QUALITY SYSTEM IN UNIVERSITIES AND THE FUTURE ASSURANCE

General Quality Systems

Quality management has become an effective synchronized tool of the present-day for which organizations seek acceptance. Universities are no exception for this phenomenon. The idea of a deliberate plan controlled and co-ordinated by an agency which maintains a bench mark is called the ISO 9000. No matter how much people dislike ISO 9001 certification, it's the only tool to achieve an ISO 9000 standard which guarantee the compliance of quality. It also certifies that consistency and processes are being applied. Indeed, some institutions enter the ISO 9001 certification as a marketing tool.

So, if quality systems are to stay than the formal definitions of how a system should perform, the implementation is as critical as formulation. Even where there is no official recognition of a standard programme, people will seek one to satisfy their need for structure. Investors in Human Resource Training and Development also need quality systems which satisfy their desires. This requires not only documentation with an endorsement, but an assurance by accreditation of their academic and related affairs which invariably reflects in their strategic or corporate plan and thus differ substantially from a conventional quality approach to official recognition by a body.

ISO 9000

I am often enquired whether the next step in the enforcement of quality certification will take place for regulatory agencies to insist on a pre-requisite to conduct any business. The Board of Investment is a classic example. What the individual national administration might do, none of us can predict with absolute certainty with too many internal and external political problems like GSP plus and so on. The 'push' for adopting ISO 9001 will always come from those organizations who see it as a good thing and advantageous in encouraging their goods or services to become acceptable by standards to take up future global challenges.

The next big question for many people concern with the subject is whether or not ISO 9001, and in particular, independent quality management certification, will sustain and continue. After all, other management initiatives and styles have been time to time changed according to the time of the need. Today we hear more on good practice with 'ethical management', an area interconnected to 'quality circle'. On the other hand, more closely related philosophy of Total Quality Management has shown surprising longevity. Although most of these tools are no longer known by their name, the basic philosophies are still being widely employed in every type of industry and agency.

ISO 9001

Taking all of this in to account, one may guess that the future of ISO 9000 and its associated standards will develop in one of the two ways, either the world will become bored with it and registration will be adopted until it gradually fades and disappears like most other management tools or it will grow to the point where it becomes normal practice to seek a certificated, simply to avoid having to explain why it does not really apply to the product / service. The only difference we will see is that it will gradually become less of a talking point and more ordinary, just like the conventional annual financial audit of accounts.

There are, already other well known and popular systems like European business Excellence Model, the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award or the Dubai Quality Award. They are becoming popular with organizers who award them strictly to a limited number of organizations per year and most businesses adopt them for the direct commercial benefits. If motivation of certification is for narrow benefits then survival will also be a limited factor. In the mean time, companies are more sensitive towards rating and ranking, which indirectly affect their mere continued existence.

Quality Assurance in University System

The University is a community of students, scholars and staff committed to bringing out the best in all its members. Therefore, the aim is to provide an environment for teaching, learning and research that stimulates innovation and to produce outcomes comparable to the highest expected standards. Sources "Quality Assurance (QA) procedures are aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university" These fundamental ideas inform the University's approach to quality assurance and improvement. This is in pursuit of the University goal to maintain the quality of all educational programmes and the University's philosophy of "Quality Management." Academic Affairs has a major goal to pursue accreditation for all the programmes for which there are accrediting agencies.

The University promotes a view of quality assurance similar to that of ISO 9000 as an integral part of the academic enterprise to be assessed. Its quality assurance agenda is driven by people who are active in teaching, research and administration, rather than from any central institutional 'quality unit', motives are rather different. The Quality Assurance procedures include the evaluation of each department of each faculty of the university of Services provided by employees who are competent to make national and international comparisons on the quality teaching and research and the provision of various administrative services at university level.

The procedures shall include assessment by those, including students, availing of the teaching, research and other services provided by the university that defines basis for:

Internal QA procedures for the university - Autonomously

External QA of individual faculty - Periodic audits

External QA of the university - Review of QA procedures

The University's quality assurance and associated reviews and data collection systems are not designed around the requirements of external audit but form a routine part of its

activities in the pursuit of excellence. In the past External examiners of the university system perform validation by setting examination papers and assessing the performances. This is also by way of periodic external endorsement for professional programmes. Universities also prevailant apply the same criteria of excellence to quality assurance as to all other activities. They strive to learn from best practices like 'Quality Circles' and benchmarks for quality assurance for those of the leading research universities around the world.

The Methodology later evolved and adhered is by Self-assessment i.e. assessment by Academic/Administrative Departments themselves in addition to students/stakeholders. Moreover Peer Review can be carried out by National experts as well as International experts and other appropriate Stakeholders. Contemporary assessment is also carried out with the quality publication of Findings, Journals and Research Papers of the University. The Follow-up of the above is bore by proper implementation.

Self Assessment

A statement consisting solely of functions, activities and outputs is not a self-assessment report. A good self-assessment report implies no surprises of a report of a Review Team, which is a validation of the self-assessment report and good practices. Having a small quality committee representative of all staff at all grades is essential with the involvement of the Heads of the Departments. Regular communication with all staff is required not only on the Quality Committee practices but also on the Follow up - Good Practices.

In order to activate this, firstly circulate Review Report to all staff and compromise on an agreement of a plan of action with timescales and deliverables with 1 year to 5 year span. This process is by carried out publishing the Review Report, and formulating the Quality Improvement Plan from which the progress could be monitored and reviewed with an interval of a year with five year extended plan. This could also be done perhaps by inviting members of the review group to back the continuous progress of the plan.

Quality Assurance in Sri Lankan Universities

The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council of the University Grants Commission has identified following eight specific areas. An assessment is executed and a comprehensive report is submitted to the authorities:

> Curriculum Design, Content and Review
>
> Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods
>
> Quality of Students Including Students Performance and Progression
>
> Extent of Students Feedback: Quality and Quantitative
>
> Postgraduate Studies
>
> Peer Observation
>
> Skills Development
>
> Academic Guidance and Counselling

Future Quality Systems

The future Quality Systems will have a description of the culture, attitude and organization of an Institution that strives to satisfy the needs of the whole community. The culture requires quality in all aspects of the operations of the Institution, with processes being done right the first from time and defects and waste eradicated from operations. Institutions like Defence Universities have to concentrat in their code of conduct which not only enhance the quality but also differentiate the institution. Therefore to be successful in implementing the Quality System, the organizations must concentrate on the following combined four key elements:

Ethics & Leadership

Communication & Trust

Teamwork & Training

Recognition & Integrity

Quality systems defined and implemented from time to time will change to keep up with the competitive standards, so it support and initiate the development of growth. There is a number of potential possibilities that transpire when trying to foresee what will happen to the management of quality. It is likely that for future decades of the twenty-first century the development of quality system will be inextricably linked to the future of the ISO family which include a set of procedures that cover all key processes:

Monitoring processes to ensure they are effective;

Keeping adequate records;

Checking output for defects, with appropriate and corrective action where necessary

Regularly reviewing individual processes

The quality system itself for effectiveness

Facilitating continual improvement

Beyond this, the hallmark of future quality assurance depends upon benchmarking the ingenuity of activities;

"What is the major difference between those who survive and those who do not? It is the organizational ability to learn, a desire to survive and the ability to adopt."

- R J Graham and R L Englund

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