

**Jitka SMUTNÁ<sup>\*</sup>, Radim FARANA<sup>\*\*</sup>**

SELF-ASSESSMENT METHODS IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

SEBEHODNOTÍCÍ METODY V OBLASTI ZLEPŠOVÁNÍ KVALITY VYSOKÉHO ŠKOLSTVÍ

### **Abstract**

Organizational performance is maximized when it is based on the management and sharing of knowledge within a culture of continuous learning, innovation and improvement. The methodology embodies the principle of self-evaluation or self-assessment. The higher education institutions would learn from feedback by reviewing impact of strategies and actions, trends in results and by comparing through benchmarking.

The focus of this paper is the implementation of EFQM excellence model in the higher education (HE) sector. This paper describes the specific issues in implementing the model in HE institutions, with a particular focus on the choice of self-assessment methodology. The early signs are that EFQM excellence model self-assessment can help to produce a more customer-oriented culture in HE institutions, providing that the lessons learned from the wider public sector are put into practice.

### **Abstrakt**

Maximální výkon organizace je založen na správných zásadách managementu a sdílení získaných znalostí v rámci firemní kultury, neustálého vzdělávání a zlepšování. Teoretické metody spočívají pak v osvojení způsobu sebehodnocení. Vysokoškolské organizace dokáží uspět díky účinnému hodnocení veškerých činností a strategií organizace, sledování aktuálních trendů ve vývoji a srovnání výsledků pomocí benchmarkingu.

Tento příspěvek se zaměřuje na zavedení EFQM modelu excellence v oblasti vysokého školství. Článek popisuje specifika zavádění tohoto modelu se zaměřením na vhodný výběr sebehodnotících metod. EFQM model excellence v oblasti sebehodnocení přispívá vysokoškolským organizacím orientovat se na zákazníky a zkušenosti z oblasti veřejného sektoru aplikovat v praxi.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model has been in use for almost 20 years. Initially, it was mainly implemented by “industrial” organisations. These organisations have currently built up much experience in the issues to be addressed when aiming for successful implementation of the model. In recent years, there has been a surge of interest in the model from a variety of public sector organisations resulting in the EFQM developing a version of the model for the public sector.

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<sup>\*</sup> Ing., Department of Control Systems and Instrumentation, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, VSB-Technical University Ostrava, 17. listopadu 15, Ostrava-Poruba, e-mail jitka.smutna.st@vsb.cz

<sup>\*\*</sup> prof. Ing. CSc., Department of Control Systems and Instrumentation, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, VSB-Technical University Ostrava, 17. listopadu 15, Ostrava-Poruba, tel. (+420) 59 732 4380, e-mail radim.farana@vsb.cz

## 2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-ASSESSMENT AND THE EFQM EXCELLENCE MODEL

The success of the Baldrige Model (USA) and the Deming prize (Japan) encouraged the formation of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) in 1988. The 14 founders of EFQM were all Presidents of world-class organisations representing a number of different markets and were endorsed by the European Commission. The full list of organisations was the following: Bosch; BT; Bull; Ciba-Geigy; Dassault; Electrolux; Fiat; KLM; Nestlé; Olivetti; Philips; Renault; Sulzer; and Volkswagen.

The EFQM excellence model, initially called the European Model for Business Excellence, was introduced in 1991 with the European Quality Award being awarded for the first time in 1992. From its inception, the adoption of total quality management (TQM) principles has been at the heart of the EFQM vision. This vision was restated in 2000 as “A world in which organisations in Europe excel” with the role of the EFQM “to be the driving force for sustainable excellence in organisations in Europe”. [1]

### The EFQM definition of self-assessment is:

Self-Assessment is a comprehensive, systematic and regular review of an organisation's activities and results referenced against the EFQM Excellence Model. The Self-Assessment process allows the organisation to discern clearly its strengths and areas in which improvements can be made and culminates in planned improvement actions which are then monitored for progress. [1]

Thus, it can be seen from the above definition that self-assessment is a vehicle for systematic continuous improvement in an organisation.

To help organisations with the process of self-assessment, RADAR logic was introduced and can be seen graphically in Figure 1.

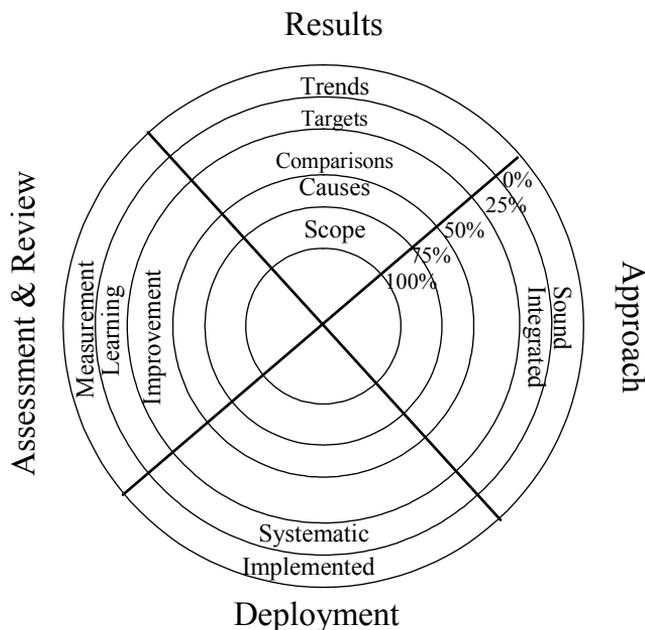


Fig. 1 RADAR Scoring Matrix

RADAR is a powerful tool for self-assessment and a basis for scoring the application for awards in EFQM model. It can be used for evaluating the results, identifying improvement opportunities, planning the actions, implementing them and again assessing the effectiveness. So results lead through approach, deployment and assessment and review to a new set of results, which again are starting point of iteration. In short the RADAR (Results Approach Deployment Assessment Review) logically states that identify the gaps in results that an organization was aiming for through its policy and strategy, plan and develop an integrated approach to deliver the required results, deploy the plan in a systematic way ensuring implementation in totality, assess and review the approach based on the analysis of the results and plan for further improvements if necessary.

- The model takes account of five aspects of performance in order to clearly understand the results:
- *Trends* – how perceptions / indicators are changing over a period of time, are they improving
- *Targets* – are the target set appropriately (targets should exceed currently achievable levels of performance) and are they being met
- *Comparisons* – does the organization compare its results with those of its competitors, best in industry and best across industries
- *Causes* – are the results caused by meticulously planned approach or are they ‘accidental’
- *Scope* – are the results measured in all the relevant areas of the organization

### 3 EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

If we ask the question “What is excellence in Higher Education?” The response could be summarised as:

- achieving mission/vision;
- achieving/exceeding benchmarks and internal measures;
- best practice;
- community engagement;
- cost-effective;
- customer/stakeholder satisfaction;
- dissemination of good practice nationally and internationally;
- learning outcomes;
- making optimal use of all resources – financial, human, assets;
- match between desired and actual perception;
- positive atmosphere in staff and student environments – integration in teaching and research;
- quality of teaching and learning; and
- relative to starting point – achieving targets.

It is evident from these responses that excellence is not limited to traditional measures of profit/loss or those imposed by external accreditation.

Many approaches to encourage improvement have been considered for use within Higher Education Institutions and we can make conclusion that financial indicators alone are limited in their ability to adequately represent the range of factors associated with organizational excellence. [3]

#### Self-assessment methods in the HE institutions

There are different type of self-assessment methods that we can use by the evaluation process. This project is evaluating the benefits of applying the EFQM excellence model to Higher Education Institutions. One aspect of this project is to examine self-assessment approaches supported by the EFQM, which are:

- I. questionnaire;
- II. matrix chart;
- III. workshop;
- IV. pro-forma.

## **I. Questionnaire approach**

Deemed by the EFQM (1999) as one of the least labour intensive approaches the questionnaire self-assessment approach aims to obtain the views of (all) the people within the organisation.

The benefits associated with this approach are quick and easy to apply, can involve all the organisation's people, supports communication efforts and can be used in conjunction with other approaches. The associated risks are that the strengths and areas for improvement cannot be ascertained, accuracy of feedback is dependent upon the phrasing of the original questions, there may be questionnaire fatigue within the organisation and expectations can be raised and unfulfilled if timely, appropriate actions do not occur. [6]

## **II. Matrix chart approach**

In essence, the matrix chart approach requires an organisation to create a series of achievement statements that can be assigned a rating from 1 to 10. Statements would have to be identified for all the nine criteria of the model, thereby involving the creation of 90 achievement statements in total. The matrix chart is then used by management teams who self-assess where the organisation is in relation to the statements. [2]

The benefits associated with this approach are that it is simple to use, requires minimal training, can involve all the organisation's people, supports team discussion and clearly demonstrates the progress and the lack of progress in relation to all the nine criteria of the EFQM excellence model. The associated risks are that the list of strengths and areas for improvement are not produced, it does not allow comparisons against EQA applicants and there is no direct cross-reference between the matrix statements and the sub-criteria of the model.

## **III. Workshop approach**

The workshop approach has five distinct phases; they are:

- Training.
- Data collection.
- A scoring workshop.
- Prioritisation of improvement actions.
- A review of progress.

The latter becomes part of the normal review process for the organisation. The benefits associated with this approach are that it: is an excellent way to familiarise management teams with the model, supports team building and allows for discussion and agreement regarding the strengths and areas for improvement, which provides motivation towards improvement actions. The associated risks are that it; is less robust than the award simulation approach, requires expert facilitation and can result in unrealistic, often over-generous scoring.

## **IV. Pro-forma approach**

The pro-forma approach involves using a set of pro-formas, which in total contain all the 32 sub-criteria of the EFQM excellence model.

Assessment teams collect the appropriate information and then use the pro-formas to undertake a self-assessment. The benefits associated with this approach are that it provides factual information, delivers a list of strengths and areas for improvement, can involve a range of the organisation's people and provides a reasonably accurate indication of an award application score.

The associated risks are that: the process is dependent upon good data collection and the forms can stifle recognition of the full story relating to excellence development.

### **Comparison of the approaches to implementation between the public sector and HEIs**

The constraints that guide public sector organisations such as imposed policy and strategy (from governments and audit bodies), public accountability, constancy of purpose and prescriptive approaches are common to many of the public sectors. The authors have experience of organisations as diverse as police forces, hospital trusts, museums, local government and charities, all benefiting from the implementation of the EFQM excellence model. No one single approach to self-assessment was favoured in this range of public sector organisations and in some cases different approaches were used as organisations developed. The approaches to implementation are equally varied across the entire public sector.

## **4 CONCLUSION**

It has been shown that the use of EFQM excellence model self-assessment in the public sector, and particularly the HE sector, has lagged behind that in the private sector. This has been partly because of the lag in adapting the EFQM excellence model for public sector use and partly due to the lag in pressures to respond to customers through continuous improvement in the public sector when compared with the private sector.

Industries within Europe are already seeing the benefits of applying self-assessment techniques. The integration of the EFQM excellence model self-assessment into public sector organisations and particularly the HE sector presents a challenge for those tasked with its implementation. The early signs are that EFQM model self-assessment can help to produce a more customer-oriented culture in HE institutions, providing that the lessons learned from the wider public sector are put into practice.

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