

Factors Influencing Staffs' Satisfaction in Internal Quality Assurance

Author's names and affiliations: Veeravan Lekskulchai

Department of Pathology, Faculty of Medicine, Srinakharinwirot University, Sukhumvit 23,

Bangkok, 10110, Thailand. E-mail: veeravah@swu.ac.th.

Abstract

Internal quality assurance (IQA) has been implemented in higher education institutes for decades. Success in IQA requires all organization staffs' engagement. However, the survey found that IQA was still a job of some staffs. There were some staffs viewing IQA as an undesired extra-job. The staffs' negative attitudes towards IQA were mainly results of their bad work experiences. The possible key success factors for staffs' IQA satisfaction and commitment are improving work conditions and creating impressive work experiences. Leadership as well as IQA system and information has influence on staffs' IQA satisfaction and commitment.

Keywords: internal quality assurance, satisfaction, attitude, leader, empowerment

1. Introduction

Due to the global movement in educational reform and the competition in education business, many countries have implemented quality assurance in higher education as a national policy. As a result, all higher education institutes must annually have their quality evaluated or have internal quality assurance (IQA) in order to gain acceptability from their customers and stakeholders as well as from the public [Office of the national education commission (2003), Filippakou (2011), Houston (2010), Loukkola and Zhang (2010), Singh (2010), Spangehl (2012), Umemiya (2008)]. Faculty of medicine, Srinakharinwirot University, which is a governmental higher education institute, started implementing IQA in 2004. Since then, the faculty and its departments annually had their quality evaluated by comparing with the national higher education QA frameworks and guidelines at the end of each academic year. The main goals are to assure the faculty has operated under the objectives, principles, and directions set forth in the nation education act 1999 [Bureau of higher education standards (2003)], to assess how the faculty has accomplished in operation and if its quality met the national higher education standard. The IQA process includes gathering data and evidences for each IQA criterion, writing a self assessment report (SAR) and submitting the report to the certified assessors officially assigned by the university. After site visiting and the SAR reviewing, the assessor committee finally gives an evaluation report along with recommendation to the faculty and departments. The evaluation results are eventually taken to set the organization strategic plan. In the past couple years, the plan-do-

check-act (PDCA) cycle was integrated into the national higher education QA frameworks and guidelines. By this cycle, IQA process becomes a job requiring participation and co-operation of the organization staffs at all levels. According to European university association's quality culture project [Jensen and Christensen (2006)], one of the key success factors for a well-functioning IQA system is the engagement of staffs. IQA can be accomplished if the PDCA cycle is working. A problem is if the organization staffs understand the PDCA cycle.

Job performance has significant positive correlations with job satisfaction and organizational commitment of organization staffs. The organization staffs would work enthusiastically if they recognize the positive aspects of work experience and are satisfied with the work situation [Fazio (1986), Robson, et. al., (2005), Saari and Judge (2004), Yousaf (1998)]. Satisfactions in IQA work experiences and IQA work situations are expected to be key success factors for staffs' IQA satisfaction and IQA engagement, consequently, for the success of IQA and the organization quality improvement. The best way to know what are desired IQA work experiences and IQA work situations is asking staffs directly.

2. Survey and Data Analysis

A questionnaire was designed as a tool to survey all potential factors that might influence the staffs' IQA satisfaction. The questions were divided into 3 parts. In the first part, the respondents were asked to give their personal information: gender, age, and education. In the second part, the respondents were asked about their current job: academic or non-academic, length of working experience, and the overall job satisfaction. And questions in the last part surveyed all possible potential influencing factors on the staffs' IQA satisfaction. The 5-point-Likert scale ranked from 1 = strongly disagree up to 5 = strongly agree, was used to determine the respondents' satisfaction and opinion on each given item. In order to identify the most influencing factors for enhancing staffs' IQA satisfaction, the respondents were asked to select the top 5 most influencing factors towards their IQA satisfaction. Five hundred questionnaires were sent to faculty staffs in a self-completion format. The respondents voluntarily and anonymously completed the questionnaires and returned them for analysis. The results were divided by sex, age group, education, job status, and length of working experience. The comparison was performed by student t-test analysis and the relationship was analyzed by Pearson correlation (SPSS IBM Singapore Pte Ltd., Registration No.1975-01566-C).

3. Findings

Sixty two percents of the distributed questionnaires were completed and returned. Seventy four percents were female and 26% were male. The respondent's ages were between 21 to 56 years (average = 32.8 years). The respondents were classified into 4 age groups: 21-30 years (31%), 31-40 years (39%), 41-50 years (22%), and over 50 years (8%). The length of working experience in the respondents' current job was classified into 4 groups: less than 1 year (10%), 1-5 years (28%), 6-10 years (26%), and over 10 years (36%). The respondents' education was divided into 4 groups: below bachelor's degree (13%), bachelor's degree

(48%), master's degree (11%), and doctoral degree (28%). Thirty six percents of respondents were academic staffs. Overall, the average score of job satisfaction was 3.73 and the average score of IQA satisfaction was 3.34, which was statistically significant lower than the average score of job satisfaction (one-tailed paired t-test, $p = 6.1 \times 10^{-10}$). As showed in table 1, the average scores of job satisfaction in most groups were statistically significant higher than the average scores of IQA satisfaction. Figure 1 shows the comparison between the average score of job satisfaction and the average score of IQA satisfaction. The highest average score of job satisfaction and the lowest average score of IQA satisfaction were in the group of respondents with doctoral degree. However, there was no statistically significant difference in IQA satisfaction between academic and non-academic staffs (one tailed unpaired t-test, $p = 0.13$).

Table 1 Average Score of Job Satisfaction vs. IQA Satisfaction

Figure 1 Average Score of Job Satisfaction vs. IQA Satisfaction by Education

Half of the respondents reported they have never worked in IQA but have participated in IQA activity such as giving information for the SAR or attending in QA workshops. Only 30% of the respondents have evidentially worked in IQA as data collectors, report writers, and administrators. The average scores of IQA satisfaction in these 2 groups were 3.34 and 3.47, respectively, which were not statistically different (two-tailed un-paired t-test, $p = 0.27$). Figure 2 presents the percentages of respondents' willingness to be a part of IQA. There were some young staffs that had never recognized IQA in their institute and some were unwilling to be a part of IQA. The average scores of IQA satisfaction of staffs willing to be a part of IQA and experiencing in IQA was 3.47. The average scores of IQA satisfaction of staffs not recognizing IQA and not willing to be a part of IQA was 2.90 which was statistically significant lower than that of the former group (one-tailed unpaired t-test, $p = 0.0003$).

Figure 2 Percentages of Respondents' Willingness to Be a Part of IQA

Two percents of the respondents rejected IQA as a part of their responsible work. About 20% of academic staffs and 12% of non-academic staffs took IQA as their undesired extra-work. A quarter of academic staffs and 16% of non-academic staffs felt that IQA system was too confusing to be abided by. The average score of IQA satisfaction in this group was 2.94 which was statistically lower than that of the group who were satisfied with IQA system (one-tailed un-paired t-test, $p = 0.000052$). As showed in figure 3, most respondents viewed that their faculty and departmental leaders ignored or partially contributed in IQA. There were statistically significant differences in the average scores of IQA satisfaction in the group who were satisfied with the leadership compared with that of the groups who felt that their leader ignored or partially responded in IQA (one-tailed un-paired t-test, $p = 0.005$ for faculty leader and $p = 0.000022$ for departmental leader).

Figure 3 Percentages of Respondents' View on IQA Leadership

As indicated in table 2, the average scores of satisfaction with given factors towards IQA were varied from 3.18 to 3.87, whereas the average scores in IQA satisfaction of these groups were roughly equal or approximately of 3.4. There were fairly correlation between the satisfaction with each specific factor and the IQA satisfaction (Pearson correlation coefficients ~ 0.4-0.6).

Most respondents felt that the faculty did not give them time for IQA, leading to quite low average score of satisfaction in this item. This result indicated that the staffs had misconception about IQA and the PDCA cycle. The average score of satisfaction in opportunity in sharing their opinion in IQA was high but this factor did not increase IQA satisfaction. The staffs do not only need to express their idea but also need to be a part of decision making.

Table 2 Satisfaction in Key Success Factors towards IQA and IQA Satisfaction.

The most influencing factor for IQA satisfaction that respondents listed was the role of faculty leader in IQA. The second factor was systemically IQA planning and deploying. The third factor listed was the role of departmental leader in IQA. The fourth factor was clear and easily accessible IQA information. The fifth factor voted was the time set for IQA by reducing routine work load. Opportunity in sharing idea and giving incentive or reward were also listed as possible key success factors for IQA.

4. Discussion and Application

IQA has been implemented in the faculty of medicine, Srinakharinwirot University for a decade and the PDCA cycle has been put in all main missions for couple years. With this cycle, IQA was expected to be embedded into the main stream of the institution activities and no longer just a unique job of an assigned person or team. However, the results showed that IQA was still a job of some assigned staffs. Some staffs viewed IQA as an undesired extra job, were unwilling to be a part of IQA and even unwanted to recognize IQA. From their point of views, the working time is for their hired job and no time should be spent for IQA unless reward or incentive is given or their workload is reduced. As EUA recommendation, QA activities should not be considered as a separate activity carried out by specific person(s), but that a concern for quality should be permeated and embedded in all activities of the institution and should be the responsibility of each and everyone [Jensen and Christensen (2006)]. Therefore, the faculty should create work situation which encourages its staffs to understand PDCA cycle and to be able to integrate IQA in their routine work. Since their jobs are a part of faculty operation, they are a part of IQA regardless of their willingness. Time reserved for IQA is not necessary because IQA must be embedded in their routine work.

The survey results indicated that most respondents felt satisfied with their current job but unhappy with the IQA. As mentioned above, resistance to IQA may be a reason of

dissatisfaction with IQA. The confusion in IQA system may be a bad work experience that discourages staffs from IQA and, as a consequence, reduces staffs' IQA satisfaction. As reported, some staffs might have personality traits to avoid uncertainty and this group would not be satisfied with a confusing work situation. The frustrated or discouraged staffs would have negatively attitudes or be unwilling to do the job and would have less organization commitment [Ahmad, et al. (2010), Cook and Wall (1980), Saari and Judge (2004)]. Because IQA criterions are yearly undated for increasing standards and adapting to current social situation, confusion in IQA system should be corrected by distributing undated IQA criterions earlier or at the beginning of each academic year. The IQA criterions and frameworks should be comprehensively deployed to the staffs as soon as possible.

The other reason for IQA dissatisfaction may be unavailable information necessary for IQA. The lack of an adequate information system required for IQA serves as barrier against the implementation of IQA. Therefore, the clear communication and availability of data necessary to understand the complicated process are important ingredients in the successful implementation of continuous quality improvement [Lee, et al. (2002), Shortell, et al. (1995)]. For this barrier, clear and easily accessible IQA information and available IQA consultants may be key success factors for IQA. These factors may help in reducing staffs' frustration and anxiety and improving their performance in IQA. The staffs need to achieve clarity with regard to what is being measured and what is the overall goal [Jensen and Christensen (2006)]. To enhance staffs' IQA satisfaction, the IQA goals should be stated clearly and the directions to achieve the goals should be set systemically and understandably. An IQA expert should always be available and should give information clearly and friendly. Concise and understandable IQA information should be posted online or in a guidebook.

The results from this survey indicated that leaderships or contributions to IQA of organization leaders both in faculty and departmental levels were the first and the third most voted influencing factor for IQA satisfaction. The faculty staffs look to their leaders as a working model. In the respondents' view point, staffs would trust their leaders and commit to their organization if their leaders had a participatory management style. The fact that staffs will trust their leaders and commit to their organization if the leaders show not only verbal commitment but also active and practical commitment [Al-Assaf (2004)]. A portion of time leaders spending on a given work will serve as a broad-brush map to keep their staffs focused and energized on that work [Breckler and Wiggins (1992), Eagly and Chaiken (1995), Fazio (1986)]. Therefore, for the quality of organization, the leaders should be an exemplary role model for their staffs by administering the organization with participatory style.

The staffs were quite satisfied with experience in sharing their opinion in IQA. They would be more satisfied with IQA if their opinion was taken as a part of IQA decision making. These could lead their pride as a faculty co-owner and responsibility for the organization quality. It has been suggested that all staffs at every level of the organization should be involved and be empowered to identify their crucial and unique part in the scheme of a job [Harvey and Williams (2010)]. They should be able to participate in decision making, consequently, to be proud of them as a part of the organization. With the feeling of

ownership, they will be satisfied with their contribution for the success of the organization and of their work [Ahmad, et al. (2010)]. Staffs with a feeling of ownership with respect to either their organization or role will be more likely to provide better levels of performance [Robson, et al. (2005)]. The top-down management approaches with limited staff empowerment are barriers that hamper continuous quality improvement [Lee, et al. (2002), Shortell, et al. (1995)]. The leaders should view their staffs in a humanistic way, not in an instrumental way [Saari and Judge (2004)]. They should look at their staffs as a colleague, not a labor in order to gain their staffs' loyalty and organization commitment.

This survey shows that factors influencing staffs' IQA satisfaction include embedding the PDCA cycle into the routine works, reducing the confusion in IQA system by preparing clear and understandable information and friendly consultants, working as a team or empowering staffs, and redirecting leadership towards active and practical IQA commitment. All higher education institutes have same main missions and staff variety. As a consequence, factors influencing staffs' IQA satisfaction should not be much different for this survey unless culture and social norm have impact on.

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Table 1 Average Score of Job Satisfaction vs. IQA Satisfaction

Group	Average score of job satisfaction	Average score of IQA satisfaction	p-value two-tailed paired t-test CI level = 0.95
Gender			
Female	3.68	3.31	7.63×10^{-7}
Male	3.89	3.43	0.0005
Age group			
21-30 years	3.65	3.24	0.001
31-40 years	3.73	3.29	5.2×10^{-6}
41-50 years	3.71	3.50	0.088
> 50 years	4.20	3.60	0.22
Education			
Below Bachelor's degree	3.55	3.59	0.83
Bachelor's degree	3.79	3.34	1.1×10^{-6}
Master's degree	4.00	3.29	0.006
Doctoral degree	3.60	3.21	0.0013
Job status			
Academic staffs	3.63	3.24	0.0003
Non-academic staffs	3.78	3.38	1.4×10^{-6}
Length of working in current job			
< 1 year	3.72	3.11	0.0073
1-5 years	3.66	3.28	0.0028
6-10 years	3.80	3.39	0.0013
> 10 years	3.76	3.48	0.0055

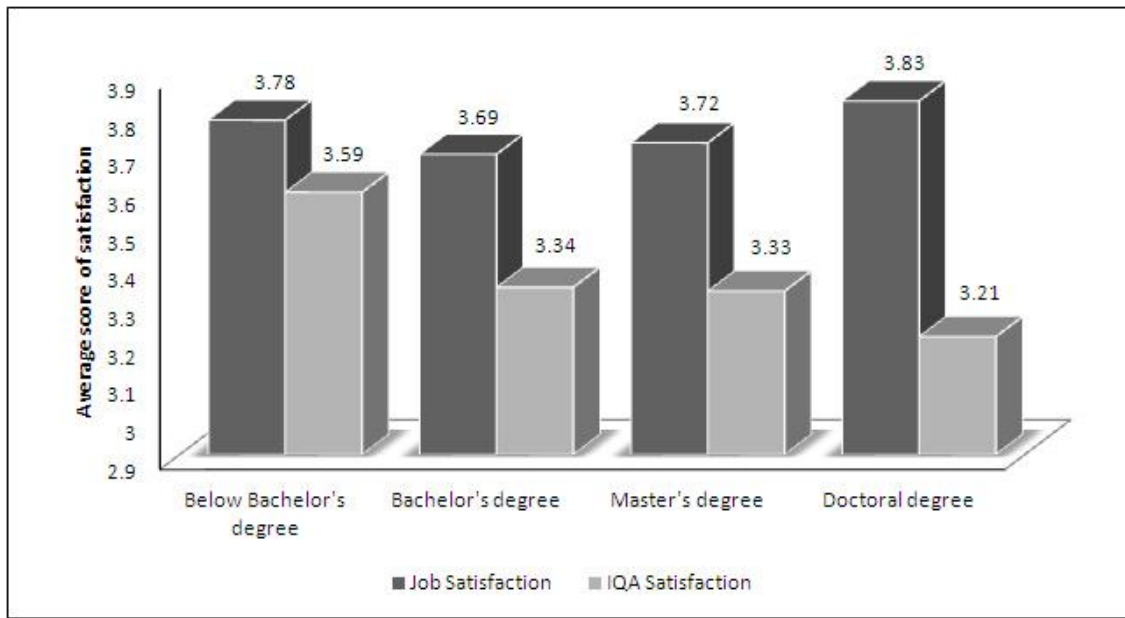


Figure 1 Average Score of Job Satisfaction vs. IQA Satisfaction by Education

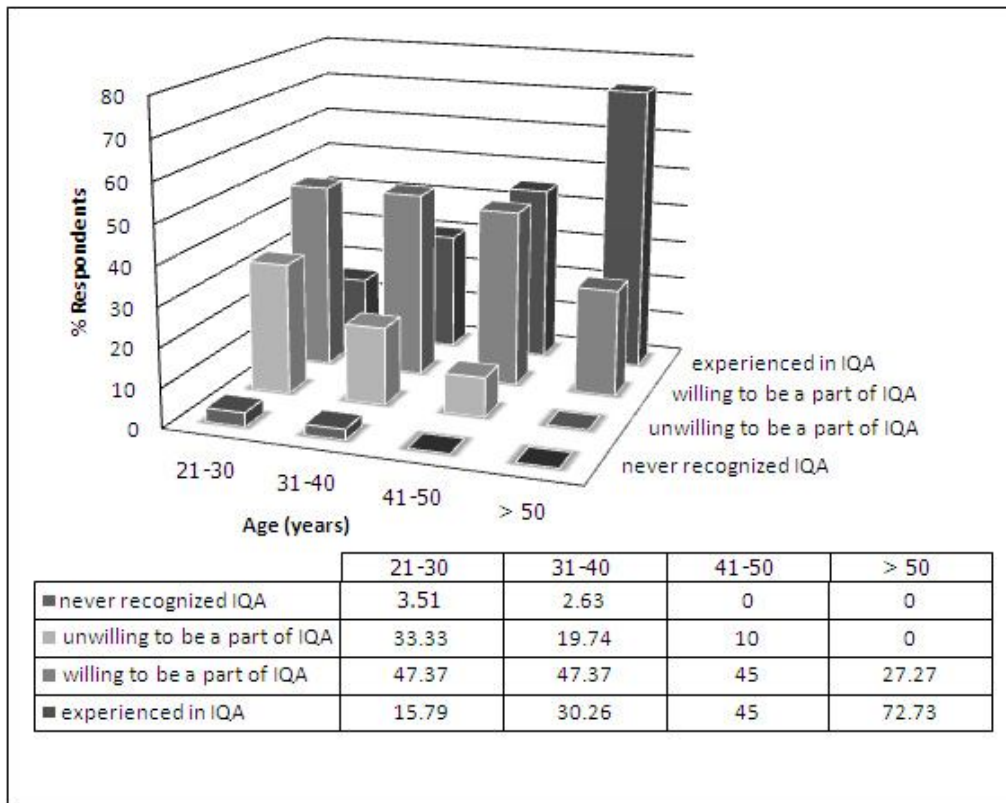


Figure 2 Percentages of Respondents' Willingness to Be a Part of IQA

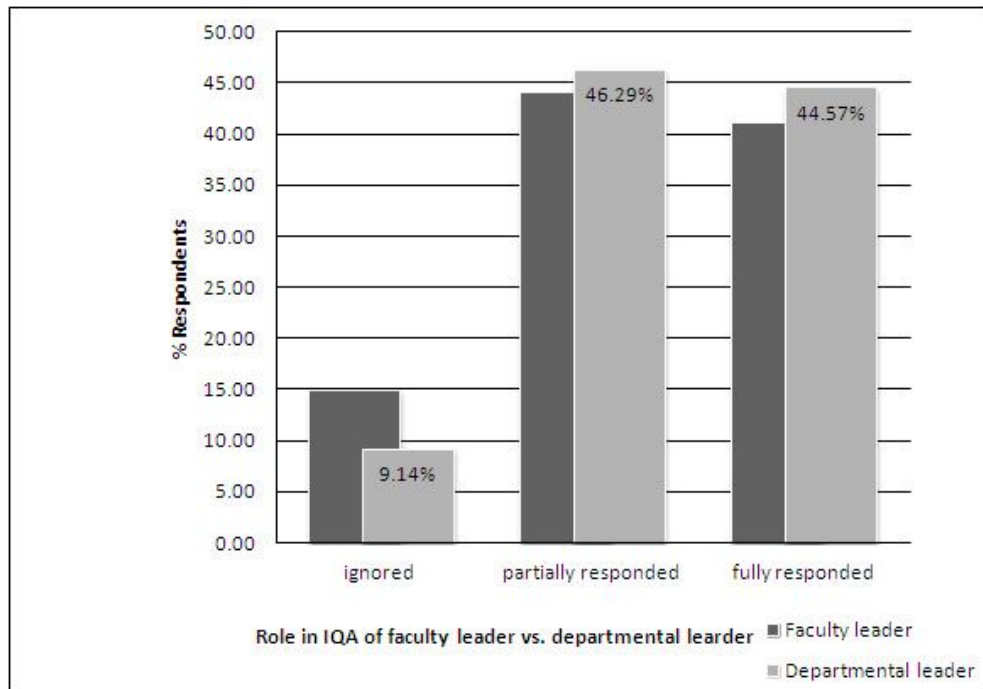


Figure 3 Percentages of Respondents' View on IQA Leadership

Table 2 Satisfaction in Key Success Factors towards IQA and IQA Satisfaction.

Factor	Average score of satisfaction in the given factor	Average score of IQA satisfaction	2-tailed paired t-test	Pearson correlation coefficient, r
Time set for IQA	3.18	3.38	0.0002	0.53
Giving incentive/reward	3.29	3.37	0.12	0.57
Clear and easily accessible IQA information	3.32	3.37	0.26	0.63
Systemically IQA planning and deploying	3.40	3.37	0.56	0.47
Informing IQA evaluation results	3.48	3.38	0.06	0.48
Assigning person(s)/committee for IQA	3.52	3.38	0.24	0.46
Opportunity in sharing idea	3.87	3.39	0.003	0.41