

TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICES BASIC PRINCIPLES

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Abstract:

Before we talk about Total Quality Management in Higher Education, we must perfectly understand the main characteristics of education services. Then, we must acknowledge the dimensions of quality in Higher Education and its approach in the education context. Knowing the above mentioned, we can establish a starting point in what it means the foundation and coordination of a system, address exactly to the quality assurance in the education services. This paper aims to describe the main concepts involved of TQM for higher education service.

Key words: *Total Quality Management, Quality Assurance, Service Quality, Higher Education Quality Assurance*

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The main concepts involved of TQM for higher education service

Customer

Generally the students are considered as end customers. Harvard University defines its customer as “as one to whom we provide information or service”. Students who use the institute’s service and employers who are consumers of students are regarded as customers. Therefore the customers are students, employers or both. According to Spanbauer there are two types of customer: external (students, employers, taxpayers and community at large, other educators from different institutions) and internal (other instructors, service department staff)

According to Srivanci, students as customers take four roles: the product in process; the internal customers for many campus facilities; the laborers of learning process and the internal customers for delivery of course material need is determined by education mix. via teaching, research and extension activities.

Identify the customer in HE it’s an important thing; on the other hand many higher education institutions think that it’s really big challenge to do so, Lawrence and Robert (1997, pp. 279-91). According to Owlia and Aspinwall, (1998, pp. 501-18), “From different customers of higher education, students were given the highest rank. The remainders, in rank order, were employers, society, faculty, and families”. The philosophy behind ranking was that since needs/expectations of different groups of customers may differ or even oppose each other, giving a priority to them is essential.

Michael and Sower (1997, pp. 104-120) claim that no university or college wants to have a specific definition of customer in higher education, while they see it even worse to define students as customer of higher education. This point serves a sticky problem for administrators and HEIs. Most faculties do not agree with the point to define students as customer of education, since it refers to assumption that “customer is always right”...

Michael and Sower (ibid) believe that quality of education does not mean necessarily to give students whatever they want. In fact, their point of view comes from the point that students are mostly engage with short-term satisfaction and students are

just concern about passes the classes and graduates, which is in the contrast of real learning and long-term purposes of education.

According to Venkatraman (2007 pp. 92-112), customer in higher education must be regarded as stakeholders, which in this case we take into consideration both internal stakeholders like employees and external stakeholders such as students and society.

Process in HE Service

Process is a series of actions or operations concluding to an end. A process transforms measurable inputs into measurable outputs under a value adding operation.

Educational process is a series of actions or operations leading to an educational end learning, training, and or scholarly activity. Transformation process for an educational institution consists of activities performed to disseminate knowledge, to conduct research and to provide community service. Process in the education system include teaching, learning, research, administrative activities and knowledge transformation

Teaching represents the core of any educational system. The objective of teaching is the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to students. Apart from classroom lectures, more innovative teaching can be imparted through other modes including discussions, case study analysis, presentations, field projects, role play, simulation methods amongst others. Teaching methods in synchronization with the learning objectives will facilitate better teaching-learning process.

Research focuses on exploration of the knowledge and bringing new contributions. In an educational system of any country, research has been stereotyped to be part of higher education system. It is generally associated with the university system where by research is pursued after obtaining a post graduates level, though there may be need of research at lower levels of the educational system hierarchy. Research facilitates new insight into the subject matter. It is related to innovation. It has been evidenced that many scientific innovation were led by research, which were followed by commercialization of products.

Extension activities are primarily aimed on the application of the developed knowledge to address the common problems of people and society. Higher educational system does not operate in isolation. There are many interfaces including sociological, cultural, economic, technological, political, and so on. A good higher education serves to solve the problem of the society affecting these interfaces (i.e. commercial organizations are working in cooperation with the university laboratories to develop new their products are also part of extension activities).

Product

The first refers to bring together all the constituent services of what higher education global service means. Higher education service as a product is actually made from a combination of services: primarily, related and complementary. The service product is actually the offer of higher education which includes itself the elements of differentiation. These elements set the competitive advantage that the higher institution is based in the promotion process and maintenance on education market.

The second one

The second refers to the fact that the student can be considered a result of immaterial production process. Through educational contribution brought by the educational institution the student as a "product" has gained an added value, becoming a person trained in certain areas and with a specific degree. Individual as specialist may be a "product" who will put himself available to market and through its professional contribution he will bring added value too.

Total Quality Management

The term of Total Quality Management (TQM) was developed by Feigenbaum, in 1961, who named it firstly as Total Quality Control (TQC). TQM can be defined as “the process of integration of all activities, functions and processes within an organization in order to achieve continuous improvement in cost, quality, function and delivery of goods and services for customer satisfaction”. It refers to the application of quality principles to overall process and all the management functions in order to ensure total customer satisfaction. TQM implies the application of quality principles right from identification of customer needs to post purchase services.

According to Witcher (1990) TQM is composed of three terms:

Total: meaning that every person is involved including customer and suppliers.

Quality: implying that customer requirements are met exactly.

Management: indicating that senior executives are committed.

TQM has been adopted as a management paradigm by many organizations worldwide. Quality movement in across the world starts with quality improvements project at manufacturing companies. But later it spread to other service institutions including banking; insurance, nonprofit organizations, healthcare, government and educational institutions.

TQM models, based on the teachings of quality gurus, generally involve a number of “principles” or “essential elements” such as teamwork, top management leadership, customer focus, employee involvement, continuous improvement tool, training etc.

TQM is the process of changing the fundamental culture of an organization and redirecting it towards superior product or service quality (Gaither, 1996)

TQM can be defined as a general management philosophy and a set of tools which allow an institution to pursue a definition of quality and a means for attaining quality, with quality being a continuous improvement ascertained by customers’ contentment with the services they have received (Michael *et al.*, 1997)

TQM may also be defined as: doing things right for the first time, striving for continuous improvement, fulfilling customers’ need, making quality the responsibility of every employee etc.

Therefore, defining of what TQM really is does seem to be a tough job by itself. For instance, Okland (1989) says TQM is “an approach to improving the effectiveness and flexibility of business as a whole”, and some other definitions in this context are:

- A set with improvement tools useful in an organization
- A management philosophy
- A program for changes based on a company’s culture
- A management system

Recently, one definition has been introduced in this context from Hellsten and Klefsjö (2000, pp. 238-44). They see TQM as a management system, which is consisting of three interdependent components: values, methodologies, and tools and the aim is to increase internal and external customers’ satisfaction with a reduce amount of resources. Since, in this work, we have management system view and this work will be based on this approach, this view of TQM will be discussed in the next section in more detail.

The objective of TQM is to build an organization that produces products or performs services that are considered as quality by those who buy or use them. The quality of a product or a service is the customer’s perception of the degree to which the product or service meets their expectations.

As we have seen, the purpose of TQM is customer satisfaction and therefore it is necessary to define the concept of higher education service customer.

The Core Values of TQM applicable to Higher Education Service

Top Management Commitment

Working with TQM and keeping up the quality improvements demands total commitment of the management (Dale et al., 1997; Abraham et al., 1999; Reed et al., 2000). The management must initiate planning for implementation and participate in the work including evaluation of processes and results. All senior leaders in the organization must create a customer orientation and set clear and visible quality values. The importance of the role of senior managers as advocates, teachers and leaders cannot be overstated (Tenner & DeToro, 1992). These leaders must serve as role models throughout the organization, thus reinforcing the quality values at all levels in the organization by choosing and applying appropriate techniques and tools.

Focus on Customers

A central core value in TQM is that all products, service and processes should always have a customer focus. Quality should be valued by the customers and should always be put in relation to their needs and expectations (Oakland, 1989; Tenner & DeToro, 1992; Shiba et al., 1993; Dahlgard et al., 1994; Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003). This signifies that quality is a relative concept, which, among other things, is set by the market competition. The organizations need to be dedicated to satisfying customers. This effort must be long-term and continuous since the quality of a product can be experienced as strongly weakened if a competitive product with better characteristics enters the market. To focus on the customer means, therefore, that one tries to find out the customers' needs and values by conducting market analyses and then trying to fulfill the market expectations while systematically developing and manufacturing the product or service.

Focusing on the customer does not only apply to the external customers. Every employee has customers within the organization, internal customers, and in order to do a good job their needs also have to be fulfilled. In order to satisfy external customers, the internal customers also need to be satisfied (Oakland, 1989; Tenner & DeToro, 1992; Shiba et al., 1993; Dahlgard et al., 1994; Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003).

Base Decisions on Facts

An important core value in TQM is to make decisions based on facts that are well founded and to not allow random factors to be of decisive importance. This calls attention to the importance of knowledge regarding variation and ability to handle and control variation, see e.g. Deming (1994).

The majority of new products or services are unsuccessful on the market (Kotler, 1996). This underlines importance of that the production processes and the production developing processes are based on facts related to the customer's experiences plus customer's present and future needs (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003). The different measurements required to obtain these facts can be classified as measurements of customer satisfaction including employee satisfaction, measurements of market position, product development and operating measurements. When the organization receives the described information it is in a position to quickly determine how well it is performing, compare its performance to that of competing or benchmarked organizations, and decide the action that is now convenient.

Focus on Processes

Much of the work within an organization can be looked upon as a process, which means a repetitive sequence of activities (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003). The goal of the process is to produce products or services, which should satisfy the customer. The corollary of focusing on processes is that the focus is not on results. Instead the result is the dependent variable. The result comes from whatever process is followed; process

drives result (Shiba et al., 1993). The process generates data that indicates how well it satisfying the customers. This means that we should not look upon every single piece of data, for instance a customer complaint, as something unique but instead as a part of the statistics, which can give information about how well the process is working and how it can be improved (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003).

Continuous Improvement

It is not enough for an organization to do better than it did previously. The external demands an organization faces are continuously increasing. Consequently, an organization needs to continually try to improve the quality of its product, service and processes (Imai, 1997; Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003). The continuous improvement of the process leads to customer satisfaction, which results in an external quality improvement. The continuous improvement of the process also leads to fewer defects, which results in an internal quality improvement (Dahlgard et al., 1994). The Deming cycle, or the PDSA-cycle, is a model for process analysis and improvement and serves as a symbol for continuous improvement. The PDSA-cycle consists of the four phases; plan, do, study and act (Deming, 1994).

Everybody's Commitment

If the organization's quality strategy should be successful, all of the organization's employees should be engaged in the work of satisfying the customer with a continuously improved quality. Everybody's commitment means that continuous improvement should be practiced everywhere in the processes and that the involvement of all employees at every level should be facilitated. This core value also includes suppliers, who over time will become partners by working with empowered employees to the benefit of the organization (Tenner & DeToro, 1992; Bergman & Klefsjö, 1994). The work is based on the skills and participation of every employee and his or her understanding of what are required. Educating and training all employees provides the knowledge needed on the mission, vision, direction, and strategy of the organization as well as the skills they need to secure quality improvement and resolve problems (Tenner & DeToro, 1992). Keywords for commitment are information, delegation and training (Wruck & Jensen, 1998; Bergman & Klefsjö, 2003).

Total Quality Management in Higher Education

There are three generic approaches to TQM in higher education (Harris 1994). Firstly there is a customer focus where the idea of service to students is fostered through staff training and development, which promotes student's choice and autonomy. The second approach has a staff focus and is concerned to value and enhance the contribution of all members of staff to the effectiveness of an institution's operation, to the setting of policies and priorities. This entails a flatter management structure and the acceptance of responsibility for action by defined working groups. The third approach focuses on service agreements stance and seeks to ensure conformity to specification at certain key measurable points of the educational processes. Evaluation of assignments by faculty within a specified timeframe is an example.

Sangeeta *et al.* (2004) considers education system as a transformation process comprising of inputs of students, teachers, administrative staff, physical facilities and process. The processes include teaching, learning, and administration. Output's includes examination results, employment, earnings and satisfaction.

Roffe (1998) considers that due to open competition, students are becoming more customers as well as consumers and expected to pay a growing share of the costs of education. This leads to competitive forces that generate different programmers for different student groups. The conceptual problems include whether TQM in higher education should be people or problem oriented, difficulty in introducing the application

and acceptance of TQM in higher education institutions, which have not embraced tenets of TQM, team Vs individual orientation towards TQM, maintaining the rate of innovation amongst others.

TQM, or continuously quality improvement, is a comprehensive philosophy of living and working in organization; it emphasizes continuous improvement. Its fundamental purposes are to improve quality, increase productivity, and reduce costs (Chaffe and Sherr, 1992). It demands that everything is done to better serve the customer – in our case, students.

Base on what major proponents had said, five elements characterized TQM improvements as practiced in higher education (Chaffe and Sherr, 1992; Miller, 1991; Harris and Baggett, 1992; Kovel-Jarobe, 1993).

1. It is focused on an identified process or system within an organization. Quality improvement works on these processes and systems in an organization, one by one, redesigning and makes them simpler and thus reducing the opportunities to make mistakes.

2. It is design to identify, understand and meet customer needs.

3. It relies on data to define needs, describe problems and arrive at solutions. Quality improvement uses scientific methods to analyze data, construct and test hypotheses, and evaluate results in order to solve problems.

4 It involves those who make decision about improvement and is sponsored by an appropriate manager or decision maker. Quality improvement requires more than participation; it necessitates the improvement of those who work in or on a process day to day to identify problems, generate solutions and satisfy customers.

5. It respects individuals and their contributions whether they are customers, team members, administrators, or colleagues.

Conclusion

The main resource and tool of TQM in higher education is people. People are the main component of the most service activities. In judging the quality, the notion of stakeholders, including students, parents and employers, plays a vital role in appraising educational system as a whole on each of these parameters. It is imperative that all individuals and group associated with the higher educational system are well aware about their duties and responsibilities. Training of students is the main objective of educational system so as to facilitate to be better specialists of tomorrow. Parents have to be informed on continual basis about the development of their wards so as to elicit their feedback for the improvement of the system. Employers' role is vital in terms of providing intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors to the employees. They have to observe and take into account the changes in the external environment for the betterment of the institutions.

Thus we see that the participation of all the constituencies of higher educational system will result in continuous improvement in the process. This will facilitate more customer friendly practices, which will result in Excellencies of performance in terms of quality outputs. This cycle if repeated continuously will improve quality at each stage. The need for higher education is primarily based from what the customers wants in terms of output and satisfaction.

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