

Theoretical Studies and Contributions Pertaining to Quality Management in European Union

Ruxandra Marin

Polytechnic University of Bucharest

Doctoral School of Engineering and Management of Technological Systems, Romania

ruxy1579@yahoo.co.uk

Margareta Ilie

"Ovidius" University of Constanta, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Romania

ilie.marga@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper is part of doctoral research and presents a study on current tendencies in European quality management.

Creating and adopting a singular quality management system at European level is the main goal of managers throughout Europe.

The EFQM (European Foundation Quality Management) model of excellence brings forward self-assessment within any organisation.

The main goal of this research is to analyse the benefits of implementing and utilising a quality management system at European level. The paper researches the tools and models being used within quality management, the author emphasizing the need of a new vision on European quality management.

Key words: quality management, quality, EFQM, autoevaluation

J.E.L. classification: G32, H83

1. Introduction

The main strategic decision of an organisation should regard adopting a quality management system. In order to design and implement a quality management system in an organisation, it should be taken into account the fact that every organisation has specific needs, different objectives, unique products and services; processes and activities. Each organization varies in size and in the way it functions.

Between 14-26 October 1946, many national organisations from twenty-five European countries gathered in London and decided on creating a new organisation named ISO, organisation which started its activity on 23 February 1947.

ISO represents over 150 countries in the present and every country has a representative within ISO. In our country, all the ISO standards are adopted, translated and distributed by ASRO.

At present, the EU has its own legislative and executive competence. It also has an independent justice system and a central bank. At European level, all entities previously mentioned are supported in anything they initiate by many institutions and competent organisations that were generated by the founding treaties. It is obvious that a multitude of treaties have been signed in the last years, helping to develop proficient management skills inside the EU.

2. Theoretical background

1992 was the first year in which the EFQM Excellence Model was used, after the applications for the European Award for Quality had been evaluated. From then on, EFQM became an organisational frame and the basis for many quality awards in numerous areas of Europe.

EFQM is used as a management system that encourages an organisation's self-assessment.

The basic elements of the EFQM model are:

- The EFQM Fundamental Concepts;
- The EFQM criteria;
- The EFQM RADAR Logic.

The EFQM Excellence Model is based upon the correlation between its elements as they are the ones that set into motion and make the entire system function correctly. It is an instrument used within an organization that can indicate where the organization stands while trying to achieve excellence, placing self-assessment into the foreground. It helps the management to establish the weaknesses and guides the managers towards solutions in order to solve problems.

This model can be applied to any organisation, disregarding its type, size or structure. Being a relatively new instrument, self-assessment has innovative potential, stemming from within the organisation, which is both a positive aspect and a challenge. Self-assessment must begin with an evaluation that seeks to identify the improvement measures that are to be implemented.

The EFQM excellence framework is based on nine criteria. Five of them are decisive factors, and four are the obtained results. The first five criteria include what an organisation does, while the last four present what the organisation accomplishes.

To sum it up, results are caused by the decisive factors and the feed-back of what has been achieved and the analysis of the latter help improve the decisive factors. This framework states that there are several approaches to obtain long-lasting excellence performance-wise.

At the European level, a culture of quality was being sought after precisely in order to create and enhance the vision of quality in the EU, trying to achieve economic growth and an increase in employees; the upsurge of competitiveness within European organisations.

It should be pointed out that this vision on quality at European level manages to present an overview on the role different public or private entities have in the EU. It acts in two important directions: in the external environment, it pursues customer satisfaction; in the internal environment, it aims at the efficient development of different strategic and management functions as well as highlighting the human resources and their potential.

In November 1998, a meeting of ministers with duties in the public sector services took place in Vienna. They decided to promote the quality of public services by creating a common action plan.

Consequently, after the meeting, they started projects that aimed to study good practices used in public services; work groups were created to generate charts that were used to compare the results obtained in every country involved in the projects (Gómez, J.G., Costa, M.M. and Lorente).

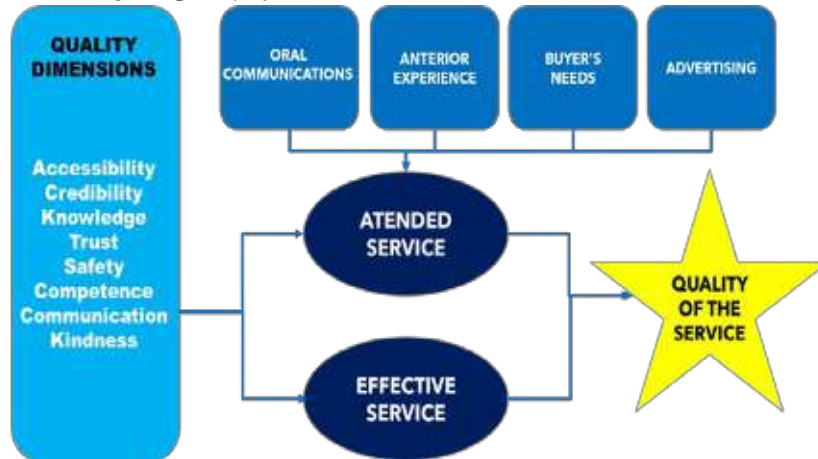
But, what matters the most is the fact that a new instrument based on self-assessment was introduced, implying minimal costs as it was done by their own employees; public servants assessing their own work and its results.

3. Research methodology

The first version of the new European vision on quality was published in 2000, and has three fundamental elements: "Getting richer through diversity", "We build on the basis of our success", "Wining together". This vision on quality is translated in many languages and published on the European Organization for Quality website in order to be available in all EU countries.

Debates, in which representatives in many public sectors such as associations to promote quality, local and central public administration, education and commerce chambers took part, were organised and based on the new European vision on quality.

Figure no. 1 Perceiving the quality of services



Source: own processing

It should be noted that the main protagonist is **the client**. Determining the quality of the services will be final, after investigating what the client needs and expects from a public organization.

The quality of public services is difficult to define, assess or express in quantifiers, having very few physical aspects(performance, functional features or maintenance costs) that might be used for comparison or measurement.

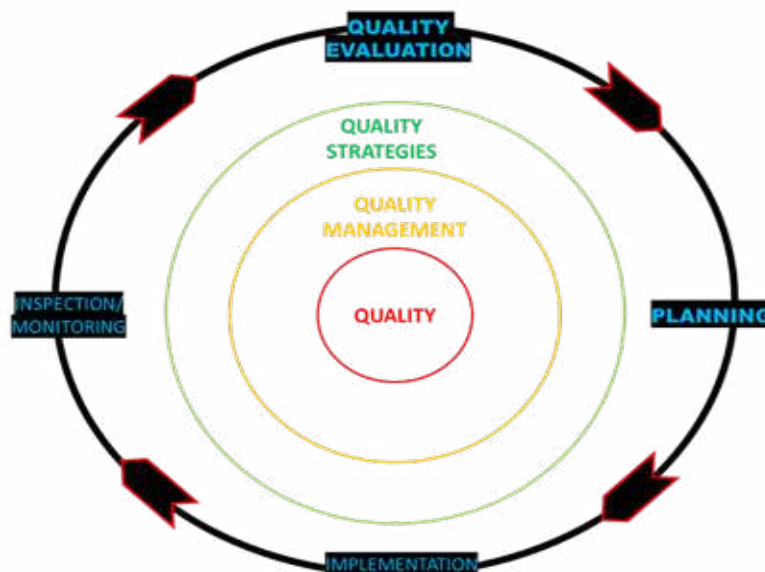
4. Results

Assessment from clients/consumers is the result of comparing the clients' needs and the real performance offered by these services.

All the institutions/companies want to gain benefits in relation to the competition. In order to do so, they will have to achieve an increase in the quality of the services/ products they offer in order to surpass the clients' expectations in what perceived quality and expectations are concerned.

All the entities that pursue an increase in the quality of the services/ products they offer have as their main goal to identify the most important factors which regard quality, the expectations clients have; the way they assess the services, the ratio between their expectations and the way they perceived the products/services.

Figure no. 2. A model of continued improvement over quality management



Source: own processing

The European Union was founded on and still relies on a pact between sovereign nations which decided to share a common destiny and exert part of their sovereignty together.

This union of European countries desires to bring together aspects beloved by all European citizens, such as: peace, economic development, democracy, justice and security.

The number of states that adhere to the European Union generates countless changes and is considered to be an important aspect. The main threat brought forth by this aspect brings an increase in the centrifugal force that can lead to an implosion in the system. To prevent such undesired events, EU member states must give up short-term interests in favour of long-term interests and plans.

Figure 2 presents a model of continued improvement over quality management, which has several stages: assessing the quality; planning the measures which aim at increasing quality; implementing the adopted measures; monitoring the quality of services/products.

The cycle of continued quality improvement has at its core the quality that will be analyzed in order to be improved, followed by the quality management the public institution relies on during self-assessment. Quality strategies depict the complete vision achieved by superior management in public institutions by involving themselves in the process of self-assessment, implementing quality and risk management.

5. Conclusions

Ensuring quality means embedding it in all the activities of the targeted entity. Implementing a quality system in an enterprise contributes to its well-being and development. To successfully implement such a system, the top-tier in the institution's management must be involved as much as possible.

Designing and implementing a quality management system within an organization might be influenced by: aims, products/services, existing processes and, also, the size and structure of the organization. Applying the quality management principles not only generates direct benefits but also brings an important contribution in the field of risk and cost management. The organization must establish, document, implement and maintain a quality management system and continually improve its efficiency through the use of quality policy, objectives; audit results, corrective and preventive actions; the analysis done by the management.

Using the "self-assessment" instrument in the process of continued improvement in quality management offers the involved staff the opportunity to acquire significant knowledge in what quality management principles are concerned.

The process of European integration has an effect over the entire continent, which, in its turn, is part of a radical and fast evolving world; the planet looking for its balance points.

6. References

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