

QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS: MEANING AND IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The strategies of quality implementation in all sectors of activity, and the implementation intensity are clearly influenced by the number of contextual factors, such as the executive decentralization degree, and the administrative and legal traditions. The reform implementation is a major priority aimed to bringing all public institutions, starting from education and ending with public administration, up to European standards, in order to contribute to meeting the societal needs, raising the citizens' living standard, being characterized by transparency, predictability, responsibility, and efficiency.

KEYWORDS: *Ongoing Education and Training, Performance Assessment, Public Administration, Quality Management.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality policies and their implementation, promoting and developing quality management in the public sector will only be achieved if measures are identified to ensure the modernisation of public service in view of optimising the decision-making process, improving the human resource management, the quality of public service by promoting and introducing the elements of quality management, the continuous training of employees, assessing the performance of all personnel.

The European Commission encourages institutions to become learning institutions, i.e. institutions that support learning at all levels. Other authors (Tribus, 1992) opine that organizational learning is not only acquiring new knowledge, but also using it in the institutional operation, generating new knowledge. Therefore, organizational learning is focused on the knowledge used within and in the interest of the organization.

Up to date, a lot of experience has been gained, and experts agree that quality management also operates in education or public service. The elements that are peculiar to the field of education or public service as compared to the field of goods manufacturing are as follows (Bran et al., 2006): the school is not a factory; the product customers are multiple, respectively: the students themselves; the parents; the employers; society as a whole; students have to become "co-managers" of their own education; there is no possibility to make-up.

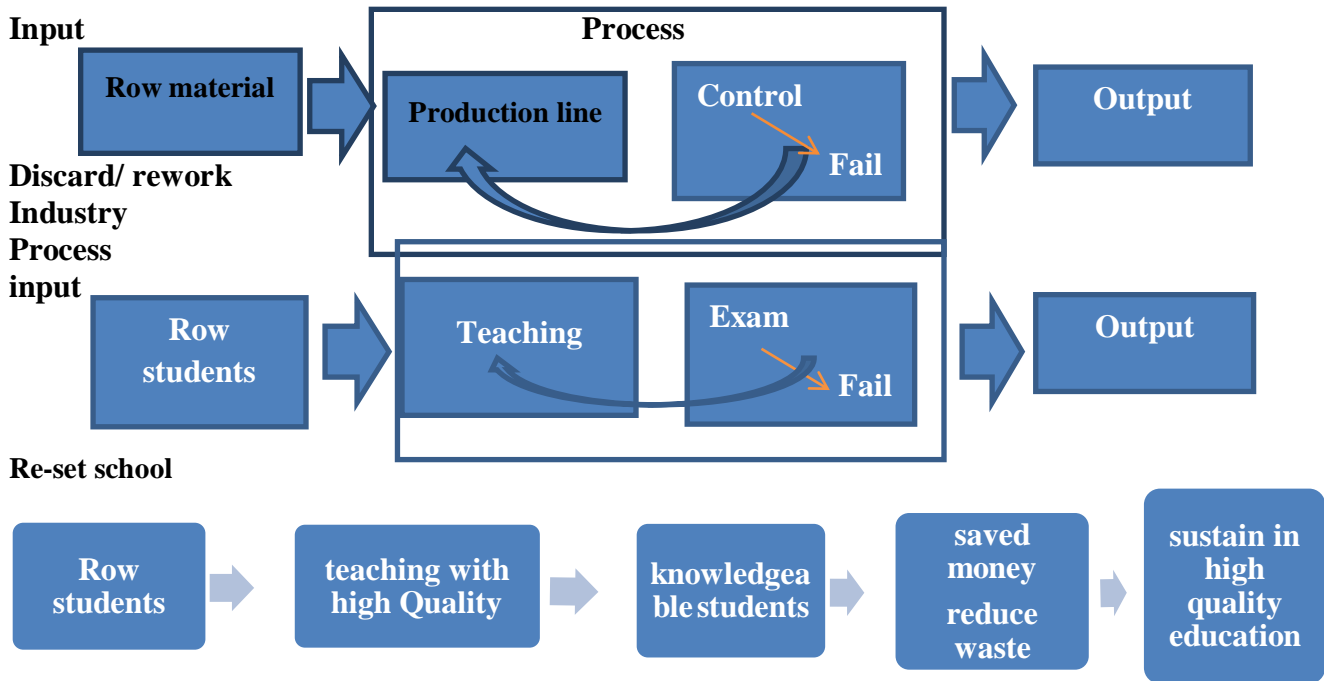
Facing an ever more turbulent environment, marked by increasing competitiveness, as well as the impact of technological progress, managers are ever more aware that adapting to the environment and taking advantage of all the opportunities it offers involves a strategic approach of the actions to be deployed in order to achieve a favourable position on the market (Colan & Colan, 2009).

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2. DISCUSSIONS

Quality management is a different means of organizing people's efforts. The major objective is harmonizing efforts so that people not only take on tasks gladly, but also participate in the continuous improvement of the manner of fulfilling these tasks. Quality management introduces a major change in management-staff relations (Colan & Petcu, 2009).

The individuals involved in the management of these institutions have to understand the role of main „external customer” of economic entities in regard to school or training centres as „supplier of immaterial goods” (knowledge, competences) and services (professional training/ specialization, research, design, consulting, etc.). Unfortunately, Romanian institutions have not yet reached this development stage, as there is high demand on the market. The difference comes, at this point, from the quality and responsibility of the educational institutions management. The teaching institution is first and foremost learning employees. But, in addition to the learning processes taking place at individual level, there are collective processes of organizational learning, referring to the company in its entirety. Their intensity and efficacy differs according to the implementation manner.



TQM in school

Figure 1. Difference between Industry, school, and TQM in school,
 adapted (Muhammad Faizal bin Ghani, 2014, p.42-52,)

Managerial training and improvement should take into consideration the following essential aspects: the formation and improvement programs should ensure by their orientation and content, the knowledge transfer, skill acquisition, and behaviour modelling to manifest in the action of management in a certain time span; the programs focus on the intense valorisation of the attributes of competence, creativity, initiative, prospective spirit; the prospective component is predominant in the managerial approach, as managerial training has to provide the synthesis of the future requirements; the improvement ensures

the flexible professionalization of the future management staff, so they may be able to significantly increase their knowledge, skills and abilities; attending these programs is a part of the general requirement of ongoing education, connected to the progress of society and its predictable evolution.

The public administration based on European Standards may be considered the cornerstone of its efficient operation. The institutions implemented a detailed reform of public service regarding the introduction of these standards in the public sector, on account of the citizens using ineffective public services at all levels, and in this regard concrete reform strategies and programs in the field of public administration are preparing the implementation of quality management in the public sector. The conformity of European standard service provision in general will bring about a less arbitrary legal framework, and lesser corruption. To the citizens, this will mean efficient and efficacious services, a more transparent information system, as well as professional staff.

In regard to implementing the self-assessment methodology together with the organizational systems of quality management, the study shows that states have progressed to a certain extent, but self-assessment is in its early stages of development. It is desirable that the quality management tools be implemented in all the institutions of central and local public administration – mainly on account of transparency, credibility and efficiency increase. The quality of the public sector is indispensable to a legitimate government. At the same time, it seems to be impossible, intangible, opaque, ambiguous and multidimensional (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 1995, p. 162) (Ken et al., 2002).

At present Romania is still tributary to the old educational models of industrial education, no longer adapted to present and future realities. The main features of this policy are: orientation towards the past, curriculum immobility; a personnel policy that does not provide differentiated paths in teaching careers, and is not correlated to the present needs of schools, a student policy that does not take into account individual characteristics, an obsolete professional training system ignoring the global fair practices, ignorance of education specialists concretized by the insufficient or complete lack of studies of reform analysis, impact and implementation, lack of education specialists in educational units, an unstimulating salary policy for young people and performance. On the other hand, it is only by developing cooperation between the various actors involved, as well as forging partnerships between groups of suppliers and beneficiaries that the essential information may be collected and processed so that to reach the recipient under the form and at the time it is needed. The necessary data sets refer to formation types, implementation manners, venues, costs, dependence on previous or basic training, and so on.

Management attitude is the one able to maximize the use of financial and human resources made available for the success of internal marketing measures. Medium management, right below the executive level, is crucial to the successful implementation of internal marketing measures in point of quality. The most important managerial issue is forming a team at company level that focuses on a strong value system.(Colan & Petcu, 2009)

A focused strategic approach (Lachlan et al., 1999) is needed in choosing and implementing the assessment methods. It is due to the fact that the combination and matching of the assessment techniques should take into account the teachers' age, skills and curricular contexts, among other factors. Assessment methods should be the most accurate and precisely operationalized. A series of assessment methods given as examples below may be used by the same pupils, the same timetable or in identical or overlapping periods. The assessment methodology of an educational institution should include direct and indirect strategies, tools and techniques in order to gather the information that strategists use in measuring the level, application scope and learning depth experienced by the students. By the simultaneous use of multiple data collection and processing the assessment techniques of teaching and learning improve the quality of the information that evaluators collect from students and

other sources. The triangulation approach strengthens the relevance, validity and reliability of the strategies derived from such data.

The analysis of the features and the present-day situation in Romania in the field of the continuous training of the human resource yields a number of parameters that should be taken into consideration when defining the medium and long-term strategy:

- Defining the place of continuous training in the Romanian educational system;
- Determining the potential categories of beneficiaries, as well as partners, at central and local level;
- Evincing the available resources, and also the resources necessary to system development;
- Determining structural developments and institutional adjustments, as well as establishing the possible connections that may be created with the formation suppliers.

From an economic point of view, all these flaws lead to huge costs by:

- inefficiency of the education system on the labour market;
- lack of confidence of the foreign capital in the labour force from Romania.

By analysing the present situation, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- lack of professionalism regarding the educational marketing policy;
- educational reforms that do not focus on developing this sector;
- lack of marketing structures in the educational system;
- not enough specialists in the field and their lack of involvement in educational activity;
- lack of solid studies able to provide the state with a departure point in defining educational policies;
- founding the educational policy on marketing studies, thus being able to accurately set the necessary objectives, strategies and techniques (the marketing policy) to optimize supply and demand, and consequently increase the efficiency of the educational process;
- involving economic agents in defining the school strategy in order to achieve agreement between the workforce demand and the supply provided by school;
- the need to organize marketing structures;
- the educational system is not organized in order to specifically respond to the instruction needs of adults in the direction of their interests and in accordance with their cognitive abilities and natural skills;
- it is not organized so that it may respond to the present and future needs of the labour market;
- the existence of two uncorrelated markets of the workforce supply and demand.

So, the following organizational measures are proposed as mechanisms of mediating and differentiating the formative supply and demand for all employees of public institutions:

- 1) Differentiating the educational supply according to adult categories depending on their specific needs and their specific skills;
- 2) Organizing the labour market according to competence sheets necessary to get a post, including the ratings for the application of specific knowledge;
- 3) Involving institutions in the study of the market needs, drawing up the most suitable programs and services, and only after that in the actual use of the price, communication, distribution and advertising. An efficient educational marketing process does not mean impulsive or occasional outbursts of an educational institution on the market. The process should be contoured as part of the educational strategy and policies which include, in their turn, a specific marketing strategy.
- 4) Drawing up programs of educational change as a response to this information. In marketing lingo, educational change means generating on the market a model able to influence customer demand, according to the general needs of the community or society. In order to stay afloat, education suppliers have to discover customers and offer the right products for their needs or requests.

Thus, in order to be able to also perform the function of continuous training, the institution should develop a strategy specific to ongoing education, a component of the general strategy, which should take into account specific features, out of which the following may be mentioned:

- continuous formation mainly addresses a high number of motivated adults, with clearly defined claims and already having work experience;
- it is necessary to develop a specific learning support involving a high degree of technology, and hence high financial investments, surpassing by far their budget possibilities;
- activity financing should also include extra budgetary resources, such as study fees paid by the beneficiary or the employer, sponsorships, non-refundable external funds obtained by specific programs in the European Union or other countries, etc.;
- it depends on proving the opportunity and efficiency of the activity provided;
- it is necessary to constitute a specific structure, especially designed to this purpose, i.e. by a centre, department, or ongoing education direction, able to coordinate the activity provided by each of the institutions, within its area of expertise;
- the chosen strategy should be efficient and contribute to securing an advantageous position of the company on the market;
- a company may operationalize the chosen strategy, either too slowly, and in this case it allows the competition to spoil its plans, or too quickly, when it attempts to introduce a product on the market before the potential customers are willing to buy it.

If the company has correctly assessed its advantages, based on clear competitive edge, which differentiate its offer from the competition's, and at the same time manages to identify the environment opportunities, this agreement between advantages and opportunities within the market will only manifest for a limited time span.

In conclusion, the company's marketing strategies should act when these "windows" are open, which will allow their success, but without having an independent power from the tactical results. So, once again we should stress the need to correlate strategy formulation and implementation.

Once the positioning strategy has been established, it goes on to being put into practice by means of a marketing mix. The elements of the mix will define the company's supply within the target market. The mix should be thus conceived so that the target customers perceive it as superior and unique as compared to the competition. The building of the marketing mix corresponding to each market segment constitutes the "operational" part of the strategy, being followed by the description of the tactics by means of which the marketing strategy adopted by the company is to be put into practice.

At the centre of customer satisfaction there should be the concepts of ideal performance. Creating value is possible by the analysis of the product characteristics, but also by certain innovative forms of price setting, even closer to customer expectations, more functional distribution modes, high quality forms of organizational communication and assistance. All these result in customer satisfaction, also supported by the previous analysis of the present customer situation, the accurate identification of objectives, their individualization, specification and clarification in terms of the expected effects, developing solutions adapted to reducing the distance between customers and objectives, the accurate evaluation of resources, the company's ability to forge new quality relations with the ones it interacts with, its own audience, customers, partners, and all the "stakeholders" in general. The necessary transfer consists of refocusing the organization's attention from the concept of marketing mix towards the concept of value mix, where the marketing tools are used only to the extent they represent tools of creating the value perceived by the customers.

Through all the instruments of attracting adults towards organized forms of continuous education, the following two actions are desired.

First is a proactive approach to decreasing and preventing unemployment in the categories that are challenged in point of socio-professional insertion, young people by means of developing programs suitable to the needs of the unemployed, especially for long-term unemployed people, young people and vulnerable groups, developing informative and assistance programs, professional formation/reconversion programs for the unemployed made redundant by restructured companies, whose qualification no longer responds to the requirements of the labour market, developing "job-rotation" programs; professional formation/reconversion programs able to provide a qualification to young people who are still out of work 6 months after graduation; second-chance programs, accompanied by social assistance for young people from challenged categories, who have not graduated compulsory education and thus do not have any qualifications, including schools in partnerships with the economic agents, with apprenticeship programs, stimulating partnerships to smooth the transition from school to the workplace; stimulating employers into integrating and maintaining vulnerable categories in their employment; stimulating and facilitating employers' access to programs and funds aimed at human resource development, with vulnerable categories of people as target groups;

Another action consists in promoting flexibility and adaptability on the labour market by adapting the educational systems and ongoing professional training system to the ever changing requirements of the labour market, developing flexible programs of certification of the competences obtained at the workplace; supporting entrepreneurs in their attempts to adapt the occupational standards to their own requirements; developing the network of suppliers of ongoing professional training and stimulating their certification for „niche” qualifications; developing the ability of suppliers of ongoing and professional formation to provide services corresponding to the requirements of the labour market; developing partnerships between schools, economic agents and other actors involved in adapting the curriculum to the market requirements; adapting and diversifying the programs of active measures for the labour market requirements; identifying the needs for competences and qualifications necessary to decrease the unbalance on the labour market, by market studies and prognoses; evaluating the impact of the active measures and stimulating the measures that prove a real impact on the labour market; stimulating the creation of observatories of the labour market.

3. CONCLUSIONS

It is imperative to completely change the educational policies by the following measures:

- decentralizing educational programs, curriculum offers and professional training programs that should be provided by legal persons independent from the administrative structures of MEN;
- introducing by cooperation with the competent international institutions a professionalization line in higher learning and policy making in education;
- introducing compulsory feed-back mechanisms ensuring the validity and applicability of programs, able to prevent abuse and corruption in the system;
- developing education quality control lines departing from the initial concrete data and tracing progress and/or performance;
- conditioning the funding level by the progress and/or performance level;
- creating permanent professional reconversion programs allowing for the teachers adaptation to new necessities;
- introducing compulsory ongoing teacher training correlated to the formation needs found about by means of periodical assessments;
- creating parallel funding lines for schools by involving private fund-providers;
- enriching the educational program spectrum corresponding to the market needs;

- creating a world-level nucleus curriculum with updated directions;
- creating a genuinely competitive framework in regard to the educational offers, including textbooks, curricula, syllabi;
- creating expert bodies to take up the specialized program part;
- forming excellence networks among teachers providing programs of mentoring or tutoring, in-depth study, acceleration, enrichment within their teaching load;
- introducing psycho-pedagogical research techniques as compulsory in professional training programs;
- attracting internationally successful know-how and teaching technologies;
- promoting and multiplying successful experience;
- non-linear hierarchisation of education units based on performance in performance areas;
- introducing enrichment programs as compulsory in all education forms;
- introducing teacher training programs for all directions in the educational policy;
- introducing modern evaluation types and successful international baccalaureate programs;
- introducing ethical assessment methodologies for all the components in the educational process avoiding any type of abuse and regulating inputs and outputs in the educational system by negotiations with all the factors involved;
- increasing the access to training;
- developing cooperation among the various actors involved, as well as by building partnerships between suppliers and beneficiaries;
- financing is the basic element in all stages of the processes, which means that without solid investments in the field, none of the objectives can be attained;
- the existence of a data set comparable to global counterparts and fair practices examples;
- organizations should invest in human resources;
- organizing advertising and information campaigns, conferences and seminars destined to higher management, presenting the advantages provided by the support of the workforce by ongoing training, and building IT applications contributing to adopting training decisions and administering the corresponding information.

In conclusion, it is required to stress participation, valorising self-control and self-discipline, fulfilling the staff's aspirations of self-development, and favouring the stakeholders, making individuals and groups responsible for continuous education, control-free leadership.

It results in creating three possible strategies to improve quality in order to replace traditional bureaucratic production (i.e. focusing on internal processes, activities, and sometimes the output and government through regulations) (OECD, 2001, p. 98):

- from traditional bureaucracy concentrated on the supplier to a citizen-oriented traditional bureaucratic production ;
- from traditional bureaucracy focusing on the supplier to the voluntary participation of customers in this mechanism ;
- from traditional bureaucracy focusing on the supplier to supply determination or codetermination, which is quality-oriented, by the citizen or customer.

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