

## FINAL EVALUATION REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION AND TRANSFER OF THE QUALITY MODEL IN ITALY AND AUSTRIA

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report presents the findings of the Evaluation of the implementation and transfer of the Management model (Empower 2010-revised ) in Italy and Austria. The report has been redacted by the Italian Quality Expert, prof. Salvatore Trollini and the Austrian Quality expert, dr. Thomas Reautschnigg.

According to the Empower.ment Workplan, the report of the Final Evaluation must be carried out by the two Quality Experts commissioned by the Italian and Austrian participating schools, in order to assess at geographical level, the work carried out in terms of comprehension, concrete application and diffusion of Quality principles and processes within the educational institutions.

More specifically the objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Undertake an analysis of the results of the model implementation and a comparison with its objectives;
- Assess the efficiency of the policy set up after the needs analysis
- Establish whether changes are needed for participating schools and suggest possible improvements to the scope.

The evaluators relied on the following methods to conduct the evaluation:

- Continuous face to face meetings with the Scholastic working groups of schools (SWG);
- On distance assistance and tutoring with the correction of draft documents of assessment and feedbacks on all works developed during the two project years by SWG.

The analysis will be further illustrated according to the activities developed within the core Work packages, that are:

- WP1: Adaptation of Empower Model
- WP2: Experimentation of the Model
- WP3: Monitoring and Evaluation of the planning and the experimentation (at Quality model level).

### ***The Methodological framework***

The model has been planned so as to be flexible and suitable to improvement and adjustments on the basis of individual requirements and/or external inputs as partners' suggestions, good practices,

socio-cultural inputs, ISO standards as well as inputs coming from new group of disadvantage people (as disadvantage students) .

The EMPOWER model, thanks to its flexible nature, has been created with the scope of being used by whatever VET institute and other secondary schools and for this reason it can be continuously adapted and improved by any other educational and vocational contexts. The model, in addition to being intuitive and interactive, is supplied with special guide lines to allow an easy comprehension and application.

The structure and the content of this product are based on 5 dimensions or macro processes numbered as A, B, C, D, E. Each dimension, in turn, is articulated into elements (processes) and questions (sub- processes). In order to reply to them, the model makes clear a set of suggestions /ideas called “factors” that are annotated. It follows that the implementation of the model with this interactive formula is absolutely non- technical: in reply to questions, on the basis on the suggestions given by factors and notes, the VET institute user is able to emphasize its strength and weakness points about all Quality requirements of the model. In practice the School Working Groups of every institute, thorough this formula of “driven self-evaluation”, could emphasize their critical areas on which making an intervention with appropriate corrective actions as well as implementing benchmarking actions with other schools participating to the experimentation with also technological supports (platform for the publication of evaluation report and forum).

The versatility of the model shows a set of factor and connected notes, as foreseen by the basic version, which are not exhaustive: the schools, on the basis of their peculiarity, can enrich the model introducing additional factors and explicative notes. Actually, the project proposal intends to use and ri-adapt the model general design through a needs’ analysis that we be conducted on the new School Working Groups in Italian and Austrian schools. In such a way, there has been possible to define new target groups, enlarging the focus to other disadvantage students. The model has been experimented again through a prior information and awareness campaign about Empower and the Quality culture.

The structure of this new project foresees the ri-adaptation and the ri-experimentation of innovative the methodology of Empower model to other schools in Italy and Austria, starting from the excellence centres identified in the final evaluation of the previous experimentation: the Casagrande/ Cesi Institute and the EHS Borg secondary school. The aim is to adequate and

implement in the system the methodology so that it can be used in other educational contexts with their own particular needs.

On the contrary, concerning Romania, the Control Room after the needs analysis has opted for proceeding by degrees through an intense training and information activity aimed at raising awareness in order to get closer the Romanian school and Institution to the Culture of Quality and other tools to implement the evaluation by processes. The methodology has been also extended to the disadvantage categories such as linguistic and ethnic minorities, disabled, etc. The model has been also adapted in order to manage all students' exigencies, included disadvantages' ones. In practice, the transfer is geographical (Italy and Austria) as well as of adaptation of the needs of other target groups (extension from immigrant students to other disadvantage groups, including all the students with special needs of learning).

#### **ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY QUALITY EXPERTS IN ITALY AND AUSTRIA**

- Training courses were conducted on quality in schools, offered to the work groups of the partners and stakeholders in the areas involved;
- Support was provided for the training of the work groups of the schools and the local committees, involved the interested parties who had demonstrated the most interest in the project during the meetings designed to raise awareness.
- Support was provided to the work groups, especially from a methodological standpoint, for analysing the needs of the interested parties.
- Through the quality expert's participation in the work group meetings and long-distance tutoring, methodological assistance was provided on a rather ongoing basis for the preparation of self-evaluation reports.
- Support was provided during the local committee meeting in order to periodically and systematically gauge the point of view of the local stakeholders;
- Support was provided for updating the analysis of the needs of all the interested parties and for the preparation of a new self-evaluation report, which included the integrative requisites regarding environmental protection and health and safety, also based on the areas of improvement identified during the first draft and the good practices changed by the other schools participating in the project;
- A cross "peer review" was conducted for each partner, with the aim of confirming in the field the status of the application of the model and the efficiency, effectiveness and flexibility of the actions taken.
- Assistance was provided for implementing the corrective actions required to be taken as a result of the findings (areas for improvement) shown in the self-evaluation report and confirmed in the external evaluation (peer review);
- Assistance was provided in the design of a grid listing process control and performance indicators, customised for each participating school, which can be enriched over time and used by other organisations in the field;

- During the national and transnational meetings, the participants shared the good practices that emerged during the experimentation and planning of the actions for the sustainability and transferability of the model.
- An initiative was conducted aimed at transferring to a school district (nursery, elementary and middle school of Assisi), whose headmaster had shown interest in the management model involved in the Empower-ment experiment. The headmaster, together with a delegation of the same institute, was welcomed into the “IIS Casagrande-Cesi” school by the headmaster, by the Empower-ment work group and by the Steering Committee. During this very productive meeting the adaptability of the model to the context of the nursery, primary, and middle school level was also evaluated from a technical standpoint. It should be pointed out that in that forum, the Headmaster of the school demonstrated considerable enthusiasm, noting obvious improvements in the organization and relational climate between students and teachers and within the faculty, completely changing his mind about his perplexities and skepticism expressed during the initial phase of the experimentation. The director of the Assisi school district is also committed to sharing, promoting and transferring the Empower-ment methodologies to other schools in the territory.

#### **WP1: ADAPTATION OF THE EMPOWER MODEL**

##### *Work package progress description*

The steps involved in sharing and analyzing the model’s needs and adaptation, as provisioned in the project, have been completed, as demonstrated in the minutes from national and transnational meetings, during which the phase was developed. Secondly, a special validation report was drawn up by the Steering Committee based on the framework that emerged during the previous phase.

##### *Methodological approach*

For the first phase, the methodological tools included lectures enriched by discussion and debate, with the support of slides and a video projector and, for classroom exercises, cooperative learning, using flip charts, transparencies for video projectors and post-it notes. For the analysis of needs, the methodology used was to prepare a questionnaire that was sent to the interested parties identified. Both the content of the questionnaire and the processing of the results and the list of needs were defined during brainstorming sessions (and reverse brainstorming) using post-it notes and flip charts. The same method using the same aids was adopted by the Steering Committee in order to validate the model.

##### *Deviations from the initial proposal, including change reason*

Compared to the initial planning, the training activities, through lectures, discussions, and debate, exercises and group work in order to regulate the self-assessment activities and the collegial presentation of the results, were concentrated and completed before the first experimental phase (WP2), to ensure that the work groups already had an adequate store of

knowledge to move easily along the individual dimensions of the management model and could already begin launching the internal transfer phase to involve all of the school's stakeholders.

#### 4. WP2: EXPERIMENTATION OF THE MODEL

##### *Work package progress description*

The two Italian schools and the two Austrian schools have completed every part of the self-assessment report, complete with the assignment of a numerical score based on the grid contained in the model and a listing of the strengths and areas for improvement. Romanian school "GRUPUL SCOLAR "HENRI COANDA" followed the assessment process as a combined process answering the modello and Romanian Quality Law for schools.

The "IIS Casagrande-Cesi" school, EHS and Goethe Gymnasium has also adequately developed additional requirements on the Environment and Safety introduced in the second year, while the "IPSSCTSP "DE FILIPPIS" school, although it followed the criteria and methods, implemented the system with some delay.

Both of the Italian schools, also the Austrian schools encountered problems with the E dimension of the model (Results, analysis and improvement), due to the schools' general difficulties in collecting data, analysing it with appropriate statistical tools and interpreting the findings for decision-making purposes.

In fact, the strategic value of monitoring and measurement as a tool for improvement has not yet been fully perceived. It is in this area that the efforts of quality experts have been concentrated to raise awareness and to provide methodological support. In fact, the lack of feedback, complete and supported by data, to management that, during the general review of the system could proceed with a new planning and re-planning of the management system, according to the virtuous PDCA cycle, would have made the experiment model incomplete in its final and crucial phase.

The efforts and commitment of the Italian partners, while not always continuous, were appreciable. The same situation in Austria. Less time budget was hindering better performance. However, the self-evaluation reports revealed that there is a wide margin for improvement for the implementation of the model. Although the model was proposed by the partners in a way that could be described as "a-technical", with a "guided implementation" formula, through questions, insights (factors) and application examples (notes), and a complete lack of procedures, operating instructions and time-consuming forms, many requisites were not adequately developed and properly interpreted, compared to the expectations of the Steering Committee.

Generally speaking, the tendency to respond to the questions of this model appears to be non-proactive, so to speak (with phrases such as "At the moment, the training institution / school does not ..."), rather than gaining insight from the explanatory examples (notes) to become aware of their organizational gaps with respect to the requirements of the model and to identify potential solutions to address them.

The central role of the Ministry in defining the general educational contents may well be seen as a constraint in the independent management of one's own learning process, but still leaves plenty of room for freedom and does not preclude, however, to have a good educational organisation, founded on the concepts of quality, effectiveness, efficiency and flexibility, following the logic of process management, a performance measurement system and ongoing improvement.

Difficulties persist in framing the organisation as a system, consisting of a network of processes. The D Dimension (providing educational and support services) is almost seen as something pre-established, preconceived, and not the result of an adequate analysis of training needs, of the performance results of the processes implemented, of the feedback data from the users and other interested parties, as well as proper and systematic planning activities.

Most likely, the deficiencies can be mainly attributed to the often inadequate involvement of Senior Management (School director, Headmaster) and in the work groups that, on their own, do not have decision-making authority and have a limited impact on the strategic choices of the training institute or school. Without a conscious involvement and a strong motivation by Senior Management, the probability of a successful implementation of the model are significantly compromised and the results are merely sporadic and random.

No less important is the rare diffusion, especially in the public sector, of the culture of quality and the modest practice, especially in the fields of training, to work to achieve processes (on an inter-functional team), with a predominance of hierarchical-functional organizations, characterized by considerable bureaucracy, functional specialization and poor coordination (even among teachers). An appropriate action to raise awareness and promote the culture of quality may have required more training activities. The transnational meetings, which proved to be sporadic (due to limited budget), were not very effective in this direction.

The project's limited budget also had a major impact on the actual motivation of the personnel involved, a key factor in the experiment's success.

As a logical consequence, on average, the commitment of the partners was not always consistent, nor did it meet expectations. No partner fully complied with the time schedule guidelines for the preparation of the self-evaluation reports.

The most active partner was undoubtedly the IIS-Cesi Casagrande school from Terni, which capitalized on the closer interaction with the quality expert of the Steering Committee, which has in any case conducted, also to the benefit of other partners, a methodical activity of FAD mentoring, returning the files sent back to the groups in a timely manner, along with comments and suggestions for the proper implementation of the model requirement that is the subject of the self-assessment, and the Austrian partners (EHS / Goethe Gymnasium), which has taken advantage of the valuable collaboration, in the presence of a local quality expert.

The E Dimension that, with the collection of the performance results of the processes and the comparison with the objectives and targets planned in Dimension B, closes the "virtuous cycle" of W.E. Deming, and puts Senior Management in the position to review, supported by the data, the organizational system (Dimension A) and to begin a new "Deming cycle" (planning new objectives for the coming year - Dimension B -, planning the need for economic and human resources, materials and funding – Dimension C - redesigning and re-calibrating the education process, providing, under the new rules, the relative instruction and services - Dimension D -,

monitoring and measuring the performance of processes, collecting data on the results – Dimension E-, re-examining everything and starting again with a new plan), was less focused in terms of interpretation and less developed on an operational level. Only at Romanian school “GRUPUL SCOLAR “HENRI COANDA” a management review like document was done, as it is a must stated out in Romanian Quality Law for schools.

This reflects a rather general difficulty in measuring, collecting and analyzing the performance data of processes on which Senior Management, during periodic reviews, can base their decisions on for ongoing improvement. Even the concept of a comprehensive review by Management (point A3 of the model), to verify the implementation of policies and the achievement of strategic objectives formulated during the planning phase doesn't yet appear to be fully assimilated and metabolized by the partners, often confused with the control process (dimension D) and the ongoing evaluation of teaching activities.

The following points summarize certain examples of common problems that emerge from the self-evaluation reports with respect to five D dimensions of the assessment.

In dimension A:

- The descriptions of the responsibilities is often limited to a list of the main figures on the organizational chart without describing the links between them;
- The question about the Management System oriented the Study Programme to describe the activities more relevant to the control of the supply rather than the Management System itself;
- Therefore, the Study Programmes were not able to adequately identify their “network of processes” with the relative management responsibilities and the support documentation utilized;
- The re-examination activity is still not perceived as being worthwhile, and consequently not properly applied in a systematic way.

In the B dimension:

- The interested parties listed in the self-evaluation reports were often all of those indicated in the model, without specifying those with which an actual report was prepared to indentify the needs;
- The difference between the needs of the interested parties, the training objectives (general) and learning objectives (specific) has not been perfectly understood and assimilated;
- The meaning of policies and objectives has not been fully understood and the answers often describe the way in which the activities are carried out and not the objectives and managerial directions for the requested aspects.
- The following points have not been fully internalised in a logical sequence: listing of the interested parties → formulation of objectives (quantitative) and targets and related policies on the identified needs (stratified by the individual interested party) → verification of the coherence (bottom-up) between policies, objectives and the needs of the interested parties, for which, at this point, the management system has a precise picture for planning and supplying the educational service (dimensions C and D) and, once delivered, to evaluate the results (dimension E), the latter to be used, along with any new requirements, to reformulate policies and goals for the coming year (new dimension B).

- The quality of the assessment of the new themes “Environment” – “Health and Safety” was poor and has a lot of improvement potential based on evaluation of environmental aspects and risk assessment. Detailed data-analysis would be the bases for future success in this field.

In the C dimension:

- there was a prevailing tendency of the Study Programmes to describe the available resources without describing the process for defining the needs, retrieval and evaluation
- only for certain questions did the Study Programmes provide answers, expressing an assessment of the available resources!
- many responses included a list of available resources (both human and infrastructural) that could have been properly summarised through indicators

In the D dimension:

- The answers do not always reveal the actual planning process of the contents and the training experiences that the Study Programme implemented for reaching the objectives;
- Very little attention was placed on the model’s requirement to describe the adequacy of the contents, the distribution method and of the other results of the planning to the training objectives.

In the E dimension:

- Under the “Results” item, where available, and in a partial way and not in terms of the objectives and policies defined in dimension B, the results were presented without describing the activities necessary for collecting and processing the data, which created problems for answering in cases where the results were not yet available;
- The “Analysis and Improvement” element was often used to provide a “final” overall analysis of the evaluation of the Study Programme, summarising the problems indicated in the self-evaluation report;
- The formalized management of the critical issues and the use of appropriate tools designed to investigate the root causes and to implement suitable corrective actions to prevent their recurrence are concepts that have not yet been well assimilated and, therefore, the critical issues are addressed in an offhand, casual, informal and unstructured way.
- The points that follow summarise certain examples of common positive examples that emerged from the self-evaluation reports in relation to all of the dimensions:
- Raising awareness on the issue of self-evaluation and on the enormous potential of this tool to improve organisation and consequently increase the satisfaction of the parties involved, in different ways, in the life of the school and education institute;
- Becoming familiar, in a “painless” way, with the concepts, techniques and tools taken from management theory and aimed at continuous improvement;
- The cultural, moral and social enrichment of the members of the self-evaluation group, even in the absence of an appreciable economic compensation;

- Enthusiasm for reviving and making one's work more enjoyable, with the ability to see it with different eyes, and feel like part of an important project and the ability to instil this enthusiasm in one's colleagues and, indirectly, in their students;
- The ability to learn from your mistakes. Rather than seeing them as something to hide, errors should be seen as an opportunity to improve and rethink the way you work;
- The ability to compare yourself with others and to draw from their experiences valuable suggestions for improvement and cultural and social growth.

### *Methodological approach*

The guided and interactive implementation of the management model through questions, reflection factors and explanatory notes is, in itself, a highly innovative element and methodological simplification compared to the proposals currently found on the national and international market, for introducing international quality standards (in particular the ISO 9001:2008, which proved to be somewhat of a failure in the field of education and training). Again, the entirely new connection scheme between the Empower Model and the ISO 9001 Model, for the exclusive use of the auditors of certification bodies, which allows for a timely response and mirrors the requirements of the two standards, and ultimately ensures coverage of all points in order to achieve quality certification, without discounting the heavy bureaucratic and document-related demands typical of ISO certifications, represents an additional methodological innovation and guarantees the efficiency of the Empower model. Additionally the connection scheme in Austria was enriched by two Austrian quality standards used in schools (they do not reflect all the elements used in Empower model). In Romania the connection scheme was adopted also to compare the Empower model to Romanian "Quality Law for Schools" which is very similar to ISO 9001 scheme. The mentoring activities involving the physical presence of the tutor, through the participation of the quality expert in the most important work group meetings, and the tutor's long-distance participation, through clarifications provided via e-mail without limitations, complete the picture of an implementation method that is guaranteed to be a success.

## **5. WP3: MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE PLANNING AND THE EXPERIMENTATION**

### *Work package progress description*

Considering that the work package is in a transversal phase, not all of the tools for monitoring and evaluating effectiveness, efficiency and flexibility stated in the project have been implemented, as these tools have different timing.

The Steering Committee has continuously monitored the activities of the work groups, also through direct and long-distance participation in meetings. This activity, aimed at ensuring the effectiveness (correct implementation of the requirements of the model), efficiency (ensuring compliance with scheduling) and flexibility (adaptability of the model to the particular context of the individual school) of the planning phase, was highly appreciated by the work groups and proved to be of critical importance for marking the timing of the actions of the work groups and to avoid dangerous potential "drifts" if the work groups had been left on their own.

All of the self-evaluation reports, complete with a score assigned to each dimension and a list of the strengths and weaknesses were, over time, carefully screened by the Steering Committee,

which was able to get an idea about the reliability of the self-assessment prepared by the work groups.

No analysis was made of the convergence between the objectives and planned targets (resulting from the B dimension of the report) and performance results (resulting from the E dimension), as no national partner developed its own "dashboard" of indicators. This was also due to the lack of performance data and / or the inability to process it. This data, which the schools measure as an aggregate through management software, must be properly extracted and stratified in order to obtain suitable indicators that are strategically useful for the school.

The preparation of a range of complete and coherent performance indicators, completely immersed in the reality of the school, already a problem area in the previous Empower experiment, was the challenging goal of this new edition of the Empower model. Here the efforts of the quality experts to provide methodological assistance for the work groups were most heavily concentrated. However, there is still much room for improvement.

A draft of a table containing an extremely detailed dashboard of effectiveness, efficiency and flexibility indicators was prepared. It also specified the indicator's variation range and a brief explanation of the same. In this way, if individual work groups already have an idea of a comprehensive picture of key performance indicators typical of a school, they can become familiar with them and single out those they deem most appropriate to their own situation. This does not preclude the integration of the table with new indicators suggested by the work groups according to their experience and the progressive refinement of their ability to gather and analyze data.

#### *Methodological approach*

The method of assigning a numerical score to the implementation status of the model requirements, size for size, according to a homogeneous grid and agreed upon by the partners, to accompany the report with a table summarizing the strengths and areas for improvement (possibly enhanced by a SWOT analysis), has been a highly innovative methodological element, which has enabled the comparability in a spatial and temporal sense of the different realities observed and a better appreciation of the evolving trend of each of them and to promote a synergetic cooperation and the exchange of good practices (benchmarking).

Familiarization with this simple quantitative method could be useful for defining a real dashboard of indicators, process control and overall performance.

A cross-peer review, conducted in the presence of the two quality experts (the Italian expert examining foreign partners and the foreign expert from Austria examining Italian and Romanian partners) completed the framework of the evaluation activities, ensuring a competent, independent and objective judgment, making it possible to validate the internal self-evaluation. Additionally internal audits were done in Austria by the Austrian Quality expert at EHS Borg and Goethe Gymnasium.

#### **Conclusions:**

The development of the experiment, for the national partners, has not always respected the timing of the planned schedule;

The overall results are rather satisfying;

The national partners demonstrated an inconsistent commitment, while the commitment in certain areas was active and continuous, others proved to be erratic and superficial. This latter circumstance is poorly suited to the implementation project for a Quality Management System (centred on the "focus area" of the integration of disadvantaged students), which, on the contrary, requires a considerable commitment, determination, perseverance, motivation, enthusiasm and involvement of senior management, with strongly cohesive and motivated teamwork. In any case, the audits (peer reviews) provisioned to be carried out in the field by experienced evaluators to directly verify the degree to which the management model is applied, help to increase the work group's awareness of the importance of the management model, and to make them more committed and serious about its implementation;

The financial resources available were undoubtedly too limited to adequately involve (in terms of time spent and motivation) the necessary human resources (for skills, experience and availability) for the complete success of the experiment and the effectiveness of the transfer;

For as much as the proposed model was to follow simple and intuitive (fool-proof) formula and, during the process, equipped with guidelines for the application, the results of the experiments appear to suggest the need to improve the training of teachers on issues of Quality Management Systems. The same Prof. Karou Ishikawa, one of the fathers of Total Quality, once stated: "Quality begins and ends with education";

Partners, especially if organizations or public schools, should find a "non-economic" incentive and, so to speak, an "ethical" incentive if they want to improve the quality of their education services, a need that is more widely felt, if only for a matter of survival in the market, for the organizations or private schools, which is much more attentive to the selection of human and material resources, the collection and analysis of performance data to be compared, when possible, with the competitor's data, as well as the implementation, the maintenance and improvement of a management system that is effective, efficient and flexible.

#### **Prospects and suggestions:**

The path to a quality in educational organization is long and full of obstacles and requires considerable determination, enthusiasm, confidence, patience and perseverance from the project team. The team should be encouraged, even when disappointment, discontent and resignation is likely to overwhelm them when faced with initial failures. This process should be seen as an investment, the benefits of which will not be seen immediately, but in the medium term (5 years, as per the estimates of Japanese literature). There's no need to hurry. We must take one step at a time and not surrender to the unavoidable challenges, staying our ground while avoiding to go back to the starting point, consequently throwing away all the work that has been done and thwarting the efforts made.

In the light of these observations, in order to revive the initiative, to consolidate the results achieved and the effectiveness of the transfer of this trial, the following is considered to be essential:

- the active involvement of school management in the self-evaluation groups;
- an adequate training and sensitization of the members of self-evaluation groups;
- an adequate economic incentive for the members of the self-evaluation groups, already burdened with curricular and extracurricular scholastic activities.