

THE ROLE OF QUALITY ENVOYS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY IN SAKARYA UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Increasing the quality of higher education has been one of the main focuses of higher education institutions and still is at the top of the agenda. Universities and research institutes have been spending a lot of efforts to create quality culture to assure the quality of the education and training. The term "Quality envoy" is newly introduced in Sakarya University for the purpose of creating a dynamic and active participation in quality improvements at business level. It is extremely important for the big organizations such as universities to guarantee active participation of all employees in quality related tasks. However, this is not easy due to some cultural, organizational and procedural reasons. Governmental institutes require more commitment from their employees and stakeholders than private enterprises. This paper introduces the results of employing quality envoys in Sakarya University of Turkey.

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality can now be considered as the most significant factor in determining the success and failure of an organization. However, managers of organizations such as universities are facing a very challenging task under highly dynamic and continuously changing environment. That is the quality of education and training as well as administrative services under very limited resources. Universities, similar to other organizations, are facing new competitors with new technologies and new services. Quality knowledge as well as understanding and comprehension of quality by the university staff and students are essential for the universities to sustain competitiveness. This would not be achieved without proper quality culture within the organization which is still a challenging task for the managers.

Despite quality circles and improvement teams who are devoted to improve quality in their organizations, there is still a great deal of failure stories as well as successes in every domain [Friedman and White, 1999, Goetsch and Davis 1997, Longo and Cox 1997]. In many organizations, the failure of Total Quality management (TQM) does not due to poor Planning by upper management but mainly due to poor execution or implementation of TQM Processes at company wide. Employees can be educated and trained in quality knowledge. However, in most of the cases, this is not enough. In order to gain practical experience, they

do not only need to hear and see the good practices but also being actively involved as much effectively as possible in quality improvements. Achieving this would definitely make the quality to turn into the way of life [Öztemel, 2005].

Providing guidance to the managers and employees is not easy. It does not only require commitment to quality but also requires special capability of conveying quality knowledge into practices. Quality envoys are specifically trained to help spread of quality within the organizations and increase active participation in continuous improvements.

The term “quality envoys” is first introduced by Öztemel (2005). Quality envoys are those who are specifically trained on quality and have practical experience in implementing continuous improvements. Sakarya University created a series of quality implementation using quality envoys, one from each university unit. This paper will outline the importance of the quality envoyship and the role of envoys in quality improvement activities in Higher education through a case study performed in Sakarya University.

2. QUALITY ENVOYS

Quality Envoys are those who possess experience and knowledge of quality improvement and be practically involved in the best practices. They are those who are specialist in implementing quality philosophy within their responsibilities and have the capability of spreading quality into their environments. In other words, they carry out a special mission of deploying practical quality within the organization under their responsibility. Note that quality envoys are assigned hierarchically from the same level of organizations. A manager can be a quality envoy for other manager. A worker can be an envoy for a worker. Similarly mid managers can be envoys for the mid managers. This is very important. Because, a manager can better understands other managers. A worker can feel the same things other workers feel. Each envoy is assigned a partner for whom the quality support is to be provided by the envoy. Partners are those who possess specific process knowledge and experience in carrying out their own responsibilities needing assistance in quality improvements. Öztemel (2005) provided detailed explanations about the quality envoys and their characteristics. Note that organizations can use both internal and external envoys. Internal envoys are those who are also working for the relevant organization. External envoys are those who are working in other organizations and hired on a purpose.

3. CASE STUDY IN SAKARYA UNIVERSITY

Sakarya University fairly young established state university. The university Senate decided to employ Total quality management in 2003. The master plan was generated and implemented. The university following the master plan implemented the following activities.

- Establishing a quality council and quality envoys.
- Strategic management
- Performance based management by objectives.
- Self assessment
- Self improvement and self commitment, self satisfaction
- Process management
- Team working management
- Continuous improvement action plans
- Continuous monitoring of the activities

As one of the main characteristics of the above activities was the employment of quality envoys and the scope of this paper covers only the quality envoys the rest of the activities will not be described here.

Sakarya University is a growing university with 11 campuses and around 30000 students. There are mainly education and training in every scientific and social discipline. Most of the staffs that are experienced and knowledgeable in their areas of research were not familiar with the terms and principles of total quality management. There has been a series of seminars and training courses on quality management. Despite these, the people (managers, academicians, and other staff) were not feeling the essence of quality and were reluctant to satisfy the demands of the quality council.

The University Senate created a Quality Council from the managers of the faculties and other units of the university. The council was responsible to perform all quality related activities. Due to lack of practical experiences it was difficult to obtain the same level of comprehension and understanding as well as implementation from the different units. Some needed help, some needed support. Some needed best practices as examples. The quality council decided to employ the concept of quality envoys as defined by Oztemel (2005).

They decided to use internal envoys and some lecturers expert on total quality management was asked to train and grow the envoys with the envoys. A series of consultations, training and experimentation the university managed to create quality envoys for each university units.

Quality envoys were mainly operational envoys and were responsible to turn quality decisions into practices within their departments. They were responsible for the following.

- They did have a special mission of making their partners capable of applying the quality practices. They managed to utilize their expertise along this line and produced positive business results and a positive atmosphere within their working environment.
- They provide their quality knowledge to their colleagues. They shared their experiences on actually running job together with their partners.
- They helped university to spread the quality through practical applications They provided road maps to their partners for continuously improving the quality.
- They implemented their knowledge and experience on certain tasks together with their partners.
- They were not those who were responsible to collect the data to make quality assurance systems work properly. They helped improve the work from which the data should be collected and interpreted by their partners.

Note that, the quality envoys were and are the part of the organizational chart and accountable for improving only the quality of work they were and are responsible for.

Another important fact about the envoys is that they did not held responsible for the failure or success. The reward for increasing the improvement for certain tasks should be given to partners who were the real employees and managers responsible for carrying out the tasks to be improved. The envoys were considered as a guide to the employees towards the success.

The quality envoys were very successful. Since they were assigned to help others to improve the quality the following tasks were achieved;

- Strategic plan for 2004 and 2005 were prepared and implemented with their help. Preparation for the plan for 2006 is going on.
- Self assessment for 2004 and 2005 were held prior to strategic planning and this process is currently performed for strategic plan for 2006.

- Performance monitoring system was established and has been used effectively. The performance of satisfying the university functional goals and objectives is monitored and evaluated in every 3 months since 2004. This process is being carried out now even without the help of envoys.
- Processes for education, training, research and academic services were defined and is yet to be refined through improvement teams and other activities.
- A new system for tracing and monitoring process improvements was established and used effectively.
- A system was established for measuring self satisfaction of employees, academics, and students. This process is run once in a year for related measurements. The unit managers were asked to improve the areas required by the measurement system.

Quality envoys are still operating to bring better quality in education, research and other administrative services in Sakarya University.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper presented a new way of spreading the quality within a university especially for process improvements at all levels. The concept of quality envoys is introduced for this purpose. The case study in Sakarya University indicated the success of the idea of envoyship. This would definitely increase the chance of improving quality even by updating the daily knowledge of the quality engineers.

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