Quality Assurance Workshops in Building Capacity of University Lecturers for Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe

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Abstract:
This qualitative research was conducted to explain the, "opinions, experiences, feelings and behavior" of lecturers as a result of the quality assurance workshops (Hancock 2002:2). The interpretivist philosophy underpinned the whole research as focus was on interpreting the influence of quality assurance workshops on lecturers' performance (Scwandt 1994). The phenomenology research design was used. The sixteen academics in Mashonaland East Region of the Zimbabwe Open University were the population and all of them participated in the study. Interviews were used to elicit data. For triangulation, data was also generated through analysis of internal quality audit results carried out over the last year. The research concluded that, quality assurance workshops imparted knowledge, developed skills, attitudes, confidence and competence of the staff members in the implementation of the ISO 9001 based quality management system. Effective workshops use learner centred approaches. Workshops are important for continuous improvement in service delivery. The time for the quality assurance workshops was not sufficient for the participants to develop the required mastery of skills. Quality assurance workshops left out the part-time tutors who are important players in the open and distance learning institution. The study recommends that, regular quality assurance workshops must held to continuously improve on the academics knowledge, skills, attitudes, confidence and competence on the implementation of the quality management system. Academics should be afforded the opportunity to suggest areas they need work shopping. Part-time tutors should be staff developed too. Staff development programmes should be learner centred and address the immediate and future quality assurance needs of the institution.

1. Background

Developments in open and distance learning arena give impetus to organizations, Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) included, for accelerated implementation of quality management system. World Bank (2009) states that at the global level, the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was established in 1991 to promote sharing of knowledge and experience in quality assurance.'' African Council for Distance Education established the Continental Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency for distance education in Africa in 2008, a little later after the SADC Protocol on Education agreement signed in 1997 in Blantyre, Malawi.

It becomes clear that continental and regional efforts in putting in place quality assurance management systems will eventually be synchronized in cascading fashion from the continental level to regional, national and institutional level. At the national level, the Zimbabwe Council for Higher education was launched in 2009 to monitor the quality of education in all higher education institutions in Zimbabwe public or private. At institutional level, ZOU put in place the Quality Assurance Unit.

There are three compelling reasons for ZOU to have a strong quality assurance (QA) system visa-viz professionalism, regulation and market forces. Globally demand for higher education has soared. World Bank (2009:9) notes that, ''projections gave 120million students worldwide by 2020.'' By 2004, the enrolment was already 132million. In an environment of great demand, institutions are likely to respond by increasing their enrolments but there is definitely need for a good quality assurance system for a university like ZOU to demonstrate its professionalism so as to remain relevant. World Bank (2009) concurs with the above assertion by observing that there is need for a robust system to ensure that programmes offered are in response to the socioeconomic needs of the society they serve. In that regard, ZOU put in place Quality Assurance Unit so as assure its stakeholders that it is not only responding to demand but indeed to deliver a quality service.

The second driver for ZOU's quality assurance effort is the need to fulfill the demand for transparency and accountability thereby fulfilling the regulatory dictates for higher education. World Bank (2009:10) observes that, "an effective quality assurance system

promotes transparency and accountability as institutions are required to open up to external scrutiny by peers, professional associations and national QA agencies where they exist."

Increasing competition and shorter knowledge cycles require continuous improvement (World Bank 2009). While ZOU is the only university in Zimbabwe mandated to offer distance education, most public universities in Zimbabwe have created a variation of ODL known as block release. This a complete devolution from the usual part time programmes offered by conventional universities. This development influenced ZOU to seek continuous improvement of quality to beat rivals and maintain its first-mover advantage in ODL in Zimbabwe. Such competition is not confined to local universities as observed by World Bank (2009) that, stiff competition in the developed world has forced institutions to seek new markets in the developing countries.

Having seen the desirability of the QAU, ZOU put in place the unit and spelt out the key performance areas as espoused by Gwarinda and Kurasha (2011:5)

- Planning and designing quality management systems in line with the policies and best practices that meet the vision, mission and core values of the university;
- Development, promotion and management of quality within the institution;
- Monitoring the implementation of quality improvement plans;
- Reviewing reports on the internal and external analyses and evaluations of institutional performance; and
- Providing research information to support the self-auditing, policy formulation, decision-making, planning and development of the institution to give ZOU a strategic advantage in higher education

It can be realized that key performance areas for the quality assurance unit mainly have to do with planning, development, monitor, review and providing research and information on quality issues.

In line with its key performance, areas the QAU put in place the Quality Management System in the form quality policies, procedures, a set of practices for sustainable development. For effective implementation of the QMS there was need to develop the required knowledge, skills and attitudes. Schostak (2009) identified continuous professional development (CPD) as one approach to improve knowledge, skills and attitudes. New knowledge and skills, experiences and opportunities, and competence and confidence levels were needed since the ultimate objective of engaging in it was to change the lecturers' practices (Schostak 2009:68). International Education Standard 7 (2005:86) substantiates by explaining that, "CPD contributes to the competence of professionals and therefore acceptable CPD activities are expected to develop the professional knowledge, skills and values, ethics and attitudes of the lecturers, relevant to their current and future work and professional responsibilities."

2. Statement of the problem
The need for a systematic approach to quality has necessitated the setting up of quality management systems (QMS) in universities. The immediate challenge being that everyone in the university has to implement the system without any formal training. It is up to the QA unit to train the university staff on the implementation of the system. Workshops are one way of training the staff. It is therefore the thrust of this research to find out the extent to which QA workshops have been able to capacitate university lecturers for sustainable implementation of the QMS.

3. Research questions
To what extent have quality assurance workshops imparted knowledge and skills for sustainable implementation of the quality management system?

How capacitating have been the experiences and opportunities provided by quality assurance workshops for sustainable implementation of the quality management system?

What impact have quality assurance workshops made on the confidence and competence of university lecturers in sustainable implementation of the quality management system?

To what extent has been the adequacy of resources channeled towards quality assurance workshops?

4. Literature Review

4.1. The contribution of quality assurance workshops to lecturers' knowledge and skills for sustainable implementation of the quality management system
The introduction of the ISO 9001 as a philosophy guiding the quality approach in Zimbabwe Open University was an innovation in itself. This called for a different approach to doing business. Knowledge and skills on implementing the programme had to be taught and developed throughout the organization. Adam Smith's (1776) Human Capital Theory, propounds that in order to increase productivity, the organization has to create an inventory of knowledge and skills in the available staff. Zimbabwe Open University rolled out a staff development programme to fill in the skills gap created by the implementation of the ISO 9001 Quality Management System. Castetter (1992) points out that a staff development can be initiated by the individual or the organization. In this case the organization initiated the programme as also propounded by Castetter (1992) to develop lecturers for the immediate technical requirements and beyond.

While the introduction of the ISO 9001 was an innovation meant to improve productivity, there was need for modification of attitudes and skills based on the knowledge embedded in the philosophy. Wiles and Bondi (2000:269) state that every change calls for practicing lecturers to upgrade knowledge and skills to "improve performance independent of certification." They further point out

that this is achieved through, "on-site courses and workshops". Pigors and Myers (1981) define staff development programmes as institutional endeavors, strategies and execution of plans to equip staff members with, "technical, academic and psychosocial development," to improve on their performance towards the achievement of organizational goals.

Buckley and Caple (2000) explain that workshops, as a form of training is a planned effort to modify attitudes among other aspects to achieve effective performance. In this instance, lecturers were accustomed to doing business with little documentation. To the contrary, the ISO 9001 system relies on documented procedures and documentary evidence to testify that a procedure is being fulfilled. The ISO 9001 therefore calls for change in attitudes where one values documenting every procedure or task undertaken. These are the attitudes that the workshops were trying to develop.

The Quality Assurance Unit thus spearheaded the development of the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes through two workshops for lecturers. The first being a three-day awareness course and the second being a three-day development and implementation course. The new knowledge, skills and attitudes enable staff to execute the new tactical approaches taken to achieve organizational objectives. Latham and Kinne (1974) studied the effectiveness of a one-day workshop in goal setting for pulpwood logging operators and discovered that those who had been trained registered increased production. Sparrow and Davies (1988) examined the effect of training on performances levels in service engineers in a company, and found that training significantly increased the speed of servicing a machine. Similar positive correlations between training and job productivity were registered by Bartel (1992), Mathieu, Tannenbaum and Salas (1992) and Frayne and Geringer (2000).

4.2. The experiences and opportunities provided by quality assurance workshops for sustainable implementation of the quality management system in ZOU

The ZOU Quality Policy Manual (2013) states that the Quality Assurance Unit is to establish, implement and maintain a Quality Management System; promote quality awareness; report on the performance of the quality management system among the functions. In fulfillment of its functions, the Quality Assurance Unit established the Quality Management System. The unit went on to promote quality and QMS awareness through workshops. Tracey (1994) describes workshops as, "programmes that are designed to involve participants in the learning process. They make use of panel discussions, and group interviews, group problem solving and role playing." The workshops exposed the participants to the principles of the ISO 9001, requirements of the Quality Management System and its implementation among other issues. The workshops adhered to the principles of workshops where there was active participation of participants in discussions and group tasks over and above the presentations made by the facilitators. The multi-faceted approaches were to reap the gains identified by Schostak (2009) that, successful learning is much more likely to occur through active modes of learning than through passive ones. Opportunity to examine the QMS and its requirements before full implementation was availed through group tasks. These activities were meant to develop self-efficacy and implementation skills of the QMS. Bandura (1977:193) defines self-efficacy as, "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce outcomes." Van Der Zanden (2001) found that participants to Master Gardener workshop registered an increase in confidence levels in their work after their workshop experiences. UNEP (2000:11) points out that workshops do not only "enhance people's technical ability, but also willingness to play new developmental roles and adapt to new demands and situations."

The impact of workshops can take various forms. Guskey (2000) identifies five stages in the development of lecturers. Level 1 gauges the participants' reaction to the experiences and opportunities availed to them during the staff development activities.

4.3. The impact of quality assurance workshops on the confidence and competence of university lecturers in sustainable implementation of the quality management system

In order to implement the new QMS, academic staff needed the competence and confidence to take it on. Betts (2001:17) defines, "competence as the ability to perform activities within an occupational area to levels of performance expected in employment. Other views of competence are an ability to do a task, a capacity to do a particular job, and the capacity to perform to a set standard." The new abilities and self-efficacy were developed in the two three-day workshops.

Betts (2001:18) identifies two approaches to assessing competence, the traditional and the Management Charter Initiative approach. The former is based on testing competence through tests after a formal structured learning programme, while in the latter, assessments are based on evidence from the workplace. This relates to the actual application of knowledge, skills or attitudes. This view is in sync with Guskey's (2000) level 4 where participants' use of knowledge and skills is checked in both degree and quality, while level 5 checks on the student outcomes that are the end result of professional development. IES 7's output-based approaches concentrate on measuring the development and maintenance of competence achieved through learning. The common approach to examining gaining competence through workshops is by assessing the application of learnt skills.

Another avenue would be checking on the student outcomes. Wiles and Bondi (2000:286) note that, "a few studies have been determined if staff development activities have led to improved student outcomes, yet these can be measured through graduation rates, attendance," and other factors. In the ZOU these could also include student complaints, performance in research and assignments as a result of assistance from lecturers.

4.4. The adequacy of resources channeled towards quality assurance workshops

The two-three day workshops on the implementation of the QMS, were held in a space of about six months. Kelsey (2003:6) notes that, "long-term and sustained formal training is necessary to fully develop specific skills and that workshops are generally inadequate for deep learning." In concurrence, Bandura (1977:120) asserts that, "formal course work serves to facilitate mastery experience." To

make up for the need for longer periods of learning the organization might organize short staff development programmes at departmental level where emphasis on the required behaviours is made.

Guskey (2000) asserts that Level 3 evaluation focuses on the organizational support for the skills gained in staff development programmes. A quick check is done on the administrative support on the resource allocation for both implementation of skills learnt and time for sharing and reflection.

5. Methodology

This qualitative research was conducted to explain the, "opinions, experiences, feelings and behavior" of lecturers as a result of the quality assurance workshops (Hancock 2002:2). The interpretivist philosophy underpinned the whole research as focus was on interpreting the influence of quality assurance workshops on lecturers' performance (Scwandt 1994). The phenomenology research design was used. Hancock (2002:4) explains phenomenology as, "a way of describing something that exists as part of the world which we live. Phenomena may be events, situations, experiences or concepts." This design was adopted in an attempt to explain the behavior of lecturers because of their experiences in quality assurance workshops.

5.1. Population
Zimbabwe Open University Mashonaland East Region's sixteen academics were the population of the study. Information was gathered from all the academic staff members since it was a small population.

5.2. Data Collection
Hancock (2002:4) explains that, qualitative data are collected through direct encounters with individuals, through one to one interviews." In this research data was collected through interviews with six lecturers in the region since saturation was achieved before interviewing the remaining ten. For triangulation, data was also collected through analysis of internal quality audit results carried out over the last year. This set of data existed in the natural state because the internal quality audits were conducted before the conception of this research, so it can be used to explain the resultant behavior of lecturers in a natural manner (Hancock 2002:5).These audits were conducted after the quality assurance workshops. Students' complaints were also analysed together with tutor evaluation forms to determine student outcomes.

5.3. Presentation and Discussion of Findings

5.3.1. Sub-problem 1: To what extent have quality assurance workshops imparted knowledge and skills for sustainable quality service delivery?
Participants were asked in what ways the quality assurance workshops successful/worthwhile/inspirational or otherwise. The most repeated response which came first in all instances was that the workshops imparted new knowledge. This finding was in tandem with Wiles and Bondi (2000) who point out that workshops upgrade the lecturers' knowledge. Asked to explain the new knowledge acquired respondents pointed out that the ISO 9001 principles, ISO 9001:2008 (Standards Association Of Zimbabwe) requirements were outlined.

Participants further pointed out that this knowledge and the examples given for practicality brought to the fore the need for attitude change towards service delivery. One participant responded, "From the workshops, I realized that 'quality is everyone's business' and it starts with me." 'Quality is everyone's business' was the footnote and catch phrase in the quality assurance workshops by the Quality Assurance Director's presentations. This finding concurs with Pigors and Myers (1981) who assert that workshops enhance the psychosocial development in participants to improve on their performance towards the achievement of organizational goals.

One participant explained that technically, they were as such, not ready for implementation of the programme after the first workshop but improved after the second workshop. This finding concurs with Pigors and Myers (1981) who explain that workshops equip staff members with technical skills to improve on their performance towards the achievement of organizational goals.

5.3.2. Sub-Problem 2: How capacitating have been the experiences and opportunities provided by quality assurance workshops for sustainable implementation of the quality management system in ZOU?
An attempt to determine the attitudes of participants towards the workshop was made. Participants were asked give their views of the quality assurance workshops in relationship to implementation of the quality management system. One participant was not impressed that the programme was bureaucratic in that it was initiated by the organization. This feeling was contrary to Castetter's (1992) view that the organization initiates a staff development programme in an attempt to fulfill organizational needs. Some participants however pointed out that it was necessary for the organization to initiate the programme as it was targeted towards development of every staff member of the organization, in agreement with Castetter's (1992) view.

On whether the workshops were enjoyable, most of the participants pointed out that the first was lukewarm while the second was more enjoyable. Asked to elaborate, one participant explained that the first involved a lengthy presentation followed by some activities while the second was filled with a variety of activities. This finding confirms Tracey's (1994) description of workshops, as programmes that are designed to involve participants in the learning process.

In response to whether participants found the workshops necessary for implementation of the ISO 9001 based quality management system, all the participants were very positive. One participant explained, "We had firsthand experience with the ISO 9001:2008 SAZ

document in group work activities." Another participant pointed out that, "We brainstormed on the quality statement for our institution." The experiences of the participants were centred on the ISO 9001:2008 SAZ document and show that the activities were to enable participants to implement the quality management system.

Participants were asked whether the workshops were necessary for improved service delivery and their responses are captured below.

The eight principles of ISO 9001call for improved service delivery especially on the emphasis on customer focus which implies that every process should be guided by the students' needs.

Involvement of people call for a paradigm shift in the way we do business where the service provider and the customer work as partners.

The workshops were really empowering in the sense that I got to realize that provision of quality service is not incidental but has to be planned.

From the participants' responses, it would seem there workshops' provided fertile ground for changing the mindset of lecturers in their provision of services.

5.3.3. The impact of quality assurance workshops on the confidence and competence of university lecturers in sustainable implementation of the quality management system

Asked whether the workshops did not create the impression that implementation of ISO 9001 may bring in victimization, participants were clear that the quality management system was targeted towards continuous improvement. One participant explained that, "The quality management system is about managing quality not and not managing people, so the idea of victimization is out of the question." The clear knowledge on the aims of the quality management system builds confidence and competence in the academics they try out ideas to improve quality.

Participants were asked to state the teaching methods used and evaluate their effectiveness. Their responses were varied. The lecture method was appropriately used. The method was used in the first workshop as it involved a lot of theory on the ISO 9001 quality model. The method was used and followed up with discussions. The second workshop was learner centred with a lot of group work and problem solving. This finding concurs with Tracey (1994) who asserts that workshops involve participants in the learning process. The methods used increased my confidence in the implementation of the ISO 9001 standards. This finding concurs with Van Der Zanden (2001) who found that participants to workshop registered an increase in confidence levels in their work.

In an effort to find out if the academics had developed their competence in the actual execution of their work with regards the quality management system, an examination of the internal quality audit reports was made. Two internal quality audits were conducted in 2013, one in each semester. Six observations, which could be addressed by academics themselves, were made in the first audit. In the second audit, three observations which could be addressed by academics were made, showing an improvement on the competence of the academics in their implementation of the requirements of the quality management system.

5.3.4. Sub-Problem 4: To what extent has been the adequacy of resources channeled towards quality assurance workshops?

Participants were asked to identify administrative challenges to effective workshop management. The common challenge was cost. According to the memorandum dispatched by the Human Resources Director to the regions, the workshop venues were supposed to cater for break away groups. However, due to the high cost of hiring such venues, the first workshop venue in the region was rather small and did not allow for complete break-away groups, although this was achieved in the second workshop. The participants also decried the limited time that they had for the workshops. They felt they needed more time to be able to grasp the essential aspects of the quality management system. This finding concurs with Kelsey (2003) who explains that, "long-term and sustained formal training is necessary to fully develop specific skills and that workshops are generally inadequate for deep learning."

Asked to give their recommendations for to improve the administration of quality assurance workshops, participants mentioned that there was need for more time to be spent on such workshops. One participant noted that it is necessary to expose part-time tutors to such workshops as they are an essential component in the open and distance learning. Part-time tutors are in direct contact with the student in tutorials, research supervision and even examination invigilation so there is absolute need for their competence in the quality management system.

6. Conclusion

From the research findings it can be concluded that;

- Quality assurance workshops imparted knowledge developed skills, attitudes, confidence and competence of the staff members in the implementation of the ISO 9001 based quality management system
- While quality assurance workshops were ideal for organization wide staff development, some academics felt that there is need for staff members to suggest areas they would like to be dealt with in staff development programmes
- Effective workshops use learner centred approaches
- Workshops are important for continuous improvement in service delivery
- The time for the quality assurance workshops was not sufficient for the participants to develop the required mastery of skills
- Quality assurance workshops left out the part-time tutors who are important players in the open and distance learning institution.

7. Recommendations

- Regular quality assurance workshops must held to continuously improve on the academics knowledge, skills, attitudes, confidence and competence on the implementation of the quality management system.
- Academics should be afforded the opportunity to suggest areas they need work shopping
- Part-time tutors should be staff developed
- Staff development programmes should be learner centred and address the immediate and future quality assurance needs of the institution.

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