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Academics coping with quality: a study of attitudes towards quality assurance in Georgian higher education

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Academics coping with quality: a study of attitudes towards quality assurance in Georgian higher education

Mariam Shurgaia

The purpose of this study is to identify those individual and context-specific variables that serve as predictors of academics' attitudes towards the change associated with the implementation of internal quality assurance (IQA) systems in Georgian universities. Such variables as the academics' perceptions of the quality of change management and the perceived outcomes of changes introduced by IQA, along with the individual characteristics of academics are measured as possible predictors of academics' attitudes towards change. A questionnaire containing items with Likert-type answer scales was distributed to academic staff (n=210) of three public and two private universities located in the capital of Georgia. As the findings suggest, in general, academics have positive attitudes towards current and upcoming changes offered by IQA systems. The perceived favourability of outcomes as well as the perceived high involvement in change processes play significant roles in defining positive attitudes. On the other hand, negative attitudes are influenced by the perceived low involvement in change processes and low self-efficacy. As a whole, these findings have practical implications for university leadership as to how to manage changes introduced by IQA systems in a manner that ensures the commitment of academic staff.

Keywords: quality assurance, Georgia, universities, management of change, academic staff.

Introduction

The demand for quality assurance (QA) and accountability measures in higher education has become a central concern in European countries and has presented significant challenges for institutions. In Georgia, similarly to other European countries, QA systems became an integral part of the higher education system after the adoption of the new Law on Higher Education in 2004 and joining Bologna process in 2005, which created legal and political demands for individual universities to establish internal quality assurance (IQA) systems. The call to dedicate institutional efforts to develop effective and robust IQA systems voiced in the Berlin Communique (2003), was

supported and prioritised by the Georgian Government. It was advocated that Georgian universities should build an effective IQA system that would be guided by the common set of European standards for IQA framed under the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance document (Darakhvelidze, 2012).

QA reforms have been the part of wider transformation of the Post-Soviet higher education system that was especially radical after the so called 'Rose Revolution' in 2003 when the new, pro-Western government launched system-wide reforms to transform the country into a liberal democracy and integrate with Europe. One of the vivid steps to reach these objectives was to join the Bologna process in 2005 (Jibladze, 2012). With the influence and support of the Bologna process and other supranational actors, the national government launched reforms of higher education emphasising its role in social and economic development. The new Law of Georgia on Higher Education (2005) created a legal bases for these reforms. The law made public universities more autonomous and more accountable to society. The funding model of higher education institutions changed substantially. As the basis of the new law, the three-cycle degree system, ECTS and the Diploma Supplement were introduced in universities (Higher Education in Georgia, 2012). As a part of the trend towards deregulation, the need to establish regulatory mechanisms was stressed. As a result, the National Examination Centre, the National Accreditation Centre, which later became the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), and the Centre for Information and Recognition were established (Higher Education in Georgia, 2012). In this context, HEIs were required to adjust to the new national policy instruments and go through the organisational change as a result of the implementation of IQA systems to meet the requirements of the National Accreditation Centre.

While HEIs as a whole have been affected by the changes initiated in the domain of QA, the day-to day activities of individual lecturers are also influenced in many ways (Westerheijden, Hulpiau, and Waeytens, 2007). Academics who are faced with changes in their working lives introduced by IQA may respond with different degrees of acceptance, support or resistance. It has been argued (Newton, 2000) that whether QA systems lead to improvement of educational processes or to formal compliance and ritualistic behaviours largely depends on the responses of academics. As Newton states, if academics have a pivotal role in improving the quality of teaching and learning, more

attention needs to be paid to how they adjust to QA arrangements, which will lead to a better understanding of how to manage change processes to get more support.

While a number of studies on how university staff view QA arrangements have been conducted, a comprehensive study on how academics deal with the organizational changes after the establishment of IQA systems are absent in the Georgian context. The purpose of the study is to investigate whether academics' attitudes are more positive or negative towards current and upcoming organisational changes related to the introduction of IQA systems and their requirements such as ECTS, self-assessment forms, student feedback forms, syllabi, etc. The study answers the following research questions:

First key question: which factors influence academics' attitudes towards changes following the introduction of IQA systems in Georgian universities?

1. Are the academics' attitudes towards changes following the implementation of IQA systems more positive or negative?
2. Do academics perceive the impact of IQA on teaching and learning processes as more positive or negative?
3. Are there any connections between the perceived impact of IQA on teaching and learning processes and academics' attitudes?
4. Do academics perceive the level of such contextual factors as changes related to information, change-related self-efficacy and involvement in change processes as high or low?
5. Are there any connections between the contextual factors (change related information, change related self-efficacy and involvement in change processes) and academics' attitudes?
6. Are there any connections between academics' individual characteristics such as gender, experience in working with quality, programme supervision, academic affiliation and disciplinary affiliation?
7. Are there any connections between institutional arrangements (type of institution) and academics' attitudes?

Second key question: How should the IQA system be developed so that it underpins the expectations of academic staff?

Conceptual Considerations

In order to meet the objectives of the study, the focus will be on the individual level (the micro-level perspective) grounded in organizational change literature. This approach implies that organizational change is only possible if staff members are ready to change their mind-sets (Bouckenooghe, 2009). Human factors have been commonly identified as a contributor to the difficulties or even failure of policy implementation (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Clegg and Walsh, 2004 as cited in Bouckenooghe, 2009). Many studies on organizational change management argue that any organizational change will be unsuccessful without the participation and commitment of individuals (Hallgrimsson, 2008).

Having underlined that the successful implementation of policies heavily depends on how staff members view the change process, a conceptual framework provided by Elizur and Guttman (1976) of attitudes towards change will be utilised for the purpose of the study. The concepts are derived from organizational psychology literature, covering cognitive, affective or instrumental behavioural modality. Cognitive responses refer to the opinions about the advantages and disadvantages, usefulness and necessity of change; affective reactions to change refer to feelings of being linked to, satisfied with or anxious about change (Piderit, 2000); and behavioural responses are the actions that are taken or are intended to be taken in the future for or against proposed change (Elizur and Guttman, 1976). This conceptual framework allows the identification of individual responses towards change according to two different poles: positive and negative attitudes. Using this three-dimensional perspective of attitudes towards change to study how academics deal with new quality arrangements will take into account key processes of human functions: the processes by which individuals feel, think and act (Smollan, 2006).

The review of the organisational change literature, as well as higher education studies, demonstrate that there are many variables that are likely to affect staff members' attitudes towards change in their working environment. As some studies reveal, one variable is *change related information* which helps staff members make sense of the change process, reduces uncertainty and shapes positive beliefs about the process (Wanberg and Banas, 2000; Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois and Callan, 2004; Bouckenooghe, 2009; McKay, Kuntz, and Naswall, 2013);

The second significant contextual variable identified in the literature is staff members' *involvement* in the change process. Many studies confirm that employees' participation in the change process has a significant and positive effect on positive attitudes towards change (Wanberg and Banas, 2000; Kezar and Eckel, 2002; Holt, Armenakis, Field and Harris 2007).

Thirdly, change related *self-efficacy* is argued to influence attitudes towards change. Employees who doubt their ability to respond to the demands of a specific organizational change are likely to focus attention on their own feelings of incompetence, which will be accompanied by feelings of psychological distress, and a failure to deal with the situation (Bandura, 1977). In contrast, employees who have high levels of change-related efficacy are unlikely to be distressed by feelings of inadequacy and, for this reason, are expected to persist in their efforts to manage the organizational change process (Wanberg and Banas, 2000; Jimmieson, Terry and Callan, 2004).

As the literature suggests, besides these three context-specific variables which are related to organizational practices during the implementation process (Fedor, Caldwell, & Herold, 2006), the perceived outcomes of change can also influence employees' attitudes towards change. Ajzen (1991), for instance, explains that attitudes develop from the beliefs individuals have about objects or events. Individuals form positive attitudes towards objects or events that have largely desirable consequences, and unfavourable attitudes towards objects that mostly have undesirable consequences. Applied to a change context, it has been suggested that favourable or positive perceptions of change outcomes are more likely to increase positive attitudes towards change compared to negative evaluations of change outcomes (Fedor et al. 2006; Bouckenooghe, 2009).

The key question in the presented study is how do academics perceive the impact of QA systems on educational processes: whether they contribute to the development of teaching and learning processes or to standardization, control and/or burdensome management procedures (Cardoso et al., 2013)? Academics' views on QA system is a subject of controversy and strong ambivalence (Kleijnen, Dolmans, Willems and van Hout, 2011). On one hand, the available evidence (Papadimitriou, Ursin, Westerheijden

and Valimaa, 2008; Cartwright, 2007; Newton, 2002) suggests that academics complain of increased bureaucracy and increased workload as a consequence of the implementation of QA arrangements. Newton (2002; 2000) reveals that academics see the main outcome of IQA systems to be ritualistic game-playing which only feeds 'the beast of bureaucracy'. Other studies (Papadimitriou et al., 2008; Harvey, 2002) also suggest that, as perceived by academics, QA mechanisms create a considerable workload and excessive bureaucratic demands which involve overwhelming volumes of paperwork. Some other findings (Bell and Taylor, 2005; Laughton, 2003 as cited in Cardoso et al., 2013, p.98) demonstrate that QA is perceived by academics as trying to grasp the academic world through the language and ideology of managerialism, which threatens academics' privileged positions through new forms of regulations used in the business world.

On the other hand, there is some positive feedback from academics on QA practices as a means to stimulate educational practices, trigger discussions and reflections about change. As some evidences suggest, QA, according to academics, enables the development of teaching and learning quality and thus benefits students, as well as academic work (Huusko and Ursin, 2010; Kleijnen et al., 2011).

As the review of the relevant literature demonstrates, both the change process - associated with the quality of information regarding change, the involvement of academic staff members in the decision making processes and change-relate self-efficacy - together with the perceived outcomes of change represent two dimensions that are important in shaping academics' attitudes towards changes as introduced by IQA and towards IQA systems in general. When we take into consideration change processes and the perceived impact of change, along with the individual characteristics of academics and the institutional arrangement they belong to (as portrayed in Figure 1), we get a fairly complex picture of the factors influencing academics' positive and negative attitudes.

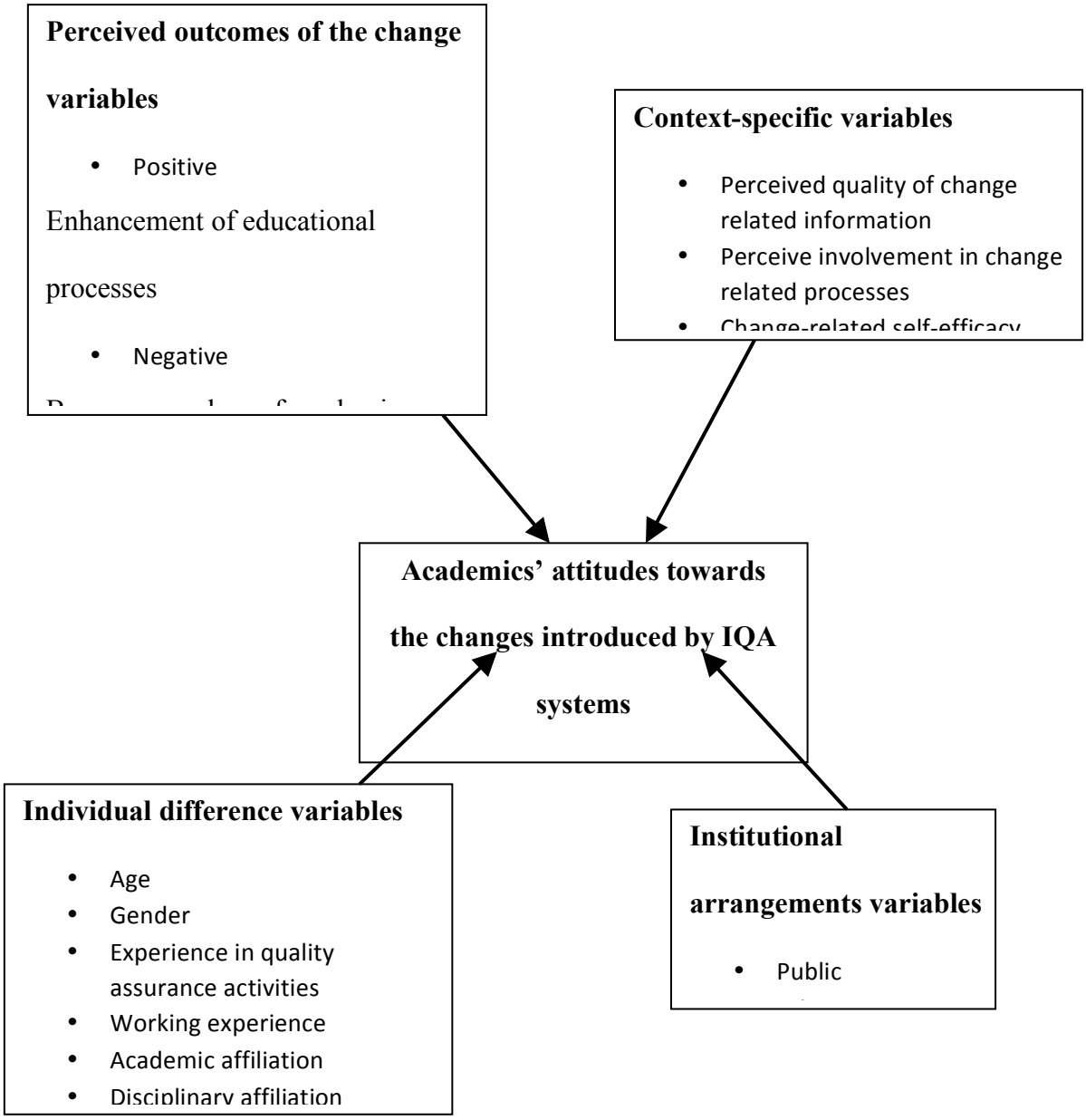

Figure 1. Conceptual model of predictors of Academics' attitudes towards the changes

Methodology

The study is based on a survey conducted in three public and two private Georgian universities selected based on a convenient sampling strategy. The main criterion for selecting universities was that they are accredited and therefore, have established IQA systems. Secondly, all selected universities are comprehensive higher education institutions and offer multi-profile educational programmes. In terms of academic staff within the selected universities, the snowball sampling method was utilized. An attempt to make the sample as heterogeneous as possible was made by including academic staff

with different disciplinary affiliations. A total of 210 academics participated in the study.

a) Instrument

In order to answer the research questions, an instrument consisting of forty one questions was developed based on the results of the literature review and previously established questionnaires, which were adjusted to reflect the context of Georgian universities. All closed items were formulated as statements and participants were asked to indicate their agreement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = fully disagree, 2 = disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = fully agree, 3 = neutral). There were also options 'I don't know' and 'I refuse to answer'.

The content validity of the overall instrument was determined by seven experts: six academic staff and one head of the IQA office. Principal components analysis with Varimax Rotation method was employed to assess the construct validity of the sub-scales.

The attitudes towards change were measured using a scale developed by Vakola et al., (2005), based on a theoretical model of attitudes towards change, including emotional, cognitive and behavioural components. General statements about the attitudes towards change from the original questionnaire was transformed into concrete statements about attitudes towards change followed by the introduction of IQA in Georgian universities, including syllabi, credit distribution, self-assessment forms etc. Factor analyses revealed two sub-scales with eigenvalues greater than one: 'negative attitudes' consisting of 8 items (α= 0.84) and 'positive attitudes' consisting 6 items (α= 0.82). The two-component solution explained 50.5 per cent of the total variance (see Appendix A, table A1).

The second part of the questionnaire includes seventeen items about the effects of IQA on teaching and learning processes. Some items of the questionnaire are based on those developed by Kleijnen et al. (2011), measuring faculty's perception towards the effects of IQA, and were adjusted to the given context of the study. Factor analysis using the same procedure as for the attitudes towards change questionnaire resulted in two sub-scales with eigenvalues greater than one: 'perceived positive effects of IQA' consisting

of ten items (α = 0.91) and 'perceived negative effects of IQA' consisting five items (α = 0.69). The two-component solution explained 52.1 per cent of the total variance. Two items could not clearly load on either of the two sub-scales; therefore they were eliminated from the final analyses (see Appendix A, Table A2).

The third part of the questionnaire focuses on context-related variables such as perceived change-related information, perceived involvement in change processes and change-related self-efficacy, which are identified as likely to influence attitudes towards change. Variables were measured via eight items adopted from Wanberg and Banas' study (2000) measuring predictors to openness to change. Factor analyses resulted in three sub-scales, with eigenvalues greater than one, explaining 71.5 per cent of the total variance: Change related information (α= 0.67); involvement in change processes (α= 0.84) and change related self-efficacy (one item) (see Appendix A, Table A3).

The questionnaire also includes two open-ended questions focusing on academics' opinions on the biggest problems that IQA systems might have and suggestions for improvement.

The following statistical analyses were conducted: descriptive statistics including the mean scores per item and per scale, standard deviation per item and percentage distribution; the independent-sample t-test (to determine if two different groups of academics have different perceptions); one way analyses of variances (ANOVA) (to determine whether there are any differences between the means of more than two groups of academics); the Pearson product moment correlation (to measure whether there are statistically significant relationships between attitudes towards change and independent variables) and linear regression analyses (to assess the value of independent variables as predictors of attitudes towards change). Content-analysis method was used to analyse qualitative data derived from the open-ended questions and to discover patterns and/or themes.

Results

a) Basic Sample Characteristics

Overall, 67 per cent of respondents were female and 33 per cent male, with a minimum age of 25 and maximum of 47 (SD = 12.6). As a whole, 37.1 per cent of the respondents

were assistant professors, 37.6 per cent were associate professors and 23.9 per cent were full professors. Among them, 33 per cent indicated that they were supervisors of one or more academic programme. In terms of participants' working experience in their selected universities, 54.3 per cent of academics indicated they had 9 or less years of working experience, which means they started working in their given university after the IQA system was introduced in 2005. With regards to disciplinary affiliations, 17 per cent of the participants belong to humanities, 16 per cent to social and political sciences, 16 per cent to business and economy, 13 per cent to law and 4 per cent to health and medical sciences. The number of academics who work in private universities was considerably small (33 per cent) compared to academics coming from public universities (66 per cent).

b) Academics' Attitudes towards Change

The first research question addresses whether academics' attitudes towards changes following the implementation of IQA systems are more positive or negative. As a whole, the mean score for the sub-scale of negative attitudes was 2.39 and the mean score for the sub-scale of positive attitudes was 3.7, indicating that in general, academic staff have more positive attitudes towards changes introduced by IQA systems within universities.

The percentage of respondents who revealed negative attitudes ranges from 14 per cent to 21 per cent. While 21 per cent of academics indicated that they formally accomplish tasks introduced by IQA, 19 per cent of academics feel emotionally tired due to these changes. 19 per cent of academics also feel sceptical about the work of IQA and its outcomes. Additionally, there was a considerably high percentage of neutral answers for all three components of attitudes, especially regarding emotional and behavioural aspects. Neutral responses are in positive correlation with negative attitudes ($r = .39, p < .001$) and in negative correlation with positive attitudes ($r = -.38, p < .001$) suggesting that academics who provided neutral answers tend to be more negative than positive.

c) Perceived Impact of IQA

The second question investigates whether academics perceive the effects of changes implemented by IQA systems on teaching and learning processes as negative or

positive. As a whole, the mean score of the 'perceived positive impact' sub-scale is 3.46 and the mean score of the 'perceived negative impact' sub-scale is 2.48. This implies that, overall, academics are more positive about the effects of IQA.

d) Relationships between Attitudes towards Change and Perceived Impact of IQA

In order to answer the third research question regarding the relationship between attitudes towards change and the perceived impact of IQA, a Pearson's correlation test was run. As the results suggest, there is a moderate positive correlation between positive attitudes and a perceived positive impact of IQA which is statistically significant (r = .34, p < .001). Also, a strong negative correlation was found between negative attitudes and a perceived positive impact of IQA (r = -.52, p < .004). The perceived negative impact of IQA and negative attitudes towards change subscale did not have any statistically significant correlation (See Appendix B1).

Linear regression analyses were used to test if a perceived positive impact of IQA predicts academics' positive attitudes towards change. The results demonstrate that a perceived positive impact of IQA explains 14.2 per cent of the variance (R square =.142 F (1, 74) =12.256, p < .005). It was found that a perceived positive impact of IQA predicts positive attitudes (β = .37, p<.001).

Perception on level of involvement, change related information and self-efficacy

With regards to the fourth research question on how academics evaluate change related contextual factors, the data suggests the following: In terms of timeliness and adequacy of information regarding IQA activities and its current and upcoming changes, academics tend to be more or less positive (*mean*=3.22; *median*=4; *SD*=1). Most of the answers on items focusing on involvement in change process tend to be neutral, which results *mean* of 2.94 and *median* of 3 for 'involvement' sub-scale, indicating that the respondents tend to perceive that they are not sufficiently involved in change processes introduced by IQA offices. As for the change-related self-efficacy, academics demonstrate high-level confidence that they are able to cope with changes introduced by IQA (*mean*=3.93; *median*=4; *SD*=.80).

e) Relationships between Attitudes towards Change and Contextual Variables

Since there were only two items focusing on change-related information, four on involvement in change processes and one on self-efficacy, a correlation analyses per item and attitudes towards change scale was run. Results demonstrate a high level of correlation of items from all three sub-scales with both positive and negative attitudes towards change. A higher degree of involvement in change-related processes is related to more positive attitudes to change and correlates negatively with the negative attitudes scale. Change-related information is in significant positive correlation with positive attitudes and relates negatively with negative attitudes. As for change-related self-efficacy, academics demonstrating a high level of self-efficacy also have positive attitudes, while negative attitudes were in negative correlation with high self-efficacy and positively correlated with a low self-efficacy level (See Appendix B2).

Linear regression analyses reveal that among the three context-specific variables, a perceived high level of involvement in change related processes could predict positive attitudes of academics, explaining 15.9 per cent of the variances: *(R^2* = 0.159 *F* (1, 94) = 17.757, *p* < .0005; β = 0.39, p <.001).

Even though the correlation analyses demonstrated that a high level of change-related information and high self-efficacy correlate with positive attitudes, those two variables did not have a statistically significant predictive ability of positive attitudes. Positive attitude as an independent variable did not demonstrate a predictive ability of those two variables either.

Perceived low level of involvement in change related processes can significantly predict negative attitudes of academics, explaining 22.5 per cent of the variances: *(R^2* = 0.225; *F* (1, 94) = 27.239, *p* < .005; *β* = - 0.47, *p* <.001)

Regression analyses reveal that a low level of change-related self-efficacy can also predict negative attitudes and explains 9.9 per cent of the variances *(R^2* = 0.99; *F* (1, 94) = 10.278, *p* < .0005; *β* = - 0.31, *p* <.003).

f) Relationships between Attitudes towards Change, Individual Characteristics and Institutional Arrangements

The sixth and seventh research questions investigate whether there are any relationships between the individual characteristics of academics and their institutional arrangements, and attitudes towards change. The results demonstrate that there were no statistically significant differences between any of these independent variables and attitudes towards change.

g) Academics' Suggestions for the Further Improvement of IQA

The final research question investigated how the IQA system should be developed so that it underpins the expectations of academic staff. Fifty two respondents provided suggestions for the improvement of IQA services. The majority of the staff members (27 per cent) emphasised the importance of more involvement of academic staff in the activities of IQA systems. For instance, one of the respondents stated:

'It is essential that IQA offices involve academic staff in the discussion of the upcoming projects. Academic staff need to be asked opinions about already implemented projects at least via email.'

The recommendation of one of the respondents also refers to the ambiguity of the purposes of IQA systems, suggesting that 'argumentation and explanation for the need and meaning of ongoing and upcoming projects offered by IQA systems needs to be provided, so that academic staff are more open to IQA activities'.

The second most frequent suggestion provided by 19 per cent of the respondents referred to simplifying forms of self-assessment, syllabi and other documents required by IQA offices.

Some of the respondents also suggested that provision of training, both for academic staff and representatives of IQA offices, would be helpful.

Thirteen per cent of the respondents were very radical, suggesting that the IQA systems should be completely abolished.

In total, 97 respondents answered the open-ended question related to the biggest problem that IQA might have. Five major problems were identified:

1. Formality and bureaucracy was identified by 22 per cent of the respondents to be the major problem of IQA services. For instance, one respondent wrote:

'There is a lack of identifying real problems in the teaching and learning process. Instead, the focus is on analysing formal aspects of syllabi or other documents, which makes IQA system's work too formal and bureaucratic'.

Four per cent of academics think that this formality of IQA leads to ignorance of the real essence of the teaching and learning process. Some of the respondents explain that the formality of IQA activities is a result of a lack of clear argumentation as to why changes introduced by IQA are beneficial and essential.

2. Lack of timely information about upcoming changes was a major concern for 14 per cent of the respondents.

3. The lack of involvement of academic staff in the activities of IQA processes was thought to be an issue according to 15 per cent of the respondents.

4. Finally, 10 per cent of academics indicated that IQA offices have a lack of qualified staff.

Conclusions and discussion

The main objective of this study was to determine which context-specific and individual variables shape academics' positive and negative attitudes towards change following the introduction of IQA systems in Georgian universities. The most important finding of the study was that in general academics have positive attitudes towards current and upcoming changes offered by IQA systems. Respondents also hold positive perceptions on the effect of IQA systems on educational processes. The perceived favourability of the outcome as well as the perceived high involvement in change processes play significant roles in defining positive attitudes. On the other hand, negative attitudes were influenced by the perceived low involvement in change processes and low self-efficacy. Contrary to what was expected, change-related information, individual characteristics and type of institution in which academics work, were not significant predictors of their attitudes towards change.

Before the interpretations of the major findings are presented, the primary limitations of the study should be noted. First, a larger sample with more diversity, including academic staff working in universities outside of the capital, would have benefited the study results and would ensure wider generalizability. Furthermore, ideally, the number

of participants would have been more evenly distributed across gender, private/public universities and disciplinary affiliation. The inclusion of more academic staff per discipline would have enabled better investigation into the influence of the discipline on attitudes towards IQA systems. Furthermore, internal consistency of the sub-scale focusing on change-related information (α= 0.67) and perceived negative effects of IQA (α = 0.69) are slightly below the generally accepted alpha level of .70 (Nunnally, 1978). These lower internal consistencies may have attenuated true relationships between the constructs and attitudes towards change. The result of this study and their analyses should be interpreted in the light of the study context and its limitations.

First of all, it can be concluded from this study that in general all three components of academics' attitudes towards changes (emotional, behavioural and cognitive) are positive. Most of the respondents perceive the work of IQA to be useful for the development of their institutions. They also express readiness to support changes related to its work. On the one hand, the study results reveal that a lower agreement was found among academics that IQA helps their professional development. This suggests that there should be more of a focus on training and staff development activities. On the other hand, the majority of academics perceive IQA procedures as a tool for the enhancement of educational programmes and curricula enabling them to identify defects in educational processes, rather than as distraction from teaching and learning and unnecessary bureaucracy. This result seem to be promising compared to the other studies (Papadimitriou et al., 2008; Cartwright, 2007; Newton, 2002; 2000), which mainly reveal that academics perceive the effects of IQA on educational processes and on their working environment negatively.

The overall positive evaluation of the outcomes might be explained by the argument that the transformation of the Georgian higher education system in general, and the implementation of QA arrangements as a part of this wider reform, is aimed at developing a democratic society as a counter-action towards the Post-soviet inertia. Academics should be the ones who are fully aware that the quality of the higher education system, which is of paramount importance for the European family and is reflected in the Bologna process, is an integral part of the country's integration with Europe. Furthermore, it can also be argued that in nine years since the establishment of IQA systems in universities, IQA services managed to develop inward-looking practices

that contribute to the overall enhancement of teaching and learning. This can explain the overall positive evaluation of the results of IQA by academic staff.

In terms of control and focusing on external accountability, high agreement was found that IQA controls academics and closely follows the external requirements of the National Accreditation Centre. However, statistical analyses could not clearly reveal whether academics consider control and accountability as a positive or negative effect of IQA. While some evidence (Watty, 2006) suggests that academics are more negative towards IQA when it leads to control and external accountability as opposed to improvement, the findings of this study do not clearly demonstrate this duality. In general, respondents of this study hold positive perceptions towards the effects of IQA, even though they also agree that it controls the work of academic staff and closely follows external requirements. As Harvey and Newton (2007) argue, accountability, on one hand, and improvement, on the other hand, are not "two ends of a single continuum" (p. 232). There can be a context where compliance may lead to improvement, while in others it may not (Kleijnen, 2012). Considering the recent history of post-soviet HE systems, control of educational processes by means of national QA arrangements might be perceived as a positive thing in the Georgian HE context, since it is aimed at improving the dubious quality of educational programmes and eliminating widespread corruption and chaos in universities by means of establishing accountability measures. This argument can also be strengthened by the result of the study revealing that the majority of the respondents do not agree that IQA systems threaten academic autonomy, even though they indicate that IQA systems control the work of academics.

It should be noted however that even though there is a low percentage of academics who clearly show negative attitudes towards change, a considerable number of respondents tend to demonstrate neutral responses. As Coetsee (1999) explains in his model of commitment to resistance continuum, neutral attitudes, or indifference, may be a first level of resistance to change, or a transition phase between resistance and acceptance. The study results show that neutral responses correlate with negative attitudes, confirming Coetsee's suggestion. Thus, even though the majority of staff members expressed commitment to changes planned by IQA, it is worth paying attention that some of the staff members, even though they do not clearly demonstrate

negative attitudes, potentially can resist the work of IQA. They can, for instance, fulfil the quality procedures in a purely formal manner. However, in general, the study results demonstrate that while resistance to quality exits, it is not the dominant voice of the academic community, confirming the studies by Kleijnen et al. (2011) and Huusko and Ursin (2010) that suggest that academics have positive perceptions on QA procedures, viewing them first and foremost as an opportunity for improvement.

The perceived favourability of the outcomes of IQA systems significantly determines the overall positive attitudes towards the changes associated with IQA practices, confirming the findings of other studies (Bouckenooghe, 2009; Fedor et al., 2006; Ajzen 1991), which suggests that positive perceptions of the impact of change increase commitment to change.

Another significant finding of the study is that the major concern for academics seems to be the lack of involvement in change related processes. For university management this has significant implication given the finding about the strong positive relationship between academics' attitudes towards IQA systems and their perceived level of involvement in decision making processes. As the results reveal, academics' perceived level of involvement in decisions of IQA services is an important variable in shaping both positive and negative attitudes towards change. This result is not surprising considering strong empirical evidence in the change management literature, as well as in higher education studies, that participatory management can play a significant role in the successful implementation of change (Kezar and Eckel, 2002). Many studies (Mckay et al., 2013; Holt et al., 2007; Wanberg and Banas, 2000) confirm that giving voice to staff members in decision making processes increases the acceptance of change. The results of the presented study also reveal that the perceived lack of involvement in change processes might result in staff members' resistance to change. Therefore, in order to lessen academics' resistance towards IQA systems, more involvement of academics' in decision making processes should be ensured. The study by Kleijnen (2012) reveals that academics tend to prefer to work in organisations that emphasise such values as collaboration, a healthy work environment where all staff members have a common stake in the university's future. This also refers to such IQA procedures where teachers are allowed to formulate and discuss issues related to quality *themselves*.

The results of this study also reveal that change related self-efficacy may serve as a predictor of negative attitudes of academics towards IQA. These results confirm the findings of other studies which suggest that staff members will not perform well when they are not confident in their abilities to cope with change (Jimmieson et al., 2004; Cunningham et al., 2002; Wanberg and Banas, 2000), and that they might resist change when they perceive change situations to exceed their capabilities (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, even though high-self efficacy did not seem to serve as a predictor of positive attitudes in the presented study, still, a positive correlation between those two variables could be identified. As Bandura (1997) argues, change-related self-efficacy depends on a specific situation and may be increased through various interventions to enhance staff members' belief they can deal with change related situations. In the context of the presented study, as it was suggested elsewhere, a lack of adequate training and support of academic staff was identified as an important issue. Staff development activities and trainings might strengthen academics' confidence in their abilities to deal with the complex requirements of IQA and, in turn, improve their attitudes.

Contrary to the findings of other studies (McKay et al., 2013; Bouckenooghe, 2009), the results of this research suggest that the perceived level of change-related information did not play a significant role in defining academics' attitudes towards change. One explanation for this finding can be that the reliability of the sub-scale was slightly low, which may have weakened the true relationship between those two variable. Therefore, future research should develop more a reliable sub-scale to measure change-related information, which might give different results. Even though change-related information as a variable did not seem to be sufficient to define attitudes towards change in this study, the correlation between those variables still could be identified: academics who are satisfied with change-related information also demonstrate positive attitudes, and academics who are dissatisfied with the change-related information tend to have negative attitudes. Thus, another possible explanation for the insignificant predictive value of perceived change-related information of attitudes towards change could be that change-related information has an indirect effect on positive and negative attitudes, which might be mediated through such variables as perceived involvement in change-related processes. It might be that only possessing information about the

decisions made by IQA management may not be sufficient to shape positive attitudes, since academic staff needs to be involved in the decision-making processes *themselves*.

In response to the second key research question related to suggestions from academics on how to improve IQA systems, qualitative data suggest the following: The major concern of academics is the lack of involvement in decision-making activities, formal acceptance of IQA procedures as a result of unclear communication as to why the IQA system is beneficial, a lack of information about upcoming changes, and the lack of qualification of the staff members. Therefore, first and foremost academics suggest the establishment of clear lines of communication, where they are asked their opinions about the planned IQA changes at least via email. When academics perceive the outcomes of IQA systems as beneficial as a result of clear communication, they are more likely to demonstrate positive behaviours, thoughts and feelings in favour of activities offered by IQA systems. Furthermore, according to the respondents, academics should be encouraged about the benefits of IQA systems and related activities through clear information about the purposes and values of IQA systems and their outcomes. A second course of action suggested by academics refers to simplifying the forms of syllabi, self-assessment, etc. Constructive discussions between academic staff and representatives of IQA offices on why these forms are needed on the one hand, and how academics would prefer this process to be administered on the other hand, would be helpful to find solutions. Thirdly, the need for trainings related to IQA work is underlined in suggestions as well.

Despite its limitations, the study is a significant preliminary step towards assessing the role of various variables in shaping Georgian academics' emotions, cognitions and behaviours with regards to IQA arrangements in Georgian universities. As a whole, these findings have practical implications for university leadership on how to manage changes relating to IQA systems in a manner that ensures the commitment of academic staff. In trying to maximize academics' openness to IQA systems, university management should not neglect such dimensions as academics' participation in decision-making processes, trainings and staff development activities, which would build the confidence in academics that they can handle change, and a clear communication strategy to improve academics' perception about the favourability of the impact of IQA systems.

The main contribution of the study lies at the individual level (the micro-level perspective), grounded in organizational change literature and organisational psychology, which is used to better understand the processes of change in HEIs. Findings from this study stress the importance of such psychological factors as individuals' attitudes towards the implementation of QA systems. They suggest that future research in organisational change in universities would benefit from exploring elements of the change process (e.g. perceived quality of involvement in change processes, perceived quality of change-related information etc.) that contribute to defining attitudes towards change. Therefore, further research on quality reform, or any other change process within the university, can benefit from the conceptual model of predictors of academics' attitudes towards change developed for this study based on the review of literature on change management and higher education studies.

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Appendix A: Factor Analyses

Summary of Factor Analyses Results for Attitudes towards Change

Items	Factor loadings	
	Negative attitudes	Positive attitudes
Qu.19.The changes followed by the implementation of IQA created uncomfortable environment for my academic activities	**.723**	-.162
Qu.20.These changes are unpleasant for me	**.661**	-.297
Qu.23.I am sceptical about the work of IQA and its outcomes	**.613**	-.371
Qu.24.Due to these changes, I am not satisfied with my job anymore	**.604**	-.204
Qu.28.These changes make me emotionally tired	**.518**	-.239
Qu.29.These changes bring extra problems to me	**.608**	-.336
Qu.31.I formally accomplish tasks introduced by IQA	**.523**	-.232
Qu.32.I often demonstrate my negative attitudes about IQA (e.g.at faculty council, academic council, with colleagues)	**.518**	-.139
Qu.25.I am trying to encourage my colleagues to adopt changes introduced by IQA	-.134	**.646**
Qu.26.I support the implementation of changes offered by IQA	-.399	**.798**
Qu.27.I am happy with these changes	-.186	**.609**
Qu.30.I will work longer hours to successfully implement changes introduced by IQA	-.467	**.502**
Qu.21.These changes help the development of the university	-.361	**.457**
Qu.22.I am willing this change to be successful	-.323	**.236**

Table A1. (Note. Major loadings for each item are bolded)

Summary of Factor Analyses Results for Contextual Factors

Summary of Factor Analyses Results for Perceived Impact of IQA

Items	Factor loadings: Perceived Positive Impact	Factor loadings: Perceived Negative Impact
Qu.2. IQA contributes to improvement of the university's teaching programmes	**.818**	-.034
Qu.4. IQA stimulates the academic staff to community to know and reflect on the institutions' quality	**.819**	-.004
Qu.5. IQA empowers students by taking their opinions into consideration	**.652**	-.122
Qu.7. IQA stimulates identification of defects in teaching and learning process	**.644**	-.200
Qu.10. IQA leads to more involvement of academics in the enhancement of quality of programmes	**.784**	.016
Qu.14. IQA enables development of educational programmes and curricula	**.734**	.052
Qu.11. IQA stimulates staff members' professional development	**.752**	.330
Qu.15. IQA helps academics to administer their everyday academic life	**.777**	.246
Qu.17. IQA encourages new forms of teamwork and collaboration	**.701**	.392
Qu.18. IQA stimulates innovation process	**.682**	.379
Qu.3 IQA makes it impossible for academic staff to make their personal contribution to the quality of education	-.498	**.183**
Qu.6. IQA contributes to waste of time and extra bureaucracy	-.626	**.418**
Qu.8. IQA leads to division of academics' attention from teaching and learning	-.576	**.410**
Qu.13. IQA contributes to the increased workload and administrative burden	.024	**.746**
Qu.16. IQA threatens academic autonomy	-.443	**.484**

Table A2. (Note: Major loadings for each item are bolded)

	Factor loadings		
	Involvement in change process	Change related information	change related self-efficacy
Qu.37. I have some control over the changes that have been proposed by IQA	**.789**	.223	.181
Qu.38. If I wanted to, I could have input into the decisions being made by IQA	**.764**	.206	-.090
Qu.36. I have been able to participate in the implementation of the changes that have been proposed and that are occurring	**.759**	.337	-.022
Qu.35. I have information about the changes that IQA plans in the future	**.729**	.287	.026
Qu.40.The information I receive about the changes introduced by IQA is timely	.232	**.826**	-.257
Qu.34. The information I have receive about changes introduced by IQA adequately answers my questions	.468	**.691**	.062
Qu.33. I get nervous that I am not able to handle changes introduced by IQA	.215	-.239	**.836**

Table A3. (Note: Major loadings for each item are bolded)

Appendix B: Correlations

Correlation of Attitudes towards Change with Context Specific Variables

	Impact-Positive	Impact-Negative
Attitudes-Negative	-.52**	.23
Attitudes-Positive	.34**	-.18

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table B1

Correlation of Attitudes towards Change with Items on Context Specific Variables

	Change related self-efficacy	Adequacy of information	Timelines of Information	Involvement in change process	Involvement in change process	Involvement in change process	Involvement in change process
Attitude-negative	.28**	-.35**	-.23**	-.25**	-.45**	-.29**	-.45**
Attitude-positive	.03	.36**	20*	.34**	.27**	.29**	.34**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed).

Table B2