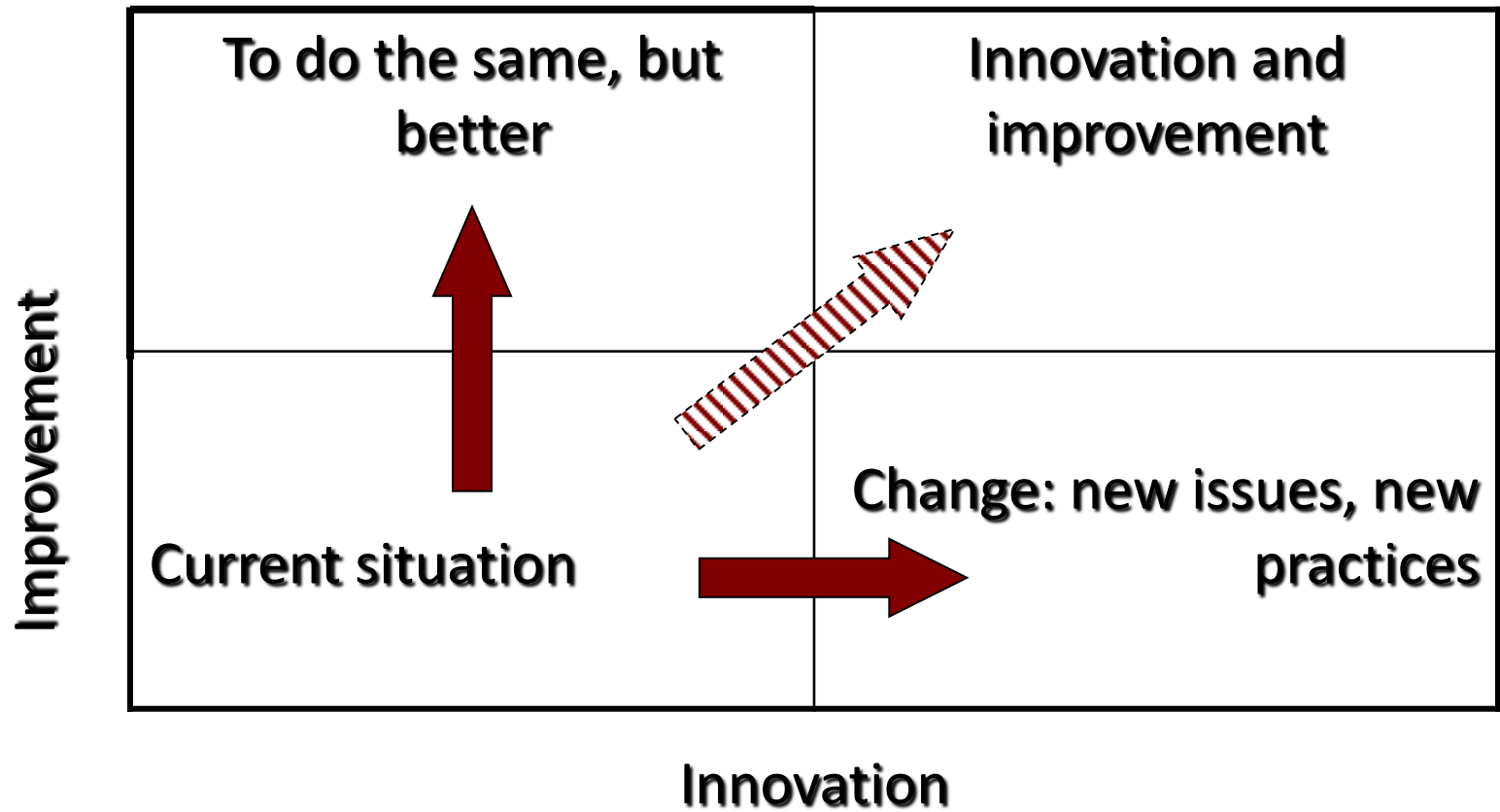
# Quality management: challenges for QA agencies

- Need to revise standards and procedures. Take into consideration the need for diversity and the weight of academic drift
- Crisis of peer review: how to define who is an actual peer?
- Professionalization of QA, not only through practice (decision making councils, technical staff; training of external reviewers)
- Need to manage the tension between control of threshold standards and the promotion of continuing improvement



- Prepare effectively to take into account life long learning:
  - Recognition of prior learning, qualifications, credentials
  - Recognition of different teaching modes (part time students, modules, labels)
  - Emphasis on appropriate pedagogical practices (adjustment to student characteristics, use of ITC, redefinition of learning outcomes)
- Widen the concept of qualifications
  - Diverse learning itineraries and modes (TNE, online courses, OERs, MOOCs, among others)
  - Progress from substantial equivalence to substantive difference in recognition processes
- Capacity to recognize and promote innovation





## Final comments

- Higher education is not independent from the social context in which it operates: it is affected by it, and it is also an agent for change
- Quality is the primary responsibility of HEI – but quality management needs to be promoted, valued, assessed, by QA processes
- To do something right at a given momento is no guarantee of continuing to do it right in the future → it is necessary to evaluate, to plan, to learn – and to un-learn!

