

SELF-ASSESSMENT AS A QUALITY MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract

With regard to Vocational Education and Training (VET), some of the central issues to come out of the Copenhagen Process were how to improve trust-based transparency and quality in VET and in the labour market. Due to its discourse-based total quality conception, the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) Excellence Model is one of the favourite quality schemes in the pedagogic field, notwithstanding an initial rush toward ISO standards in the 90ies.

The Leonardo da Vinci Project SAETO (LI-05-B-F-PP-164510), hereafter referred to as “the project” developed a software application for self-assessment in educational and training organisations (ETO) that adapts the EFQM model to the educational sector and links it with ISO 9000 – all within one assessment process. The use of this software solution is supported by an e-learning environment.

The project aims at a structured introduction and implementation of the SAETO self-assessment solution in Liechtenstein covering more than 50% of the national ETOs, and pilots in Austria, Germany and Slovenia with at least 8 ETOs in each of these new regions. Moreover, the implementation of SAETO will help to strengthen the deployment of the Common Quality Assessment Framework and will provide references throughout the partner regions as well as a showcase for a fully structured deployment in one country, namely Liechtenstein.

Target sectors and potential beneficiaries of the project are:

- Educational and training institutions in partner countries. These could use the new training programmes as a part of their training courses or educational initiatives (or the TI-SAETO concept which is focused on the special needs of small ETOs) to serve different customer groups such as internal and external trainers, teachers, apprentices or students, projects or initiatives in the educational sector,
- Other organisations and institutions who could use the final products, and
- Trained users of the programme who could use the SAETO delivery style to work more closely with their target group. This group includes social care units, educational organisations and non governmental organisations working with socially disadvantaged groups such as the unemployed, homeless, addicted, ex- offenders, children of the streets, etc.

This project comes at a time when Europe is stepping up its efforts to establish systematic quality policies across all levels of the education and training systems (Common European Quality Assessment Framework) in all member states of the European Union. The countries participating in this transfer project have very different pre-conditions and levels of experience. Liechtenstein is the first country to seek to cover its entire education and training system by using the SAETO self-assessment approach based on the former Leonardo da Vinci project; in Slovenia SAETO will be used for the first time. Portugal and Austria have experience exclusively based on industrial applications of the basic product GOA, but no experience using the SAETO education- and training-specific application. Thus, each of the partners contributes a unique national and disciplinary perspective with regard to further adaptation and fine-tuning required in order to allow fast and easy adoption of the offered solution across the various regional ETOs. At the same time, the partners' different technical backgrounds will lead to further enhancements to the product, which in turn will improve subsequent SAETO versions.

The target groups for implementing SAETO are vocational and educational training organisations that want to bring a greater transparency and quality control to the services they offer and that need to be certified according to ISO or EFQM. Due to the demands of CQAF (Common Quality Assessment Framework in VET), this will apply to more and more ETOS over the coming years.

Individual users include managers of training organisations as well as the trainers who will be directly involved in surveying customer satisfaction, and, conversely, trainees who will give feedback on classes attended; also employees who are involved in the TQM process as part of their daily work.

Other, indirect users are the external stakeholders of each ETO who will become involved in the organisation's development via satisfaction surveys.

Once the process and tool has been successfully validated and valorised, consultancy groups will have an additional tool at their disposal for improving the competitiveness of EU member organisations in all of their diverse cultural, social and legal dimensions.

Keywords:

EFQM, Quality Management, Self Assessment

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality in Vocational Education and Training (VET) is one of the central issues of the Copenhagen Process [1] [2], particularly more trust-based transparency and quality in VET and in the labour market. Due to its discourse-based total quality conception, the **European Foundation for Quality Management** (EFQM) Excellence Model is one of the favourite quality schemes in the pedagogic field, after an initial rush toward ISO standards in the 1990s [3]. The Excellence model represents a comprehensive, holistic approach addressing all stakeholders involved in education and training. At the same time, it is an open approach allowing for the inclusion of all processes specific to an organisation or institution.

The Leonardo Project SAETO (LI-05-B-F-PP-164510) developed a self-assessment software application geared toward educational and training organisations (ETO) that translates the EFQM model to the educational sector and links it with ISO 9001 and 9004. The result is a software solution combining both standards in a single tool that is supported by an e-learning environment.

Due to the national and sometimes even regional autonomy of the education systems in Europe, there is a need for well-structured deployment of the self-assessment software to as many regions as possible. Such a structured approach will also bring along a larger benefit once the software is in place and being used.

To ensure a successful roll-out, the Trans-SAETO project aims at a phased introduction and implementation of the SAETO solution in Liechtenstein covering more than 50% of the national Education and Training system, as well as pilot in Austria, Germany, Slovenia and Switzerland with at least 8 ETOs in each of these regions. The pilot programmes will focus on supporting the special needs of vocational schools (Berufsschulen) that follow the approach of the "Dual System", the backbone of vocational training and education in all German-speaking parts of Europe.

The Trans-SAETO project also plans to carry out an adaptation of the SAETO solution to meet the unique cultural requirements of each region and to add a bilateral satisfaction survey assessing the co-operation of the companies and vocational schools, i.e., the two partners in the Dual System. A parallel SAETO transfer project (TI-SAETO) covers Belgium, Latvia and Turkey.

A further focus of the project will be on the reimplementation of the existing computer-based trainings (CBTs) with the aim to better address the needs of unexperienced users who wish to implement the programme at a very early stage without extensive training.

2. QUALITY MANAGEMENT AT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The mission of educational institutions is to ensure teaching and learning; and, additionally, at higher education institutions [4], to foster research of a quality that contributes to the skills and competencies of the students and, more broadly, to the welfare of the society. Quality management is vital for the institutions to be able to demonstrate fulfilment of proposed objectives in their study programmes and

research. As a result these quality measures help to define and improve standards and processes in diverse contexts in order to satisfy stakeholder groups like students, employers, parents, or funding institutions. Currently most of the educational institutions have adopted or are developing their quality management practices in order to improve input, throughput and output. The challenge is to develop effective preventive action, disciplines, and mechanisms for continuous improvement. Figure 1 shows the different areas covered by EFQM and ISO 9000:

Areas covered in EFQM and ISO 9000

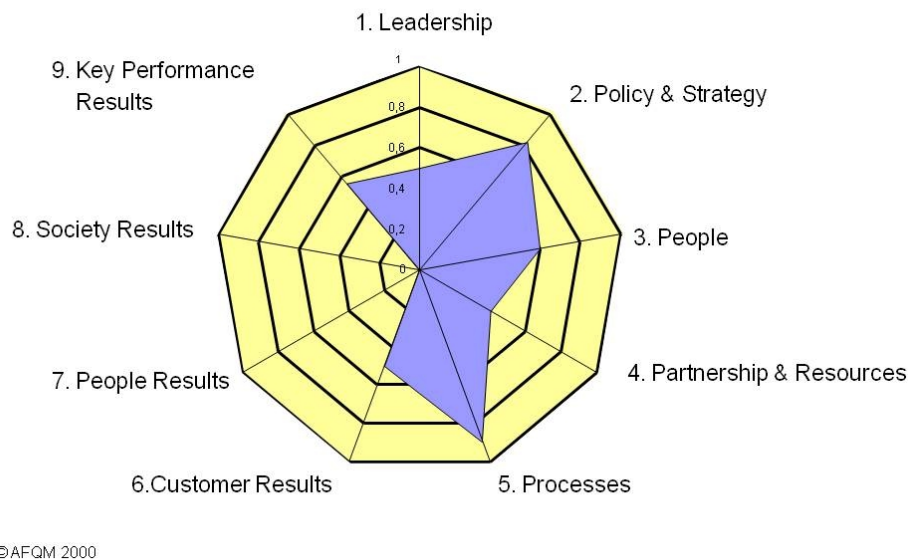


Figure 1: Areas covered by EFQM (yellow) and ISO 9000 (blue)

3. EFQM APPROACH

In addition to the reasons outlined above, the SAETO project has chosen EFQM as a core model for Total Quality Management for educational and training organisations. This is due to the fact that an EFQM-based self-assessment is systematically fully consistent with the European Common Quality Assessment Framework in Vocational Education and Training (CQAF in VET) [5].

Comparing the results to the model allows an organisation to assess critical quality areas like:

- how customers, employees and other stakeholders view the organisation
- where the organisation can gain something
- who the organisation can learn from (benchmarking)
- the impact of organisational problems

Organisations using the Excellence model have seen a strong return on investment, including faster growth and better operational results than the sector average. The University of Leicester published a paper based on a long-term study in 2005 [6]; in it, they presented evidence indicating that performance improves over both short- and long-term timeframes when the principles of the EFQM Excellence Model are implemented effectively.. The overall findings of this project as well as the basic foundation of the concept is that self-assessment by itself or per se solves nothing. Self-Assessment is an analytical tool only and serves as a model for how to analyse the institution from a quality management point of view. Furthermore, self-assessment must be linked to other operational approaches like a Continuous Improvement Process (CIP) [7] to achieve recognizable gains. Quality management excellence is the goal, not a condition [8]. The EFQM concept supports a continuous approach designed to move the organisation along the pathway towards excellence. The goal is to

improve performance step by step, not in one big leap. EFQM is not a one-time exercise to see how good the organisation is already; as a tool for continuous evolution, not revolution. Finally, EFQM is not only designed to be used by already excellent organisations only, but by organisations at all different points on the path to excellence.

Organizations beginning to implement EFQM-based excellence should therefore keep in mind that they have to fulfill some prerequisites to ensure a successful self-assessment, such as to involve all levels of personnel, inform all people, and create a common understanding of quality. These steps will avoid that people might feel excluded from the process, and even controlled.

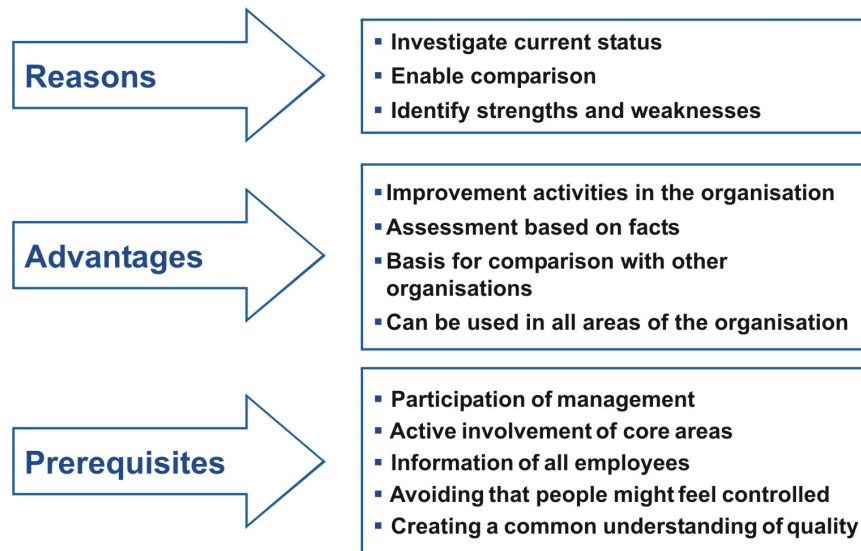


Figure 2: Benefits and prerequisites of the EFQM excellence model

Typical stumbling blocks for getting good results out of a self-assessment are [9]:

- The expectations are too high, especially concerning the organisation's own competence
- Management is insufficiently committed; it just sees EFQM self-assessment as a task to be subcontracted and does not want to get itself too deeply involved.
- The key process owners are not (sufficiently) involved and information on performance indicators owned by them is only acquired indirectly.
- Self-assessment is only implemented as a one-time shot and not as a continuous effort with direct links to the CIP. This error is commonly rooted in the expectation that self-assessment alone solves the problem.
- Self-assessment results are not sufficiently fed back into running projects or key processes and so the potential for improvements is not realised.

The SAETO project has implemented the EFQM Model using the language and typical process landscape of educational and training organisations, thus making adaptations easier for ETOs. At the same time, within certain limits, the self-assessment catalogue can be customised by the organisation applying it.

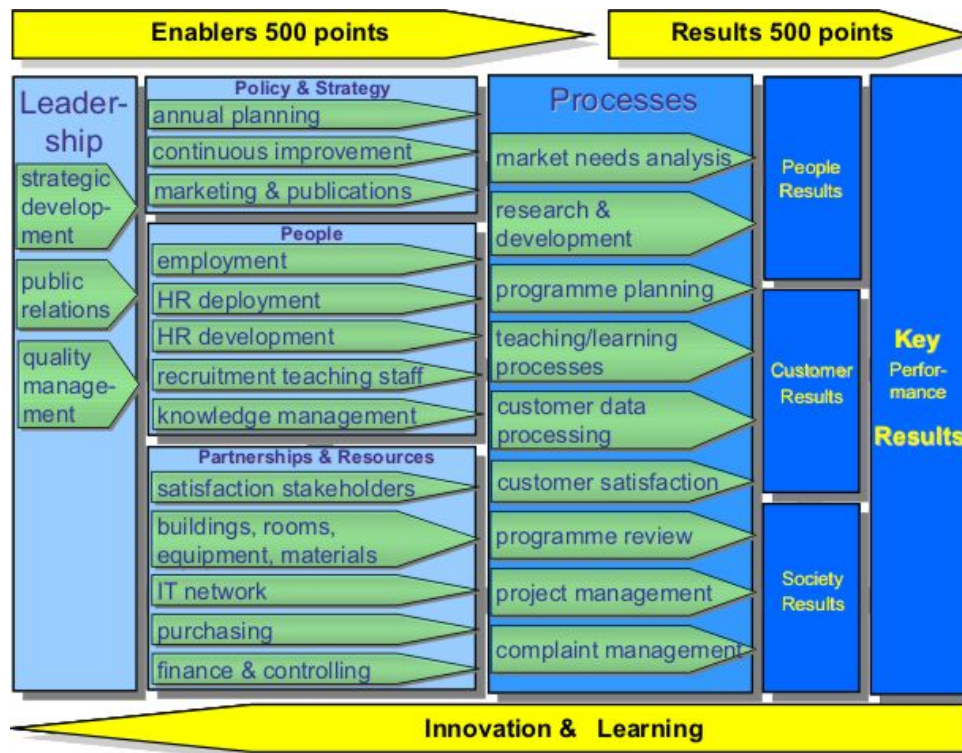


Figure 3: Self Assessment Catalogue (developed as part of the SAETO Project)

The work accomplished in SAETO and now transferred and validated through the two Leonardo da Vinci projects Ti-SAETO and Trans-SAETO offers the following benefits to educational and training organizations (ETO's) all over Europe:

- It is a true pan-European solution with multinational validation carried out in over a dozen countries.
- It offers a well-tested and commercially stable product based on the quality models of both EFQM & ISO licensed by EFQM. At the same time, this solution is consistent with the official European CQAF standard.
- Besides self-assessment, SAETO offers a number of survey catalogues for stakeholder analyses of ETOs.
- The scalable structure of the solution offers the end user a choice between either short or in-depth assessments, thus adapting the complexity of the SAETO tools to the level of experience with the Excellence Model.
- The modular structure of the solutions makes the tool adaptable to specific and individual needs according to the type and size of each ETO.
- The offered solution follows a holistic approach and offers not only the analysis of the current situation but also supports the improvement process by a direct follow-up on improvement suggestions via the GOA Balanced Q-Card
- A further strength of SAETO is the integration of methodology, training modules and software, all supported by an international partner network.

4. LEARNING AND TRAINING ENVIRONMENTS AS SUPPORT FOR IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The project aim is to implement SAETO in different countries across Europe. National project partners are responsible for the implementation at the educational institutions in their respective nations. Deployment of the SAETO solution as well as the EFQM model are basic requirements for a successful implementation. The support and learning services accompanying the implementation

process are designed to help educational institutions 1) use SEATO in an effective and efficient way and 2) evaluate the solution as related to their own needs and requirements. The learning service environment covers three levels.

First, participants receive a basic software package called GOA Workbench, which introduces EFQM as well as the SAETO software solution. Serving a dual purpose as a software application and as a project dissemination instrument, this computer based training (CBT) package can be ordered through the official project web page www.trans-saeto.com. The CBT CD-ROM includes a movie about the project, tutorials, a presentation about SAETO and the software modules for installing GOA using EFQM.

Second level training support is a classroom-based training with experts in each country. During this SEATO training workshop, participants develop a basic understanding for the EFQM model as well as for the GOA software. Thus, the one-day training class aims to support the implementation process by developing user skills for SAETO.

At the third level, the Trans-SAETO project uses Moodle as the learning and service and help desk project environment for implementation. This learning platform is the communication link between educational institutions, core project partners and SAETO experts. The platform facilitates interaction and knowledge transfer between core project partners and educational institutions as end-users. In addition to learning materials, the Moodle platform offers extended features like FAQ, best practice reports, manuals and practitioner forums.

The learning design supports the project goals by offering different transfer and communication channels like CBT, personal contact and virtual community. The challenges of this approach are channel management, movement between different levels, different languages and diversified user groups.

During the learning process, the core project team uses the different interaction channels to support the users. The information and services of each channel – whether e-mail, forum, or oral presentation – need to be coordinated at both a national and international level. The standardisation of processes on the one hand, and the national or local customisation related to the different requirements on the other, are important prerequisites for the success of the implementation. Also movements between the different training environments and levels have to be tuned.

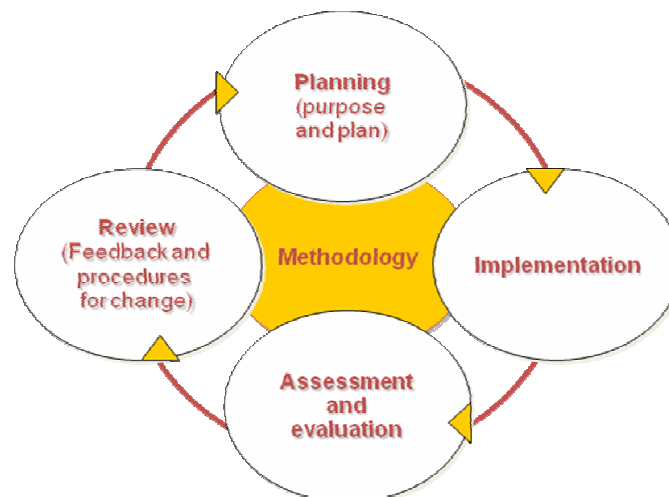


Figure 3: EFQM cycle (based on EFQM RADAR approach and Deming Cycle)

In order for educational institutions to use SAETO effectively, they must understand the EFQM process cycle. The learning environment provides a solid theoretical foundation so that after the solution is put into practice, each organisation has the theoretical basis for reflection and evaluation.

The implementation process is designed to lead users up the learning curve, so that the levels of knowledge increase in accordance with the requirements of the different project stages. The experience gained during the implementation can thus be used for new deployments in national or

even in international cases. Thus the Moodle platform is not a closed system with learning materials carved in stone, but a dynamic tool intended to increase project success (i.e., adoption and usability) in the long run. In particular, the discussions and sharing of experiences between end-users during tutorials and the exchanges with the project partners create a lively, interactive environment.

4. CONCLUSION

Coming out of the Copenhagen Process, self-assessment will come to be the cornerstone of continuous quality improvement in education and training in Europe. The European Common Quality Assessment Framework (CQAF) in VET provides a homogeneous framework for quality assessment across all existing quality systems and levels of education. SAETO meets all systematic requirements of CQAF in VET for organizations and can also be used at higher education institutions. By facilitating the utilization of the EFQM model at educational institutions, the SEATO software helps improve quality management. Clearly, SEATO and self-assessment are only tools to help organizations improve quality. The quality of the results depends upon the degree to which the tool is implemented into an institutional quality management system and, beyond that, the depth of commitment behind the institutional quality management system.

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