QUALITY OR INNOVATION?

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Abstract

Quality involves the removal of unwanted variations, the enforcement of strict standards and controls, the application of best practice and the elimination of waste and errors. Innovation involve exploring many radical ideas, deliberately deviating from existing standards and controls, experimenting with prototypes and devoting resources to projects which are likely to fail. So at first glance, quality and creativity look to be at odds. One is striving for the elimination of variation and error while the other is crying out for both. They are surely two opposing philosophies requiring very different mindsets and attitudes. Can they co-exist? A high performance innovation organization realizes that quality is a key dimension of value delivery and hence must be integrate in the innovation program and culture. Quality and innovation need not be in conflict; together they can be very successfully partners. Creativity and innovation must be mobilized to serve an organic and fair society based on intercultural dialogue and respect for nature and people's health and welfare worldwide. Crossing time is crucial to innovation: how to maintain quality and innovative nature of a practice when they are not made only by the employee? When you reach this point, motivational support and adequate resources allocated to governance are essential for success and sustainability process. Quality assurance should be included in the development process of firms. A key factor for an effective quality assurance, which improves the innovation at the microeconomic level, requires commitment of all firms in the same industry in quality assurance.

Key words: quality, creativity, innovation

To be creative means to imagine something that did not exist before and to seek new forms and solutions. Being innovative means to introduce changes in society and the economy. Original design activities turn ideas into values, linking creativity to innovation.

Economic , environmental and social crises challenges us to find new ways of thinking and action. Creativity and innovation can contribute to progress towards prosperity of society, but society must assume responsibility for how they are used. Today, creativity and innovation must be mobilized to serve organic and fair society based on intercultural dialogue and respect for nature and people's health and welfare worldwide.

Quality is seen as a desirable social objective, but his contributions to business profitability are considered marginal. This is the result of misconceptions. The moment of proceeding to innovation is crucial: how to maintain quality and innovative nature of a practice when it is no longer only conducted by employer? When you reach this point, motivational support and adequate resources allocated by the leadership are essential to the success and sustainability of the process.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Quality assurance should be sensitive to context first, and therefore, must be individualized. When implementing quality assurance processes need to take into account the disciplinary characteristics, various organizational cultures, the historical position of the company and the national context.

Quality assurance should be included in the development process of firms. A key success factor for an efficient quality assurance that enhances creativity at institutional level implies engaging the whole institutional community and not just considering quality assurance as the special purview of a specific quality assurance unit.. This approach regard strategic planning, educational development and staff development as part of quality assurance processes. May require agencies dealing with quality assurance to review theirs standards and processes in order to examine how they can encourage companies to adopt this approach.

Developing an innovation strategy gives the innovation process a place within the strategic orientation of a business. As a basic principle: Innovations are not miracles, they are not sudden inspirations from outside or from above. They are the product of a systematic process. In short: An innovation is systematized coincidence.

An innovation strategy can be developed as follows:

1. Determine an innovation strategy
2. Translate it into innovation and search area matrices
3. Compare the search areas to the needs of the customers
4. Search for new products, technologies, services or procedures

Study which could see the implementation of quality and innovation at the microeconomic level was done by questionnaire used a sample of 30 companies from Iasi County, randomly selected companies, especially SME. Questions were designed in such a way that does not resemble a questionnaire that must be answered by the participating companies, but instead they were designed as basic as an incentive to exercise self-reflection.

A first question was if they wish to participate in a presentation to a self-evaluation and a further strengthening and possibly an existing successful practices. Another question was whether participants would implement a new practice. The objectives were to reflect on this issue on current practices in place, to develop a practice for testing and / or its implementation and a report on first experiences (if possible) on the results obtained. Half of survey participants have made comparisons of their quality assurance processes and innovation with those across Europe and have used examples of innovation from their own experiences. The questionnaire was used as a last question: how should look and what should pursue quality assurance process as 2020 could be met customer expectations? On this question, most company haven't concrete answers.

The other half of the companies focus was on innovation methodology for phase of product testing. Among the questions that were addressed by the questionnaire to this group of companies, there are the following: at what level are taken into account in developing business ideas from current employees and at what level of external actors? The answer at this question was ambiguous, most companies working with companies dealing in particular with the introduction of quality and innovation at the microeconomic level and not focus on the employee's ideas.

In this study we will focus on innovation, "which refers to the conditions promoting creative organisations" (EUA, 2007). Such innovation does not only depend on the characteristics of the individuals involved, but does demand work, commitment and is a conscious choice made by the institutional community. However, the main activities being research and teaching which aim to create and disseminate new knowledge – one would expect it to be an obvious, albeit, conscious choice.

The most important condition for innovation is the attitude of the institutional management and leadership. Without the commitment of the leadership, isolated or individual initiatives to create or enhance institutional creativity do not succeed. The attitude of the leadership in encouraging creativity is always important, but it does become especially vital when an innovation has resulted in a pilot that is then established as an institution-wide practice.

The moment of proceeding from innovation and piloting a new practice to routine is crucial: how to maintain the quality and innovative nature of a practice when it is no longer only conducted by committed and enthusiastic pioneers who are typical key factors of a successful pilot phase? At this point motivational support as well as proper resources allocated by the leadership is essential to the success and sustainability of the process.

Although innovation is always related to individuals, however results have been obtained from the interaction between individuals. Therefore, institutional structures can inhibit or enhance the innovation process. The natural tendency for business managers is to focus on improving efficiency and refining the current processes because it is clear that "we can do things better." Improving quality and efficiency is important but it is not enough.

Successful businesses combine brilliant innovation with constant improvement and focus on quality. It is no good innovating if you cannot deliver a quality product or service to your client.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Three-quarters of the companies responded that they have changed their quality assurance approach and innovation's ideeas recently or that they are about to do so in the near future

As a single entity, company does not guarantee innovation. It can create prerequisites for such an implementation, but in the end should take account of the workforce so that entity willing and able to take advantage of the opportunities to exercise their capacity to innovate.

A major challenge for project participants was to overcome the microeconomic and macroeconomic constraints when trying to find ways to develop more flexible processes for quality assurance and implementation of innovation. Often it was stated that national or institutional legislation stands in the way of change.

The different stages of a quality and innovation circle meeting are:
1. Definition of the problem and description of the status quo:

The study's participants describe the current situation as they see it. This first step ensures that everyone is on the same page.
2. Development of key performance indicators:

In order to eventually measure the degree of success, key performance indicators need to be defined by the participant companies. This means that the current situation has to be described in numbers and facts in order to provide a baseline for later comparison. The goals should be verifiable. The 'SMART' rule is an ideal tool to aid in the definition of indicators: a goal should be specific, measurable, ambitious, relevant and time-limited.

3. Analysis of the causes of the problem:

With the help of creativity techniques, the participants search for the causes of the problem.

4. Development of solutions and suggestions for improvement:

In this step also, creativity techniques offer the best approach to devising innovative and creative solutions and suggestions for improvement. Important: The two stages (collecting ideas and evaluating ideas) must be considered and tackled separately.

5. Action planning:

The developed solutions are collected in a list of actions or a so-called catalogue of measures. Each individual measure is described, given a deadline and assigned to one or several responsible person(s).

6. Implementation:

During this stage, the quality of communication and information is causally linked to the success of the implementation. Ideally, the measures and actions can be realized by the participants themselves.

7. Controlling:

The goals identified in step 2 are monitored and checked. Subject to this controlling is not only their implementation but also their effect (deviation analysis).

8. Continuous improvement process:

The results and insights gained in step 7 are integrated in the continuous improvement process. In the case of significant discrepancies the issue is returned to the participants team.

The successful organization will focus on quality and innovation; it will juggle efficiency and creativity. Creativity does not mean chaos nor does it mean leaving things to chance. You can put in place processes for idea generation, idea evaluation and proposal implementation. The whole process can be managed on a formal basis while accepting many informal inputs.

What is needed is a total quality approach to the process of innovation.

Implementing such a process, without taking into account other components (funding mechanisms, legislation, etc.) would not be fruitful and would not lead to sustainable results. This is

one reason why this method does not lead to the questionnaire detailed instructions on how to design specific quality assurance processes and innovation, but provides some ideas that can be adjusted for each company.

To be successful in the quality and innovation assurance process at the micro level, it should balance the following factors:

- to contribute to the development and improvement of new procedures,

- to provide a transparent and comparable allowing flexibility and change in order to promote innovation and development,

- to clarify the overall goal, nepromovând a "culture-threshold" required to meet only minimum requirements.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to prepare recommendations for a methodology that would aim at strengthening the innovative practice through quality assurance processes. These recommendations are intended to offer some principles that every company should be able to apply with minor adjustments if necessary. In addition to these recommendations, the study wishes to remind all participants that it should include measurement of innovation through quality assurance processes. As they can appreciate the results of innovative practices, but can not assess the innovation itself.

Quality assurance processes should enable risk taking which are essential for creating new experiences. Internal quality assurance processes must be able to identify failures and to define the process by which the company reacts and rectifies the situation where a failure has occurred, rather than prohibit taking risks with everything. External quality assurance should check if the company is able to react to unusual circumstances rather than punish the occasional failures.

Exchange of experience in quality assurance process is essential for future development company. The study encourages the creation of platforms for dialogue at different levels: in the company between departments at national level between companies, between companies and the European quality assurance agencies. Encouraging such dialogue, we must not forget that when other companies can learn from experiences, whether constructive or not, should not only aim to copy successful practices, but has made a critical analysis of practical components may apply their own context.

Companies need to take a more proactive role and push themselves to be competitive

internationally and need to facilitate changes that will promote innovation...or be left behind (EUA, 2009).

Quality and innovation culture is still under development or identification in most companies and a great deal of work still remains to be done before truly say that there is a culture of quality and genuine innovation.

Looking ahead, it is almost impossible to predict what will happen to the quality assurance process and the implementation of innovation at the microeconomic level.

The case study data, presented in this paper, show that quality is an essential foundation for progressing to large scale innovation and also continues to act as a catalyst for innovation.

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