

Zen, motorcycle maintenance and quality in higher education

Zen, motorcycle maintenance and quality in higher education

Laurie Lomas (King's College London, London, UK)

Quality Assurance in Education

ISSN: 0968-4883

Publication date: 2 October 2007

Abstract

Purpose

The paper seeks to deepen the understanding of university lecturers' perceptions of quality.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper employs a literature review to establish a robust analytical framework and the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a random sample of 20 lecturers in a range of UK universities. The interview data was categorised using the constant comparative method.

Findings

The majority of the respondents perceived quality to be largely related to fitness for purpose and accountability rather than transformation. Many respondents made reference to quality assurance or terms associated with it. On the other hand, very few respondents referred to quality enhancement or associated terms.

Research limitations/implications

The research would suggest that enhancement activities in universities need to be developed further and then highlighted as the respondents in this small sample perceived quality to be more about assurance than enhancement. The research would need to be extended to a far greater number of respondents, as at the moment the results are largely illuminative.

Practical implications

Academic development staff should review the impact of their quality initiatives and, if necessary, consider different ways in which they can enhance the quality of the teaching in their universities.

Originality/value

There has been an evaluation of the effect of particular Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund initiatives and the impact of subject reviews, but there has been relatively little consideration of lecturers' perceptions of quality.

Keywords

Quality improvement

Quality assurance

Managerialism

Management accountability

Citation

Lomas, L. (2007), "Zen, motorcycle maintenance and quality in higher education", *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 15 No. 4, pp. 402-412. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09684880710829974>

 Download as .RIS

Publisher: Emerald Group Publishing Limited

Copyright © 2007, Emerald Group Publishing Limited

To read the full version of this content please select one of the options below

You may be able to access this content by logging in via Shibboleth, Open Athens or with your Emerald Account.

To rent this content from Deepdyve, please click the button.

If you think you should have access to this content, click the button to contact our support team.

The plot of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* unfolds on a trip that the narrator and Christopher are taking cross-country, from the northern Midwest to the Pacific Ocean on a Honda 305 Superhawk motorcycle. Father and son wander west and go off the grid, following a paper map clutched in their hands. Meanwhile, Phaedrus' thoughts tread through the past. But the specific action is not where the rubber hits the road, so to speak, for this novel. Instead, the art is always found in the details along the road: "We stem down into an enormous canyon with high white bluffs on either side," w At the heart of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* is Phaedrus's quest to understand something that he refers to as "Quality." He has found that the rational division of the world into "subjective" and "objective" spheres does not appropriately encompass human experience. A pivot point for this division is the phenomenon that allows us to discern the good from the bad, which seems to be neither subjective nor objective, and a great deal of the text chronicles Phaedrus's personal and professional attempts to understand and categorize this phenomenon. After years of study, Phaedrus derive *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values (ZAMM)* is a 1974 philosophical novel, the first of Robert M. Pirsig's texts in which he explores his *Metaphysics of Quality*. The book sold 5 million copies worldwide. It was originally rejected by 121 publishers, more than any other bestselling book, according to the Guinness Book of Records. A narration of a summer motorcycle trip undertaken by a father and his son, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* becomes a personal and philosophical odyssey into fundamental questions on how to live. The narrator's relationship with his son leads to a powerful self-reckoning; the craft of motorcycle maintenance leads to an austere beautiful process for reconciling science, religion, and humanism. Resonant with the confusions of existence, this classic is a touching and transcendent book of life. One of the Cambridge learner attributes is 'engaged.'. Robert Pirsig's book '*Zen and the art of Motorcycle maintenance*' has a lot to say about high quality engagement, indeed the main idea he presents is that this is the secret to a fulfilled life. What lessons does this hold for schools? According to Pirsig being engaged is a necessary condition for excellence. The feeling of being a subject separate from an object disappears when we are profoundly absorbed in what we are doing. Pirsig uses the term 'quality' to describe an experience that he likens to the original meaning of the ancient Gree