

Reflections on a training week at the SMK University of Applied Social Sciences

Type of visit: Training sessions

Dates of visit: November 18-22, 2019

City, country: Vilnius, Lithuania

Participation in one-week training sessions delivered in the frames of EQAC project was a distinctive experience. This training week acknowledged the importance of four key aspects in assuring quality in higher education institutions. These aspects are: teaching methodologies, data stewardship (on the example of QPR portal), Total Quality Management (TQM) and soft skills development.

The training session devoted to the “Golden rule of communication” facilitated by EKT expert Mr. Alvidas Punis enhanced our understanding on the differences in perception between decoder and encoder and supported the understanding of how differently a speaker and a listener can approach to the single case. The further pair work with designing and copying the same figure constructed of matches was an outstanding example of communication gap experienced at a workplace. Hence, it is emphasized that if a message was interpreted wrongly it could lead to a certain level of miscommunication. Moreover, it is important to note two other important remarks grasped from this session: “the speaker is the one, who designs the story”, “the perfect story is the one you can return to”.

Another informative and engaging session led by Mr. Punis contributed to our ability to convince our team members. One of the distinctive suggestions by Mr. Punis was to make a clear distinction between “an opinion” and “a position”. Simultaneously, the facilitator’s advice was at first to find a solution by a person him/herself and then to find a common solution. This recommendation reminds a useful teaching technic, the “think-pair-share” method of teaching, which promotes understanding through individual understanding, active reasoning, and explanation.

The training session facilitated by Ms. Laura Senkevičiūtė-Doviltė gave us insights on the important roles of QAC employees. In the course of the session, Mr. Senkevičiūtė-Doviltė presented QPR Portal, which formulated an overview of its important tabs and elements. Thus, the training participants conceptualized their skills in the use of QPR Portal, the third essential element of QPR software.

New knowledge acquired on the topic of TQM allowed us to reexamine our understanding of the concept and its core principles. In this comprehensive session we concluded that TQM makes several noteworthy contributions to an institution (including HEIs) and brings multiple positive outcomes as improved processes, students’ satisfaction, employee productivity and

increase of morale as well as upgrade of work environment. Thereby, TQM approach, in our opinion, is an immense model, which can be broadly implemented at the university as well as during the further implementation of EQAC project outcomes.

The method Ms. Inga Juknytė-Petreikienė relied on during the explanation of the topic, especially, in determination of the class activities was essential for us, the practitioners in teaching. Her class on TQM was compiled of 6 phases: students' reflection of own previous knowledge about the topic, introduction to the session, explanation of the topic, self-control tasks, consolidation of the acquired information (video footage and Q&A session), students' reflection of the knowledge he/she gained during this particular session. For us, the most significant aspect was the possibility given to students to assess their knowledge in the beginning and the end of a class. Thus, the reflection model delivered during Ms. Juknytė-Petreikienė's presentation can serve as an important tool, which allows a student to identify what is the level of knowledge gained during a seminar. In addition, owing to the results, a lecturer is able to estimate the quality of the methodology applied. This interpretation of assessing learner's experience is different from the approach currently administered at ATMU.

Several other models presented during the sessions certainly upgraded our ability in designing didactic materials and enriched our pedagogical skills. For instance, provision of a competences based self-evaluation grid on the first session is an essential tool which allows students to recognize the learning outcomes and accordingly allows them to evaluate their skills on the first and last sessions. This method of assessing students' progress will be presented to ATMU professors during the follow-up trainings as it is essential for accountability purposes and for obtaining instructional feedback.

Another important technique, Ishikawa's (fishbone) diagram, used in formulation of a problem, was a prime example of how a graphic tool may assist in exploring and displaying the possible causes of a certain problem. Ultimately, working on the thorough case devoted to identification of a problem and causes of an imaginary company, we achieved a certain degree of in-depth understanding of the diagram. However, to improve the achievement, we perhaps needed to work on the existing problems, e.g. encourage analysis of problems arose during the EQAC project or existing at our universities. In future group work it can thus be suggested to analyze the real problem, rather than formulating an assumed issue.

It is important to underline that the training sessions were organized with high professionalism and significantly contributed to fostering our understanding of QAC and its essential processes.