Quality Management Systems: Our Hope for the Future

By Boniface Mwirigi Kiula

Since adoption of quality management systems (QMS) based on ISO 9001:2008, JKUAT has also steadily risen to be one of key champions of transformation of Government Agencies in Kenya. Through an MoU between JKUAT and the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) in 2008 under the Research, Production and Extension Division, the University embarked in a spirited campaign to facilitate the adoption of quality management and the eventual transformation of Government Agencies.

Under the MoU, JKUAT would facilitate training of top managers, middle managers (implementers) and operators and equip them with the awareness, knowledge and skill required to establish, document, implement, maintain and continually improve a quality management system in the respective institutions. In the years after, JKUAT has developed internal capacity, besides offering QMS training services, to also facilitate the documentation, implementation, maintenance, continual improvement as well as QMS internal and external audit services.

As the year 2011 drew to a close, the JKUAT QMS Resource Team had handled several high profile institutions including the Ministry of Industrialization, Ministry of Planning, National Development and Vision 2030, Ministry of Provincial Administration and Internal Security, Water Resources Management Authority (WRMA), Kimathi University College of Technology (KUCT), Municipal Council of Thika, Municipal Council of Murangá, County Council of Thika and Kenya Rural Roads Authority (KeRRA). Of these institutions, the Ministry of Planning, National Development and Vision 2030 and Kimathi University College of Technology are now ISO 9001:2008 certified with the others at diverse pre-certification stages while the projects for the Ministry of Industrialization and the Kenya Rural Roads Authority ongoing.

The adoption of QMS is a critical component of social, economic and political development. At the very heart is the transformation from functional, fixed-in-the-box, style of management in which every unit in an organization is closed from others and hence "defends its turfs" to a process approach in which related activities and resources are managed together regardless of departments to convert sets of inputs to sets of outputs that satisfy and exceed the ultimate requirements of the defined customer.

The QMS based on the eight principles of focus on the customer; astute leadership; involvement of people and utilization of their diverse competencies, training and awareness; process approach; integration of organization's processes into a seamless system; embracing a spirit of continual improvement in the organization; collection, analysis and utilization of facts to facilitate effective decision-making as well as the recognition of the central role played by suppliers and therefore fostering mutually beneficial relationships with them.

If the very spirit of QMS was embraced, private and public institutions would turn around their customer experiences, give impetus to socio-economic development and perhaps reinforce a spirit of patriotism in the citizens. Sustained national optimism is more a result of the promise of the possibility of prosperity and success, reinforced by the certainty of systems that work for the weak and the mighty, the thrift and hardworking even as they reassure of liberty and freedom. With efficient and effective systems, a citizen's faith in their countries is built and their patriotism nurtured at the national level while at the institutional level, the satisfaction of customers is assured, morale of employees revitalized, the support of stakeholders reaffirmed while the institutions prospects of success and sustainability fortified and buttressed.

We can express our gratitude to the Government of Kenya for making QMS a central theme of every government agency and even requiring that each of them pursues ISO 9001:2008 certification and making this even more certain by embedding it in the annual performance contracts.

The government demonstrated it's believe in systems by instituting systems at the national level such as the widely referenced Kenya Vision 2030; the socio-economic blueprint of the Nation that has given impetus to long ignored areas such as infrastructure development (new roads, increased and expanded airports, internet connectivity, new seaports and railway lines among others); agricultural production and value addition; expanded access to basic, secondary and higher education; tourism; irrigation and rural electrification among others. The country, the 2007/2008 post-poll upheaval notwithstanding, also embraced and has a new constitution that is expected to institute systems that can deliver and be depended upon.

Besides performance contracting, the government has had a taste and test of other systems and standards, at the institutional level, including rapid results initiatives (RRI) and development and strategic planning that is aligned to the national agenda. Perhaps the question would be the relationship between all

these systems, standards or approaches. The government instituted a "dream team" and attempted civil sector reforms in the 1990s. The benefits were either masked by the general public apathy or were never there at all. In the post-2002 era came the performance contracting which faced rejection by many sectors of the civil service but later embraced through sheer government determination as well as awareness and training. Results based management (RBM) and rapid results initiatives (RRI) also followed. The establishment of service charters and their virtuous display in government offices cannot be forgotten.

However, the success of the dream team, civil service reforms, performance contracting, RBM and RRI would not be ascertained without reviewing and giving birth to new internal structures. One project could be possibly embedded in the annual performance contract, fast-tracked through RRI and achieved. Well done! The lack of established structures that would ensure success of a similar project by a different set of people at a different time would almost certainly spell doom. Remember the many promises documented in service charters that were never delivered. Some employees even declared that the service charter was mere public relations. A system needs to be established and sustained, that would ensure that regardless of the times and circumstances we can reproduce products and services that would meet the requirements of the current and future customers.

It is for this reason that the emergence of a greater impetus towards establishing QMSs is highly lauded. Under it, the whole system is reoriented with clear processes demarcated with a clear focus on the respective customers. With processes well done it would be possible to reproduce satisfactory results that satisfy and exceed the expectations of the customers. It would be possible to run through the timelines of the various process activities and declare for sure that the process would deliver the result in a defined time-period and thus assure a student that your application for admission will be handled and replied to in 14 days, or you will collect your National ID in 30 days or you can collect the birth certificate in 7 days. With this kind of clear processes the information on service charters in offices across government would make a lot of sense.

Several attempts at automating institutions have grossly failed. Failure of ICT systems projects in government agencies such as information and financial management information systems (IFMIS), human resource management information systems (HRMIS) and enterprise resource planning systems (ERPs) has largely been blamed on poor requirements analysis, lack of technical

skills, poor project management or corruption among others. None of these can be excused. However, ICT systems largely reflect what would be done manually but whose efficiency and effectiveness is being improved by adopting ICT. Hence, the reason why ICT experts will spend a lot time trying to understand the envisaged systems from the users' perspective. The user requirements can be blurred and differ from one user to another albeit in the same department. What if the processes were properly defined *ab initio*? The users would be reading from one script and less time would be spent documenting the requirements for the software. The ICT experts would just pick the documented processes, sub-system or the whole system, automate it and deliver the system. Voila!

In the case of Kenya there are challenges that need to be addressed if efficient and effective QMSs are to be established, implemented, maintained and continually improved.

One is the general perception that the effort and investment to implement QMSs was forced upon institutions through the annual performance contracts in which every government agency was required, as one of its performance contract items, to pursue certification to ISO 9001:2008. The very essence of the adoption of a QMS is a strategic intent by the top managements (boards, councils, commissions, CEOs) to adopt systems that demonstrate ability to consistently provide products and services that meet customer, statutory and regulatory requirements while also enhancing customer satisfaction. Thus, the very perception of coercion, whether real or imagined should fade out into history and give way to a new realization, a renaissance and total reorientation. Henceforth, adoption of a quality culture whose benefits would not only accrue to the individual, the institution and the government but also bequeath hope and success to the future of our Nation.

The second challenge is the false assumption that QMSs established under ISO 9001:2008 are all about documentation. In this state and attitude, there is the tendency to make impressive documentation of our systems and when done revert to "our way of doing things". It is sad and despicable to dole out customer feedback forms to obtain customer perception as to the services rendered just before scheduled internal or surveillance audits to fool the QMS auditors and once the audits are past, the feedback is never analysed while the forms are stored to be retrieved at the next audit. The rest of the time customer requirements remain unattended and customers are disillusioned.

The third is a false assumption that the government is all rich, all capable and far removed from the individual person. It is utter folly to drive the institution's vehicle recklessly or use stationery wastefully or report to work at 10.00 a.m. and leave at 4.00 p.m. or inflate the cost of equipment just because *"hii ni mali ya serikali"!* It is a serious test of patriotism. It also reflects a lack of understanding that the government forms the whole while the individuals and the institutions form the parts and if a part fails in its duty the whole suffers and all of them face imminent demise.

The forth challenge is impunity at the high echelons of leadership and governance in which processes and systems matter the less while the individual leaders' influence and scheming matter the more. The mastery of impunity tramples established systems to benefit the fleeting whims of those in power. At the very best this state of affairs creates disillusionment for those that are faithful to the processes, systems and standards; raises a bleak future where those with hope can only rise to seize the day with their own culture of influence-peddling leaving the institutions and nations a mangled wreck of the past or an hopeless beast into the future.

Fifth are the illusory expectations of customers, suppliers and stakeholders that once an institution is ISO 9001: 2008 certified all its products and services become "quality" immediately. The institutions also fuel this perception given the glamour with which they launch and celebrate the certification. An institution is certified upon meeting the requirements as set out in the Standard and it's QMS which could be the bare minimum. Quality culture in practice, products and services is a whole ecosystem that is nurtured over time. The QMS so established ought to be maintained and continually improved, a step at a time, while preserving the quality gains accrued at every step.

Finally is lack of competence, training and awareness to drive the future of QMSs. This inadequacy of competence, training and awareness can affect several layers of the QMSs with varying results. Noting the general culture of local institutions, quality was never at the very centre hence an investment has to be made to change attitudes and ways of doing things. The top management must drive the reengineering and transformation so that people wake up to a new dawn of quality culture. Top management must also rise to the occasion with the determination to handle the small and the big changes that ought to be done to streamline institutions so as to deliver products and services that meet and exceed customer requirements.

It is also noteworthy that the requirements of ISO 9001:2008 are mere guidelines and that the Standard by far and large prescribes "the organization shall determine". It is therefore incumbent upon the top managers, middle managers and operators to determine mechanisms to, for instance, plan how to develop their unique products and services, obtain requirements of their unique clients, design and develop the products and services, obtain supplies of quality inputs and infrastructure, realize products under a quality controlled environment, preserve these products and services for the customer, find out what monitoring and measurements needs to be maintained for the respective products and services and how the data obtained can be analysed for maximum utility in continual improvement.

It is hoped that Kenya can be transformed through the internal transformation of individuals, processes and systems and thus embrace the future with a reborn quality culture. It is also hoped that the reason our institutions are embracing QMSs is not merely to show compliance with government coercion or gain points in the annual performance contract evaluation but to support the Nation in its quest for a prosperous future as espoused in the Kenya Vision 2030. The championship by JKUAT is at the very core of its vision of *"a university of global excellence in training, research and innovation for development"*.

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