

# APPLICATION OF RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT TO MANAGE ADULT STUDENT RELATIONSHIP AND EXPERIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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## **ABSTRACT:**

*Higher education market is changing rapidly in the last few years, in order to succeed, higher education institutions must be ready to adapt to the technological pace. Current prospective adult students expect to receive a high level of service from the institution i.e. right from the pre-enrollment to post-enrollment. With the current market and escalating costs, HEIs must provide a quality service in an efficient and streamlined process to maintain the relationship with the adult students.*

*Relationship management is getting focused by the higher education sector, where in institutions are trying to meet the challenges of increased adult students expectation. If relationship is handled effectively, it might bring benefits to both the higher education institutions and the education sector as a whole. By leveraging relationship management, HEIs has the scope of gaining 360° degree understanding of adult student, where in the institution can use it to communicate with the adult students effectively.*

*This paper outlines the application of relationship management in managing the adult student relationship and experience before the enrollment and after enrollment process being undertaken by the prospective adult students.*

**Keywords:** *Higher Education Institutions, Relationship Management, Adult Students, Enrollment Process*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Many higher education institutions are now trying to adopt relationship management in order to attract, retain and serve the prospective adult students. Institutions are trying to adopt the business model, where in students are being viewed as customers and implementing a relationship management would help institutions to gain a competitive edge among the other competitors. Still, many of the higher education institutions are still not able to implement the relationship management as they lack adequate knowledge about such systems.

Relationship Management can be an amazing tool which if institutions are able to leverage, it can give valuable insights about the prospective adult students and allows institutions to develop a stronger relationship not just with prospective adult students but also the alumni.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous resistance of implementing the relationship management occurred because of the usage of business concepts and principles in HEIs came from academics and educators who initially opposed to applying the market forces to the HEI system because they considered that these principles contradicted educational values (Daradoumis et al, 2010)

Higher Education Institutions are complex organization, with many different stakeholders: students, academic staff, non-academic staff, government, regulatory bodies, other universities etc. Each stakeholders has a different assumption as to what a CRM solution is. Therefore, implementing CRM software requires a thorough analysis of major business requirements (Sindakis et al., 2015)

CRM tools are widely being implemented in the corporate organisations, and it is very much suitable for implementation in the universities and higher education institutions (Buttle and Maklan, 2015)

CRM in Higher Education can be termed as “Student Relationship Management”, where the concept highlights the importance of relationship building between the students and institutional constituents (Ackerman and Schilbrowsky, 2007)

CRM and Database marketing is a fast, efficient and flexible solution for managing the relationship with the higher education stakeholders. CRM tools and techniques in conjunction with database marketing can help institutions to differentiate themselves from the competition (Milovic, 2012)

Understanding the student satisfaction and experience, higher education institutions can align their institutional structure, enrollment and retention processes to become more of student centric (DeShields, Kara &Kaynak, 2005)

Current generation of students is becoming conscious of their rights and of gaps between their expectations of their course delivery and the reality of that service. Furthermore, students are viewing themselves as consumers and are demanding value for money during their education period (M A. King, 2008)

HEIs are constantly in transformation, trying to follow and adapt to the trends of market orientation and behavior. As a result, their management style is evolving through the adoption of new management practices, such as CRM strategy (Daradoumis et al., 2010)

Usage of direct and database marketing strategies generated through CRM systems have a high chances of boosting the universities recruitment potential (Tapp et al., 2004)

The adoption of CRM strategies in gaining students insights could enable a service provider to deliver services that would meet the expectations of stakeholders and generates the student satisfaction, loyalty and retention behaviour (Seeman& O’Hara, 2006)

The adoption of relationship management by higher education institutions also brings the use of appropriate instruments in order to understand the needs of students in terms of training, to organise services tailored to their characteristics and requirements, to improve the process of education and yield better results that in turn reduces the number of dropouts (Neville et al., 2005)

The core value of student relationship management is to develop organizational capabilities that enable education institutions to construct a holistic understanding of their students, and consequently to increase student retention levels. In pursuit of these objectives, HEIs should develop strong CRM strategies well aligned with information system solution. (Daradoumis, Rodriguez Ardura, Faulin; Xhafa& Martinez Lopez, 2010)

Nowadays, a new concept of CRM education is emerging and still in development: Student Relationship Management. SRM is oriented specifically towards a higher education environment where strategy, processes and philosophical lines are oriented to academic goals and student needs (Zhou, 2012; Trocchia& Finney, 2013)

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper is exploratory in nature, where it provides insight on the relationship management, which can be adopted by the HEIs and limited research has been done pertaining to this topic. The data for the study were gathered from journals, articles and expert opinions.

- **Journals:** Data was collected through journals, where it gave significant insight on the relationship management and its possible scope which can be implemented to manage the relationship with the prospective adult students and alumni
- **Expert Opinions:** Expert Opinions were collected from online webinars which gave an insight on how higher education institutions can apply relationship management in managing the relationship and effectively give out student friendly experience in the institution
- **Articles:** Articles were reviewed to gain information on how to integrate relationship management in the higher education institutions

After gathering all the data, content analysis technique was used in order to systematically review it up to manageable data which was correlated to the topic.

### IV. RESEARCH GAP

After reviewing the literature through the content analysis technique, studies were mainly focused on the adoption of customer relationship management in higher education institutions. There was a significant gap between the relationship management and student experience during the student lifecycle.

In every HEIs, there are number of systems that departments and teams use to accomplish their work i.e. tools for admissions, student information system and accounting systems. Older relationship management are becoming obsolete where it only focuses on the recruitment of adult students not on the experience during the entire student lifecycle period. This research paper highlights the application of modern relationship management tools which not only highlights the recruitment of adult students but also focuses on how to

manage the relationship between the students and how to augment their experience during their student lifecycle period using the inbuilt features of modern relationship management.

## V. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

**Student Experience:** Higher Education Institutions is continuing to experience unprecedented challenges in the form of increased expectations from the students for flexibility and access to information, services and learning; an uncertain and ever changing economic and regulatory environment; and pressure to reduce costs and streamline certain processes. In order to be successful in this current environment, HEIs have a need to change the way they manage relationships across the entire student lifecycle period.

Unlike like the traditional methods, relationship management system has the scope of designing as per the need of higher education institutions, where in HEIs would be able to manage the adult student leads and relationships by tracking communication and give necessary information relating to an individual.

**Student Relationship:** Relationships serve as a foundation for higher education, where in transfer of knowledge from faculty members to adult students, the creation of new knowledge among researchers, and the development of students by stakeholders across the institution occur through a series of individual points of engagement, culminating in deeply meaning full and productive relationships. While the modern life may have shifted many of the interactions to the virtual realm, the tenure of student's relationship with the institution remains for lifetime. HEIs have to recognize the need of these relationships but also position those as strategic assets, which can be a critical to the long term success of HEIs.

With relationship management for higher education institutions, they could utilize the data which are gathered to gain more insight into the behaviour of prospective adult students, alumni and devise the strategies accordingly.

This paper highlights an approach where HEIs can build an effective relationship with the adult students and alumni through the usage of relationship management and how the adult students experience with the institutions can be made better.

## VI. RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Higher Education Institutions have the need to understand the needs, preferences, and enrollment behaviour of the adult students; in order to plan and execute interactions that create best possible experience for the students.

Responding to the needs of students must be fast, but students not only expect a quick respond, they would also build perception by looking at how well HEIs handle their needs and requests.

Relationship Management is fundamentally essential for the future of the HEIs. Advancements in technology has enabled HEIs to organise around the students and build better relationships with the students. Relationship Management enable the HEIs to track student behaviour, predict their future behaviour, quick response to the needs of the students and deliver a personalised programmes or courses for the students, and build an everlasting relationship with the institution.

**a. Customer Relationship Management in Higher Education Institutions**

If HEIs want to embrace online programmes or distance learning, CRM will be a stronger tool and more pervasive, where HEIs can view adult students as customers which could give competitive advantage for higher education institutions and could enhance their ability to attract, retain and serve its students.

By implementing CRM in higher education institutions, they can create a student centric focus, improved student data and process management, increased student loyalty, retention and satisfaction with the institutions programmes and services.

**b. Student Relationship Management in Higher Education Institutions**

Student Relationship Management can be defined as a specialised relationship management concept which is applied to academic institutions, which involves automating and synchronisation of numerous processes such as academic advising and counseling before pre enrollment to the institution and to improve the student experience, which can reduce the rates of dropout and improve the institutions efficiency

**VII. RATIONALE TO APPLICATION OF RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Few of the higher education institutions are on the verge of implementing relationship management system to attract, engage and communicate better with the prospective adult students at the different points of the student lifecycle.

In the current days, adult students want regular, relevant and insightful communications; and HEIs staffs want a streamlined way of reaching out to students without the burden of extra administration. The easiest way for HEIs to reach a harmonious state with their stakeholders is by implementing a modern relationship management for HEIs. A relationship management system provides valuable insights about the prospective students, allowing institutions to nurture stronger and more personal relationships with prospective and current adult students but also with alumni.

**VIII. IMPORTANT ASPECTS TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN CHOOSING RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

Different aspects are to be considered for choosing an relationship management, there aspects can used to assess and compare each of the relationship management system

- a. Contact Management:** Contact Management consists of features which help HEIs to better manage leads, prospects, students and alumni etc.
  - **Document Management Feature:** Uploading and saving of documents with individual accounts is possible.
  - **Application Management:** Creation of online application forms and the ability to update the status of an application so that students can track it.

- **Email Integration:** It is another aspect which has to be considered by the HEIs where emails can be sent through the system or it can be integrated or synchronized with other email software.
- **Workflow automation:** It automatically creates and assigns tasks to employees based on the pre-determined prompts which is set within the relationship management software
- b. **Recruitment and Marketing:** Recruitment and marketing features help HEIs to create more targeted recruitment campaigns and recruit qualified candidates from around the world.
  - **Lead Management:** It enables institutions to efficiently collect information about leads.
  - **Email marketing tools** further optimize the student recruitment process and are valuable features to have.
- c. **User Management:** User Management features the tools that help relationship management users to increase efficiency and effectiveness of their work and get the best user experience possible

## IX. RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT PLATFORMS AND TOOLS

If HEIs want to harness the true potential of relationship management, then they should be using the right platforms and tools. Finding the right ones among the many can be a real challenge. Below are the list of relationship management platforms and tools, which could enhance the student relationship and improve the student experience throughout the student lifecycle period.

- **Target X:** This relationship management system is an open source platform where it helps to manage the full student life cycle from pre-enrollment to alumnus. The system is customizable and user friendly
- **Data Harvesting:** Data Harvesting is a modular relationship management platform that allows institutions to save money by purchasing only the modules that are necessary for their particular needs.
- **Admittor:** Admittor is a simple relationship management system, which doesn't have any complicated functionalities and has an eye appealing design.
- **Jenzabar:** Jenzabar is a cloud based relationship management system, it has an integrated software that provides toolset for reporting, analysis, score carding, monitoring of events and metrics.

There are other relationship management platforms and tools which are available for improving the efficiency of HEIs in managing the adult students relationship with the institution.

## X. CONCLUSION

Communication is essential to ensure that the various relationships between staff, students, employers and other stakeholders are effective and joined up.

In addition to building an effective relationship with the students, institutions must also be in the ideal position to facilitate and support these relationships, strengthening ties and connections with the institution, as well as enhancing and improvising their own reputation. An effective relationship management can influence the experience being felt by the prospective adult student and can improve the student experience, the institutions efficiency and improve retention.

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