Evaluation plan

The history of quality management in the private sector shows an interesting evolution along two dimensions. First, the dominant orientation has been broadened from the product to the total system of production and delivery, and from product-related criteria to external criteria (for example, the environmental impact of products and production processes). Second, an evolution of views and practices has taken place concerning the involvement of various types of actors.

These developments point to an increasing complexity of the quality management function. Therefore, the first aim of this paper is to examine the implications of this evolution for the professionalization of this function. (Dick 2001) The private and the public sector have, withrespectto quality management and evaluation, followed their own lines of development. Even the key concepts--quality management and evaluation--have a different meaning, especially with respect to the relation between diagnosis and intervention.

However, their basic question is the same: how can we assess realized performance and use the results to improve future performance? Besides, the boundaries between the private and the public sector are blurring more and more (Godfroij & Nelissen, 1993) and both sectors try to learn lessons from the other. Therefore, the second aim of this paper is to explore the relevance of the above mentioned questions for evaluation in the public sector.

The relevance of private sector evaluation approaches for public sector organizations should be related to similarities and differences between the two sectors with respect to their targets and success criteria, their client systems, products and services, influence of stakeholders, and requirements with respect to publicaccountability. For example, compared to private enterprises, the products and services of public organizations are often less concrete and specific, and processes have to meet criteria other than technical efficiency.

For public organizations, the set of relevant stakeholders is more differentiated, client systems are often more diffuse and anonymous, and feedback processes from client groups can be more indirect and complicated. Because of these differences, public organizations have to be appraised by other and often more complex standards than do private organizations, such as equal accessibility, equity, and democracy. This suggests that public sector performance has to meet more diffuse and diverse criteria, and can be judged less easily.

(Airasian 2006) On the other hand, the required performance of public organizations can be regulated quite explicitly. Procedures are often defined more clearly, with a view to accountability and democratic control. And because governments today have huge financial problems, financial criteria are often very specific. Thus, clients, products, and processes of public organizations are often clearly defined, qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

Furthermore, private enterprises also have to take into account more than just economic and technical requirements and often use quality management systems, which pay attention to internal social factors as well as societal claims and standards. Thus, the contrast between public and private organizations is only limited. In the field of evaluation, the challenge is basically the same, although public sector evaluation can be more complicated.

For private enterprise, the market is supposed to be the most effective and efficient mechanism for the selection between good and poor performers. The price mechanism combines quality and efficiency criteria and reflects the added value of the products or services in the eyes of the buyers. Thus, at an aggregated level looking at profit figures is a clear and simple way of evaluation. This method has, however, little explanatory value.

In order to discern causes of underperformance, quality-related factors and efficiency-related factors should be assessed separately. While efficiency evaluation looks at the cost-generating activities, quality evaluation--the focus of this paper--starts with the product itself. The evolution of quality management in the profit sector started many decades ago as quality control at the level of the finished product--defining quality standards at the product level and comparing the product characteristics with these standards.

It took some time before the idea gained ground that the performance (profits) could be raised significantly by shifting attention to the steps in the production process where product deficiencies (and costs) are generated. This brought into vision the distinct process phases as well as the employees contributing to the process. Quality management began to pay attention to the role of the actors involved in production and distribution processes, and to the system of primary and supporting processes as a whole. It is now widely accepted that quality management should have a broad scope: total quality management.

References

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