Quality Management in Schools
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Several managerial systems in the world economy on how to improve the efficiency of organisations on achieving goals were developed after the Second World War. One of the most popular was Deming’s PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) cycle from the 1950-s for profit oriented organisations. That success tempted people to use and modify similar systems for public affairs (e.g. NPM – New Public Management) at first, and later on in educational institutions. The main problem in implementing the system in education, however, was the question of a customer, i.e. who is the customer in the school system. Therefore, many discussions have been held in scientific publications (e.g. Eagle&Brennan, 2007 “Are students customers? TQM and marketing perspectives.”) as well as in the public media on that issue.

The central issue in a quality management system ensuring the formation of a learning community within schools is the validity of teachers’ involvement in the process.

There is now much evidence to support the hypothesis that in those schools where teachers are actively involved in the creation and implementation of a quality management system it is possible to find more characteristics that indicate a learning organisation.

Many countries have recently turned to the use of total quality management principles and excellence models to better meet the current needs of society for school management. Much data concerning the use of various excellence models (ME) (such as the Malcolm Baldrige Performance Excellence Model – (developed in 1987) and the EFQM Excellence Model – (designed in 1991) at different levels of schools has recently been reported (Nabitz, Severens, Wim van den Brink & Jansen, 2001; Steed, Maslow & Mazezatskaya, 2005; Svensson & Klefsjo, 2006; etc.). The central issue in quality management in an educational institution is the validity of the processes and the principles used in implementing such a system in schools.

Quite often countries renamed and modified the systems – school self-evaluation as an important term appeared into documents and different studies providing more freedom and flexibility for adaptation already existing models under the local circumstances. New terms like “learning communities” and “learning schools” (as organisations) appeared.

Many of European educational systems have used EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) as the basis for their own schools’ self-evaluation system (see the Model of Excellence: www.efqm.org/en/). Steed et al (2005) have described eight main principles for the Model of Excellence (EFQM):

- Customer Focus (excellence in creating sustainable customer value).
- Results orientation (excellence in achieving results that delight all the organisation’s
stakeholders).

- Leadership and Constancy of Purpose (excellence in visionary and inspirational leadership, coupled with constancy of purpose).
- People Development and Involvement (Excellence in maximising the contribution of employees through their development and involvement).
- Management by Processes and Facts (Excellence in managing the organisation through a set of interdependent and interrelated systems, processes and facts).
- Partnership Development (Excellence in developing and maintaining value-adding partnerships).
- Corporate Social Responsibility (Excellence in exceeding the minimum regulatory framework in which the organisation operates and striving to understand and respond to the expectations of their stakeholders in society).
- Continuous Learning, Innovation and Improvement (Excellence in challenging the status quo and effecting change by using learning to create innovation and improvement opportunities).

The five first criteria (enablers) modified for the schools (EFQM model) are:

- School leadership.
- School strategic planning (developmental plan, curriculum, other long term plans).
- School pedagogical staff and support systems (personnel).
- School stakeholders (parents, students, local community, etc.) and resources.
- Educational processes.

These listed principles have been considered mainly as the basis of the educational self-evaluation system (e.g. Estonia).

The school leadership depends on the head’s personality, his/her skills to run a team-based managerial system in the school and ability to involve staff members in school development procedures. The school strategic planning depends on the school owner’s understanding of the school and the school’s ability to develop its own vision and mission and find ways to move in those directions as an organization through different planned activities. The quality of the school personnel is influenced by the formal national requirements for the pedagogical professions one hand, and the school’s abilities to hire the best people to fulfil vacancies, to create professional learning environment and common understanding of the pedagogical processes on the other. The school’s work with stakeholders could be crucial because parents and students are often considered as customers for the school and school owners (most often local communities) are providing significant part of school resources available. Therefore, the school’s success and efficiency are significantly influenced by its ability to involve stakeholders in everyday school life. All these four indicators are like prerequisites for the educational processes – the most important processes in the school.

There are many authors demonstrating different experiences and perceptions of implementing models of excellence in education (Lindborg, 2005; Bore & Wright 2009; Edmund 2008, etc). Meirovich & Romar (2006) indicate that teachers (faculty) have a dual role (suppliers/retention seekers) if any ME is introduced. Linde (2000) states that quality models may contribute to the reduction of teachers’ stress. Arif & Smiley (2003) declare that, in American public schools, teachers
can implement curricular exchanges with their students more effectively if ME is used in the school. Sa & Saraiva (2001) contribute to customer and service provider discussion related with implementing ME. They demonstrate that customer-oriented kindergartens and their teachers can be creative and very effective, but building up that type of system takes a long time.

“...all teachers, education officials and school advisors, in particular, have a crucial role in this institutional intervention, whereas its gradual implementation can change the culture of the school, reinforces the role of teachers, enables all stakeholders of the school and contributes to the improvement of the quality of the school educational provision.” (Fataki, 2011)

Several studies indicate problems with the implementation of ME. Ngaware, Wamukuru & Odebero (2006) indicate as a result of questioning 300 teachers in Kenya, that if leaders are not providing the necessary leadership for implementing ME then a change in the school culture cannot be achieved. Avis (2006) adds that educational practice has high complexity and claims of successes of ME are overstated. Safakli & San (2007) conclude that teachers consider leaders implementing ME as “bad”, despite the nature of teamwork and collaboration inside the unit. Li & Wong (2008), on the basis of a study with twelve Chinese kindergartens, indicate that teacher professionalism is the key to the success of ME. Detert (2008) argues that teachers’ personal interests and capacity issues limit change initiatives.

These studies demonstrate that the implementation of ME in school could be a powerful tool, but its implementation is a very complicated and lengthy procedure.

Heads of schools often ask if they can use such managerial systems to reach the real essence of learning, or if they can create a real learning organization in schools, where experienced teachers mentor newly qualified teachers and where new educational knowledge is discussed and based on team work in order to update the educational processes. Also, there is evidence from schools claiming that they did everything that was demanded from them - created teams, planned activities, trained staff members, invited stakeholders to school, carried out satisfaction studies among students and parents, did needed paper work, etc. but nothing changed for the better. On the contrary, teachers are more tired of additional duties, parents’ and students’ satisfaction did not rise and school owners are still worried about school efficiency.

It raises several questions: can such semi-administrative activities initiated by the school managerial team change schools into learning organisations where experienced teachers involve newly qualified teachers in teams to follow school vision and mission? Can those systems create environment where everybody is working towards the direction of a common goal which is appreciated by the students as well as parents? Is school self-evaluation system a tool for rising school efficiency and meeting learning goals or is it an additional bureaucratic system that distracts people from these goals? These are the questions that should be answered by every educational politician and school head.
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- Can those systems create environment where everybody is working towards the direction of a common goal which is appreciated by the students as well as parents?
- Is school self-evaluation system a tool for rising school efficiency and meeting learning goals or is it an additional bureaucratic system that distracts people from these goals?