

# **The Impact of Quality Assurance on Enhancing Program Effectiveness at the University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates**

**By**  
**Dr. Esam Agamy,**  
**Director of the Institutional Research Unit, University of Sharjah, UAE**

**Conference Sub-theme: Different approaches to QA and their impact on efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability**

## **Abstract**

The University of Sharjah developed an integrated five-year institutional effectiveness plan. The aim of the plan was to ensure the University's ability to achieve and maintain quality in learning and teaching and support facilities, in addition to enhancing a university-wide quality culture. This effectiveness five-year plan was based upon the University's mission and vision, analyses of the available data, resources, faculty and student feedback, and accreditation standards.

This paper is an overview of the design, development and implementation of the University of Sharjah quality assurance system and its impact on enhancing program and learning and teaching activities. The paper focuses on the impact of current quality-related processes on university cultures, considers alternative strategies and synthesizes recommendations for action from related literature. Implementation of the quality-assurance plan has led to improvements in many areas, including the University's organization, internship, IT applications, student advising, community service, student services, academic support services, curricula, and community service. These improvements have enhanced the University's programs, as well as the learning and teaching process and the student's experience. Qualitative and quantitative measures were used to assess the performance and the actual enhancement to the programs and activities.

## **Introduction**

In many countries and many cultures, the issue of quality management is firmly on the agenda for higher education institutions (Becket and Brookes, 2005). Both quality assurance and quality enhancement are now considered essential components of most quality management programs (Brookes and Downie, 2002; Stensaker, 2005; Vettori et al., 2007).

National and institutional systems for evaluation, assessment, accreditation and audit are now a routine in the many countries (Harvey, 2006; Harvey and Stensaker, 2008).

## **Culture**

It is no longer helpful to think about quality merely in terms of maintaining standards. Instead, higher education institutions, like many other organizations, are being encouraged to take a developmental approach to quality (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2003; Stensaker, 2007). This implies that organizations, as well as individuals within those organizations, are continually changing and learning as they cope with new

situations and expectations (Gordon and Owen, 2008). The ability of any organization to adapt effectively is influenced by its culture.

Although the word "Culture" is complicated it could be identified, according to Harvey and Stensaker (2008), as behavioral (shared, learned human behavior, a way of life), normative (ideals, values, or rules for living), functional (the way humans solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together, or mental (a complex of ideas, or learned habits that inhibit impulses and distinguish people from animals).

Culture can be created, influenced and managed, where induction, faculty and staff training, policy initiatives or the university's mission statement are all attempts to manage culture by setting standards and expectations of behavior which are reinforced by reward or disciplinary policies. On the other hand, culture may be more or less controllable or managed but may exert a powerful influence. Critics of this managerialist perspective (Wieck, 1976; Van Maanen and Barley, 1985) tell us that culture is never straightforwardly created or controlled. In large organizations like universities there are likely to be multiple cultures or subcultures competing to operate in the way that they believe is most appropriate (Becher, 1999).

Universities are traditionally organizations in which academics have enjoyed a considerable level of freedom and professional autonomy (Mintzberg (1991). Managers are less able to control how the two primary functions of the university, research and teaching, might operate and are likely to meet considerable resistance when they try. Instead, members of the university community must collaborate to make sense of the changing landscape, begin to understand what works effectively and work together to implement new practices. The challenge is to create an environment in which these activities can take place.

### **Approaches to Quality**

Alternative approaches in applying quality have taken a number of forms. Some universities have adopted ideas from industry. Middlehurst (1999) has made compelling arguments for Total Quality Management as an organizing principle for higher education. Total Quality Management embodies ideas of collegial discussion and consensus-building about processes with a view to reducing inefficiencies or waste. Instead of retrospectively evaluating the success of an activity with the hope of improving it in the future (the assurance model), staff work together to ensure that all activities are designed to minimize any failures from the very start (Yorke, 2000).

However, academics have traditionally enjoyed a high level of autonomy in the classroom and may not always welcome the team-working, consultation and continual information-gathering that are the keystones of Total Quality Management. It is also hard for many universities to develop a clear mission or even a broad institutional consensus about a high quality student experience. It may be hard to include students, employers, parents and other stakeholders in discussions (Silver, 2003). For example, students may be more able to assess the value of their education in enhancing their employability after several years in the workforce (Yorke and Knight, 2000; Williams and Cappucini-Ansfield, 2007).

Learning together as an organization to create a high quality, learner-focused culture implies moving beyond improving existing processes or structures and moving towards a state in which review and reflection are an embedded and internalized way of life (D'Andrea and Gosling, 2005). An effective learning organization recognizes good ideas and expertise at all levels and encourages all members to develop their skills in an environment of trust, honesty and respect (Yorke, 2000).

Quality assurance is not just the latest fashion, but is a remarkably successful management fad (Stenasker, 2005; Harvey and Stenasker, 2008). Accountability requires external scrutiny of institutions and publishable outcomes, while quality enhancement requires that this is linked into a process of continuous quality improvement, at the institutional level, and at the level of the academic discipline (Newton, 2007). This has clear implications for institutions and national agencies, in terms of what one might term 'the rules of engagement'. According to these rules' universities are responsible for quality and standards. They require systems for managing and improving quality, and for meeting accountability requirements. These systems should be robust, transparent and premised on self-evaluation. Stakeholders require accessible information, while national agencies, in addition to conducting quality reviews, have an obligation to assist institutions in the discharge of their responsibilities.

### **Implications for Policy-Makers and Practitioners**

For many universities, creating an effective learning culture means overcoming a considerable number of barriers including rigid hierarchies, functional divisions and stratified knowledge bases (Avdjieva and Wilson, 2002). D'Andrea and Gosling (2005) argue that collecting data about the student experience of teaching interactions and sharing practices with colleagues must take place in an environment free from the fear of punitive outcomes. Most importantly, developing a real culture of quality through effective learning means moving away from preserving what higher education already is towards an aspiration towards what it could be (Stensaker, 2005). In Europe, approaches to quality towards involve the ideal of searching for excellence through the demonstration and sharing of the best practices (Gordon and Owen, 2008).

Educational institutions are facing a variety of forces that significantly impact their success and sustainability (McCuddy, 2007; McCuddy et al., 2008). These factors include the teaching and learning enterprise, taking appropriate decisions and actions in a fast-paced world, considering the impact of technology on people and organizations. In developing the competencies of students, higher education has increasingly shifted toward a student-centered or student-focused model of teaching/learning and away from a teacher-centered or teacher-focused model (McCuddy and Pirie, 2007; Morse, 2007). Underlying this shift is the profound belief that active participation by the students in the teaching/learning process enhances both commitment to learning and learning outcomes (Morse, 2007).

The whole process of reviewing and redesigning curricula is an exercise in managing change. Given the multiple stakeholders in the educational enterprise, the many forces that impact upon those enterprises, and the organized and complicated activities in which those enterprises engage, the management of curricular change can be a

daunting challenge that can be met by adapting and applying knowledge and techniques.

### **Assessing Quality in Higher Education**

Quality assurance refers to the 'planned and systematic actions [deemed] as necessary to provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality' (Borahan and Ziarati, 2002). For higher education institutions, this requires them to demonstrate responsible actions in their professional practices and demonstrate the results they achieve with the available resources (Jackson, 1998; Harvey, 2006).

The actual measurement of quality is also approached differently by various stakeholders. While some prefer to utilize quantitative data to produce quantitative ratings, others prefer to adopt a qualitative approach. While quantitative ratings facilitate performance comparability, especially on a longitudinal basis, they generally fail to provide any clear explanation as to why certain ratings are given. As such they may be more suitable for quality assurance initiatives. Qualitative data, on the other hand, often provides richer data (Powell et al., 1997), which can more readily inform decision making for quality enhancement purposes. However, it may prove less beneficial when benchmarking performance. A quality management program that utilizes a mixture of both types of data would seem most appropriate for both quality assurance and enhancement purposes (Brookes, 2003; Becket and Brookes, 2005).

### **The UoS Institutional Effectiveness Plan**

In 2004 the University of Sharjah developed an integrated five-year institutional effectiveness plan. The aim of the plan was to ensure the University's ability to achieve and maintain quality in learning and teaching and support facilities. This effectiveness five-year plan was based on the following:

- The University's mission and vision consistent with public accountability and social responsibility and developing innovative responses to rapidly changing environments in learning and teaching.
- Analyses of the available data, resources, and faculty and student feedback.
- The Licensure and accreditation standards set by the Commission of Academic Accreditation in the UAE.

The plan has the following purposes:

- ♦ Bringing all of the University's units into a university-wide effectiveness plan.
- ♦ Guiding the institution toward achieving the University's vision through goals and objectives statements.
- ♦ Reflecting institutional goals and objectives in the development of university activities and the budget.
- ♦ Directing the use of assessment results to improve processes and revise plans.
- ♦ Reporting to the Board of Trustees on the progress toward achieving our goals and objectives.
- ♦ Creating a culture of quality assurance and quality enhancement throughout the University.

## **Methodology**

### **Model of the UOS Effectiveness Plan**

The model for integrated planning and evaluation presented in this section can be best described as the middle ground between a 'top down' and 'bottom up' process. It is in effect a 'steering by engagement' approach as identified in Clark's terminology (Clark 1998, Lillis, 2007, Tsai and Beverton, 2007).

A two-way communications process is an essential component of this model. Formal feedback is provided to departmental self-study teams as to why their recommendations were/were not incorporated in the institutional plans to increase the transparency of the process. The documentation phase essentially captures the outcomes of both the review and planning phases.

### **Phases of the University Institutional Effectiveness Plan:**

The plan covers a period of five years from the academic year 2004/2005 to 2008/2009. The following is an overview of the activities and processes implemented each year.

#### **Year One: Building the Institutional Foundation**

During that phase the University revised its expanded statement of institutional purpose and its core values.

#### **Early Explorations of the Context**

Environmental analyses included the following:

- Analyses of existing student satisfaction surveys.
- Faculty feedback through a survey and meetings.
- Student satisfaction with support services and general education through surveys.
- Available program advisory boards minutes.
- Recommendations from the University Board of Trustees
- Recommendations of the commission for academic accreditation visiting teams.
- Available recommendations of external evaluators.

Examples of the surveys and meetings during the exploration stage are:

1. A descriptive survey of faculty members was undertaken, the aims of which were to:
  - Explore the faculty's perceptions of issues concerning students' academic skills.
  - Explore the relationship between the skills, which are considered essential, and those in which the university offers support to students.
  - Investigate the resources currently available and how they are used.
  - Identify the areas where faculty feel they would value faculty development opportunities.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the data collection and analysis. 170 questionnaires were returned, which represents about 60% of faculty members at the time.

2. A second descriptive survey was carried out on students' views regarding the support that they receive in the development of their academic skills including the general education program. The student survey included all undergraduates. Subsequent open-ended questions focused on the nature of support, where they accessed it, and how effective it had been. 1225 questionnaires were returned from students, which represented a response rate of only 25%. However, the regular semester-wide course evaluation survey usually has a response of over 70% of students.
3. Two university-wide forums attended by more than 70% of faculty members. The first forum was about student advising, while the second forum was about information technology reality and ambition.

### **Interpretation of the Analyses and Needs**

Analysis of the faculty and student survey responses and other available data resulted in the following requirements and needs:

- Faculty development activities in areas related to learning outcomes and assessment and academic accreditation.
- The need to revise and update the existing curricula.
- The need to update the University's General Education Program.
- The establishment of student career development services.
- The need to stimulate extracurricular activities.
- The establishment of a University of Sharjah alumni association.
- The need to stimulate and improve educational support services, such as library resources, IT, etc.
- The need for more transparency in the some policies and procedures such as faculty recruitment and evaluation.
- The need for creating a culture of quality assurance and quality enhancement.
- The need for more effective communication throughout the campus.

### **Evaluation Tools:**

The University is using the following evaluation tools in an attempt to support a transparent and trustful environment:

- Faculty annual evaluation report by faculty.
- Dean and chairperson annual evaluations.
- Annual unit/departmental reports.
- Course evaluations by students.
- Faculty peer observations.

At the end of the academic year all faculty members attended a workshop on learning outcomes and assessment.

### **Year Two: Detailed Plans at the Departmental Level**

Each academic unit created or revised its mission statement and identified its intended educational, research, or service outcomes. The units identified assessment criteria for

evaluation of the plan that reflects the University's mission, goals, and strategic direction. These were submitted to the University administration. During this phase extensive consultation and faculty and staff development took place.

A major four-day faculty development program was organized on outcome based education and assessment and embedding information technology in the learning and teaching. Committees and task forces produced their reports and recommendations on enhancing important activities such as student advising and career development, internship, general education, and an alumni association.

### **Year Three: Implementation of the Plan**

The units began implementation of their plans and monitored its progress. The Institutional Research assisted in this process by conducting surveys and providing data related to student, faculty and staff numbers, student academic performance, performance indicators.

### **Year Four: Establishment of the Annual Institutional Effectiveness Cycle**

This phase witnessed a very active exercise of reviewing the expanded statement of institutional purpose and intended outcomes. Assessment processes were also refined in light of all feedback and analyses of the previous years. This strategic planning exercise engaged all leaders of academic and administrative units, program coordinators and most of the University faculty and staff. Two major and many smaller workshops were organized. The exercise resulted in formulating the University's strategic plan initiative.

The University started implementing the proposed "Advising and Guidance" course for all freshmen. This course is an obligatory university requirement given to students upon joining their first semester of the program. The course includes fifteen modules that introduce to students information about the University of Sharjah, student advising, registration and academic probation, curricula, academic support services, extracurricular activities, and time management and study skills.

### **Year Five: Final Review**

In year five, the institution will produce an end-of-cycle report taking into account any recommendations produced by the previous year's reports, analyses and independent review.

### **Implementation and Monitoring**

In addition to putting plans into action the implementation phase incorporates an annual review of departmental cross-functional plans with each team/committee providing a progress report against the original objectives of its plan and any other recommendations. The reviews are formative rather than summative in approach. There is scope to modify objectives or introduce new objectives on the basis of a changing environment. An institutional progress report is undertaken annually.

## **Engaging the University Community**

The 'steering by engagement' model as mentioned by Lillis (2007) engages the university community represented by the academic and administrative units, the students, and the board of trustees.

The engagement with the academic units takes place at three critical points:

1. The academic units are involved in the initial self studies, the outcomes of which are collated for consideration at the institutional level prior to setting institutional priorities. This provides departments with an opportunity to influence institutional goal setting, highlight their achievements, and identify problematic areas.
2. The academic departments are asked to develop their own plans in support of institutional priorities. Departments have the flexibility to develop their own solutions to the challenges presented as appropriate to their context.
3. The academic department is engaged through the development of personal annual faculty plans which are aligned to their department's objectives. This increases relevance, ownership and maps some responsibility from the department to the individual.

The engagement with the students has taken place at some points such as:

1. Students are involved in the initial stage of planning through surveys and meetings with different levels of the university administration.
2. Students are represented in some college or department councils and committees of students' affairs and activities.
3. Students have organized two regional conferences and large numbers of mini meetings, workshops, etc where they give valuable feedback.

The engagement with the board of trustees takes place regularly through the progress report on almost all university activities. Valuable feedback and recommendations are received from the board and are taken into consideration.

## **Creating Quality Culture**

The faculty and student surveys led to organizing university workshops, where faculty were encouraged to engage in debate around their overall approach to academic skills and their evaluation of and need to embed IT into the learning, and teaching and administrative processes. A university-wide forum and many workshops were organized to discuss the issue of student advising and its impact on student performance. Students were part of the planning and delivery process.

The engagement process helped in supporting good communication throughout the campus.

1. The departmental self studies are undertaken under central guidelines and according to agreed templates. Responsibility for completing the self study rests with the department. It also enhances the chances of weaknesses being identified and addressed.
2. The departmental and institutional review ensures that institutional goals are set on an informed basis. Through a managed communication process departments can see the adequacy or otherwise of their proposed strategies in light of the changes in the environment and perhaps through comparison with other departments.



3. Departments have responsibility for producing their plans in support of institutional goals. This aspect of the process and is guided by central institutional goals. They can develop their own solutions and strategies to meet these goals and this significantly enhances initiatives originating from all levels of the organization.
4. There is a regular progress review system whereby departmental plans are reviewed annually with respect to the objectives set, which again increases responsibility. The personal faculty annual plans increases the responsibility of the individual to assist in the attainment of the departments' goals and are reviewed on an annual basis in tandem with the department's plan.

### **Impact of the Plan on University Activities (Quality Enhancement)**

During the implementation of the plan, follow up and reporting showed many points of improvement or enhancement. There were also some problems that have been dealt with through formative evaluation. Both quantitative and qualitative measurement tools were used. The following is a brief description of improvements in many areas that have a direct or indirect impact on the University's programs, and learning and teaching, and the student learning experience.

#### **Organization**

At the beginning, of the plan implementation of the University was administered by the Chancellor, Assistant Chancellor, and Executive Director for Financial and Administrative Affairs. After one year of implantation, it was obvious that the University administration should be supported so that it could handle all of these activities. The University created new positions for three vice chancellors (for Academic Affairs, the Medical Campus, and Financial and Administrative Affairs), in addition to a Dean for Academic Support Services and the Deanship for Graduate Studies and Research. This new organization came into effect at the third year of the plan. The new positions participated in effective implementation of the plan objectives and consequently, supporting and enhancing different activities as is reflected in enhancing the learning and teaching process.

#### **Teaching and Learning:**

The quality of teaching and learning noticeably enhanced as measured by student satisfaction, faculty/peer observations, and publications.

- All academic programs have established clear objectives and measurable outcomes. Among these are:
- Blended learning using IT and face-to face teaching expanded to more courses that use the Blackboard, multimedia and simulations.
- Many instructors use advanced teaching and learning methodologies, a variety of assessment tools, such as problem solving, case studies, and group discussions.
- The concept of self learning and student-centered activities became more familiar.
- There is a great improvement in reporting teaching and learning activities and assessment in the annual reports of faculty, departments and colleges.
- Students are more satisfied with course evaluation issues such as clarity of course objectives, delivery techniques, and assessment methods.

The Board of Trustees approved the establishment of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning to continue enhancing all teaching and learning activities in the University.

### **New Programs**

The University of Sharjah is characterized by being a comprehensive university offering more than 60 diploma, bachelor and master programs. New programs were created to cope with the market needs as a result of the continuous assessment and analyses. This wide variety of programs was reflected in enhancing the learning and teaching environment by providing more opportunities to students and faculty.

### **Curricula**

Due to the continuous evaluation and assessment of existing program and feedback from committees, stockholders, and reviewers, most of the existing program curricula have been reviewed and updated. For example, the College of Shari'a has completely revised its two programs and developed modified programs that better suit student and community needs. The Department of Civil Engineering has begun introducing courses related to the environment and has changed its name to Civil Engineering and Environment.

### **Strategic Planning**

The strategic planning process was an excellent practice for the University community to widely share ideas on enhancement on almost all university activities and programs.

### **General Education**

The University's General Education Program has been reviewed over two years using feedback from student surveys, employers, alumni, and departments. An updated general education program was implemented that is thought to be better achieving the mission of the University and its programs.

### **Student Advising**

Improving student advising, publication of advising guidelines and organizing awareness events has enhanced intervention strategies and support for "at-risk" students; and assisted in the development of academic support specifically targeting sophomore students.

The newly offered "Advising and Guidance" course has ensured that all new students receive proper information on the University's processes, facilities, and regulations, in addition to their gaining some personal skills. Preliminary feedback from faculty and students indicate that this course has enhanced student performance.

### **Faculty Affairs and Transparency**

The faculty annual plan that is prepared by the faculty member at the beginning of the academic year helped faculty members to organize their activities to maximize their production based on the University's mission and objectives. The faculty annual evaluation is a well-documented transparent process that involves discussion and

feedback from faculty members, the chairperson, the dean, the University Central Committee, and the Chancellor. Indeed, implementing this process has resulted in significant improvement of teaching and learning methodologies, use of information technology, research activities, and community service. The active faculty development programs have had a significant impact in improving teaching and learning, documentation, student assessment, and academic accreditation.

### **Student Academic Performance**

Comparative analyses of student grades and GPA over the last four years has shown interesting results. There was a decrease of 1.4% of the average grade "excellent" at the university level. At the program level, some programs showed an increase in the grade "excellent", while other programs showed a decrease. This can be considered as demonstrating corrective action because the increase in these grades occurred in programs with very low "excellent" grades and vice versa. In addition, student satisfaction was good even in the programs that showed a decrease in the grade "Excellent".

### **Internship**

The newly formed internship and career office improved the internship process as an integral part of academic programs at the University. Successful internship enriches the student's learning with professional practice and fulfills important learning outcomes. Students were generally satisfied with the quality of training achieved in the UAE and abroad.

### **Library and Learning Resources**

The introduced rich learning resources, including online databases and books enriched the teaching and learning process and contributed to improving student performance. Orientation programs organized for faculty and students satisfied library users and encouraged them to visit the library more frequently.

### **Information Technology**

Significant improvements were achieved in the IT infrastructure and applications thereof. These include enhancing IT awareness within the university and community, IT equipment in more than 85% of the classrooms with considered instructor smart with internet access, increasing the data storage by above 250%, doubling the email capacity for faculty and students, and upgrading the network infrastructure. The University also implemented the Banner "Integrated Campus Management System" and Blackboard. These facilities have enhanced many aspects of teaching and learning, including student engagement in self learning, student faculty communication, and a better classroom environment.

### **Community Service**

Students have become engaged in wide variety of community service activities through graduation projects, career development services, internship and others. These activities significantly enhance student learning and career experience as evidenced from student feedback.

## **Student Affairs**

The Deanship of Student Affairs has significantly improved student services, including initiating career development and student counseling, doubling athletic, cultural and social activities and improving student dorms. In feedback from students, there is a clear indication of satisfaction with the services being provided. The counseling services have helped in enhancing and improving the quality of life and educational experience of students, which are important for personal development, academic success and retention.

## **Alumni**

The first activities of the Alumni Association were successful. Employed alumni helped to give their experience to alumni and students. They also helped in locating jobs for their colleagues. Alumni are the ambassadors for the University and are the best reflection of the University's excellence.

## **Discussion**

The challenge for leaders, as Gordon (2002) has identified "is one of adjusting prevailing cultures to secure closer alignment of individual and collective goals." Harvey and Stensaker (2008) argue that successful quality initiatives will depend on investment in the culture and the identity and organizational climate of institutions. They suggest that different universities will respond differently to quality policies and practices according to how their cultures have developed in the past. Examples of different institutional cultures might include responsive quality culture, reactive quality culture, regenerative quality culture, and reproductive quality culture. As Harvey (2007) argues there is no point implementing quality assurance processes if they do not reflect the normal working practices of staff and finding ways of engaging with students that recognize and support their role as co-creators in effective institutional cultures.

Assessing impact is difficult and complex, and requires isolating the quality assurance factor (Harvey, 2006). It would be a mistake to try and identify quantitative factors alone, qualitative analysis is important as well as the appreciation of the interactive processes that convert policy and intention into implemented action. In the case of the University of Sharjah's effectiveness plan, the main impacts identified by the respondents include the changes evident in the review process from one review to the next; improvements in performance indicators; the establishment by institutions of internal quality assurance units and formal processes; faculty feedback; feedback from students indicating positive changes and statements from employers suggesting a perceived improvement in graduate abilities.

Self-evidently, the implementation of quality-directed actions and initiatives does not always proceed smoothly and friction-free. Strategic decisions regarding quality can be characterized as being settled along a continuum of different options, which are defined by at least two poles. A decision might usually benefit certain developments to the detriment of others, leading to trade-off situations (Newton, 2007). In such situations, the decision-makers face the challenge of finding a reasonable order of preferences, which should correspond to the university's overall objectives. Other

commentators (Wieck, 1976; Van Maanen and Barley, 1985) tell us that culture is never straightforwardly created or controlled. In large organizations like universities there are likely to be multiple cultures or subcultures competing to operate in the ways that they believe are most appropriate (Becher, 1989). These subcultures might be disciplinary. Equally, the division might be between the academic staff and their administrative counterparts. New faculty members joining the university will bring different assumptions to the mix, either from other institutions or from their own experiences as students. Faculty development programs are unlikely to fully replace deeper beliefs about what higher education is for and how it should operate.

Faculty members have to be able to trust in a satisfactory appreciation of their commitment and feel that their contributions are not devalued by rigid formal controls. In the same way, students need scope for trying and testing their new knowledge, skills and competences in a fault-tolerant environment. In this regard, mutual trust relies on the expectation that developments cannot be steered in a precisely predetermined way, but that it is safe to count on the endeavours of all participants in the process. Thus, the whole quality process has to be accompanied by trust and confidence-building actions. But even more important than a well-designed system for circulating information is communication throughout the institution.

Adopting a quality culture approach requires two strategic decisions that do not sit comfortably with traditional (quality) management approaches. Firstly, it is necessary to empower all actor groups that hold a stake in the teaching and learning processes (stakeholder-orientation), enabling them to develop their own quality goals, initiatives and measures (within the overall framework defined by the institutional mission) and making productive use of the actors' self-organizational abilities (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2004). Secondly, this depends on a huge amount of trust that these groups are willing and able to support such an endeavor. This means that all members of the university are held responsible for the organizational developments.

## **Conclusion**

As Lillis (2007) stated it is not enough to copy a standardized model of quality assurance and development and hope that a strategy that has already been successful at another university will have similar success in one's own institution. It is necessary to acknowledge and consider the historical, cultural and social characteristics of a certain quality culture and to develop strategies that are adequate for such conditions. Under these conditions, the quality culture approach will have a chance to actually achieve results. During the planning and implementation processes, the University of Sharjah has taken into consideration all such conditions that are related to the environment and its characteristics.

Areas for further attention include developing effective mechanisms for sharing good practices, targeting resources to support enhancement and, importantly, and facilitating more faculty, staff and student engagement with quality enhancement. Of course, the particular mix will vary from institution to institution, as indeed will views about the desired trajectory goals and priorities for further development. There has been a growing awareness of the need to create an environment where assessment and feedback processes are more explicit and accessible for students. This in itself is creating an environment that fosters collaboration and an increased sense of

responsibility for faculty in supporting students in both the content and process of learning.

The University of Sharjah plan has had an impact across the university in terms of awareness, processes and procedures. This has contributed to a range of constructive initiatives, arising from the creativity of faculty in the light of their changed perceptions, which have had an impact at the level of both faculty and student practice and university-wide strategy. This represents a positive shift forward from when the plan started in 2004. The University's community is cognizant of the changes that are already emerging but at the same time recognizes that there are ongoing and new challenges ahead.

## References

- Avdjieva, M. and Wilson, M. (2002). Exploring the development of quality in higher education. *Managing Service Quality*. Vol. 12, No. 6, pp 372 – 383.
- Becher, T (1999). *Academic tribes and territories: intellectual enquiry and the cultures of disciplines*. Buckingham, Open University Press.
- Becket, N. and Brookes, M. (2005). Analysing Quality Audits in Higher Education. *Brookes eJournal of Learning and Teaching*. Volume 1, Issue 2, pp 1 – 12.
- Borahan, N. G. and Ziarati, R. (2002). Developing Quality Criteria for Application in the Higher Education Sector in Turkey, *Total Quality Management*. Vol. 13, No. 7, pp. 913-926.
- Brookes, M. (2003). Evaluating the Student Experience: An Approach to Managing and Enhancing Quality in Higher Education. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education*. Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 1 -9.
- Brookes, M. and Downie, N. (2002). Managing Change: The Value of Student Feedback, EuroCHRIE Congress 2002, Barcelona.
- Clark, B.R. (1998). *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities: Organizational Pathways of Transformation*, Open University Press, New York, NY.
- D'Andrea, V-M. and Gosling, D. (2005). *Improving teaching and learning in higher education: a whole institution approach*. Maidenhead, Open University Publishing/McGraw-Hill Education.
- Gordon, G. (2002). The roles of leadership and ownership in building an effective quality culture. *Quality in Higher Education*. Vol. 8, No.1, pp 97 – 106.
- Gordon, G. and Owen, C. (2007). *Cultures of Quality Enhancement: a short overview of the literature for higher education policy makers and practitioners*.  
[http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/documents/Quality\\_cultures\\_literature\\_review.doc](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/documents/Quality_cultures_literature_review.doc)
- Harvey, L. (2003). Scrap that student survey now. *Times Higher Education Supplement* 12<sup>th</sup> December 2003.
- Harvey, L. (2006). Impact of Quality Assurance: Overview of a discussion between representatives of external quality assurance agencies. *Quality in Higher Education*. Vol. 12, No. 3, pp 287 – 290.

- Harvey, L. (2007). Quality culture, quality assurance and impact: overview of discussions. Embedding Quality Culture in Higher Education: selection of papers from the 1<sup>st</sup> European Forum for Quality Assurance 2007 (available online at: [www.eua.be/fileadmin/user\\_upload/files/Publications/EUA\\_QA\\_Forum\\_publication.pdf](http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/EUA_QA_Forum_publication.pdf))
- Harvey, L. and Stensaker, B. (2008). Quality culture: understandings, boundaries and linkages. *European Journal of Education*. Vol. 43, No. 4, pp 427 – 442.
- Henkel, M. (2004). The demise of a dominant culture? Higher education institutions in transition. *Learning and Teaching in the Social Sciences*. Vol. 1, No. 1, pp 21 – 32.
- Jackson, N. (1998). Academic Regulation in UK Higher Education: part 1 current practice and conceptual frameworks, *Quality Assurance in Education*. Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 5-18.
- Lillis, D. (2007). Steering by Management – Towards an integrated planning and evaluation framework in higher education institutes. Embedding Quality Culture in Higher Education: selection of papers from the 1<sup>st</sup> European Forum for Quality Assurance 2007 (available online at: [www.eua.be/fileadmin/user\\_upload/files/Publications/EUA\\_QA\\_Forum\\_publication.pdf](http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/EUA_QA_Forum_publication.pdf))
- McCuddy, M.K. (2007). “The challenges of educating people to lead in a challenging world”, in McCuddy, M.K., van den Bosch, H., Martz, Wm.B. Jr, Matveev, A.V. and Morse, K.O. (Eds), *The Challenges of Educating People to Lead in a Challenging World*, Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 3-30.
- McCuddy, M.K., Pinar, M., and Gingerich, E. (2007). Using student feedback in designing student-focused curricula. *International Journal of Educational Management*. Vol. 22, No. 7, pp. 611-637.
- McCuddy, M.K. and Pirie, W.L. (2007). “Willingness to innovate: use, misuse, and abuse of student evaluations of instruction”, in McCuddy, M.K., van den Bosch, H., Martz, Wm.B. Jr, Matveev, A.V. and Morse, K.O. (Eds), *The Challenges of Educating People to Lead in a Challenging World*, Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 149-68.
- Middlehurst, R. (1999). Quality enhancement in principle and practice: a case study in leading change. *Tertiary Education and Management*. Vol. 5, No. 1, pp 25 – 48
- Mintzberg, H. (1991). Organisation design: fashion or fit? In Gabbaro, J ed. (1992) *Managing People and Organisations* Harvard Business School Publications, Boston
- Morse, K. (2007). “‘Learning on demand’: the education objective for the knowledge economy”, in McCuddy, M.K., van den Bosch, H., Martz, Wm.B. Jr, Matveev, A.V. and Morse, K.O. (Eds), *The Challenges of Educating People to Lead in a Challenging World*, Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 33-49.
- Newton, J. (2000). Feeding the beast or improving quality?: academic’s perceptions of quality assurance and quality monitoring. *Quality in Higher Education*. Vol. 6, No. 2, pp 153 – 163.
- Newton, J. (2007). What is quality? Embedding Quality Culture in Higher Education: selection of papers from the 1<sup>st</sup> European Forum for Quality Assurance 2007 (available online at: [www.eua.be/fileadmin/user\\_upload/files/Publications/EUA\\_QA\\_Forum\\_publication.pdf](http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/EUA_QA_Forum_publication.pdf))

Powell, A., Hunt, A., and Irving, A. (1997). Evaluation of Courses by Whole Student Cohorts: a case study. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 397-404.

Silver, H. (2003). Does a university have a culture? *Studies in Higher Education*. Vol. 28, No. 2, pp 157 – 169.

Srikanthan, G. and Dalrymple, J. (2003). Developing alternative perspectives for quality in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management*. Vol. 17, No. 3, pp 126 - 136

Srikanthan, G. and Dalrymple, J. (2004). A synthesis of a quality management model for education in universities. *International Journal of Educational Management*. Vol. 18, No. 4, pp 266 - 279

Stensaker, B. (2005). Quality as fashion: exploring the translation of a management idea into higher education. Paper presented to the seminar “Dynamics and effects of quality assurance in higher education – various perspectives of quality and performance at various levels” Douro, October 2005

Stensaker, B. (2007). Impact of quality processes. Embedding Quality Culture in Higher Education: selection of papers from the 1<sup>st</sup> European Forum for Quality Assurance 2007 (available online at: [www.eua.be/fileadmin/user\\_upload/files/Publications/EUA\\_QA\\_Forum\\_publication.pdf](http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/EUA_QA_Forum_publication.pdf))

Tsai, Y. and Beverton, S. (2007). Top-down management: an effective tool in higher education? *International Journal of Educational Management*. Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 6 – 16.

Van Maanen, M. and Barley, S. (1985). Cultural organisation: fragments of a theory in FROST, P et al (eds.) *Organisational culture* Sage, Beverly Hills.

Vettori, O., Lueger, M. and Knassmuller, M. (2007). Dealing with ambivalences – strategic options for nurturing a quality culture in higher education. Embedding Quality Culture in Higher Education: selection of papers from the 1<sup>st</sup> European Forum for Quality Assurance 2007 (available online at: [www.eua.be/fileadmin/user\\_upload/files/Publications/EUA\\_QA\\_Forum\\_publication.pdf](http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/EUA_QA_Forum_publication.pdf))

Weick, K. (1976). Educational organisations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly* Vol. 21, No. 1, pp 1 – 19.

Williams, J. and Cappucini-Ansfield, G. (2007). Fitness for purpose? National and international approaches to publicising the student voice. *Quality in Higher Education*. Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 159 - 172

Yorke, M. (2000). Developing a quality culture in higher education. *Tertiary Education and Management* Vol. 6, No.1, pp 19 – 36.

Yorke, M. and Knight, P. (2004). *Learning, curriculum and employability in higher education*. Routledge