



SME COUNSELLING

DEVELOPMENT OF A "FRONT-LINE" ADVICE - GUIDANCE - COUNSELLING SCHEME FOR SMEs' EMPLOYEES

SME Counselling

NEWSLETTER No. 3

Highlights:

1. EUROPEAN APPROACH OF TQM IN RELATION TO MANAGEMENT STANDARDS AND GOOD PRACTICES
2. HOW TO FOSTER USE OF TQM PRINCIPLES
3. SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOLS FOR MANAGERS
4. INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS
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1. European Approach of TQM in Relation to Management Standards and Good Practices

SME Counselling project aims at improving social skills of SMEs managers, therefore facilitating the use of TQM principles for performance improvement. In addition to quality management systems, already used by many SMEs, a more sustained improvement is possible by applying the total quality management (TQM).

Both ISO 9001 and the TQM are suitable to reach the expected quality of an organisation, but differ in their systematic approach to keep the system in order and to manage continuous improvement. Total quality management, as the word explains is not only dedicated to the production process, but also to other parts of the organisation.

Total quality management is rising above the system oriented approach and makes the connection to the needs of the customers in the society and the improvement of the quality of the product and the organisation. The integration of quality and environmental management systems ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO 17025 and the Good Practices GMP/GLP/GCP with TQM will lead to an organisation which is capable of reaching a high level of satisfaction for customers, personnel and society. Companies have to look for a sense of initiative and creativity, organisational responsibility and involvement of personnel. A focus on continuous and specific improvement as a function of customer needs will be important to reach customer satisfaction on the long term. Willingness for an organisation to build up a quality philosophy containing the basic principles: **self-reflection and self-assessment, ongoing learning and co-operation within a team** will be important to reach the goals for total quality management. Core criteria like **customer orientation, committed leadership, competence development, long-range perspective, process orientation, public responsibility, continuous improvement, learning from others, faster response, management by facts and partnership** have to be well known and implemented into the total quality system.

The TQM criteria provide useful practical questions that compel the organisation to ask significant questions and to seek a new level of excellence. Quality Assurance as such does not positively affect the quality of an operation, whether it is a non-profit or a business

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organisation. It is the attitude of people that makes things happen. Changing the attitude of people is a difficult task. The only way of doing so is through awareness and dedicated practical training. To make an organisation aware of its impact on their direct customers and its dependency from clients in the society in its chain of relations with suppliers, sponsors, customers and society. The starting point for success is to develop a common vision about the combined role of Quality Assurance and Total Quality Management.

2. How to Foster Use of TQM Principles

The method approached by the SME Counselling project is to provide specific training tools for enabling managers to improve people results within their organisations.

At the European Union level, lifelong learning is declared the essential concept for enabling the development of the desired knowledge-based economy. As revealed by the feedback obtained by the European Commission during the wide consultation process for adopting the communication "Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality", the methods of addressing lifelong learning are very different at national level. Thus, almost all Member States consider re-thinking of guidance and counselling a priority. At company level, access to lifelong learning actions is still very much restricted to those who are self-motivated (that have already a fairly high level of qualifications). Furthermore, regardless the training offers available, employees in SMEs are rarely involved in any learning process, due to some essential reasons:

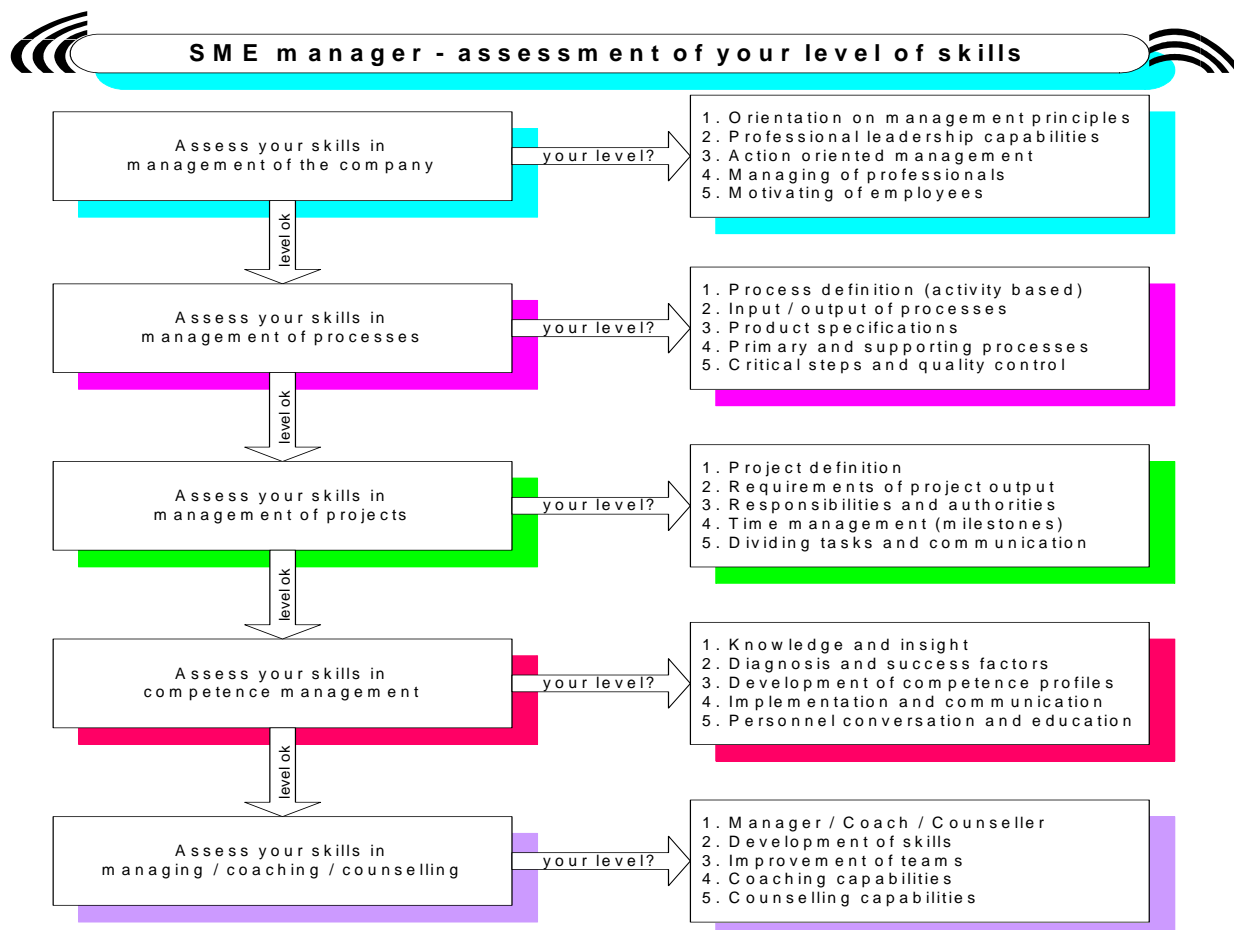
- employers are not aware of the competitive edges offered by reskilled and motivated employees (they usually think that the existing skills of their workers are satisfactory, even if there is a skills gap and a mismatch between the professional qualifications available on the market and the versatility required by small businesses)
- scarcity of available (human and financial) resources, combined with lack of internal incentives/constraints (such as those supported by trade unions in larger companies).

Even when deciding to give training, relative few SMEs are interested in assessing their employees' actual skills or training needs. Choice of lifelong learning suitable actions (internal courses, external courses, "on-the-job" training, conferences, workshops, job rotation, quality circles, self-learning) is made according to "fashion" or external trends.

Therefore, the SMEs managers should be able to have specific social skills to encompass the needs of the employees.

3. Self-Assessment Tools for Managers

Here is a proposed self-assessment tool for SMEs managers. Knowing the level of proficiency enables the manager to choose adequate tools to improve some skills or to acquire new ones.



4. International Meetings

The 3rd international meeting of the SME Counselling project partner organisations was organised by the Italian partners - Provincia di Varese and API Varese, in Varese, on 6 - 8 October 2005.



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