

## FROM QUALITY MANAGEMENT TO MANAGING QUALITY: SYSTEMIC APPROACH

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*Dear Readers!*

*“Many might be surprised when they hear that I have never created a long term management plan. Of course, a long term management strategy based on management theory is necessary and important. But if we don't live through today tomorrow will not come. I wonder whether it is possible to foresee what will be happening in five or ten years if you don't know what is going to happen tomorrow.”*

***Kazuo Inamori***

There have been more and more discussions going on in recent years about the quality of service provided in different level and different type of educational institutions. It is not one educational institution that characterizes quality as the most important priority of the activity. However, one thing is to characterize and declare and another is to actually strive for this quality. In other words, the priorities of educational institutions can be quite different however, it is inevitably obligatory to try to survive in the market. Quality system is one of the mechanisms helping the institution to organize and fulfill the activity so that to ensure its effective work under competitive conditions. Moreover, no institution should wait for its prestige to start diminishing on the contrary it has to do its best to guarantee successful functioning in the future. Thus, the head of every educational institution today has to care about how effectively its institution functions, what are possible ways and methods of its activity improvement. It is not enough to have practical experience and intuition to do this. Theoretical knowledge is necessary here. It is worth mentioning such a relatively new science field as Qualitology; (квалитология-Russian) which by its nature is triple. The essential parts of it are: quality theory, quality evaluation theory (kvalimetrija) and quality management theory. On the other hand, the analysis of quality management problems is impossible without systemology, management, innovation and theoretical and practical achievements in other spheres. Eventually, the most major are international quality standards ISO 9000:2000. Everything is joined here into a closely related system.

A significant thing is quality conception. For certain it is clear that it differs. There is one understanding of quality in business sphere and another in education. And it is natural because education is a specific activity sphere of a society. Despite this, international quality standards are more and more applied in education. We can mention, for example, international standard IWA-2. These are recommendations of how to apply ISO 9001 in education sphere. Quality standards in education sphere are of the same importance as in other spheres. The requirements in education market are growing constantly. The leaders of educational institutions must know whether the service provided by their managing institution is of good quality. This can't be said referring only to intuition, experience and even to some kind of researches carried out. For that purpose it is necessary to certify provided service. Practically, this is not the object of discussion today in educational institutions. In

fact, in Lithuanian higher schools the process of program evaluation, accreditation is going on, in comprehensive schools internal and external evaluation has been started and so on. I'm not going to analyze these processes in detail, but I want to stress that accreditation of programs and different way of evaluation is not a quality management system yet. Certification is practically the only way to prove that quality system is functioning. I would like to emphasize that precise compliance with standards and regulations doesn't mean that certain institution will perform a quality work. Much depends on the other factors which are not regulated.

The essential thing which was realized quite long ago in many European countries is a consequent change of the attitude passing on from quality management to managing quality. The emphasis today obviously has to be transferred from external quality control to internal in order to reduce the number of various controls. As it is known, control in itself is side, not necessary actions which would rather not be taken because they require big financial and other expenses and in the end virtually do not change anything. Therefore, it has to be exactly defined what is going to be controlled. It follows that the organization first of all has to be able to coordinate quality management by its inner efforts. And this is firstly for the purpose of the institution's successful and effective functioning (Lamanauskas, 2007).

Another important aspect is quality education. A person having graduated from an educational institution of any level has to have conditions to acquire proper (quality) education. Finally, international standards require this as well. One of the essential (out of eight) quality management principles is orientation to the consumers. One of the most urgent problems of Lithuanian education is availability of quality education. This requires exhaustive theoretical and empiric researches. Financial difficulties, the shortage of different other recourses, various indeterminations and similar issues hinder the solution of this problem. It can be safely asserted that the quality of education at a greater part depends on scientific, pedagogic personnel. On the other hand, leaders' managing competence is very important, their ability to manage not only "by eye" or precise adherence to standard documents but also certain systemic-logic attitude to various situations or problems. Often management decisions are made without having required information or this information is inaccurate, unreliable and insignificant. Elementary management problem solving algorithm is being forgotten when first of all it is necessary to formulate the problem (to name it), determine the reasons of its origin, find optimal ways to its solution and only then take on to solve it (make adequate management decisions).

Besides, it is obvious, that all successfully working leaders despite their managing style and other peculiarities are united by systemic view of any situation, ability to think in a strategic way and seek determined targets. In other words, improving the quality and effectiveness of managing is the premise for ensuring quality of general development (Baskajev, 2007).

Currently it has become rather fashionable in Lithuania to prepare strategic activity plans of educational institutions. By its essence strategic planning is a good thing because it is possible to involve a lot of people into planning activity. In this way a very important managing principle i.e. participation of the personnel in the management process is being realized. In other words, every member of the organization sees and perceives the situation in his own way. This kind of interchange of information among workers and leaders is useful. However, other not always positive things can be noticed. There are cases when a strategic plan is ordered "to be made" by a certain consultancy company or by individuals. Recently this has become peculiar to comprehensive schools. Such "artificially" constructed strategic plans in most cases are for manager's "drawer". Finally, someone earns quite solid money and sets up not a bad business. It is important to understand this because quality management broadly speaking is business as well (selection of consultants, auditors and other specialists, quality systems implementation, preparing them for certification and certification process itself). These questions, in fact, are regulated by a new international standard ISO 10019-2005 (Guidelines for the selection of quality management system and use of their services). As famous quality management specialist N.Injac (2006) emphasizes this standard introduces some kind of clarity into the whole quality management system. From the managerial point of view it is clear that mission, policy, and goals of the institution are defined by marketing researches. Just the latter practically are not carried out in comprehensive schools, very seldom are implemented in higher schools and other educational institutions. One more paradoxical thing is publicizing of strategic plans. The suggestion to "copy-paste" a strategic plan from another very similar one can be heard

during various discussions. It is even being suggested to publicize the plans on the internet. However, strategic plan is a document for internal use. The question is whether, in general, it is necessary to spread it. Under the conditions of severe competition this is not only not useful but often dangerous for the institution.

Questions concerning quality of education become urgent in another aspect too. A rather intensive plundering of education market is taking place. This tendency can be noticed in many European countries. This applies to all types of educational institutions especially this question is severe in Lithuanian higher schools. Here, on the one hand, some kind of struggle is going on between universities and colleges, on the other hand, between state and private institutions. Gradually international education structures more and more actively show themselves in education market. In order to understand all occurring phenomena you need exhaustive information. We can't assert that education institutions do not care about internal and external information. However, information gathering should not be an end in itself. First of all, we must care about facts which "hide behind the data". Moreover, it is necessary that on the basis of information we could affect processes in the direction of their improvement. So, collecting information, putting it in order, keeping, processing, storing the results and so on are very important activities when we are talking about quality management system effectively taking place in certain educational institution. Suitable and timely information is a premise for accepting optimal management decision. All mentioned activities are inevitably related to statistics. Applying of statistic methods in quality management is as a matter of fact, a priority. Speaking about comprehensive schools we can claim that there is a lack of competences in the sphere of application of statistic methods. Speaking about quality management it would be necessary to mention that standard ISO 10017:2003 regulates what statistic methods can be used in quality management. Statistic methods help to measure, describe, analyze and interpret information even having limited (not full) data. Researches show that most frequently problems arise because of educational research data processing quality, the newest research discussion, competence of the researchers to take part in one or another research (Čigienė, Lamanaukas, 2005). Another problem is baseless overestimation of importance of qualitative research methods in Lithuania. Recently it has been felt a lot. On the contrary, only referring to well-grounded methods we can give a very exact evaluation of any process condition. Education process doesn't often go on regularly or strictly according to the laws we are aware of. Randomness exists everywhere and always. Randomness is an element of objective reality. That is objective. Understanding and reducing randomness is a key to success. The features of any objects or processes always have a certain dispersion i.e. always are random. Education processes also are determined by accidental cases e.g. the repetition of teaching results depends upon students, teachers or lecturers and also upon different other parameters. The organization of education process, the microclimate of education institution always have one or another ("dispersion")-not defined accidental cases. Statistic analysis used properly allows us to distinguish accidental changes and those which are caused by concrete factors. So, in this aspect very important jobs are awaiting.

Often one can hear education theorists, practitioners and politicians claim that in different education spheres different quality guarantee conceptions exist. This also refers to quality guarantee devices. They are very different. Arguments and elementary disagreement inevitably occur among education participants on quality questions. I don't think that this should be treated as a negative thing. It is obvious that education quality is decreasing tendentially, competition is getting stronger, education market diversification and differentiation is taking place. A need to communicate in a broader space and in more various contexts arises among education participants. One more important aspect is quality perception and guarantee in different level institutions. In recent years there have been a lot of discussions in Lithuania about the quality of studies in higher schools (somehow the quality of education is forgotten). In the last years audit system has been started to be implemented in comprehensive schools. An ambiguous question arises again – Why only an audit system? Does audit system already mean quality management system? It is worth noting that it is perceived on the international level that without quality education in lower sections (levels) quality education in higher levels is impossible. In other words, we should speak about quality education already on a pre-school education institution level. Quality has to start from pre-school education institution and this is conceivable even in the developing countries (Tharmaseelan, 2007).

Several aspects of education quality having been discussed obviously tell us about the importance of systemic attitude. Every educational institution, first of all, has to be able to solve problems itself, look for ways out from certain situations. And this is much more complicated than in business world. In business sphere a defective product made is simply eliminated from the system and doesn't get to (shouldn't get to) consumer. In education sphere it is more complicated. It is very difficult to eliminate damage, it is almost impossible. The more, that the emphasis is transferred from external quality control system into internal in other words, institution has to be able to coordinate occurring quality management questions by inner efforts. In general, it can be asserted that any attempt to improve quality means that quality system exists no matter that it is not certified. It is very difficult to implement quality management systems in educational institutions. As it is known, education systems are rather conservative and tend to resist the implementing of innovations. Most frequently they have "we know everything" attitude. Quality management system means, first of all, that processes which are carried out in certain educational institution are managed and forecasted. I would think that duty of any head of educational institution is to seek that quality conception would become a need and virtue of every institution employee. This is a constant work. Constant efforts are necessary for this. Quality management is not a single action. This is a systemic task for the implementation of which a long term, methodical and systematic work is necessary not only for achievement of a certain quality level but for its maintenance and constant improvement.

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