Introduction

In order to stimulate academic research on the role of quality culture as well as to underpin reflection on it in real educational settings, we need a working definition of the concept “quality culture”, a conceptual framework and an instrument. In this paper such an elaboration of the concept of quality culture is presented. First we give the working definition of quality culture as formulated by the Flemish Bologna Expert Team. Afterwards we present the dialectical model for quality culture of Berings (2009). This model was the starting point from which an instrument was developed to explore quality culture in higher educational settings. The instrument is based on an instrument that originally has been developed to analyse the relationship between organizational culture on the one hand and student and employee satisfaction on the other hand (Bering, 2001). This instrument was extended and revised in order to get a grip of the quality culture within a HEI. It was applied in a study in 14 university colleges (‘hogescholen’) and universities in Flanders (Berings, 2009). The opportunities and pitfalls of the application of this instrument as a tool for reflection on quality culture, are illustrated in two cases. The first case is situated in a faculty of a university. The second case is based on a department of a university college.

Quality culture defined

A broad consensus exists in higher education about the importance of quality culture. Advocates of Total Quality Management (TQM) as well as sceptics towards such a managerial approach on quality recognize the importance of quality culture. The advocates of TQM emphasize that organizational culture has to be in line with the quality assurance processes and systems so that they can sustain each other reciprocally. On the contrary sceptics rather argue that quality culture makes top down developed quality management largely superfluous. In other words quality culture is considered by them as a substitute for taut quality procedures and systems. By consequence linking the concept of quality automatically to the TQM paradigm is not evident in higher education. Therefore the Flemish Bologna Expert Team has chosen to formulate a working definition of quality culture that is not indissolubly connected to the TQM paradigm. Their working definition sounds as follows: quality culture is an organisational culture which contributes to the development of effective and efficient care for quality and can be presented graphically as follows.
By using the concept ‘care for quality’ and not ‘quality management’ or ‘quality assurance’ the Bologna experts contrary to other scholars (Oakland, 1993; Viljoen & van Waveren, 2008) avoided an a priori linkage of quality culture nor with the TQM paradigm, neither with external Quality Assurance. Their definition leaves a sufficient degree of freedom for proponents as well as for opponents of the managerial approach of quality in higher education (Helms et al., 2001; Youssef et al., 1998). Moreover it can stimulate a fruitful debate about the relation between the system and cultural approach and the dialectic nature of quality culture in itself (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008). Such a dialectical approach is also the core principle of the conceptual framework of Berings (2006; 2009) that is inspired by the work of Robert Quinn and his colleagues on competing values (Cameron, 1986; Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Quinn, 1988).

**Conceptual framework**

Thus, although a broad consensus exists about the importance of quality culture there remains a lot of debate about the meaning and content of the concept of quality culture and the way it is related to educational and organizational outcomes. In order to clarify the role of quality culture Berings (2009) presented a conceptual framework for quality culture that encompasses divergent visions on the ‘care for quality’ in higher education. The two dimensional Competing Value Model of Quinn (1988) was reconciled by Berings (2001; 2006; 2009) so that it reflects better the cultural tension between ‘managerialism’ and ‘professionalism’ well known in higher education (Kolsaker, 2008). The difference between this competing model and the original model of Quinn lies in the number of bipolarities, namely three instead of two. Compared to the Quinn-model in the first place the bipolarity ‘collective versus individual orientation’ is new. However the dimension collectivism-individualism is a classical dimension in culture models (Hofstede, 1998) as well as in models concerning universal and work values (Schwartz, 1992). Also in the literature about professionalism in education the tension between individual and collective orientation is emphasized (e.g. Clement, 1995; Ostroff & Rothausen, 1997; Hargreaves, 1994). Moreover Berings (2001) surveyed 1747 employees in a sample of more than forty departments and concluded that the dimension ‘collective orientation’ had the most predictive validity for student satisfaction as well as for employee satisfaction. Enough reason for paying attention to the ‘collective orientation’ as a component of quality culture. But collective orientation is not the only field of attention in the model that is composed of three bipolarities that can be interpreted as pairs of competing values as defined by Quinn (1988). Competing values are values that are both considered as valuable but are to a certain level incompatible or tricky to be accomplished together.

Figure 2. Dialectical approach to quality culture
The resulting framework for reflection on quality culture is based on three pairs of competing values or bipolarities. Each bipolarity consists of a value associated with the TQM paradigm on the one hand and a value associated with the traditional academic world on the other hand. By consequence each pair of opposite values can be considered as competing values. The challenge for higher educational institutions and especially for their quality management systems is to find creative solutions for the three paradoxes in this model (Berings, 2006).

Before looking at the opposite value we go back to the two different visions on quality, on the one hand the TQM-paradigm characterized by ‘managerialism’ and on the other hand a more traditional vision of the academic world based on ‘professionalism’. The managerial approach is well recognized in the principles and practices in line with TQM. The core values are here: Innovation, Collective orientation and System Control. In the opposite traditional academic view the values on the opposite side of the model are accentuated: Tradition, Individual specialization and Self determination. The accent on these values, especially the last one, is in line with the idea that academics don’t like to be managed and by consequence are critical towards TQM. This can be illustrated by a quote borrowed from the report on the three rounds quality culture project of the European University Association “It is often the case that when speaking of quality, it is easy to revert back to such managerial concepts as quality control, quality mechanisms, quality management, etc. These concepts, however, are not neutral. They convey a technocratic and top-down approach that will backfire in academic settings. The self-perception of academics as successful professionals who are committed to excellence means that they dislike being managed.” (EUA, 2006, p. 6).

An instrument to explore quality

In order to make the competing value model about quality culture in higher education more manageable, a reflection instrument is developed and tested in a pilot study conducted in collaboration with the Flemisch Bologna Expert Team (Berings, 2009). Six holistic descriptions of ideal typical cultural images corresponding to the six poles of the conceptual framework were adopted from the first study (Berings, 2001). These holistic circumscriptions can be seen as ‘images of organization’ in line with Gareth Morgan (1997) and in line with the idea of “ideal types” of Max Weber. Members of organizations can compare their own organization with these images. Each of these six images of organization corresponds with one of the poles of the three dimensions in the model:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image of organization</th>
<th>Features</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innovation oriented</td>
<td>proactive external adaptation and an internal focus on continuous improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition oriented</td>
<td>A conservative reflex and devotion to traditional values and practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People oriented</td>
<td>Confidence in people and room for self-determination and creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System oriented</td>
<td>Coordination, standardization and formalization by plans, schedules and hierarchical structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionally oriented</td>
<td>The competences of highly qualified and specialized autonomous professionals are the standardizing principles; management and administration are supposed be supportive rather than directing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective oriented</td>
<td>Shared ideas and values, social problem solving and team work are taken for granted.</td>
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A more detailed elaboration and foundation of the six images can be found in Berings (2009). The six images or “mirrors” are used to give organization members the opportunity to express their preference or aversion towards each image. In order to enhance the validity and reliability of the instrument five cultural features were added for each of the six cultural images. For each of these six images as well as
for the 30 complementary items, two questions are asked: a) to which degree this organization seems to be attractive to work in for you? b) to which degree does your organization resemble this organization? Thus this instrument assesses the culture preference as well as the culture perception. The gap between preference and perception reflects the amount of organizational change readiness. The results of such a survey can be summarized in an organizational culture profile that shows the preference, the perception and the readiness for change.

The pilot study of 2009 revealed the following cultural profile for the 28 (sub)organizations (two diagnoses for each university college/university participating) together. In general the highest perception score is found for the people and innovation oriented image. The preference is highest for the collective oriented organization but also the attractiveness of the people, innovation and system oriented organization is above the midpoint of the scale. After comparing the perception with the preference we can conclude that the readiness to change is highest with respect to the collective oriented image.

Figure 3. Global cultural profile

The same study revealed that employees of universities put the same weight on the collective orientation compared to employees of university colleges while for other images we see typical differences between the two corresponding with the ‘managerial’ versus ‘professional’ orientation in the proposed conceptual framework (Figure 2). Innovation and system orientation is more accentuated in university colleges, while tradition and individual professionalism and specialization is more accentuated in universities.

Figure 4. Cultural preference in universities and ‘hogescholen’
Two cases

As we have already illustrated the cultural profile that emerges after surveying employees differ from organization to organization (Berings, 2008). Here we will present two cases, one from a university and one of a university college (‘hogeschool’). We will present these cases in a systematical way following the model proposed by the Flemish Bologna Expert Team (Figure 1). After giving a short identification of the department we will describe how the care for quality is sustained by on the one hand internal and external quality assurance systems and tools and on the other hand by the organizational culture as it emerged from the survey. The evaluation of the appropriateness of the system and cultural characteristics of their care for quality logically depends on the primordial performance criteria of the departments. Therefore we present for each case also these performance criteria and how they are monitored within the department. We will finish with an evaluation of the perceived congruence, fit or misfit between the system and cultural feature of the care for quality and the postulated educational and organizational objectives and correspondent performance criteria.

Case 1.

| Identification | – A programme in a faculty in the group of sciences and technology
| | – University with 13 faculties, (63 bachelor programmes, 121 master programmes and 57 advanced master programmes
| | – Academic degrees
| | – Academic staff involved in education and training, research and service to society

| Quality system (external) | – External peer review at the programme level (by site visits), followed by accreditation.
| | – The process of external peer review is coordinated by the Flemish Interuniversity Council, particularly the quality assurance agency within this organisation
| | – Self evaluation of the programme results in a report that serves as basis for the external peer review committee. After having conducted a site visit the external committee reports on its conclusions.
| | – Procedures and evaluation criteria are determined in a protocol that has been approved by the Flemish Interuniversity Council, the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders and the Flemish government.
| | – The report of the external visiting committee serves as basis for the decision concerning the accreditation of the programme. The accreditation is granted by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders. The accreditation of the programme grants the HEI the right to offer the programme, to deliver diploma’s and to receive government funding (the latter excepted for the advanced master programmes).

| Quality system (internal) | – Internal quality system is based on the concept of the quality cycle, the overall educational concept of the university and the educational framework of each individual programme. No reference is made to well known managerialist paradigms (like EFQM, ISO, CIPO …).
| | – The fundamentals of the quality system consist of the clear articulation of goals an objectives on the organisational level as well as on the programme level, the attention paid to providing support of all kinds in implementing and realising the objectives, the regular evaluation of the quality and clear procedures and support with regard to the follow-up of evaluation activities.
| | – The internal quality system aims at reconciling a top down with a bottom-up approach, centralised with decentralised initiatives, initiatives aiming at accountability and at quality improvement.
- Each programme has its own programme committee, responsible for the quality of the programme. On top of this, this faculty has a special group, focused on the translation and implementation of the educational concept of the university and the university wide guidelines for the faculty, adding specific objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance criteria</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Outcomes monitored: study success, student satisfaction, employee satisfaction, employment statistics, scientific output, market share etc.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality culture</th>
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<tr>
<td>- For each value except for specialization the preference is larger than the perception and so there is readiness for change. The biggest gap and therefore the biggest readiness for change can be seen for the value of collectiveness. Whereas the perception is 2.44, the wish amounts to 4.56. There is also a bigger wish for focus on people (4.44) than there actually is (3.56). There is slightly more professionalism and focus on specialization (3.44) than wished for (3.22). There is room for more system approach (perception: 2.22; preference: 3.11). It is striking that at the same time there is a wish for more innovation and for more tradition, although the wish for innovation is the strongest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When one looks at the culture features, the perception is that there is plenty of room for specialisation and room for individual creativity. The faculty tries to attract top specialists, has much trust in the staff who have the freedom to plan their own working plans. There is a preference for collaboration (4,11) but this does not mean that much time should be devoted to the elaboration of a shared vision (3,00).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case 1: Quality Culture Diagnosis

### Radar

**A: innovation**

**B: people**

**C: system**

**D: collective**

**E: tradition**

**F: professional**

### Scores

**B: people**

**F: professional**

**A: innovation**

**E: tradition**

**D: collective**

**C: system**

#### most perceived features

1. Staff members are allowed to choose their working methods themselves (3.89)
2. Staff members have the opportunity to specialize in the domain they are good in (3.89)
3. The staff members feel they receive a lot of room for personal creativity (3.67)

#### least perceived features

1. Every minute is used efficiently (2.33)
2. Time and effort were allocated to develop a common vision (2.44)
3. Important arrangements are committed to paper (2.44)

#### most preferred features

1. The organization has an eye for the person behind the employee (4.22)
2. Management trusts its staff members completely (4.22)
3. The staff members feel they receive a lot of room for personal creativity (4.22)
4. The team regularly discusses the best way to work (4.22)
5. Staff members have the opportunity to specialize in the domain they are good in (4.22)

#### least preferred features

1. Procedures with which staff members are familiar, remain unchanged for a considerable period of time (2.33)
2. Staff members with a long employment record are held in high esteem and enjoy authority in the organization (2.33)
3. It rapidly responds to new trends in society (2.78)
### Case 2. Care for quality

#### Identification

- **Department of Health & Welfare: Remedial Education & Remedial Education Management** (students ca. 700 & ca. 80)
- The accent in the Bachelor Degree is on the professional orientation what is reflected in the curriculum.
- Although the major mission of the department is education, applied research has developed into a growing asset. Since all the researchers are partly engaged in the educational programs as a lecturer, there is a strong convergence between education and research.
- More than one third of the employed alumni (34%) worked with mentally impaired people, 23% worked in welfare with children and adults, 13% worked in mental healthcare and 10% worked with physically impaired people.

#### Quality system (external)

- This quality assurance system consists of three parts: an internal preparative part, an external part and the part where the formal decision is taken.
- Self-evaluation of the programme organised by the higher education institution itself and results in the self-evaluation report submitted to VLIR/VLHORA.
- External quality assessment organised by the VLIR and VLHORA. An assessment panel (experts in the field of study, experts in quality assurance, educational/pedagogical experts, and experts in the international development of the field of study) visits the HEI after reading the self-evaluation report. The result of the external quality assessment is the assessment report sent to the accreditation organisation (NVAO).
- The NVAO evaluates the thoroughness of the external assessment and accepts or rejects its findings. A positive accreditation decision by the NVAO results in the recognition of the programme and is kept or listed in the Higher Education Register for 8 years. Accreditation is a prerequisite for awarding bachelor's or master's degrees education funding and study financing for students.

#### Quality system (internal)

- The HEI uses the EFQM-model as a backbone for its quality assurance and is sustained by the quality manual embedded in the intranet system. This model is used for accountability and as well as for improvement in a 4 year cycle.
- Quality is managed and monitored by an extensive Multiyear Education Development Plan (2008-2013) that focuses on issues like the educational program, students, staff, research and employability, internationalisation, organisational development.
- Within this ‘master plan’ a department formulates each year their own specific Priority Action Plans.
- The goals are monitored by the head of the department and the departmental quality assurance officer. Once a year the progress of this Multiyear Education Development Plan is followed up by the LCUC quality assurance officer in close coordination with the educational staff of the LCUC. When necessary goals are adjusted or resources are (re)allocated.

#### Performance criteria

- Outcomes monitored: study success, student satisfaction, employee satisfaction, employment statistics, scientific output, market share.
- Performance criteria are defined for outcomes like study
success; student drop out; student satisfaction on academic staff, educational program, social services, catering; student and staff international mobility; alumni satisfaction on the educational program; alumni employment; and staff satisfaction on management.

Quality culture

- The **people oriented** pole showed the highest value in the pilot study with the quality culture instrument. The perception (3.56) of the respondents on this feature almost reflects their preference (3.44). Management on departmental and HEI level shows confidence in their staff and leave a lot of room for self-determination and creativity.

- The well recognized and fostered ‘culture of freedom’ possibly has the side effect of an experienced lack of coordination. The culture profile shows an implicit need for a well-considered management system and organisation. This is confirmed by the scores on the **system oriented** pole where the preference (3.33) largely transcends the perception (2.56). A survey (Spring 2009) on the transparency of the departmental organisation in which a majority of the staff participated reveals a lack of knowledge about the organisation and its management. As a result of this, the organisation and its hierarchical structure is reviewed and made more transparent. In addition to this, departmental procedures were reviewed, more standardized and formalized in view of an assessment by an external panel of experts in March 2010. In this way the system oriented pole was adjusted.

- Complementary to already mentioned accent on individual creativity is the accent put on **innovation** where – again – perception (3.22) almost equals preference (3.33). Small groups and individuals take a lot of initiatives like introducing of work based learning, developing new ways of assessment, strengthening international internship.

- The tendency toward innovation is not extreme and partially completed by a modest care for **tradition** with respectively a score of 2.78 and 2.89 for perception and preference.

- The greatest gap is found for the **collective oriented** pole. Between perception (2.89) and preference (4.22). The lack of collectivism can be attributed to the strong growth and renewal in academic staff and its third task activities like societal services and community development. Beyond that, it seems there is a great need for shared ideas and values, for a more common sense and team work beyond the commendable innovative work of individuals and small groups. In the last year several staff meetings were held to be prepared for the external audit. After this audit took place new discussions were held and ideas were exchanged about new perspectives for the future.

- In spite of the enhanced specialization in the work force there remains a clear preference for the collective orientation that seems be considered more as a alternative than a complement for an organization culture characterized by individual specialisation, performance and competition. This is reflected by the scores on the pole **professionally oriented**, 2.33 and 1.89 respectively for perception and preference.
Case 2: Quality Culture Diagnosis

Radar

Scores

most perceived features
1. Management trusts its staff members completely (3.78)
2. Staff members are allowed to choose their working methods themselves (3.67)
3. Each staff member’s individual qualities and limitations are taken into account (3.67)
4. Staff members are allowed to concentrate on the tasks they are good at (3.67)

least perceived features
1. A lot of effort is made to attract top specialists (2.44)
2. Every minute is used efficiently (2.67)
3. Things that have proven to work well remain unchanged (2.67)
4. The organization tries to be one step ahead of other organizations with respect to innovation (2.67)

most preferred features
1. The organization has an eye for the person behind the employee (4.11)
2. Colleagues get ample time to learn from each other and exchange experiences (4.11)
3. Management trusts its staff members completely (4.00)
4. The team regularly discusses the best way to work (4.00)
5. Time and effort are allocated to develop a common vision (4.00)

least preferred features
1. Procedures with which staff members are familiar, remain unchanged for a considerable period of time (2.33)
2. Staff members with a long employment record are held in high esteem and enjoy authority in the organization (2.44)
3. Staff members lose as little time as possible with tasks that are not part of their specialization (2.67)
4. The organization tries to be one step ahead of other organizations with respect to innovation (2.67)
Discussion

We can conclude that a dialectical approach to quality culture can be fruitful when it is based on a robust and recognizable conceptual framework completed with an assessment and reflection tool. Such a tool can help higher educational institutions and their divisions to reflect on their organizational culture. It can be a starting point from which a better fit can be developed between quality culture and quality systems in order to maximize the accomplishment of the educational and organizational goals. Therefore Flanders Bologna Expert Group has started a new project on quality culture in order to validate the assessment and reflection instrument in a larger sample and to develop a more elaborated method for the follow up of the results of the survey.
Literature


Abstract

In this paper we elaborate a conceptual framework as well as an instrument for reflection and research on quality culture. We illustrate this dialectical approach sustained by a survey in two cases.

Questions for discussion

Can a dialectical approach to quality culture be translated in a manageable tool for assessment and reflection?

Can such an approach help to maximize the fit between internal and external quality assurance systems, quality culture and organizational and educational goals?