
Towards a "better" University: the Use of the EFQM Model in a UK Higher Education Institution

Jacqueline Blackmore Ms,

Faculty Quality Manager, Faculty of Business and Law, Liverpool John Moores University, 98 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool, L3 5UZ; E-mail J.A.Blackmore@livjm.ac.uk

Alex Douglas Dr,

Senior Lecturer in Operations Management, Faculty of Business and Law, Liverpool John Moores University, 98 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool, L3 5UZ.
E-mail A.Douglas@livjm.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper examines the use of the EFQM Model in H.E. Institutions in the UK and offers a case study of how one University used the Excellence Model as a means to change the way it operated. It identifies and discusses the critical success factors for a university utilising the Model, in particular Leadership (criteria 1), People Management, particularly with regard to performance evaluation (criteria 3), having key processes in place (criteria 5) and the identification of the correct key performance results for its various stakeholders (criteria 9).

Key Words: Excellence Model, Higher Education, critical success factors.

1. Introduction

In the last few years there has been a surge of interest in the applicability of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model to the public sector generally and Higher Education (HE) institutions particularly. This paper examines the evolution of the EFQM Excellence Model (the "what") and then focuses on quality management practices in education in the UK in order to determine the forces that are driving many Universities to consider utilising the Model (the "why"). Having discussed the "why" of the Model the paper will then report on the "how" of the Model with reference to a case study of one UK institution, fictitiously named Riverbank University. Finally, the paper identifies and discusses a number of areas that arguably hold the key to the successful

usage of the EFQM Model as part of a long-term objective of internal quality improvement and stakeholder satisfaction.

2. The Evolution of the EFQM Excellence Model

The EFQM was formed in 1988 following the success of the Japanese Deming Prize and the USA's Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. The Model itself, originally called the Business Excellence Model, was introduced in 1991 with the European Quality Award being awarded for the first time in 1992 (Hides and Davies, 2002). The Model itself was updated in 1999 and changed again in 2003.

In explaining the origins of the EFQM Excellence Model much of the literature gives credit to the work of the so-called "Quality Gurus", most notably W.E. Deming and Joseph Juran. (Sheffield Hallam University, 2003). These proponents of quality improvement set out various approaches to Total Quality Management (TQM). Unfortunately, almost 80% of quality initiatives have failed to deliver what was expected (Atkinson, 1993). This may be due to the very many definitions of what TQM actually is and the lack of clear requirements and directions. Van der Wiele et al (2001) suggest that this lack of clear requirements for TQM is not mirrored by the EFQM Excellence Model, which is itself a framework for total quality and organisational excellence. Indeed, Van der Wiele et al (2000) argue that the EFQM Model "defines and describes" TQM in a way that can be more easily understood by senior management. This would allow them to accept ownership of any changes required and be able to drive their organisations towards excellence. It would also give a tangible pathway to TQM with clearly defined requirements.

The aim of the model is to represent the TQM (Excellence) philosophy that can be applied to all organisations irrespective of location, size or sector (de Dommartin, 2000). The Model rightly recognises that there are a number of different ways to achieve the goal of excellence and these may vary from organisation to organisation (Saraiva et al, 2001).

2.1 The Model Criteria

The Excellence Model is a non-prescriptive framework based on 9 criteria. Five of these are "enabler" criteria and four are "results" criteria. The "enablers" cover what an organisation does. The "results" cover what an organisation achieves. "Results" are caused by "enablers" (<http://www.efqm.org>). Each of the enabler criteria is made up of four or five sub-criteria and each results criteria consists of two sub-criteria. The Model is based on the

premise that excellent results with respect to Performance, Customers, People and Society are achieved through effective Leadership, sound People management and development, effective use of Partnerships and Resources, clear and well directed Policy and Strategy, and effective Processes (EFQM, 1999).

2.2 Self-Assessment

The Excellence Model is a self-assessment tool. Self-assessment against the Model can be used to gauge present performance and to identify opportunities and areas for improvement. The results are evaluated on the basis of their relevance and scope, and the enablers are evaluated in terms of approach, deployment, assessment and review (RADAR). This scoring process provides a basis for comparison, both internally and externally, as well as a measure of progress over time thus proving continuous improvement. The aim is to identify performance weaknesses with a view to identifying root cause and thereby instigate improvements in order to achieve planned goals. These then form the basis of any improvement plan.

2.3 EFQM Model Implementation

There are several approaches to implementation, and organisations can use different combinations depending on their current structure, culture, and what it is they are aiming to achieve from the process of self-assessment. The approaches are: award simulation, pro-forma, workshop, matrix chart and questionnaire (Dale, 1999).

The Award Simulation approach involves using a team of trained assessors and writing a full submission as per the full EFQM Award. The Pro-forma approach involves the design of a set of pro-forma (e.g. one page per Model criteria) with an explanation and space for Strengths and Areas For Improvement. Forms can be completed by individuals or teams for assessment by trained assessors. This approach reduces the workload involved in the self-assessment process. The Matrix approach involves the creation of a company specific achievement matrix. This comprises a list of achievements against a number of points on a 1 to 10 scale. A briefing introduces and explains the matrix approach, each team member then rates the matrix individually. A consensus meeting is held with a trained assessor. An action planning meeting follows this. The process is repeated every 6 to 12 months. The Workshop approach requires the involvement of the management team who are responsible for gathering data and presenting evidence to peers at workshops. This requires two fully trained assessors to facilitate, one of whom is from that part of the organisation being assessed and one other. The workshop takes approximately one and a half days. At the end

of the workshop the action planning begins. The Questionnaire approach is one of the least intensive approaches provided the existing EFQM questionnaire is used. It allows the gathering of peoples perceptions in the organisation.

This concludes the discussion concerning "what" the EFQM Excellence Model aims to bring to an organisation. The next section discusses the "why" or driving forces behind EFQM Model implementation in UK Universities.

3. Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the UK

3.1 UK Government Policy

Many of the developments in quality assurance within the HE sector have come about due to various pieces of legislation imposed on the public sector by a series of Conservative and Labour Governments over the last 25 years. The first Thatcher Conservative Government wanted to reorganise the public sector by modelling it along the lines of commercial enterprise and quality was to play a key role in that strategy (Kirkpatrick and Lucio, 1995). The inherent belief was that the private sector and its management practices were far superior to those of the public sector. In fact Government policy was based on two assumptions (Prior, 1993). Firstly, that public services would be more effective the more they were organised according to the principles of market economics; and secondly, the management of this new style public services would be more efficient the more similar it was to the private sector. The Government wanted to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public services in order to reduce the financial burden on the British taxpayer. Management was strengthened and legislation enacted to impose a set of performance indicators for measuring services performance. These performance indicators covered local government services, police, railways and the national health service.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) became responsible under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 for assessing the quality of higher education and commissioned the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to assess the quality of teaching via Subject Reviews.

In 1997 a review of education was undertaken by the Dearing Committee, commissioned originally by John Major's Conservative Government with bipartisan support on 10th May 1996 to make recommendations on how the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education should be developed. Dearing's view seems to have been drawn from the business (private) sector in line with the Conservative philosophy that private was best.

The drive to improve the efficiency of universities was seen as calling for strong central management, thus leading to less autonomy for the employee, particularly the lecturer (Dearlove 2002). For example, less academic control over student entry in an attempt to widen participation and increase numbers. The first Blair Labour Government, elected to office in May 1997 implemented many of Dearing's recommendations. However, Blair's second Administration has initiated a review of HE funding generally. The driving force behind current policy is the need to provide high quality services within budgetary constraints. In order to facilitate the achievement of financial and other key objectives and to aim for continuous improvement in service delivery, the Government has been encouraging public sector organisations including the police, local government and NHS Trusts to implement the EFQM Excellence Model criteria. Now, it appears to be the turn of education to discover the benefits of the Model.

3.2 The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

The QAA, established in 1997, is an independent body funded by subscription from HE institutions and through the contracts with the main HE funding bodies including HEFCE. Until recently, QAA assessed the quality and standards of all 180 HE institutions in the UK at two levels. Firstly at Institutional level, where it reported on the degree of confidence on an institution's effectiveness at managing the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its programmes. Secondly, what latterly were called Subject Reviews, were assessment on the performance of subjects, for example, business, law or social sciences.

Between 1993 (when they were carried out by HEFCE) and 2001 over 2,500 reviews were carried out in more than 60 subjects at an estimated cost to all HEIs of between £45m and £50m per year (Better Regulation Task Force, 2002). This massive cost caused a number of complaints from universities, particularly those who did not rely on HEFCE for the majority of their funding, and a decision was taken to reduce the cost burden on universities by combining the two. Thus, in January 2002, institutional audit was combined with subject review to become Academic Review.

The term "review" is used in much of the QAA documentation. However their system of review is based on audit and is very much akin to ISO 9001 audits, which are inspection oriented. How this "command and control" philosophy will be made compatible with the TQM philosophy of self-assessment and the Excellence Model will be one of the major challenges facing QAA and academic institutions. This will be the subject of a further research paper in the near future.

4. Case Study - Riverbank University

Literature on the EFQM Model abounds, with a plethora of case studies that detail various approaches to EFQM implementation (see, for example, the British Quality Foundation journal, Excellence, or the Institute of Quality Assurance journal, Quality World). The vast majority of these case studies deal with private sector organisations, fewer with public sector organisations and fewer still with Higher Education. It is this gap that the second half of this paper aims to address.

4.1 Background

Riverbank University is situated in the North West of the UK and has approximately 20,000 full-time equivalent students and 700 full-time equivalent academic staff supported by 550 administrative staff and 196 technical staff. The University has been a member of the EFQM since 1997. The Vice Chancellor (VC), who came into post in the spring of 2000, had experience of the EFQM Excellence Model in his previous post where a number of pilot schemes had been run. This experience would inform many of the decisions taken at Riverbank.

Riverbank, along with a number of other universities working together, received funding from HEFCE to explore the application of the Excellence Model in very different academic areas. Riverbank's pilot scheme was in the School of Engineering.

4.2 Purpose

The new VC wished to change the culture of the University and give the people working there a sense of direction and clear purpose. The University recognised that leadership and management were crucial in achieving strategic and operational plans and in developing a culture to allow effective working. The ultimate aim was to use the Excellence Model as a driver for change to what the VC called a "better University". Better for all stakeholders, including students and their parents or guardians, management, academic and non-academic staff, partners, the local community and funding agencies. For this to happen would require a move towards a total quality management culture that focused on stakeholders, was process oriented and based on teamwork and management by fact. The outcomes from the EFQM self-assessment process would be used to inform the strategic plan for the next few years and senior management behaviours would stress the need for cultural shift. Thus good leadership, setting the right strategy and policies, using resources effectively and good people management with critical processes in place should lead to people, customer and society

satisfaction and the achievement of key performance results. Also, over time, the self-assessment exercise could be used to measure improvements in performance as well as being a tool for benchmarking performance against other organisations. In addition, there was a general belief that the self-assessment exercise carried out for the EFQM Model would help the University address any QAA Academic Review issues.

4.3 Phase 1: The Pilots

Over the last two years the University undertook a comprehensive review of its purpose, mission and values and made some significant changes to its academic, organisational and senior management structures. The changes to the University structure involved a massive consultation and feedback exercise and importantly, did not result in redundancies as had happened on previous occasions, where changes had been perceived as short-term cost cutting exercises.

A programme of leadership and management development was then undertaken with the new Directors and Deans, to embed the key principles 'to place our students and core academic business at the centre of everything we do, supported by a management ethos that demands sound teamwork and clarity of purpose' It had been recognised by the University that management development had been 'patchy' resulting in uneven management expertise. This leadership training for the management teams was undertaken by a team of American consultants. Around this time, the University sought to determine employee opinion on a range of issues through the medium of a staff survey/questionnaire.

At the same time as this was going on, two EFQM pilot schemes were being run - one in the Engineering School and later, one in the Human Resource Management (HRM) function. Despite initial scepticism, the outcomes from the Engineering exercise included:

- Staff working together to a common set of aims;
- Staff believed that they had a stake in changing the way things were done;
- Staff were "given licence" to criticise constructively and find ways of improving matters themselves - empowerment;
- Senior management found the experience liberating;
- Management by facts

From the VC's viewpoint, both pilot studies had created experienced and trusted ambassadors within the university and this "grassroots support" would be invaluable if the process was to be rolled out across the University.

4.4 Phase 2 - Applying the Model across the University

Following on from the pilot studies, and the lessons learned, in order to get the full planning and operational benefits, the VC agreed with the Board of Governors and the Strategic Management Group (SMG) within the University to adopt the EFQM Excellence Model as the foundation for the University's strategic planning and organisational development.

Soon after, a Director of Excellence was appointed. He was responsible for introductory training on the EFQM Model for all senior staff, importantly, relating the Model to the operations of the University. This was followed by assessor training for the most senior management team.

The University then invited staff to become involved in the self-assessment exercise. The aim was to form a team representing a 'diagonal-slice' of the University to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The diagonal slice team was made up of 21 staff from across all grades and disciplines selected from 98 initial volunteers. The VC aimed to use people who "would not normally be involved in extra-University activity" rather than the usual 'professional committee' attendees. Therefore, the team included people from a wide-range of backgrounds and with different reasons for participating in the exercise. One member admitted that he was there out of cynicism, i.e. he wanted to see what it was all about for himself, before criticising it.

The 21 volunteers were involved in two days of briefing sessions about the Model and self-assessment.

Team members worked in groups of two or three and were mentored or "championed" by a member of the SMG and the Director of Excellence. Each group was given one Model criteria to assess.

Following these sessions, the criterion groups were 'let loose' on the University, with their "champions" acting as the key to unlock information where they came up against obstacles. However, all senior staff made themselves readily available and open to, what were sometimes, awkward questions. Each team chose the method of data collection most appropriate to themselves and their particular criterion, for example, questionnaires by email, face to face interviews with a cross-section of staff from all levels and searching the University intranet for policies and strategies.

They were given approximately two months to complete the task before presenting the evidence they had gathered to the SMG. After each group had made their presentation and presented their findings and supporting evidence, the SMG scored each sub-criteria within each given criteria and an external facilitator determined the overall score for that criteria.

However, it must be stressed that the scoring was less important than the identification of areas for improvement. The method used was a variation on the proforma approach previously outlined. Following the above exercise, the University Senior Management gave feedback to staff in a series of "roadshows" held at different venues across the University. What follows is a summary of that feedback.

4.5 Results

4.5.1 Policy and Strategy - Criteria 2

The University did not have links between policy and strategy and the key processes to deliver their achievement. Policy and strategy and their rationale were not communicated clearly with regard to what was required of its people. This impacts on criteria 5 - processes.

4.5.2 People - Criteria 3

The University did not have a formal or well-developed system for identifying and developing the skills and talents of its people, nor was there a systematic way for the University strategy to be implemented through the cascading of action plans and targets to teams and individuals.

There was a widely held perception of inequality of treatment between various staff groups over a range of issues due to the diversity of contract types and job requirements.

Staff and management also perceived a lack of an effective reward and recognition system.

Although there was evidence of communication through formal channels there was a belief that there was a lack of "dialogue" within the University whether top-down, bottom-up or middle out.

4.5.3 Partnerships and Resources - Criteria 4

Sharing and learning from best practice are driven centrally or very locally. There was no formal mechanism across faculties and business units to support the long-term development of an "organic" sharing and learning culture.

4.5.4 Results - Criteria 6, 7, 8, and 9

The University is unclear about who its stakeholders are. This makes it difficult to develop overall policy and strategy in the context of a results orientation that balances the needs of the stakeholders.

Furthermore, the University does not identify or set targets for those measures that are

key to the delivery and support of policy and strategy or its approaches to people management, customer relationship management or society. Measures, where taken, are usually driven by the requirements of external agencies. Where measures are used to inform decision-making, there is little evidence of the use of "leading" indicators to predict performance. There is a much greater reliance on "lagging" perception and performance data. In addition, data is not always converted into information that can be used. This makes management by facts difficult.

4.6 Phase 3 - Action Plan

With regards to Policy and Strategy actions the new Strategic Plan will identify all stakeholders and customers, their expectations and the way in which the University will engage with those expectations. There will be a clearly defined link between the Mission and Purpose, strategic direction and the process management system required to implement the strategy.

With regards to people, all HR policies will be reviewed to ensure consistency and fairness across all staff groups. A University-wide system of Personal Development Review (presumably via the Investors In people Standard) will be established through the HR Strategy. Release of staff from normal duties for involvement with projects will be a key element of staff development and is to be encouraged by leaders and backed by a formal policy. Other People actions include:

- Appropriate mechanisms for recognition and reward will be developed;
- There will be a clarification and transparency of the diverse staff roles within the University;
- The communication processes within the University will be reviewed and formalised.

In the area of Partnerships and Resources the University will establish a comprehensive partnership strategy in support of the Strategic Plan. A review of activities will be undertaken with the University to create resource headroom for areas of growth.

In order to deliver its core processes the aim is to establish a structured, documented and transparent process management system (perhaps not unlike an ISO 90001 quality management system).

With regards to Key Performance Results, the aim is to set challenging targets in all headline measures both financial and non-financial.

All of the above actions will be underpinned by leadership actions which include "living" the University Mission, Purpose and Values, engaging with stakeholders at a local level, and involvement in the design and development of the management system through clear and identified ownership of policy development and process management.

5. Critical Success Factors

Based on the self-assessment exercise and the proposed action plan, this paper has identified a number of issues that the case University needs to get right if it is to maximise the benefits of utilising the Excellence Model. These may well be the key success factors for other organisations aiming to follow a similar path.

5.1 Leadership - EFQM criteria 1

There is not much that can be achieved within any organisation without the commitment of the people at the top. Indeed, Deming's (1982) first principle for the transformation of western management style requires senior management to commit themselves to achieving improved quality as a main objective of the organisation (Beckford, 2002). Unfortunately certain things work against this principle. Mobility of management or management job-hopping is one of Deming's (1982) seven deadly diseases or bad management practices that need to be eliminated if an organisation is to improve quality. As Deming said:

"Mobility from one company to another creates prima donnas for quick results. Mobility annihilates teamwork, so vital for continued existence. A new manager comes in. Everyone wonders what will happen" (Out of the Crisis, p.121)

Such is the case in many universities. With many managers and others already working for their next job in the same or another institution. To change the culture of a university is a long-term strategy that may take between 5 and 10 years. What happens if the Vice Chancellor driving the policies and the change process leaves? Continuity is not guaranteed, although it would be the responsibility of the University Board of Management to replace a departing VC with one who would adopt similar policies as his/her predecessor. However, experience indicates that this would be unlikely. This scenario is by no means improbable. A survey of UK HE institutions for this paper on the length of time their current VCs have been in office found that the longest term was 16 years but that many had been in post less than five years. What could cause University Vice Chancellors to job-hop? Perhaps a look at salaries would throw some light on the issue. VC and top academic pay for 2001/2002 ranged from £316,000 per year for London Business School to £74,000 per year for Glasgow School of Art (Goddard, 2003). Many salaries contain a performance-related pay element, but how much and how performance is measured is not known. Put simply - it would pay to job hop.
