**Bureaucracy: the enemy of a quality culture**

This paper contends that the bureaucratic structure commonly found in higher education organisations, favoured for its ability to manage complex work in large organisations, is an organisational form unsuited to embedding a quality culture. The writer argues that this organisational form characterised by job specialisation and rigid lines of demarcation, promotes individual as opposed to collective efforts and as such is incapable of supporting a quality culture, which for the purposes of this paper, is understood to be a culture capable of meeting the needs of all stakeholders.

Bureaucracy, as applied in higher education institutions, possesses features that set it apart from the more common form of bureaucracy, machine bureaucracy. In the machine bureaucracy, the important decisions are made at the top, while, at the bottom, standardised procedures are used to exercise control. (Weber, 1962) However, in institutions of higher education there exists what Mintzberg describes as a professional bureaucracy.

The professional bureaucracy, unlike the more traditional bureaucracy, assigns authority based on knowledge. This results in increased autonomy and self-regulation among academics through internalised professional standards, which effectively replace external rules, controls and top-down authority systems typical of the traditional machine bureaucracy. (Mintzberg, 1983)

So how do the practices that support the professional bureaucracy model in higher education institutions run contrary to the ideals that underpin a quality culture and what, if anything, can universities and colleges do to address this problem?

In the following paper the author will examine features of a professional bureaucracy that render it incapable of supporting a quality culture and suggest methods of organisational redesign that can result in the required paradigm shift. These will be discussed under four main headings; *Structure*, *Culture, Leadership* and *Staff Development*

**The European Higher Education context**

When the Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999, it marked the commitment of 29 countries to establishing, by 2010, a coherent and cohesive European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The principles that underpinned the Bologna Accord were:

- Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- Adoption of a system of two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate
- Establishment of a system of credits such as European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)
- Promotion of mobility by overcoming legal and administrative obstacles
- Promotion of an overall European dimension in higher education
- Promotion of European co-operation in Quality Assurance.

At the follow up bi-annual meetings in Prague, Berlin and most recently Bergen, Ministers of the now 45 signatories committed themselves to advancing the social dimension and removing obstacles to mobility as well as making progress on:

- Implementing the agreed standards and guidelines
- Implementing national frameworks of qualifications
- Awarding and recognising joint degrees
- Creating opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education.

The commitments made by the signatories at the Bergen summit have placed the quality assurance agenda centre stage and it is thus that we find ourselves at the first all-Europe forum on embedding a quality culture in higher education. Universities and higher education institutions are charged with developing a common understanding on how best to achieve verifiable internal and external processes of quality assurance throughout Europe. The process of quality enhancement in our institutions will require significant reform, which, the writer argues, can only be brought about by radical changes in both structure and culture. This challenge is all positive as the Bologna process offers institutions of higher education the chance to 'transform' themselves into structures that are fit for purpose capable of assuring the employability of graduates and the growth of the knowledge economy throughout Europe. In the higher education context, constantly striving to achieve the highest standards is not new as it is natural for institutions to have academic excellence and high quality as their ultimate goal. Achieving these goals was easier in a time of abundant resources and favourable demographics. The environment has changed and institutions are now facing decreasing enrolments and diminishing revenues while costs and competition for students are increasing. The extent to which higher education has been impact by socio-political climate changes is highlighted in the following quotation from Robertson:

> "Universities must now maintain standards despite attenuated resources; educate a more diverse range of students; introduce more flexible curricula, including new forms of learning delivery and assessment; teach and research more intensively; prepare students for employment more effectively; contribute to improved economic competitiveness and to local economic success; and replace public investment with the merchant's penny whenever they are able." (Robertson, 1997:88)

In a changing environment this ambitious goal has to be achieved after consideration of all stakeholder perspectives, so that the change process is constructively informed.

**How then can we realise the Bologna/Bergen objectives?**

The writer argues that the establishment of a quality culture in an institution of higher education is dependent on the extent to which change is effected in four main areas:

1. Structure
2. Culture
3. Leadership
4. Staff Development

**Sub context: Defining quality**

Defining quality in higher education is difficult but three definitions appear to have gained currency: quality as value for money, quality as fit for purpose and quality as transforming.

Harvey and Green (1993) expand on those definitions.

1. Quality as value for money. This definition hinges on the extent to which the institution is accountable to the public and makes best use of taxpayers' money. The value is measured in terms of the productivity that is producing more graduates using less resources and more research per head of academic staff.
2. Quality as fit for purpose. This definition focuses on the extent to which the institution is capable of achieving it stated or implied mission paramount among which has to be to ensure that an effective learning environment is provided for students.
3. Quality as transforming. Here quality is viewed as the process whereby student's perceptions of their worlds are transformed through their learning, allowing them to better apply their knowledge. In this type of environment the teacher's role has to be 'transformational' as well as instructional.

Biggs argues that the three definitions can be further categorised as retrospective or prospective, depending on the kind of quality assured. Retrospective quality assurance (QA) looks back to what already has been done and makes a summative judgment against external standards. The agenda is managerial as opposed to academic with accountability being the priority. Prospective quality looks forward focusing on assuring quality now and in the future throughout the learning organisation. (Biggs, 2002)

In searching for a definition of quality for higher education, one is automatically directed to the writings of Deming, Crosby and Shewhart. Definitions of quality as it relates to products are manifold with suggestions such as 'fitness for purpose', 'zero defects' and 'meeting customer requirements' being the mostly commonly used.

Shewhart states that,

> "In general, the quality of a thing is that which is inherent in it so that we cannot alter the quality without altering the thing". (Shewhart, 1980, p.38)

He further reinforces this approach when he points out that,

> "Quality, in Latin qualitas, comes from qualis, meaning "how constituted" and signifies such as the thing really is."

Building a quality culture implies a shared understanding of what constitutes quality, although reaching that shared understanding can be an arduous journey. In education it is difficult to find an agreed definition, especially among those who believe that the outcomes of education in general, and teaching in particular, are more qualitative than quantitative. How to define and measure learning or effective teaching is, the author argues, a question that still baffles many academics and continues to be one of the most contentious issues facing higher education. In industry, quality is often measured in terms of inputs and outputs and this is the model that tends to be chosen for education also. We can attempt to measure inputs in terms of students, with reference to their abilities and qualifications, inputs also as relates to course quality, variety and currency and outputs in terms of dropout rates, award levels and graduate employment rates. The input/output method for measuring quality is undoubtedly more appropriate for the manufacturing industry but despite the lack of enthusiasm on the part of university heads to adopt industry-like standards, it can be argued that the experiences in industry can teach us in higher education a lot about what constitutes

best practice. Experience within the manufacturing sector has taught the importance of shared vision, co-operation, and ownership of the processes of quality improvement. It is this shared ownership of the vision and values of an organisation that is instrumental in developing a pan-organisational commitment to the achievement of a quality culture and sustaining an environment where continuous improvement is not only facilitated but actively supported. This approach within industry only came about after a lengthy process of reactive behaviour on the part of manufacturing firms faced with the challenge of global competition.

In the 1980s United States manufacturers facing competition from successful economies like Japan were forced to find ways to reduce costs and improve productivity and quality. In the rush to implement 'quality', companies adopted the approaches and the mantras of the recognised experts like W. Edwards Deming. Mistakes were made when managers wrongly assumed that the responsibility for delivering quality rested with the workers at the frontlines, the shop floor workers. The perceived role of the manager was simply to put in place the measurement systems that would identify failures. Posters with exhortations to 'get it right first time, every time' became the norm and books written by experts on the subjects lined the shelves of senior management offices. This was a 'bottom up' approach to the assurance of quality supported by top down enforcement of the measurement of deviations.

The analogy of organisations 'sheep dipping' their employees in quality washes was particularly apt and there was much consternation when, after the initial colouring, the dye disappeared. It was only after many years of failure that eventually organisations realised quality was everyone's concern but management's responsibility. This led to what is now known as the TQM or Total Quality Management movement, a movement which arose out of the ashes of the failed 'sheep dipping' approaches. Covey, when examining the failed approaches, comments,

> "I have seen the consequences of attempting to shortcut this natural process of growth often in the business world, where executives attempt to "buy" a new culture of improved productivity, quality, and morale and customer service with strong speeches, smile training, and external interventions.... But they ignore the low-trust climate produced by such manipulations" (Covey, 1991, p.266)

Only when the essential contribution of every person involved in the supply chain of goods or services to customers was recognised, could any real attempts be made at designing and delivering quality. It was this emphasis on individual contributions, and the parallel process of assigning collective responsibility, that was the immoveable foundation of successful Total Quality Management approaches.

One industry which experienced this painful learning process was the automobile industry in the United States. The 'big three' manufacturers Ford, Chrysler and General Motors saw their sales and profits fall when faced with competition from Japan. The Japanese challenged the previous market dominance of the American car makers in the late 1970s and 1980s because, unlike their American competitors, the Japanese were able to give the customers what they wanted, cheap cars that used less fuel. Quality was not an accident but rather the result of good management practices. The Japanese proved this by opening car manufacturing plants in the United States, using American workers, and maintaining the same level of quality they had in Japan. When looking to the manufacturing sector for evidence of best practice in this regard, one is drawn to the Toyota Corporation model. In factories around the world, Toyota consistently makes the highest quality cars with the fewest defects of any competing manufacturer, while using fewer man hours, less on-hand inventory, and half the

floor space of its competitors. (Federation of Automobile Dealer Associations) The Toyota story is an amazing tale of how leadership in quality has resulted in transformational change within the organisation, as evidenced by Toyota's steadily taking market share from price-cutting competitors, earning far more profit than any other car manufacturer and winning the praise of business leaders worldwide. In his book 'The Toyota Way - Fourteen principles for improving process quality', Dr. Kenneth Liker shares his insights into the foundational principles at work in the Toyota culture. He explains how the Toyota Production System evolved as a new paradigm of manufacturing excellence, transforming businesses across industries and how its success hinged upon Toyota's ability to foster employee involvement at all levels.

> "In the Toyota Way of doing things, what matters when improving quality is enabling the process and the people. You can spend a great deal of money on the latest and greatest and have no impact whatsoever on quality. Instead, you need to constantly reinforce the principle that quality is everyone's responsibility throughout the organisation" (Liker, 2003, p.1391)

The Toyota message is consistent: Do the right thing for the company, its employees, the customer and the society as a whole. This long-term philosophy is the guiding principle that determines the company's continuous quest to offer the best in quality and service to its customers, employees and stockholders. In fostering a culture of all employee involvement at Toyota, the pivotal role of each and every employee was emphasised and a 'lean' organisational structure that both required and supported interdependence and collective efforts was established.

The cornerstone of the now replicated Toyota Model was collective responsibility. This concept, as identified by Hofstede (Hofstede, 1996), is a way of building a culture where people are expected to serve the group to which they belong and where group work and teamwork are rewarded. The adoption of this approach in the troubled manufacturing sector in the 1980's resulted in the toppling of the hierarchical structures where demarcation lines sabotaged any attempts at co-ordination to be replaced by leaner, meaner and more organic systems where responsibility for the delivery of quality was everybody's business. Industry captains moved down from ivory towers to be closer to the shop floor where their products were produced, thereby reinforcing the ideal of community and collective responsibility. This was easy because the alternative for companies was chronic illness followed by a slow death.

How then can this experience from the manufacturing industry inform our plans for introducing quality systems into higher education institutions? Why can't the lessons of the manufacturing industry in the eighties be used in higher education to avoid repeating the same mistakes? The answer: "It's the structure, stupid!"

**Structure**

Structure refers to the formalising of relationships, roles and responsibilities to organise work. The inherent flexibility and adaptability of an organisations structure determines how responsive it is to changes in the environment and stakeholders needs. How responsive is the bureaucratic structure in this regard?

Bureaucracy, although associated now in the media with delays, inefficiencies and red tape, has, as evidenced by its widespread use, continued to be a popular organisational form. Bureaucracy literally means 'rule by office or officials' and it is a theory primarily associated with the German sociologist, Max Weber (Weber, 1962).

Bureaucracy is based on a legal-rational type of authority and its organisational form is characterised by job specialisation, a specific authority hierarchy, formal sets of rules and regulations and rigid, inflexible personnel promotion criteria. Weber, when using the word bureaucracy, was concerned with how work was divided, coordinated and controlled in large organisations performing complex tasks. This structure was both impersonal and rational, eliminating the possibility of nepotism or whim thereby guaranteeing fairness. Bureaucracy, for Weber, emphasised speed, precision, regulation, clarity, reliability and efficiency. This would be achieved through creating a fixed set of tasks, imposing detailed rules, regulations and procedures, and monitoring through hierarchical supervision. This is still the structure of choice for many government bodies and agencies and most higher education institutions. The greatest virtue and probably defining characteristic, of bureaucracy, according to Weber, was as an institutional method for applying rules to specific cases thereby making the actions of government fair and predictable.

In this original *machine bureaucracy*, control was exercised through, rules, technology and the supervisor's command. This ensured that the behaviour of individuals within large complex stable organisations would be predictable. Since that time, environmental conditions have changed and authority within bureaucratic structures is increasingly based on knowledge. In response to this change, there has emerged what has now become known as the *professional bureaucracy.*

It is this variation in bureaucracy that is most commonly found in universities and colleges of higher education. In a professional bureaucracy, the central coordination mechanism is the standardisation of skills and qualifications and the key part of the organisation is the handling of knowledge by academics through teaching and research. This is referred to by Mintzberg (Mintzberg, 1979), as the 'operating core'. Rational discipline then becomes internalised by professional staff, like teachers, doctors or accountants, through a process of socialisation rather than being imposed externally. Self-regulation based on professional standards replaces external rules, controls or authority from above. Professional bureaucracies modify the principle of centralised control and thus allow their staff greater *autonomy.*

In his treatise on professional bureaucracies, Mintzberg argues that they are inflexible structures only suited to producing standard outputs in a stable environment. Professional bureaucracies depend for survival on the 'pigeonholing' process which assigns academics to specific slots based on their training, skills and specialisations. Recruitment in professional bureaucracies tends to be based on paper qualifications that appear to support institutional aims and objectives and the system affords very little flexibility in this regard. In Ireland, higher education organisations recruit teachers with professional qualifications that are discipline- specific but many still place no requirement on their personnel to have any proven skills, training in either teaching or education. To this day, some institutions still do not even mention expertise in teaching and learning as a 'desirable' alongside the traditional paper qualifications in advertisements for teaching positions. Yet, when presented with greater demands for accountability and transparency from stakeholders, higher education establishments are forced to develop and embed internal processes of quality assurance that

are robust enough to meet external audit requirements. In measuring quality in higher education, the focus turns to teachers and 'teaching quality'. When managers in universities and colleges focus on measuring the quality of teaching, they find that the self-directed autonomous specialists that they assiduously recruited appear happy to work as individuals and seem unconcerned about making changes to their work practices. Tensions between academic staff and college management have been the source of many writings on the subject, with academics claiming that managers do not value teaching and learning but simply want to 'bean count'.

Faced with this challenge how can our educational establishments respond?

As a teacher, I believe that transformations in structure, culture and leadership have to happen. The bureaucratic structures that are in common use not only support individual efforts but discourage collective efforts or risk taking. Promotion based solely on paper qualifications has resulted in organisations with senior management whose leadership skills have not been developed. Managers in a bureaucracy make decisions using predetermined processes and procedures that tend to be impersonal in nature and do not require the use of individual judgment. The hierarchical nature of the structure ensures that power and responsibility, although somewhat dispersed, tend to remain at the top of the organisation. The 'them and us' culture is therefore supported with academics feeling that decisions are imposed from above and more often than not, because of their autonomous jobs, those same academics can choose to ignore them.

How then can we build a structure in organisations that would support ongoing continuous improvement and encourage innovation and change?

In order to replicate the 'Toyota model' and benefit from the potential synergies that accompany it, what universities and colleges need to do is to create small cohesive units that foster interdependence and imply co-ordination of activities. Colleges who adopt this 'college within a college' approach have the opportunity to make use of the skills the specialist academics who have a preference for self-direction and autonomy, within flexible structures made up of smaller collaborative interdisciplinary groups. Such groups should be interdependent and essentially small 'learning organisations'. Huismann argues that Mintzberg's *adhocracy* is a more appropriate structure during turbulent times. Adhocracies rely on mutual adjustment as the key coordinating mechanism and prevent in so far as possible any form of standardisation. Management is primarily rooted in project and integration initiatives and less on hierarchical control. Administration, structure and strategy formulation are ad hoc and often temporary in nature. The principle of mutual adjustment facilitates design structures that are organic, decentralise selectively and use horizontal specialisation. (Huisman, 2006)

Realising the type of structure envisaged by Mintzberg requires fundamental change within our organisations, change that would have to be led by transformational leaders operating in cultures that support collectivism and teamwork.

**Culture**

Organisational Culture is "the collection of relatively uniform and enduring values, beliefs, customs, traditions and practices that are shared by an organisation's members, learned by new recruits and transmitted from one generation of employees to another" (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2004, p.643)

According to Daft (Daft, 1998) culture in every organisation provides employees with a sense of organisational identity and generates a commitment to beliefs and values that are larger than themselves. The culture in an organisation generally comes from the early founder or leader who articulates and implements particular ideas and values as a vision, philosophy or business strategy.

Cultures serve two critical functions in organisations:

1. to integrate members so that they know how to relate to one another, and
2. to help the organisation adapt to the external in the external environment.

The former, Daft calls *internal integration* and it ensures that members of an organisation develop a collective identity that allows them to work together effectively. The culture determines how people communicate within organisations, what behaviours are encouraged or discouraged and how power and status is distributed.

The latter, Daft refers to as *external adaptation,* is a measure of how well the organisation meets it goals and interfaces with external stakeholders. He also writes about the importance however of *culture strength* in the achievement of organisational goals. *Culture strength* refers to how strongly organisational members agree on the importance of certain values. If widespread consensus exists around the importance of those values, the culture is cohesive and strong; if little agreement exists the culture is weak. (Daft, 1998)

Research among corporate cultures highlighted the importance of the existence of both internal integration and external adaptation in culture strength. The research carried out by Kotter and Hessett and mentioned in Daft, found that a strong culture that does not encourage adaptation to the external environment is not guaranteed success.

Bureaucratic organisations grow *bureaucratic cultures* which have an *internal focus* and an orientation towards a stable environment and preserving the status quo. This organisational culture supports methodical approaches to doing business as employees follow well-established practices in the pursuit of goals. In Weber's model of a bureaucracy, personal involvement is low but is outweighed by consistency, conformity and collaboration among employees in adhering to rigid work practices. However, this type of culture would have low levels of external adaptability and hence would not support an environment where responsiveness and adaptability are crucial to meeting stakeholders' needs. When the goal is to embed a quality culture in an organisation, responsiveness to changing stakeholder needs is essential.

The vision of an organisation that could adapt on demand such as Mintzberg's adhocracy is achievable only if a culture is developed to support adaptability. The type of culture required is rooted in creativity and innovation at all levels within the organisation ensuring that optimal solutions to problems are sought and found.

This type of culture can be referred to as an *adaptability/entrepreneurial culture* and is characterised by strategic focus on the external environment through developing an inherent

flexibility to meet changing customer needs. This culture encourages norms and beliefs that support the capacity of the organisation to detect, interpret and translate signals from the environment into new behaviour responses (Daft, 1998). The challenge for higher education organisations is to bring about a paradigm shift that results in the transformation of a bureaucratic culture to an adaptability/entrepreneurial one more prevalent in industry. The success or failure of the organisation in this regard hinges on its leadership. What is clear regarding culture is that, once established, culture becomes both pervasive and firmly embedded. It is these features of culture that will guarantee the ongoing success of a well established quality culture but which also present the greatest challenge for leaders attempting to change or transform their individual organisations. Embedding a quality culture in an organisation requires that the leader both understands the mission and values of the organisation and possesses the skills to lead the organisation's staff on the journey towards the achievement of the shared mission and goals.

**Leadership**

If we agree that organisational culture is underpinned by the value system, then organisational values are developed and strengthened by *value based leadership.*

Value based leadership is characterised in the relationship between a leader and followers that is based on shared, strongly internalised values that are advocated and acted upon by the leader. It is the leader, through his or her everyday behaviours, rituals, ceremonies, symbols, organisational systems and policies that influences cultural and ethical values. Great leaders make for great organisations as evidenced in the success of organisations like Herb Kelleher's Southwest Airlines, the most consistently profitable airline in the U.S. airline industry. Southwest believes that treating your customers and your employees well are equally important. Kelleher's behaviour reinforces this as he has earned a reputation for remembering the first names of thousands of his workers and he has been known to visit employees from the lowest levels in his company when they are sick. (Daft, 1998)

How then does higher education fare when developing leaders to lead transformational change?

Again we return to the bureaucratic structure which is designed to eliminate the need for judgment in decision making by having compliant employees who make decisions according to specified behaviours and codes. This feature of bureaucracy ensures that its leaders and managers are never encouraged to 'grow up' as it is only through risk taking in decision making that innovation and transformation can happen. In a bureaucracy it is preferable to stick to the tried and tested habits and practices as it is against these metrics that performance is assessed and promotions awarded. Entrepreneurial middle managers run the risk of losing their positions if they endeavour to either think or step 'outside the box' or the 'pigeonhole'. In order to address what is a gaping hole in organisational skills, a new approach to staff recruitment and development must be put in place. In today's changing environment maintaining the status quo will render the organisation unable to respond to shifts in demands in the environment. It is this challenge of leading higher education organisations during times of momentous change that is addressed by Ramsden in 'Learning to Lead in Higher Education' (Ramsden, 2002)

Ramsden emphasises his commitment to the notion of transformational leadership. He defines this as "a form of leadership which is held to be appropriate to the dynamic environment of the 'learning organisation' in an external context of rapid change it is a value

driven from of leadership which engages followers through inspiration, exemplary practice, collaboration, spontaneity, and trust'( Ramsden, 2002, p.66). Transformational leaders foster faculty development and equip people with the skills and confidence to solve their own problems together effectively. The leadership strategies are obvious in their active communication of educational values and beliefs, their never-ending involvement with their colleagues in cooperative planning, celebrating joint achievements and using appointments procedures to support cultural change. 'Like good teaching, in which both clear objectives and independence are important for good learning, good educational leadership requires directive strategies as well as enabling ones'. Ramsden maintains that transformational leadership is about sharing leadership, a concept which fits particularly well with the basic processes of scholarship since higher education is about transforming and empowering students through enhancing their knowledge and skills. He provides a model of how this theory can be applied in practice. He does this by dividing the practice of academic leadership into four central academic leadership responsibilities:

1. Vision, strategy and planning
2. Enabling academic people
3. Recognising and developing performance
4. Learning to lead and improving university leadership

Ramsden offers many suggestions as to how each of these responsibilities can be shouldered by the leaders such as focusing, when planning strategy, on positive, desired, ideal futures as opposed to problems, past mistakes and negative reactions. He further points out that the process of strategic planning never ends, that it is a process not an event. In emphasising that the only vision that people believe in is their vision, he encourages leaders to listen to their colleagues and find out about shared aspirations and in doing so discover common patterns. In addressing the 'enabling academic people' leadership responsibility he provides valuable insights into the ways in which leaders can influence the improvement of teaching and learning in their colleges. This focus on the core activity of our institutions, the teaching and learning is central to the achievement of a quality culture and leads the author to the last piece of the quality culture puzzle, investment in staff development.

**Staff Development**

In the previous section, the challenges associated with assuring quality in a professional bureaucracy were highlighted. The autonomous nature of the work of the specialist pigeonholed within the structure supports endemic resistance to change. Robbins (2001) differentiates between individual and organisational resistance to change. Individual sources of resistance are habit, the need for security, fear of the unknown, selective information processing and myopia (inability to look into the future). Most of the resistance is rooted in a fear of the future. Gibbons (1998) also contends that many academics view the emphasis on accountability in higher education as an attack on institutional autonomy. He further contends that the opposite of accountability is trust and that the increased demands for accountability in higher education are the result of a loss of public trust in higher education. Organisational resistance to change is often evidenced in what is referred to a *Structural Inertia,* a feature once again of structures in higher education. Organisations can go some way to managing the resistance to change if they recognise that change is a learning process- one in which everyone in the organisation has to be developed to allow them to adjust to changing structures and cultures.

In this regard, the recently announced Strategic Innovation Fund by the Irish government is evidence of government commitment to bring about radical change in higher education in Ireland. In the author's opinion, the change envisioned will be achieved through widespread staff and organisational development. Investment in training and development is the key to unlock the creativity and imprisoned innovation in our institutions of higher education. Autonomy, whilst on one hand facilitating individualistic approaches to work in poorly led organisations, also holds the key to innovation and creativity. Autonomous thinkers and workers are confident in their own abilities to self-direct towards the achievement of goals that they value. This self-direction under the stewardship of a transformational leader can result in levels of innovation and change previously considered impossible to achieve in academia.

Academics are highly qualified creative people who have the potential to use their abilities to subtly sabotage all efforts to achieve cultural change and reform if they do not share the leaders' vision of the future. Academics have witnessed momentous changes in our higher education organisations over the past ten years due to widening participation and diversity. In general, teachers have responded by adapting in their own ways to the challenges presented but there has been a glaring absence of coherent strategy around the upskilling of teachers to deal with these challenges. If the organisational structures favoured by our higher education institutions have been deemed incapable of supporting the quality culture movement, prompting radical change in this area, then surely it follows that teachers and academics need to be developed also to allow them to play their part in the achievement of the quality culture ideals. Investment in staff development holds the key to realising a true quality culture and enhancing the experience of all learners in higher education. Staff development, alongside cultural and structural reform, can result in staff willingly and constantly assessing the quality of their own teaching against standards based on best practice. It is preferable to have a well trained teacher design and deliver his or her own method of quality assessment, once trained in the skills and methods of teaching, than have an external agent attempt to measure what is happening in the classroom. Individual standards for the delivery of quality are best set by motivated teachers, who feel valued within their organisations and who understand, and are committed to, the organisational values, vision and goals. Managers may shy away from this because of a natural distrust of self-regulation which they would view as not being amenable to scrutiny from external stakeholders. However, teachers who truly see their roles as vocational get their payoff everyday by assessing the success of their teaching methods against stated learning outcomes. They don't need written feedback or questionnaires, as understanding can be read on the faces of students as they sit before them in class. Anyone who has taught knows the satisfaction that is derived from seeing students experience that 'light bulb' moment when the teacher's explaining skills clarify the muddiest point.

The outcomes of teaching are often more qualitative than quantitative but, in an environment that calls for robust processes of internal quality assurance, supported by external auditing, invariably there is a rush to count and/or tick boxes. It is often the case that what is measured is determined by convenience as much as importance, as it is much easier to develop and collect 'quantitative' measures of teaching and learning than it is to develop truly valid and reliable tools that assess learning outcomes and teaching quality from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. Deming (1982) when discussing the idea of 'profound knowledge', observed that, without context, data and information is unimportant. When assessing the quality of teaching and learning it is essential that information is collected and presented in a way that reflects the link between 'what' is being measured and the 'why' of measurement.

Failure to take account of this often results in institutions concentrating on measurements linked to inputs and outputs set against funding arrangements. Qualitative and quantitative measurements that are developed within the context of the organisations mission, vision, values and goals result in information being gathered that can be used to inform changes, thereby allowing organisations to respond to the changing needs of all stakeholders.

Who is best qualified or placed to measure both the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of the learning environment?

Like the workers in the manufacturing plants of the eighties it is those at the coalface, the academics. Institutional leadership can develop within all staff a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for institutional goals by investing in staff development on an ongoing basis. Specialist academics are willing to self-direct and it is that self same autonomy which under bureaucratic structures can present barriers to change, that can act as a driver for innovation and change when investment in staff development creates a culture of trust. This self-direction by individual teachers can be supported by the ongoing practice of self-reflection among academics as espoused by Schon (1983).

Reflective practice which informs teaching is what Biggs (2002) describes as 'prospective quality assurance' and is the key to quality enhancement in our learning organisations. Christensen (1991) claims that 'people live life forward but understand it backward' and this is exactly why the process of reflection supports constructive alignment. Quality teaching means trying to enact the aims of the institution by setting up a delivery system that is aligned to those aims. Teachers who encourage students to give them feedback and who adjust their teaching approach in response to feedback are practising critical reflection, the most accurate and effective quality measurement of all. Critical self reflection brings to the quality enhancement process a bottom up approach that allows academics to retain control of the classroom, a domain that they believe is primarily theirs and theirs alone. This bottom up approach can yield success when individual organisational members are encouraged to take ownership of, and responsibility for, their own quality in a spirit of teamwork and collaboration. This approach draws on the work of Senge (Senge 1990, Senge et al, 1999). Senge argues that where industrial corporations exist in turbulent environments, their organisation has to be capable of continual change. This responsiveness to change is rarely achieved by top managers or leaders driving change from the top down but rather by a planned process of staff development which enables staff to be actively involved in building their own capabilities to respond to change. This is what Senge refers to as the 'learning organisation'. In his 1999 study Martin shows that universities tend to ignore Senge's advice and endeavour to drive change from above. The study confirmed an ever-widening gulf between staff who felt that leaders lacked vision and imposed unworkable changes, and leaders who felt that staff were intransigent and resistant to change. This gulf was exacerbated by the lack of meaningful communication between leaders and staff, creating vacuums in which fear can grow. For universities and colleges to become like Senge's 'learning organisations' they would have to make the shift from demanding compliance to encouraging commitment. Continuous investment in staff is crucial to achieving this commitment to change.

**Conclusion**

If we are to aspire to develop a higher education arena in Europe that recognises humans as 'lifelong learners' then the objective of embedding a quality culture within higher education is a *journey* as opposed to a *destination.* And so, here we stand at a crossroads in higher education in Europe. Widening participation and increased diversity among learners have forced our learning organisations to adapt incrementally in response to changes in stakeholder requirements. The speed and extent of change in higher education has reached a point where incremental improvements to now outdated structures and processes will no longer make the grade. The Bologna process offers higher education the chance to radically reform resulting in transformed institutions capable of advancing a knowledge economy.

Ramsden (1998, p.141) maintains that the task of leadership is to gain commitment to a shared vision and then to energise action. The shared vision of a European Higher education arena that delivers on the Bologna principles is contingent on leadership. Leadership is required to stimulate the action that will lead to a truly embedded culture of quality, a culture that is based on quality principles relating to vision, mission and outcomes.

Translating the vision into action will require considerable expertise in defining, articulating and agreeing shared values and priorities that will unite all diverse groups within the institution. Middlehurst (1993) explores the cultural traditions and constraints that affect the leadership role in institutions of higher education and concludes that at the heart of the matter was that the leader's 'right' to influence must be

> "acknowledged by individuals in the community and earned by those aspiring to leadership through exemplifying particular values, by providing benefits to individuals and groups that would otherwise be unavailable to them and by serving the diverse interests of the university community" (Middlehurst, 1993, p.75)

These quality principles "are a personal philosophy and an organizational culture that utilizes scientific outcomes measurement, systematic management techniques, and collaboration to achieve the mission of the institution". Essentially, the quality principles change the culture of higher education institutions. This is done by designing into the structure, systems and processes, high degrees of interrelatedness and interdependence. The mission evolves and changes as stakeholder expectations are included in defining the direction of the institution. The power of the principles comes from the synergy of the whole system, fundamentally linking the mission to measurable outcomes. The importance of measurable outcomes agreed between all members of the community is crucial to the establishment of a quality culture. Senge (1994) sums it up when he states,

> "In the long run, the only sustainable source of competitive advantage is your organisation's ability to learn faster than its competition."

Accountability to stakeholders can result in what Biggs refers to as "distorted priorities". He argues that bureaucrats want administration to run smoothly, to avoid public criticism and to anticipate and legislate for awkward cases. Their safest working environment is that people are not to be trusted, the so-called 'Theory X" environment. (McGregor, 1962). The alternative is the 'Theory Y" environment, where trust is implied. How the two sets are balanced is what Biggs contends separates quality from a mediocre institution with the quality institution being biased towards the establishment of optimal conditions for learning.

The late Dr. Stefanie Hofmann, in her report on lessons learnt from the institutional evaluation programme (Hofmann, 2005) concluded that,

> "There is no "blueprint" solution- the Institutional Evaluation Programme experience also demonstrates that there is not a single model for the university of the 21st century. Culture, tradition, environment and diverse demands of stakeholders and societies at large have a strong impact on individual institutions. Any general recipe for improvement and change can only be as good as its purposeful application in its specific context"

As Biggs points out,

> "In summary, the impediments to quality are manifold, but the message should be clear. It is a matter of alignment. Where quality is defined as fitness for purpose, quality teaching means trying to enact the aims of the institution by setting up a delivery system aligned to those aims" (Biggs, 2002. p.12)

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