IMPLEMENTATION AND MAINTENANCE OF ISO 9001: A CASE STUDY IN A MALAYSIAN TRAINING ACADEMY

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A Thesis Submitted to Asia e University in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to describe the Implementation and Maintenance of the ISO 9001 Quality Management standard in a Malaysian Training Academy. Though it has worldwide popularity, studies on the Implementation and Maintenance of the standard in Education is limited. This is more so in terms of its application in Training where there appears to be a paucity of studies on the subject. Further, the apparent lack of or nil studies in Malaysia on the subject accentuates the problem.

The research design is qualitative and uses a descriptive single case study strategy in addressing the problem. Data collection and analysis was based on three sources of data which were: interviews; participant observations; and documents. Semi-structured questions were used as the research instrument for online interviews. Purposive non-random sampling was used to select 8 key resource persons as respondents. The interview data were coded and analysed through thematic analysis. Structured and unstructured methods were used to capture participant observations. Document content analysis was employed for analysing documents and data from the 3 sources was triangulated.

The findings were related to improvements made, benefits, critical success factors, problems faced and lessons learned. Generally, better documentation was ranked as the number one improvement arising from Implementation and Maintenance of the standard. Among other benefits of Implementation and Maintenance were better administrative efficiency and improved processes. It was also found that collective team effort made up of staff and management as well as effective communication played a key role in Implementation and Maintenance. The level of management commitment was found to be high with manpower and financial resource being

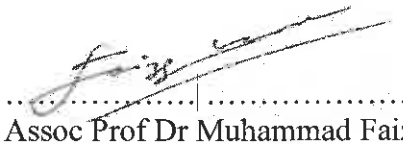
adequate for the Implementation and Maintenance of the standard. Of note is the finding that Implementation and Maintenance of the standard improved the quality of training and services in the Academy.

Management commitment, knowledgeable leadership and involvement of all staff were found to be the top three critical success factors for Implementation and Maintenance. Problems faced were attributed to the people factor in terms of their appreciation of the standard and willingness to contribute. As for lessons learned, the importance of leadership was emphasised. Further, it was found that the availability of a dedicated team of staff, better awareness and more focus on improving processes would enable better Implementation and Maintenance.

Overall, the findings of the research show that ISO 9001 can be effectively implemented and maintained in Training through: proper planning, teamwork; training; communication; management commitment; knowledgeable leadership; and continuous improvement. The findings also show that external consultants and incentives or rewards were not a factor in the successful Implementation and Maintenance of the standard in the Academy. One of the implications of this research is its contribution to knowledge in terms of understanding how ISO 9001 can be successfully Implemented and Maintained in Training.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised /read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, as a thesis for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



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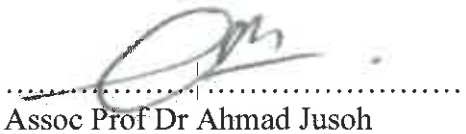

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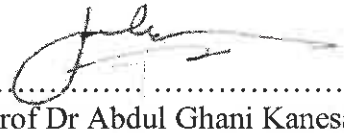

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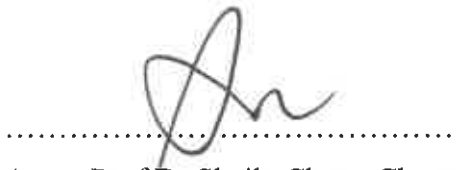

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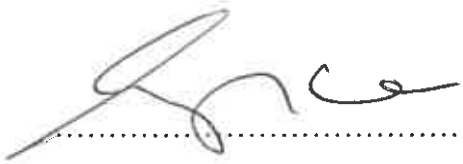

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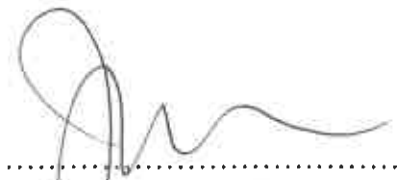

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my late parents,

Ponniah Victor & Lourdu Mary

“Your love and sacrifices mean more and more to me with each passing day“

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

There is currently an urgent need in industry and other fields to improve the quality of products and services, making the predication by Juran that the 21st century shall be the era of quality (Schlickman, 2003) ring true. In business as well as organisations in general, there is a major focus on quality throughout the world as a strategy to address growing competition and customer demand (Ali & Rahmat, 2010; Pourrajab, Basri, Daud & Asimiran, 2015). Education in general and by inclusion Training, has not been spared from such a need. This is more so as quality of educational and Training institutions has become an increasingly important issue (Fojt, 1996; Karapetrovic, Rajamoni & Wilborn; 1998; Pawlowski, 2007). Such importance takes on an added urgency due to the national and global contributions of education and Training towards social as well as economic well-being and development (Fojt, 1996; Ghani & Pourrajab, 2014). Further, apart from its importance, the improvement of quality is considered crucial in a number of areas including industry, manufacturing, health and education (Singh, Grover & Kumar 2008, as cited in Ghani & Pourrajab, 2014).

The issues in Training involve many aspects such as the trainer, Training materials, Training methods, the use of Information Technology (IT), Training or learning outcomes, customer satisfaction, support services as well as facilities. Some of the issues are: trainer's qualifications, experience and competencies; relevance and currency of Training materials and content;

effective evaluation of outcomes; suitability and effectiveness of Training methods; measurement of customer satisfaction; and the quality of support services as well as facilities (Fojt, 1995; Fojt, 1996; Sandelands, 1997). Taking the case of evaluation of Training, Fitzpatrick's 1976 classic framework made up of 4 levels of evaluation has been used by many institutions to assess Training outcomes. These are: 1. Trainees reactions; 2. Trainees learning 3. Trainees' application of what they learned; and 4. Use of learning for enhanced job performance (Fitzpatrick 1976, as cited in Juran & Geodfrey, 1999). However, many institutions find it challenging to move beyond level 2 mainly due to the logistics involved. Adding to the challenge is that many other authors have added more levels to this classic framework (Juran & Geodfrey, 1999). One major overall issue in Training has been stated to be the shift in the traditional pattern of Training which had a technical base or reason for Training. This shift has led to a focus on holistic development of professionals in the workforce and the need to provide the Training required for such development (Juran & Geodfrey, 1999).

In recognizing this need and to bring about the required improvements, many institutions are giving due emphasis and importance to improving the quality of their products and services through the adoption of quality models including total quality management (TQM) and the ISO 9001 quality management system. In the context of quality management, ISO 9001 is an internationally recognized and reputed standard (Bell & Omachonu, 2011; Quazi & Jacobs, 2004) with Heras (2011) observing that ISO 9001 is arguably the most important contribution to quality management. Moreover, and in terms of

improving the quality of education, ISO 9001 is being an increasingly adopted model based on research, including that of (Bae, 2007; Bevans-Gonzales & Nair, 2004; El-Morsy, Shafeek, Alsheri & Gutub, 2014; Moreland & Clark, 1998; Taib et al., 2012). Further, and especially in the context of the education industry in Malaysia, several educational institutions have sought certification to ISO 9001 due to the pressure to improve the quality of education (Zailani, Othman & Abdullah, 2009).

In reference to ISO 9000 and ISO 9001, it needs to be clarified that under ISO 9000 are a series of several standards and it is not a standard by itself (Lundquist, 1997). Under these series of international standards is ISO 9001 which is the standard used for certification as it specifies the requirements for Implementation and Maintenance (ISO. org). Therefore, both the terms are specific and cannot be used interchangeably.

As can be noted, much of the reference to quality and the importance of quality is based on the findings of researchers in the context of education. This is due to the paucity and lack of such material with specific reference to Training based on what was available and accessible to this researcher. In relation to implementing ISO 9001 in Training, there was only one article that was sighted by the researcher, though reference to the standard was in terms of BS 5750 which is the national British version of ISO 9000 (O' Brien, 1993). Therefore, it is in view of the importance of the topic and the lack of studies in Training, that this research is being undertaken.

1.1.1 Importance of Research Topic

It is now more than 28 years since the ISO 9000 series of standards were first introduced in 1987 and over the years, despite a number of criticisms, the popularity of the standards remains uncontested. Hoyle (2009) states that the popularity of the standard has increased and it enjoys enormous worldwide appeal. Boiral (2012) notes that the standard has become the reference model for Quality Management with Sampaio, Saraiva and Rodrigues (2009) asserting that the standard has become a "worldwide phenomenon" (p. 1) while Bell and Omachonu (2011) state that ISO 9001 has "grown into the de facto standard for management systems" (p. 723) around the world. This is evidenced by the growing number of certificates issued worldwide. Accordingly, and given the validity and importance of ISO 9001, numerous studies have been undertaken (Psomas & Fotopoulos, 2009) and a large body of literature is readily available on the Implementation and to a lesser extent, on the Maintenance of the standard. Again, in terms of education and Training, this does not seem to hold true. There appears to be only a handful of published studies and articles on the Implementation of ISO 9001 in education (Doherty, 2008; Henkel, 2004; Thonhauser, 2008; Van den Berghe, 1997, 1998). Where available, they relate to universities (Karapetrovic et al., 1998; Kaur, Mohamad & George, 2006), schools (Noraini, Hazman & Norhana 2006; Tafoya, 2009) and vocational Training (Bevans-Gonzales & Nair, 2004; Nair, 2002). The shortage and gap in literature become even more glaring when it comes to ISO 9001 Implementation and Maintenance in a Training organization. An online search over a period of almost one year yielded only two studies. One is by Quazi and Jacobs (2004) which is related to Training