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The prospects of implementing the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) in education

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Abstract

Lately there have been initiatives in stimulating an improvement in the quality of products/services, both on national and international levels. In Europe there is the European Foundation for the Management of Quality, that accords the European Award for Quality and on the international level there is the set of ISO 9000 standards. This new perception of quality has now reached education. Educational institutions are required to devise their own specific ways of approaching the matter of quality and to demonstrate publicly that they too, can provide consistent high-quality services. Among the new initiatives we can note the insuring of quality, the total quality and the management of total quality, aiming at improving quality, seeking to achieve excellence too. The paper aims to highlight this new philosophy, this new methodology called TQM that helps educational institutions to master changes and establish their own ideas so as to be able to face the new external pressures of competition and we tried to present the prospects of implementing TQM in education.

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1. Introduction

The TQM theory elaborated by W. Edwards Deming to better the management of industrial units can also be applied to the educational process on condition that it be well understood and adopted to what is specific to education.

Although a lot of basic concepts from industry have already been taken in, we must consider the fact that the school is not a "factory" and the student is not "a manufactured product". Deming develops the TQM theory relying on the humanist philosophy that starts from the belief that all people are educable, that they want to do good things and deserve respect.

The way in which people respond to the managerial actions is of utmost importance for the success of TQM. So, Deming lays emphasis on the need for managers to understand the fundamental principles of the executors' psychology, so as to find out how to attract them.

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The strategically planning of quality is one of the key-points of a programme for improving quality in view of implementing the principles of TQM. The questions must be answered are: Why does institution exist? What does it really aim to do?

2. Characteristics of educational institutions which have introduced the principles of TQM

Educational institutions exist as long as they are useful. They and their social environment are continually developing: they all have a "life" cycle consisting of four main stages: foundation-formation, growth-expansion, maturity and the last stage, which can lead either to decline or revival. The decline in the life cycle of educational institutions can be avoided provided that the process of periodic revitalization is carried out permanently.

The characteristics of traditional educational institutions are distinctly different from those that have introduced the principles of TQM.

The differences between an university organized according to the principles of TQM and an ordinary one consists in:

- optimization of the activity of faculties. Each faculty, starting with deanships, professorships and secretary ships must work taking into account well-defined standards of quality, respectively written procedures to help them organize the whole activity;
- vertical alignment. Each person must understand the policy of the university in the domain of quality and its mission;
- horizontal alignment. there must not be competition between different faculties, all from the same university. there should be certain functional mechanism to solve efficiently any problem, especially if the system of quality management is implemented:
- a single command for all activities. key-procedures for all syllabuses or administrative programmes must be organized so that all processes should be controlled by just one series of commands; the elaboration of the procedures must be done starting from the question: who is the customer of each process?

In education, TQM has a significant role in empowering the teaching staff to improve what the student learn and the way they learn.

The need for quality in higher education is experienced by everyone involved in it, it is a national and international alarm signal.

The creation of a culture of quality is an essential condition for implementing the principles of TQM in an university. The managerial staff is responsible for creating such culture so as to obtain performance in the quality of educational services; performance can rest above similar service offered by competition.

In the education field the process of teaching/learning must be regarded as the essential mission of the institution, one that has to be continually improved.

The decisive role is played both by professors and parents, administration, scientific researchers in the domain of education and social sciences.

In education results are seen in the future, this is why a long-term perspective is required, which supposes a clear identification of objectives and their communication to all the employees.

The fundamental philosophy of management in education and of teaching must remain the same over a long period of time, irrespective of trends and of changes taking place in the social environment.

At present we can see how classically-furnished schools are changing into modern ones, fitted with computers. It all supposes a change of methods, not of the philosophy and goals of education.

TQM in education supposes a holistic approach out of which each of the following seven elements should not be missing: philosophy, vision, strategy, aptitudes, resources, rewards and organization. Each element has a function that must not be omitted. For instance, when there is no philosophy, the system has no results, when vision is missing there is confusion, when there is a lack of aptitudes, there is cause for alarm, when resources are missing there is frustration, when there are no rewards there is bitterness, when there is no organization, there is chaos..

3. “Outside” and “inside” customers in education

In higher education there are a lot of outside "customers" for a "product" which, in fact, represent the education of the student.

The first customer is the student who benefits from this product (the education he received) all his life.

The second customer is represented by parents (supervisors, sponsors) because they are going to use this product and especially because they pay for this education.

The third customer is represented by the future employers who will pay to obtain the benefit of the student's education.

The fourth customer is society, community, represented by governmental organizations that contribute to some of the costs involved in education and that want the student, once he becomes an adult, to become a tax payer.

The inside customers are the professors and the board of administration from the institution of higher education. Between them a "supplier-customer" relationship is established.

Each university should aim at providing each student with four opportunities for development:

- the knowledge enabling him to understand practical phenomena;
- the know-how enabling him to take action;
- the wisdom he needs to establish his priorities;
- the character insuring the co-operation, the perseverance and the respect of society.

When applying TQM in education we must take into account not only the content but also the system, the environment, the style and the processes that are necessary to highlight it. There is a large variability of contents from one institution to another, from one country to another that is why it is necessary for the theory of management in education to settle the way in which such dissimilar contents should be dealt with.

In this context we can note the statement made by higher education ministers at Bologna (1999), Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007), Leuven (2009), Vienna (2010) and Bucharest (2012) which laid the foundations for the education reform, for creating a unique European university environment and for solving the problem of compatibility regarding university diplomas.

From the multitude of options expressed in books and papers specialized in fundamental principles of TQM we can synthesize the following:

- the commitment and the total involvement of the managerial staff;
- absolute priority accorded to the customers' demands;
- the fundamental change of the culture of the institution through the systematic and continuous training of the staff;
- the involvement of the whole teaching and administrative staff;
- the permanent improvement of quality;
- the making of decisions on the basis of real facts and data;
- the assessment of the costs of quality;
- the pursuance of the quality of the educational services, all along the course they follow.

Among these principals there is one that is the most difficult to apply, although it is decisive for the success of TQM that is absolute priority accorded to the outside customers, and mainly, to the demands of the students. The problem is how to persuade the professors to listen to, to understand, to fulfill and even exceed their expectations, the last one being the goal of TQM.

The prospects of implementing TQM in education depend on:

- the way in which the ISO 9000:2000 standards are adapted to what is specific to higher education;
- the commitment and total involvement of rector ships and deanships;
- the formation of a culture of quality in universities for motivating professors and students;
- the empowering of the professors trained in the domain of quality;
- the involvement of the hole teaching and administrative staff.

In conclusion, it is the quality of education that makes learning become a pleasure and a joy.

The pleasure of learning changes permanently. What appears to be fascinating for a certain age, is inappropriate for another. Professors must always talk with students to find out the feedback of their performance.

In order to motivate a student to study permanently there must be a sustain commitment from the part of all hierarchic rank management in the university.

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