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## University Student Administration and Quality Improvement - A Holistic Approach

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# University student administration and Quality Improvement – a holistic approach

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*ABSTRACT: This paper explores links between quality in student administration with overall university quality. It identifies the need for a holistic approach to quality improvement in student administration within Australian universities. It suggests that the challenge for quality improvement is to first develop a knowledge of stakeholders' conceptions of quality and then design matching quality improvement processes and procedures within a 'learning organisation' context. Further, it argues that long term success in the area of quality improvement will be determined by 'authentic leadership' within a context of organisational cultural change.*

## Introduction

To function and prosper in a climate of increasing competition for reduced public resources coupled with demands for accountability, higher education institutions must take on a more proactive role in understanding, monitoring and improving the service, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of their operations and develop or adopt reliable measures to monitor its goal attainment and customer satisfaction. The core business of teaching, learning and research can be considerably facilitated by the quality of service and satisfaction which the student administration provides to its internal customers and external stakeholders. It is the University's student administration critical role and its impact on stakeholder satisfaction with which this paper is most concerned.

This proactive role also needs to include support systems such as student administration. In a university setting, quality is everyone's business, not something exclusive to academic staff. It

requires a holistic rather than a fragmentary approach to efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Universities need to set themselves apart as institutions fundamentally concerned with quality processes and outcomes, and continuous improvement.

## **Student Administration within the University Context**

In a university setting, quality is as much tied to student administration as it is to teaching, learning and research. A crude indicator of the significance of administrative support required and the functions which University administrators perform can be judged from the number and ratio of Academic and General Staff in the higher education sector. For example, in 1998 out of a total of 69,574 staff in Australian universities, 39,426 (or 56%) were general and support staff (Kemp, 1999). Whilst there are admittedly staff other than Administrative Staff represented in the General Staff figures, this figure provides some indication of the amount of support necessary for the functioning of the ever-increasing organisational complexity in the higher education sector. In order to justify this high ratio it is perhaps even more important that the quality of the services administrative staff provide is also high. Otherwise in times of a resource crunch an argument could be advanced for the downsizing of non-academic staff to effect cost savings.

Coupled with this is a claim (Coorey, 1996) that academics are being forced to do more administrative work, at the expense of teaching and research. In addition, the trend since 1996 has been a significant decrease in both academic and non-academic staff (DETYA, 1999), whilst student numbers have increased by approximately fifty per cent between 1989 and 1998. These trends not only place a strain on university resources, they also provide a major challenge for universities to develop or maintain high quality services with fewer staff and greater numbers of students.

There are two schools of thought regarding the contribution that the student administration makes in supporting and facilitating the University's core business. One school of thought is advanced by Piper (1993) who argues that the contribution of support services to the quality of students' education and research is negligible. Further, Massaro (1996) asserts that whilst management practices are important, the quality of a university eventually rests in academic outcomes (stating that a well managed university will not necessarily produce high quality teaching and research, but the calibre of academic staff and the university's 'offerings' will). Interestingly however, despite the increased administrative load that many academics carry, the reality is that they continue to rely heavily on student administration to support their teaching and research, and receive guidance on policies, procedures and compliance obligations dealing with safety, occupational health and equity.

A second school of thought taking a contrary view is advanced by Conway and Rheinberger (1997). They disagree with the views of Piper and Massaro, stating that there is a direct relationship between the quality of a university and the quality of its administrative support. Without high quality administrative support there will not be high quality overall and the university and its future could be compromised. Indeed it is difficult to imagine one without the other, given the complexity of the accountability which universities face. For example, significant

levels of administration are required to service the reporting mechanisms to the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and for the increasingly competitive attraction, monitoring and retention of students (on which Commonwealth funding is based).

There are other supportive voices. Wilson (1996) and Cliff (1994) argue that the quality of administrative support is linked to the quality of teaching and research and that administrative service will impact on students' overall perception of the university's quality. Reinforcing this line of argument, Delene and Bunda (1991) point out that various sections of an institution are interdependent and the efforts of each impact on its overall quality.

Within a University student administration context the different processes concerning students are interconnected and the quality of one section impacts on other sections. This means for example, that stages such as receiving an enquiry about enrolment through to despatching an information/application package to receiving necessary forms back, assessing and replying to the application, despatch of teaching and learning materials (in the case of external/distance students) and so on, all need to be identified and recognised as being part of a holistic approach to quality improvement. If the enquiry stage does not work well then the stages that follow will all be adversely affected in that the process will either be delayed or result in the potential loss of a student. Similarly, if the information/application package is inadequate or flawed then the following stages will also be detrimentally affected. Likewise, students need quality administrative support and guidance upon the completion of their studies, in preparation for further studies or employment. In other words, essentially, students need to move through student administration related quality procedures before, during and after they experience academic related quality.

## Definition of Quality

Having argued that quality in student administration is crucial for a university's efficient functioning, it is appropriate to turn to the task of defining *quality*. Whilst there are many different views on what quality is (for example see Anwyl, 1992; Barnett, 1992; Billing, 1998; Birnbaum, 1994; Laver, 1992; Lindsay, 1994; Parasuraman, 1995; Ruben, 1995; Senge, 1990) there are certain common threads that are central to understanding quality. These include:

- there is no single nor correct definition;
- a perception of quality is the product of a person's life experience;
- different perceptions of quality are both inevitable and legitimate;
- perceptions of quality have changed over time and will continue to change; and
- quality is determined by stakeholders and their level of satisfaction.

Further, according to Anwyl (1992) "*Judgements about quality, as about beauty, have much to do with the values of the beholder*" (1992, p. xii). What is quality to one person may be quite the opposite of another. Anwyl argues that the issue of 'ownership' is therefore central to the debate and further:

If we believe there are multiple owners, interests or constituencies, then it is certain that each has varying ideas about what quality is for them, and we should try to find that out quickly. (1992, p. xvii)

He suggests that whilst students are one of the major stakeholders, their configuration has changed over time from being an elite group to that of a mass group. The moves from taxpayer funded to partially self-funded have also sharpened education and changed perceptions of quality service. Values and ideas are largely a product of each person's experience and perception. A very simplistic example of such differences might be evident in the elitist view of university study being solely for pursuit of knowledge compared to a more contemporary utilitarian one of for employment after graduation. The Australian university system has also changed from being virtually free to one in which 'the user pays'. This ideological shift has brought with it much more critical and demanding stakeholder expectations in terms of quality and delivery of education. This shift has also added to the complexity of arriving at a common definition of quality when the context in which it exists continually changes. We argue that the values and ideas of quality which students' hold and their expectations relating to the quality of education and services they receive have also changed. And therefore, our contention is that there is an ongoing need for Universities to regularly monitor their stakeholders' perceptions of the services they provide, particularly the student administration.

### **Organisational Culture, Leadership and the Learning Organisation**

In order for all stakeholder groups – direct (students, Academic and General Staff) and indirect (government, parents, employers and community, University management) to experience and savour the University's quality there would need to be at least a shift in the existing mindset of the major University constituents, enactment of a culture of continuous learning and renewal, and regular appraisal of the service work ethic. The University, like other human service organisations, comprises multiple, contesting domains or subcultures, each domain vying for dominance/prominence to the exclusion of others. Not only does this contestation sap the energy of its constituents in micro politics, it can also undermine the core business of the enterprise. Thus, an understanding of the existing dominant culture of the University and an appreciation of a more over-arching culture, embracing the contributions of all its constituents is highly desirable. This is also a main challenge of the leadership in the quest for improved structures, processes and outcomes.

It has been argued (Bhindi, 1995; Reed, 1992; Schein, 1997) that cultural analysis is a powerful tool necessary for the creation and management of change, and that leadership and culture are intertwined. Schein's (1997) position on leadership and organisational cultural change can be used to gain a holistic perspective on quality within student administration. This is because leadership and culture are vital components in understanding and improving quality. They embed the improvement processes in the culture itself, and therefore make them more likely to continue and succeed in the long term. If the improvement processes become part of the culture then they become accompanied by a shared assumption by the people who work within that culture that such processes are worth doing and they will be carried out with optimism and enthusiasm. Without such cultural change improvement processes are likely to be 'short-lived' and carried out under perceived or real duress by those at the 'coal face'.

In order to improve, change and refine shared assumptions, people must feel comfortable and 'safe' in questioning existing shared assumptions and investigating possible new ones. The literature refers to this concept as 'The Learning Organisation' e.g. Hough (2003), Senge (1995). Schein (1997) explains that organisations and their leaders will need to become perpetual learners because we really don't know what the world of tomorrow will be like, except that it will certainly be different.

Other management commentators (Bhindi, 1997; Billing, 1998; Senge, 1990) also support the concept of and the need for a Learning Organisation. Redding and Catalanello (1994) reinforce the importance of the Learning Organisation by claiming that it is the reason why some organisations/companies continue to survive and prosper in the long term (more than seventy five years), while others cease to exist within forty years. They assert that all organisations face an uncertain future and that the only way to offset this is to continuously obtain and learn from new information, and then improve the organisation in light of this.

Duignan and Bhindi (1997) add to our understanding of leadership by arguing that successful leadership should be 'authentic', based on ethical, moral values, stewardship, and concern and caring for others welfare. They report on widespread cynicism of leaders and leadership within a culture of 'artifice', suggesting that a better type of leadership is called for, one based on truth and trustworthiness. Gunn (1995) concurs, adding that such leadership should also recognise and value the university's greatest resource, human capital, more than it has done in the past.

These imperatives on culture, leadership and the Learning Organisation are important to keep in mind especially as cultural change is necessary in the way quality is conceptualised and delivered. Successful organisations will continuously adapt to their environment. They will adapt by being a Learning Organisation and by having leaders who can create and change the culture so that quality and quality improvement become shared assumptions amongst their employees, from the coalface to the upper echelons. Adaptation will become systematic, systematised and accepted by staff at all levels as the only way to survive and prosper in a world where change is rapid and constant. We argue that it is within such an environment that a shift of mindset can occur about the important facilitative role that the student administration plays in extending and promoting the University's core business. We also argue that raised awareness of the interdependence will have a salutary effect on the staff working in the student administration and the quality of services they provide to both internal and external stakeholders.

### **Monitoring Quality: Selected Approaches**

There have been two major approaches to understanding and improving quality in higher education. One has been an application of Total Quality Management (TQM) often in the form of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). The other is 'gap theory', derived from service marketing literature e.g. Servqual Literature, which is underpinned by stakeholder judgements. TQM tends to focus on process whereas 'gap theory' concentrates on identifying stakeholders' judgements and comparing them to the types and level of service that is actually being provided. If used creatively, aspects of both can be applied to the University context, specifically to monitoring the effectiveness of student administration.

### Gap Theory

The basis of Gap Theory is recognising and accepting that stakeholders and their judgements about quality are a prime source of data for understanding and improving quality. Lindsay (1992) supports this, claiming that two different approaches are being used regarding national concerns about quality in higher education - 'production-measurement' (e.g. Millett's outcome measures identification, 1979) and 'stakeholder-judgement'. He states that in order to fully understand the quality debate we must first of all recognise that quality is a central concept in higher education, but that it also has a diversity of meanings for different people. He argues that while the production-measurement approach is more easily measurable and quantifiable it is in the stakeholder-judgement approach that richer, more meaningful information can be obtained. In addition he claims that most studies in the past have been focussed on the task of developing procedures to monitor and enhance quality rather than attempting to define and measure it. He points out that a production-measurement, i.e. performance based approach on its own neglects to include interested parties judgements about worth, which he argues have to be an integral part in the quality process. Both the performance-based and stakeholder-driven quality have important implications for 'high pressure', frontline operations such as the student administration.

Lindsay claims that the Commonwealth government's approach to monitoring quality prior to 1991 was by and large focussed on the production-measurement centred view. However, following a series of consultations and submissions (HEC 1991) the Government recognised the need to incorporate stakeholder-judgement views into the process. Nevertheless, while such developments served to broaden the debate they did little to resolve the main issues. Debates did little more than acknowledge:

the inevitable diversity in judgements about quality that arises from the different perspectives on goals and values of the various stakeholders. (1992, p. 160)

Lindsay (1992, p. 162) argues that this diversity and the different perspectives require further honing and definition. Specifically he observed that:

Particular attention should also be given to deciding how stakeholder groups are to be defined, how their input and judgements are to be sought, and how their inevitably diverse and conflicting judgements are to be brought together in ways that will actually assist decision making directed to improving higher education. (1992, p. 162-163)

Others such as Yudof and Busch-Vishniac (1996) also stress the need to include stakeholders' views in the quality 'loop'. How can stakeholder sensitivity be effectively monitored? The 'gap theory' proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) argues that service quality exists along a continuum from unacceptable through to satisfactory and superior. Their conceptualisation builds on the premise that "*service quality results from a comparison of what customers feel a service provider should offer (i.e. their expectations) with the provider's actual performance*" (1995, p. 145). Their model of measurement (known as SERVQUAL) is based on identifying and addressing the gap between the expectations and actual performance.

Drawing upon the work of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, McDonald and Lee (1997) provide another 'performance-importance' based research instrument for analysis of service quality. They suggest four areas of performance gaps that can compromise quality: a gap between what customers expect and what managers think they expect; a gap between managers' beliefs

about customer expectations and the standards set for employees; a gap between service specifications and actual delivery; and a gap between service delivery and the expectations firms encourage among customers. They acknowledge though that SERVQUAL was not without its critics and cite Carman (1990), Cronin and Taylor (1992) Hemmasi et al. (1994) and Athiyaman and O'Donnell (1995). The authors state:

Carman explores the difficulties of adequately defining and measuring expectations and of understanding how expectations are formed. He suggests that they stem "presumably mainly from past experiences with similar services, but word-of-mouth and mass media also play roles" and that the question of how much experience a respondent should have before being able to answer a battery of expectations questions should be resolved (1990, p. 48).

It appears that Carman's question on *'how much experience?'* is irrelevant. There are no right or wrong answers here, rather an honest and accurate account of someone's expectations (which will be the product of their experiences) and requirements. If we accept that there cannot be a single nor correct definition of quality as suggested above, then similarly there can be no correct interpretation or expectation stemming from this. Cliff (1994) suggests that SERVQUAL is at present the best way of measuring service quality but warns that it *"should be customised for the particular markets in which the organisation provides services"* (1994, p 51).

Gap theory is based on stakeholder judgement and such feedback is not only very appropriate for a study on quality in student administration but is also integral to any quality process. It forms an important part of the 'data base' required for well informed and correct decision making regarding the improvement of quality. The theory needs to build in Birnbaum's (1994) 'relative importance' of the items being measured as well as Lindsay's (1992) belief that stakeholder judgements are at least as important as quantitative measures.

#### *TQM and CQI*

Haas and Holkeboer claim *"colleges and universities are turning increasingly to business and industry and, in particular, to the principles of Continuous Quality Improvement"* (1993, p. 5). So much so that:

By the end of the 1992-93 academic year, well over half of the 3500 colleges and universities in the U.S. had either implemented or were seriously considering CQI programs, including comprehensive research institutions like Michigan, Pennsylvania, Cornell, and Wisconsin. (1993, p. 6)

However, Harman (1996) applies a 'reality check' and points out that:

While Total Quality Management (TQM) has had a major influence on thinking about quality management and quality outcomes in industry, its influence to date in higher education has been more limited. In cases where TQM has been applied within higher education institutions, its application has been more common and generally more successful when related to administrative processes and service activities, rather than to academic functions. Still, there are examples of higher education institutions, especially in the United States, who have made strenuous efforts to apply TQM principles to both academic and administrative areas and have reported successful results (Seymour 1992; Chaffee and Sherr 1992; and Sheer and Teeter 1991). (1996, p. 8)

Doig and Whitchurch (1993) analyse the applications of TQM to higher education, confining its benefits mainly to areas such as continuous improvement, a customer-centred approach, commitment at all levels, a team orientation with good vertical and lateral communication, responsiveness to change, and developing arenas of excellence. Perhaps one of the reasons for its limited influence on higher education is TQM's origin in the manufacturing domain. Commentators such as Billing point out:

unlike manufacturing industries where product processes must be controlled to reduce variation (Deming), service processes should maximise it in the sense of meeting wide variation of need from customers. (1998, p. 141)

Whilst he says this seems to be a "false antithesis", the real aim should be seen as "consistency of process". If we accept this argument then TQM is just as appropriate in a student administration setting where different stakeholders will have different needs and expectations.

Lewis & Smith (1994) ardently support TQM for higher education. They have no doubt that it is the right approach, and advance the following reasons for their enthusiasm:

- It builds on the tradition of concern for quality that has characterised higher education in the United States and throughout the world.
- It recognises the need for continuous development of the people who are part of the higher education system, whether students, faculty or administrators.
- It involves principles applicable to institutional administration and classroom teaching, thus providing a bridge between traditionally separated parts of the system.
- It will help us meet the challenges of the 1990s and build effective universities and colleges of the twenty-first century. (1994, p. ix)

They stress the need for renewed focus on quality and appropriateness of TQM in higher education given that over the past decade dissatisfaction with the performance of the higher education system has increased, the student population is getting older, market forces and competition have increased, technological advances and distance education will add to this competition, and government funding will decrease. There has also been a greater 'customer' enfranchisement and consciousness about product quality as a result of the increased privatisation of education. They claim that far from being foreign to higher education:

total quality emphasizes principles that are firmly enshrined in the halls of academia. These include an emphasis on knowledge and education, experimentation and management by fact, continuous improvement, and respect for and the ongoing development of people. (1994, p. xi)

And further:

The basic total quality model for action is compatible with the scientific model espoused by higher education. The total quality model is based on the Shewhart cycle, consisting of a four-step process: (1) plan (study the situation and/or process), (2) do (carry out appropriate tests), (3) check (assess the results), and (4) implement - evaluate. Despite differing terminology, the espoused process is the same for total quality and the academy. (1994, p. xi)

They stress that:

Practitioners of total quality and the academy also share a belief in the need for continuous improvement. The academicians may identify it as continuous learning or research, but for both it is a belief in learning appropriate concepts, processes, and skills and applying these skills to appropriate problems and projects. For both it is a commitment to quality, initiated with a dedication to a shared mission (a body of learning) and vision and the empowerment of everyone (students and employees) to incrementally move toward the vision. (1994, pp. xi-xii)

Yudof and Busch-Vishniac (1996) also support the use of TQM in universities, but provide a more balanced view, discussing what should and should not be borrowed from industry in a university context. In doing this they stress a number of benefits and pitfalls. Benefits include:

- TQM offers a technique and a justification for constantly searching for improvement.
- It fosters a willingness to change and creates flexible structures.
- It re-distributes decision-making to active participants, rather than hoarding it for those at the top of the hierarchy.
- The fourth positive aspect of TQM is the attitudinal change it can bring across the campus.
- In adopting TQM procedures, we shift the bulk of our focus onto our immediate customers and develop effective means of obtaining timely information from them on how we are performing in various areas. (1996, p. 25)

Their pitfalls include its name and language, a commitment of necessary resources (in recognition that a proper application of TQM requires considerable time and money), an accurate identification of stakeholders and the need for a tangible reward system for participants.

Lewis & Smith (1994) also explain why they believe a TQM approach is necessary in terms of market forces and a changing student population:

Students who believe that higher education will provide the key to employment and career growth are increasingly assessing the value of a degree based on their perceptions of quality learning, service, timeliness, and price. Sensitivity to these criteria was not critical in a rapidly expanding economy, in which a premium was placed on a college degree even if the value added by the educational experience was minimal. The expected limited growth of the coming decade will encourage students to assess the value of their educational experiences by something more than a piece of paper. This will encourage greater competition among educational institutions to provide the quality of education desired by today's students. (1994, p. x)

TQM, according to Lewis and Smith (1994), can and should become part of the quality process in higher education. We however believe that TQM is one of the many tools available in the overall process rather than the one and only correct approach. Its steps as outlined by Lewis & Smith (1994, p. xi) above are basic, clear and logical and could be incorporated into a meaningful and valuable framework within which regular and reliable stakeholders' perceptions of quality in student administration can be obtained and continuously reviewed.

## Vignettes

While anecdotal evidence suggests that in all Australian universities' student administration areas are interested in quality, what it means and how best to measure and improve it, some take a more proactive approach than others. An informal email sent to each of Australia's 37 public university's Registrars by the principal author in August 1998 revealed a multiplicity of approaches. The data suggested that some Universities conduct surveys specifically on student administration, others seek broader data on the whole student experience at the University. Four reported that they were not aware of any such studies on quality at their institution. Some focussed on commencing students, some on current students and others on graduates. Some concentrated on postgraduates, others on undergraduates. For some the data collection was an annual process while for others it was an ad hoc reaction. Only four indicated that their institution used a systematic approach in that students were surveyed either every year or every 2-3 years. Even so, there is a need to broaden this approach to include all key stakeholders e.g. the University's internal stakeholders such as Academics and General Staff, not solely students.

The Graduate Careers Council of Australia Ltd. (1999), the only independent non-profit organisation jointly funded by Australian universities and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) has also been active in seeking information on graduate destinations and their experience with their course. Within the questionnaire there are no questions directly related to the quality of the student administration services received, except for space for additional comments on the experience whilst studying at the university. However, once again we see a concentration on the student as the information provider. The Council recently (1999) engaged in an Institutional Arrangements for Student Feedback (IASF) Project on behalf of DETYA<sup>1</sup>, aimed at providing current and best practices for obtaining student feedback. Whist part of the project's brief was on "general services - student support, administration", again, the feedback was from the student only.

Westmore (1998) reports that there is a United Kingdom based International Benchmarking Club operated through its Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service (CHEMS) which currently comprises nine universities from Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom. Its data on a range of university processes, which change every year, are obtained from each member university. Interestingly, stakeholders are not considered in the set of data sources used by this approach.

It is very clear to us once again, that there is no single or definitive approach to quality improvement in student administration. The challenge is to learn from past approaches to design one appropriate for the university, and in this case the student administration. We can draw on the above and any other approaches and case studies to design a coherent framework that is suited to the university or the section within it. Heywood (1998) supports this view:

What in fact is offered by a 'quality' approach is a coherent framework for thinking about the management and improvement of organisations - a systems view of the organisation. The tools that might be used in such a framework can (and should) be drawn from all fields of endeavour. Judgment is required on what might work in a particular context. For example, benchmarking is an

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<sup>1</sup> Now known as DEST

approach to improvement that can find a home within a coherent quality framework; the two approaches are not in conflict. (1998, p.10)

Neither it could be argued are TQM, CQI and Gap Theory. Elements of all of these can be used to understand, analyse and improve quality in an effective, efficient, systemic and systematic manner. These are all tools available that have been tested in various contexts. They are clear and logical and have the same aim - to attempt to understand and improve quality. They need to be used sympathetically, i.e. adapted and justified carefully within a culture where academics are one of the main stakeholders and typically are not supportive of processes and terminology that have been borrowed from the commercial sector. However, with effective leadership and cultural change, a 'learning organisation' (including the student administration section of a university) can 'capitalise' on these tools and address the quality issue in a progressive, proactive way.

## Conclusion

Very little research has been conducted and disseminated on meaningful conceptions of quality held by different university stakeholders that could be used to inform and improve the quality of student administration services in the Australian higher education sector. What has been reported tends to lack substance and merely asks interest groups (which have usually been confined to staff and students) to evaluate the current state of service. The emphasis needs to be on gleaning from each interest group what quality means to them in relation to particular services, keeping in mind that 'there are no wrong answers'. In addition, selected literature review suggests that in the main, discussions on quality are embedded in commercial/industrial terminology. This kind of terminology may not be readily comprehended by those engaged in the higher education sector. The development of appropriate discourse and terminology should be used to utilise and retain university culture and momentum.

We agree that once conceptions of quality have been identified in Australian higher education, it may be possible to use 'gap analysis' on the basis of multiple stakeholder perceptions, to develop a protocol of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) within Total Quality Management in the University student administration services. While such combinations would seem to be ideal, we believe that they would be entirely achievable. These processes are not foreign to higher education, but they need to be integrated in a more systematised manner.

We believe that the success of the process will depend ultimately on the extent to which the student administration adopts the principles of the Learning Organisation, and on 'authenticity' and sincerity of leadership within the administration to develop, implement and monitor the cultural change that inevitably must follow. Such cultural change can be facilitated by first identifying, investigating and understanding the existing cultures and sub-cultures and the distinctive and shared values they espouse.

We endorse Lindsay's conclusion that,

Overall, while focussing more attention on important core issues in higher education, the quality debate has regrettably not generated a conceptually sophisticated and innovative attack on the illusive notion of quality in higher education. ... Particular attention should also be given to deciding how stakeholder groups are to be defined, how their input and judgements are to be sought, and how their inevitably diverse and conflicting judgements

are to be brought together in ways that will actually assist decision making directed to improving higher education. (1992, pp 162-163)

In order to increase the student administration's effectiveness and efficiency, stakeholders' conceptions of quality need to be canvassed on a continual basis. Such rich and meaningful data can inform better quality improvement processes and practices. An analysis of such data may indicate which functions are currently perceived as high quality and of importance to the stakeholder group and which functions are seen as low quality and not important. These kinds of data have been obtained by some universities predominantly from one stakeholder group only - students. While this is helpful, it is far too limited to gain an accurate view of quality. All major stakeholders' conceptions need to be tapped and considered in a holistic, relational investigation of University student administration.

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