Developing Alternative Perspectives for Quality in Higher Education

Abstract

A fresh view is necessary of quality in higher education as the debate is currently narrowly focussed, essentially around adapting industrial quality systems to higher education. The views are sharply divided and there is very little consensus on practice. In the article several alternative perspectives on quality in higher education are developed, either through a review of current approaches, or looking at the history of practice of quality, or through a comparison with industrial quality systems.

One way of broadening the understanding is to look at perspectives of the stakeholders of higher education. This reveals a very clear pattern, from which the requirements of the overarching system can be framed. Looking at historic developments in higher education, traditionally, the notion of academic freedom was seen as the requirement of excellence in education. In more recent times (pre 1990) measures of quality control were imposed on higher education, but their adoption was superficial compared to industry. Practice of quality control in Higher education was diluted by the exercise of academic freedom. Post 1990 period saw the need for a considerable increase in the quality systems activity in higher education in view of dynamism in the sector. There was a strong preference for the adoption of quality management in view of its extensive practice in industry. Presently, the practice of QM in higher education is deteriorating into managerialism in institutions in view of lack of development of a shared vision and lack of a match between QM techniques and educational processes.

Based on the above, guidelines for a new approach to quality system in higher education are proposed. QM can still be the broad management methodology but it should be more flexibly adapted to educational processes. QM as adapted to higher education must be made to preserve the traditional values of academic freedom and collegial modes of operation.

A Brief Background

Principles of quality management are a relatively new entrant to the arena of management practices. Even though the original literature in the area (eg. Shewhart, 1931; Feigenbaum, 1951) dates back to the era of ‘Human Relations Development’ of management theory (1930-60), a serious discussion of it in the Western management literature began only since early 70s (eg. Chapman, 1969; Gryna & Juran, 1970), after the phenomenal success of its application in Japan. Higher Education followed nearly a couple of decades later (eg. Sherr & Teeter, 1991; Mayhew et. al., 1990). But, presently, as a theory supported by a set of techniques, quality management (QM) has gained dominance in organisational practice. Quality management forms the basis of organisation excellence movement (eg. Malcom Baldrige Awards) and evaluation standards for operational effectiveness (eg. ISO 9000-2000). Its influence is only matched by the theories of ‘scientific management’ by Taylor (1911) in the early part of 20th century, which led the industry to a relentless pursuit of efficiency through division of labour and mass production throughout the century.

Contrastingly, the industry and the universities looked at QM theories to address their problems at the opposite ends of the market spectrum. Manufacturing Industry and Service Organisations saw quality techniques as a way of getting out of the customer alienation through massification of markets and undue emphasise on efficiency (ch. 3, Deming, 1982). To

the universities, QM appeared as way out of elitism, and consequent seclusion through making its product, education, exclusive. This led to popular apprehensions about its relevance and effectiveness of its operation (p3, Freed et al., 1997). The need to deal with, and cater to the mass markets was thrust by social developments, for which it seemed to be ill prepared (p10, ibid). Ultimately, these developments led both university and industry sectors to focus on similar outcomes: building flexibility and improvement in dealing with a large customer base, in an environment of enduring uncertainty (ch.1, Seymour et al, 1996).

It is understandable, that any new approach will bring with it an array of detractors and some controversy. In comparison to industry sector, in higher education it has been vocal (Harvey 1995; Bensimon, 1995). Disagreements have been very sharp and fundamental, leading to a serious erosion of meaningful practice (Birnbaum and Deshotels2, 1999;Vazzana et al3, 2000).

Issues in developing a model

Since ‘the basic European university model..’ is the ‘..only common academic model worldwide’ (p3, Kempner et.al. eds., 1998), it should be possible to generalise the elements of a model for ensuring quality in its performance. The concepts and practices of quality in higher education have only been with us for just over a decade. There have been detailed discussions in a variety of forums and media during this period on all aspects of implementation, assessment, and improvement of quality. Despite such an abundance of activity, an exploratory work on the fundamental issues relating to quality in higher education becomes necessary because of the following considerations:

Approach to a Model

Unfortunately, it is a reality of life that despite the volumes being written on it, and several patterns of practice put into effect in different countries (Woodhouse, 1996), there is still no agreement on a model for quality in higher education. There are disagreements surrounding the fundamental suitability of models proposed. All these models are essentially variants of Total Quality Management (TQM) methodology, and are of industrial origin. The disagreements seem to stem from basic differences in approach to quality between higher education and industry (Yorke, 1997a). Such a situation seriously detracts from synergistic development of the elements of any model in use, but only contributes to a divisive debate on the suitability or otherwise of the very model itself (Jauch & Orwig, 1997). Realistically, the effectiveness of a model in use is ultimately indicated by the sustenance and improvement in the capacity of a higher education institution. It should provide a template for interactions to achieve the goals consistently. If one broadly looks at the practice of QM in the higher education sector in the past 10 years, all the indications seem to be pointing it out to be more as an euphemism for control by the funding bodies (Westerheijden, 2000). If this be so, then it clearly serves the long-term interest of none of the stakeholders of the institution. Hence in order to come up with a more effective model for Quality in Higher Education one has to carry out a renewed exploration around (eg. Kezar & Eckel, 2000):

Issues unique to Quality in higher education,

Deeper exploration of the alternative approaches proposed, and

An examination of some behavioural issues in the environment (both internal and external) of education.

Stakeholders’ perspectives

Another observation from the models for quality adopted so far in higher education is that they have clearly failed to win all-round support from the key stakeholder groups in higher education. If one studies the history of adoption of management models so far in higher

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2 the survey by Birnbaum and Deshotels (1999) of 469 higher education institutions concluded that the adoption of TQM in the academy is both a ‘myth and illusion’

3 Vazzana et al (2000) in a survey involving 400 business schools concluded that few are using TQM to manage core learning processes.
education, there is in fact little evidence that there has even been an attempt to consider the perspectives of the stakeholders (Birnbaum, 2000). A model, which would be accepted community-wide, is one which is sensitive to the expectations of different groups of people involved (Schulman & Houser, ch. 11 in Seymour et al, 1996). Ideally, any model can only succeed if it represents the shared vision of the stakeholders. The current portrayal of Quality Management as attempts at control and manipulation clearly shows that it is failing to meet their expectations (Barret, 1996). There are several stakeholder perspectives about the role of a quality system in higher education, which will have to be addressed by any model:

Providers (Funding Bodies and community at large): To provide an effective way to ensure an optimum utilization of resources for providing an acceptable level of quality in the delivery. Here quality is interpreted as ‘value for money’ (Harvey and Green, 1993) where the funding authorities are looking for good return on investments.

Users of Products (Courseware) (eg. students, both current and prospective): To provide, an evidence of the comparatively high standards, which would ensure a relative advantage in career prospects. This is the purported role of league tables compiled by the private bodies from the quality audit and other performance data (Yorke, 1997b). The interpretation of quality here is one of ‘excellence’ (Harvey & Green, 1993), which guides the student choices.

Users of outputs (Graduates) (eg. the employers): To provide assurance of comparatively high levels of capability of the graduates to handle the job complexities to ensure competitive advantage. The interpretation of quality here is one of ‘Fitness for purpose’ (ibid) where the employers are looking for competencies matching the functions.

The employees of the sector (both academics and administrators) are looking for a different set of outcomes. They require deep levels of job satisfaction, through successfully meeting the challenges. This is required to manifest itself by comparatively high levels of respect, as evidenced by remuneration and recognition. The interpretation of quality here is one of ‘Perfection (or consistency)’ (ibid) where the behavioural norms are met and core ethos is upheld.

Thus the perspectives of the four main stakeholders seem to cover the four out of five distinct ways in which quality is interpreted in the higher education debate according to Harvey and Green (1993). The fifth interpretation - quality as ‘transformation’ – is argued as a meta-quality concept, which subsumes the other ones. In other words, the other interpretations are argued as possible operationalisation of transformative process than ends in themselves (p51, Harvey and Knight 1996). It is this view of quality as ‘transformation’ of the participants that is potentially capable of addressing the concerns of all the stakeholders’ group. Unfortunately this interpretation has been singularly missing from all the approaches to quality in higher education so far (Harvey 1998).

**Evolution of Approaches to Quality**

In order to develop broad perspectives as indicated above, it is necessary to explore the approaches to quality both in the historic past and the recent developments in higher education to understand its origins and trends:

**Historical imperative**

The role of a university as understood in its earliest days of formation was one of subservience to religious dogma and political ideologies, at least in different parts of Europe, in the medieval period (13th century Oxford, Paris etc) (‘…the authoritarian heel of ecclesiastical or secular power…’ (p235, Cobban, 1975)). Often times, in the course of history this has been a source of heady confrontations (eg.p143, 151 & 160, Wieruszowski, 1966). Therefore the founding fathers of modern universities under the patronage of Von Humboldt in Berlin (1810) enshrined freedom in teaching and learning (lehrfreiheit and lernfreiheit) as central to academic way of life to avoid the confrontations with autocratic forces in the establishment (p75, Thelin, 1982). Academic freedom was seen as sin qua non for excellence (quality) in intellectual endeavour. This view of freedom entrenched ‘…the perennial struggle for autonomous being which has been the persistent hallmark of European
university idea.’ (Conclusion, Cobban, 1975). This nexus between freedom and quality is deeply embedded at the core of academic ethos. Whether academic freedom equates to academic excellence (quality) or not, it sits increasingly at odds with the utilitarian/community service role universities are required to play, which imposes a ‘...state of subservience to the needs of the economy ...(as) higher education ...is inescapably bound into its host society’ (p220, Mitchell, 1998). Recently, issues surrounding the notion of academic freedom have been a source of serious contentions (ch6, Van Patten, 2000). Viewed proactively, academic freedom and social responsibility need not be dichotomous. It is a challenge to develop ‘a redesigned organisation (which) ought to expand the personal liberties and create a climate for organisational commitment’ (p19, Tierney, 1999). The imperative for any management model for quality is to foster the spirit of traditional values of freedom while fully meeting the contemporary criteria of service.

Pre 1990 approaches

The period before 1990 is significant as it represents the period before the initiation of major moves towards quality management. During this period, quality was managed, by and large, in a control sense, as a means of ensuring the basic standards. The general approach to control of quality during this period is illustrated using the case of Britain, which gives a broad basis for interpreting these trends internationally, as ‘(i)n many basic ways there is a convergence of institutional models and norms’ worldwide (p13, Kempner et.al. eds., 1998).

During the time, the field of higher education in the United Kingdom (UK) had two distinct sectors: Universities and Further Education establishments. The approach to management of quality in each of the sector was unique (Becher et al, 1978):

The further education sector:

This is largely typified by Polytechnics and Technical Colleges, which had the role of meeting the community needs in the practice of various trades. They were funded and administered largely, as arms of local governments thus keeping them ‘...under social control, directly responsive to social needs’ (Ch. 14, Venables in Shattock ed., 1996). They were not to ‘...cross the binary line into the haven of university…but should stay with the regional area.’ (p143, Stewart, 1989). Regional Councils oversaw their academic function. For them the issue of quality was one of maintenance of standards to meet the community needs. An inspectorate carried out periodic evaluations of academic functions, which was deemed as sufficient to meet these requirements. Community provided the recognition and support for these institutions, hence periodic inspectoral visits evolved, by and large as a way of maintaining public confidence without seriously offending the sensibilities of the institutions, ‘...in a discreet, gentlemanly and non-coercive way.’ (p43, Becher et al, 1978). Measurement of ‘quality in education’ was always recognised as ‘an elusive concept’ often prone to controversies, but overall, inspection was seen as a ‘vital... tool ...in the maintenance of standards’ (Ch4, Melia in, Green ed., 1994). Another mechanism of control came into play, when the institutions moved to offer degree courses generally recognised as the preserve of the universities. A Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), scrutinised and approved the proposal for the offering, and appointed examiners to maintain a check on standards. Such practices were very much on the lines of contemporary industry norms, where quality control was extensively practised. In a similar way, special inspectors were employed to control and ensure the quality of products with discrete measures in industry as well. In both the instances the purpose of the ‘quality control ethos’ was the same: maintenance of an anticipated level of standard through an intervention of people from outside the process. The intervention, inspection (or checking), as argued by Deming (p29,1982) invariably finished up as being ‘...unreliable, costly (and) ineffective.’ It does not contribute to improve the process but only seeks approbation from a third party that the basic norms are met. The direct consequence of this was a steady loss of motivation for the process owners to improve
quality. Worse still, their focus becomes narrow, just one of crossing the hurdle of inspection. This led to the development of routines of ‘gamesmanship’ for hoodwinking the ‘interloper’. On the whole, the customer had minimum gains from such elaborate control procedures.

But in spite of the similarity of the approach to quality control, there were very substantial differences between industry and education in a number of areas. In industry, the controllers were a part of the establishment meant to ‘assure’ the fault free functioning of the products, so that warranty repair costs and loss of goodwill could be averted. In education, the inspectorate remained a government arm outside the higher education institutions. Despite the regularity of the inspections, the education institutions, which established ‘self evaluation’ in the form of special units, were rare. Wherever such units were set up ‘they had tended to give rise to such dislike and suspicion that they have typically been disbanded within a year or two.’ ‘One of the most obvious reason is that teaching is traditionally regarded as a private matter, from which it follows that it is unseemly to expose it to the view of others’ (p137-140, Becher et al, 1978). In other words, measures of quality control were clearly subservient to assertions of freedom.

Higher education institutions on the other hand depended on the professionalism of the academics to do the right thing by the inspection (or checking) system. In addition, issues of quality were not as much a challenge to the survival of the higher education institutions as industries. Each institution had a reasonably well-designated territory within the community, and barring any serious breaches, funding was reasonably well assured. In other words, quality control was never considered as a critical issue in the educational administration system.

In industry, up until 1970s, the dominant paradigm was control, when quality had special connotation: a product of the level of sophistication of control (p532, Feigenbaum, 1951), therefore increased quality has to be more expensive and exclusive. Such attitudes had very little meaning within an individual higher education institution, as the approach to control of quality by evaluation was cursory. What was done by way of evaluation typically was self-appraisal by an individual or a teacher group, rather than bringing on an independent critic or applying some absolute measure. Any significant allocation of resources for evaluation was considered ‘not necessary and worthwhile’ by the institution. Thus, evaluation was only a marginal aspect of higher education, not an inherent feature, (p137/8, Becher et al, 1978) in stark contrast to industry norms. In practice it ‘served to undermine, rather than reinforce (their) educational intentions’ as ‘(t)he pattern of course provision’ tended to ‘remain set in a changeless and steadily outdated mould’ (p149/53, ibid)

**The Universities:**

On the other hand the universities were seen to have an international role in linking the community to the body of knowledge around the world. ‘Their accountability has never been to the local community...but rather to international scholarship’ (p244, Price in Shattock, 1996). Hence the community was relatively less competent to make judgements on their performance. ‘The traditional stance of the university system has been that they are so complicated that no outsider can understand them.’ (p229, Swinnerton-Dyer in Shattock, 1996). Therefore ‘...the universities looked after their own performance and reputation’. There ‘...was no provision for any outside look at how a university operated quality controls, curriculum development…and much else.’ (p253/4, Bird in Shattock, 1996). But there were some broad coordination mechanisms. The University Grants Commission (UGC), which disbursed the government funding, maintained a general control of student numbers and staff ratios. The universities also had a practice of appointing external examiners for their courses, which served to maintain a parity of standards with other institutions. The government strictly

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4 Becher et. al.(p133, 1978) describe the British higher education as ‘change inhibitor ..in the absence of some definite way of encouraging innovation’.

5 Bird (p253, Shattock, 1996) noted the universities’ ‘clamour’ as ‘what business was it of Government how any university was run, and how could its intervention help?’
had no access to any reports generated from these contacts (ibid). The attitude was derived from the universities’ assertions of the prerogative of autonomy. ‘Just as universities look(ed) up to international scholarship, the polytechnics look(ed) down to the local and regional grass roots.’ This became the ‘important strength’ of the further education sector in the period of explosive growth of higher education in 1980s (p245, Price in Shattock, 1996). With the surge in industry demand of workers for ‘knowledge economy’, influential persons in the business community called for increased graduate output. Higher education had to transform itself from ‘elite’ to ‘mass’ status, by allowing a ‘...relatively open access to heterogenous student body, many of whom (we)re older, work part-time, (we)re relatively less well-prepared.’ (p203, Trow in Shattock, 1996). The further education sector was able contribute to ‘...to achieve the quantum leap..’ by graduating a record number of students. Relatively the universities were less amenable to change to respond to the new circumstances. Their inward looking attitudes gave rise to rigid and highly departmentalised organisational structures, which locked them into ‘unresponsive collegiate bureaucracies’ (Price (p243) in Shattock, 1996). Meanwhile with increasing market share of further education in graduate production, the binary system in higher education became inherently unstable. The breakdown of the divide inevitably began to take place from 1991 onwards with Polytechnics assuming the title of universities, marking the beginning of an integrated higher education sector.

Review

The era of management in higher education prior to 1990 by and large, relates to the period before the involvement of higher education in quality management. A typical approach to performance management was seen through the example of the developments in the UK as above. It is characterised by a strong aspiration for academic freedom by the institutions balanced strongly by the moves of the government to rein in administrative efficiencies and ensure community service parameters. The universities dominated this era with the assertion of their research role. The further education sector meekly accepted their community service role. In both sectors the aspiration for academic freedom was very strong. The university sector exercised this in full measure, and kept the government at arm’s length. The further education sector cooperated with government quality control, but never took the measures seriously, particularly if one looks at it in comparison to the industry practices at the time. The main difference in ethos between industry and academia is the strong insistence by the core staff of the latter of academic freedom. Finally, the further education had their moment of glory when the floodgates of demand for professionals opened up when they were able to outperform universities in graduate production. This ingratiated them with the governments and they were able to win a position on par with the dominant partner.

One tends to find similar themes at play during the era in different regions of the world irrespective of political or social contexts as ‘(u)niversities worldwide share a common culture and reality’ (p13, Kempner et.al. eds., 1998). The management style in higher education was determined by the balance between the government’s attempt to exercise control and the institution’s assertion of autonomy. The resultant scenario varied from the ‘...stifling atmosphere of state regulation..’ (p30,Mora & Vidal in Gaither ed.,1998) as in Spain until reforms in 1983, to a ‘...different.. scene in (North) America..’ which ‘...often look(ed) like a vast buzzing, booming, confusion’, ‘...with no central authority..’, standards or funding (p96, Shils in Shattock, 1996). In all these cases universities maintained their elite status emphasising more on research and postgraduate functions. The further education sector (eg. the community colleges in US) was left to pick up the rising demand for graduates using it as leverage to enhance their status. The aspiration for academic freedom in the higher education sector as a whole was consistently strong, and certain governments (eg. Netherlands) used it as a bargaining chip to entice the sector to agree to reforms (p21, Maassen in Gaither ed., 1998). Finally, in spite of the pressures for performance, deployment of principles of quality control in the sector was minimal as compared to the practice in industry.
Post-1990 Scenario

One of the first issues, which required consideration in the new format of higher education, was that of quality. The quality control approaches of the former era were evolved during the periods of relative stability. The changes in the external environment in the closing years of the decade (1980s) were much more turbulent than any other time in the history of higher education (Part 1, Radford et al., 1997). For instance, in the UK, there was a 70% increase in student numbers in the first half of 1990s and the predictions were pointing to an accelerated growth in the years to come. This was exacerbated by the increasing reluctance of the governments to commit more funds to meet the challenges – for example, in the UK the funding per student dropped by 33% in the same period and the reductions in the further years appeared inevitable. In addition, the government maintained a ‘serious concern that higher education institutions be publicly accountable...by being able to demonstrate the high quality and value for money...’ (Clark, 1996). This brought to a head the need for a paradigm change in the approach to control of quality. The present approach ‘..based on a combination of...quality assurance grounded in elitism...and in many countries a close regulation of key components of the educational process..' was considered no longer to suffice in the changed circumstances. The emphasis was required to shift to ‘assessment and improvement’ from the traditional ‘regulation and control’ (Brennan & Shah, 2000). A more sophisticated approach to quality was needed as:

The maintenance of standards in a dynamic environment was considerably more challenging, and

The traditional methods were only aimed at the maintenance of status quo; more proactive approaches, which will ensure quality improvements, will have to be devised to keep pace with the changes.

Evolution of Management Methodologies:

Management fads

Quality in operations is ultimately a function of the management system within the institution. Historically, higher education institutions have always been under pressure to become more efficient and effective. While they were respected for their prowess in knowledge generation, management was not considered their forte. Hence from time to time a ‘hum of corporate buzzwords’ of newfangled management techniques hit ‘the shores of higher education’. Birnbaum (2000) has systematically studied the influence of seven major techniques from ‘Program Planning Budgeting System (PPBS)’ of late 1960s to ‘Business Process Reengineering (BPR)’ of mid 1990s. He concludes ‘with confidence that these innovations have uniformly failed’ in higher education institutions. The list includes TQM as well, which paradoxically continues ‘to be the foremost concern in higher education alongside funding issues’ (Harvey, 1998). Higher education’s typical response to all of them has been one of ‘virtual adoption’, which is ‘essentially (a) superficial’ response with no ‘significant impact on the institution’s core’. Repeated failure of these cycles of management ‘fads’ in academic organisations happen as they are viewed through a corporate ‘organisational paradigm’, ‘that emphasises the importance of goals, rationality and causality’. Birnbaum (2000) concludes that ‘(u)less and until higher education is able’ to develop a management system consistent with its core values, and ‘...tell its story with a narrative more compelling than the market-oriented economic utility...’ another ‘fad cycle’ is inevitably ‘around the corner’.

Quality Management in Industry

As mentioned earlier (in ‘A Brief Background’), in the early 1970s, quality management (QM) began to gain wide acceptance in industry as a management methodology to ensure a market share by focussing on the quality of the products. Some of the highlights of industrial practice will be reviewed to gain a perspective on management developments in higher education. QM required industries to move away from the practice of inspecting quality into the products (quality control). Instead the workers were to be empowered and skilled to manage the quality of the processes in autonomous teams. It sought to implement principles
of continuous improvement to raise quality as a marketing tool (Ch1, Deming, 1982). At the organisational behaviour level, a ‘learning’ culture was considered as the requirement for obtaining process improvement, which replaced the insecurity and manipulation involved in a controlling culture (Ch68, Senge, 1994). Traditionally, it was always believed that quality and cost are characteristics of a product where the latter rises exponentially with respect to the former. QM provided a new basis for believing that given proper worker morale, they could have an inversely proportional relationship, where cost drops even with a consistent increase in quality. This is based on the power of empowerment, which is supposed to cut through the waste in all forms (Ch4, Oakland, 1990). There was significant attention paid to quality management techniques by industry and service organisations. Fascination with systems for quality management gave rise to the International Standards for Quality (ISO 9000) in late 80s. The interest in industry was so phenomenal that by the time ISO 9000 was revised for the second time in the year 2000, there was a near-total acceptance of the standards in all industrialised nations of the world.

Quality Management in Higher education

Increasing popularity of QM in industry at the time when sweeping changes were taking place in higher education (late ‘80s) was an important factor in its adoption in higher education. The industries’ experience was seen by the funding bodies as having direct implications for the challenges faced by higher education. Management of quality was made central to the new discourse on governance of higher education institutions. Formal bodies were set up to carry out periodic quality assessments. A number of authors who have analysed the developments (eg. Ch2, Radford, 1997; Barnett, 1994; Salter, 2000) tend to conclude that such assessments of quality do not address the core issues of education, and that they merely tend to be about the exercise of control, i.e. a broad public assertion of power by the funding bodies. Given the position of the funding bodies as stakeholders with only an overall interest in the functioning of the sector, they can only be looking for the basic maintenance of standards, and achieving excellence from there on becomes a goal for the community in the university to aim for. Hence it is understandable that measures for monitoring quality are pitched at a fundamental, or perhaps a manageable level. Again, conclusions about control tend to arise out of a lack appreciation of position of the funding bodies as overseers who are looking for a reasonable management of resources. If one looks at the issue from the principles of quality management, which barely tend to get a mention in the literature referred to earlier, QM relates product quality to processes, and ultimately to morale and management. Therefore resource management gets expressed, in a quality-managed environment, as quality characteristics of output. In other words, output quality is directly an indicator of health of processes. If, as critics tend to conclude, external assessment introduces a ‘managerialism’ or centralisation in an institution, then it is a direct indication of the weakness of organisational culture supporting the practice of QM. The culture in the organisation is not collaborative as QM requires, but it is control oriented. Brennan and Shah observe that (2000) where an ‘organisation emphasised interdisciplinary and consumerist values, external assessment served to strengthen academic values and disciplinary culture.’

Another area which is not well explored by the current literature dealing with QM in higher education (eg. Freed, 1997; Dill, 1995; Newby, 1999) is the rationale for such a move: as to what would be the justification for a higher education institution to embark on a major organisational transformation as QM requires? In the case of industry, the rationale for reinventing Deming and other ‘guru’s of quality management, after ignoring them for 20 years, was the spectacular success of its ‘market share’ promises as vividly illustrated by its success in Japan. Clearly, higher education had very little interest in that aspect as the sector was enjoying a phenomenal success in the market place with record numbers knocking on its doors. With increasing student participation, the funding authorities wanted, not a drop in quality, but a steady one, or if possible at all, one that would increase with time. As the limits of funding for education had already been reached, the only way ahead was one of reducing funding despite the increasing participation (contributing to an exponential reduction in unit costs per participant). QM provided a new basis for believing that, given a conducive organisational culture, the student numbers and the unit costs could have an inversely
proportional relationship, whereby even with a spiralling reduction in funding a consistent standard could be maintained. The hopes for decreasing funding costs, along with maintenance of standards, established a firm basis for the funding bodies to steer the universities towards the adoption of QM so that there is hope for growth over the longer term. The current difficulties with QM, as extensively reported in the literature (Yorke, 1997a; Bensimon, 1995; Birnbaum & Deshotels, 1999) seem to stem from implementation, rather than its theoretical weaknesses as an overall philosophy. The strong appeal of QM to the funding authorities perhaps proved too strong a deterrent to any in-depth discussion about its adaptation to higher education. In various countries the decision to monitor the quality of higher education seems to have come about more by edict rather than through a dialogue. As a reaction, the higher education institutions, in turn, side stepped the need to engage in an internal dialogue to develop a shared vision to transform the organisation through quality. The senior management showed a strong tendency to require that quality management principles be adopted in all units. This led to a centralised control – termed as managerialism by critics - to insist on the adoption of quality initiatives irrespective of the level of readiness of the units or the suitability of the techniques to their operation. This was widely criticised as causing a decay of quality in education: taking attention away from addressing the intrinsic aspects of learning. The academics, by and large, responded by adopting an attitude of compliance rather than attempting to bring about a ‘transformation’ in the learner or in the institution. De Vries wrote that ‘...(q)uality management as it is applied to universities is a misrepresentation of the way in which quality education is achieved.’ (Ch2, Radford et al., 1997). Barnett (1994) saw ‘...the language of accountability’ in relation to quality as ‘...a code for a level of heightened surveillance.’, clearly indicating the absence of a collaborative culture. As mentioned earlier, national surveys (eg. Birnbaum and Deshotels 1999), concluded unequivocally that the adoption of TQM by academy is both a ‘myth and illusion’.

The resultant situation in the higher education management scene is a dichotomous one: there is very little motivation among the staff for quality management in the institutions, and the moves to assess quality by funding bodies is becoming an increasingly prevalent practice, with more countries enacting legislations that effect. The present scenario is characterised as an ‘ideological struggle’ with ‘...the state acquir(ing) the statutory muscle to begin to insist that the institutions be publicly accountable...’ and ‘...the academics discover(ing) that they have little power to resist the encroachments of the state’(Salter, 2000). Inevitably, as the States gain more control over all the ‘governance components’, there would be a more visible signs of degradation of academic vitality. At some stage, then, there may again the moves to revive the debate on restoration of institutional autonomy in higher education to improve quality!

Hence it is imperative that a fundamental review of quality in higher education be carried out to break down the negative cycle based on control. It should look critically at developing a new theoretical basis for its management as well as assessment. The emphasis has to be ultimately on increasing the university’s capacity and to transform itself to meet the challenges.

**Basis for a new approach**

It appears reasonable to continue to develop a new approach, largely based on quality management philosophy, but adapting techniques firmly grounded in theories of educational research. In addition an examination of the history of higher education is necessary to underpin the intrinsic value system.

**Nature of Quality model**

With the logical basis for acceptance of QM as management philosophy in higher education already elaborated, it does not appear that universities need have any qualms about its basic validity. The main difficulty with the application of the industrial version seems to stem from the nature of the processes. Industrial quality systems are clearly process oriented, focussed on the needs of the customer. This is based on the assumptions that process characteristics are measurable and maintaining and improving them would adequately meet the customer...
requirements and give a competitive edge. But these aspects are far too subtle in relation to education, and have invariably been the source of controversy (eg. Yorke, 1997a; Harvey, 1995). Most of this literature focuses only on education function, but it has to be stated that in higher education as well, there is a substantial component of service both in the area of academic function (eg. enrolment, library) and general administrative functions (eg. Cafeterias and recreation). To such service areas techniques of QM similar to any other service environment eg. banking or travel, would be appropriate. As for the academic processes an in-depth study of educational research needs to be made.

Ultimately, there is a need for the quality model to be adopted as a result of the aspirations of the employees of an institution. Development of a ‘Shared Vision’ is one of the important determinants of participation, therefore of success (Ch.44, Senge, 1994). This is a real challenge in leadership for quality (Ch.9, ibid).

**Quality in learning**

In educational research literature several authors have looked closely at the issues of teaching and learning, and have proposed models for quality in higher education. Four such recent models developed elaborately in literature are examined by the authors (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2002) with a view to developing a model for quality in higher education. The study of the models revealed the following:

It is possible to synthesise a general model for quality addressing educational issues, and it is also possible to integrate it with the model addressing the service areas of higher education.

Based on this, the authors derive the elements of a model called a ‘Holistic Model for Quality in Higher Education’, and broadly describe its features. It may be useful to examine it with a view to developing alternative approaches to address the issues in higher education.

**Culture and Value Systems**

The management model should also devote in-depth consideration to the development of a supportive organisational culture and these should be integrated with the elements of the model. All the quality models mentioned in the literature so far make only vague reference to organisation culture (eg. ISO 9000, TQM, Business Excellence Framework etc), whereas the pattern of interaction- organisation behaviour - is a crucial component. Senge et.al. (p445, 1994) point out how up to 80% of the implementation efforts end in failure, due to a lack of ‘transformational leadership’ supporting conducive interactions. Hence it becomes the management’s role to create a culture conducive to the implementation of any quality model.

In addition, the brief historical study of higher education developments carried out in the paper reveal a yearning for academic freedom and a preference for collegial mode of operation as cherished values. These should be preserved as core values in the organisational behaviour patterns for a quality system to be successful in the long run.
Conclusion

A fresh view is necessary of quality in higher education, as the debate is currently narrowly focussed, essentially around adapting industrial quality systems to higher education. The views are sharply divided and there is very little consensus on practice. In the article several alternative perspectives on quality in higher education are developed, either through a review of current approaches, or looking at the history of practice of quality, or through a comparison with industrial quality systems.

One way of broadening the understanding is to look at perspectives of the stakeholders of higher education. This reveals a very clear pattern, from which the requirements of the overarching system can be framed. Looking at historic developments in higher education, traditionally, the notion of academic freedom was seen as a requirement for excellence in education. In more recent times (pre 1990) measures of quality control were imposed on higher education, but their adoption was considerably more superficial compared to industry. Practice of quality control in Higher education was diluted by the exercise of academic freedom. The post 1990 period saw the need for a considerable increase in the quality systems activity in higher education in view of the dynamism in the sector. There was a strong preference for the adoption of quality management in view of its extensive practice in industry. Presently, the practice of QM in higher education is deteriorating into managerialism in institutions in view of lack of development of a shared vision and lack of a match between QM techniques and educational processes.

Based on the above, guidelines for a new approach to quality system in higher education are proposed. QM can still be the broad management methodology but it should be more flexibly adapted to educational processes. QM as adapted to higher education must be made to preserve the traditional values of academic freedom and collegial modes of operation.

As flexible approaches are developed towards a framework for quality in higher education the debate about management and techniques will become increasingly more constructive. The relationship between, administration and academics, industry and education sectors, and, theory and practice, will begin to change from one of apathy to synergy. Eventually, universities would become capable of asserting themselves as leaders rather than followers in the field of management practice.
Glossary:
QM – Quality Management
TQM- Total Quality Management
UK – United Kingdom
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