
Chapter 6

Concluding observations.

Utility and applicability of the models in vocational training institutions

6.1 General observations

1. Vocational training institutions in the Latin America and Caribbean region, whether they are individual organizations or big national systems, must develop quality management systems in line with the world trend. There are models for this, and each has different advantages, as we have seen in this study. Even though these models may have different objectives they all lead to an examination of the quality of programmes and institutions, and this involves the means and processes in operation, the infrastructure of the institution, academic results, the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the service rendered, and the conditions under which it is run in each institution.¹

2. There are three basic models that currently enjoy the greatest international recognition, and numerous educational institutions in the region have been making good progress in the application of the total quality focus using them. They are (a) the ISO Standards model, especially that of the ISO 9000 family, (b) the model of systems to accredit programmes and institutions that have been developed, particularly in the sphere of higher education, and (c) the model of national and international quality awards, which in some cases include excellence awards for school management. More and more vocational training institutions in the region are developing their quality management systems by applying one or more of these models (or other models, which have been mentioned in this study like the EFQM or those based on the Malcom Baldrige system).

3. Various countries in the region have adapted the ISO 9001:2000 Standard for application in the educational sector, for example the Chilean NCh 2728 Standard for technical training organizations (OTECs), or have drawn up guides

¹ Republic of Colombia, Law 30 of 1992, whereby the higher education system in Colombia is organized.

or manuals to facilitate the application of this standard in educational institutions, like the IWA 2 in Mexico, the GTC 200 in Colombia or the IRAM 30000 in Argentina.

4. Adopting the model implicit in the ISO 9001 means that institutions have to gauge the quality of their pedagogic, support and administrative processes, and this leads them to tackle a range of questions in a range of areas including the pertinence of the curriculum, the competence of their teaching, administrative and technical staff, the relationship with employers to define training needs, the suitability of classrooms and workshops for training purposes, the quality of enrolment, evaluation and certification processes, and the insertion of trained students in the target market.²

5. Accreditation, on the other hand, is a procedure whereby the State grants and makes public peer recognition of the good quality of the academic programmes, organization and functioning of an institution and how well it discharges its social function.³ An accreditation process must comprise the following stages: (a) internal evaluation (self-evaluation), with the effective participation of everyone involved in the educational programme or centre that seeks accreditation, (b) external evaluation carried out by “peers” who are not involved in the educational programme or centre being evaluated, and (c) final ruling, which must be public, and the institution in question must receive prior notification.⁴

6. *“There is no doubt that the main effect of accreditation is public certification that the educational programme or centre in question satisfies certain minimum quality requirements. However, this is not the only effect since the accreditation process yields a diagnosis, and those involved in the educational programme receive counselling as to how they should proceed in order to attain these minimum requirements. They also benefit from the implantation of a culture of continual evaluation and quality improvement in the institution.... Accreditation is the most important mechanism that is available to educational institutions for accountability to society, and this applies not only to institutions that receive State funds but also to those that are privately financed.”*⁵

² www.cinterfor.org.uy/calidad 2005.

³ Colombian National Ministry of Education (MEN), National Accreditation Council (CNA - Consejo Nacional de Acreditación): “Lineamientos para la Acreditación Institucional”. *Series Documents CNA* No. 2, Bogotá, Colombia, June, 2001.

⁴ Martín, Julio M., op. cit.

⁵ Idem.

7. National quality awards have various objectives including promoting the cultural changes necessary for organizations to adopt integrated management focuses and practices, and also of excellence management, as a basis for competitiveness, and also establishing, updating and disseminating an integrated management model for evaluation and diagnosis in organizations. To achieve this, the various awards examined in this study all have a central core in their work with organizations, which is a model to promote, evaluate and recognize management excellence geared to total quality and continual improvement. Organizations can use these criteria of excellence as a reference framework to improve their management system or to carry out self-evaluation aimed at improvement, or as a guide to drawing up the reports that serve as the basis to put themselves forward as candidates for awards.

8. Three crucial elements in these systems of awards stand out as the focus for continual improvement in organizations and as incentives to make organizations more competitive and promote social well-being in countries. These are (a) the application of excellence models by organizations, and self-evaluation in organizations based on the criteria and methods defined in the awards schemes, (b) feedback to organizations that take part from the body in charge of the awards scheme, and (c) a presentation on best practices by organizations that win the awards.

9. An analysis of the relationship between educational institutions and the bodies that administer national quality awards in different countries in the region shows that, in practice, there are at least three situations, (a) countries in which educational institutions can take part in the national awards scheme in the category of services, (b) countries in which there is a separate category for educational institutions in the national award scheme, and (c) countries in which there is a special guidance programme for educational institutions that involves the application of a model for developing a quality improvement system in school management.

10. Even though organizations that go in for awards may not actually win an award, a special mention or a prize, they still enjoy other benefits. These include the application of a management excellence model to make them more competitive and efficient, the chance to set up their own model for quality management, administration for total quality and continual improvement, self-evaluation and the learning throughout the organization that results from this, a new perspective from the experts who carry out the external evaluation, and feedback through the external evaluation report – not only from the written report but also during the field visit. Organizations that win an award have further

benefits, namely the right to use the logo that goes with the award, public recognition from the government, recognition that the products or services in question are very reliable, national or international recognition as a model to follow, the possibility to go in for international awards, and in some cases a prize in money or in kind.

11. The evaluation of vocational training institutions should not only be geared to the objectives that institutions make explicit when they come to implement a quality management system, but should also be used to systematically incorporate an analysis of the results of management in terms of quality, pertinence and equity. In order to attain this objective, governments, education authorities and organizations of the social groups involved should promote the evaluation of the quality of education and training as reflected in results, in terms of their impact on employability, enterprises, work quality, the use and quality of training, remuneration and productivity. To do this there are many focuses and methodologies, like evaluating impact through follow-up on those who have been trained by surveys of workers and employers. One example of this is a recent initiative in Colombia to develop a labour survey for education, initially for graduates from higher education, whose main aim is to “...provide quantitative information about graduate employability and qualitative information about the pertinence of the training area to graduate occupations, among other data”.⁶ (See Annex 6.1, which presents the aims of the survey, and Annex 6.2, which has links to many web pages for similar programmes in the Americas and in Europe).

6.2 Utility and applicability of the models in vocational training institutions

1. The three models analyzed here are all aimed at getting organizations to generate and maintain systems that lead to total quality, that is to say quality in all the different spheres of the organization, which is conceived of as a single system and not as an aggregate of separate parts in which one may be defective without affecting the others or the overall mission. The way this objective is pursued is different in each model, but they all share the basic conception –in awards systems it is implicit and in the ISO 9000 and accreditation it is explicit–

⁶ Colombian National Ministry of Education: “Graduados Colombia Observatorio Laboral para la Educación”, www.mineducacion.gov.co Calidad Graduados Colombia, Bogotá, December, 2005.

that the full operation of a good quality management system will be a better guarantee of good results in management's mission, and therefore of excellent products or services for the customer.

2. From the descriptions given here of the different systems, there seems to be no technical reason why one or more quality management models cannot be applied at the same time, or one after the other, in the same organization. In fact, some vocational training institutions in the region have done or are doing just this, although their reasons and objectives may differ. There are three possible scenarios, (a) organizations that employ a combination of two or more models in the development of their quality management systems, for reasons that are strictly technical, (b) organizations that apply different models at the same time but to different processes, so as to comply with national standards in their country, and (c) organizations that apply two models one after the other because the first is a pre-requisite to be able to undertake the second.

3. To sum up, an institution can implement a quality management system by using different combinations of the quality models available, and tailor these to its own individual needs in terms of mission, organization, enterprise size, quality philosophy, access to resources, legal requirements, financial constraints, and desired insertion in the local, national or international context.

4. The institution's decision about how to implement a Quality Management System is influenced, and in some cases determined, by its perception of the benefits involved, technical considerations, economic suitability, or the legal situation prevailing in each country. Another factor in this decision is whether it is possible to legally accede to the formal results of one or other model.

Of the various models on offer, the one that involves the fewest restrictions is the ISO 9000 family of standards. This is because it is designed for any kind of organization, while accreditation, on the other hand, has parameters that clearly limit participation by certain kinds of organizations like, for example, higher education institutions or programmes. However, at least one country—Colombia—is in the process of designing an accreditation system for work training institutions and programmes. In other countries, like Chile for example, vocational training institutions can apply for accreditation for their programmes, and indeed for the institution itself in the undergraduate teaching and institutional management areas.

National Quality Awards are available for categories of enterprises and organizations, but the classification systems and organization parameters do not always make it easy for educational institutions to take part since the definitions of components, criteria and customers, and the points systems, are not suitable

for institutions in this field or tend to generate conceptual resistance or pose operational problems. For precisely these reasons there is a special category for educational organizations in some national quality award systems including those in Mexico and Uruguay, and in some countries there is an Award for Excellence in School Management like the one being developed in Colombia.

With this in mind, individual training institutions, or small and medium-sized ones, will find a very useful tool in the educational management excellence models outlined in chapter 4, where there is an overview of how these operate in Argentina, Chile and Colombia.

For many institutions that have limited budgets, the main preference factor when it comes to choosing a model to develop their management quality system will be the cost of implementation or participation. This applies whether the aim is certification, accreditation, competing for an award, or if internal reasons like strengthening the organization are paramount.

5. The ISO 9001:2000 international standard certifies specific processes in organizations and training centres. That is to say, this system does not give certification to the organization as a whole but only to processes that have been documented, checked and self-evaluated by the organization itself and have undergone an external certification audit. However, the model implicit in this standard is very suitable for developing a quality management system in an organization that heads a big system. This is the case of the large vocational training institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean: their central administration is normally located in the country's capital city, and they do not offer training directly but coordinate a large network of centres. A good example of this kind of organization is the SENA in Colombia, whose programme is headed by a national committee, supported by regional committees, and actually implemented by committees in the different training centres. The ISO 9001:2000 system is also suitable for developing quality management systems in work training centres that are small and have a limited budget or limited human resources to make up the necessary quality work teams. These organizations can use guides like the IWA 2 or the GTC 200 in Colombia, the IRAM 30000 in Argentina, or some other version that has been adapted in a given country.

6. As was mentioned in chapter 5, there does not seem to be any technical reason why a quality management system should not be implemented using elements from two or even three of these models at the same time. In each combination the weight of one or other of these models would be determined by the institution's main objective in each case:

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- To develop a good system to improve the organization and its processes and results, and make it more attractive to clients at home and abroad.
 - To obtain an international certificate, and thus enjoy the competitive advantages that this involves.
 - To obtain official accreditation for some programmes or for the institution as a whole, so as to maintain competitiveness.
 - To win a quality award or management prize, to make the organization more competitive.

7. ILO/Cinterfor will continue to support vocational training institutions in the region as they progress towards quality management, in the framework of its commitment to fostering cooperation and the sharing of experiences. Thanks to technical cooperation from pioneer institutions, others have been able to undertake the quality certification process. This is a clear illustration of how training institutions in the region are willing to cooperate and share information and the experience they acquire in specific areas. The vocational training institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean are not just a network; they are also a learning community. This has been clearly demonstrated by their collective capacity to accumulate knowledge and to disseminate this knowledge among other institutions.⁷ This is what is happening now and will continue to happen in the implementation of quality management systems.

⁷ ILO/Cinterfor, *Calidad, Pertinencia y...*, op. cit.