Integrating Total Quality Management into Review of Educational Institutions

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Abstract

In order to achieve an incremental improvement through institutional review, educational organisations must consider supporting management strategies to assist in the review process. Integrating TQM into the institutional review process can lead to success in linking the vision and mission of an educational agency to its management and operational strategies. This paper describes the theoretical perspective of integrating institutional review and TQM processes for achieving continuous improvement, and how the concept of TQM can be used as a planning tool to improve the processes and outcomes of the institutional review. It characterises the management goals necessary for making continuous improvement in the quality of performance of all the processes, products, and services of the educational institution. This paper also advocates that the institutional review process is, was, and always will be, a way of planning, analysing, identifying, and implementing appropriate management strategies for continuous improvement. Thus, every process in the review can be improved through linking the activities to the central focus of an educational institution through TQM. It concludes that educational institutions that integrate TQM into their institutional review can have a strategic advantage in making continuous improvement in the provision of quality learning and services for their customers.

Introduction

The reputation of an educational institution is too precious an asset to leave to chance. An institution seeking to create and maintain a high reputation needs to have good planning, implementation, management, review, and quality strategies based on institutional vision and mission (Carlson & Ranney, 1992). Planning establishes purposes, guidelines, strategies, and constraints for an institution. Implementation is the process of causing the institution to behave in accordance with the established purpose, guidelines, and strategies. Management is a complex, problem-solving process. Review evaluates the institution’s performance and determines the needed adjustments in planning and implementation. Quality strategies create an environment that encourages institutions to both look for and find a better way of meeting the needs of internal and external customers (Ansoff & McDonnell, 1990).

Total Quality Management

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a management tool that can be used to help an enterprise or agency work through impediments to progress (Stein, 1991). It can be implemented at the level of a department, a functional branch, or the entire institution. It brings the customer-supplier perspective into an institution. TQM emphasises the understanding of processes, the importance of variations and measurement, the behaviour of the customer and the suppliers, and the involvement of management and employees at all levels of an institution (Bone, 1991). In implementing TQM, strategic analysis and planning are important to develop procedures for tailoring the techniques to the needs of a particular institution, through a series of step by step problem solving techniques. TQM is aimed at turning good organisations into quality driven organisations by influencing people, input, process, and output of an institution (Besmowski, 1991). The planning aspects of TQM are designed to improve its implementation prospects. Thus, TQM can provide a planned strategy for making real improvements in any organisation.

Educational Institutional Review

Institutional review has become a regular function of educational institutions, especially at post-secondary level. It is a method of identifying opportunities for continuous improvement and leads to a consideration
of needs, competition, obstacles, or challenges (Maasen & Sharma, 1992). One can formulate several different varieties of institutional review which vary in degree and purpose. It is a participatory activity of people who are responsible for institutional management. It is often seen as planning for self-development of an institution to meet the requirements of stakeholders and is generally used to assist management to define goals and objectives, set priorities, simplify processes, reduce waste, resolve problems, and take initiatives (Collins, Cockburn, & MacRobert, 1991).

Institutional review involves a systematic analysis and interpretation of existing educational and managerial events and processes within an institution to bring about improvements in the delivery of services and products to various customers (Vancouver Community College, 1986). It aims to provide information that can be used in identifying institutional policy formulation, planning and decision making, implementation, and auditing (Mohrman & Cummings, 1989). In an educational context, institutional review bridges the gap between the community and educational agencies by focussing on the strategic issues that are important for institutional growth and expansion while meeting the needs of various stakeholders in the communities. It focuses on the effectiveness, efficiency, and social indicators of educational programs and services and the management processes.

**Types and levels of institutional review**

Generally, institutional reviews are of three kinds depending on who is conducting them: self-study, internal review, and external review (Pardey, 1989). Self-study review is conducted by the management of an institution to identify the possibilities for development and improvement and to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the institution. In the self-study process, management, together with the responsible persons or group determine the direction and activities, procedures or processes to be investigated, and develop a time frame. In fact, the scope of the institutional review is basically decided by those involved in the self-study. Internal review is the review undertaken by or on behalf of an institution, by a person within the organisation but who does not have any direct role in the development process. External review is the review undertaken by an independent certification body or similar organisation. Although the three types of reviews differ in the purposes for which they are conducted, the basic methodology adopted in the review process is the same.

In educational settings, there are four categories of institutional review: system review, policy and programs review, process review, and product and service review (Arter, 1989). A system review encompasses the management strategy used for meeting the needs of stakeholders. It can be characterised as a review of the operation and management of the entire educational institution, including activities such as planning, implementation, measurement, and improvement. A policy and programs review includes the review of current policies, procedures, and operating instructions that are specified in strategic and operational plans, activities, and performance indicators. A process review is an in-depth review of a particular process and activities that are performed as specified in the procedures and work instructions. A product and service review is a detailed examination of the characteristics of graduates, and other products and services unique to the educational institution before or after they are accepted by the customers. The four kinds of reviews can be performed either wholly or in part within any educational institution. In spite of the differences and commonalities among the four levels, they are all important in establishing a mechanism for the identification of opportunities for improvement in educational institutions.

**Steps in institutional review**

Institutional review is a planned approach to determine the improvement possibilities within procedures and activities in relation to inputs, processes, and outcomes of an educational institution. Unless efforts are made to measure the relationship between actual and expected inputs, processes, and outcomes within an organisation, it is impossible to detect the gap between what is intended and what is achieved in terms of performance. The philosophy of institutional review is to insist on the need for improvement with objective evidence. The scope and the level of an institutional review are variable factors that have to be considered in the planning process. Further, institutional review requires systematic planning, performance, reporting, and follow-up. A structured approach to the review process and proper training
of personnel is a key component in ensuring as effective review. In educational settings, the institutional review process may involve the following steps: (i) environmental scan, (ii) collection of data, (iii) analysis and interpreting of data, (iv) development of strategic and operational plans, (v) implementation of plans, (vi) auditing activities and processes, (vi) continuous improvements. While each step is likely to be different from the other, these steps are common to all, regardless of the types of review. Further, how each step is executed will have a direct effect on the other steps.

Integrating TQM into Institutional Review

Implementation of both institutional review and TQM is a systematic process made up of definable stages and events and counter events. As a result, strategic focuses are translated into practice, a value system, leadership practices, a mission statement, goals and objectives, and a plan which will ultimately lead to the achievement of an organisational purpose. However, integrating the institutional review and TQM in an educational context is not a simple task. The integration involves interactions of people, processes, outcomes, and demands the articulation of the vision and mission into continuous improvement strategies to provide transition from planning to implementation (Schobert & Brown, 1990). Analysis of environment and organisation factors, including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), must be identified to establish a rationale for the integration. Such rationale could facilitate the incorporation of the key elements: (i) customer perspective, (ii) mission and objectives, (ii) improvement opportunities, (iii) control of the process, (iv) leadership and teamwork, (iv) performance monitoring, and (vi) continuous improvement. These factors and the elements could be used to determine the fitness and readiness of an educational institution and its management for the integration of TQM into the institutional review.

There are commonalities between the purpose of the institutional review and TQM. They both set periodic objectives, assign resources, review accomplishments at the completion of the implementation period, analyse objectives that were not met, and then set new objectives for the next phase of the continuous improvement. In addition, both require the ability to get individuals and groups within the institution to perform specific activities in order that objectives are translated into actions. It is fact that every educational institution is part of a larger system that is constantly changing. From this point of view, an organisation needs to develop coherent short and long-term management strategies at all levels of the institution. For this reason, TQM must be part of every step in the review process and it has much to contribute to an integrated process. Both institutional review and TQM emphasis on consolidating management and resources to gradually bring internal processes and systems under control. This indicates that the review and management process can go hand-in-hand to achieve the organisational purpose of an educational institution. That is, institutional review can effectively achieve the defined organisational purposes with the support of TQM.

The interrelationship resulting from the integration process could be considered as the most important byproduct that is necessary to achieve self-sustained growth and development in an educational institution. Further, the integration link can be strengthened through investigating strategies and processes that are common to institutional review and TQM planning. The very essence of success is the alignment between institutional review and the TQM process. The integration process needs to have a future vision. The development of such a vision and a clear understanding of what an organisation is trying to achieve is the key to the long term success of integrating institutional review and TQM. A common organisational vision could lead institutional review and TQM to a new era in the institutional development process and this can become a positive outcome of the integration process. Thus, current thoughts on the integration of institutional review and TQM could be considered as a new direction for institutions. Those pioneering this idea could make a wave of innovative improvements in the management and administration of people, programs, processes, and outcomes. An understanding of what happens to an organisation undergoing changes is an essential component for the integration process. For this reason, performance standards must be established for measurement and monitoring of the integration process. Performance standards, when properly used, will have a significant impact on the success and well-being of the educational institution. These performance standards could be linked to the institution’s ability to identify those goals which are practically feasible and provide ongoing direction and focus for the allocation of resources and skills.
Benefits of the Integration

Organisations concerned with establishing a promising future need a conceptual framework for managing discontinuities, a systematic approach to making strategic decisions, and a methodology for guiding their implementation. Integrated TQM strategies are driving quality improvements in many manufacturing and service industries, and are facilitating the implementation and strategic management process. They ensure that the goals are articulated and focused, directions are mapped out, resources are optimally allocated and factors critical to successful performance are identified and managed. As a part of the integration, the processes can be defined and a framework for quality deployment can be developed to give functional guidance that will result in further institutional development.

The success of the institutional review could be determined by the degree to which the TQM process is integrated. That is, desirable outcomes could be achieved in the way it is managed and the way people approach their job. There may be improvements in many processes through the integration of TQM into institutional review. For example, senior management can initiate actions to ensure continuous quality improvement initiatives through people, process, management focus, performance, and customer concerns. Further, it could bring about constancy of purpose regardless of political, economic, or other influences and suggests a full partnership with leaders, customers, work force, suppliers, and other interested people through a shared purpose and vision. While the need for institutional review is fundamental, the need for consistency, coherence and discipline in the management of the review is no less important as can be demonstrated from the integration process.

The quality improvement process must fit with environmental factors whenever possible. Both institutional review and TQM entail a continuous assessment of the physical and socio-economic as well as internal environment within an institution. They require a structure with a flattened authority system that is connected by interactive work groups and managed by leaders with vision, exemplary behaviour, motivation, empowerment, and support. Institutional review and TQM could be used to articulate and achieve the organisational goals and objectives. Quality must be the fundamental aspect of the educational institution and must be utilised at every stage of the planning, management, and measurement process. Thus, quality concepts can be introduced into relevant aspects of institutional improvement philosophy in a way that directly supports the organisational purpose of the educational institution.

Institutional review and TQM set guiding principles for continuous process improvement to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of the educational institution. In fact, objectives for integration can be set according to the capacity of an institution to plan and manage the desired changes. Both utilise a participative management and team process with an emphasis on leadership and management. Thus, everyone in the institution can contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency requirements established through institutional review and TQM.

Conclusion

Institutional review sets the general directions, uncovers possibilities, and guides and controls the direction in which an organisation will grow and develop. Total Quality Management is pragmatic and a result-oriented management strategy. The results of the integration of institutional review and TQM are expected to be quality products and services, new markets, satisfied customers, new strategies to respond to emerging challenges. TQM converts the institutional review into growth, success, and self-sustainment. Institutional review ensures that an organisation does the right things and TQM makes sure that the things are done correctly. Institutional review is creating the opportunity for improvement and TQM is helping to achieve it.

Institutional review and TQM need each other; they can be supplementary and complementary to each other in successful educational institutions. The overall success of an institution is dependent on both institutional review and TQM. Institutional review and TQM can be the guiding lights to an institution in deciding where and how it guides its future. Therefore, they merit serious attention as strategic tools, not only to set the direction of an organisation but also to achieve benefits. Educational institutions integrating TQM into institutional review will be aligned, horizontally and vertically, in pursuit of strategies aimed at
continuously improving effectiveness, efficiency, and social indicators. However, as in any quality improvement initiatives, the litmus test of integrating institutional review and TQM is yet to come.

References


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