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Practices and Challenges of Quality Assurance Schemes in Ethiopian Quality Award Organization: Comparative Analysis of Private and Government Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

This paper is prepared to give a comparative analysis of quality parameters in private and government higher education institutions in Ethiopia based on the Quality Excellence Model of the Ethiopian Quality Award Organization. The study considered two private and two public higher education institutions that competed in the National Quality Award competitions and who were capable of passing to the second phase. The result indicated that most of the public higher education institutions have a little more advantage in establishing an organized and articulated leadership system as compared to private ones. However, there is no quite huge difference between the two with regards to the availability of relevant policies and strategies. Availability of resources is higher in public higher education institutions than the private ones. In private higher education institutions, there were some gaps observed in facilities, like class rooms, additional facilities for disabilities and others. However, careful management of resources is much more pronounced in private ones. The process quality criterion and the strengths and shortcomings are more or less similar in their type and magnitude in both public and private higher learning institutions. The core business processes of education and consultancy, research and community service are similar in public and private. While the introduction of technology in the delivering of results is implemented in both, public higher education institutions take advantage of creating linkages with the industry and with other higher educational institutions. Private higher education institutions usually measure their results by the rate of return they generate to shareholders while those of the public institutions measure their performance by number of graduates every year. While the private higher institute has to take the necessary benchmark from the public higher education institutions in the form of benchmarking, networking and industry linkage, the public higher institutions need to learn from the private ones in their cost conscious approach and cost effective approach. More importantly, efforts have to be made by both in addressing the ultimate contribution to the socio-economic development of the country and promoting their social responsibility than simply focusing on number of graduates or amount of profit earned.

1. Introduction

In the world we are living, quality is a must that has not required to be compromised. It is the universal standard searched by human race. Even if the basic parameters may differ from sector

to sector in relation to the rules and requirements of each profession, the general principle of quality governs all. It is almost entirely an acceptable truth necessary for survival and success in the long term that companies have to promote in their entire make up. Even though there are companies, which compromise quality in their operation and to generate some short term benefits, the gap created by their act of compromising quality will catch them up in the near future and they will urged to repay the liability with pronounced interest. No one will leave without paying what is due to him/her, of course, the payment mode may differ. This is universal truth.

Having this theoretical truth, it is important to identify how to promote quality in our country in general and in higher education sector in particular. This paper is prepared to give an idea about the quality parameters relevant to higher education and the quality assurance mechanism held by taking the case of experiences of those higher education institutions competing to be awarded the Ethiopian Quality National Award. The Ethiopian Quality Award is the only organization involved in the promotion of quality by giving quality awards to those companies recognized of achieving higher standard of quality by comparing the practices with a well established quality model. Therefore, the paper tries to identify the basic quality requirements that higher institutions has to ensure and the process of quality assurance as to how whether the recognized quality has really been achieved. The quality parameters as well as the assurance process have equal impact on quality.

Using the quality excellence model, there were quite some higher education institutions competing in the Ethiopian Quality Award. Their experiences in the quality award do really give some important ideas about quality assurance and quality systems. As the competing higher education institutions were from private and government, it is actually important to present a comparative analysis between the two. It gives quality parameters and its implementations in the higher education institutions from different perspectives to provide a complete picture relevant to the higher education system in the country as a whole.

The paper uses secondary data from books, documents and assessment manuals and more importantly the assessment results of the higher education institutions competing in the Ethiopian

National Quality Award. Particularly, the quality manual and assessment documents are the prime source used in this paper. The data collected will be organized in order to fit the higher education quality issues. The paper is organized into four parts. The first part is about literature review where the basic definition of quality so as to give a theoretical ground to base our frame of analysis. The second part is about the quality standards that higher education institutions in Ethiopia have to meet and the quality assurance system employed. The third part is about the findings which indicate the positive as well as opportunities for improvements observed in the quality award competition. Finally, conclusion and recommendations will be presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1 What is Quality?

Quality is one of the most important words in the business world. It has universal acceptance in almost all actors involved in the corporate world. However, as it have quite different parameters; many people can refer it as different things according to their own unique perspective. Therefore, it is highly important to identify clearly what is all about quality at the outset.

By quality we do really mean is operational excellence where companies approach their performance in an integrated approach that result in the delivery of ever-improving value to customers and stakeholders, contributing to organizational success sustainability, improving of overall organizational effectiveness and capabilities and organizational and personal learning[2]. An organization, with a reputation of quality excellence has an organized and well established system that can effectively utilize opportunities to sustainably fulfill the ever changing customers' preferences and sustainably grow in the harsh and challenging environment[3]. Quality is usually measured by the degree to which you meet the customer's desired product/service attributes. Attributes vary according to the product/service being delivered. Examples of commonly measured attributes include functionality, error rate, and performance to schedule.

[2] Liker Jeffrey, (2004) The Toyota way, 14 Management Principles from the World's Greatest Manufacturer, MacGraw- Hill, New Delhi, P XI,

[3] Peters, Thomas & Robert Waterman, (2004) In Search of Excellence, Lessons from America's Best Run Companies, p XVII.

Standards are usually established for the degree of quality expected[4]. Quality is widely recognized as one of the most important disciplines and strategies for economic development. Global Competitiveness is a reality and quality is a key to winning in the market place. By itself, quality may not guarantee success, but it is difficult to compete without it. Quality is usually at the heart of every successful company.

2.2 Excellence Model of EQA and its Quality Parameters[5]

The Excellence Model of EQA involves an integrated approach of seven core elements, namely: Leadership, Policy and Strategy, Resource Management, Processes, Customer Focus, Business Performance and Societal Impact. The model indicates that any company can achieve extraordinary excellence in its overall business performance through the implementation these seven elements in an integrated whole. The model is actually not new to the business practices. What makes it new is a new approach to implement them in an integrated whole and the focus they get by all parties and stakeholders of the organizations. The model enables companies to make all fragmented elements into integrated and purposeful whole. The seven key components are actually adopted based on international practices. However, the Excellence Model of EQA has detailed elements under each key element that take into account the specific situations in the country. The specific elements under the key elements are revised to enable to take into account the changing circumstances in the country. It has been said earlier that quality is the most important aspect of competitive advantage. It is impossible to compete in the market place without a recognized reputation of quality. Actually, quality is not only for competing in the market place. Nowadays, it is impossible to survive long in operation without quality.

However, quality is an elusive concept with quite numerous interpretations. One can interpret to its own view. Another person can also interpret it its own perspective. Therefore, to avoid such aspect, it is highly important to identify pertinent and agreed upon parameters so that we can concretely identify and implement it in the real world situations. These criteria are components

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[4] Peters, Thomas & Robert Waterman, p 8
[5] Ethiopian Quality Award Organization, (2012) Self Assessment Manual.

of excellence model that an excellent company has to fulfill to survive and compete adequately in the market place.

According to the Ethiopian Quality Award Organization, there are seven basic parameters under two categories that principally indicate whether an organization really implement quality in its operation. These quality parameters in total prove that quality is really promoted. These parameters are designed based on international practices and customized to fit the prevailing situation in the country.

There quality parameters of The Excellence Model of EQA include:

- Enablers or Drivers of Performance. Under this there are four basic parameters, namely:-
    - Quality Leadership,
    - Clear and Effective Policy and Strategy
    - Optimum Resource Management System,
    - Clear and workable Processes,
- Business Performance Results, Under this category, there are three parameters, namely
    - Customer Focus Systems and Operations,
    - Sound Business Performance
    - Positive Impact on Society,

The EQA model required that each competing company has to ensure all the enablers and results are in place in the organizational area. In order to ensure them all, the necessary specific questions are in place in the self assessment manual.

2.2.1 Enablers/Drivers category.

The enablers/drivers are those quality aspects that the company has to ensure so that the necessary preconditions for sustainable business performance could be assured. These parameters indicate that the company has really established the necessary ground for smooth operation and success. These parameters are not full by themselves, but just to create a conducive atmosphere for efficient and effective operation. A company that is recognized as

adequately establishing them is believed to create the necessary preconditions to achieve quality results. The basic idea of considering these quality parameters is the fact that the issue of quality is not a result one that is to be achieved at last, but also ensuring the necessary preconditions and processes from the beginning. It is a fact that we have to consider it just the day the company begin its operation. We have to start quality as a way of thinking just at the outset. Therefore, the matter of quality is not to be delivered while the product is marketed at last, but rather a principle that has to be embedded all the time, at all levels, and in all aspects of organizational system. The basic parameters of quality under this category include four, namely: Leadership, policy and strategy, Resource Management and Processes. These four aspects are the core elements of organizational operation where they laid the basic foundation to get into operation. Without these necessary organizational enablers, it is actually impossible to survive let alone succeed.

2.2.1.1 Leadership

Ultimately it is the quality of leadership that drives excellence, nurtures creativity, innovativeness, and achieves shared objectives among the best in people. True leaders exhibit strong will, clear thinking, are creditable, have the ability to inspire the vision, and are able to empower them to move from vision to reality. Leaders should have a sense of honor, clarity of purpose, a drive for perfection, a commitment to quality, an ability to think in the right direction, and understands the need to accept full responsibility for his decisions. A leader must instill purpose in the organizations employees in order to: develop individuals, build effective teams, delegate the ownership and authority, and must never allow his likes and dislikes to influence professional judgments. A central element of good leadership is visible involvement in the setting and supporting of customer oriented goals. Leaders need to show clear understanding of their customer, and stake holders and their different requirements; demonstrating clear commitment to excellence, and continuous improvement, across the organization as a whole.

2.2.1.2 Policy and Strategy

Policy and strategy addresses internal culture, structure and operations in both short term and long term with regard to priorities, direction, and needs of customers, community, resources, government initiatives and the community at large. Organizations must establish and clearly communicate their policies and strategies including their processes and plans and justify their continual existence. The organization must pledge to learn the expectations of customers, and strive to meet and exceed them at every juncture. The policies and strategies must be based on relevant and real information which is complete and unequivocal.

2.2.1.3 Resource Management

Five major resources exist in every organization: people resources, material resources, equipment and machine resources, and information and financial resource. How best an organization uses theses resources is a hallmark of value addition. The organization must continuously seek to release the full potential of its employees to realize the organization's goals. Is a significant amount of money tied up with work in progress (WIP)? Is inventory turnover optimized in ways that ensure that the organization is free from unreasonable working capital needs. The method of finance system to show accounts receivables, notes receivables, accruals and cash flows, capital tied up on assets, total investment etc are essential to know the financial performance of organization. The information at different stages of conversion, value addition process is very important in making appropriate decision. The information must cater to make the information available at right place and right time.

2.2.1.4 Processes

A process can be defined as sequence of operations that are performed during conversion process to convert a set of inputs (labor, material, knowledge, information, supplies, equipments, money, and time etc.) to produce required output through value addition at intermittent stages. Every organization will have a network of processes that will need to be identified, evaluated and improved on, on regular basis to ensure their effectiveness and efficiency. The areas of concern

are up gradation, renovations, continuous improvement and reengineering the business processes to gain cost competitiveness and quality leverage.

2.2.2 Business Performance Results

In the above category, the company has to establish basic grounds for quality in the form of establishing sound leadership, clear and implementable policy and strategy, enabling resource management system and sound processes. In this category, the company has to deliver results using the basic grounds established in the first category. The basic idea of this category is having the basic grounds fulfilled is pointless unless we achieve the required results. We have to coordinate the results with the necessary conditions. After the necessary conditions fulfilled, we have to ensure the results are achieved. The quality parameters under this category includes: Customer focus, business performance, and impact on society. These parameters clearly indicate whether the required business performance results and ultimate accomplishments of success are in place. They identify whether the company really ensure success using the enablers indicated as enablers, to show that the necessary preconditions are really important.

2.2.2.1 Customer Focus

The customers are defined not only as the end user of products or services but also the employees, stakeholders and others in the complete chain of supply. Customer service mainly dwells on meeting and exceeding customer expectations. The system must be consistent, flexible, and responsive towards customer requirements. It should also ensure that guarantee provisions are made, corrective actions for any deficiency are duly redressed, and complaints are handled correctly. To raise productivity, employees should be motivated and developed to exercise their maximum potential at work. The benefits of high productivity will bring widespread advantages, not simply more profits. Customer focus will bring spiral effects through improved organizational performance due to employees' attitudinal change, involvement, building teams and developmental activities of organization. Quality normally measured to the degree in which the company satisfied its customers. A satisfied customer is the common

indicator of quality service provision. Therefore, the higher institutions have to ensure that they focus on customer satisfaction as a sustainable way of doing business.

2.2.2.2 Business Performance

It is a well-understood phrase to state, "It cannot be managed if it is not measured". Business results are the measure of its performance for its efficiency, effectiveness and service rendered to all its stakeholders and other intangible intended out comes with regard to set objectives, targets and organization goals. It tells about the health and behavior of organization, about its financial health (the life line of organization), value addition, utilization of capacity, resources, liabilities, effectiveness of management system, sales and marketing, inventory turnover etc. These are measurable performance indicators to identify the weak areas of organization. The company has to deliver its responsibilities in a clear manner in the business performance. Normally, business performance is measured in terms of the level of performance according to plan, which includes, for instance the rate of return on investment, the number of students enrolled and graduated, the number of new faculties opened, number of new entrants, etc. Each company has to devise its own performance measurement parameters according to the business they are in. the quality parameters clearly articulated that the company has to deliver its business performance in remarkable achievement level. Any company without a recognized record of achievement in its business performance, it is not regarded as a company with quality focus.

2.2.2.3 Impact on Society

This primarily includes the socio economic impact of the business organ, its perception to quality of life, commitment towards preserving global and local environment, community development, and most importantly the contribution towards national development. The higher education institutions, as part of society, have to discharge their responsibilities in protecting the environment, have to involve in community development activities, and play a vital role in national development. Society has to benefit from the activities of the higher institutions, and this has to be ensured in recognizable way.

2.2.3 Quality Assurance Schemes

In order to ensure the quality performance, the following steps are going to be implemented. The evaluation process has the following steps:

Stage 1: Application

This is the step where interested applicants for the quality award apply to be registered for it. For the application, the only requirement is just willingness to get into the competition. The competing companies just approach EQA for registration.

Stage 2: Self-assessment

Self assessment is the next stage where the competing organization is presented with the opportunity to evaluate its performance based on the selected quality parameters prepared. The competing organizations fill the self assessment questionnaires that enable the organization to assess its own performance to ensure whether the quality parameters are really in place. The organization has to disclose its real performance. The competing organization also is required to supplement the self assessment manual with supporting documents that discloses the self assessment manual.

Stage 3: Submission of self-assessment report

The next stage is submission of the self assessment manual to EQA for approval. The competing company has to present the entire document for evaluation.

Stage 4: Independent review by the technical committee

After the self assessment manual is presented together with the supporting documents, the technical committee evaluates the quality performance review the documents independently based on the excellence model. The technical committee evaluates the self assessment manual rigorously and gives points accordingly.

Stage 5: Consensus review by the technical committee

The technical committee then discussed about the review results and arrives at consensus about the entire result. The committee discussed about the procedures employed, the data collected and the results arrived and a common understanding is arrived and the team endorsed the results.

Stage 6: Short listing

The technical committee then short listed those contestant companies that achieve results of recognition will be shortlisted for the next phase of competition.

Stage 7: Second registration

After those companies that achieve remarkable results will be notified and are invited to register for the second competition, field visit.

Stage 8: Site visit review

The site visit is the second competition that companies will be visited in physical by the technical committee to ensure the results are really in place. The technical committee approached the organizations and assesses all aspects of the organization to ensure that the quality parameters are really as per the self assessment manual, and provide final result for the award.

Stage 9: Technical committee recommends award recipients to the judge

The technical committee then recommends the results of the competition based on the field visit and recommends to the Jury (Judges) for approval together with the assessment result. For this purpose, the technical committee involve in series discussions to go through the results and ensure the results are really objective.

Stage 10: Judges' evaluate and recommend,

The Jury (Judges) involve in panel to approve the recommendations of the technical committee about which company will of course be awarded. The Jury, can request verification about the entire process and even the evaluation process will resume once again. This is for the purpose of arriving at legitimate approval process. After analyzing the entire process of evaluation, the Jury will make its own decision about which company will be awarded. The Jury's recommendation then will be forwarded to the Board for final approval.

Stage 11: EQA Board approve the recommended award recipients

The board then makes its own decision based on the recommendations of the Jury. The board's decision is final and then a national ceremony will be held to recognize those companies which are fortunate enough to get the award.

3. Quality Assurance Results of Higher Education Institutions

A number of higher education institutions were involved in the last two consecutive competitions. There were more than ten private as well as government higher education institutions that were involved in the quality award competitions. Therefore, the analysis of the paper is about the findings observed in these quality competitions. The analysis is based on comparison between the government and private higher education institutions to identify the positive as well opportunities for improvements.

3.1 Leadership as a quality parameter in higher education

According to the EQA assessment result, positive as well as areas of improvements have been observed in the assessment process in the leadership aspect indicated as follows.

3.1.1 Positive Elements

In the EQA assessment, both private and government higher education institutions have clear mission, vision, and values and it is one of the positive areas that they all share. The private as well as the government higher educational institutions have strengthen in identifying their mission, vision, and values in professional and acceptable way. Therefore, we can say that this is one important element to be cited as a positive element. In all the government and the private higher educational institutions, the leadership follows an open door system of dealing with important issues. The private and government higher education institutions leaders are relatively easy to approach and work with. In addition, the leaders are also reported to take some measures to motivate and recognize employees in relation to their performance, even if there are plenty of improvements to do.

Another important aspect of quality in all education institutions is the concern to promote excellence outside the organization, in another private as well as public organizations. There were examples of support by the higher educational institutions in other organizations to promote excellence in their performance in the form of organizing workshops, conferences, and research undertakings. The government as well as the private higher educational institutions undertakes efforts to practice workshops and conferences.

More importantly, there are also some elements of change initiations in some private, but in all government higher education institutions. The change initiatives in government higher education institutions are stronger as compared to private ones. The basic driving force for this is the availability of significant pressures from the government side to promote the change initiatives. The government higher education institutions have also more advantage in the implementation of strong mechanisms to control unfair action, discrimination and moral harassment and efforts to make sure the values of the organization are respected.

In addition, the government higher education institutions are also made some advantages in the existence of strategic framework that provide opportunities of articulating their objectives in smart, clear and measureable way. This is also a fact observed as a result of government initiation as a policy framework of introducing result based management system in their operation. In general, the leadership in private as well as the government higher education institutions is more in positive trend to lead the education system with some advantages observed in government part due the advantages generated through government policy intervention.

3.1.2 Opportunities for improvements

With respect to opportunities for improvement, there are some differences between the government and private higher education institutions. Almost all of the private higher education institutions competing in the quality award need to improve the strategic management system that provides opportunity for making objectives SMART, measurable and clear targets and cascade them up to the individual levels for good performance practices. In addition the private higher education institutions also need to devise strong mechanisms to control unfair actions, discrimination, and moral harassment to make sure that the values of the organizations are respected by all parties involved. However, all the government and the private higher education institutions alike needs to automate their performance system to take into consideration. Once it has been under implementation, there has to be a need to upgrade and improve.

3.2 Policy and Strategy

3.2.1 Positive Elements

In all private as well as the government higher education institutions relevant policies and strategies are available and well documented. These policies and strategies are important leadership instruments that they are going to use them in handling day to day performance. Another important aspect that the private higher education institutions have advantage is the good efforts of coping up with the dynamism of the education sector and the changes in the government policy. The private higher education institutions tried to strategically align their policies and strategies in response to the government governing policies. This is one important aspect that they operate in the environment. Actually, the government higher education institutions are of course align their strategies in accordance with the government policies and strategies, since they are part and parcel of it.

However, the government higher education institutions acquire more advantage to strategically design and include their market share and efforts to improve it in the governing policies and strategies. Moreover, the approach to develop policies and strategies in more participatory and likely to involve those interested parties in government higher education institutions than in the private ones. This is also a result of government in quite different policy dialogue and participatory forums.

In addition, the government higher education institutions also devised a strategy of incorporation of best practices from other higher education institutions and also from abroad. This is actually due to the government intervention to practice best practice sharing as a form of government policy.

3.2.2 Opportunities for Improvements

The Private Higher Education Institutions have to review policies and strategies continuously with tangible measures and targets. Moreover all higher institutions focus more on education and less on training and consultancy, therefore there has to be improvements in this areas. In both the government and private higher education institutions, even if the relevant policies and strategies

are in place, there are of course some elements missed to be included in the policies and strategies. One of such issue is environmental issue. Even if an attempt have been observed in the government higher educational institutions to incorporate it as an integral part of an overall system of modernization and development, it is not yet finalized to be implemented as a whole.

In general, the policy and strategy framework in the higher educational institutions alike is more or less on the side of positive where the relevant policies and strategies are of course in place, with some shortcomings. One of the shortcomings is the absence of periodic revision and missing of some cross cutting elements like environmental protection.

3.3 Resource Management

3.3.1 Positive elements

Resource Management is the third important element in the quality parameters. Resource management comprises different elements as human, material, financial, and information resources necessary for the implementation of policies and strategies. In the EQA quality award practices, almost all of the government and private higher education institutions have clear organization charts and job descriptions to appropriately manage their human resources. Moreover, all competing institutions have recognized system to upgrade the capacity of their staff through staff training and development. Almost all higher education institutions use 360 degree academic staff performance evaluation system to motivate high performing academic staff.

With respect to the availability of modern office and classrooms, and teaching materials, the government higher educational institutions are more in conducive place than the private higher education institutions. This actually is the result of less budget burden on government higher educational institutions since they are entitled to get yearly budget from the government. The government higher education institutions provide relatively housing facilities for their staff, while the private ones are not. On the other hand, the private higher education initiations are made some good efforts to optimally utilize available resources. This is one aspect is because of

more pressure on private educational institutions to utilize effectively what is available. With respect to managing finances, both of the higher education institutions are of course somehow in good condition.

3.3.2 Opportunities for Improvements

Managing support staff in all of the higher educational institution is an area where drawbacks and short comings are observed. In the private as well as government higher educational institutions, the way support staffs were managed was not well organized as the academic staff. Even in government higher education, there were not fully documented and appropriate job descriptions for the support staff with clear performance indicators. This was also exacerbated by lack of appropriate evaluation system employed to them. The resource management in the private as well as government higher education institutions, the resource management process was not supported by modern information technology. Still the management of resources was handled by traditional system of documentation that limits optimal utilization of resources.

The recycling of materials such as papers is one area where the private as well as the government higher education institutions have to work. As the educational institutions depend more on paper, it appears that they incur too much cost and recycling can contribute for this cost reduction. These private higher education institutions have to improve office facilities, modernize them, with automated system, and also improve facilities to accommodate people with disabilities and also have to improve the beautification and cleanness of school and office compound. Even if the government higher education institutions were somehow took advantage, they were not fulfilling the standard of beautification. They have to exert more effort to appropriately increase the beautification of their compound and office facilities. Therefore, it is advisable that both private as well as government higher education institutions have to improve the resources management system through the introduction of modern Information Technology, recycling of materials (paper), involve in the beautification of the classrooms and office compound.

3.4 Processes

3.4.1 Positive elements

The core processes of higher education institutions are three: education and consultancy, research, and consultancy. Therefore, these three core processes were clearly identified in all the private as well as public higher education institutions. In those private and government higher education institutions, quality assurance teams were available to ensure the quality of the core processes. Moreover, in all competing institutions, the involvement of student representatives in the periodic evaluation process is one important aspect that has to be continued.

The use of IT in the different implementation of the processes in all of the institutions is also another important aspect. Student registration, result management, and other official matters are now beginning to be managed through IT. There are also attempts to organize periodic workshops and conferences to base on selected research topics and disseminate the results to those interested parties for consideration. There are also periodic magazines, newsletters and pamphlets that enable good practices and knowledge sharing. Moreover, the government higher education institutions have also advantages in implementation of BPR as a form of revitalization of their business processes as a form of government intervention.

3.4.2 Opportunities for Improvement

Even if attempts have been observed to establish core and support processes, the fact to improve the performance of the business processes has been an area of concern. The core and support processes were not improved as the situation demands. In addition, in all of the higher educational institutions, even if there were attempts to establish service standards, it was not comprehensive. There were also limited efforts undertaken to assess their implementation against to the established design. Another important aspect is the implementation of IT. As has been indicated earlier, there were attempts to introduce the use of IT. However, it was not as per the expectation that meet the situation at hand. The higher education demands massive IT utilization. The requirement of the work volume is too much. However, what has been observed has been

mild implementation of IT. There has to be massive and fanatical drive to implement IT as a way of life and way of dealing with business. There are very limited IT library facilitates.

3.5 Customer satisfaction

3.5.1 Positive Elements

In all higher education institutions that got into competition, there were practices to undertake baseline survey and stakeholders and customers feedbacks about their performance. And some of higher education institutions, particularly, the government ones reported to achieve higher customer satisfaction rate, for some of the core businesses. For instance, in one of the higher education institution, there was more than 90% customer satisfaction rate registered for community and health services. This customer satisfaction survey has been reported to be continuous practice.

There are also good practices in terms of handling complaints of the key customers, students while undertaking their core businesses. The system has been established as a permanent way of dealing business. To enable the customer accessibility to education, in private higher education institutions there are attempts to involve the community in distance education. This is also an important element to increase customer satisfaction. Another important aspect is the implementation of social get together and annual programs to enhance the motivation of employees. This is also observed in all higher education institutions as a way of enhancing employee satisfaction, internal customers. The availability of housing facilities for staff makes the government higher education institutions advantageous. Staffs have been given housing facilities in government educational institutions.

3.5.2 Opportunities for Improvements

The implementation of customer satisfaction survey in private higher education institutions has not been as it is expected. Even if there are some attempts to do it once in a while, it has to be

performed continuously in a sustainable manner. Moreover, in private higher education institutions, staffs were not entitled to get housing facilities as most of these institutions are located in important city centers of the country. But this aspect enhances employee satisfaction.

3.6 Business Performance

3.6.1 Positive Elements

The business performance of all government as well as private higher education institutions has been indicated to be improved. The rate of return on investment (ROI) took a positive trend to increase the shareholders capital. Moreover, the income tax paid to the government is also on the increase. The property of the higher education institutions has been reported to grow tremendously as new buildings and other fixed assets grow continuously. There are also important developing trends in introducing new and diversified education fields to support the development of the country through the introduction of new departments, applied researches and other activities. Even the number of new entrants in the government as well as private higher education institutions was increased at a precedent rate. Yearly, a handful of graduates have been completed their education and entered the labor market. This is one important positive trend.

3.6.2 Opportunities for Improvements

Even if positive results have been observed in some performance standards in some of the basic parameters, particularly the quality parameters observed in graduates is still one critical element to be addressed. Most of the higher education institutions are not in a position to undertake the impact assessment study to ensure the real benefit accrued because of the high investment in education. The trend is that the government higher education institutions measure their performance based on the number of graduates, on the number of new fields under opened and similar other important but incomplete parameters. On the other hand, the private higher education institutions focus more on the rate of return accrued (actually important and irreplaceable) but still incomplete parameter to measure their successes. The society demands that the higher education institutions have to support the development efforts of the country

through contributing capable expert in quite different fields. Moreover, the higher education institutions should travel ahead in terms of identifying development opportunities and removing bottlenecks observed along the path of overall vision of the country to reduce poverty

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3.7 Impact on Society

Impact on society is other important quality parameters to be included in the performance of higher education institutions.

3.7.1 Positive elements

Higher education institutions in general identify community support as one core businesses in the country. All of the higher education institutions identify to support the community in their expertise advantage as one of the key business performance aspect. This is one important element to be raised as positive. All the government and private higher education institutions involve in the support the neighboring community in short term training, provision of financial support, and construction of toilets and soon. Even some of the higher education institutions, particularly, the government ones involve to work together with the neighboring government offices to conduct research to resolve the problem and challenges that they face. Some of the private higher education institutions also have been seen to provide limited scholarship to the very few selected poor sections of the society. In addition, there are also attempts to involve in the environmental protection by planting trees in their neighbors. Particularly, as the government higher education institutions take large plot of land, planting trees and protecting the vicinity of the campus is another important support to the society.

3.7.2 Opportunities for Improvement

The effort to support the society in all of the government as well as the private higher education institutions is actually an area of concern. Those activities that the higher education institutions are involved are of course important in their impact. However, as the name implies, there appears little concern to evaluate and assess whether the necessary impacts are actually generated due to

the interventions. And according to the actions of higher education institutions, the social impacts take too much time to see and much effort to clearly identify them. Particularly, the private higher education institutions are somehow in the disadvantageous position as compared to the government one's in the aspect of promoting environmental protection. Actually, there are no significant differences between the two.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

Quality is one of the most important words in the business world. It has universal acceptance in almost all actors involved in the corporate world. By quality we do really mean is operational excellence where companies approach their performance in an integrated approach that result in the delivery of ever-improving value to customers and stakeholders, contributing to organizational success sustainability, improving of overall organizational effectiveness and capabilities and organizational and personal learning. The Ethiopian Quality Award is the only organization involved in the promotion of quality by giving quality awards to those companies recognized of achieving higher standard of quality by comparing the practices with a well established quality model. A number of higher education institutions were involved in the last two consecutive competitions, in the year 2009 and 2012. There were more than ten private as well as government higher education institutions that were involved in the quality award competitions.

When we see the assessment results of EQA, there are of course positive results observed. Particularly, the enablers are more or less observed positively than the results. The leadership in all higher education institutions, even if have some very limited shortcomings, is on the positive trends. The policy and strategy framework is also positive. However, the results are somehow lacking. Both private and government higher education institutions focus not on the ultimate fulfillment of their purpose.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the above conclusion, it has been indicated that the following basic points can be indicated as recommendations.

1. All of the higher education institutions need to focus primarily on the basic success factor, the contribution they make by their intervention. It has to be embedded in their performance management system, and overall system of operation.

2. Private as well public partnership has to be established to create strategic partnership platform where best practices will be shared, common plans will be designed, and evaluated. This form of partnership also used as yardstick where they can commonly evaluate their performance.

3. More efforts have to be taken by all stakeholders to identify the basic quality parameters and included in the institutional reform by taking into consideration the unique aspects of higher educational institutions.

4. Leadership is the most important key component of quality parameters. Therefore, the leadership commitment has to be ensured by all processes at all levels.

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