Integration: is it the key to effective implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model?

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the integration issues that are important to consider when attempting to implement the European Foundation for Quality Management’s (EFQM’s) Excellence Model in UK universities. The aim of this paper is to explore the role that integration plays in effecting this implementation and to see how, in practice, integration might be achieved.

Design/methodology/approach – A literature review reveals several factors in relation to integration. These factors were explored in four case studies of the implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model in UK universities.

Findings – Evidence was found to support the view that the more that integration took place, the more likely it would be that implementation would be effective.

Research limitations/implications – The research only covers four cases and therefore is only generalisable back to theory rather than to the population of UK university academic units.

Practical implications – The paper proposes mechanisms for integrating the use of the EFQM Excellence Model into the organisation.

Originality/value – This paper makes a contribution to the understanding of integration and its effect on the implementation of a quality improvement methodology. Academic managers in universities (and possibly managers in other organizations) may find its recommendations useful if planning a similar implementation.

Keywords European Foundation for Quality Management, Total quality management, Self assessment, Integration, Universities, United Kingdom

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

A large research project (the author’s PhD) was carried out to examine in detail how the EFQM Excellence Model implementation process had been conducted in a number of cases in UK university academic units with a view to developing a guidance framework for implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model in this particular context. This drew upon the successes and difficulties identified in the case studies and the existing literature on the implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model and other total quality management (TQM) approaches in universities and other contexts. This paper focuses on one major aspect of that research; the integration issues that are important to consider when attempting to implement the EFQM Excellence Model in UK universities. The aim of this paper is to explore the role that integration plays in effecting this implementation and to see how, in practice, integration might be achieved. Shih and Gurnani (1997) identified that many quality management programmes failed because there was a lack of integration between these and other
functions of the firm, and so they were seen as independent and isolated. The research question to be addressed was “How does integration affect the implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model in UK universities?” The EFQM Excellence Model is based on TQM principles (EFQM, 2003) and so the scope of the literature review covered both the implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model and TQM.

Clearly this research is focused on determining effective implementation and the role that integration plays in this. Therefore it is useful to define the key words implement, effective and integrate. A large number of research papers were reviewed that examined the effective implementation of any number of management initiatives; however the author was surprised to see that no attempts were made in these papers to define what was meant by this phrase. Acur and Englyst (2006) claimed that effectiveness is success. Unfortunately this does nothing to advance the general understanding of the phrase without a definition of success. Thus the author turned to dictionary definitions and then related these to integration and the effective implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model.

**Implement**  
To carry into effect (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2003).

To carry out or put into effect (Wordsmyth Online Dictionary, 2003).

To put a plan or system into operation (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2003).

**Effective**  

In use, in operation (Newbury House Online Dictionary, 2003).

Successful or achieving the results that you want” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2003).

Despite the article “What is integration?” (Gulledge, 2006) surprisingly containing no clear definition of the term, there was more success in defining integration. Garvin (1991) refers to integration as the degree of alignment or harmony in an organisation. More specifically, with respect to quality management programmes, Shih and Gurnani (1997) saw integration as linking the quality management programme with company strategy and human resource management systems. Again, dictionary definitions were accessed to supplement the above views.

**Integrate**  
To combine two or more things in order to become more effective (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2003).

To put or bring together (parts or elements) so as to form one whole; to combine into a whole (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2003).

It can be seen from the above definitions and previous research papers that implementation infers effectiveness and that integration would appear to play a part in achieving effectiveness. Therefore something that is effectively implemented is something that is in operation or use. At the time that the research was conducted, all
four case organisations had been attempting to use the EFQM Excellence Model for a period of three years. The author argues from the above definitions that the EFQM Excellence Model would have been effectively implemented when its use had been integrated into the regular management practices of the organisation. For example, had ownership of the self-assessment process been demonstrated by staff in schools/departments/divisions carrying out their own self-assessments and/or were the improvement plans generated in self-assessment linked in to the organisation’s strategy and/or business planning process? Therefore it can be argued that if the case organisations were still using the model at the end of this three-year period in a way that was integrated into the management of the organisation and in the ways that they had intended, then it had been effectively implemented. This then aligns with Fullan and Pomfret’s (see Vrakking, 1995, p. 44) description of the goal of implementation as:

Maximization of the degree in which the actual use of an innovation corresponds with its intended use.

**Literature review**

Although the focus of this paper is integration it is worth briefly reflecting on other elements which impact on the effective implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model. First, it needs to be noted that there are limitations of self-assessment (against the EFQM Excellence Model) as a method of data collection. Hides et al. (2004) reported that the self-assessment process was dependent upon good data collection. Karapetrovic and Willborn (2001) pointed out the reliability and completeness of the collected data as a possible downside for self-assessments. Since different approaches to self-assessment use different tools, some (such as the questionnaire approach) will inherently collect less accurate and comprehensive data, for example on strengths and areas for improvement, than the others (e.g. the award simulation). This view is echoed by Hides et al. (2004). This choice from the various approaches to self-assessment links to the second element impacting on effective implementation, that of EFQM maturity. EFQM (2003) recognize that organisations, on their journey to excellence, may show different levels of maturity. Svensson and Klefsjö (2006) warn that, if the organisation has not reached the necessary maturity level, it is probably a waste of resources to start a comprehensive self-assessment project. Hides et al. (2004), p. 196) report that the long-term nature of the EFQM Excellence Model makes it unsuitable for “quick fixes” whilst Karapetrovic and Willborn (2001) link the choice of the self-assessment approach to the level of maturity of an organization and the intensity of effort invested in the self-assessment. For example, with a lower effort and at the beginning of the “excellence journey”, less complex designs of the questionnaire and matrix-chart approaches are suggested, whereas the award simulation model is recommended for mature organisations with a higher invested effort. Dale (2002) suggests that thought is given to evaluation of this linkage between the TQM maturity of an organisation and the self-assessment approach adopted, and the relationship with resources and costs. This then links to the third element, availability of resources in terms of commitment, time, energy, information and finance (Hides et al., 2004; EFQM, 2003), which will impact on the thoroughness of the self-assessment. The fourth element impacting on effective implementation is that of organisational culture (see Shih and Gurnani, 1997; Samuelsson and Nilsson, 2002; Sousa-Poza et al., 2001). They argue that culture plays a key role in shaping all quality management activities and, although a detailed
discussion of this is outside the scope of this paper, it is dealt with thoroughly in Davies et al. (2007). The fifth element in effective implementation is that of education and training relevant to the EFQM Excellence Model and the process of self-assessment (Osseo-Asare and Longbottom, 2002; Samuelsson and Nilsson, 2002; Sousa-Poza et al., 2001; Owlia and Aspinwall, 1997; Jackson, 2001).

One of the key factors to emerge from the literature as impacting on the effective implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model in the context of UK universities, and the focus of this paper, is that of integration. PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2000, p. 35), in their evaluation of the UK Public Sector Excellence Programme, state that:

Detractors of the Excellence Model are more likely to be found in an organisation where there is a low level integration of the use of the model in the day-to-day running of the business.

Bauer (2002), in researching the implementation of business excellence, found some support for the argument that successful implementation was aided by integration. Several issues emerge from the literature that suggest that implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model is more likely to be successful if it is integrated into the organisation and its processes in various ways. These are reviewed below.

**Multi-level use of the EFQM Excellence Model**
In the implementation of TQM, Thiagaragan et al. (2001) recommend establishing activities in all the levels of the organisation. The author suggests that this might also be applicable with the EFQM Excellence Model having the effect of a “tap root”, helping to ensure integration into the organisation.

**The use of the EFQM Excellence Model in strategic planning**
Chin and Pun (2002) argue that TQM is part of the business planning process and should be integrated with other strategies. Conti (1997) believes that self-assessment and the subsequent improvement planning should be integrated into the company planning cycle and particularly strategic planning as the implementation of specific improvements might need the strategic allocation of resources. Alternatively, if improvements are not feasible or too expensive, then the strategic goals of the organisation might need to be reviewed and amended. Wells (2001) recommends that self-assessment is integrated into the existing strategy framework and Henderson et al. (1999) argue that strategic and operational plans should be formulated for business improvement. Van der Wiele et al.’s (1996) survey identified linking the outcomes of the self-assessment to the business planning process as one of the five most important steps in the self-assessment process. The respondents learned as a result of the first self-assessment that there is a need to make self-assessment an integral part of the business planning process. Lewis (1999) describes how most departments in Southwark Council had difficulty in embedding the assessment processes into planning and review activity whilst Munro-Faure and Munro-Faure (1994, p. 254) state that:

Quality Improvement requires careful planning to ensure a long-term strategic focus coupled with short-term action-oriented performance goals.

Elmuti et al. (1996), in their investigation of TQM in US higher education institutions, found that one common mistake made was not using strategic issues to drive the implementation. This is supported by the work of Bardoe and Sohal (1999), who found that one of the reasons for the failure of TQM was the fact that it had not been
integrated into the strategic planning systems of the organisation. Zink and Voss (1998) argue that the vision of business excellence has to become an integral part of corporate planning in German universities. Pupius (2002) elaborates on this by arguing that EFQM self-assessment should form part of an integrated planning process in UK higher education institutions.

It appears that linking EFQM Excellence Model self-assessment with the strategic planning processes has the potential to help integrate the EFQM Excellence Model into the organisation’s processes and thus aid effective implementation.

The use of the EFQM Excellence Model in performance management
Poirier and Tokarz (1996) list the integration of performance management/appraisal into the TQM process as one of twelve critical TQM factors. This view is supported by Cullen and Holingum (1987) who argue that each functional manager should have quality objectives that are set annually. Oakland (1999) explains that performance review techniques such as self-assessment are useful in identifying improvement opportunities and motivating performance improvement whilst Koehler and Pankowski (1996) describe a case in which quality criteria were integrated into performance appraisals. Thiagaragan et al. (2001) and Beatham et al. (2005) advocate the identification of critical success factors (CSFs) aligned with company policies and the definition of key performance indicators (KPIs) for each CSF.

There appears to be some evidence in the literature to support the notion that the linking of performance management with EFQM Excellence Model usage would be a key issue in improving the integration of the EFQM Excellence Model into an organisation, thus aiding effective implementation.

Alignment of the EFQM Excellence Model with other organisational systems
Melan (1998) analysed 11 Baldrige application summaries and identified having a system for sustaining the intervention as one of the factors for successful implementation. Poirier and Tokarz (1996) list the alignment of organisational systems as one of 12 critical TQM factors. More specifically, Oakland (1999) explains that the key is to align the employees of the business with the core processes of the organisation. Dale et al. (1998) emphasise the need to integrate the use of the EFQM Excellence Model into other management activities and Oakland (2000), describing the TQM implementation at the University of Bradford Management Centre, explains that it was seen as essential to fully integrate any TQM initiatives into the Management Centre’s management systems. Jackson (2001) offers an interesting perspective on integrating TQM tools into organisations. She emphasises the positive effect of the tool facilitating activities that are already in place. As a result people are more comfortable with this situation than they would be in one in which existing processes were being completely discarded for new ones.

If the EFQM Excellence Model can be aligned with activities, which are already taking place within an organisation then it is more likely to become integrated into the organisation and thus aid effective implementation. In the UK university context this could be an alignment with, for example, the present quality assurance arrangements for institutional audit.

Staff involvement and teamwork
Storey (see Holmes and McElwee, 1995, p. 6) discusses the concept of “soft HRM [Human Resource Management]”, which accepts the idea of resourceful humans who
have something to offer and can contribute to organisational development and the achievement of excellence. Poirier and Tokarz (1996) list empowerment/involvement as one of 12 critical TQM factors and Harvey (1995) explains that a central tenet of TQM is that every employee has an important role to play in improving the quality of the product or process. Poirier and Tokarz (1996, p. 137) state that:

No improvement process would be successful without dedicated people.

Mersha (1997, p. 170) argues that:

TQM success is unthinkable without the full and active involvement of all employees.

Vrakking (1995) argues that the chances of successful implementation increase if employee participation is applied correctly and in a controlled manner. Mersha (1997) continues this argument by highlighting that the failure to empower individuals and teams is one of the factors which results in failed TQM implementations. Thiagarajan and Zairi (1997) argue that TQM succeeds only with employees’ involvement in the TQM process and their commitment to its goals. Taylor and Hill (1992) and Jackson (2001) argue that every effort must be made to involve all organisational members as fully as possible in continuous improvement activities, while Thiagarajan et al. (2001) recommend maximising internal stakeholders’ involvement. Munro-Faure and Munro-Faure (1992) argue that TQM requires the harnessing of the skills and enthusiasm of everyone in the business. Antony et al. (2002) however found a lack of employee involvement when researching TQM implementation in Hong Kong industries. They thought that this could be attributed to managers feeling threatened by the idea of delegating authority and empowering employees. The research of Samuelsson and Nilsson (2002) has shown that the chosen approach to self-assessment must foster staff participation. Conti (1997) recommends that self-assessment teams should be the main mechanism for gaining staff involvement.

Taylor and Hill (1992) recommend team working as an important vehicle for promoting employee involvement. Gobeli (see Bardoel and Sohal, 1999, p. 269) found that the formation of teams was fundamental to the implementation strategy of TQM for small companies and Oakland (1999) argues that the complexity of most processes places them beyond the control of any one individual and thus the only efficient way to tackle process improvement is through the use of some form of teamwork. This, he indicates, relies on the premise that people are most willing to support any effort in which they have taken part or helped to develop. This view is supported by Munro-Faure and Munro-Faure (1994) who say that individuals must be actively involved in improvement. Mersha (1997) indicates that co-operation and teamwork are necessary ingredients for TQM success and Ho and Wearn (1996) recommend establishing improvement teams to gain staff involvement. The UMIST-TQM implementation framework (see Chin and Pun, 2002, p.278) recommends the establishment of teamwork that is designed to become part of the organisation’s method of working. Chapman (2000) describes the implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model in two cases in which internal improvement teams were set up with clear support, in terms of resources and priority, from senior management. All the companies studied by Krasachol and Tannock (1999) emphasised the importance of group activity in their TQM programmes and this is supported by the work of Van der Wiele et al. (1996) who noted from their survey of EFQM members that one of the learning points from the first round of self-assessments in respondents was that there
was a need to develop teamwork. O’Brien and O’Hanlon (2000) describe a case of EFQM Excellence Model implementation in which more than a third of the 600+ workforce were involved in improvement teams within a year of starting. Harvey (1995) acknowledges the emphasis on teamwork in TQM and raises concerns about this in the academic environment. Harvey (1995, p. 29), commenting on teamwork, states: “In many respects this is an alien process for many academics who are not only used to working alone but are valued by their institutions for their individual contribution”. Harvey (1995, p. 29) goes on to say that:

For most academics, individual teaching and scholarship are the norm. Indeed, there is a conflict between teamwork and individual brilliance.

Taylor and Hill (see Owlia and Aspinwall, 1997, p. 530) state that team working is not common in higher education, although Owlia and Aspinwall (1997) found, when investigating TQM implementation in US universities, that employee involvement and team working were adopted in 86 per cent of cases. Moeller and Sonntag (2001) identified that dysfunctional group membership or ineffective group dynamics impeded the success of self-assessments.

It appears therefore that the involvement of staff and the use of team working are key issues if integration is to be achieved.

To summarise, the issues concerning integration that have emerged from the literature are, first, that multi-level use of the EFQM Excellence Model in an organisation might have the effect of a “tap root”, helping to ensure integration into the organisation. Second, that it appears that linking EFQM Excellence Model self-assessment with the strategic planning processes has the potential to help integrate the EFQM Excellence Model into the organisation’s processes and thus aid effective implementation. Third, that there appears to be some evidence in the literature to support the notion that the linking of performance management with EFQM Excellence Model usage would be a key issue in improving the integration of the EFQM Excellence Model into an organisation. Fourth, that if the EFQM Excellence Model could be aligned with activities which were already taking place within an organisation then it would be more likely to become integrated into the organisation and thus aid effective implementation, and finally that staff involvement in teams was likely to be important in integrating the use of the EFQM Model into the organisation.

**Methodology**

The above aspects of integration were explored using structured, in-depth interviews with key personnel who had been involved with the implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model in four academic units of UK universities (schools, departments or faculties; dependant on the organisational structure and terminology in use) and by the review of documents accessed in the organisations using a case study research strategy (Yin, 1994). Discussions that the author had with the project managers in each of the case study organisations revealed that there was only a handful of people in each case study organisation who would have sufficient knowledge of the implementation process to be able to provide an accurate insight into the implementation process. It was not possible to interview direct equivalents in each organisation because of differences in the organisational structures, differences in the ways that the organisations had approached the implementation and movements of staff over the three years of the projects. In order to get a variety of perspectives on the
implementation, the author discussed the issue of possible interviewees with each of the four project managers. The project manager in each of the cases was one of the interviewees as they were well placed to have a good insight into the implementation process. In all four cases, the majority of staff involved were members of the academic management. In three of the four cases a senior member of administrative staff had been involved in the implementation process. It was decided that their views might offer a different perspective to that of the academic management involved and so interviews were carried out with them. The remainder of the interviewees came from the academic staff. As a result of these discussions it was decided to interview four staff in each case. As the interviews were to be very detailed (the interview was estimated to take two hours) and detailed supporting documents were to be accessed, the author was confident that this practical limitation would not significantly affect the quality of the data collected as there would be sufficient sources of evidence for triangulation purposes. To have interviewed staff with little knowledge of the implementation process might have risked encountering the problem of reflexivity (Yin, 1994) in which interviewees “invent” answers to please the interviewer. The author decided to tape record each interview, with the interviewee’s permission. The author made detailed notes during each interview and used the tape recordings to check the accuracy of the transcribed interview notes. The typed record of each interview was sent to the interviewee to verify that it was an accurate record of the interview. The interview guide can be seen in Table I. In addition a wealth of documents covering the three years of the projects was available to the researcher, which facilitated triangulation of information gained from the interviews. Particularly the following documents were made available to the researcher; memoranda, agendas and minutes of meetings, project plans, progress reports, strategic plans, presentations, self-assessment reports, and improvement planning, action and review documents. The researcher was also able to verify key dates in the implementation process by asking the interviewees to access their personal diaries covering the period in question.

All four academic units had started their implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model three years previous to the research being carried out. It is argued that this was sufficient time to have implemented the model effectively. A case study strategy is effective in exploring contemporary phenomena over which the researcher has no

| 1. | How many organizational levels was the EFQM Excellence Model implemented in? |
| 2. | Was the planned level of staff involvement with the EFQM Model achieved? If not, why not? |
| 3. | How many rounds of self-assessment have been carried out and when? |
| 4. | Which of the following were the intended uses of the model? Which of the following has the model actually been used for and how often? |
|   | Self-assessment framework |
|   | Strategic tool |
|   | To provide a holistic, broader view of the business |
|   | Performance management tool |
|   | Benchmarking tool |
|   | A means of integrating other quality and management initiatives and tools |
|   | A means of gaining a quality award |
|   | To motivate staff to get involved in quality improvement activities |
|   | Other (please specify) |

Table I.
Interview guide

5. How was the EFQM model aligned with other organizational systems?, e.g. Subject Review, Institutional Audit, Individual Performance Appraisal System, Internal Quality Reviews
control; particularly when how and/or why research questions are being asked (Yin, 1994; Stake, 1994). The cases were made anonymous and labelled “A”, “B”, “C” and “D” so that the interviewees felt at ease in answering potentially sensitive questions. The data from the interviews and document review were analysed using Program Logic (Yin, 1994). This method enabled the researcher to identify key issues of the phenomena under investigation and to place these in time order over the three-year period.

It was seen earlier in this paper that implementation infers effectiveness. Therefore something that is effectively implemented is something that is in operation or use. The intended uses of the EFQM Excellence Model were compared with the actual uses (as confirmed by detailed evidence from the cases) for each case in order to inform a judgment on effective implementation.

Findings
Table II compares the intended and actual uses of the EFQM Excellence Model in each case.

In case “A” the intended use was not clear and the EFQM Model was barely used at all. Therefore the implementation can be described as ineffective. The EFQM Model had been used at one level, the school. The only real involvement of staff (about 15 per cent of the school’s staff had been involved) was in two improvement groups; however the improvement groups made no real progress with the improvement projects. There had been two rounds of self-assessment; what was described as a “quick and dirty” assessment in the third quarter of 2000 and self-assessment workshops in the first and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Intended uses</th>
<th>Actual uses</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Not clear, possibly self-assessment framework to aid improvement</td>
<td>One crude self-assessment and one round of workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some limited involvement in quality improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Self-assessment framework to aid improvement</td>
<td>One outline self-assessment in the pilot school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Self-assessment framework to aid improvement</td>
<td>One self-assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To provide a holistic, broader view of the business</td>
<td>To provide a holistic, broader view of the business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A means of integrating other quality and management initiatives and tools</td>
<td>Once as a strategic tool (informed the business plan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To motivate staff to get involved in quality improvement activities (lesser intent)</td>
<td>To motivate staff to get involved in quality improvement activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Self-assessment framework to aid improvement</td>
<td>Three self-assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategic tool (to inform the business plan)</td>
<td>Twice as a strategic tool (informing the business plan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To motivate staff to get involved in quality improvement activities</td>
<td>To motivate staff to get involved in quality improvement activities (to a small extent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benchmarking (lesser intent)</td>
<td>Benchmarking (internal)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Performance management tool</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>To provide a holistic, broader view of the business</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A means of integrating other quality and management initiatives and tools</td>
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Table II. Comparison of intended and actual uses of the EFQM Excellence Model
second quarters of 2001. By the summer of 2003 the EFQM Model was not in use at all. Its main use had been in self-assessment and it had motivated some staff to get involved in quality improvement activities; however, the EFQM Model had not been aligned with other organisational systems. In summary, very little integration was achieved. The EFQM Model was used for self-assessment but was not used in strategic planning. Staff were involved in self-assessment teams and improvement teams, but these were not effective. The model was only used at one organisational level, was not linked with performance management and was not aligned with other organisational systems.

In case “B” there was a clear intention to use the EFQM Model as a self-assessment framework to aid improvement; however it was barely used at all in the three-year period. Therefore the implementation can be described as ineffective. The EFQM Model was partly implemented in two levels, the Faculty Executive group and one pilot school. One round of self-assessment had taken place in a pilot school of the Faculty in early 2001, but by the summer of 2003 the EFQM Model was not in use at all. Staff involvement with the EFQM Model was not achieved and only about 3 per cent of the Faculty’s staff had any involvement with the use of the EFQM Model. The project manager in this case thought that the reason for the lack of involvement of staff was that senior management commitment had not really been gained; therefore it was difficult to involve other staff. The EFQM Model had been used once (partly) for self-assessment and once as a strategic tool (it partially helped the Dean’s Advisory Group with the definition of key results). Although the Quality Working Group tasked with implementing the use of the EFQM Model in this case had shown in October 2000 how various internal and external initiatives could be aligned with the EFQM Model, no attempts were made to align it with other organisational systems. In summary, very little integration was achieved. The EFQM Model was used to a small extent for self-assessment but was only used in strategic planning in a marginal way. The EFQM Model was only used to a small extent in two organisational levels, it was not aligned with other organisational systems, it was not linked with performance management and few staff were involved in its use.

In case “C” the intended and actual uses of the EFQM Model corresponded reasonably well; however the model was only used on one occasion and had not been used for over two years since the first self-assessment. Therefore the implementation can be described as having been somewhat effective; however its use was not sustained. The only documented self-assessment was at the school level. The planned level of staff involvement was mainly achieved as 18 out of 85 staff (21 per cent) in the school were involved in a diagonal slice which carried out self-assessment; however only one of three improvement groups that had been set up subsequent to the self-assessment was really active in making progress with improvements. The partial lack of staff involvement was claimed to be because of the focus on other priorities. One round of self-assessment was carried out in March 2001; however by the summer of 2003 the EFQM Model was not in use at all. The EFQM Model was used as a self-assessment framework, a strategic tool (the school’s 2002 strategic plan was based on the self-assessment outcomes), to provide a holistic, broader view of the business and to motivate staff to get involved in quality improvement activities, however the EFQM Model was not linked with performance management and was not aligned with other organisational systems. In summary, very little integration was achieved. The EFQM Model was used once for self-assessment and was only used in strategic planning on one occasion. The model was only used in one organisational level, was
not linked to performance management and was not aligned with other organisational systems, although staff were involved in teams for self-assessment and improvement.

In case “D” the EFQM Model was used for all its intended uses and some extra ones. It was used on a regular basis over the three-year period. Therefore the implementation can be described as having been effective. The EFQM Model was implemented in two organisational levels, the Faculty and the three schools, and in the sub-units (a third level) in one school. The planned level of staff involvement with the EFQM Excellence Model had been achieved (about 6 per cent of the Faculty’s staff were involved with the use of the EFQM Model), but involvement was patchy with more involvement in some schools than others. The plan was to involve school executives (the senior management of the schools); there had not been much involvement of staff beyond this. There had been problems in one of the three schools caused by the use of “champions” who were not senior members of the school which had resulted in the school executive not being fully involved in the self-assessment. Three rounds of self-assessment were carried out in November 2001, May 2002 and November 2002. The EFQM Model was still in use in the summer of 2003. The EFQM Model has actually been used in this case for self-assessment on three occasions, a strategic tool for business planning twice, a performance management tool (to develop key performance indicators), to provide a holistic, broader view of the business, to motivate staff to get involved in quality improvement activities (to a small extent), as a means of integrating other quality and management initiatives and tools (it had informed a school review and an institutional audit), as a benchmarking tool (sharing of internal good practice), to restructure one school and in a contract bidding process, as it had been specified by the customer. The EFQM Model was aligned with other organisational systems as it had been linked to internal quality reviews and institutional audit but was not fully aligned with these; one teaching contract review was based on the EFQM Model and the November 2001 self-assessment was linked to an external review in January 2002. EFQM self-assessment became integrated into the annual planning cycle and the performance reviews of the heads of school and the associate deans were linked with the EFQM Model. In addition there was a link between EFQM self-assessment and the annual monitoring of taught programmes. In summary, substantial integration was achieved. The EFQM Model was used three times for self-assessment and was used in strategic planning on two occasions, it was used in two to three organisational levels, was linked with performance management and was aligned with other organisational systems; however staff were only involved in the use of the EFQM Model to a limited extent.

Discussion

The literature, particularly Bauer (2002), had suggested that implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model was more likely to be effective if it was integrated into the organisation and its processes in various ways. Attempts were made in the cases to use these integrative approaches. In case “A” three of the five approaches were attempted but with little success. In case “B” only two were attempted with almost no success. Case “C” attempted three integrative approaches with some degree of success and case “D” attempted all five integrative approaches with a good degree of success. Thus there is some support for Bauer’s (2002) view that the more that integration takes place, the more likely it is that implementation will be effective. In the next sections these integration approaches are discussed in the light of the case study findings.
Multi-level use in the organisation
In cases “A” and “C” the EFQM Model was only used in one level, the school. There
was an unsuccessful attempt to use it in two levels in case “B”. Only in case “D” was
the EFQM Model used successfully in more than one level. It was used in two levels for
most of the Faculty (Faculty and School levels) and in three levels in one school with
the addition of school sub-units. Case “D” exhibited the most effective implementation
and the EFQM Model was used in the most levels. In the implementation of TQM,
Thiagaragan et al. (2001) recommended establishing activities in all the levels of the
organisation. The author suggested earlier that this might also be applicable with the
EFQM Excellence Model having the effect of a “tap root”, helping to ensure integration
into the organisation. This research offers some support for this view.

The use of the EFQM Excellence Model in strategic planning
It appeared from the literature that linking EFQM Excellence Model self-assessment
with the strategic planning processes of an organisation had the potential to help
integrate the EFQM Excellence Model into the organisation’s processes and thus aid
effective implementation (Conti, 1997; Wells, 2001; Henderson et al., 1999; Van der
Wiele et al., 1996; Bardoel and Sohal, 1999; Zink and Voss, 1998; Pupius, 2002; Hansson
et al., 2003). In case “C” the school’s 2002 strategic plan was based on the outcomes of
their 2001 self-assessment and in case “D” the self-assessment was integrated into the
annual business planning process on two occasions. These two cases exhibited the
most effective implementations. McCarthy et al. (2002) believed that the important
aspect of this issue was whether the actions arising from self-assessment were agreed
as important and reviewed by senior management, and the integration of the action
plan into the business plan was simply a means of achieving this. This is exactly the
process that was adopted in case “D”. Thus this research offers some support for the
view expressed in the literature that linking EFQM Excellence Model self-assessment
with the strategic planning processes of an organisation has the potential to help
integrate the EFQM Excellence Model into the organisation’s processes. This is
because it legitimises the action plan through the involvement of senior management.

The use of the EFQM Excellence Model in performance management
In the literature there was some indication that the linking of performance
management with EFQM Excellence Model usage would be a key issue in improving
the integration of the EFQM Excellence Model into an organisation (Koehler and
Pankowski, 1996; Thiagaragan et al., 2001 and Beatham et al., 2005). The EFQM
Excellence Model was only used in performance management in case “D” and this
implementation was effective. So this research offers some support to the notion of
integrating performance management with the implementation of the EFQM
Excellence Model as an aid to effective implementation.

Alignment with other organisational systems
The literature indicated that if the EFQM Excellence Model could be aligned with
activities which were already taking place within an organisation, then it was more
likely to become integrated into the organisation and thus aid effective implementation
(Melan, 1998; Poirier and Tokarz, 1996; Dale et al., 1998; Oakland, 2000; Jackson, 2001).
In cases “A”, “B” and “C” there were no attempts to align the use of the EFQM
Excellence Model with other organisational systems, however in case “D” the EFQM
Model was aligned with five other organisational systems. It was linked with internal
quality reviews, the institutional audit, a teaching contract review, the performance reviews of the heads of schools and the annual monitoring of taught programmes. Case “D” had the most effective implementation. This research then offers support to the views offered in the literature.

**Staff involvement and teamwork**
The amount of staff involvement with the EFQM Excellence Model varied significantly across the four cases, but was broadly in line with the planned involvement, with the exception of case “B”. In case “C” around 30 per cent of the school’s staff were involved in self-assessment and improvement teams; in case “A” around 15 per cent of the school’s staff were involved in self-assessment and improvement teams; in case “D” around 6 per cent of the Faculty’s staff (mainly senior) were involved with the EFQM Model and in case “B” only about 3 per cent of the Faculty’s staff had any sort of involvement with the EFQM Model and no teams were formed. A high level of staff involvement didn’t therefore necessarily result in the integration of the EFQM Model into the case study organisation.

Teams were formed in three of the four cases; however there was little progress on planned improvements in the improvement teams in these three cases. This perhaps lends some support to the views of Harvey (1995), Moeller and Sonntag (2001) and Davies *et al.* (2001) who saw teamwork as a potential barrier to quality improvement initiatives in higher education.

**Conclusions and recommendations**
The aim of this paper was to explore the importance of integration in effecting implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model in academic units of UK universities and to see how, in practice, integration might be achieved. It was concluded that integration of the EFQM Excellence Model into the organisation was an essential element in effective implementation. It is important to note however that this was only one of several elements. In the larger research project, a number of other elements were also found to be essential for effective implementation:

- a clear motive for its use, particularly setting out clear expected benefits and objectives;
- gaining senior management commitment;
- demonstrating senior management commitment;
- education and training; and
- activities to maintain momentum in the implementation process.

Within case study research it is not possible to isolate these other elements from that of integration or, in other words, to establish “control” over them as one might do in a quantitative piece of research. This is a limitation of the case study research strategy; control over variables is sacrificed for a detailed understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Yin, 1994). A detailed discussion of these elements is outside the scope of this paper; however, in outline, the absence of one or more of these elements in a case led to ineffective implementation and the presence of all of them in a case led to effective implementation. Thus integration can contribute to effective implementation, but only in combination with several other essential elements.
The research question which was set earlier in this paper was: “How does integration affect the implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model in UK universities?” The answer then is that integration, if achieved, can have a very positive effect on whether implementation is effective. In practice, integration of the EFQM Excellence Model can be achieved through a combination of multi-level use in the organisation; using it as part of the strategic planning process; aligning its use with other organisational systems, linking its use with performance management and involving staff in its use through teams.

It follows from the findings and conclusions of this research that further research in this area should focus on:

- how the integration of the EFQM Excellence Model can be sustained over time once an initial implementation has been effective as this research only examined cases in which the EFQM Excellence Model had been in use for three years;
- a more detailed exploration of the link between EFQM self-assessment and the strategic planning process, which appears to be a major driver of integration; and
- an exploration of teamwork (or more accurately a lack of it) as a potential barrier to quality improvement initiatives in higher education.

References


About the author

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