

Compromise to Customers via Quality Systems: a case study in higher education

Blaya, I; Mira, J.J.; Rodríguez-Marín, J.; Gómez, J. M.; García, A.; Rodrigo, J.; Carratalá. M.

Abstract

Organisations that have implemented Quality Systems can guarantee the optimal service for their customers. That is what we presumed from the beginning in Miguel Hernández University (founded in 1997). Management is based in our Quality System, having not only a complete documented system but also an implemented system where people work applying quality improvement to achieve standards and compromise of service to our customers according to the mission.

Our Strategic Plan for Quality includes objectives in teaching, research and management and activities to achieve them, using different tools: process management, management by objectives, evaluation, indicators monitoring, using EFQM Model as a framework.

The effort of people working at Miguel Hernandez University has been recognised by external organisations, such as, EFQM Recognition for Excellence (+500) in 2004, three ISO recognition: work experience for students, research and teaching plan (1999, 2002 and 2003). We have received recognitions by other quality organisations in Spain, for instance, Club de Excelencia en la Gestión (NPO in EFQM) and the Spanish Association for Quality in (Representative of EOQ).

In this presentation we make a short walk into our Quality System, highlighting the key factors and the advantages we have found and giving evidences of the first assumption: guarantee of service. We know what customers want, what we have and how we can improve and how to carry out plans; we analyse results, specifically customer level of satisfaction and we revise the plan to start again. To sum up: that is our application of the PDCA cycle.

Key words: quality plan, process design, indicators monitoring, improvement plan, EFQM Model as a framework, compromises to customers, recognition systems, evaluation and improvement, performance measurement.

Introduction

How can we guarantee optimal service for the customers? Probably there is not a magical recipe for this, but it is assumed that organisations that have implemented Quality Systems have more opportunities. That is what we presumed from the beginning in Miguel Hernández University, a higher education institution founded in 1997, which management is, therefore, based in our Quality System. Miguel Hernández University was built meanwhile our Quality System was being designed and implemented, having not only a documented system but also an implemented system where people work applying quality improvement to achieve standards and compromise of service to our customers according to the mission.

From the very start, Miguel Hernández Univesrity has considered the need to introduce a method for continuous improvement in order to achieve standards of quality. It began the path towards this by designing and applying a series of tools, manuals and guidelines which are compatible with the Quality System.

The Quality System at UMH includes a Quality Policy which was approved in 1998, consisting of the Quality manual, the manual for Process Design and the Strategic Plan for

TOPIC AREA: Quality Systems

Quality which works in the areas of teaching, research and development, and management. This Plan includes objectives in teaching, research and management and activities to achieve them, using different tools: process management, management by objectives, evaluation, indicators monitoring, using EFQM Model as a framework. Among actions carried out, we should emphasize what is known as Teaching Accreditation, the Quality assessment system as perceived by students and teachers, Management by Objectives, Administration through Processes, Quality report cards and Improvement teams.

Problem formulation

At University Miguel Hernández, we were looking for a global tool, which would make continuous improvement possible, establishing the dynamics for the diagnosis and the implementation of improvement plans. Also, an instrument which would encourage staff participation and involvement was necessary.

On the other hand, besides needing a method, an element which would act as a 'motivator' was required. It was considered that the consecution of external recognition could be a stimulus for people who work at the University. To sum up, a good model for carrying out the leadership in our organisation.

For these reasons, the EFQM Model has been and is an aim and a method for UMH, and as it is on its web, it is based on the premise that: "Excellent results with respect to Performance, Customers, People and Society are achieved through Leadership driving Policy and Strategy, that is delivered through People, Partnerships and Resources, and Processes". (www.efqm.org)

It is a model of continuous application in which its 9 criteria are broken down into a number of sub-criteria, which can be used independently or together. These subcriteria are evaluated and weighed up in order to determine the organization's progress towards excellence.

Methodology

In the first place, Systems of Total Quality, which were being introduced to other public and private organizations, were studied.

In the second phase, key elements were designed for a Quality System: Quality Policy, Quality manual, Process Design manual, Balanced Score Card and besides this the setting up of committees responsible for quality management.

The third phase, consisted of designing and establishing strategies for Management by Objectives, Process Management and Design of Improvement Plans through the Accreditation Guides designed ad hoc and the data from the surveys (opinion of our customers).

Parallel to this, the human resources were provided with tools (training, applications, manuals, etc.) in order to encourage participation.

In this phase it was very important to implement our Strategic Quality Plan. The areas of action for this Plan are teaching, research and administration, and as with every Quality Plan it has a focus point (quality management system, work plan and strategic objectives), deployment (actions, indicator systems, incentive plans) and evaluation and revision of the plan. The results of the first Strategic Plan for Quality 2000-2003 were positive, with an improvement in the quality of the different areas (Teaching, R+D, and Administration). It helped to introduce the philosophy of Total Quality in the UMH, emphasizing the need to count on the different perspectives of the different groups of interest (students and their families, employers, teachers, researchers, administration and service staff, managers of the educational system, etc).

We implemented a strategy to know what customers want, what we have and how we can improve and how to carry out plans: identifying customers, needs, opinions and demands.

TOPIC AREA: Quality Systems

Indicators system (related to Strategic Plan for Quality) gave us information: we could analyse results, specifically customer level of satisfaction, and we had the instrument to revise the plan to start again.

The fourth phase consisted of a review of the tools and elements of the Quality System, introducing the improvements detected when they were set up and applied by the people involved. For instance, we revised our Quality Policy and the Strategic Plan for Quality, introducing the II Plan in 2004. This document was drawn up from the experience with PESCA I and with contributions by different groups within the UMH. The principles of PESCA II can be summed up in: client orientation for processes and procedure; implication of all people who form part of the university community; factual approach for decision making for the improvement of quality based on indicators, process management as an improvement strategy; decisive implementation of quality evaluation systems and improvement systems

The fifth phase, report about the organization was written following the EFQM Model by the staff of the organization, being assessed by a Committee and being recognised with the EFQM Recognition for Excellence (+500) in 2004.

Results and conclusions

The assessment, which is carried out by the University, is very positive, not only because of the results but because it has been very useful internally. The participation of the people involved throughout the whole process was achieved, from participation in the design of tools to the inclusion in the proposed improvements.

A report was written, which has helped the University reflect on; how it organizes itself, the results obtained, management and aims.

Also, we have succeeded in an external assessment (receiving more than 500 points), once again involving people who work at the University and who participated in the external visit.

It's important do not forget that it has helped to encourage a culture of total quality and continuous improvement, facilitating a global scheme which has helped to situate the different elements, strategies and efforts carried out by the organization. It has been possible to set up the Plan-Do-Check-Act method in the day to day running of the organization.

In the same way, we have developed our own tools which are adapted to the reality of universities, facilitating the application of different instruments to a different sector which has different demands and needs. The Quality System includes a series of materials for training and documentation produced by UMH, besides other tools among which the following can be found.

- "Guide for Teaching Accreditation" ("Guía de Acreditación Docente")
- "Guide for Services Accreditation" (Guía de Acreditación de Servicios")
- Surveys
- "Process Design Manual" (Manual de Diseño de Procesos)
- System of Indicators for Teaching, Research and Management.
- System of Incentives for Teaching, Research and Management.
- "Manual for Customer treatment" (Manual de Atención al Público)
- On line application for Management by Objectives
- On line application for Process Management
- On line application for Quality Record Card
- Application for follow-up of impact on the media.

TOPIC AREA: Quality Systems

All of the University's customers have also participated; internal (teachers, researchers, administration and service staff) and external (students, businessmen, secondary school teachers, suppliers etc).

The effort of people working at Miguel Hernandez University has been recognised by external organisations, such as, EFQM Recognition for Excellence (+500) in 2004, three ISO recognition: work experience for students, research and teaching plan (1999, 2002 and 2003). We have received recognitions by other quality organisations in Spain, for instance, Club de Excelencia en la Gestión (NPO in EFQM) and the Spanish Association for Quality in (Representative of EOQ).

The application of the EFQM Excellence Model in UMH has produced some highly satisfactory results, because not only has a global model been adapted and recognized at a european level in UMH, but also it has served to develop a series of tools which are easily adaptable to other institutions of higher education.

Relevant references and literature

www.efqm.org

ALDAY, A. Y RODRÍGUEZ, S. (1997). La calidad total en la universidad: ¿podemos hablar de clientes?. Boletín de Estudios Económicos LII, 161; 333-352.

ANECA (Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación), Ley Orgánica 6/2001, de 20 de diciembre de 2001, de Universidades, artículo 32.

BLAYA, I.; GARCÍA, A.; MARTÍNEZ, B.; SITGES, E.; MIRA, J.J.; GÓMEZ, J.M.; RODRÍGUEZ-MARÍN, J. (1998) Guía para la Autoevaluación, Universidad Miguel Hernández

CHACÓN, S; PÉREZ-GIL, JA; HOLGADO, FP Y LARA, A (2001). Evaluación de la calidad universitaria: validez de contenido. Psicothema, 13 (2): 294-301.

FRANKE-WIKBERG, S. (1990). Evaluating education quality on the institutional level. Higher Education Management 2 (3); 271-292.

HANSEN, WL. Y JACKSON, M. (1996). Total Quality Improvement in the classroom. Quality in Higher Education 2 (3); 211-218.

JUANES GÁRATE, B. "El gato de Alicia: Modelos de Calidad en la Administración Pública." Díaz de Santos, D.L., Madrid, 2001.

KOWLEY, J. (1997). Beyond service quality dimensions in higher education and towards a service contract. Quality Assurance in Education 5 (1); 125-139.

LLAMOSAS-VILLALBA, R, ALARCON, AG, PINILLA, L, ET AL. (2005). Quality management system of higher education courses IASTED INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY : 7-12.

Ministerio de Educación Ciencia y Deporte (MECD) (2001). II Plan de la Calidad de las Universidades. BOE, 3 de Agosto de 2001.

MIRA, JJ. BLAYA, I. GARCÍA, A. (2001) La mejora de la calidad en las universidades españolas. Análisis de contenido de la información sobre calidad en las páginas web de las 64 universidades. Revista Mexicana de la Calidad, 1:121-130.

PINTO, M, BERROCAL, JLA, GARCIA, JAC, ET AL. (2005). Quality assessment of Spanish universities' Web sites focused on the European Research Area. Scientometrics 65 (1): 67-93.

RODRÍGUEZ-MARÍN, J; GÓMEZ, JM; MIRA, JJ; BLAYA, I; GARCÍA, A; MARTÍNEZ, B; PÉREZ-JOVER, V. Y RODRIGO, J (2000). Guía para la Acreditación Docente y de Servicios Universitarios. Elche: Universidad Miguel Hernández.

VACA FLORES, S.I. "MODELO EUROPEO DE CALIDAD, APLICADO A LA ADMINISTRACIÓN PÚBLICA ESPAÑOLA." INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ADMINISTRACIÓN PÚBLICA, ALCALÁ DE HENARES, 2000.