CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but rather we have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit. (Aristotle)

1.1 Introduction

Organisations worldwide are faced with increased competition due to globalisation and have attempted to gain competitive advantage by positioning themselves as "excellent". However, only a handful of organisations can truly be described as "excellent" or "world class". Excellence is likely to be a hallmark of the successful organisation in the 21st century where there will be many excellent organisations; these will be the maturing exponents of Total Quality in all its varied forms. Whereas today excellence is so unusual it stands out, in ten years time excellence will be taken for granted. It will be the expected level of performance – the entry ticket without which an organisation will not be a competitor, let alone a possible winner.

Champy and Nohria (1988:xiv) describe globalisation as "organisations from all parts of the globe competing to deliver the same product or service, anytime, anywhere, at increasingly competitive prices. Globalisation is forcing organisations to organise themselves in radically different ways".

Meyer (1996:5) points out that Africa is emerging from its dark years of isolation and economic stagnation and is entering a global economy characterised by competitiveness. Competitiveness is critical to the future of South Africa in three ways:

- SA exports need to compete in an international market
- SA products and services are competing within the SA market with international competitors
- SA is competing for foreign investment of the sort that creates jobs

According to Cloete and Bunting from the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) in South Africa, many higher education institutions are responding to a more competitive market environment by 'trying to reinvent themselves like corporations'. They are responding to pressures to adapt to the 'new public management' by introducing management procedures and a management ethos which have traditionally been associated with the private sector. They are trying to determine what their core functions and core departments are in order to dispose of unproductive programmes and to contract out certain administrative functions. This international trend is at least being followed by some South African higher education institutions.

Higher education institutions worldwide have not been exempt from the demands for excellence and quality. The new legislative framework in South Africa and the broader challenges of globalisation and market competition have put enormous pressure on higher education institutions to devise new ways of managing what have become more diverse and very complex institutions.

Various higher education specialists have pointed out the trends and challenges facing higher education institutions. In South Africa, higher education specialists like Cloete *et al* (2002:237) point out that, within the space of five years, higher education institutions have been confronted with many challenges, including the need to:

- diversify their income streams while doing more, and different, things with increasingly less reliance on fiscus
- reconfigure their institutional missions and the ways in which they traditionally produced, packaged and disseminated their primary product-knowledge in order to meet the challenges of a diversifying student population, as well as an increasingly technologically-oriented, and globalising economy
- forge new kinds of relationships with other knowledge producers within and outside higher education, especially in industry and the private sector

Dr Mala Singh, the Executive Director of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) points out in *Kagisano*, the

CHE Higher Education Discussion Series (2001:10) that the key trends which are bringing higher education in line with other organisations' positioning for global success include:

- the requirement of higher education to demonstrate efficiency, effectiveness and value for money through business re-engineering drives, integration into public finance management accounting systems, external quality assurance systems and other accountability frameworks designed to accommodate greater stakeholder scrutiny.
- declining investments of public funds to subsidise student fees and service costs, and the requirement to 'do more with less'.
- the dominance of managerial and entrepreneurial approaches to and within higher education, resulting in the tendency to run higher education institutions like income-generating businesses.
- the privatisation of higher education in encouraged competition with public institutions or within public higher education itself.
- the increasing development of labour market responsive curriculum reforms intended to appeal to employers and students as 'customers' and 'clients'.

In the United States of America, higher education specialist Clark (1998:xvi) maintains that the university-environment relationship is characterised by a deepening asymmetry between environmental demand and institutional capacity to respond. The imbalance creates a problem of institutional insufficiency. So much is now demanded of universities that traditional ways prove inadequate. Universities require not only an enlarged capacity to respond to changes in the external worlds of government, business and civic life, but also a better honed ability to bring demands under control by greater focus in institutional character. Strongly needed is an overall capacity to respond flexibly and selectively to changes taking place within knowledge domains of the university world itself.

Higher education institutions must be proactive in responding to the challenges facing them. They need to change their management practices and the way work is done. New standards, new systems, and new responsibilities must be developed.

Freed, Klugman and Fife (1997:4) point out that for the culture to change, members need to shift their thinking about how work is done. When the paradigm shifts, members begin to ask different questions in search of new answers to the same old problems. They embrace change as a positive value in the culture since **continuous improvement** is based on continuous change.

According to (Freed & Klugman 1997:9) a culture of **quality improvement** encourages members to have ownership in the institution and to take responsibility for managing themselves. The shift to this new quality culture is accomplished when quality efforts become an internalised standard of excellence for members within the institution rather than a way of doing business imposed by upper-level management.

“When business and industry were faced with difficulties, many organisations responded by improving quality and service through total quality management (TQM) or continuous quality improvement (CQI). There is a growing trend in higher education to implement these same quality principles to address challenging issues that threaten the health of higher education” say Freed and Klugman.

Higher education institutions that use quality improvement efforts to cut costs and to improve under crisis conditions are positioned to be more competitive in the future. They critically examine their current processes and systems with the intention of reducing and improving them so that the institution functions more efficiently. They collect information from their stakeholders to help them improve customer satisfaction. They are not afraid to ask for new ideas and feedback from all members of the institution. The quality improvement mind-set that helps institutions survive through the lean times will also allow the institutions to take advantage of times of growth.

Higher education institutions of the future will display the same characteristics as those organisations described by Champy and Nohria (1988:xv-vvi) as ”twisted into a new shape by fierce global competition, changing markets and technological breakthroughs, the organisation of the future is emerging with distinct characteristics. It will be:

- information-based
- decentralised, yet densely linked through technology
- rapidly adaptable and extremely agile
- creative and collaborative, with a team-based structure
- staffed by a wide variety of knowledge workers
- self-controlling – which is clear only in an environment of clear, strong and shared operating principles and of real trust

The South African higher education sector has been faced with various challenges for the past decade. One of the issues has been the focus on quality, emphasised by Professor Kadar Asmal, Minister of Education in the Foreword to the National Plan on Higher Education 2001: *"The people of our country deserve nothing less than a quality higher education system which responds to the equity and development challenges that are critical to improving the quality of life of all our people.*"

To address most of these challenges, particularly the merging of various universities and technikons in South Africa, the need for a framework for continuous improvement has become imperative.

It is assumed that no single quality model could address all the needs of the South African higher education sector to ensure continuous improvement. Therefore this thesis will:

- Integrate the lessons learnt from the higher education sector in the United States of America and the United Kingdom
- Adapt the SAEM Public Sevice Level 3 questionnaire for the higher education sector
- Incorporate the latest international developments on entrepreneurial institutions, innovation and quality in the higher education sector
- Create a unique quality framework for the South African higher education sector to ensure **continuous improvement**

1.2 Definitions and rationale

To examine continuous improvement in the higher education sector, the following constructs are discussed:

- The concept of total quality management and other related concepts
- Quality models and their application in the higher education sector
- Self-assessment principles and practices
- The structure of the higher education sector in South Africa
- Quality challenges in South African higher education institutions

Terms such as "companies", "organisations", "institutions" and "enterprises" are used by various authors. Throughout this thesis, the term "institution" will be used instead of "companies", "organisations", and "enterprises" when referring to a university, technikon or college.

"Self-assessment" throughout will refer to ***institutional self-assessment*** *and not* ***academic self-assessment***.

1.2.1 The concept of total quality management

"Total quality management (TQM) is a business approach that focuses on improving the organisation's effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness to customers needs by actively involving people in process improvement activities. The achievement of business or organisational excellence is at the core of TQM (Porter and Tanner 1996:1).

According to Freed and Klugman (1997:ix-xi), by the 1980's, United States companies awoke to find they could not survive unless they changed their ways of conducting business. Products made in the US were falling behind others in quality, especially those made in Japan.

After World War 11, the United States business and industry had the largest market, the best technology, the most skilled workers, the most wealth, and the best managers of the industrialised countries. With all of these advantages, it was

easy for American business and industry to succeed without giving much thought to continuous improvement of products and services.

At the same time, Japan was intent on improving its economy through manufacturing and trade: Japan's products, however, were inferior to American products. In an effort to improve their status in the marketplace, Japanese companies worked together to acquire information on foreign companies. They also invited W Edwards Deming and Joseph M Duran, two of the pioneers in the continuous improvement movement, to conduct training courses on statistics and management for quality improvement.

Japanese companies embraced Deming's and Juran's theories, and added their own ideas to continuous quality improvement and these best practices propelled Japan into the position of world marketplace leader by the late 1970's.

By the 1980's, United States companies awoke to find they could not survive unless they changed their ways of conducting business. Products made in the US were falling behind others in quality, especially those made in Japan.

To save their companies, several American businesses also turned to quality improvement specialists. The three best experts known, Deming, Juran and Philip B Crosby, each contributed significantly to the ideas of continuous improvement.

The HEFCE *EFQM Excellence Model Higher Education Version* (2003: 6) points out that the concept of quality, first introduced by W Edwards Deming in the 1950's, comprises a much wider dimension:

"Deming (1986) set out an approach to total quality management by the introduction of his now famous 14 points. In addition to promoting product or service quality, it also gave industry a human face.

Duran (1988) built on Deming's philosophies, defining quality as *fitness* for use in terms of design, conformance, availability, safety and field use. Unlike Deming, he

focused on top-down management and technical methods rather than worker pride and satisfaction. Juran developed his TQM message around 10 key steps.

Crosby (1979) popularised total quality through his book *Quality is Free.* He built on the thinking of Deming and Juran, and added his idea that quality is 'conformance to requirement'. Crosby stressed motivation and planning were the key issues, rather than statistical process control".

As a result of this evolution in quality thinking, TQM became a driving force for quality improvement within many organisations across the world. Inspired by the TQM philosophies, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) was created in 1988 drawing from the experience and knowledge base in the United States, where the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) had been launched.

The EFQM is an assessment framework designed to analyse any organisation against a set of "excellent" criteria. This model has been used and applied to the higher education sector and is continuing to be used as a framework for continuous improvement.

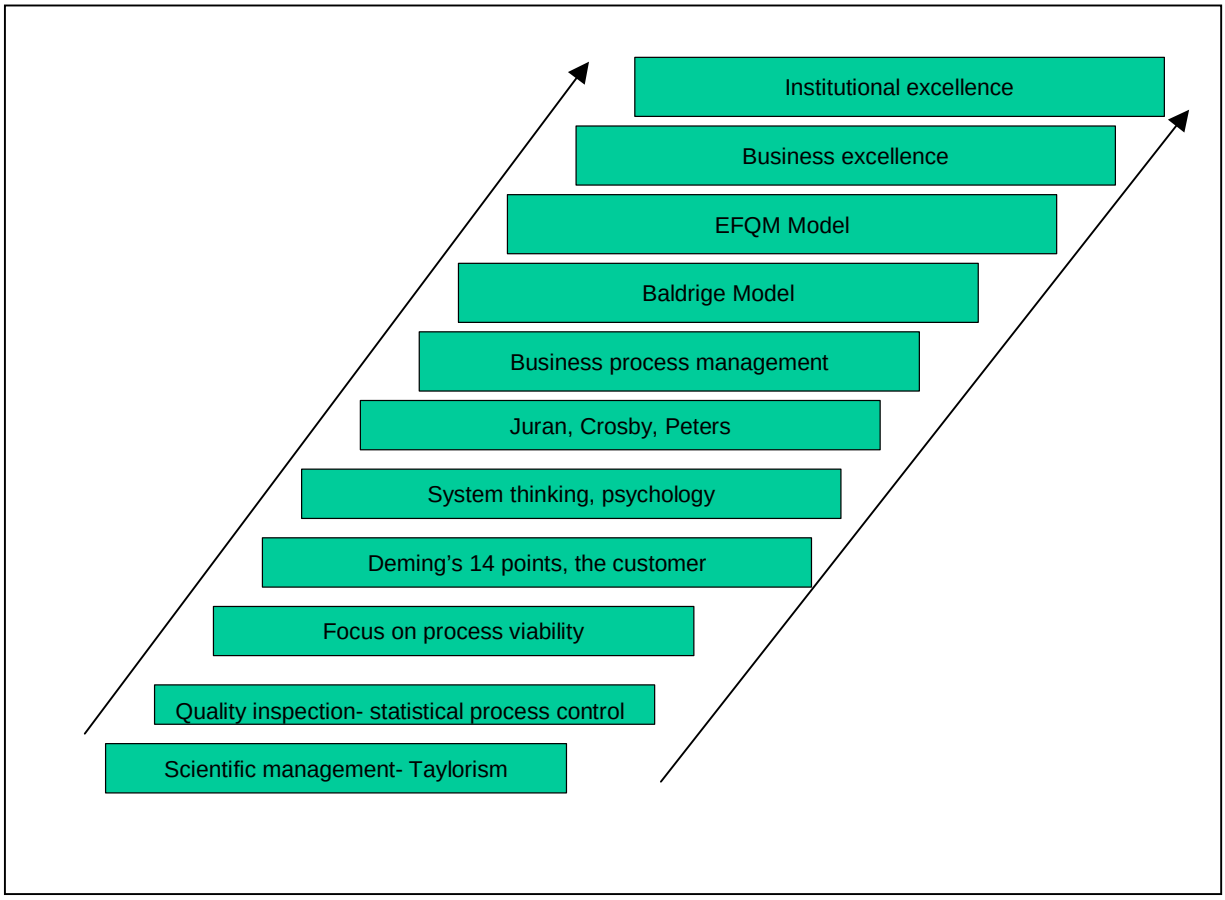
According to the EFQM, organisational excellence has been defined as: "the overall way of working that results in balanced stakeholder satisfaction (customer, employees, partners, society, shareholders) so increasing the probability of long-term success as an organisation" HEFCE, *Applying self-assessment against the EFQM Excellence Model in Further and Higher Education* (2003:1).

In an education context, this means balancing the needs of students, staff funding and regulatory bodies as well as those of local communities.

In the most recent version of the Model, excellence is also defined as "outstanding practice in managing the organisation and achieving results based on a set of fundamental concepts".

The evolution of excellence is clearly depicted in Fig 1 where the foundation of scientific management principles was laid by Taylor, and later refined by Deming, Juran, Crosby and Peters. Business process management provided the base for the quality models that were to follow, eventually leading to institutional excellence.

Fig 1: The evolution of the excellence concept



(HEFCE, Embracing Excellence in Education 2003:7)

The many other management trends linked to quality including **innovation, creative thinking, competitive strategic planning** and **learning organisations,** are also finding favour within the higher education sector and they are discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

1.2.2 Quality models and their application in the higher education sector

In this thesis, three quality models will be analysed; in the United States the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA), in the United Kingdom the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) and the South African Excellence Model (SAEM). To avoid misunderstanding and ensure consistency in this thesis, all three models will be referred to as **quality models** and not **excellence models**.

These three quality models will be examined and the question posed why quality models for the higher education sector are not being used to a large degree in South Africa? One of the reasons could be that although the SAEM is available for various sectors, no provision is specifically made for the higher education sector.

In Chapters 3 and 4 an investigation into quality models will be made and a critical analysis done of lessons learnt in the United States and United Kingdom higher education sectors. The benefits of using quality models in higher education will also be discussed.

Developed in 1990-1991 by the European Foundation for Quality Management, the EFQM provides an inclusive framework for managing change to best effect by clearly displaying the links between cause and effect. The model, which is used as the basis of both the European and United Kingdom quality awards, is a flowchart of how an excellent organisation operates (www.efqm.srhe.ac.uk).

The MBNQA follows the same logic: by improving the 'how' of a company's operations (the *enablers* of leadership, policy and strategy, people management, resources and processes) improved *results* will follow from each of the stakeholders (financial, customers, people and society) (www.quality.nist.gov).

The SAEM is based on the premise that; "customer satisfaction, people (employee) satisfaction, impact on society, supplier and partnership performance are achieved through leadership, driving policy and strategy, people management,

customer and market focus, resources and information management and process, leading ultimately to excellence in organisational results (www.saef.co.za).

The MBNQA, EFQM and SAEM models are similar regarding their definitions of criteria, but whereas MBNQA has seven criteria, EFQM has nine and SAEM eleven. These criteria are divided into “Enablers” and “Results”. The Enablers cover what the organisation does, and the Results cover what the organisation achieves: Enablers cause Results.

All three models are based on the simple **premise** that processes are the means by which an organisation harnesses and releases the talents and potential of its people to produce results.

1.2.3 Self-assessment principles and practices

Self-assessment is seen as a key driver for improving performance in an organisation and is a key concept of all the quality models. The majority of organisations that employ the models, use it as a way of finding out where they are now, considering where they want to improve, and then making decisions on how to get there.

Self-assessment is a method of looking across an organisation at a specific point in time to see where it is in relation to achieving its performance outcomes. In the initial stages, self-assessment can be used as a ‘health check’ – a starting point for focusing attention and action.

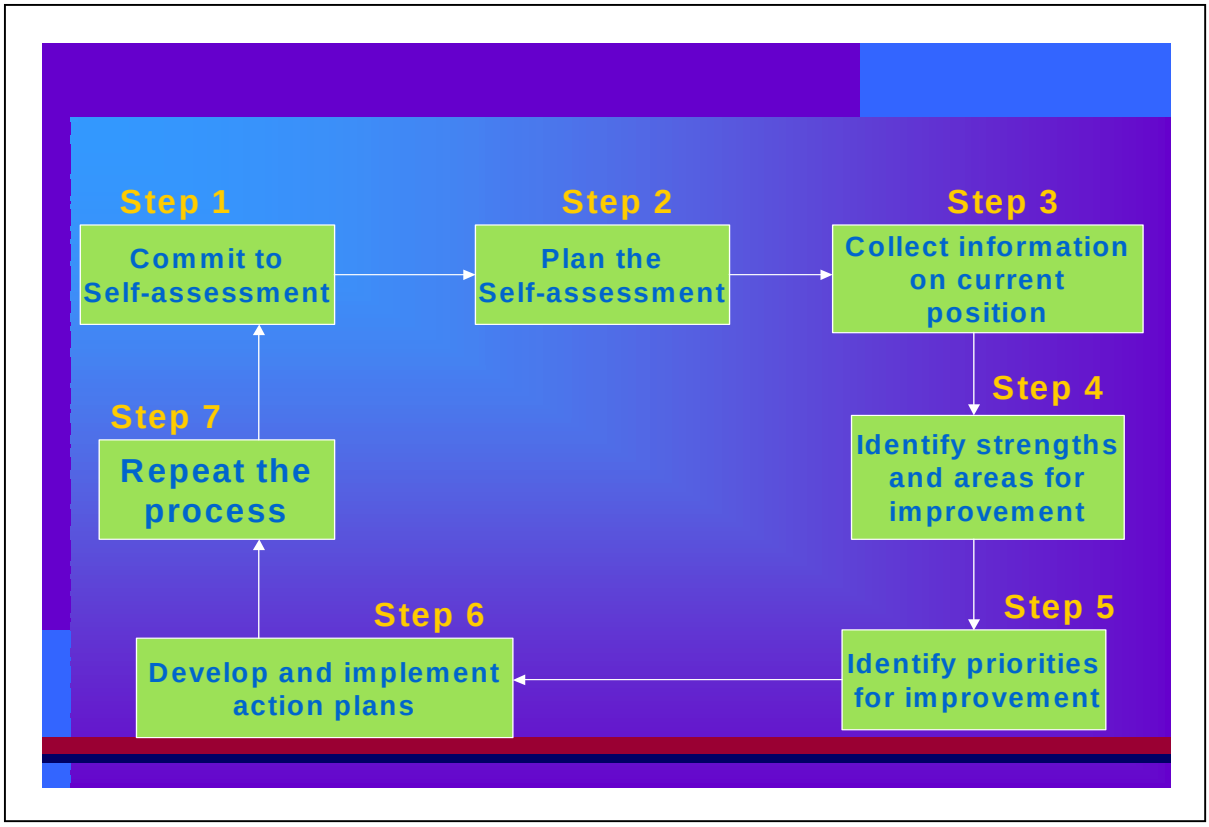
The EFQM defines self assessment as: ‘ A comprehensive, systematic and regular view of an organisation’s activities and results referenced against the EFQM” in the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) *Applying Self-Assessment against the EFQM Excellence Model in Further and Higher Education* (2003:6).

According to Porter and Tanner (1996:4) “the process of self-assessment represents one of the most comprehensive ‘health-checks’ available to an

organisation. As well as reviewing the direction of the organisation, it rigorously evaluates the current status of the organisation's processes (the 'hows') and the achieved performance levels (the 'whats').

The self-assessment process allows the organisation to clearly identify, under each of the criteria, its strengths and areas in which improvements can be made. This seven-step process is explained in Fig 2.

Fig 2: Seven-step self-assessment process



(SAEF Y200/1 No 2 Self-Assessment Questionnaire and Workbook for Pubic Service Performance Excellence Level 3)

1.2.4 The growing use of quality models in the public sector

The HEFCE *Embracing Excellence in Education* (2003:4) says that worldwide, there has been an increased use of quality models to ensure continuous improvement in organisations.

"A survey undertaken by PriceWaterhouseCoopers in the UK, analysed 3 500 different public sector organisations. Their findings show that there has been an explosion in the use of the Excellence Model in the public sector. Although many of these organisations are at an early stage of implementation, 81% of users found that the Model has already proved to be an effective tool within their organisation.

Almost all agreed that the long term use of the model would help them to achieve continuous improvement and consequently improve front line service to customers. 85% also stated that the model helped them to link together key policies and initiatives.

According to the EFQM, the Excellence Model is used by over 20 000 organisations across Europe, by 60% of Europe's largest organisations, and by 9 of the 13 European organisations in the Financial Times's 50 World's Most Respected Companies."

1.2.5 The benefits of using quality models

The use of quality models, particularly self-assessment, has been likened to holding up a mirror and facing the truth: we do not always like what we see, but we need to acknowledge what we see to be able to make improvements. According to the HEFCE *Applying Self-Assessment against the EFQM Excellence model in Further and Higher Education* (2003:6).

"The impact that undertaking self-assessment can have on institutions is both tangible and intangible. When implemented successfully into an institution, the benefits have included:

- Clear identification of stakeholders and their requirements
- Engagement of students and other customer groups
- Identification of and improved engagement with partners
- Improvement of business planning, through the appropriate integration of self-assessment which leads to greater clarity of focus and more resourceful and strategically focussed plans
- Improvement activities which are planned, undertaken and reviewed

- Identification and mapping of processes leading to greater efficiency and effectiveness
- Improved internal and external communications
- Sharing of good practice across organisations, and within organisations
- Systematic gathering of data to inform internal and external quality assessments
- A change in culture to one of openness, sharing and continuous learning, innovation and improvement"

1.2.6 The structure of the higher education sector in South Africa

An overview of the higher education system in South Africa is provided in Chapter 2, but at the outset it is important to explain this sector.

The South African Education system is divided into three levels: **primary education, further and general education** and **higher education**. The South African Higher Education system comprises 21 universities and 15 technikons as depicted in Table 1. These 36 institutions will be reduced to 21.

Table 1: SA universities and technikons*

Note: Technikons have been renamed "Universities of Technology" as from 6 June 2003 (Press Release, 5/6 June 2003)

UNIVERSITIES	
INSTITUTION	**REGION**
Rhodes University	**EASTERN CAPE**
University of Fort Hare	
University of Port Elizabeth	
University of Transkei	
University of the Free State	**FREE STATE**
Medical University of South Africa MEDUNSA	**GAUTENG**
Rand Afrikaans University	
University of Pretoria	
University of the Witwatersrand	

Vista University	
University of Durban-Westville	**KWA-ZULU NATAL**
University of Natal (Durban)	
University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg)	
University of Zululand	
Potchefstroom University	**NORTH WEST**
University of the North West	
University of the North	**NORTHERN PROVINCE**
University of Venda	
University of Cape Town	**WESTERN CAPE**
University of the Western Cape	
University of Stellenbosch	

TECHNIKONS	
INSTITUTION	**REGION**
Border Technikon	**EASTERN CAPE**
Eastern Cape Technikon	
Port Elizabeth Technikon	
Technikon Free State	**FREE STATE**
Technikon Northern Gauteng	**GAUTENG**
Technikon Pretoria	
Technikon South Africa	
Technikon Witwatersrand	
Vaal Triangle Technikon	
M L Sultan Technikon	**KWA-ZULU NATAL**
Mangosuthu Technikon	
Technikon Natal	
Technikon North West	**NORTH WEST**
Cape Technikon	**WESTERN CAPE**
Peninsula Technikon	

(www.chet.org.za)

1.2.5 Quality challenges facing higher education institutions

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the changing role of and challenges facing the higher education sector worldwide with particular reference to Southern Africa.

Van Damme in the *South African Journal for Higher Education* (2000:10) says that undoubtedly, quality has been the central concept and the major focus of policy and institutions and governments in the field of higher education in the nineties. "With varying intensity, pace, thoroughness and success, most countries in the world have established systems and procedures of quality assurance in higher education, comparable to those in industry or government created a number of years before. Now, at the end of the nineties, traditional, informal academic self-regulation – which for centuries was held to be sufficient in guaranteeing quality – has been replaced by explicit quality assurance mechanisms and related reporting and external accountability procedures."

In the changing higher education environment facing major challenges, the notion of quality becomes a distinguishing labelling tool with potentially powerful effects. One can expect that the international higher education market will become more competitive and more diversified in future, and that perceived quality will become the decisive criterion for students and stakeholders in an increasingly complex market.

Van Damme in the South African Journal on Higher Education Vol 12 No 2 (2000:10) says there is considerable variation in methodologies in international systems of quality assurance, but in most cases quality assurance models use similar key methodologies for the evaluation of programmes or institutions:

- In many countries, quality assurance is based on a kind of *self-evaluation*
- *Peer review* by outside experts, often combined with one or more site visits is a powerful external complement to internal self-evaluation

1.3 Research problem

In South Africa, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) has executive responsibility for quality assurance within higher education. The CHE document, ***Quality assurance in Higher Education***, distributed by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), (2003:Introduction) states that: "*Q*uality assurance in higher education in South Africa is neither new nor unfamiliar. A range of internal and external, formal and informal quality assurance arrangements have been in place for many decades. What is new in relation to quality assurance in South Africa is the need to respond to the rapidly changing landscape that now constitutes higher education. The changes include a shift towards a more integrated yet differentiated public sector, a growing private sector, increased work-based training at higher education levels, an outcomes and impact orientation that requires new or vastly changed evaluation systems, and a greater demand for demonstrating higher education responsiveness and relevance to social and economic reconstruction".

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, various education experts have indicated the challenges and issues facing higher institutions and in particular, Freed and Klugman (1997:9) are of the opinion that "as the problems facing higher education have grown, more institutions have adopted quality principles and practices, and they predict that this trend will continue."

Bogue (1994:123) poses the question "whether the initial euphoria and the subsequent quiet passage of some previously heralded management concept will eventually also describe the fate of the TQM in colleges and universities, remains to be seen. An argument can be made that many of the philosophical principles of the TQM have been at work in academia for some time. The quest for quality will always remain an unfinished journey and there is no reason to neglect any conceptual tool that will aid us in that quest. As with any tool, the effectiveness of its application turns on the artistry of the user in ensuring it fits the time, task and place".

The question that thus remains is how South African higher education institutions will respond to the rapidly changing landscape that now constitutes higher education.

Higher education institutions worldwide, but particularly in South Africa, are still not fully utilising modern management methods, approaches, practices and methodologies in managing the institutions. They also do not ensure that these methods are constantly reviewed and improved to ensure total quality management, innovation and excellence.

To compete in the global arena, it is essential that modern management methods should underpin the management practices at higher education institutions. These will include the management approaches to business functions such as strategy formulation, finance, investment, risk management, human resources, labour relations, marketing and communication, procurement, quality assurance, client service, innovation, facilities and real estate and information technology.

Although teaching and learning, research and service learning programmes are at the core of what higher education institutions do, it is also necessary to focus on governance, finances and other institutional operations. What is required is a quality framework for assessing the institutional excellence of the higher education institutions. The framework will be based on the concept that the institution will achieve better results by involving all people in continuous improvement of their processes.

In this thesis, continuous improvement in higher education will be examined and a framework for continuous improvement in the Southern African higher education sector will be proposed. To understand continuous improvement, a proper theoretical framework has to be outlined. This framework should be contextualised and integrated to suit the South African higher education environment and the challenges it faces. Reference will be made to two international quality models and the South African Excellence Model, as well as international quality practices in the higher education sector.

The HEQC are not prescriptive as to what models or methods higher education institutions in South Africa use as part of their self-evaluation report. However, to ensure that governance, finances and other institutional operations are addressed, it would seem that the SAEM could be used as part of the framework for higher education institutions to ensure continuous improvement. It could also provide a meaningful instrument to benchmark higher education institutions' performance against world standards.

Acknowledging that higher education institutions have unique characteristics, this thesis will attempt to contextualise and integrate quality models and quality studies to provide a framework for continuous improvement in higher education institutions to supplement the current academic self-assessment measures.

Three quality models will be analysed; the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award in the United States, (MBNQA) the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) in Europe and the South African Excellence Model (SAEM). The SAEM combines the best of the MBNQA, the EFQM, Australia (Australian Quality Award), United Kingdom (United Kingdom Quality Award) and Japan (Deming Prize), but it incorporates a South African emphasis in accordance with national priorities.

The quality models use self-assessment, a powerful management process that will allow higher education institutions to assess their levels of efficiency and effectiveness, identify gaps in their processes, and institute significant performance improvements to achieve higher levels of competitiveness.

Self-assessment comprises a comprehensive, systematic and regular review of an institution's activities and results, referenced against a model of performance excellence. The self-assessment process will allow an institution to clearly identify its strengths and areas in which improvements can be made.

Du Toit from the Border Technikon in South Africa explains in the South African Journal on Higher Education Vol 15 no 2 (2001:24) how the Technikon has used the SAEM as follows: "In using an adaptation of the SAEM as an instrument to guide the process of self-assessment, areas for improvement or gaps can

systematically be identified. The SAEM can be seen as a “management tool” to implement the philosophy of TQM in the Technikon. It should not be seen as an initiative in competition with existing improvement activities, but rather as an extension towards a more holistic, systemic approach.”

The quality models also engage organisations in an analysis of stakeholders, and particularly supports the recognition of the needs and expectations of customers and customer groups. The EFQM defines customers as ‘final arbiter of the product and service quality, and customer loyalty” It suggests retention and market share gain are best optimised through a clear focus on customer needs. In other words, it encourages institutions to have a clear focus on the student experience.

The quality models therefore offer a strong stakeholder-focused approach – which is at the heart of everything the higher education institutions strive for. Most, if not all, institutions aim to put students at the heart of learning and teaching – whilst considering other key stakeholders, such as parents, employers, partners, funding providers and regional/local communities. The student relationship often goes beyond what might traditionally be viewed as a customer relationship, with students in some institutions seen as partners in the learning process. This means that unless institutions are driven by a way of working that looks inside at what is being done and how it is being done for all key stakeholders, it is unlikely that continual improvement which meets or exceeds stakeholders’ expectations, could be achieved and sustained.

This ethos of excellence that the quality models provide also builds on, and relates to the positioning of educational institutions alongside the needs of the local and wider society.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to contextualise and integrate quality models to provide a framework for continuous improvement in higher education institutions. This will comprise the following sub-objectives:

1.4.1 To determine the shortcomings and contextualise the SAEM Public Sector, level 3 self-assessment questionnaire for the higher education sector. At level 3, the starting level, organisations apply for an excellence certificate. At level 2, the more advanced level, organisations apply for an excellence prize and at level 3, the most advanced level, organisations apply for an award. The SAEF self-assessment questionnaires have been adapted to correspond with the three levels.

1.4.2 To provide a format for self-assessment quality workshops within the higher education context.

1.4.3 To investigate if the self-assessment results can be used as part of the SWOT analysis phase during strategic planning and to link the strategic objectives to the Balanced Scorecard

1.4.4 To link a discipline, for example, marketing and communication initiatives to the SAEM

1.4.5 To benchmark faculties and support service departments at higher education institutions

1.4.6 To link continuous improvement initiatives for the higher education sector to the SAEM

1.4.7 To propose a framework of continuous improvement for the higher education sector based on quality models and quality studies in higher education institutions

1.5 Demarcation and delimitation of the study

This exploratory study will investigate three quality models: the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) in the United States, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) in Europe and the South African Excellence Model (SAEM). The application of the Malcolm Baldrige Education Criteria and the

Higher Education Funding Council for England consortiums' use of the EFQM in the higher education sector will be analysed.

A combination of only two self-assessment approaches were selected: the questionnaire and workshop. Regarding the questionnaire, the SAEM public sector, level 3 questionnaire was used as this sector most closely resembles the higher education sector. Of the three levels available, Level 3, the starting level, was selected.

Due to the lack of sources on quality models in higher education, the literature review in Chapter 3 and quality models in Chapter 4 rely heavily on the Higher Education Funding Council for England, particularly the publications by Sheffield Hallam University, one of the two consortium project leaders.

1.6 Importance of the study

There is general acceptance that higher education institutions need to address quality issues if they are to survive in the globalised economy. Higher institutions in the United States and the United Kingdom that have implemented quality models like the MBNQA and the EFQM are already reaping the benefits of implementing these models as was discussed in 1.2.5. **The benefits and lessons learnt are also discussed in Chapter 4.**

If these quality models are benefiting higher education institutions worldwide, then why are South African higher institutions not at least considering the lessons learnt and implementing a quality model adapted for South African higher institutions?

What is needed is to contextualise and integrate the quality models used in other higher education institutions and propose a unique framework for South African higher education institutions.

This study will provide:

- A summary and comparative analysis of the trends/issues/challenges facing the higher education sector

- A summary of quality models as well as the fundamental concepts of these models and a contextualising of these concepts for the higher education sector
- A new higher education sector for the SAEM
- A format for self-assessment workshops at higher education institutions
- A format for a strategic session linking SAEM self-assessment results to the SWOT and the BSC
- The adapted SAEM model will enable higher education institutions to do self-assessment at faculty/department/school level to identify their strengths and areas for improvement
- A format for linking marketing and communication initiatives to the SAEM
- A framework for linking continuous improvement for the higher education sector to the SAEM
- A framework for continuous improvement in the higher education sector
- The higher education sector will be able to benchmark itself against worldwide quality models

1.7 The basic research approach

To achieve the specific research objectives set, a qualitative approach has been selected. This approach is particularly suited to the exploratory design of the study, as it allows an in-depth investigation of quality models, quality studies, the SAEM and the application of the SAEM within a higher education context.

1.8 Structure of the study

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the higher education sector and refers to education specialists worldwide who have identified various issues facing this sector. The concepts of academic self-assessment and institutional self-assessment are explained and why institutional-self assessment is of such importance.

Other concepts like total quality management, quality models in higher education, self-assessment principles and practices, the benefits of sing quality models are also explained.

The structure of the higher education sector in South Africa and the quality challenges facing higher education institutions are pinpointed.

The chapter concludes with the research problem, objectives of the study, demarcation of the study, basic research approach and importance of the study.

Chapter 2: The higher education sector with specific reference to South Africa

This chapter describes the changing role and major challenges facing higher education institutions, how they will need to adapt if they are to survive in a globalised environment as well as the unique characteristics of higher education institutions. Reference is also made to entrepreneurial and enterprise universities.

An overview of the education sector in South Africa is provided, as well as a brief history of South African universities and the structure of the higher education system. Reference is also made to the merging of South African higher education institutions as well as the White Paper on Education and the implications of the proposals.

Chapter 3: A literature review of excellence models

This chapter provides an introduction to quality models and the application of continuous improvement principles in the higher education sector.

An overview of the establishment of excellence models is provided with particular emphasis on the MBNQA in the United States, the EFQM in Europe and the SAEM in South Africa.

A review of the models indicate that they share similar characteristics and, similar to the United States and the United Kingdom, the SAEM can be adapted to suit

South African higher education institutions, However, this model has shortcomings that are mainly attributable to the fact that the model has not been contextualised for the higher education sector.

Self-assessment as part of continuous improvement is discussed as well as the various approaches.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) and how the BSC can be linked to quality models.

Chapter 4: Quality models in the higher education sector

This chapter discusses quality assurance and provides examples of the application of quality models citing examples from higher education institutions using the MBNQA and the EFQM.

In the United Kingdom, the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) and the two Consortiums provide invaluable information on lessons learnt and benefits derived from the use of a quality model in higher education institutions.

The chapter concludes with a discussion on using quality models for benchmarking in higher education.

Chapter 5: Problem statement, research objectives, hypothesis/propositions and research methodology

In this chapter the research problem is restated, as well as the research objective and the seven research sub-objectives. The exploratory research contextualises worldwide excellence models for higher education institutions. Research questions and hypotheses are formulated based on the literature review from Chapters 1 to 4 and the quality models proposed in Chapter 3.

The research design, methodology, unit of analysis, time frame, population, sampling, phases, data capturing and tabulating and the scoring of data are explained.

Chapter 6: Research results and analysis

This chapter will present the findings of the different phases of the exploratory study.

In the **first phase**, a pre-workshop was conducted with a corporate group to determine whether the workshop provided the respondents with an overview of quality and an understanding of the questionnaire.

During **phase two,** the revised workshop was conducted among the five faculties and one Support Service Department. During these workshops, respondents completed the SAEM Level 3, public sector questionnaire.

During **phase three**, a workshop was held in a faculty as part of the strategic session to determine if the self-assessment findings in terms of **strengths** and **areas for improvement** correlated with perceptions in the faculty. The strategic session followed a specific programme, philosophy, thinking and process. The strengths and areas for improvement were prioritised and integrated with the strategic objectives that were linked to the BSC and the SAEM.

During **phase four,** an analysis, comparison and incorporation of the lessons learnt from the HEFCE, as well as the Malcolm Baldrige Excellence Criteria in Education, were done. This included a personal interview in the United Kingdom with the Sheffield Hallam University Excellence Manager.

During **phase five**, the SAEM questionnaire and workshops were revised, based on the lessons learnt from phase one and two.

During **phase six,** the research findings were integrated and proposals for formats and frameworks were proposed.

The chapter concludes with a verification of the research hypothesis.

Chapter 7: Conclusions, recommendations and proposals for further research

In this chapter a final discussion on general theory is provided with recommendations addressing the seven research sub-objectives and the main objective.

The chapter concludes with proposals for further research.

1.9 Summary

In the introductory chapter continuous improvement in the higher education sector was introduced by providing definitions and rationale.

The research problem, objectives, demarcation and delimitation of the study and the basic research approach were outlined as well as the importance of and need for research on **continuous improvement** in the higher education sector.

In **Chapter 2** the higher education sector's changing role and the challenges facing it will be discussed. The South African higher education system and the specific issues facing higher education institutions will be scrutinised.