

Self-assessment of organisations and professionals as a road towards quality

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Abstract

Quality is not the result of control in the sense of checking on people but the result of control in the meaning of managing to do what is required to be done in order to achieve an established objective. Quality in teaching and learning means achieving that the learner can decide, do and learn for (self-) improvement according to all criteria related to a given process or task. The same applies to teachers as learners in the context of a quality system; like their students they must learn how to decide, do and learn for (self-) improvement according to all criteria related to the learning process or organisation they are responsible for.

How can teachers or trainers in adult education achieve this? Based on the assumption that teachers as well as teaching organisations are self-referential systems, establishing and developing quality systems based on self-assessment is the road to quality chosen by more and more educational and training organisations in Europe, including the European Common Quality Assessment Framework.

As a part of the paper two software-based self-assessment tools are presented. One is dedicated to facilitate greatly the self-assessment of teaching organisations on their way to become learning organisations. It is based on the EFQM Excellence Framework and offers three levels of complexity, from basic to the full implementation of the EFQM model. The other one is a self-assessment tool for teachers or groups of teachers developing, carrying out and evaluating a training course, measure or event including its impact. Both tools are already adapted to the language and thinking of educational and training organisations. They were developed and are being improved and enhanced in Leonardo da Vinci projects.

1 Introduction

In the Excellence model of the European Foundation for Quality Management the word quality is not mentioned at all. The reason is as simple as this: Quality is universal and omnipresent; everything has quality, quality is everything. So the normal question would be: What quality? Whose quality? And: Quality for whom? It makes much more sense to talk about concrete aims referring to specific stakeholders, strategies for achieving them, people, partners, resources and relationships to implement them, processes serving to support them, results, impacts. Why talk about quality?

Talking about quality normally intends to agree on methods or a whole system of how to measure and monitor the conditions of its production as well as the results of this production process. Service also is a production process. Person-related services like teaching and curing or caring for people are special processes, because their core activity consists in a co-production between the provider and the customer of the service. For learning, this means that the learner is the actual producer of the result, hopefully an enhanced capacity of controlling his or her reality of work or life, in one word, competence. The teacher can only offer his or her knowledge and try to facilitate learning by creating favourable conditions of learning. And the management of an educational or training organisation (ETO) can only comply with its most elementary task of creating favourable teaching and learning conditions. Measuring impact, i.e. the effect of a learning process in a practical environment, is very difficult as establishing causal relationships between a concrete learning process and specific action in a particular context frequently is very complicated.

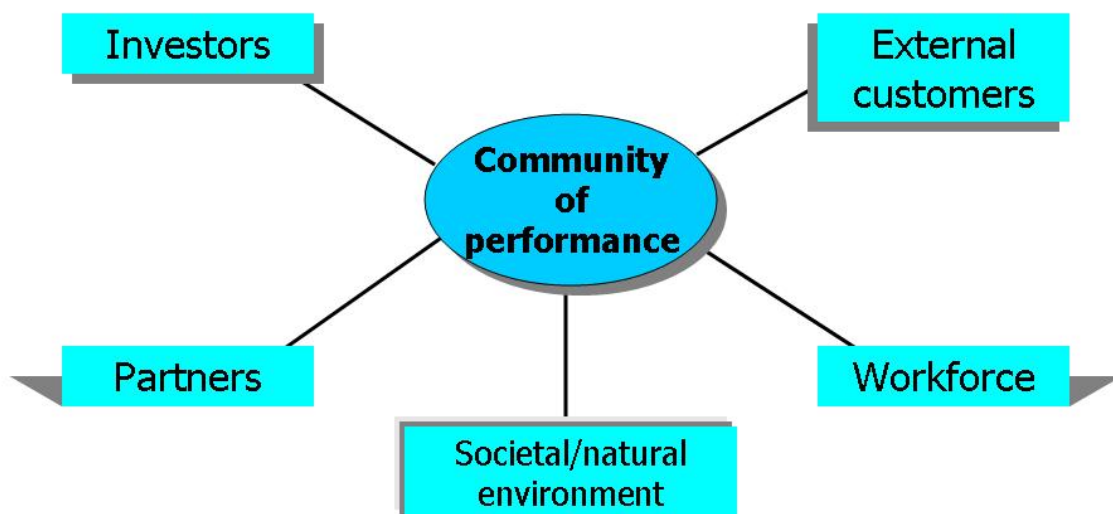
Since its beginnings in the 1940s, systematic quality management has gone through, roughly speaking, three phases: a first phase of quality testing after production, a second phase of controlling the production process of quality from design and development to de-

livery or shipping, finally the third and present phase, where the attention is focussing on the quality of the whole organisation or, said differently, the step from quality management to the quality of management. In education, during the second phase, along with interpretations of quality management (ISO 9001), evaluating processes and results became the state of the art converging eventually in the third phase with holistic approaches like EFQM or branch-specific interpretations of it. One could also interpret this third and ongoing phase as the process of professionalisation of management in educational or training organisations. This paper will present two ways of supporting and reinforcing this process on the organisational level and on the level of the core process of ETOs, i.e. teaching and learning.

2 Quality of organisations

As a researcher and consultant in evaluation and quality processes, I hardly ever ask for quality. We always talk about: What do you want to achieve? How do you want to achieve it? What have you achieved? When I support an educational or training organisation (ETO) in the implementation of a quality system, we always start with a stakeholder analysis.

The 5 Satisfactions



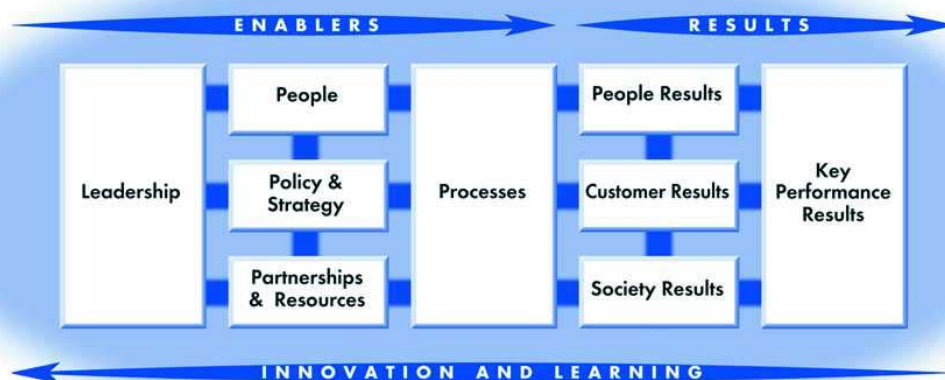
Each organisation has five stakeholders: investors, customers, employees, partners and the natural and social environment. Investors are those persons or institutions who initially or continually provide support in terms of capital, time, influence, ideas, etc. External customers (as opposed to the internal chain of suppliers and customers) are in the first place the learners, especially for further education there are often companies or institutions who pay for the students; there might also be the regional labour market or the public in general as a third possible 'customer'. All those who have a labour contract with the organisation form the workforce. Partners are all those who deliver something which becomes part of the product or service of the organisation; in ETOs contracted teachers, trainers, instructors may be the most important group, but also all those who supply appliances and materials. The environment finally provides the institute with laws, regulations, public expectations, values, etc.; it includes also the values the organisation itself may want to be respected (vision).

A stakeholder analysis consists in three steps; in a first step, the responsible people of an ETO identify who these five groups are *for them*, with names to them; the second step leads to a ranking of importance within each group of stakeholders; the third step then asks what each of the most important stakeholders in each group expects from the organisation, or, in other words, what the organisation would have to do and do for satisfying the expectations of each of these stakeholders, taking into account the specific relationships among these stakeholders (mission, policy and strategy). Another tool (customer supplier analysis, see Franz/Sarcina 2009: 206) linking directly to the stakeholder analysis, supports a more thorough analysis of individual tasks and of degrees of fulfilment. But it is not always used in the first approach.

In sociological terms, quality is a construct, a contract and a process. After this first analytical approach which has constructed the organisation's own view of its responsibility for fulfilling the written and unwritten contracts with its stakeholders, the second phase is dedicated to the question whether all conditions and processes are in place to achieve the aims and purposes attached to each of the relevant stakeholders, i.e. the people and skills, the technical and material resources and the partners, especially external teachers, who with their products and services contribute to the institute's performance.

So the next step reviews the processes and asks whether all required processes of an ETO are duly identified and structured, the fundamental and central processes of an ETO being the teaching and learning process and the handling of the learners and their data from their first contact to their final certificate or attendance confirmation. Here is where professional experience and the corresponding state of the art become part of the picture.

With these three steps we have introduced the relevant people of an ETO in a very practical way into the Excellence model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (cf. the model graph) without ever talking about quality in general.



The first five criteria (from left to right), the so-called enabling elements, constitute the set of aims, methods and instruments which a professional management and workforce of an ETO have at hand in order to influence their performance level. The four following criteria are the results and the way of measuring them, external and/or self-established indicators of success specifying the degree of goal attainment.

The whole model shows very well that it represents a permanently installed evaluation and self-evaluation cycle leading to a revolving system of learning and improvement (or innovation), in other words, towards the development of a learning organisation. More than this,

it provides systematic support for a more professional management of whatever type of organisation. This is of utmost relevance for the great majority of educational and training institutions just as well as for the great majority of other small enterprises in particular, as their management normally does not consist of people who have gone through corresponding management studies or trainee phases but mostly have come to their responsibility as entrepreneurs or technical experts and recognised performers of their technical functions, i.e. mostly teaching in an ETO. However, organising and leading, i.e. managing an organisation requires much more than being a good expert and being recognised for it. If they also want to be successful as managers of an ETO they need a more comprehensive idea of how an organisation works. The EFQM Excellence model is such a comprehensive concept providing a catalogue of questions asking for the organisation's own capacity of agreeing on aims, strategies, people, partners, resources and processes as well as for the self-assessment of all results achieved. It does not prescribe what exactly has to be done, it asks for the way how an organisation has defined and implemented its own *raison d'être*. And, what is even more important, it does not expect you to be perfect but is expressively designed as a model of learning and improvement. All you need to start is the will to become a better organisation.

2.1 Self-assessment and improvement

The central developmental medium and driving engine of this management model is self-assessment in regular intervals. Why and how will be described in more detail. Self-assessment can be applied on two levels,

- firstly on the level of the organisation, the whole organisation or parts of it regarding certain aspects,
- secondly on the level of the individual or collective performance concerning the design and planning, realisation and results of specific courses, training measures or learning events.

For both levels, the following chapters will offer tools and experiences.

Self-assessment, as opposed to external assessment, has a number of decisive advantages.

- Since self-assessment does not immediately expose an organisation and its people to the pressure of success as it is built up by external testing or auditing for certification, it is much easier for an organisation to be honest regarding its own state of affairs and to admit critical results, because the immediate aim of self-assessment is improvement, not winning a label.
- Self-assessment usually encourages broader participation, actually asks for it, while external assessment often, from a success-oriented management point of view, asks for controlling the production of assessment results and, thus, incites to exclusion processes.
- Self-assessment plus improvement help to build self-consciousness and self-trust in an organisation which eventually also may lead to the decision to expose the organisation to an external assessment and to obtain a certification or some label.
- Self-assessment is an active way of developing communities of practice in an organisation towards becoming a community of performance (cf. Franz/Sarcina 2009: 49).
- Self-assessment is a way of building social capital (Franz/Sarcina 2009: 71)

Of course, self-assessment is not yet the improvement but only its basis, the identification and detection of learning and improvement potential. A lot of critical issues turning up in the course of a self-assessment process can be tackled immediately; others need a more thorough analysis and may lead to improvement suggestions and projects or other actions. In fact, the most important characteristic of self-assessment is the more intense and focused communication and joint occupation of more, if not all people in an organisation concerning their work and conditions of work. In doing so, they exchange their views and come to terms of what they define as their commonly agreed standards of doing things. In

this process, they develop a common language of co-operation with shared mental models. As self-assessment is repeated in regular intervals, even those who do not want to share agreed solutions or procedures will co-operate more willingly as the occasion of empirical, evidence-based assessment will arrive and allow for correction and improvement. Anyway, improvement projects will always fix terms of validity of an agreement regarding its duration and the measurement of success. Thus, much futile conflict can be avoided as common experience will create evidence of what is the better or best solution. Consequently, such processes not only create a common language of co-operation but also a common language of conflict which is usually much more respectful than in a culture of rumours and distrust. As a result, the forces of self-organisation are strengthened and a more professional way of looking at and dealing with managerial issues is growing over time. In other words, the quality of the organisation will be enhanced; it will be developing towards becoming a community of performance.

2.2 SAETO - Self-Assessment for Educational and Training Organisations

This process of self-assessment with regard to the whole organisation and its management can be greatly facilitated by dedicated software-based tools. I have been an active partner in several projects funded by the EU Life-long Learning programme Leonardo da Vinci, where such tools have been developed and adapted to the specific needs of educational and training organisations in a number of countries.

Based on a questionnaire generator and statistical analysis engine called GOA WorkBench, the SAETO self-assessment tools provide question catalogues based on the EFQM Excellence model on three levels of complexity.

- The basic tool asks some 80 questions and offers a simple and greatly reduced view of an organisation. It can be answered in one day and covers the needs of small education and training providers, about 70 to 80 per cent of all providers. It is free of cost.
- The advanced tool consists of a catalogue of around 150 questions offering a more detailed mirror of the organisational reality. Here self-assessment may take up to a day per enabler criterion. It can be used in a computer network, i.e. spread the questions, collect answers anonymously and provide a centralised analysis of the gathered data.
- The full assessment tool reproduces the complete EFQM model of some 230 questions and requires a longer and more complex process depending very much on the concrete organisation and its structure and culture of communication.

All questions are already adapted in a general way to the conditions of ETOs (Dal-luege/Franz). In a certain way, we have produced a branch version of EFQM for education. Nevertheless, from the advanced tool upwards the users receive the full administration rights and can change the formulation of all questions. In this way, each organisation can adapt the self-assessment to its own wording and specifications remaining, of course, linked to the original order foreseen by the EFQM Excellence model.

This advanced version (and higher) also indicates for all questions to which criterion or sub-criterion of the ISO 9001 model it is corresponding. Thus, users who quote certain documents for proving that they comply with the EFQM criteria, at the same time build a quality management manual which is fit for being used in ISO 9001 certification audits and processes. Large training providers who work for international markets will need this “translation” function.

Several support tools enhance the practical applicability of the self-assessment software. They facilitate the implementation of the improvement suggestions made during the self-assessment and gathered with the SAETO tools. They support customer and employee satisfaction surveys. A special tool supports a satisfaction survey among the companies who send their apprentices to the public vocational schools.

Currently, two further EU-funded Leonardo projects are developing and transferring the product. Trans SAETO improves the learning modules accompanying the self-assessment tools and will offer them via the web, along with implementing self-assessment for the whole education system of Liechtenstein. It also transfers the results to Austria and Slovenia. TI-SAETO, the second project, transfers the results to Turkey, Latvia and Belgium. The whole project family is accessible via www.saeto.eu.

3 Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning has two masters, the teacher and the learner. The decisive result is depending on the learner as he or she, his or her brain, is the system which selects, adopts and accepts (or not) according to its own interest, psychological and physical situation what the teacher offers. Logically, the quality of learning is the result of a co-production process. The teacher can only offer his or her knowledge and try to create a situation of learning in which the learner can easily adopt what is offered to him or her. Providing a concise formula, one could say: Good teaching consists in making learning easy. This formula is not an absolute to bad teachers, it is by no means an acquittal, quite on the contrary, it describes the responsibility of the teacher and, hence, of the teaching organisation.

Above we have described one possible way of how a teaching organisation can become a learning organisation. Any organisation can become a learning organisation. This is the general aim of the EFQM Excellence model. But the deeper purpose of our considerations is to find out how a learning organisation offering teaching can make learning easier to its clients. This must be the overarching organisational objective of any ETO.

Creating the personal, organisational and material conditions for achieving this objective is the main and characteristic purpose of organisations dealing with education and training and logically of their management, management understood in its double meaning, as direction and as the common responsibility of all those who responsibly contribute to this purpose. It is the object of several EFQM criteria:

- The criterion People asks for identifying in detail how this aim can be reached by employing the right people in the right conditions (recruitment, employment, development, team spirit etc.). Here also ethical criteria may apply such as gender, age, ethnicity, handicaps, etc.
- The criterion Partners and Resources is of crucial importance for ETOs as many, if not most of them have a relatively small staff in terms of employment but a large halo of contracted teaching “staff”. Criteria for selecting this teaching personnel, reasonable selection procedures, creating good and pleasant conditions of co-operation with them, offering them the best possible support in terms of information, administration, procedural routines, rooms, equipment and materials, is of utmost significance for the overall aim of making teaching easy for making learning as easy as possible.
- The criterion Processes, finally, asks for the identification and definition of all relevant processes, of which the teaching process is the most important one, according to measurement criteria of effectiveness and efficiency.

If it is true that the teaching process is the most important one in an educational or training organisation, it is necessary to mention that within this responsibility of the organisation there is the inalienable, personal and professional responsibility of the teachers of making learning as easy as possible. The two main customers of an ETO are the learners and, if they are not the payers of the course, the state, the labour agency, the company or whoever else may pay for it. The paying customer has a contract with the organisation; the learner, in any case, has a double contract, a formal or informal one with the organisation and an informal one with the teacher/s. Therefore, we have a triangle contract situation,

and the success of its outcome is immediately depending on the productive co-operation of all three of them. The organisation must provide a service to the learner and to the teacher; the teacher must keep the promise of the formal contract as well as the personal promise of being professionally able to be a good teacher. Nevertheless, the overall formal responsibility is with the organisation.

If this is true, it is within the responsibility of the organisations to offer the teachers a procedure of how to control and warrant their personal professional promise keeping, i.e. their unwritten contract with the learner and their written contract with the organisation. Offering such a procedure includes an initial decision on checking or enabling, control or trust. As in the case of the organisation, our vote goes for the option of enabling or trust. And again self-assessment is the first choice as it combines enabling in the first place without excluding checking. The English word control in its double meaning of steering and checking is the clue for a self-assessment solution.

Therefore, we have created a tool for the self-assessment of teachers who design and/or plan and/or carry out any type of teaching and who want to or should check the results of this process.

3.1 PlanEval

The tool called PlanEval combines the steering with the checking. It provides a full catalogue of questions regarding four phases:

- strategy, with a number of questions concerning the market, potential partners, conditions and evaluation methods to be employed
- planning and design, with questions asking for the contents and methods of teaching, the resources needed and available, the evaluation procedures and the marketing
- implementation, i.e. the teaching and learning process, and monitoring, with questions regarding the ongoing adaptation of the process to known and newly turned up conditions and situations of the learning process
- results and impacts, with questions asking for the effectiveness of the learning with respect to the context conditions, the starting conditions of the learners, the contents, the methods, the pace, all this from the teacher's point of view as well as from the learners' perspective (based on satisfaction surveys reflecting all these issues), for the impact if observed or observable in some way, and for the efficiency of the respective course or event in financial terms. The result of learning is an enhanced control of reality (work, task, function) in the context for which the learning has been provided, i.e. improved competence.

Such an instrument will support teacher beginners in learning to plan a complete cycle and control all relevant framework conditions including their own personal ones. It will equally help the experienced teacher to overcome deficient routines under new or changing framework conditions. And it will finally support the management or groups of teachers to plan and develop new training offers or study courses and to monitor the first realisations till they have become a normal recognised routine. Also here the self-assessment scale goes from 0 to 4 (zero for not relevant), and the tool equally asks for qualitative notes on shortcomings, improvement possibilities and learning as well as documenting the process. A statistical function allows for immediate checks of the values reached at any time in the process. Of course, the tool also can provide full reporting on all qualitative notes entered during the process. So, over time, the tool as a whole will provide an empirical basis for a critical professional self-esteem which will find its expression in the esteem of the others, by the learners as well as by the peers.

4 Conclusions

Education and training are specific processes of service and production at the same time. This production process of learning is characterised by independent and naturally differing constructs of quality of the learner, the teacher and the 'teaching organisation'. These three partners are in a triangle contract situation in which the organisation has a formal service contract with the learner or the entity delegating him or her to learning and paying for it, and a formal service contract or a service-oriented employment contract with the teacher. The teacher has an informal service and production contract with the learner, service in terms of creating a learner-friendly learning situation and using learning-friendly methods, a production process in terms of offering his knowledge and expertise for the joint process of learning. But learning is an exclusive activity of the learner and functions only with his or her active consent and co-operation. Therefore, the success of this teaching and learning process in terms of the production of new knowledge and competence in the learner depends on the active co-operation of teacher and learner in a context created by the organisation and the teacher. The customer is the co-producer of the result and its quality. As in caring and curing (and other person-related services like wellness etc.), this is the specific characteristic of teaching and learning processes and situations.

The EFQM Excellence model is the most comprehensive and holistic system providing a management system for a learning organisation rather than a quality management system. In this model regular self-assessment and improvement are the main systemic mechanisms requiring the participation of all parts of the organisation. If it is true that learning is a co-production process, also a learning organisation and innovation system as the Excellence model postulates to be, needs the consent and active participation of the learners, i.e. management and employees in the context of their stakeholder construct, for its own development. In practicing this system they develop from mere communities of practice to a community of performance. Learning itself is/becomes a process of improvement and self-improvement.

This developmental process could also be described and analysed as a process of competence development of an organisation as well as of each of its members, that is to say, as the self-sustained development of an organisation towards a higher degree of managerial competence and responsibility with regard to satisfying the needs of the organisation's stakeholders and as the development of professionalization for good teaching as well as for good management. Learners are the core stakeholder of a teaching organisation, and teaching is the core process of an educational and training organisation. We have presented two tools which are able to support and facilitate this process, to make learning and improvement easier, one on the organisational level, the other one on the personal and interpersonal levels. As always, it all depends on what use is made of them, whether they are perceived as an opportunity for improvement and self-improvement or just another administrative control mechanism. The difference is made by trust.

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