ULBS

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SUMMARY

PhD TITLE THESIS

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION – A PREMISE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND EFFICACY IN THE VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTORY ELEMENTS

Communication, an indispensable process of maintaining human relationships, is essential for any human community, regardless of its characteristics and its size. Organizational communication is a process of messages exchange which manage the alignment of points of view and actions in order to harmonize the individual and collective goals knowledge, the methods and the means used to accomplish them, supporting the acquisition of the necessary skills, and motivate the groups.

Starting from the way how technology development has remodeled the exchange of information between people, regardless of geographic dispersion and speeding up the transfer of information, organizational communication has gained an extra dimension that requires a new approach of the use of the concept.

The European Commission launched the "Higher Education in Europe" strategy and its main objective is to improve how more than 4000 European universities operate in order to provide graduates with the opportunity of acquiring the skills and knowledge needed for a the labor market . The European Commission's report highlights the fact that many families have to give up higher education programs or even drop out of study programs, this facts increasing the dropout rate at this level. In the same time, it is intended to provide the necessary support for the member states and also for the educational systems, in order to give everyone the access to free and high-quality education programs, regardless the student's financial situation.

The economic crisis - the enforcement of some austerity measures and budget cuts - demographic developments, rapid technological changes and the demand for new skills represent some serious challenges, urging the adoption of widespread reforms in higher education systems in Europe, must not negatively affect the quality of education. [1]

Universities from the European space need to have a complete vision and the actions taken to promote the valorisation of the material resources and the human resources that they have in order to provide higher education programs of high quality. Another recommendation aims at the diversification of the study programs that meet the quality criteria, aligned with the requirements of the labor market.

In this context, the general objective of the thesis is to identify and analyze the principles of an efficient management and aspects of organizational communication, in order to outline an organizational model as a virtual university, an efficient management model in the virtual university and effective communication within virtual university.

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[1] Project regarding education (2013/2041(INI)), European Parlament, The Comision for culture and education, Raporteure: Katarína Neveďalová, 28.05.2013;
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/cult/pr/934/934949/934949ro.pdf, 20.08.2013

The thesis - *Organizational communication – a premise for organizational efficiency and efficiency in the virtual university* - proposes a new approach to the organization of university-type institutions, namely the virtual university, academic management, organizational communication in the virtual university and new development opportunities of study programs adapted to the needs of students and to the specific context of the Romanian educational system.

Through its structure, the thesis uses a series of notions regarding the main aspects of the concepts of organizational communication and management in order to establish a model of virtual university organization structure, an efficient management and communication model within the virtual university

Analyzing the literature, we have seen an evolution of the higher education system with direct repercussions on academic organizations, which prove to adopt effective management principles and manage to adapt to the needs and requirements of its beneficiaries and the labor market, integrating the student as a resource in the internal university of the traditional university and not only as a consumer / customer beneficiary of educational products or services.

Using Open University - UK Regional Center, edX on-line course provider and COURSERA as representative cases, traditional universities can make the transition from traditional education to new ways of delivering information through the use of multimedia platforms and new technologies.

Building a coherent system with an efficient management system within a virtual university, the student it is not considered to be just a client, or an absent user or beneficiary of a platform, but an important and integrated element of the organization, who actively participate in the development and improvement of managerial activities, communication within the organization and, last but not least, didactic activities. Thus, the virtual university manages to establish the type of social relationship with the student, and to fulfill his role and responsibilities in relation with the student.

Even if during our demarche we have observed that the universities adopted qualitative principles and not quantitative, a certain openness regarding the use of new means of communication both at the level of management and also in the teaching / learning activity and the development of study programs, based solely on the use of multimedia platforms, some respondents considered not to be a viable option, for both academic management and traditional teachers and also for a particular group of students.

In this context, the research of the thesis, it is focused on the analysis of the communication between management and teachers, students - students, students - management and the expectations of the teachers regarding the on - line study programs and the use of a virtual environment. Research focuses on attitudes towards on-line learning and the use of a virtual learning environment (VLE)

The most important contribution of the thesis is represented by the applicative part allowing the establishment of a virtual university model and the use of the collected data for

formulating some suggestions for organizational communication and the university management improvement.

2. THE THESIS' STRUCTURE

The thesis is organized on 4 parts with 8 chapters. In the first three parts of the thesis we analyzed the literature and highlighted several points of view, approaching the theoretical elements in a personal maner. Our incursion into the perimeter of several fields, with different but equally important weights, we consider to offer a comprehensive and complex vision of the proposed theme.

Therefore, the next figure presents the structure of the thesis
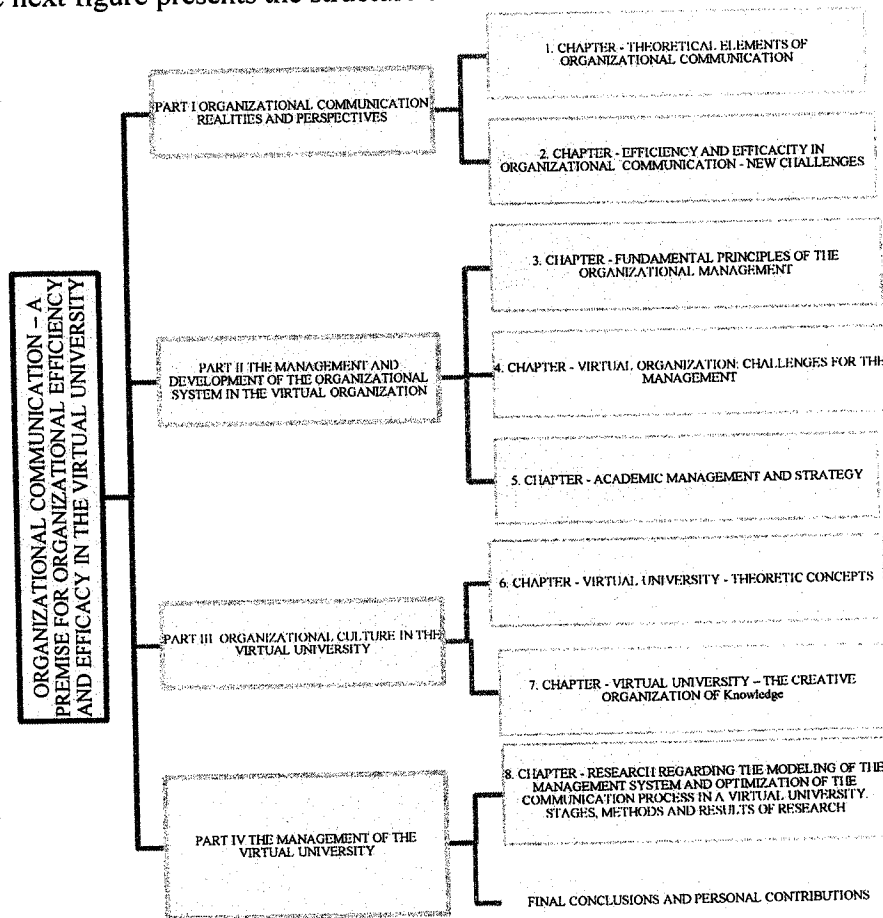
Fig. 0. 1. Thesis' structure
(own source)

In the first part of the thesis Organizational Communication - Realities and Perspectives, Chapter 1 – Theoretical elements of organizational communication, we aproached the main aspects of organizational communication concepts, we identified and analyzed the main elements of the communication process, communication models, and also the barriers communication. We consider that Tuuli Tukiainen's agenda model responds to the needs identified and formulated by organizations which develop their activity predominantly in the virtual environment. Chapter 2 Efficiency and efficacy in organizational communication - new challenges, we have been looking to identify the factors that determine communication efficiency as a condition of organizational efficiency and effectiveness; determining the role of communication and the efficiency of information processes; by addressing the main elements of the communication process, communication functions and highlighting new information technologies that enable effective communication within the organization. In the current context, multimedia platforms represent an efficient mean of communication within the organization and an indispensable factor for our approach.

Therefore, in the first part of the thesis our objectives were as follows:

• to identify of communication's main components, as well as their influence regarding the efficiency and efficacy of virtual university, respectively on the general performance of the organization;

• to identify of the factors which determine the efficiency of communication as a condition of organizational efficiency and efficacy;

• to define and analyze the notions of communication and information, the main elements of the communication process, communication functions, models and ways of communication and also the main concepts related to organizational communication;

• to define the concepts of public institution, organization, organizational management, and elements of organizational communication;

• to identify key directions of communication improvement with the help of new information technologies and modern information management programs;

This part of the research pursues to define and clarify the basic concepts of organizational communication with which the thesis operates, in order to implement an efficient communication system in the virtual university.

The second part of the thesis - The management and development of the organizational system in the virtual organization, we approached the fundamental concepts of management, organizational management, elements and notions of the higher educational system.

Chapter 3 - Fundamental principles of the organizational management, we approached the organization as a system and the principle of efficiency and efficacy of the organization, taking into account the specifics of higher education organizations from public sector.

Efficiency and efficacy have been pursued in particular by the private sector; in the public sector, the main concern is to fulfill the citizens' demands, beneficiaries of services /

products, without paying particular attention to the use of resources, we consider compulsory the application of the principle of efficiency and efficacy at the level of higher education.

Chapter 4 - Virtual organization: challenges for management, we dealt with concepts about designing and managing the virtual organization and the virtual organization as knowledge flagship. So we approached the higher education system and the implementation of the virtual university, from the perspective that the university has an important role and impact over the society in which they act, training the qualified human resource as an essential component of the knowledge society. Starting from the significance of the concept of management in the academic organization and continuing with the presentation of the strategy and mission components in the organization in terms of the academic organization efficiency and efficacy principles i, in Chapter 5 - Academic management and strategy - we considered appropriate to analyze the strategy and the declared vision of 3 universities representing the Romanian space - University 1 Decembrie 1918, Alba Iulia, hereinafter referred to as UAB, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, hereinafter referred to as UBB and Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, hereinafter referred to as ULBS. As part of this approach, we analyzed the strategy of the universities, the mission, visions and objectives proposed, but also how the university strategy overlaps with the strategy and objectives set at national level to meet the priorities defined by the European Union regarding the education, especially higher education. Therefore, we support the alignment of the university strategy with the policies of the European Union and the establishment of instruments for evaluating the implementation of the strategy.

Therefore, in part II of the thesis we pursued the following objectives:
• to delimitate the efficient management principles in the virtual university
• to identify the principles of organizational system management;
• to formulate a set of recommendations aiming to improve the quality of managerial communication and interpersonal communication in the universities studied in order to be applicable also by virtual universities.

The new market's dynamics influence the classical forms of organization, being requested an efficient management and a competitive organization at national and international level, especially in the case of higher education organizations.

In order to meet a certain set of goals, the organization's management can appeal to the model provided by the virtual organization to deliver a product or service. Detached from the traditional -core organization, the virtual organization will borrow and adopt a number of features including organizational values and culture. Starting from the premise that the virtual organization will adopt the organizational culture and the values promoted by the core organization, we considered necessary to approach the organizational culture from the perspective of the virtual organization. Another aspect of the virtual organization's culture that attracted our attention was the aspect representing the human resource as multipliers and creators of organizational culture. In the context given by the virtual organization, the development of a product and / or service requires the establishment of a multidisciplinary virtual team of

specialists positioned in different locations, regardless of their geographical dispersion. Specialists from different organizations and cultures, using different languages, promote and reflect in the new environment the core organization's values and culture. So the organizational culture within the virtual organization is influenced by these aspects that can represent barriers to the proper conduct of the activity.

Therefore, the third part of the thesis - Organizational culture within the virtual university, beginning with Chapter 6 Virtual University - theoretic concepts, aimed at clarifying the concept of virtual university and highlighting the particularities of the virtual university concept, the design and organization of the virtual university.

The development and implementation of the virtual university involves identifying and treating the implications regarding the structure and the higher education institutions' identity.

Organizational culture as a process of fundamental values and beliefs dissemination characterizes the organizational environment and influences how the organization manages to respond to the external environment transformations and also to react to the associated problems.

Taking into consideration the new educational market, the direct competitors of traditional universities are represented by educational platforms offering higher-level study programs of MOOC type. In order to outline a complete image, we have identified organizations providing online courses or study programs delivered through multimedia platforms - Open University, edX and COURSERA as good practice models.

Chapter 7 – Virtual university – the knowledge creating organization, emphasizes the importance of the relationship university-knowledge and defines the virtual university as a flagship of knowledge. From this perspective, we have set the following goals:

• to determine the particularities of the design and organization of the virtual university;

• to identify the main elements defining the concept of virtual university and highlighting the particularities of the virtual university concept;

• to analyze the main elements of strategy development in the virtual university type;

• to identify the elements of communication that determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the virtual university;

• to identify some examples of good practices and highlight the main issues for the development of the virtual university;

The virtual university promises to provide for the traditional higher education institutions the capacity to respond to new organizational requirements as well as the demands of today's society.

Building the virtual university seems to require, first of all, a corporate structure able to co-ordinate specific educational activities with a formal character and standardized practices. At this stage, we learned that most universities are trying to build the virtual university from the bottom up, adding one course, without considering the rebuilding or reorganizing the core structures of the university, which slows down the implementation process and predisposes to failure. The immediate grounds of a failure are varied: the lack of interest of students, the small

number of students participating in the training program, which leads to high maintenance costs of the platform, ineffective partnerships, and difficulties in coordinating a large and diverse number of actors. One of the requirements of the virtual university is the notion of information and the ability to overcome geographical limitations. Creating and using the information requires particular attention to overcome the geographic limitations, personal concepts and attitudes, and creating , as far as possible, neutral and standardized knowledge [2].

The studies highlight that introducing a new multimedia courses, should be taken into consideration some aspects regarding the organization of the learning environment, the pressure performed over the students and the requirement of adapting to the new study methods. Despite the difficulties, are recorded some improvement of the students' results, reflected in the increase of the number of graduates integrated into the labor market.

To summarize, the virtual university promises to offer to the higher education institutions the capacity of responding to both organizational and society needs. With the help of ICT, it is suggested that the university can respond simultaneously to the requirements of new markets, the fulfillment of national regulations, and also fulfilling the demand of trained labor force.[3]

Regardless of the teaching / learning environment used and the methods of transmitting information without the involvement of the students and teachers in the teaching / learning process, we can not talk about the success of virtual university implementation.

Targeting the evaluation and monitoring the communication process within an academic organization and drawing up some suggestions for improving the process, ie highlighting the teachers and students perspective of integrating within the process of communication, and moreover, recording the level of communication between the two communities and their expectations of on-line study programs and the use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) required two scientific researches, a quantitative and qualitative scientific research based on questionnaires. The results of the research are presented in part IV of the thesis -The management of the virtual university.

Chapter 8 – Research regarding the modeling of the management system and optimization of the communication process in a virtual university. Stages, methods and results of research, can be considered the most important part of the thesis. Were applied two types of questionnaires, one for the academic community and the other for the student community.

The questionnaire survey aimed at achieving the following objectives:

• to investigate students' attitudes regarding the academic service provided by a higher education organization, on-line study programs and the use of a virtual learning environment;

• to investigate teachers' opinion on using a virtual teaching / learning environment and on-line delivery of study programs;

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[2] Porter, T. M., „Information, power and the view from nowhere", pp. 217-230 în L. Bud-Frieman, (Ed.) Information Acumen: The Understanding and Use of Knowledge in Modern Business. London: Routledge., 1994
[3] Brown, J.S. and Duguid, P. Universities in the Digital Age, disponibil la adresa http://www.parc.xerox.com/ops/members/brown/papers/university.html, 1995;

The first questionnaire was launched in the Faculties of Economics of 5 accredited public higher education institutions, UAB, Transylvania University of Brasov, hereinafter referred to as UTB, UBB, ULBS, Petru Maior University of Târgu Mureş, hereinafter referred to as the UPM, targeting the teachers fownd in direct dialogue with the students.

The second research-based questionnaire targeted the Faculties of Economics' students within the five mentioned universities, aiming to record the level of communication between the student community and the academic community, students' expectations and attitudes toward online learning and the use of an environment of virtual learning.

For each of the two researches we generated the graphical representations confirming or refuting the hypotheses, making it possible to formulate some proposals, remarks and conclusions based on the collected data.

The complexity and novelty of the research requires the use of a research methodology that brings together a set of research methods, techniques and tools:

• the bibliographic study of general and specialized documents and materials in order to know the current stage and the dynamics of the processes and phenomena subject of the analysis and the scientific argumentation of the subsequent research;

• the scientific and empirical observation of the organizational communication elements, management and strategy in the university;

• conducting an analysis of the concept of virtual university and emphasizing specific phenomena;

• conducting and presenting a questionnaires based research, studying the analyzed aspects - communication, management in university; expectations and attitudes towards on-line learning and the use of a virtual learning environment, the implementation of the virtual university;

• statistical methods used to interpret the results obtained;

The research has certain novelty elements, regarding both the methodology and the tools used as well as the obtained results. The results of the data interpretation demonstrate the necessity of integrating the beneficiaries in the evaluation of communication and management within the universities, proving the need to orient the actions towards the student and the opportunity of implementing the virtual university system.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND PERSONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Our approach started with the identification of the main elements of the organizational communication and has a major impact on organizational management and organizational efficiency and effectiveness. We considered necessary to clarify the basic concepts of communication, management and education, and the elements which define the organization and, in particular, the virtual organization.

The literature in the field of communication and organizational communication offers a great deal of information with various innovative approaches.

Explaining the role and impact of communication over the organization and its beneficiaries, the development of new technologies and society changes, we emphasized how organizational communication influences the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization, the need to adapt to new markets, the necessity of communication strategy development which takes into consideration the development of technology and the new communication technologies.

The contribution, of the first part of the doctoral thesis, is represented by the attempt of defining the concepts necessary to access the next stages of the research and to establish the communication model that can meet the requirements of a virtual organization and facilitate the virtual university implementation taking into account its specificities. We considered necessary to approach the concepts of organizational communication, starting with the definition of the organization found in the literature, continuing naturally highlighting the main elements of the communication process and treating the main communication barriers.

We defend that the Agenda Model proposed by Tuuli Tukiainen is one of the models that respond positively to our goals, both by supporting the efficiency of the information flow and introducing the notion of communication forums, as well as promoting the communication as a process of reciprocity, dialogue with equal opportunities to interfere within the communication process. The model proposed by Tukiainen required an approach regarding the use of the the multimedia platform within the organization, the advantages and disadvantages of using the platform, and the organizational framework needed for an efficient communication process.

The contribution to the first part is the analysis of the main components of communication, the combination of theoretical elements and the approach of multimedia platforms as an efficient internal and external communication environment.

Regardless of the type of organization and / or the adopted communication model, efficient communication can not take place without a suitable management according to the new technologies. The latest information systems benefit from the development of platforms that allow users to access the data by the every organization level. In order to implement an efficient information system, it is absolutely necessary to purchase the main components - performant equipment, multimedia tools and specific applications. Another element that should not be neglected is the personnel, the user of the system, training the personnel in this sense being absolutely necessary. Therefore, communication efficiency consists of receiving in good conditions the information and understanding the message by the receiver, the message transmitted generating the appropriate response. So, information technology and management are two inseparable elements. Justifying the role of management in implementing an efficient communication system adapted to new technologies, we insisted on defining the organizational system and highlighting the principles of efficiency and effectiveness in public organizations, highlighting the limitations of this type of organization and implicitly of the management, listing the elements that allow the implementation of an efficient management in the organizations, and the virtual university. The need for effective management and a competitive organization at

national and international level has expanded to the level of higher education. So we considered it necessary to draw attention to the principles of efficiency and effectiveness in the educational system. The need to adapt the educational system to the current needs, especially addressing to the needs of direct beneficiaries, developing effective policies and ensuring performance and knowledge, foreshadows the need to adapt the organizations within the system.

Another innovation brought by the thesis, is the approach of the virtual organizations defining aspects, seeking a viable model of a virtual organization with wide applicability. So, the virtual organization, with a high-quality information infrastructure linking the involved organizations, dispersed over large distances, characterized by a high level of flexibility, which can be dissolved when the task is fulfilled and new alliances are made, comes to respond the most diverse and varied needs, regardless of the field of activity. The general model of the virtual organization manages to respond to our goals but we observe the lack of information within the literature, regarding the organization's configuration and aspects that define it even more about the communication system, communication mode and organizational communication under the conditions defined by the virtual organization.

Pursuing the objective of the thesis, we approached the aspects of management in university, highlighting the main objectives of academic management, the need to adapt to European policies, and concentrating efforts to adapt to emerging technological changes, paying particular attention to the way how information it is stored and the quality of information. In this part we aimed to highlight the importance of defining the objectives and the mission of the university, also considering that the strategies established at the level of the universities offer us the possibility of drawing an overview of the higher education system and of the way in which the organization responds to the requirements of its environment. The universities UAB, UBB; ULBS we have learned that the mission and objectives formulated by each university are in line with the requirements of the European Union and the policies promoted by the Ministry of Education.

Articulating and applying the academic strategy denotes a flexible university with a great capacity to adapt to the new requirements and trends in education, research and management that respond both to the requirements formulated at international level and to the needs identified at the local level and regional with strong anchoring in the realities of today's society.

Although we appreciate the efforts of the universities, the compliance with the requirements of the European Union, we emphasize the necessity of integrating the student as an active part in the managerial process and in the academic life, developing a teacher evaluation system which reveals the efficiency and effectiveness of the evaluated teacher, developed in the online environment.

In conclusion, an evaluation and monitoring system which includes the assessment of employees, services and / or products provided, organizational performance, etc. but also regulatory measures should be integrated evaluating means from outside the organization involving the citizens, stakeholder and other types of evaluators.

Applying the concept of efficiency and efficiency in public institutions require changes at the legislative level, simplifying the rules and procedures and their implementation, developing an efficient document management and obtaining a simplified document circuit, adopting a management that takes into account the needs of the services or products beneficiaries and a communication system that supports both external communication and internal communication.

We underline the necessity of developing the study programs according to the needs of potential students, training programs targeting certain age groups, dealing with topics with a high degree of specificity and achieving the objectives assumed by Romania in the field of education, underlining that the flexible system of the university virtual is a viable option.

Organizational culture is the element that moves the organization and can determine the success or failure of the organization, and at the same time can generate resistance to change, The organizations with a strong culture can fail when changing and adapting to the needs of the environment. So we considered appropriate to analyze the values and the mission promoted by the major online study program providers: the UK university - Open University - Regional Center, edX on-line course provider and the COURSERA platform. We concluded that the main causes of a failure are the students' lack of interest, high maintenance costs of the platform, ineffective partnerships etc.

We recommend the development of an effective structure that responds to life-long learning and training needs, financially feasible, integrating cultural needs, and responds to the needs of the learner, regardless of the location of the actors involved.

We also consider that the design of the internal communication system requiring sizing according to the size of the organization and its specificity, in our case the virtual university - number of teaching staff, number of students, number of specializations, fields of study , along with other factors.

According to the conditions of the virtual university, the administration and the management of the university present a series of new coordinates, compared to the traditional management techniques of the university. In conclusion, we emphasize the importance of informational systems needed to support teaching and research activities and the development of collaborative networks aimed at carrying out these activities, as well as the transition from an administrative culture to a culture of personal management.

4. VALORISATION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Processing, analyzing information and formulating conclusions based on data collected in our opinion is not the end of this approach. The analysis of the specialized literature, the situation of the university education and, last but not least, the information gathered through the questionnaires open new questions and directions of research.

The results of the research were partially disseminated in the form of scientific papers, being approached various aspects that are in direct relation to the subject of the thesis.

We also intend to disseminate the results and in the form of a report sent to the teachers and students who expressed their interest in this direction and the publication of scientific papers.

Our approach will not stop here and we intend:

1. To carry out a research targeting a large number of study programs, a wide range of specialties in order to identify the way in which the virtual learning / teaching environment can be expanded and implemented;

2. Identify best practices for solving the problems related to specialized practice;

3. Development of a set of virtual environment courses;

4. A comparative study of how students perceive the advantages and disadvantages of courses delivered via the virtual environment according to the major's specifics;

5. Identify the ways of establishing a public private partnership with the purpose of developing and implementing the concept of virtual university;

6. Identify ways to collaborate with international learning platforms and initiate collaborative partnerships;

7. Accreditation of a study program delivered via multimedia means according to the model of the virtual university, certified by ANC;

Renowned European universities which successfully deployed the virtual learning environment, the expert groups that advocate and support this system demonstrate once more the efficiency and the need to develop the virtual learning environment. Taking into account the educational policies promoted at the level of the European Union, the need to adapt the Romanian education system to the requirements of the labor market and the needs of the students, we believe that our efforts to implement the virtual learning environment should not stop there and try to identify new means of implementation, development and improvement of this system.

In conclusion, the thesis Organizational communication – a premise for organizational efficiency and efficacy in the virtual university presents the benefits of developing a new type of organization, the application of an efficient management in the Romanian educational system and the development of an organizational communication system supporting the efficiency and effectiveness of the university virtual, in response to labor market requirements, of its direct beneficiaries and educational policies promoted at EU level.

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