

Competency of Quality Assurance Officers: Comparative Analysis of Literature Review and Survey Research in Thai Public Higher Education

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to compare the QA officer competencies from literature review and the survey in Thai public higher education. The study is composed of two phases. The first phase, the QA officer competencies based on 13 publications from 1991 until present, accessed through the electronic and internet database are synthesized. The second phase, the QA officer competencies in 16 public higher education institutions are analyzed. The conceptual framework of Schneckenberg and Wildt (2006) and Ehlers (2007) is employed for the analysis. The results are formed that 45 QA officer competencies from literature review are categorized into 4 groups. They are quality experience, analysis, knowledge, and innovation, respectively. While 27 QA officer competencies from the survey are categorized into only 3 groups. They are quality experience, knowledge, and analysis, respectively. The comparative study is shown that 20 QA officer competencies are in a similar category from two sources of data whereas other 52 competencies show dissimilarities.

Key Words: Competency; Quality assurance; Quality assurance officers; Higher education

Introduction

The quality assurance has become a tool for organization development that private as well as public agencies have widely implemented. A number of researches indicate that quality assurance (QA) staff influence the success of organizations, for example, Badri et al., (1995) and Saraph et al., (1989) who investigate QA as a tool for the determination of organization success, recognized that the role of QA is one among the eight major factors that leads to the success. Further, the research findings suggested an interesting fact that QA staff play a vital role in the management of organization (Waddell, 1998). The QA staff are required to be highly literate and skillful as they form a linkage between the senior administrators and staff in all sectors of the organization. They perform their responsibilities in compliance with the quality assurance policy and system development. They are normally expected to build up the incentive that encourage the personnel to adopt the philosophy and QA oriented process. The QA can minimize the operation cost, enhance the customer satisfaction and development of newly introduced techniques to keep pace with organization development (Waddell and Stewart, 1999; Gutner and Adams, 2009).

The Thai higher education institutions have employed the QA concept as enforced by the National Education Act 1999, revised (2nd version) in 2002, indicating the QA has to be incorporated in education system for quality and standard development at all levels, including internal as well as external QA. The agency-in-charge at national level is constituted by two agencies, i.e. (1) Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) which is responsible for internal QA and (2) Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (Public Organization) (ONESQA) that looks after the external QA. Both agencies convey the policy to all tertiary institutions to operate as outlined in the QA Handbook (OHEC, 2011; ONESQA, 2011).

As recognized above, the authors are interested in studying the competence of personnel responsible for QA process. Since the competency concept has been widely implemented in several areas of human resource management, for example, the recruitment, training and development, performance management, appraisal, incentive and reward, and talent

management (Ratsameetam- machot, 2008, 2011; Office of Civil Service Commission (OCSC), 2005; Horton, 2000). The review of the publications is available in international database and 16 higher education institutions, with the objective of comparing the QA competence available in literature review and survey research in higher education institutions. Results of the study indicate that the knowledge and the tool development are useful for further determination of QA staff competence.

Concept of the Study

The study relies on the concepts of Schneckenberg and Wildt (2006) and Ehlers (2007) who propose the competence of stakeholders in the process of educational quality development which comprises four competences, as follows:

1) Quality knowledge: This aspect addresses the “pure” understanding of the possibilities of current quality development and up-to-date quality strategies in higher education.

2) Quality experience: The aspect describes the ability to use quality strategies with a particular intention. It is based on the experiences that performers have with quality development and the application of quality strategies to educational scenarios.

3) Quality innovation: This aspect relates to the ability to create and develop quality strategies and/or instruments for one’s own purpose. It proceeds beyond the simple use of existing instruments and strategies.

4) Quality analysis: Quality analysis involves the ability to critically analyze the processes of quality development in light of one’s situation and to reflect one’s objectives and circumstances.

Methods of Study

The study is constituted by two phases, the pilot of which is the synthesis of literature pertaining to the competence of personnel involved in operation of organization employing the narrative review approach. Information from research articles, thesis available from Google Scholar, database for academic work, and electronic database subscribed

by Resource Learning Center of Central Library, Prince of Songkla University. The criterion of inclusion vs. exclusion is used in literature selection. The articles selected must be published in English and peer reviewed while those unselected are articles without study of QA staff competency and are not fully published or only abstract is available. The key words used in the search include QA officer competency, quality manager competency, and quality staff competency in the title or key word of publications. The criterion in the screening is based on the work published since 1991. The abstracts are selected for those that fulfill the research objectives. A total of 13 articles were found useful to the study. Phase II studies the competence framework for the QA staff in 2012 with information from 16 public tertiary institutions available on agencies' websites and annual report of the institutions which are the public institutions as classified by OHEC (2012), encompassing the following: Kasetsart University, Khon Kaen University, Thammasat University, Nakhon Phanom University, Princess of Naradhiwas University, Naresuan University, Mahasarakham University, Maejo University, Ramkhamhaeng University, Srinakharinwirot University, Silpakorn University, Prince of Songkla University, Pathumwan Institute of Technology, National Institute of Development Administration, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, and Ubon Ratchathani University, except Rajabhat University and Rajamangala University of Technology. Followed by the interviews with the head of section or personnel working in the QA section with responsibility in the designation and competence appraisal of the personnel in the agencies for the completeness of information and to testify the information received. Meanwhile, the authors verify the validity of information on the designation and personnel competence appraisal through the interview with the personnel in charge of the further appraisal of competence. Majority of the task is carried out by Human Resource Management Section to summarize the information which is contextually synthesized.

Findings

1. QA personnel competence from literature review

The publication available are conducted both in public and business sectors. A total of 45 competencies are identified. The competence in information collection and analysis to determine the performance appear in 7 articles. Four aspects of competence are classified based on the concept of Schneckenberg and Wildt (2006) and Ehlers (2007), as follows:

Table 1 Four aspects of QA personnel competence from literature review

Type of quality competence	Competence recognized
1. Quality knowledge	1. Collection/information analysis to determine the performance ^{a,e,f,h,j,k,m} 2. Report preparation for the organization performance ^{d,e,f,l,m} 3. Development and training for agency staff ^{e,j,k,l} 4. Quality accreditation ^{f,j} 5. Knowledge of curriculum ⁱ 6. Knowledge of management tools ^l 7. Knowledge of accounting ^d 8. Knowledge of sales and marketing ^d 9. Budget management ^j
2. Quality experience	1. Incentive buildup leading to QA initiative in the agency ^{a,e,f,h,k} 2. Provide advice/consultation on QA issues ^{d,e,f,g,i,j} 3. Coordinate activities with other sectors in agency ^{a,e,f,h} 4. Leadership/human resource management in the agency ^{b,c,j,l} 5. Monitor procedures and performance results ^{a,d,g} 6. Coordinate teams ^{b,f,h} 7. Supervise the operation in accordance with quality policy ^{a,f,m} 8. Liaison with external quality associations ^{d,j,k} 9. Management skills ^{e,l} 10. Embed quality accountabilities and responsibilities into executive leadership ^h 11. Bring QA into practice ^j 12. Communication ^j 13. Convert attitudes of agency personnel ^f 14. Strategic planning ^{j,l,m} 15. Align limited resources uses to maximize benefits ^h 16. Manage business counterpart ^l 17. QA project management ^{j,m} 18. Develop personal relationship ^{a,b,c,d,i}

Type of quality competence	Competence recognized
3. Quality innovation	1. Develop document system ^{c,m} 2. Improve work procedures ^{d,g,m} 3. QA research ^{i,m} 4. Accurately translating customers needs, supporting requirements and delivery processes ^h 5. Encourage innovative ideas ^{a,f}
4. Quality analysis	1. Customers recognition ^{g,k,l,m} 2. Assess QA system ^j 3. Welcome staff feedback ^{a,d,g} 4. Maintain accreditation and certification ^{d,g,k} 5. Ensure confidence in the organization operation in compliance with policy ^{e,f,h} 6. Analyze organizational policy ^j 7. Propose QA initiative ^{a,f} 8. Deploy quality with context and expectation ^{h,k} 9. Elevate key measures that drive action aligned with bottom line results ^{a,h} 10. Emphasize organizational results through process ^h 11. Forecast the changes and measure to cope with situation ^h 12. Understand the management system of the organization holistically ^h 13. Problem analysis and solving ones that relate to QA ^k

NB: References for superscripted competences

a. Jeffrey (1992), b. Stratton (1996), c. Mallen (1997 cited in Waddell & Mallen, 2001), d. Waddell (1998), e. Wilson (2000), f. Rondeau & Birdi (2005), g. Burcher, Lee, and Waddell (2008), h. Gutner & Adams, (2009), i. Ajuoga, Indoshi & Agak (2010), j. Gagliardi, Majewski, Victor, & Baker, (2010), k. Andreescu (2011), l. Keathley, (2012), m. Tang (2013)

The synthesis of essences on QA personnel competence from the review of publications reveals the existence of forty-five competence categorized into four aspects. Majority of the competences, eighteen, are classified in quality experiences, followed by thirteen quality analysis competence while quality innovative is the least recognized competence.

2. QA personnel competence from the survey in public higher education institutions

The survey in sixteen public higher education institutions, twelve of them have no benchmark for the competence of QA personnel, the appraisal is performed based on the competence designated by the Office of Civil Service Commission. There is only one institution that has established its own appraisal criteria while three institutions have adopted the position title as the competence designation. The details on competence for the operation performance are given in Table 2.

Table 2 Three aspects of QA personnel competence from the survey in public higher education institutions

Type of quality competence	Competence recognized
1. Quality knowledge	1. Understand QA system and mechanism 2. Understand the indices and assessment criteria 3. Understand the measurement and assessment 4. Understand assessment results
2. Quality experience	1. Analytical thinking 2. Planning 3. Tolerance 4. Public relations 5.Coordination 6. Presentation skill 7. Emerging problem solving and decision 8. Consultation skill 9. Coverage and accuracy 10. Moral and ethics 11. Service mind 12. Knowledge and skill 13. Leadership 14. Communication 15. Enthusiasm 16. Proactiveness 17.Organizational commitment 18. Flexibility 19. Concern for order 20. Relationship formation 21. Information seeking 22. Literacy in information technology
3. Quality analysis	Organizational awareness

The QA staff competencies from the survey in public higher education institutions are categorized into three groupings from a total of 27 competencies. Majority of the competences, twenty-two, are grouped in quality experience, and followed by four quality knowledge and one quality analysis competences, respectively.

3. Comparison of the QA staff competence between literature review and survey in public higher education institutions

From analyzing the meaning and the description of QA staff competencies, it is formed that twenty from seventy-two competencies are interrelated. So, the remaining fifty-two competencies are different. Moreover, these competencies from two sources are in a similar category as quality experience as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 The QA staff competences in a similar category from literature review and the survey in public higher education institutions

Competence from literature review	Competence from survey
Quality knowledge	
1. Quality certification	1. Understand QA system and mechanism 2. Understand the indices and assessment criteria
Quality experience	
1. Provide advice/consultation on QA issues	1. Consultation skill
2. Coordinate activities with other sectors in agency 3. Liaison with external quality associations	2. Coordination
4. Leadership/human resource management in the agency	3. Leadership
5. Monitor procedures and performance results	4. Concern for order
6. Communication	5. Communication
7. Strategic planning	6. Planning
8. Develop personal relationship	7. Relationship formation
Quality innovation	
-	-
Quality analysis	
1. Understand the management system of the organization holistically	1. Organizational awareness

Conclusion and Discussion

The synthesis of information available from thirteen publications reveals a total of forty-five competences of QA staff, covering four aspects of competence. Among these, the highest number of eighteen quality experience is recognized, followed by thirteen competences for quality analysis. While there exist twenty-seven competence grouped in three aspects are noted from the survey on competence assessment for QA staff, majority of publications are grouped in quality experience whereas the quality innovation is undetected. The comparison of competence between those available from the literature review and from survey indicates that twenty competences are in a similar category.

From the aforementioned findings, it is shown that most competences are categorized in quality experience, which is in congruity with that from the literature review and the survey. Due to the QA staff has a major role of transferring the QA policy into practice, particularly in those connected with the core organizational responsibilities. Hence majority of competences are related to the introduction of system and QA mechanism for maximum efficiency. Diverse techniques, methods, and skills are required in the operation. The least recognized competence, i.e., quality innovation, which is undetected in the survey, presumably due to the fact that the QA system has been systematically developed during the last decade. Majority of the higher education institutions are in the learning period for the system management in the organization. However, OHEC (2011) has shown appreciation to such issue as the nine components have been incorporated in the criteria for internal QA. The target is the expectation of higher education institutions and affiliated agencies to disseminate good practice or QA related research developed in other agencies. It is basically emphasized that the common innovation for the organization be set up. To date, it has not been designated to assess individual performance while the quality innovation obtained from the literature review reflects the responsibility of QA agency to develop and continuously streamline the system, for example, development of documentation system, improving the procedure, work process and research. Tang (2013) indicates that the process

of conveying QA system into the Libraries of the Australian Technology Network (LATN) which conducted the study in higher education. The survey on Thai tertiary institutions did not recognize such competence, probably due to majority of tertiary institutions have adopted the competences designated by OCSC and hence fail to directly reflect the task of QA staff.

Comparing the competence noted from the literature review and the survey, it is found that there are twenty identical or similar competences. This finding points to the fact that the organization requiring the effective introduction of QA system should significantly be recognized for these competences. Since it is applied widely in human resource management in Thailand as well as overseas. This competence should be encouraged in the implementation of selection, development and individual appraisal in handling QA responsibilities. While the irrelevant fifty-two competences should be utilized supplementary in considering the needs and importance, particularly the competence extracted from the literature review that can directly reflect the tasks of QA personnel, and better cover the QA tasks. Since the research findings disseminated is systematically investigated into QA personnel, reflecting clearly their responsibilities. Meanwhile, majority of Thai higher education institution lack the direct designation of QA staff competence, rather relying on the competence for other position in the appraisal. Nevertheless, the competence shown in the literature review partially reflect the knowledge, skill, and characteristics of personnel in business sectors, e.g. knowledge of accounting, salesmanship, marketing, customer management. There should be a development to better respond to the customers' needs and delivery process. As majority of the academic article utilized in the analysis are the studies conducted by private sector, accounting for 53.84 percent. Therefore, the data can be indirectly relevant to the tertiary education. Due to the difference in status, goal and nature of work, each type of organization requires different individuals' characteristics.

Nevertheless, the organization may wish to be benefited from using competence should acknowledge the significance of QA individual competence frequently referred to. The collection, data analysis to assess

the performance is the most quoted competence, since the competence in data collection, analysis to assess the performance is in compliance with the primary objective of the introduction of QA for organization development to enhance the competitiveness. Therefore, the data collection for the assessment of organization performance is the vital process to successful organization performance. There are also critical data and information in the performance measurement in comparison with the operation plan. While other competences should comply with the nature of the responsibility assigned to QA personnel for the development of QA to progress in the direction of executive policy.

Recommendations

1. At present, the introduction of competence in the human resource management has been widely practiced and there should be an analysis of role, and scope of QA responsibilities in private and public sectors. The principle of work analysis which include the collection process, analysis of nature of task, and achievements expected by the organization, with emphasis on the actual role at present and follow the strategy or the future mission of the organization. This will allow the designation of competency that appropriately covers the responsibilities.

2. Thai tertiary education should analyze the task performed by QA personnel, leading to the appropriate designation of competence that complies with the task. Since all institutions are recruiting personnel with direct QA responsibility, although the competence, at present, are shared with other tasks. Therefore, the appropriate designation of competence can present the knowledge, capability and genuine skill of personnel that leads to the right direction of staff development. Further, the designation of competence should consider the innovative and analytical qualities to establish the balance among all four competence aspects.

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