



EFQM in Academic Libraries: the Application of a Quality Management Model at the University of Cyprus Library

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Abstract

In December 2009 the University of Cyprus Library became the first library in Greece and Cyprus to achieve the EFQM Recognized for Excellence distinction, awarded by the European Foundation for Quality Management. That was the Library's first engagement in quality management. The program helped the Library both to start processes that will improve its administration and to shape a very concrete perception of the need and methodology of self-assessment. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the discussion on adopting EFQM in academic libraries by highlighting the main points of this experience and by drawing conclusions regarding the benefits gained and challenges encountered.

Key Words: quality management; EFQM; academic libraries

Introduction

In December 2009 the University of Cyprus Library became the first library in Greece and Cyprus to achieve the *EFQM Recognized for Excellence* distinction, awarded by the European Foundation for Quality Management. That was the Library's first engagement in quality management. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the main points of this experience and to draw conclusions regarding the benefits gained and challenges encountered. Despite the fact that several academic libraries in Europe have implemented EFQM and an increasing number of them demonstrate interest in it, there is hardly any literature that focuses on the adoption of EFQM in academic libraries. The paper aims to contribute to this discussion by presenting a case study, while limiting its scope to the field of academic libraries in the European context.

The Need for Quality Management in Academic Libraries

Rowley (2005) defines quality management as "the processes associated with ensuring that quality adheres to some externally or internally set standard." Given the complicated nature of academic libraries, which involves:

- the fact that they are part of a wider organization
- their high level of engagement with users
- their broad range of stakeholders
- their collaboration with other information centers and other partners
- the increasing shift towards electronic services (Rowley, 2005),

it becomes apparent that academic libraries must, with respect to the above:

- be able to exercise effective lobbying when negotiating with higher administration
- meet their users' increasing demands
- have effective communication with all stakeholders (students, academic staff, partners, library staff, society)
- be reliable partners
- be able to function in an environment that requires continuous improvement and development.

In order to achieve the above, an academic library needs to apply quality management tools and processes that will allow it to put itself on a path of constant improvement and to meet its goals.

Quality Management in European Academic Libraries – an overview

In the mid-1990s Total Quality Management systems started infiltrating higher education institutions around the globe. The most notable among those were ISO standards (in Europe, Australia and the USA), Deming Prize (Japan), Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award (USA), and the European Quality Award (Europe) (Mehralizadeh and Safaeemoghaddam, 2010) — the latter known today as EFQM Excellence Award. In 2000 the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was established, later to become the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. ENQA, affiliated with the Bologna Process, has been a very active agent in promoting activities relating to quality assurance.

In the first decade of the 21st century many academic libraries in several European countries achieved quality certification. Spain was a country that demonstrated a large-scale involvement: within a span of four years (2003–2006) 25 university libraries were accredited by ANECA (National Agency of Quality Evaluation and Accreditation), whereas at roughly the same period eight university libraries were certified with ISO9001:2000. Furthermore, four university libraries received certification on models based on EFQM (Balagué, 2007a). In the past few years, several academic libraries across Europe and other parts of the world adopted quality management systems, with ISO 9001 and EFQM dominating the scene (Balagué, 2007b) (Herget and Hierl, 2007).

The implementation of ISO 9001 in the libraries of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain) and the Kuopio University (Finland) was evaluated by Balagué and Saarti (2009). The most significant among a multitude of benefits for the libraries noted by the authors were interconnection of activities, integration of certain core processes into teaching and research, assessment on the optimization of available resources, and utilization of user input for negotiations with the university administration about new resources.

In their research on the implementation of ISO 9000 in Greek academic libraries, Kostagiolas and Kitsiou (2008) refer, among others, to the libraries of the Technical University of Crete and the University of Patras — the only academic libraries in the country to have implemented ISO 9001 at the time. The libraries point out that, despite an initial heavy investment in time, they ultimately benefited from the implementation of the standard, indicating that “now responsibilities are better assumed, provision of instructions has been improved, inefficiencies are isolated, and improvements are introduced.”

In a research conducted by Balagué (2007b), based on a turnout of 67 answers from academic libraries from all over the world that had been certified with ISO 9001 (out of which 23 from Europe), the author cites as the main benefits of the adoption of the standard the following: (i) standardization of work processes, (ii) improvement of documentation procedures, (iii) facilitation of data gathering for management, (iv) clear definition of responsibilities, and (v) promotion of the dynamics of continuous improvement.

It should be noted that in all above examples the information used for assessment is provided by the libraries themselves — as is the case with this paper. It would be very helpful to have such post-certification evaluations of libraries by individuals or agencies not affiliated with the libraries. Nevertheless, from the feedback received it becomes apparent that certified libraries demonstrate a conviction, based on results, that quality management is a strong force for improvement.

EFQM, EFQM Excellence Model, and ‘Recognized for Excellence’

The European Foundation for Quality Management, more commonly known by the acronym EFQM, was founded in 1988 by the Chief Executive Officers of fourteen companies based in Europe in order to “develop a Management tool that would increase the competitiveness of European organizations.” Based in Brussels, it claims hundreds of members (mainly from European countries) and offers services to any organization regardless of its nature, industry or size. Among the services it offers are the recognition schemes, which aim to promote continuous improvement. There are three levels of recognition: Committed to Excellence, Recognized for Excellence, and the

EFQM Excellence Award. Assessment is conducted on the basis of the EFQM Excellence Model.

EFQM draws from Total Quality Management and constitutes a comprehensive approach that is more appropriate for the library environment than other available quality management tools that often present disadvantages for assessment in this specific industry (Herget and Hierl, 2007).

The EFQM Model is based on eight principles: results orientation; customer focus; leadership and constancy of purpose; management by processes and facts; people development and involvement; learning, innovation and continuous improvement; partnership development; and corporate social responsibility (Martín-Castilla and Rodríguez-Ruiz, 2008). It is non-prescriptive and consists of nine criteria that cover all functions of an organization: 1. Leadership, 2. Strategy, 3. People, 4. Partnerships and resources, 5. Processes, products and services, 6. Customer results, 7. People results, 8. Society results, and 9. Key results. Schematically and conceptually, the criteria are divided into two groups, the first five being the *enablers* and the latter four the *results*. Each criterion is further divided into sub-criteria covering more specific aspects and defining a general principle (e.g. sub-criterion 3e: *People are rewarded, recognized and cared for*). What is assessed is the extent to which the organization fulfils the principle. Assessment is conducted on the basis of RADAR logic (Results, Approach, Deployment, Assess and Refine) which is actually a loop process intending to act as a tool for continuous improvement.

Whereas the requirements for the first level of recognition, *Committed to Excellence*, are the identification and implementation of improvement projects, in the case of the second level, *Recognized for Excellence*, the organization is required to provide information that covers the whole spectrum of the *EFQM Excellence Model* (see relevant section above). For that purpose, the candidate organization submits to EFQM a report (*Submission Report*) that describes its operations and activities. The Report uses a template that includes all nine criteria of the model, and requires each sub-criterion to be covered in a single page. The information provided for each sub-criterion includes the (main/general) approach, deployment, assessment and review, and additional approaches.

Following the submission of the Report, an Evaluation Committee consisting of independent accredited EFQM Assessors conducts a two-day on-site

evaluation. During the evaluation, the Committee seeks to verify the information provided in the Submission Report as well as to seek additional information that will enable them to conduct a more precise assessment. The evaluation typically includes interviews of top- and middle-managers, interviews of other employees, focus groups (may include customers), on-site examination, request of proof documents, as well as anything else the Evaluation Committee deems necessary.

After the evaluation, the Evaluation Committee submits a *Feedback Report* that includes general comments about the organization, the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate for each criterion of the EFQM Model, and the grade assigned by the Committee. On a 0–1000 scale, anything less than 301 leads to failure, whereas a grade from 301 to 600 leads to three, four or five stars. Organizations whose grade extends considerably beyond the 500s are more suited to seek the third level of recognition, *EFQM Excellence Award*, rather than R4E. The certification lasts for only two years, during which the Organization is permitted to use the corresponding EFQM logos.

The University of Cyprus Library Certification Experience

The University of Cyprus (UCY), the oldest university in the Republic of Cyprus, was founded in 1989 by the Government and accepted its first students in 1992. Located in Nicosia, the capital, today it has 21 academic departments and seven research units (grouped into 6 schools), offering programs at both undergraduate and graduate level in the humanities, social sciences, economics and management, pure and applied sciences, and engineering. The Medical School and the (multidisciplinary) Graduate School are also scheduled to operate in the near future. The University has currently 4,700 undergraduate and 1,550 graduate students.

UCY has been a member of the EFQM since 2006. In 2008, following an evaluation by accredited EFQM Validators, the Administration Services of the University achieved EFQM Committed to Excellence (C2E). The program involved three improvement projects that were monitored by the Validators: (i) Performance indicators in administration processes (in which the Library was among the participants), (ii) Survey among students aiming at improving the quality of services provided to the student community, and (iii) Survey

among administration staff aiming at the adoption of advanced administration systems for human resources management.

Following the C2E achievement of UCY Administration Services, the Administration decided to pursue the next level of EFQM recognition at administration unit level. The Library was selected as the unit best prepared to seek Recognized for Excellence (R4E), with the intention that other units would follow. The Library undertook the project in October 2008 and was required to complete it by the end of the following year.

During the thirteen months it was given to prepare for evaluation, the UCY Library consulted experts and tried to identify areas of improvement and work on them to the extent possible, given the time restriction. Involving in the project practically its entire staff, the Library:

- (i) prepared the Strategic Development Plan 2009–2011,
- (ii) adopted several policies: Staff recognition and rewards, Empowerment of staff creativity, Internal communication, Staff development, Knowledge dissemination,
- (iii) mapped new and existing processes: Change management, Premises management, Environment analysis for policy and strategy (PESTLE and SWOT analysis), Short-Loan collection management, etc.,
- (iv) continued the conduct of staff satisfaction surveys, and
- (v) conducted its first user satisfaction survey, employing LibQUAL+[®].

LibQUAL+[®] was selected as the tool for measuring users' perception due to its multiple advantages over other options, namely: structured yet simple questionnaire, report delivery, segmentation of respondents, easy benchmarking, and overall compatibility with the EFQM approach. From a population of 7,025 users that were invited, 1,574 responded to the online questionnaire (22.4%). These figures ensured the survey's reliability.

With regard to the organization of preparations, the Library:

- (i) held meetings with advisors that were experts in EFQM accreditation,
- (ii) held staff meetings on a monthly basis for briefing,
- (iii) created a special thread within the staff online forum (53 posts, 2,283 views),

- (iv) uploaded all documents that might be requested by the Evaluation Committee on a wiki set up especially for the on-site evaluation (documents arranged both by Library function and by EFQM Model criterion),
- (v) appointed each criterion of the model to a staff member as owner, and
- (vi) submitted an interim progress report.

The commitment of the higher administration of the University (Rector, Director of Administration and Finance) and the support they offered to the Library during both preparation and evaluation were decisive for the outcome of the project as, according to the authors' experience, past attempts that started as bottom-up initiatives had not been concluded.

In late 2009 the UCY Library received the EFQM R4E award with 3 stars, the first library in Greece and Cyprus in doing so. For 6 out of 9 criteria the grade received was within the 300s. The only criteria that fell outside this range were Customer results (6) and Society results (8) in the 200s (primarily due to lack of substantial information about the stakeholders' perception) and Leadership (1) in the 400s. The overall grade was marked as being in the upper half of the 300s.

The Report praised, among others, the Library's leadership, staff's commitment, devotion and enthusiasm, staff's continuous education, internal communication and knowledge sharing, strategic partnerships, utilization of technology, and social responsibility. On the other hand, the Report identified the following areas of improvement: key performance indicators (need to be defined and connected to strategic directions), strategic targets (need to be documented and be more concrete), benchmarking (existing data need to be further utilized), key processes (need to be documented), data and information systems security (need for policy to be adopted), and measurements of customer and society results (need to be measured on a regular basis).

Taking into consideration both the points highlighted in the Feedback Report and the comments made by the Evaluation Committee at the end of the evaluation, the UCY Library decided to proceed with the following:

- (i) re-examine its mission statement, vision and values,
- (ii) representation of the Director: specify selection criteria and define tasks and responsibilities,

- (iii) create a Succession Plan for all key positions at the Library,
- (iv) identify and describe all job positions in the new organizational chart,
- (v) define key processes, key policies, targets, and key performance indicators,
- (vi) revise the procedures regarding the Strategic Development Plan,
- (vii) revise the manual for premises management,
- (viii) create a plan for staff development,
- (ix) create a manual for data and information systems security,
- (x) examine the possibility of adopting a Project Management system,
- (xi) create a plan for systematic benchmarking, and
- (xii) create a plan for marketing the Library's services and achievements.

Implementation for most of the above started immediately after the assessment and these sub-projects are currently in progress, despite staff reduction.

Assessment of the Certification Process and Results

The main benefits for the University of Cyprus Library gained through EFQM R4E were the following:

- (i) *Areas of improvement.* During the preparation period the Library identified several areas of activity that needed to be reconsidered, some of which were until that time simply neglected. The feedback received by the Evaluation Committee not only confirmed the need for improvement in these areas, but also identified additional areas that did not meet certain standards. This identification was the basis upon which the Library decided to take further action following evaluation.
- (ii) *The need for evaluation.* The whole experience with EFQM R4E drew the attention of the UCY Library to the fact that evaluation on a regular basis is not an option but rather a necessity. A major benefit of regular evaluation is the avoidance of certain shortcomings in library operations that may otherwise pass unnoticed for a long period of time. There must be a holistic approach in the evaluation of a library, with all factors involved taken into account (as outlined in the EFQM

Excellence Model). Furthermore, as benchmarking is essential for defining satisfactory levels of performance, the UCY Library realized the need to utilize available data (participation in LibQUAL+® and Total Quality Management Unit of Greek Academic Libraries surveys).

(iii) *All stakeholders considered.* EFQM R4E helped the Library identify all entities that can be considered as stakeholders. Moreover, the need for a two-way communication was emphasized, both for communicating Library policies and strategies and for receiving input from stakeholders. Two notable examples:

A. Taking into consideration the results and conclusions derived from the LibQUAL+® survey:

- A network of liaison librarians was formed involving all Library staff in order to set up constant, bidirectional communication with all academic departments and their staff.
- Ensuring the offering of Information Literacy to students and academic staff emerged as a key process with high priority for the Library. Corresponding performance indicators were set up and monitored.
- The Library decided to conduct LibQUAL+® every two years, despite the fact that before 2009 the Library had not conducted any user satisfaction survey.

B. Combining the results of the Feedback Report, a triplet of key performance indicators was set by the Library Direction:

- (a) (number of) sources per user
- (b) cost per source
- (c) cost per usage

Aiming to increase (a) and decrease (b) leads to the creation of and further participation of the Library in collaboration and consortium schemes. Targeting at lowering (c) leads to the establishment of systematic programs of information literacy.

(iv) *Focus on a common goal.* Non-tangible or non-concrete collateral results are very often no less important than the targets set before-

hand. The project EFQM R4E gathered all Library staff for about a whole year around a common goal. Always referring to the local context, the mobilization and commitment of staff for the implementation of this project was unprecedented, to the point that the course towards EFQM R4E proved to be a model of collaboration not only for the Library, but for all Administration Services at the University of Cyprus.

It should be noted however that “in order for EFQM to be used effectively, the organization must already have a certain experience with quality management” (Marraud, 2010). This may have been the reason why the UCY Library, despite the benefits gained, encountered certain challenges both during preparation and after certification. EFQM R4E started with a severe restriction: the combination of narrow time limits with the complete lack of any relevant experience by any staff member. The latter problem was addressed with the employment of advisors with extensive experience with EFQM and the former with immediate action and the involvement of all staff. However, despite the advisors’ significant contribution and the fact that work started literally from Day 1, challenges were not completely avoided. For some preparation steps the planning proved to be insufficient. This resulted in:

- (i) the withdrawal of a policy adopted (Staff recognition and rewards — doubts were raised by the staff about its effectiveness and it was thus postponed for further discussion),
- (ii) the non-implementation of a new scheduled process (Change management), and
- (iii) the need to revise after the EFQM evaluation a couple of new documents (Staff development, Premises management), as it appeared that they did not address the entirety of relevant issues.

Furthermore, the fervor that characterized the preparation period waned after the evaluation. The Library acquired very important experiences and data (identification of areas of improvement, user satisfaction data, etc.), however, it has yet to see its performance actually improving due to their utilization.

It should be noted that these challenges, though identified, are definitely overshadowed by the benefits mentioned in the previous section and the overall success of the project.

Conclusions

The implementation of EFQM by the University of Cyprus Library has been very beneficial for the reasons mentioned in the above section. Despite the different philosophy and approach between the EFQM Model and ISO standards (the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper), it appears that the benefits resulting from their implementation do not differ considerably, this probably due to the fact that they share more or less the same principles and are not competing to each other (Russell, 2000).

Comparing the results of the UCY Library involvement with EFQM to those of ISO-certified academic libraries:

- UCY identified areas of improvement, similarly to the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona which assessed the optimization of available resources (Balagué and Saarti, 2009), and to the libraries of the Technical University of Crete and the University of Patras, which introduced improvements in their operations and processes (Kostagiolas and Kitsiou, 2008).
- UCY realized the need for a continuous and holistic evaluation, in the same way UAB studied the interconnection between all its activities (Balagué and Saarti, 2009); these match closely Balagué's findings that the ISO certification in a number of libraries worldwide promoted the dynamics of continuous improvement (Balagué, 2007b).
- UCY identified all its stakeholders and established (where absent) channels of communication with all of them; this could be utilized in the same way the Kuopio University Library employed user surveys in order to negotiate new resources from the university administration (Balagué and Saarti, 2009).

Quality management is fundamental for any organization. Among the various management tools that exist, EFQM seems to be very appropriate for libraries, as it provides a strong basis for an integrated approach — it can act as an umbrella for additional management tools — and promotes continuous improvement. Nevertheless, like all certifications, the EFQM recognition schemes are not an end in themselves. The University of Cyprus Library, without any prior experience in quality management, achieved EFQM Recognized for Excellence and will gain the full benefits of

its involvement in EFQM — provided that all lessons learned make it a self-conscious organization unit that employs the EFQM Model as a constant way of operating.

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