

Quality and Adult Education

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Abstract: *Quality in Adult Education is not a new concept. There are thousands of companies in which implemented and registered Quality Management System (QMS). This leads to conclusion that QMS can contribute to the improvement of Adult Education process. Objectives of the Adult education strategy were defined in „Sluzbeni glasnik RS br. 55/07“published in 2005. It states that human potentials can be improved through Adult education (among other factors). This implies design, implementation and certification of QMS in Adult Education.*

Major tasks for achieving this objective includes: establishing specific standards, accreditation and certification system for Adult Education. Industry specific standards are common knowledge (aerospace, automotive, telecommunication, medical devices... to name a few). Important point is that these standards accept latest version of ISO 9001 as written and ad an additional requirement for given industry. So they are really a guide how to use and interpret ISO 9001in specific field.

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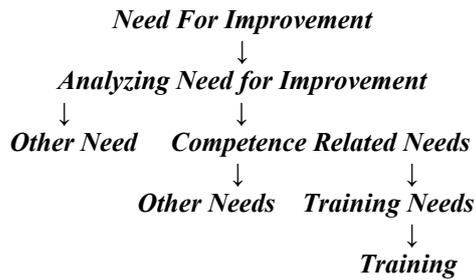
1. INTRODUCTION

Until recently, quality problems were solved at the point of their detection, not at the point of their creation. Measurements and inspections are great tools for the detection of problems, but only a successful Quality Management System (QMS), taking into consideration all major factors affecting quality, can guarantee preventive approach.

While the main reason for operating a system is to provide cost-effective control of activities within a company, another directly related reason is to provide assurance to customers that products meet,

and will continue to meet, their needs and expectations, ultimately resulting in customer satisfaction.

The whole section of ISO 9001 addresses recourses with emphases on human recourses and their competency. Rapid changes in the market reflecting increased customer expectation leads to need for continual competence improvement, not to mention new technology and innovations. So every organization has a need for improvement, but where is training, as a type of adult education, in the “big picture”? The following diagram could be an answer:



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2. QMS AND ADULT EDUCATION

The ISO 9000 family is an international reference for quality management requirements in business-to-business dealings and has earned a worldwide reputation as a “generic management system standard”. Generic means that the same standards can be applied to any organization and any product. In this context, the term “product” may include services in any sector, business enterprises, public administration, or governmental entity. No matter what the organization is or does, the ISO 9000 family spells out essential features of a quality management system.

Management system refers to a systematic approach to managing processes and/or activities, people, resources and infrastructure. Quality management refers to activities aimed at meeting customer demands and applicable regulatory requirements, as well as efforts to continually improve the organization’s performance. ISO 9001 standard defines minimum requirements for a QMS.

There are four clearly defined stages in the training cycle:

- a) Defining training needs
Required tasks for each task affecting quality shall be determined and then competence gap which could be closed by training should be defined
- b) Designing and planning training
 - All items which could constrain the training process shall be listed. They may include:
 - Regulatory requirements
 - The policy requirements
 - Financial considerations
 - Scheduling and timing considerations
 - Potential students’ motivation and learning capacity
 - Available in-house and outside

resources

- Training methods and criteria shall then be selected based on the available objectives, resources and constraints.
 - Training plan specification must be established for either negotiation with outside training provider or in-house trainer. It should contain training objectives and clear understanding of what is expected outcome of the training. The plan should be major tool for clear and open communication.
 - Selecting training provider is the last stage of the planning. Selection shall be based on defined needs and training providers ability to fulfill these needs
- c) Providing for the training
- It is training provider ultimate responsibility to deliver training according to specified plan and objective. However, organization shall provide an adequate support for the trainer and trainees.
 - Pre training support includes providing to trainer all required information including competence gaps and establishing contact between trainer and trainee
 - Training support includes provision of relevant tools, equipment and logistics, as well as feedback by trainer or trainee
 - End of training support includes receiving feedback from the trainer and trainee, and then providing feedback to relevant parts of the management
- d) Evaluating the outcome of training
- Evaluation of training outcome should determine to what degree are learning objectives met. This could include different types of evaluation including exam, but the ultimate measure of training effectiveness is participants' performance before and after.
 - Evaluation report must include analyzing data and interpretation of results, review of training cost and recommendations for improvement

Monitoring training process is done during all four training stages to determine if process is managed and implemented as required, being effective in achieving set objectives, targets and goals.

Most training providers take their responsibilities seriously as they pursue competent educators, appropriate planning and curricula, the best available methodologies and processes, providing outstanding materials and infrastructure. Nonetheless, they often fail to provide an adequate educational experience, ultimately not satisfying "learner expectations". The reason is that improving individual elements does not guarantee program's success if corresponding synergies are absent. Implementing QMS in an educational organization can create the required synergies.

There are at least five reasons why QMS could be used as one of the concepts contributing to the Adult Education improvement:

- Clear focus to the participants and their training needs
- Requirement that the entire process is planned and managed in systematic and systemic manner.
- Process realization according to the established input-output

relation (training needs-specified outcomes)

- Requirement for monitoring and measurement-evaluation
- Requirements for continual improvement of all parts of the process (Educational cycle)

QMS can provide, among other that Adult Education gains the value for the all participants (trainees, organizations, local community etc.) by enabling this process to achieve specified objectives and targets resulting in desired outcomes. Additional benefits could be:

- Creating learner value
- Focusing on social value
- Agility
- Autonomy

QMS needs to recognize the range of settings, both formal and informal, in which learning takes place, and they need to provide opportunities for learners to demonstrate their newly acquired skills and knowledge.

3. HOW CAN QMS IMPROVE ADULT EDUCATION

The QMS philosophy is based on striving to achieve customer satisfaction by meeting and exceeding customer expectation. This is done by establishing the system consisting of effective and efficient processes working toward common goal. This system is subject to continual improvement.

In an educational setting this might involve finding ways to improve learning thru management policies and administrative processes.

Evaluation is a path for quality determination. Adult education theory might help in defining measurements (evaluation) in adult education process and finding the way for more efficient evaluation methods. The ISO 9001 simply states that results of training need to be evaluated. Adult education experts have

long and outstanding knowledge of this process. They are aware of the fact that it is necessary to evaluate the entire education process, not just an outcome, as it is done in most cases. It is therefore necessary to evaluate for improvement, manage and control all inputs, activities and expected outputs of this process.

There is a number of major groups who are having a legitimate interest in the quality of adult education: students (who often pay for their education), teachers, community organizations, employers and government agencies. Adult education is becoming market orientated creating competition between educational service providers.

Education and training organizations have many reasons to move towards ISO 9000 certification (consistent processes, based on controlled inputs, improved quality at designed level, continual improvement, etc). But there are other reasons:

- The projection of a high quality image, with high visibility and credibility
- Being able to effectively respond to external factors, in particular pressures from customers
- Direct and indirect pressure from governments or funding bodies
- Incorporation of training process in a full quality management system which covers the whole organization
- The need to improve a number of specific activities of the organization

In each of these areas, several factors may play a role. The importance of these arguments is likely to vary strongly depending on the nature of the organization and its external environment. Overall, it would appear that the reasons for seeking QMS implementation and subsequently certification in the education and training world do not differ fundamentally from those in other

organizations.

Arguments in favor of certification should, of course, be balanced against the counter-arguments and disadvantages. The most often heard are:

- Interpretation problems (the standard was initially designed and written for the manufacturing industry);
- Insufficient relevance of certain components of the norm (and lack of specific mention of some issues which are considered critical to education and training);
- Inappropriate standardization in use and application;
- Time consumption and cost;
- Risk of increased bureaucracy;
- Specific problems linked to particular types of education and training organizations.

It must thus be recognized that the ISO 9000 approach may have some inherent weaknesses for education and training industry, which require skill and creativity to address. The cost and time implications are a real hurdle, and there is a serious risk of a bureaucracy. Overall differences by type of education and training provider are:

- Compared to schools and higher education institutions, the providers of continuing education and training are more likely candidates for ISO 9000 (market pressure; more similarity with other industrial services);
- Vocational education and training providers are more suitable candidates for ISO 9000 than general education institutes (closer linkage to the employment market with its quality ethos and culture);
- ISO 9000 is more likely to be appropriate for “larger” than for “small” organizations (economies of scale, and need for more

formalized process control in larger organizations);

- The more varied and customized the provision of education and training is, the more time it will take (and the more costly it will be) to obtain an ISO 9000 certificate

4. CONCLUSIONS

ISO 9000 cannot guarantee quality. It can only provide the platform for organizations to do it. If an organization is not committed to quality, i.e. it does not ascertain the needs of the customers (in adult education of the students) or whether it produces services that are not designed to consistently improve itself, no QMS will help.

A platform or a framework is needed to leverage the commitment to make significant progress towards quality management system and improvements and ISO 9000 can play that role well.

Some of the most apparent benefits could include:

- ISO 9001 QMS documentation will guide teaching, learning in a convenient, predictable and generally acceptable environment
- The documentation also improves understanding among the faculty and staff and can be used to train newly recruited staff
- Operations in institutions can be stream lined, quality problems can be identified, corrective & preventive and improvements can be accomplished in a systematic manner
- The QMS provides a clearer role and responsibility of students, faculty and staff
- Internal quality auditing allows each faculty and staff member to raise and resolve practical problems

- An adequately implemented ISO 9001 based QMS will focus on the reduction of quality problems, including student failures and fosters an environment for continual improvement
- An external and independent certification body provides and outsider's point of view, which can be used for system and processes improvement.

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