



The QUAL4T2 Method – Improving Quality in Teacher Teams

KROESE Margrieta (1), MENICA Anabel (2), DI PAOLANTONIO Francesca (3)

Landstede Groep, Netherlands (1)
Politeknika Ikastegia Txorierri, Spain (2)
CIOFS – FP, Italy (3)

Abstract

No matter which sector of education you're involved in, no matter the discipline you teach, undoubtedly like every educator you strive to achieve ever better results and to contribute to a culture of quality improvement. Why? Because like every educator you want the best quality education for your pupils, students or trainees.

The QUAL4T2 project aims to address this objective. The full name of the Erasmus+ funded project is: 'Further Quality Improvement for Vocational Education and training: Guiding Teacher Teams in Europe in strategy planning'. It aims to introduce a bottom-up approach to the development of a solid team culture and the design and implementation of strategic planning by teacher teams.

A method for monitoring the teams and the provision of simple quality tools helps teacher teams create a culture of continuous improvement and raise the quality of their educational program [1]

The Qual4T2 project is now in the final phase. This paper summarizes the outcomes of two and a half years' work, including the one-year pilot experience in five VET organizations in Denmark, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain. A Toolkit providing a range of tools for quality improvement in teams, a Quality Guide for Teams and a Story book about the one-year pilot have been developed. The tools and Guide have all been piloted; the final versions of each are based on valuable teacher/trainer feedback gathered in two reports: a research report and a pilot report. The pilot report shows the progress that all pilot teams have made. [2] The tools in the Toolkit are centered around three main areas: A - Working on Quality Culture; B - Design your Team Plan and C – Various Team Plan Models. All tools can be downloaded for free from the website www.qual4t-project.org [3]

Keywords: Education, team, quality, quality improvement, planning, quality culture, research, pilot, professional training;

1. QUAL4T2 Project aims

Teachers/trainers have multiple tasks to carry out: teaching, coaching, visiting companies, preparing lessons, attending team-meetings to evaluate learning outcomes etc... Thus teachers have to prioritize the best way to spend their work days. In addition, teams have to connect short-term actions on the job with the long-term strategy and policies of the institute/organization.

According to the project partners, supporting teams in their choice and use of quality mechanisms and implementing a bottom-up approach to the design of strategic planning is effective. By investing in professionalization, the project partners planned to contribute to the development of educators' competences, hence to reinforce quality culture and improve performance and efficiency in education [1]

1.1 Target groups

The QUAL4T2 target groups are teacher teams, quality staff members and managers. Targetted team topics are: Quality awareness, evaluation and feedback, competences needed to develop a year plan and models for a year/team plan. Materials to work on these topics are:

- a Quality guide for teams
- a Quality toolkit for teams
- a Story book with best practices

European school teams that are interested in quality improvement can use the QUAL4T2 toolkit in seven languages (English, Spanish, Italian, Danish, Dutch, Greek and German). Products are available on the website. [1]

2. Pilot year



“Increased trust in each other and involvement in the goals that we set as a team” were some of the valuable outcomes of the pilot year. About 13 teams and over 285 teachers/trainers from the partners’ organizations were directly engaged, providing the opportunity to test quality improvement materials, share experiences and learn with and from each other. This is shown in the international pilot report of this Erasmus+ KA2 project, funded by the EC. The international pilot report is available on the project website[1] and aims to summarise the piloting activities implemented in the partner organizations: Landstede groep (coordinator, NL), Politeknika Ikastegia Txorierrri (ES), CIOFS-FP (IT), Køge Handelsskole (DK) and IDEC (EL). They all tested the quality tools within their own organizations and, sometimes also further afield.[2]

2.1 Feedback and impact

Five chapters describe the application, the methods used, the difficulties met, the adaptations made and the feedback from the direct use of the selected tools in each country. The feedback was used to finalise the products. All tools are flexible and adaptable to any school in different countries which may differ also in terms of size, current culture of quality improvement or experience.

The project is already making a good impact on the teams in the partner institutions, judging by the positive feedback of the professionals (456) who took part in at least one project activity – i.e. not only direct piloting but also dissemination and valorisation ones - and by the fact that many of those directly involved in piloting activities have already decided to exploit or even insert some of the tools they tested in their own QMS. For instance: in the Netherlands the final tools have been integrated into the Quality system of Landstede groep (Kroese, 2018); in Spain the QUAL4T2 Quality Guide for Teams will be offered to the wider community of 24 VET centres in the HETEL association (Menica, 2018); in Italy QUAL4T2 products will be presented to the school system (Di Paolantonio, 2018); in Denmark teams will continue working closely together with the heads of departments spreading tools and finding ways to work better together (Dyrløv,2018) and in Greece IDEC intends to make extensive use of the Qual4T2 outputs in their own training courses (Kazantzidou,2018). [2]

2.2 Effective education plans

The main interest of the partners was obviously focused on possible changes stemming from effective use of an annual team plan for each team. The main goal of the project aims to support teachers/trainers teams in writing a year plan to empower their performance. In this regard the data gathered from the final questionnaires (we started with a 0-questionnaire) tell us that:

- The use of the annual team plan has grown, reaching a general increase of 26%
- The involvement of individual members in each team in writing a year plan increased by 54%, (almost doubled in the Netherlands and tripled in Spain)
- The task of the individual members in each team also increased 68%, almost tripling in Italy
- The importance of collecting and analysing students feedback has been confirmed which proves the “client-oriented” attitude of the partner organizations;
- The perception of Q-culture within the teams shifted from a behavioural oriented Q-Culture (-23%) towards a people oriented one (122%) thus proving the evolution of the Q-culture *towards the mutual striving of a group towards a quality awareness based on its own values and intentions, which are decisive for the behavior of the persons involved*
- The team members feel more ready and confident in managing an annual team plan, although a greater awareness also increases the sensation of needing more training; as Socrates said: ‘*I know I do not know*’.

In conclusion, the pilot report highlights ideas and recommendations on how to improve the piloted products which will be revised by the partners in a final version for wider use and exploitation within a larger numbers of organizations in the short and mid term future. During the latest project meeting in Køge (DK), the steering board identified common elements, concluding that the positive results are visible and that it is therefore desirable to spread the quality products to a wider audience. [2]

2.3 SWOT matrix

For the piloting the project partners also used a SWOT-matrix to verify the effectiveness of the products or the need to modify them with the ultimate aim of better supporting teaching teams in preparing an effective team plan.

Each partner evaluated the elements, that have influenced their experimentation. During the fifth project-meeting, the steering board looked at those matrices and identified the common elements, concluding that it is desirable to spread the project’s products to a wider audience.



All the changes that have been made to the piloted tools have been decided jointly by the partners with a view to making them more flexible and therefore adaptable to different organizations, both in terms of size and quality culture and experience in quality management.

3. Experiences of teacher teams

From May 2017 the five pilots took place in QUAL4T2 partner institutions. The feedback from the teacher teams involved, combined with the facilitators' meetings have led to this collection of good practices, tips and surprises. Feedback also shows the impact of the project on the participating organisations.[3]

3.1 Storybook

The pilot practices were used to write a QUAL4T2 Storybook. In this book, readers can follow five Vocational Education and Training organizations in the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Denmark and Greece and enjoy the stories gained from teacher teams. The book shows the frustrations when something did not go as expected, as well as the euphoria when a success was reached. Readers can enjoy these precious stories in which teams really move forward to greater excellence in Vocational Education and Training! Each chapter ends with a summary of the successes and pitfalls. An epilogue can be found on the last page. In October 2018 the storybook was presented at the EfVET Conference, where about 250 European vocational education and training centers are represented each year.[2]

3.2 Impact

An example of the impact of the project method can be found in the Dutch chapter of the Storybook; the facilitator monitored the participants in reducing the number of team objectives to 3 from an initial 6, depending on the duration of the plan (having a maximum of 6 objectives for a two year plan). Attempts were also made to help teams understand the importance of analysing data, formulating a goal and describing detailed SMART activities related to each the goals. Questions asked were: *'I am proud of..., What could go better, What needs to be improved, My ambition for the team is, What effect will our actions have on the students...'* In May 2018 this resulted in: a) three models for a year plan for the Dutch organization, from which all 52 teams may choose, depending on their culture and development phase; b) reducing the maximum number of goals; c) educational leadership steering the involvement of teams instead of individuals and d) an integral vision for the organization, the school and the team. [4]

4. Conclusions

QUAL4T2 has so far proven to be a project that can offer professionally designed and carefully revised materials, translated into partner languages as well as being available in English and German. The teams that piloted Theme A tools have realized that beyond technically perfect quality tools there are human relationships which can create shared objectives. They have learned to be a team and not a group, to listen to each other and to confront each other to achieve common goals. The most significant improvement in piloting the Theme B tools has been the ability to set a team mission/vision consistent with the training organization's vision and mission.

The most important improvement in piloting the Theme C tools has been that all teams chose the model of annual team plan that best suited the culture and needs of their organization and team, and are still using it. Designing a team-plan also encourages collaborative working; it promotes broadmindedness, understanding, respect and empathy for other people; develops the personal skills and individual responsibility of the professionals as they are encouraged and supported by the team itself in accomplishing the tasks agreed. The Quality guide, tools and storybook are published on the website.[5]

References

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