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## Quality in school

## Abstract

The paper deals with the problem of quality in school. There is a great importance devoted to the improving the quality in school. The educational institutions have gained on one side more freedom but on the other side the more responsibility either. They have to demonstrate they are able to offer quality education to their customers - pupils.

The management of quality has emerged as a key development issue for education in 1990s and beyond. In spite of this fact, there has been little agreement about what quality denotes and even less agreement about how it can best be achieved and managed. Various attempts of introducing quality standards to educational context have raised numerous questions and caused serious problems of translating "hard industrial products" into "soft educational processes". Simultaneously, a decent number of research about school effectiveness as well as about school improvement practice have been published. It seems that this body of knowledge has been and can be used "to direct the development of schools toward a desired level of performance" (S t o n e, 1997).

If quality was an easy term to define then it would not engage authors for so many years. One of the reasons that a unique or a universal definition cannot be relied on lies probably in the fact that it is "difficult or not at all possible to measure': S a 11 i s (1993) has produced a very broad definition namely that quality is "what makes the difference between things being excellent or run-of-the mili". In searching for a thorough definition we could agree with Pfeffer's denotation of quality as a slippery concept whieh means different things to different people although we agree that it is indispensable for successful organisation. Such ambiguity is connected to many important concepts whieh are mainly dealt with at the practieallevel. Quality is. definitely one of them. Quality is a dynamie phenomenon; therefore a precise definition would not contribute to realise its

whole complexity and its consequences on the practicallevel. S t o n e (1977) provides three broad approaches: a) customer-centred, b) standards-centred, c) professional assessment.

Customer-centred approaches are more or less successful adaptations from industry and commerce. They imply that customer perception is the key to understanding quality. It is customer satisfaction which counts and defines when the quality is achieved. In this context quality is considered as a relative concept. It is defined and demonstrated by a producer having a system known as a quality assurance system. The notion of keeping the customer satisfied goes along with a market driven approach. Linking quality to customer expectations has been criticised on a number of grounds. One of the most serious prejudice is related to the question of the customers' professionalism. What, for example, might happen if parents or students chose to specify professionally not acceptable solutions or products?

Standard-centred approach can be seen as an alternative approach which attempts to define quality in terms of an objective framework of per-determined standards. It is not about absolute concept but about "quality in facl" (S a 11 i s, 1993). As long as products conform to their manufacturers' specifications and standards exhibit quality - two issues must be considered: What or who is the produet? Who sets the standards? In education the pro duet however defined cannot be produced to measurably consistent standard without considering the process. Student was defined as a product during the initial attempts of introducing the existing standards like ISO to schools. Another view arguing that the student is the primary customer not the product led to the understanding that the programme and/or the process of teaching and learning may be qualified as products because the interaction between the customer and the supplier alters the quality of service. The second question about who sets the standards is a more political one. If the standards are set at the nationallevel supported by the Ministry of Education then it is elear that their introduction may be perceived as just another type of control.

There are several advantages of introducing standards: they provide elear goals and targets for the organisation, attention is focused on outputs which are easier to monitor and evaluate than the process. On the other hand, it may become a threat for the same reasons since too strong concentration on achieving targets may distract attention away from each school's teaching and learning. This approach is regarded as a less flexible than the customer-driven model "particularly as the customers view changes as a result of the educational proc*ess* itself" (S t o n e, 1997).

Professional assessment is the traditional mechanism for quality management in education based on inspection. In spite of the general trend in industry

and commerce to dispense with inspection it is in favour of total quality management approaches. There are numerous advantages of this approach (S t o n e , 1997): inspection/assessment concentrates on quality issues, the results allow a level of comparison between standards in different institutions. Institutions are held accountable for the standard of service they provide and observations are mad e by people trained outside whose perspective may be new. However, there are also numerous limitations related to it: management and staff attention may be diverted at the expense of other developments, attention can focus on grades, head-teachers may feel obliged to adopt a style based on inspection and audit against the best interests of the institution, responsibility for quality improvement maybe moved towards the inspectors themselves especially among less committed staff.

**Total Quality Management in school**

One possibility how to control quality in schools is total quality management (TQM). TQM is becoming increasingly used to describe a variety of different initiatives in organisations. It refers to the systematic management of an organization's customer-supplier relationships in such a way as to ensure sustainable, steep-slope improvemets in quality performance. Total quality means what it says. All aspects of the organizations have to be dedicated to the goal of achieving the highest possible standards of performance as required by their customers (internal or external), given the strategy they are pursuing. According to D e m i n g (1986), the problem of quality is connected with the management. The main problem is based on the fact, that the management is unable to plan on time.

There are 14 principles for the transformation of management, which represent the connection of new philosophy of quality with the necessity for management to change their attitudes.

1. Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service, with the aim to become competitive and to stay in business, and to provide jobs. 2. Adopt the new philosophy. We are in a new economic age. Western management must awaken to the challenge, must learn their responsibilities, and take on leadership for change.

3. Cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality. Eliminate the need for inspection on a mass basis by building quality into the product in the fint place.

4. End the practice of awarding business on the basis of price tag. Instead, minimize total co st. Move toward a single supplier for any one item, on a longterm relationship of loyalty and trust.

5. Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service, to improve quality and productivity, and thus constantly decrease costs.

6. Institute training on the job.

7. Institute leadership. The aim of supervision should be to help people and machines and gadgets to do a better job. Supervision of management is in need of overhaul, as well as supervision of production workers.

10. Drive out fear, so that everyone may work effectively for the company.

9. Break down barriers between departments. People in research, design, sales, and production must work as a team, to foresee problems of production and in use that may be encountered with the product or service.

10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations, and targets for the work force asking for zero defects and new levels of productivity. Such exhortations only create adversarial relationships, as the bulk of the causes of low quality and low productivity belongs to the system and thus lies beyond the power of the work force.

11. Eliminate work standards ᴄ quotas) on the factory floor. Substitute leadership. Eliminate management by objective. Eliminate management by numbers, numerical goals. Substitute leadership.

12. Remove barriers that rob the hourly worker of his right to pride of workmanship. The responsibility of supervisors must be changed from sheer numbers to quality. Remove barriers that rob people in management and in engineering of their right to pride of workmanship. This means, inter alia, abolishment of the annual or merit rating and of management by objective.

13. Institute a vigorous program of education and self improvement.

14. Put everybody in the company to work to accomplish the transformation. The transformation is everybody's job.

Prom an analysis of high performing organizations and those that can be described as permanently failing CM y er, Z u c ker, 1989), there are 5 critical features of successful TQM organization that are required to achieve sustainable, steep-slope quality improvements. These are:

1. Structure within the organization ᴄ everyone pulling towards the same strategie ends) and commitment to the shared vision.

2. An extended understanding of the customer-driven and process-oriented basis for quality.

3. An organization designed around teams, with investments made in team development and changes made in performance management systems to reflect teamwork as the basisJor the organization's activities.

4. The setting of particularly challenging or outrageous goals, whieh commit the organization to significant increases in performance outcomes.

5. The systematic daily management of the organization through the use of effective tools for measurement and feedback.

The description of the effective TQM organization has hinted at some implicit qualities (so-cailed soft qualities); it will be useful to make these explicit. They can be thought of as the 3Cs of TQM.

The first C in the soft side of TQM is **culture** - the implicite rules, assumptions and values that bind organization together (O t t , 1989; M i 11 s , M u r g a t r o y d, 1991). A successful TQM organization is one that has created culture in which:

a)  innovation is valued highly;

b)  status is secondary to performance and contribution;

c)  leadership is a function of action, not position;

d)  rewards are shared through the work of teams;

e)development,learning and training are seen as critical paths to sustainability; f) empowerment to achieve challenging goals supported by continued devel-

opment and success provide a elimate for self-motivation.

This culture minimizes the control role of those in leadership position and maximizes the power of the employees nearest to the customer. It gains energy fromachievement and a sense of ownership of the problems and future of organization.

The second C of TQM is commitment. Successful TQM organization engenders such a sense of pride and opportunity for development among its people (staff and customers) that there is a great deal ownership for the goals. Commitment extends to take a risk so as to achieve goals, as weil as working systematically to keep others informed of the opportunities that exist for development and innovation. Teachers are very committed to their own subject and to their work in their departments, but the extend to which they are committed to shared goals for the whole school is problematic, unless they have become committed by the sort of processes TQM advocates.

The final C of TQM is communication. A successful TQM organization is one in which communication within and between teams is powerful, simple and effective (for example 10 minutes updating session in the staff room, a newsletter distributed to every teacher, etc.).

Successful TQM implementation depends (M u r g a t r o y d, M o r g a n , 1993) on five key features (vision, strategy, teams, outrageous goals, and to ols for daily management). The first, shared vision is often the result of compromises among a staff concerning competing and different interests. Many are not inspiring, but are rather mixes of statements that match the interests of various groups within a staff.

The second strategy focuses on process quality and process alignment, and assumes that outcomes will foilow. The tenet and elear experience of TQM is that improvement in the detail of the process leads to enhanced outcomes. In

the case of school it means enhanced learning achievements for students. By dedicating energy to process improvement, and looking at how processes can be improved between one process owner and another, the organization can me et its performance requirements.

The third component of TQM are teams as the focus for organizational design. Most schools are hierachically managed. There is a strong tradition of what S c h e i n (1984) refers to as an organization, where:
- Truth comes from those with positional power (usually the oldest and most
   experienced but not necessarily the wisest).
- People need to be directed in the carrying out of instructions and supervised
   to enact committments.
- Relationships are basically linear and vertical.
- Each person has a niche in the organization that cannot be invaded.
- The organization is responsible for taking care of its members.
- By the early 1990s (M ~ s s - K a n t er, 1991), organizations had changed
   their organizational design to revolve around self-managing work teams
   responsible for key processes within the organization. Teams are seen to be
   desirable because:
- They maximize the creative talent within an organization and promote learning.
- They are learning units in that they encourage the transfer of knowledge and
   skills.
- They promote problem ownership.
- They encourage a wider range of problem-solving than can be tackled by a
   single individual, especially when the teams are cross-functional. -
Team work is more satisfying.

The TQM approach do es not simply establish teams. The team is empowered to determine how it will achieve the goals it has been given in a context of a shared vision and understanding - in a climate of trust.

The fourth component of TQM are outrageous or challenging goals. The goals, set up by top management and responded to by teams across the organizations concerned, have a number of features in common:
- For success, teams have to undertake a great deal of new learning so as to make
the achievement of the goals possible - simply doing the old things faster or
working harder are not appropriate responses to the challenges set. - The goals
focus primarily on process outcomes (increasing percentage of
   pupils meeting a particular performance target, new learning activities, new
   modes of teaching, etc.).
- The goals apply to all in the organization, not just some.

- The goals are directly measurable on a frequent basis (weekly, monthly, daily).
     The fifth component of TQM are to ols for systematic daily management.
When the organization has two or three outrageous goals and a strong collection of teams working systematically to achieve them in their own process areas, the organization can be highly energized - a great deal is going on. The danger is that no one keeps track of what is happening and how of the organization as a whole can learn from its experiences.

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