
Changing culture

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The author

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Abstract

Presents a case study of quality management approaches in a specialist higher education college. Provides the background to this situation and discusses how and why changes have been implemented. In particular, gives details of the new college philosophy and how it was derived. Hence, comments on the value of the *kaizen* approach at this institution.

Introduction

What follows is a description of one organization's approach to quality management and use of the European Quality Model as a framework. It is, therefore, a case study. The author provides this insight in the hope that it may help others and that she may receive feedback from other managers in the field also grappling with this issue. In particular, views on similarities or differences in approach or activities would be interesting.

The organization for which the author works subscribes to a total quality management approach and employs the European Quality Model as its framework (see Figure 1). As can be seen from the model, a number of factors need to be taken into consideration on the road to being a quality organization. One factor which is not mentioned explicitly is that of culture change. However, the author now believes that this is the most important part of "getting it right". The purpose of this article is to describe how one organization has attempted to make that culture change in becoming a quality organization.

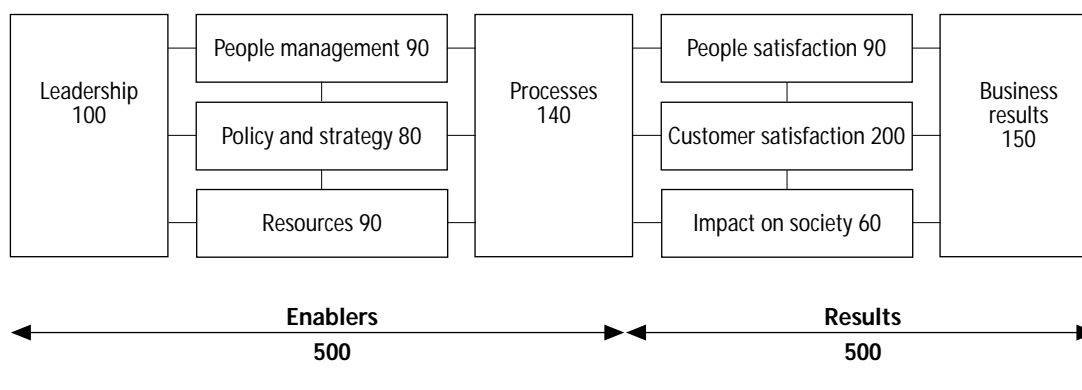
Background

The College of Guidance Studies (COGS) is the smallest higher education college in the country. It is a specialist college training guidance practitioners which incorporated in 1993 after deciding to stay with the local education authority in 1989. Although the college did not have quite the same independence as the other higher education institutions which were becoming incorporate bodies, the local authorities were charged through the Education Reform Act to implement delegation schemes for its educational establishments. This meant that the college had a lot more freedom to act than previously.

Kaizen journey

In 1991, with a view to creating a competitive edge, we started on what we describe as a *kaizen* journey. *Kaizen* is the Japanese word for continuous improvement, and that was what we were trying to achieve. The shift in culture which we felt we needed was away from a public-sector mentality to one which was more customer oriented. We employed two consultants to help us through this

Figure 1 The European Quality Model



process and initially we used the Williams model of consensus, education, problem-solving policy deployment and integration stages, but have more recently used the European Quality Model. We spent some time considering the kind of organization we wanted to be, both in business and values terms – all the staff were involved in this process and we came up with several values statements:

At COGS we believe in:

- fairness and impartiality;
- ideas responded to openly;
- value one another;
- equal opportunities.

At COGS we believe in our 5Cs:

- (1) continuous personal and corporate development;
- (2) commitment of every person to client satisfaction;
- (3) corporate behaviour;
- (4) clear, honest and open communication;
- (5) confidence in all we do.

As these statements and views had been generated by all the staff we assumed that they would be adopted by all concerned. However, that was not the case! Examples of things being done and said contrary to our values statements began to reach our ears and eyes. With hindsight, I think that what we did not recognize was that there is a big difference between setting a policy and making it happen. The words will provide a flavour (albeit an agreed one) of what the organization wants to be; but actions speak louder than words and there is a need for those words to be enacted in concrete ways and for everyone in the organization to

understand the same things from those words. We did not have this in place, so we set about correcting that. The statements came from a meeting of all staff when we considered what we felt was important to us as an organization and what we all felt we could subscribe to.

Culture change

At this stage we felt that what was needed was a commitment on the part of the senior management team (SMT) to represent more directly the culture into which we wanted to change. We wanted to create the right conditions within which staff would feel enabled to take risks, be creative and respond positively to change – all in the interests of the customer. In June 1992 we ran a session for the SMT which looked at the current culture, the one we wanted for the college and how to get from one to the other. This generated several kinds of action in relation to our 5Cs:

- (1) Fairness and impartiality:
 - giving and receiving value for money;
 - ensuring we are open with our suppliers/providers and agree exact requirements;
 - operating a fair tendering procedure;
 - costing carefully.
- (2) Ideas responded to openly:
 - working with one another to reach a workable agreement;
 - communicating openly and without fear of criticism;
 - following up feedback formally;
 - creating a learning environment.
- (3) Value one another:

- respecting yourself and respecting others;
 - improving the working environment;
 - creating a warm, rewarding and welcoming atmosphere;
 - involving people in decision making;
 - encouraging staff to mobilize their resources and realize their potential.
- (4) Equal opportunities:
- valuing and respecting all employees as people;
 - giving fair rewards and recognition for contribution;
 - providing equal opportunities for all to grow and learn;
 - pursuing student funding issues.
- (5) Continuous personal and corporate development:
- investing in appropriate staff training and other seminars;
 - acquiring new skills;
 - enjoying successes;
 - learning from mistakes;
 - encouraging staff to take risks;
 - seeking ways to improve performance;
 - accepting that getting it wrong is part of getting it right;
 - striving towards a mature, healthy and excellent organization.
- (6) Commitment of every person to client satisfaction:
- ensuring that we know what our customer requires;
 - adopting a new approach in delighting the customer;
 - putting the customer at the centre of our thinking;
 - negotiating realistic deadlines;
 - honouring promises and obligations.
- (7) Corporate behaviour:
- acknowledging that working together is effective and creative;
 - making decision-making points clear;
 - making things happen;
 - doing things you have to do rather than what you want to do;
 - being involved in the determination and delivery of corporate goals;
 - doing serious work with a sense of fun.
- (8) Clear, honest and open communication:
- communicating to understand and be understood;
 - making clear and specific statements;
 - giving and receiving criticism constructively;

- challenging inappropriate behaviour;
 - giving prompt feedback on services or returning unsatisfactory goods;
 - being assertive.
- (9) Confidence in all we do:
- taking responsibility for self and actions;
 - being creative in our problem solving;
 - not compromising – if a supplier fails to deliver, resolve the problem with them or research and get another;
 - acknowledging that COGS is a good place to work in and to do business with.

In 1994, we decided not only that was it important and necessary for the members of the SMT to subscribe to the new culture, but also that we needed also to consider the contribution that each of us was making to that new culture in its implementation and in terms of the behaviours which we ourselves demonstrated. Given our analysis of a difference between what we espoused and did, we felt that it was important for the members of the senior management team to model behaviour and avoid any potential hypocrisy in telling rather than doing. We wanted to get away from the adage of “don’t do as I do, do as I tell you” to one of “do as I do”. The demonstration of “appropriate” behaviour is part of the performance criteria for each of the managers whereby each member of the SMT evaluates another against these behaviour criteria.

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This took us into a programme of management development days. The aim of the SMT development programme is to gain commitment from the SMT for the culture change objectives and processes. The objectives of each day of the programme are:

- (1) Day 1: by the end of the session participants will be able to:
- identify the contribution that he or she makes to the effective working of the team;
 - identify the contribution that he or she could make to the effective working of the team;

- list the behaviours which can be employed or not employed in achieving culture change.
- (2) Day 2: by the end of the session participants will be able to:
 - produce a list of individual and corporate behaviours that people will agree to follow;
 - make a personal commitment to those behaviours identified.
 - (3) Day 3: by the end of the session participants will be able to identify:
 - specifically what is required of them;
 - ways of ensuring that it happens.
 - (4) Day 4: by the end of the session participants will be able to:
 - agree our definition of empowerment;
 - determine positive and negative aspects of empowerment in a culture change process;
 - identify a structured way forward for the college to empower the staff;
 - identify parameters within which staff can be empowered.

Essentially, in each instance, we wanted to look at the extent to which the individual contributed to the new culture as well as the contribution that each person was making to the team. It was therefore our intention that, through the management development days, we would undertake some kind of assessment of ourselves in relation to effective management and effective teamwork in contributing to culture change, and that we were clear about the kinds of behaviours which are more or less acceptable both for ourselves and others in making this culture change actually work. Activity three is particularly interesting, and we believe quite innovative and so worth particular attention here:

At our third session, on 1 August, we looked at what we felt was important in behavioural terms when working as a team. Initially, I presented my ideas which we then discussed, amended and agreed as a group. Having identified behavioural criteria, we then completed a form for ourselves before completing the same form for everyone else in the SMT to provide one another with feedback on how well we felt each scored in relation to the criteria. I think that for most people it was useful to “see ourselves as others do” and, for the most part, the assessment of

oneself was not too far removed from that made by the rest of the group.

Following our last management development day, we agreed at the next SMT meeting that we would focus on particular aspects of culture change as we felt that perhaps we were trying to do too much at one time. As can be seen from the list of actions generated, there are a number of values statements and therefore correlating actions. Rather than attempt all of these at one time, and possibly fail in the attempt (given the size of the job), we decided to focus on customer-orientation and talking the college up. We agreed that we would challenge anyone contravening these philosophies, whether they were members of the staff or the SMT. This would not be done in an aggressive way, but by drawing to the attention of the person concerned how their behaviour could be interpreted and what an alternative approach might be. Our view of this approach was that it is easy to ignore the little things but that they convey all sorts of messages and can ultimately become bigger issues to deal with.

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Of course, the culture change process is not only about the members of the SMT – far from it! Our staff are our most important resource and we recognize that, as an SMT, we have a responsibility to provide the right kind of environment to enable members of staff to take responsibility and to make appropriate improvements in relation to the customers whom we all serve. With this purpose in mind, we have set up what we call “family groups” to consider particular areas of work where there may be room for improvement, and have encouraged them to employ a problem-solving approach to finding solutions. Since the inception of this approach two years ago, we have taken on more staff as a result of an office staff project, refurbished the residential accommodation following recommendations from the cleaning staff and restructured the college following a discussion about this matter by the SMT. In total, we have spent in

the region of an additional £100,000 on ideas generated by our staff for the improvement of our service to our customers.

The reaction of some members of staff has been interesting: some were more than a little surprised that we were going to take up their ideas, but were also pleased. This has made them feel more able to come forward with suggestions for improvement.

Conclusions

Reviewing the *kaizen* journey taken so far, there are several conclusions which should be drawn and highlighted:

- As a result of the management development days, a higher degree of openness has been generated within the SMT. We understand ourselves and one another better and are more able to work to our combined strengths.
- As an SMT we would now feel a lot more comfortable about challenging inappropriate behaviour in one another as well as others in the college, partly because we

have agreed what is important and partly because we know that we will support one another.

- Culture change should come first in the quality process. Unless attitudes and behaviours change, any improvement will be temporary.
- The role of the SMT is crucial and commitment can be demonstrated by their behaviour.
- The importance of teamwork and working together towards the same ends is stressed.
- Take ideas seriously and respond to them.

Further reading

Total Quality Management – The European Model for Self Appraisal, European Foundation for Quality Management, Eindhoven, The Netherlands.

Williams, R. and Bertsch, B. (1989), "Stages in the management of quality improvement programmes", paper presented at the European Quality Management Forum, 19 October, Montreux.