Today’s Universities are facing conflicting demands between controlling and qualifying on the one hand and personal responsibility and autonomy on the other hand. Very often, university staff perceives the management instruments at universities such as teacher evaluations or quality cycles as supervision and control rather than instruments which can optimize the quality of the institution.

Thus, in order to promote quality management systems, the staff has to believe in the respective personal benefits. The university is faced with the task of designing and implementing quality management procedures without overtaxing their colleagues. Furthermore, instruments for self-directed quality management which foster teacher autonomy and university improvement have to be developed.

So far, little research on the effectiveness of quality management instruments for instructional contexts at universities has been conducted. The main objective of our research is to describe selected instruments of quality management for instructional contexts at the university level and to evaluate their effectiveness and their impact on institutional development. Above all, the research examines whether and how evaluation data can be used to optimize the quality of teaching.

The data for this research stems from a survey among faculty members and quality managers at three Universities of Education in Germany, Austria and Switzerland on the benefits and estimated impact of quality management tools, such as course evaluations, data feedback and quality-circles. The qualitative and quantitative analyses revealed that quality circles, for example, support instructional processes and social development.
Purposes

Quality management as a mainstream issue now belongs to the compulsory and even in part legal requirements of all universities in Europe. That is because of two developments.

1. In the whole of Europe there is the desire to give the universities the greatest possible amount of independence. Every university which wishes to be autonomous is responsible for the quality of its own work. In order to prove this quality the university has to have an effective quality system. Such a quality system is the necessary requirement to be recognised by the State system as an autonomous university.

2. In connection with the Bologna reform the university courses will be unified to such an extent that comparable standards and competences as well as specific final qualifications will be able to be recognised throughout Europe. The quality of the courses and the competences which have been achieved in these have to demonstrate a unified level so that students are able to move freely between the different universities. This should be made possible through a system of credits in which the quality standards can be examined and where necessary recognised and certificated. Universities thus need a recognised Quality management system, the instruments of which are suitable to measure the quality of the central active areas such as research, teaching, administration and all the processes connected with these.

The present research project is concentrated on an area which up to now has received little notice. The quality of the teaching is to be examined. The question of the quality of teaching has been up to now peripheral, because it seems to be difficult to define classification numbers and output Data as a proof of good teaching. It is a matter for debate whether in the area of the process of education it is meaningful, possible and useful to introduce norms for good teaching and to define standards for this.

The political necessity to come to terms with the quality assurance system in universities leads to questions of the implementation of the quality system and an examination of this are unavoidable and no university can distance itself from these questions. The research project devotes itself to this content and attempts to describe the introduction of the quality system in regard to teaching.

The main aim of the project is to identify instruments of quality management for the Teaching and to examine their impact (meaning, influence) on the members of the University and on the development of the whole institution. In one case universities are to be observed in their efforts to deal with the implementation of the quality assurance (Q.A.) measures. In the other two cases, how the existent Q.A. measures are judged by those affected, are being examined, and which consequences result from this. In the last resort it is a question of how the evaluation data from the student surveys can be used for optimising the quality of the teaching in universities, and can be used by those doing the teaching who have been observed themselves.

Theoretical framework

The new challenges from the quality management systems and their contrary valuations, can be brought into contact with a discourse on the theoretical science of Education. This discussion began about five years ago as a result of the Bologna development and is concerned with the implementation of standards and competences in the curriculum and examination regulations of the Universities. Since then, there have been two seemingly irreconcilable positions: on the one hand the claim to and the quality of the traditional university education and on the other hand the trend towards competences for which there is a demand and which with a free
open-end education stand in confrontation to the qualification for a chosen career which evolved from the demands of the economy and is linked to a particular direction. (Frost, 2006; Gruschka et al 2006). With similar arguments reservations from circles of the educational theorists have been voiced against the new direction models with evaluation and quality management. It has also been critically noted that educational processes cannot be measured and that by focussing on already-decided standards and levels of competence the importance of open and creative opportunities for learning are not recognised and the teaching is limited to aspects of what can be measured.

Looking to the Humboldt theory of education as an ideal, the freedom of research and teaching is held up as imperative, that this is necessary as a basis and result for qualified processes of education. The results of the unregulated research and teaching on the one hand have to be submitted to the critical judgment of the research community and are in their concentration on the matter itself open for future use. On the other hand - with a view to the future development of universities in Europe - the joining of national and international reference and qualifications frames of reference are to be sought after. (EU Bildungspolitik, 2010). The Swiss Q.A. system for example is primarily based on the internal Q.A. of the universities and includes in addition the external Q.A. through the relevant System of credits and their agencies. (Rektorenkonferenz der Schweizer Universitäten, 2010). There are similar systems in the other participating countries.

The present study is to be placed in this context. The Universities of Education in Switzerland, in Austria and in Germany are in a field of conflict between Controlling - Qualification - Self Responsibility and Autonomy. They have to come to terms with the controversial situation as already described. So a matter of overriding importance is the question whether the method of quality management in universities can be implemented and formed in such a way as to fulfil two tasks: 1. The members of the university community should not be burdened by and hemmed in with too much “quality bureaucracy” (Nickel, 2007). 2. The Quality Management systems should support the development of the autonomy of the university and offer an opportunity for the development of the University.

In the former training places for teachers there were always controlling mechanisms. School visits from people in authority, in the sense of inspectors, reports of accountability which were drawn up at the end of a semester or at the end of a year of study or reports of levels of achievements in studies and final qualifications which provided information about the quality of a course of training. Already in these early forms of accountability the important forms of quality management were present.

There was an implicit understanding of the concept of ‘Quality’, which was partly manifested in the rules about levels of achievement during the course of study and in examinations. This concept of quality did not contain any standards which had been agreed on in advance. It was increasingly seen as a deficit that no consequences resulted from these forms of inspection and evaluation. This was a criticism of the lack of necessary consequence of this method. Based on this criticism it was possible in the eighties for another viewpoint to emerge in the traditional culture of ‘quality’ in the universities: the quality concept from business and the science of quality which were both able to develop in a new way.

In the business and engineering disciplines a concept of quality has recently emerged which is radically different from the old concept from the universities. Quality evaluation was not seen solely as product control but also referred to the processes. Moreover the evaluation was not only control but also diagnosed processes and products in order to improve both. Thus from
the quality control an increasingly strong emphasis develop which looked to quality develop-
ment.

The first attempts to introduce a Quality Assurance based on business concepts was not greet-
ed only with agreement. The question was posed as to whether it was possible to evaluate
universities and schools in the same way as businesses and companies. Helmut Fend (2000)
drew attention in a systematic comparison of the quality management of state-run charity or-
ganisations and business models especially to the following difference:

"... dass es in Schulen im Gegensatz zu technischen Produktionsabläufen in Betrieben
keine klaren Technologien gibt, die es erlauben würden, eindeutig effektive und
objektivierbar beste Verfahren von weniger guten zu unterscheiden. Dem Lehrerhandeln liegt
eine sehr komplexe 'weiche Technologie' zugrunde, die eine komplexe Vermittlung von
Inhalten mit der 'Seelen- und Lernstruktur' der Schüler sowie deren Eigenintentionalität
beinhaltet“ (Fend, 2000, S. 69).

Even when there are clear differences between the quality evaluation in universities and busi-
nesses, it is nevertheless in the meantime clear that levels of achievement in Universities can
also be systematically observed analysed and measured.

For a successful quality management it is necessary for the starting point, the measurement of
how it is, to be the first step. It is only when relevant empirical information is present that
meaningful measures can be developed in order to put the aims of the quality management
into practice. These measures must be evaluated on a regular basis in order to check the effec-
tiveness of the instruments and activities used and where necessary to make them more suita-
ble (“Controlling of results and effects”, Nickel 2007).

The present study begins with the premise that the effectiveness and the use of quality devel-
opment measures are recognisable. But it remains open as to how the effect and the use of
such measures are judged by those in contact with them. It is possible to see them as technolo-
logically developed control instruments. But it could also be possible to see them as an oppor-
tunity to use them creatively constructively and independently in order to improve one’s own
practice. This study is an attempt to support this supposition.

Project goals and issue to be addressed

The purpose of this study is to identify appropriate tools and instruments, procedures and pro-
cesses for quality management within the field of teaching, to document them against the
background of a quality control system, and to analyze their effectiveness. The issue to be
addressed then arises as follows: How effective are the selected tools and instruments, proce-
dures and processes for quality optimization in the field of teaching?

Method

Three universities of education are taking part in this study, one each in Austria, Germany and
Switzerland. From this teamwork arises the unique opportunity of dealing with the same sub-
ject matter in three different contexts, and integrating the results. For this comparative case-
study research project, a qualitative approach has been chosen that does justice to the com-
plexity of this multi-layered subject matter.
The case descriptions give an insight into the quality management structure and content at the three universities involved, and clarify the different contexts of these universities in their respective countries.

This study takes various viewpoints, namely the descriptive viewpoint, the evaluative and the explorative viewpoints (cf. Horstkemper and Tillmann, 2004):

From the *descriptive* viewpoint, selected quality management measures in the teaching field are described and reflected both at the content and process levels. This takes place in the case descriptions.

From the *evaluative and explorative* viewpoints, the usefulness and effectiveness of selected quality management measures are analyzed by the university personnel in order to gain motivation and incentives for quality development in the field of university teaching (cf. Flick, 1995; Horstkemper & Tillmann, 2004). This takes place in three substudies as follows:

**Substudy A** is concerned with the structures in which quality management is integrated at the respective universities. It investigates the question as to what must be taken into account when implementing quality management at universities. During the course of interviews with experts, representatives of the three universities were questioned on the strengths and weaknesses of the existing organizational and decision-making structures with regard to quality management implementation.

**Substudy B** examines a university of education where comprehensive teaching course evaluation has been implemented and continuous development in collegial quality circles is addressed. In this sub-study lecturers are asked by questionnaire to estimate the usefulness of course evaluation, and the quality circle members are questioned on the optimization of teaching.

**Substudy C** is concerned with a university where quality circles have been introduced in various areas, namely in module groups, in faculty groups, and in the administration. Here again, the main question arises as to the effectiveness of the quality circle for ongoing quality improvement.

At the congress, sub-studies A and B will be presented together with first results.

**Substudies and results**

**Substudy A: Organizational implementation of quality management**

For every institution implementing quality management, the question arises as to who shall be entrusted with this task. Quality management can only be successful if it is carried out purposefully by dedicated persons or groups.

Universities have their own special problems in implementing an effective quality management organization. Specific peculiarities hinder the top-down implementation of quality management, because universities are loosely coupled systems (Weik 1976), whose individual components – chairs and departments, institutes and faculties – are relatively autonomous and only loosely interrelated. This means that the university members mainly identify themselves with their respective departments, to which they are primarily committed. They have little incentive to take over management tasks for the university as a whole – and often little interest in quality management tasks either.
Furthermore, universities are expert organizations (Pellert, 1999). Quality assurance in such organizations traditionally means allowing the experts as much freedom and autonomy as possible, in order to optimally promote their intrinsic job motivation and scientific output. The business oriented quality management approach, often based on output assessment and control, thus contradicts the quality assurance approach of expert organizations. Moreover expert organizations often have a decidedly decentralized structure and a weak top management, so that university lecturers can easily avoid compliance with quality management requirements.

The decentralized structure of universities is expressed in German-speaking countries by academic self-organization and democratic decision-making bodies. University policy therefore depends on consensus-building and on creating acceptance. Despite the slow decision-making process, however, this is not only a hindrance but also an opportunity. University people already have a lot of experience with the bottom-up work approach on which quality management places so much importance.

This substudy examines the organizational and human resources structures of quality management at the three universities, and the strengths and weaknesses of these structures.

**Results**

Despite their different legislative bases and cultural peculiarities, the three universities investigated have developed similar basic structures for their quality management. These basic structures are founded on three success factors that are regarded by the experts as decisive.

The first decisive success factor is that the university governors feel responsible for quality management and strongly support it as a process by carrying out important related duties. They are responsible for providing the material resources needed for quality management, they must demonstrate both by example and symbolically that quality management is an important objective of the university, and they have to set the strategic targets for quality assurance.

Secondly, quality management can be regarded as successful when it is understood as a common development process. The university governors should not be solely responsible for driving and implementing quality management, but should do this in teamwork with a quality management officer. The task of the quality management officer is to ensure adequate expertise input to the quality management process, to integrate the various university groups, and to organize and implement quality assurance measures accordingly. The quality management officer should be completely independent of the university governors and management as far as possible.

The third decisive success factor is the existence of a body that represents as many university groups as possible and through which university members can take part in the quality management process. Such a body meets the expectations of university members for participation possibilities and bottom-up processes. It serves as an intermediary between the university governors, quality management officers and university members. It legitimizes the quality management process on a broad basis, and feeds the ideas and criticism, needs and desires of the university members into the process. The university members should be expressly invited and encouraged to participate, even if the offering is not widely utilized.

Working groups and quality circles offer additional participation possibilities and enable the university members to jointly make improvements in their various working areas. Quality management cannot be simply “delegated away” to a few people – it is an important task for every single person.
Substudy B: Evaluation of teaching, quality circle

Student feedback into course evaluation plays an important role in quality assurance at the universities. It can however be assumed that additional measures are required for sustainably improving and optimizing teaching quality.

Two of the universities examined here have established so-called quality circles to this purpose. Quality circles are a well-known tool in the business world for improving quality and productivity and for motivating employee participation and interaction (Kamiske & Brauer, 1999). Quality circles clearly offer substantial potential for optimizing university teaching as well.

In parallel to course evaluation, one of the universities examined here also introduced quality circles as a mandatory element of the teaching quality improvement process. A quality circle is defined here as an institutionalized group of lecturers meeting to reflect upon evaluation results in their working field, discuss any problems arising, take consequences by implementing improvement proposals, and check and consolidate results. The procedure is as follows: as soon as the course evaluation results are available, the lecturers meet in collegial groups – quality circles – to discuss and reflect upon the results. Based on the course evaluation data and discussion results, consequences are drawn in the form of action plans and goals for optimizing teaching. These consequences are passed on to the superiors and university governors.

Quality circles can be regarded on the one hand as a kind of collegial consulting body. On the other hand, the information provided by the quality circles serves the university governors as a basis for strategic planning and ongoing development.

This substudy examines how university lecturers see the advantages of course evaluation and of quality circles, and how they approach their work in the quality circles.

Results

On the whole, the lecturers questioned are satisfied with the procedure for course evaluation at their respective universities. The general benefits of course evaluation are however rather mediocre in their opinion (M=3.17; scale 1-5). Course evaluation primarily serves to reflect their own teaching work and to improve their understanding from the students’ point of view. Secondly, evaluation serves for the further development of course curricula.

The benefits of quality circles are regarded as significantly greater than those of course evaluation. Quality circles are seen as a valuable tool for optimizing university teaching, although to different extents in different areas.

In the opinion of lecturers quality circles are more beneficial in individual areas than for improving quality in the university as a whole. Professional, didactic and pedagogic debate is intensified by the quality circles, which is seen as beneficial for their own professionalization and as a way of improving their own courses. Furthermore, the quality circles are regarded as improving communication and cooperation, collegial support and transparency. The lecturers see thereby an improvement in their right of say, in their job satisfaction and motivation.

Additionally, the quality circles uphold the quality of teaching in each professional area, and clarify the course standards to be attained.
Preconditional for the successful implementation of quality circles are personal-social competences such as esteem and estimation, communication skills, fault tolerance and readiness for change. Also important is adequate creative freedom with regard to the quality circle.

Conclusions / points of view

Quality management at the universities must be understood as a continuous and all-embracing process. The participation rights of university members must be taken into account as well as the fact that quality management must be actively supported at the highest managerial level. It is worthwhile building up intermediary structures between the lecturers and the quality management organization, which is usually adjacent to the university management level.

Quality development measures must be embedded in the respective university culture. To engender a positive opinion of measures and institutions such as course evaluation and quality circles among those affected, on the one hand each measure must be introduced on a process-oriented basis, and on the other hand consistent management feedback is required.

The quality management of university teaching serves on the one hand as a control instrument, and is regarded as such by those surveyed in this study. On the other hand, the quality circle as an exemplary quality management instrument shows that quality management in teaching supports professional and social development processes while at the same time opening up creative freedom and enabling decision-making participation for the lecturers.

Connection to the themes of the Congress

Leader learning and learning leaders: Tracing implications for leaders and leadership in supporting learning

The project was carried out in three Universities of Education. One aim was to investigate to what extent the measurements of implemented quality management are perceived by academics as meaningful and helpful to improve teaching in higher education. On the other hand, people responsible for quality management as well as managers of the assigned universities were asked about their experiences with quality management systems and about problems they were facing in implementing the quality management instruments.

Educational policy-making and the politics of change and improvement

A quality management system at a University of Education is considered to be a powerful tool for the management of the institution since it can influence and promote the university’s quality and its further development.

Professional development and professionalization in education: Using different approaches to improve teacher effectiveness

The implementation of quality management models and concepts which stem from economic science in the educational context can be seen as a professionalization of faculty and university management.

This specific project shows how quality management instruments which are supposed to optimize the instructional context function. Both tutors and students are involved in the quality
control cycle which comprises of data collection, reflection on the data, data feedback, conclusions and consequences for implementation. Lecturers and students experience self-reflexive assessment of teaching processes and learn how to further develop their teaching.

In our view the quality circle is a tool that can also help to break down the aforementioned skepticism of many lecturers toward quality assurance measures. This tool opens up the freedom that enables creative and self-reflective processes without any standardization. In the end this is precisely the education process traditionally embedded in German intellectual history: educationally changing one’s own point of view by confrontation with the “factual” or the “other” that still refers nevertheless to a common context (cf. Gadamer 1960).

List of references