

QUALITÄTSKULTUR IN BERUFSBILDENDEN SCHULEN



Recommendations for implementation of the project results at provider and system level

540168-LLP-1-2013-1-AT-LEONARDO-LMP

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Projekt Q-KULT



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Publisher:
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Vienna, April 2016



This project (540168-LLP-1-2013-1-AT-LEONARDO-LMP) has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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1 Introduction

Improvement of quality in vocational education and training has been a central political issue since the Copenhagen Process and this was emphasised once again by the EU2020 goals. Despite significant progress with regard to basics and concepts of quality development in vocational education and training in the last few years there are deficits in the sustainable implementation of quality management (QM) systems at the providers of vocational education and training, primarily schools. The education policy aim of all partner countries of the Q-KULT project is to improve the quality of vocational education and training in a sustainable way by means of QM systems which are actually used by the schools for their quality development.

In connexion with the introduction of QM systems at schools of vocational education in different European countries in the last ten years it became evident that some schools were more successful than others in implementing the relevant QM system adequately and fully with a view to the QM principles on which it is based. It could also be seen that it is well accepted by the people concerned (especially the teachers) and that the effects hoped for occurred. Independent from each other different experts dealing with the development of QM systems unanimously gained the impression that this might be due to different school cultures, which either foster a successful implementation or else hamper it. To advance a more satisfactory implementation on the provider level new and different approaches and strategies are necessary.

The work of the project partners showed that quality culture (as part of the organisational culture) plays an important part in the implementation of QM systems. With the tool for identifying quality culture at schools of vocational education, which is to be developed, an approach was created by means of which this influence factor can be made tangible. Based on these results schools are to be enabled (with or without consultative support) to implement their QM system in a more sustainable and effective way. In addition to this steering information at provider level the project and especially the recommendations which are to be developed from the project results are to generate steering information also for the education system level. The system level will contain information and indications on how the influence factor quality culture can be included in the development and implementation of QM systems for whole education systems.

One of the most important goals of the project was to make quality culture visible as a key factor in the sustainable implementation and institutionalisation of quality management systems in schools of vocational education. To this end a tool was developed by means of which steering options for an improvement of a sustainable implementation can be created both at system and provider level. Another goal of the project was to foster the importance of quality management by means of positive associations and promulgation in the vocational education and training systems of the EQAVET member countries.

The recommendations for providers of vocational education and training and for the educational systems level are presented separately in order to facilitate later dissemination to different target groups. For the provider level the feedback of all schools of vocational education that took part in the testing of the diagnostic tool is included. For the feedback on the systems level the results of the information and exchange workshops for members of the EQAVET network (March 2014 in Vienna) are particularly relevant. Moreover, seven to ten interviews with political decision-makers from the partner countries which are taking part in the project were planned in the project application - these interviews could be replaced by a second workshop for members of the EQAVET network (November 2015 in Vienna). Both workshops were logged in detail. From the EQAVET network representatives from the following countries took part: Norway, Denmark, Finland,

Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, Netherlands, UK/Scotland, UK/Wales. Moreover, the project partners from schools as well as representatives from Austrian “test schools” took part in the two workshops. The two workshops were eventually favoured mainly because this is a very complex subject matter and a certain basic understanding helps to get more in-depth feedback on the project results. In the second EQAVET workshop almost all participants who had already taken part in the first workshop took part again - thus on one hand the interest on the part of the participants was greater and the feedback was more conclusive due to their prior knowledge.

2 Recommendations for the vocational education and training provider level

To start with we wish to point out that the recommendations for the vocational education and training providers are included in the guide “Using the OCAI instrument to analyse the quality culture in school” (S. Kurz/ H. Ittner). Here you can find a short summary for this work package.

The recommendations for the vocational education and training provider level can be deduced for the most part from the test phase of the diagnostic tools at the schools. These were:

- three tests of the t/U procedure (one test each in DK, DE and AT),
- five tests of the SCED (three in DE, one in DK)
- five tests of OCAI (three in DE, one in DK and one in NL)

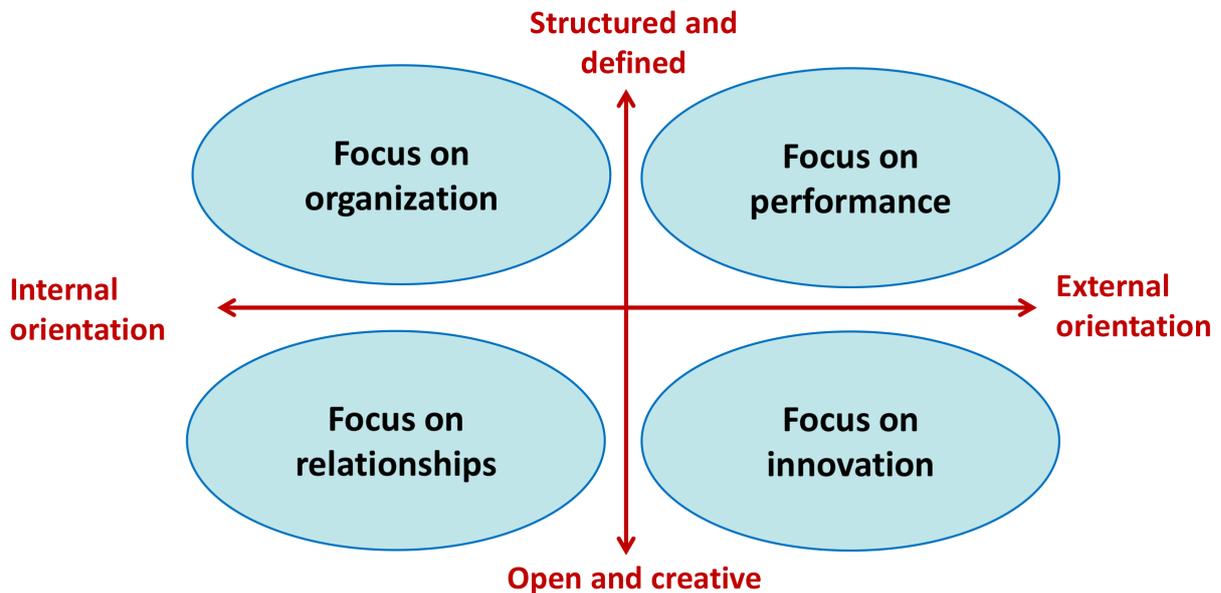
Moreover, three validation workshops on all developed tools took place in Austria in order to get feedback on the applicability and quality of the items and to be able to assess the acceptance of the tools. These validation workshops were carried out at two school locations and additionally with a group of quality managers of one school type. Moreover, recommendations for the provider level were deduced from the feedback of the experts of the EQAVET network.

The Q-KULT project generally resulted in the understanding that the discourse about cultural aspects of quality management of vocational education and training providers provides an enrichment in terms of the definition and further development of the quality management. In the course of the tests with partner schools the concept was very often met with positive response. The people involved at school level found it helpful to discuss the topic of culture and the experts in the EQAVET network also agreed that the identification of the culture could provide important hints for the (further) development of QM systems in vocational education and training.

The creation and implementation of QM systems at schools of vocational education has so far been strongly based on the application of tools and instruments - how they are used and what contributions they make to school development differs very much. The analysis of the current culture at the schools and the question whether or not the relevant QM systems and the related tools and instruments are suitable for them is the main issue of Q-KULT.

Within the Q-KULT project different instruments for the identification of quality culture at schools were analysed. In this context both qualitative and quantitative approaches (t/U procedure, SCED - School Culture Elements Questionnaire, OCAI - Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument) were taken into account. Eventually OCAI was chosen and developed further. This cultural diagnosis tool is available in an online version (<http://www.q-kult.eu/produkte/q-kult-online-tool/>) and is thus easily accessible to schools. The main users on the school level are the headmasters/headmistresses and the teaching staff. OCAI is a type-oriented model, it serves to capture and depict the culture-

typical profile of an organisation with a view to the two basic dimensions “inside vs. outside orientation” and “high vs. low structural preference”.



OCAI is based on a dialogue-based process. Teachers and headmasters/headmistresses at schools will discuss specific statements in small groups with a view to the question of which of them apply to their own school and to which extent. The small group must agree and assign points to the four different statements in each dimension. This means that there are parallel negotiation processes in the use of OCAI and thus a discussion of the shared values and attitudes within the teaching staff. The result will be a diagram which shows the accumulated group results and the position of the school within four “ideal types”. Following this result it is important to continue the discussion: How is this result understood and interpreted by the school?

What is important in the use of OCAI and other cultural diagnosis tools is that there must be an idea (especially on the part of the headmaster/headmistress) of how to continue working with the results. Given that the cultural diagnosis should have positive effects on the quality management and school development this is an essential issue.

As far as we can see today the following circumstances and situations seem particularly suited for the use of OCAI:

- a change of headmaster/headmistress, with the wish of the new headmaster/headmistress to get to know the school well also as regards its culture
- serious changes of the environment of the school (e.g. decreasing numbers of pupils due to demographic development, changes in the structure of the student body)
- new introduction of quality management at a school or fundamental reorientation of the QM
- reorientation with a view to the values of a school, e.g. in the course of a mission statement development process

OCAI, however, can of course also be used outside these situations if the school or the headmaster/headmistress expects new findings with which they want to continue to work. It is also possible that “perceived” differences of opinion with regard to the quality management of the school between headmaster/headmistress and teaching staff can be approached by means of OCAI and a discourse will develop from this. In case of big schools the OCAI can also be used in individual areas and departments or to make subcultures visible at the school.

Which requirements must be met so that the application of OCAI will be profitable? OCAI first and foremost is a discourse tool, it should not be understood as a normative diagnosis of the quality culture of a school but it should be understood as a tool to uncover the divided understanding of quality at the relevant school. This conception must be made clear when OCAI is used at schools. An essential part of the teaching staff must agree with the use of OCAI, if not, the process will not be profitable. Generally no external consultants are necessary to use OCAI; it, however, is important that e.g. the headmaster/headmistress as well as those responsible for quality are well informed about the chances and risks of the tool and that they integrate the teaching staff. The OCAI Guide gains central importance in this context. A training and guidance concept was also developed within the Q-KULT project.

The challenge in using the results at the school level is to get from the identification of the current state to the desired target state, i.e. how will schools get from culture diagnosis to action orientation? In terms of the layout nothing speaks against using OCAI once in the current state mode and once in the target state mode and to approach this question from these aspects. The online tool provides a relevant selection function. The result of OCAI can contribute to clarifying the question of which aspects of quality management correspond well to the diagnosed school culture and which are in discrepancy to this culture [see OCAI Guide].

3 Vocational education and training system level:

Two workshops with experts from the EQAVET network form the basis for the recommendations on the system levels.

- Workshop 1 took place in Vienna on March 23rd and 24th, 2015. Experts from Norway, Denmark, Finland, Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, UK/Wales, UK/Scotland and the Netherlands took part.
- WS 2 took place in Vienna on February 4th and 5th, 2016. Experts from Norway, Denmark, Finland, Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, UK/Wales, and the Netherlands took part.

Both workshops were prepared and documented accordingly. Within the framework of the second workshop a partly standardised interview guide was used, which was filled in retroactively by the participants of the workshop. This interview guide includes questions dealing with the appraisal of the experts regarding the recommendations for the system level which can be made on the basis of the Q-Kult project results. The following can be deduced for the education systems level from the feedback of the experts:

The experts agreed that the term quality culture is definitely helpful for a deeper understanding why there are differences in the implementation of quality management systems on the individual school level. Quality management systems can fit a school culture better or not so well, which is why the implementation varieties at school level differ very much from school to school.

To avoid that this diagnostic tool (OCAI) is “only another” tool that is prescribed or offered by the QM system its benefit and importance must be communicated clearly. The term and the underlying concept of quality culture of the OCAI must be clarified as well as the correlation between the diagnostic tool and the quality management of schools. OCAI distinguishes itself fundamentally from classical self-evaluation tools; it is a dialogue-based tool. The process behind it, which can or should be started at the schools, is in many cases more important than the OCAI results.

On no account should OCAI be prescribed as a tool; it should be an offer for schools that they can use if the school wants to get ahead with its quality development. Other pilotings of the tool - especially the online tool - will definitely make sense. If necessary, recommendations for how to work with the results can then be deduced.

A superordinate “analysis” on the system level, however, should be avoided. This would increase the wrong impression that there are “better” and “worse” quality cultures and tempt people into a benchmarking which the tool does not intend. In this respect the question of whether or not conclusive indicators can be generated from the results also has to be answered by no.

The experts of the EQAVET network also emphasised that definitions are important, especially if the tool is to be used in other national contexts. The development of a glossary was suggested. The quality culture in the vocational education system also depends on the culture of the relevant country. Moreover, the experts in the EQAVET network agreed that quality culture represents a “gap” in the QM systems that have existed so far.

Attention, however, must be turned to how to give education providers an understanding of the tool, including an idea of what to do with the results. The integration of OCAI into the current QM system must also work well. This is still another central field in the further development and the transfer of OCAI into different quality management systems.

From the point of view of the system level it would be helpful first to survey the quality culture at schools and then to choose and implement the suitable quality assurance tools. In Finland a quality framework for self-evaluation of schools already exists in which quality culture is embedded.

Other considerations for the use of cultural diagnostic tools on the part of the EQAVET network were to use the results for staff recruitment or to use them for external evaluations, e.g. to provide peers with more background information in peer reviews to understand the school better. This, however, also involves some risks because sensitive internal data of the organisation might be abused.