National Process of Quality Management Education: the Swedish Example

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Abstract

The application of a process view, as complement to the traditional functional division, is often a way to highlight organisational improvement potential. This paper examines the process of providing university level education in quality management, using Sweden as an example. The purpose is to assess the performance of university education as part of the supply chain of providing quality management to a society. This has been done by studying the actual offering compared to a notional benchmark of best performance. Preliminary results indicate that there could be a significant improvement potential in both providing more education of the right type and in the right way. A lot of similar basic courses are given but with varying names, possibly reflecting difficulties in defining the area of quality management and its constituents. An important reason for the detected improvement potential seems to be the lack of ownership of the studied supply chain of providing university level quality education to the Swedish society.

Key Words: Quality Management, Education, Process Management

1. Introduction

Each year in average about fifty thousand students enter university education in Sweden. It should be no wild guess that the work markets of tomorrow will be more and more competitive. Apart from specialist skills it is likely that good generalist skills are needed. Modern organisations in societies with high labour cost, like Sweden, have a need for independent professionals capable of working without too much supervision. Most organisations of tomorrow will be in constant change but still be expected to continuously perform on

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high level. This will require good processes and personnel that can work with many different aspects of quality management.

When looking at the performance of organisations we see no indications that quality issues have become less relevant in recent years. The need for quality management is evident and the flatter the organisation the more flexible and competent the employees need to be. This puts high pressure on the system of education. According to ENQA (2005) European standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance and audit in higher education are under development. A European consultative forum for quality assurance in higher education is also being established. The Swedish government has set the goal that 50 percent of the population should receive a university level education and we believe that values, methodologies and tools of quality management should form an integral part of this education. In this paper the need for quality management education in Sweden, as well as the current supply of it, is assessed.

2. Methodology

The methodology used involves the following parts:
• a stakeholder orientated assessment of the current situation using a process model
• quantitative and qualitative assessments of the national quality education output
• an assessment of the volume of the benchmark quality education
• an assessment of some aspects of the technical quality of the education
• a quality maturity assessment of some Swedish universities as an example
• a maturity assessment of the national supply chain of university level quality education

The process model used is based on (Isaksson, 2006) and serves to give an overview of the supply chain, see Figure 1. The university level education in quality management provided by Swedish universities is examined and its volume is assessed based on available data taken from the website www.studera.nu. This web-site is commonly used by Swedish students and should give a reasonable picture of the course offering. Courses including the search word for quality management “kvalitetsteknik” have been chosen.

It is believed that to attain interest in quality education it should be credible, which would mean that universities should take their own medicine. A multiple case study of three universities is carried out to study the quality education and the overall university application of quality management. To do this we have reviewed course plans and the internal use of quality management in the three chosen universities using participant observation, archival analysis, and interviews. The three cases chosen are Gotland University, Luleå University of