

The quality in education –“qualitedu”

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Abstract

“QUALITEDU” is a project co-funded by the European Union within the Leonardo da Vinci Program, that proposes to improve the quality level offered by the training activities, guaranteeing a formalized and certifiable management, in full respect of community norms, to provide incentives for management corporations for professional training for constant improvement of the quality of their own services, to support the corporations appointed for the financial planning in the definition of their participation plans, as well as to reinforce the European dimension of the IFP.

Keywords: Documental implementation, good practices, quality

I. Introduction

The concept of training quality is referable to the wider concept of quality in services. Training and services do in fact have a number of characteristics in common which make them similar, working in such a way that procedures in which a service – also training – is judged by the various stakeholders depends in relevant measure on the network of relations created between the supplier and the beneficiary of the service.

In order to produce quality in training and education there needs to be quality:

- in the ‘hard’ components (referable to technology and structures);
- in the way in which these and other production factors are put together and coordinated for training purposes (organization);
- in the way in which they are made available to the direct and indirect beneficiaries (distribution system);
- in the way in which the relational period is constructed and managed.

Training and educational quality, thus, is not only the application of the norm or the production of documentation, but above all a social product which is born and develops starting from the behaviors, skills, availability, interests (and also conflicts) of the men and women that make up an organization.

Quality is a continuous process of individual and collective learning, through which behaviors, skills, cultural values are developed, discussed, confirmed or superseded by new references, but where at the same time the identity, the sense of belonging, the quality of the work and relationships grow and are consolidated.

This project does not intend to supply stereotypical “answers” which apply to everyone (every organization should find and develop its own quality, in coherence with its own environment), but help to raise “questions” self evaluations, comparisons and ideas for improvement.

1.1. Beneficiaries

The recipients and end users of the project are:

- Education / Training organizations, trainers and training operators – who work both with public and private financing initiatives;
- Local public and private employment services which aim to re-train and re-introduce workers into the workplace;
- Public bodies, responsible for policies and planning in the field of training and education.

II. Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the project are: *to improve the quality level offered* by the training activities, guaranteeing a formalized and certifiable management, in full respect of community norms, *to provide incentives for management corporations* for professional training for constant improvement of the quality of their own services, *to support the corporations appointed for the financial planning* in the definition of their participation plans, *to reinforce* the European dimension of the IFP.

To provide all the players within the system, each for their own specialized area, useful tools for the programming, planning, management, distribution and benefit for a quality educational/training course and thus:

- to make available within the education and training system tools and information support for the development of the quality of services offered and organizational processes;
- to promote the spread of methods, instruments and good practices adapted to encourage the development of quality in education and training;
- to define a set of quality models and indicators and quality assurance;
- to construct monitoring systems to examine the process of analysis, planning, distribution and control of educational and training courses, paying particular attention to the quality of the service provided and received;
- to develop instruments for self-evaluation to support the introduction and implementation of a quality system.

The quality of the training and educational offer is directly linked to the quality of the relations that are structured around the various processes of production, policy and control. Three dimensions in particular appear fundamental:

1. the relations within the training subject, with the need for a transition from a model “for functions”, based on a low level integration between the various “specialist” professional figures (the planner, the coordinator, the tutor, etc.) to a model “for processes”, based on the development of a strong system of integrative skills common to all the human resources that work within the training agency.

In this sense, the role of Quality Assurance Manager assumes fundamental importance, not only in terms of the normalization of procedures, but also supporting the management of human resources, in the management of continuous improvement in the widespread organizational skills diffuse, acting as activator and facilitator of the collective learning processes;

2. the learning relationships between players in the training system. If quality is linked to the construction of a group of socially constructed resources (norms, skills and indicative values of the individual and organizational behaviors), it is not only necessary to reinforce observation and learning skills within the training agency. This actually presents the risk of self-referencing, which would lead the organization to a progressive loss of innovative skills. Therefore it is necessary for the training subject to take every structured and constant opportunity for observation and comparison with external references (other training agencies).

Within the methodological plan, this requires the institution of benchmarking practices, so as to guarantee the effectiveness and reliability of the comparisons, making targeted cooperation schemes possible between subjects and at the same time competitive among them;

3. the integral relationships between the participants of the educational and training systems. One of the key principles of the educational reform processes taking place is the integration of the different systems on offer, to guarantee the right to life-long learning, through the institution of methods of transit between systems based on the capitalization and the 'spendability' (credits) of the skills acquired individually. This is possible if the relations between the different components of the offer can be traced back to a common quality protocol (both of the normative type and of shared technical and organizational skills), so as to guarantee transparency, reliability and mutual trust (conditions for the institution of a system of credits), as well as the effectiveness of the project processes and distribution. The only recourse to general standards such as series norms ISO9000, TQM, VISION 2000 does not seem sufficient faced with the greater complexities and specificities of the "network model" underlying the European strategies for professional training.

Thus the project starts from the supposition that developing quality requires action rather more on the side of the social processes (actual behaviors of organizations and of the single members that comprise them) than merely on the standard devices (the standards, the criteria, etc.).

III. Project activities

Phase 1 State of the art in the partner countries of the project - share and construct a common themed glossary

- collecting, verifying and classifying the norms issued in the different countries in favor/ support of quality in training and education;
- collecting, classifying the norms, the communications and the community reference documentation;
- verifying the conscious/ subconscious application of criteria and methodologies according to the quality of service on the part of the training and education bodies;
- understanding their expectations, their needs and the widespread culture on the subject.

Phase 2 Planning and implementation of the website layout All the materials developed within the project will be found on the website of the project. Thus, each interested person has the possibility to find information on legal measures concerning the quality in education in the partner countries, good practices as well as a glossary of quality terms.

Phase 3 Good practices

- collection of documentation;
- scheduling and holding of direct meetings with operators/ stakeholders;
- formalization of good practices per country.

Phase 4 Planning and experimentation of the self diagnostic instruments establishment of the criteria and participation environments- definition of the meta-rules

- development of the content of the single sets of questions;
- verification of the internal coherence and the procedure for restitution of the results;
- availability of the sets of questions in Beta version developed in printed paper form;
- provision to a target group of users in order to check: functionality, comprehension, benefit, accessibility
- definitive setting up and loading onto the website.

Phase 5 Setting-up on line the website and its documental implementation

- loading of the documentation and/or links onto the websites/pages;
- start up of the discussion groups: definition of the themes, designation of the coordinator/ animator, operational set-up of the discussion groups;
- Putting on line the self-diagnostic instruments;
- Planning and implementation of a methodology for checking user satisfaction of the website and for the collection of suggestions, observations, corrective/improvement actions.

Phase 6 Dissemination and utilization

IV. Results expected

- Glossary (multi-lingual);
- Chart for the collection of regulations;
- National reports on regulations: in partners' languages + summary in English;
- Questionnaire/interview grid for training and educational organizations and for public institutions (partners' languages and English); Mnterviews (50);
- National reports on interviews (English);

Final report / qualitative interpretation of the information collected (English);
Website;
Grid for the research and collection;
Dossier of the collected material;
Final report on the best practices;
Model of participation formalized and shared;
Sets of questions;
Report on testing;
Online final self-assessment tools.

V. Impact

The expected impact will develop at different levels:

– On single training and education operators as far as the proposed instrument encourages reflection and the acquisition of information on organizational themes and contexts linked to the introduction of a quality -system in the own corporation.

– On training and educational corporations, as an instrument for discussion and comparison regarding the answers given from individual to several items of the self evaluation grids

– On public institutions appointed for the planning and management of funds for training, as an instrument for policy definition, of criteria for the evaluation of training structures, for the planning of improvement actions of the system.

The users may use the website as an *instrument of self-evaluation* both in relation to how much the organization has already achieved; and with regard to which practices are more coherent to the competitive environment and the internal resources of the same organization.

The users may also make use of the website as an *informative instrument* thanks to the document base, accessible via the interaction process integrated between them: the glossary, the national and community norms, the examples of good practice.

The aims which the document base will try to fulfill are:

– to provide a political-normative frame of reference on the quality of the training, via the presentation of public and private regulatory devices in the partner countries of the project and the European Union;

– to provide a technical-methodological frame of reference for the principle quality practices applied to training, in order to aid understanding of the principles on which they are based and of the necessary requisites;

– to make ideas and instruments available to the training operators to deal with courses of professional and organizational development relevant to the introduction of the various quality practices.

They may also use the site as a *point of connection and comparison* with colleagues from other organizations/ structures, via the activation of some themed discussion groups.

At the end of the community financing the website will remain active and resident on the server of the proponent subject.

Each partner in the project will be responsible for the distribution of information on the results of the project within the area of their own network of relations: training agencies and school institutions, institutional referees.

In order to guarantee the spread of information about the existence of the site each partner will maintain the information within the pages of their own institutional website, with a direct link to the project website.

VI. Conclusion

This project intends to offer a viable help to the training institutions (schools, training centers, stakeholders) that aim at implementing quality in their organization in view of improving the services they provide.

The tools that will be developed will be more valuable especially for Romania and Bulgaria as in these countries the concept of quality in education is merely at the beginning.