

PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

The latest surveys in Romanian companies showed extended needs for a new generation of management professionals capable to apply updated management knowledge and skills at international standards in the view of EU integration. The paper debates different perspectives on quality, from the traditional perspective, to "fitness for purpose" perspective, to Garvin's perspectives - transcendental perspective, product perspective, user perspective, needs perspective, and value perspective – in purpose to create a framework for excellence in management education and training needed to grow management professionals in Romania.

1. PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY

Although there are a large array of perspectives defining the concept of quality, the latest approaches focus on the customer: meeting and exceeding customer's needs [1]. Ultimately, the customers will cast their votes on the quality of the products / services offered by an organization.

Generally, there are two types of quality definitions: one is based on the relationship between quality and product / service characteristics, and the other concentrates on lack of deficiencies [2]. Product / service characteristics have a significant impact on sales, so, from this perspective, better quality costs more. On the other hand, product deficiencies have a direct impact on costs, to the extent that better quality usually costs less (less errors, less scrap, etc.). Juran [3] showed that there is no consensus in respect with what quality means, so integrating the two perspectives within the framework of a unique definition proved to be an impossible task.

Nevertheless, there can be identified several key features preferred by organizations to define quality [4]: characteristics; performance; competing capability; dependability; quick response; lack of errors; conformity with standards and procedures.

Obviously, all these characteristics point out to satisfying client requirements as the unifying factor having diverse expressions, such as: in the eyes of the beholder; right the first time; fitness for use; fitness for purpose; fitness of purpose.

The last two perspectives are of utmost importance because they draw the attention on the importance between strategy formation, strategy implementation and customer satisfaction.

Despite lack of structure and controversy, Garvin [5] defined five perspectives on quality frequently used by companies in setting quality objectives:

1. The transcendental perspective - *although quality cannot be defined, you know what it is*; in this view, quality is synonymous with excellence, is absolute, everlasting, and universally recognized; sometimes is identified with craftsmanship as the opposite to mass production; more often it cannot be precisely defined but can be learnt by experience; so, whatever is quality, people will learn to recognize it
2. The product perspective - quality is a concrete, measurable attribute, given by the number of characteristics of a product / service; in this perspective, the best quality products / services will have the highest prices since each characteristic has its specific costs; furthermore, since quality reflects the presence or absence of certain measurable characteristics of a product / service, it can be objectively measured
3. The user perspective - *fitness for use* [6]; this perspective has led to the following approaches: aggregation of very diverse individual preferences in order to define quality at market level in a significant manner; determining a consistent positive correlation between the two key concepts: quality and customer satisfaction
4. The producer perspective - the degree a product / service shows conformity with a project or specification [7]; in this respect, quality means "right the first time"
5. The value perspective - although very important, this perspective is difficult to apply because it comprises a mixture of two linked, but distinct concepts: excellence and value; it defines quality in a subjective, diffuse manner, as *the excellence we can afford*

2. PERSPECTIVES ON MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The latest survey conducted in Romanian companies by the authors - as part of a Leonardo da Vinci II European research and training Project [8] - showed extended needs for a new generation of management professionals capable to apply updated management knowledge and skills at international standards in the view of EU integration.

The need hierarchy pointed out the following areas as the most important requirements for Romanian management / business education and training:

1. Business plan writing skills
2. Global business environment; Sources of business funding
3. Innovation and creativity; Time management
4. Marketing and sales; Advertising
5. Human resource management; Strategic management
6. Pricing; Exports; Business law; Information technology
7. Market analysis / segmentation; Financial management
8. R & D capabilities; Operations management; Leadership skills

The "most credible" bodies to deliver high quality business training were perceived to be universities and further education colleges. Also, Internet based training was very much agreed (76.9 % of respondents) as a method for developing entrepreneurial and business skills, despite the fact that only 53.8 % of respondents have used an educational software product before the date of the survey.

Among the factors considered when choosing a management development course the highly rated were: the quality and reputation of the training organization; location and cost; timing; personalized counseling.

The QFD inspired [9, 10] technical or counterpart characteristics of the management education and training programs to be promoted by the "most credible" bodies - universities

and further education colleges - were identified based on the specific requirements previously identified (Table 1.):

TABLE 1. PROPOSED TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS IN ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BASED ON SPECIFIC IDENTIFIED NEEDS.

Entry requirements	TC-A1	TC-A	Accessibility
Equal opportunities	TC-A2		
Customization	TC-B1	TC-B	Hands-on (practice oriented)
In-company experiences	TC-B2		
Key speakers	TC-B3		
Practical assignments	TC-B4		
Teaching methodology / pedagogical tools	TC-B5		
Modular structure	TC-C1	TC-C	Flexibility
Timing	TC-C2		
Personalized counseling	TC-C3		
Location flexibility	TC-C4		
Accredited diplomas / certificates	TC-C5		
Course content to fit identified needs	TC-D1	TC-D	Cutting-edge program
Course content to fit latest knowledge	TC-D2		
Methods of delivery - use of IT	TC-D3		
Student and course evaluation	TC-D4		
Library	TC-D5		
Equipment	TC-D6		
Facilities	TC-D7		
Partner institutions	TC-D8		
Resource utilization	TC-E1	TC-E	Cost effective
Break-even	TC-E2		

3. PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING: ATTEMPT TO AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

In their attempt to identify key characteristics of management education and training programs to fit Romanian customers' identified needs, the authors analyzed the technical / counterpart characteristics described in Table 1. from seven perspectives on quality (Table 2.): fitness of purpose, fitness for purpose, and the Garvin's five perspectives (the transcendental perspective, the product perspective, the user perspective, the producer perspective and the value perspective).

TABLE 2. ANALYSIS OF TECHNICAL / COUNTERPART CHARACTERISTICS FROM SEVEN PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY.

TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS	PERSPECTIVES	KEY FEATURES OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS
Accessibility	fitness of purpose	equal opportunities as accessibility principle for all clients interested in a specific program
	fitness for purpose	entry requirements - pre-requisites in terms of previous education and training
	transcendental perspective	best quality programs accessible to all (no costs incurred)
	product perspective	accessibility as a measurable "product" quality attribute
	user perspective	aggregation of diverse individual preferences leading to wide accessibility to the program on a specific market
	producer perspective	"right the first time" in offering wide accessibility to a large number of interested individuals
	value perspective	offering the excellence the greatest number of people expressing interest in a specific program can afford
Hands-on (practice oriented)	fitness of purpose	upon graduation, each student is capable to perform in a significant manner in a real-life organization
	fitness for purpose	customization of programs
	transcendental perspective	custom designed programs for every individual's specific needs related to real-life practice
	product perspective	programs based on key speakers, in-company experiences and practical assignments
	user perspective	programs designed to include user's needs linked to their real-life activities
	producer perspective	specific teaching methodology and pedagogical tools to support customization of programs
	value perspective	affordable practice oriented customized programs
Flexibility	fitness of purpose	accredited programs to meet personalized needs
	fitness for purpose	modular structure following a self-designed programming and scheduling
	transcendental perspective	best quality self-designed programs

TABLE 2. ANALYSIS OF TECHNICAL / COUNTERPART CHARACTERISTICS FROM SEVEN PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY (CONTD.).

TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS	PERSPECTIVES	KEY FEATURES OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS
Flexibility	product perspective	modular structure with core required courses and a large array of elective courses offered in relation with students' personalized needs
	user perspective	course content to fit personalized needs; best timing; location flexibility (including virtual class); personalized counseling
	producer perspective	accredited diplomas / certificates to fit students' specific needs
	value perspective	best quality personalized programs at affordable costs finalized with accredited diplomas / certificates
Cutting-edge program	fitness of purpose	innovative programs to fit identified needs at the latest knowledge available in a particular field
	fitness for purpose	latest knowledge to fit student's needs embedded in the programs by design
	transcendental perspective	excellence: content and learning processes
	producer perspective	the latest knowledge delivered by using innovative methods, including IT environments; student and course evaluation; library as learning center; latest equipment; adequate facilities; joint partnerships to facilitate transfer of knowledge
	user perspective	aggregation of diverse individual options around the latest knowledge in a particular field
	product perspective	Course content to fit identified needs; course content to fit latest knowledge
	value perspective	Latest knowledge and teaching methodology we can afford
Cost effective	fitness of purpose	maximum resource utilization to achieve program objectives
	fitness for purpose	making the most of available resources
	transcendental perspective	-

TABLE 2. ANALYSIS OF TECHNICAL / COUNTERPART CHARACTERISTICS FROM SEVEN PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY (CONTD.).

TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS	PERSPECTIVES	KEY FEATURES OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS
Cost effective	product perspective	required quality of programs at minimum costs
	user perspective	minimum costs incurred
	producer perspective	maximizing resource acquisition; break-even
	value perspective	excellence at minimum costs by maximizing resource utilization

4. CONCLUSIONS

It can be pointed out that using the different perspectives on quality created the opportunity to structure and integrate key characteristics of management education and training programs around Romanian customer identified needs, setting the stage for further real life developments. Furthermore, a QFD matrix could be used to identify strengths and weaknesses between the customer attributes and the counterpart characteristics for each specific program. Following, a first draft of each specific program can be developed by joint teams of key representatives from interested stakeholders. Real-life evaluations of the competing “products” and counterpart characteristics of the proposed programs can be conducted in the view of setting specific targets and begin preparation to launch the final “products” on the market.

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