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**Philippine Quality Award (PQA) Framework as a Way to Thrive During and Beyond
the Pandemic: Perspectives from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**

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Philippine Quality Award (PQA) Framework as a Way to Thrive during and Beyond the Pandemic: Perspectives from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)



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Abstract

Purpose: The COVID-19 pandemic that shocked the world in 2019 intensified the emphasis on the need for organizational quality, agility, and sustainability in all industries worldwide, including the education sector. The pandemic exposed loopholes, areas for improvement, or the lack of organizational development techniques in administrations, including HEIs in the Philippines and in other countries, whereas it also displayed other organizations' readiness in terms of organizational development and the capacity to change towards greater effectiveness. One prominent and robust framework for sustainability and for thriving during sudden and rapid change, such as the pandemic, is the PQA Framework. PQA Framework users are expected to succeed with their organization-embedded mechanisms for leadership, strategic management, customer focus, knowledge management, human resource focus, and operations focus. This study explored the cases of nine Philippine HEIs using the PQA Framework during the pandemic and studied how they implemented the PQA Framework in a challenging situation using Organizational Development.

Methodology: The study utilized qualitative research in the form of a case study. The researcher gathered and analysed the experiences of PQA Implementers, using Thematic Case Analysis based on Braun and Clarke's techniques. This involved identifying a group of similar cases, reviewing existing literature, and selectively choosing a relevant topic. The group were identified with the criteria that they are using the PQA Framework during the pandemic. Data was transcribed, organized, and coded into themes and patterns, employing both inductive and latent approaches to extract insights. The findings were validated against existing literature to address the research questions and highlight key lessons learned from the respondents' experiences.

Findings: PQA Framework was found to have enabled organizations to thrive by facilitating strategic planning, focusing on current needs, and ensuring business continuity and agility among the respondents. In the post-pandemic period, it further supported regular stakeholder feedback, crisis management, technology investment, and a comprehensive view on quality.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Successful PQA Framework utilization requires careful planning and appropriate metrics, as many organizations struggle due to a lack of understanding of Organizational Development, Change, and Systems Perspective, leading to inefficiencies and failures. The study highlights successful implementers' experiences, offering insights into effective strategies by identifying themes and patterns related to Systems Perspective and Change Concepts that others can refer to.

Keywords: *Quality, Quality Management, Sustainability, Thrive, PQA, PQA Framework*

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INTRODUCTION

Patterned after the Baldrige Framework, the Philippine Quality Award (PQA) is showcased as the topmost national recognition for outstanding organizational performance for both private and public organizations in the Philippines (ASQ, 2023). Currently, 106 top-quality programs use Baldrige, the leading and most influential business framework for achieving exceptional results (ASQ, 2023). PQA, the “*Filipinized*” version of Baldrige, was established as EO. 448, S 1997 by Former President Ramos and has been signed into law in 2001 as R.A. 9013 (PQA, 2023) which offers a competitiveness template that encourages organizations to attain excellence in terms of performance (DTI, 2023). When utilized appropriately, it translates to massive operational quality and excellence coined as performance excellence and allows organizations to navigate through the increasing demands of time or challenging situations as in a pandemic.

Though anchored on the prestigious Baldrige Framework, PQA Framework is underutilized in Philippine industries despite the government’s efforts to advocate using it, especially the Competitiveness Bureau of DTI, as seen in its actions to tie PQA Framework’s use with partnership agreements with accreditation authorities (Business Mirror, 2022).

During the pandemic, educational institutions globally struggled to quickly and adequately move due to limited or absent crisis management familiarities during the pandemic (McLeod, 2021), and the Philippines was recorded late to adapt (Beltran, 2020). According to CHED, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in Philippine higher education and showed how it performed less than its counterparts worldwide (Malipot, 2021). Joint Memoranda of CHED and DOH faced implementation challenges as the Philippine Education System had been tagged to be under crisis long before the pandemic broke (Quilinguing, 2021). Remaining afloat in the abrupt transition became a chore as providing satisfactory leadership, quality planning, and ensuring student satisfaction was already a challenge (Torres et al., 2021).

The ongoing threat of pandemic-like scenarios highlights the continued importance of the PQA Framework, which has positively impacted Philippine industries despite disruptions. This study utilizes Organizational Development concepts, particularly Lewin's Change Theory, Bertalanffy's Systems Theory, and Kotter's Model, to provide a resource that would empower academic administrators to facilitate the effective implementation of the PQA Framework and support data-driven decision-making during challenging situations. The implementation of long-term and complex changes, like the PQA Framework, often fails due to insufficient strategy and failure to anticipate benefits. This study offers a structured approach for Higher Education Institutions to effectively implement the PQA Framework through Organizational Development, supporting government efforts to enhance academic standards and address crises. Education leaders can use these findings to better prepare their institutions for future challenges. (Brauckman, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized qualitative research in the form of a case study to explore the experiences of PQA HEI Awardees during the pandemic, focusing on the unique context of the situation. The researcher gathered and analysed the experiences of PQA Implementers, using Thematic Case Analysis based on Braun and Clarke's techniques. This involved identifying a group of similar cases, reviewing existing literature, and selectively choosing a relevant topic. The group were identified with the criteria that they are using the PQA Framework during the pandemic. Data was transcribed, organized, and coded into themes and patterns, employing both inductive and latent approaches to extract insights. The findings were validated against existing literature to

address the research questions and highlight key lessons learned from the respondents' experiences.

Table 1: Research Method Employed by the Researcher

Steps
Step 1: Select the case
Step 2: Build a theoretical framework grounded on literature
Step 3: Collect the data
Step 4: Use Braun and Clarke's Techniques for Thematic Analysis to code data and come up with themes
Code and Categorize
Generate themes
Define and name themes
Step 5: Review the themes
Use inductive and latent approach
Step 6: Analyze the results, draw conclusions, and present the data
Step 7: Validate the findings

After the data were gathered by the researcher, the researcher developed a framework for aspiring implementers to effectively integrate PQA into their systems, drawing on key concepts from Organizational Development, Organizational Change, Change Theory, Systems Theory, and Kotter's Theory.

Table 2: Filtered Relevant Concept for the Proposed Scheme

Theory or Concept Title	Relevant element of the theory/concept to the incorporation of PQA Framework in HEIS
Organizational Development	In this study, the researcher configured the step by accepting the entering and contracting stage with or without a consultant since implementer will already be guided by the proposed scheme. The implementer may move forward and use the scheme as a guide or seek the help of a consultant, as needed. The steps are entering, diagnosing, intervening and taking action, evaluating and feedback, and termination and exit. Source: ATD, Academy to Innovate HR, 2023
Organizational Change	Organizational Change defined here is referencing the implementer with the data from the successful strategies from implementers' Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze using Lewin's Theory.
Change Theory	Change is Lewin's Change Management Model Source: Embracing Change: The Timeless Wisdom of Kurt Lewin's Model LinkedIn
Systems Theory	Systems Theory in the formulation of this scheme emphasizes the importance of viewing organizations as complex wholes rather than just collections of parts. It highlights the need to understand the roles of all participants and align them to facilitate effective change and improve organizational performance through strategic systems thinking (Hart, 2023).
Kotter's Theory	In this study, the actual Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze strategies of successful implementers were used to trace the 8 stages of Kotter's Change Model for potential implementers to have concrete references, such as creating urgency, building coalition, creating a vision, communicating the vision, empowering others, creating quick wins, building on change, and embedding change.

The PQA implementation framework is analyzed through a structured approach using Change Theory's unfreeze, change, refreeze stages, alongside Systems Theory and Kotter's Model. This method simplifies the complex framework, allowing recipients to understand expectations and foresee challenges. The research breaks down the implementation into four manageable steps to aid future implementers. It investigates three questions: the application of the PQA Framework by leaders, its support for implementers during and after the pandemic, and conclusions drawn from integrating various theories. Ethical and legal standards were maintained throughout the study.

Table 3: 4P:PQA or the Four (4) Steps to Prime for the PQA Implementation

Step Number	Description
1	Prime through concept familiarization
2	Conduct Unfreezing Methodologies
3	Conduct Changing Methodologies
4	Conduct Refreezing Methodologies

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study examined how leaders of higher education institutions implemented the PQA Framework during the pandemic, leading to the researcher's development of the 4P:PQA or 4 Phases to Prime for PQA Implementation scheme, which consists of four phases for effective implementation. It leveraged Lewin's Unfreeze-Change-Refreeze Theory to clarify the organizational development processes that could hinder the optimization of the PQA Framework, making it more accessible for those interested in adopting it. Four themes emerged as the prevailing mechanism of successful PQA Framework towards PQA Implementation which are attributable to Unfreezing or for Preparing for the Desired Change and these are: leaders prioritizing welfare of human assets including implementers, increase in communication channels, and communication frequency, cohesiveness and collaboration strategies specifically battle cries, and clear instructions through guidelines, identified key people with description of tasks, commitments, and timelines, rewards and sanctions. Future implementers may focus on the Top 4 themes to make their introduction to implementation more welcoming to any organization. This finding about leadership and communication coincides with the beliefs of Morgan and Zeffane (2002) emphasizing that transparent leadership builds trust and engagement, leading to greater employee commitment and positive attitudes towards change. Their work references Lewin's change process, indicating that effective communication helps empower employees and positions leaders as change agents.

Additionally, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) highlight the importance of knowledge sharing for sustainable implementation, proposing a framework with essential elements for effective knowledge exchange within organizations. For the actual Change or Implementation of desired change, fourteen themes emerged as a common strategy for all respondents. These include: visibility of strong, visionary, moral, and strategic leadership, sufficient, open, and clear channels for communication regarding the transition, common theme dissemination through battle cry or mantra, ensuring quality is non-negotiable through policies, inventory of resources, skills, strengths, opportunities, risks, and opportunities for data driven decision making, strengthening interventions for gaps and risks, openness to change and new ways of thinking, unparalleled commitment to outlive extraordinary challenges, focus on critical challenges, synergy of all units, taskforce creation, clear designation and controls, contingency, sustainability and resilience plans such as flexibility and adaptability framework, and external expertise support. Those trying to implement the PQA Framework may focus on these fourteen

themes to make navigation easier and more concrete. Still in the topmost theme is leadership wherein successful implementers attribute their actual change success to their strong, visionary, moral and strategic leadership.

Finally, for solidifying the desired change or refreezing, ten themes emerged from the study. The ten themes that surfaced include, synchronizing organizational actions and commitment through systems perspective, valuing individual feedback, input, and contributions to the system, inclusion of all parts of the system, use of Change and Transformational Processes in strategy development, monitoring of change initiatives and actions and contributions of workforce, dedication to regulatory requirement compliance and sustenance of change, creation of collaboration measures, data driven change, and investing in technologies. The study's findings align with previous research by Northouse (2004), Laura and Stephen (2002) and Stanley, Meyer, and Topolnytsky's (2005), emphasizing the role of leadership in achieving common goals through a five-step change process: motivating change, creating a vision, developing support, managing the transition, and sustaining momentum. Previous studies also indicate that effective leadership can inspire a workforce for successful change and that openness to change is crucial for accomplishing targets.

The totally packaged scheme as seen in the table below provides a comprehensive approach for approaching the PQA Framework. Phase 1 focuses on familiarization and creating motivation for change. Phase 2, the unfreezing stage, involves questioning the need for change and identifying required support. Phase 3 is the changing stage, where the actual change occurs through communication and engagement. Finally, Phase 4, the refreezing stage, emphasizes embedding new systems, sustaining change, measuring benefits, and celebrating success.

Table 4: Scheme to Better Incorporate PQA Framework

4P: PQA		
4 Phases to Prime for PQA Implementation		
Phase 1: Perform Priming Activities through Concept Familiarization		
Arm the organization with the essential knowledge and tools to navigate upcoming changes by leveraging organizational development elements and best practices from successful implementers, demonstrating the feasibility of the process.		
Step	Description	Best Practice from Successful Implementers
1a Acknowledge Organizational Change Happening	Acknowledge and Understand Organizational Change that is happening for the workforce to be ready for explaining to the workforce the impending change. Jump into Organizational Development implementation with full knowledge on Organizational Change, Systems Perspective, and Kotter’s Model taking into consideration that a successful change process begins with understanding the journey (Bell, 2023)	<p>Unfreezing Stage</p> <p>Leaders prioritizing the welfare of human assets including implementers by providing them training, information sessions, venues for understanding the transition that will be happening.</p> <p>Increased communication channels and communication frequency for workforce to be looped-in and connected to the change initiatives happening and that will be happening.</p> <p>Ensuring clear understanding by giving clear instructions through guidelines, identified key people with description of tasks, commitments, timelines, and rewards and sanctions.</p>
1b Understand Organizational Development Implementation Stages	<p style="text-align: center;">5 Stages to OD Implementation</p> <p>Entry</p> <p>Diagnosis</p> <p>Feedback</p> <p>Solution</p> <p>Evaluation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Organizational Development Model or Theory</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Description of actions to be done</p> <p>Present, explore, and identify problems through gap analysis and come up with Project Plan reflecting mutual expectations and agreements organization wide as to allocation of time, money, and other resources with an external consultant or with the implementing team in the organization.</p> <p>Assess existing organizational status through collaborated stakeholder data to determine the targets versus existing organizational conditions.</p> <p>Review presented data organization wide to verify for accuracy and clarity.</p> <p>Implement solutions to correct organization gaps, problems, and performance of organization. If applicable, create communication plans with roles and responsibility matrix, training plan and curriculum, implementation plan, risk management plan, evaluation plan, and change management plan.</p> <p>Collect formative and summative data to check if intended goals are achieved.</p>
1c Familiarize with other Organizational Development related models specifically Kotter’s Model, Lewin’s Theory, and Systems Theory	Kotter	<p style="text-align: center;">Concept Description</p> <p>Understand the key concept of Kotter’s Model and the 8 steps for change of Kotter as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Increasing the sense of urgency 2) Create diverse and cross-functional guiding team to lead and support the change 3) Develop the vision 4) Communicate for support 5) Empower members to act

Lewin's Change Theory of Unfreeze- Change-Refreeze	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6) Produce short term wins 7) Build the actual change 8) Embed the change in the system. <p>Understand the practical roadmap towards implementing change with the premise that the entire structure must melt to its core first to set the organization up for a new structure. The concept is that the analysis of thoughts, feelings, and values behind current practices, ushers changes in a positive way. Using the analogy of a big cube of ice, the concept states that a big cube of ice can be molded into a big cone of ice, using techniques of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. Once the ice has melted into water, one can transfer it to a mold that looks like a cone and refreeze it into its new desired shape. When this model is applied to an organization, the worry about people freezing or melting becomes less. The concept believes in the power of top management to direct the organization's thoughts, feelings, and values in enforcing change that will eventually make everyone involved and gravitate toward any desired change.</p>
Systems Theory	<p>The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It consumes time for others to internalize the value of a systems model for rationalizing every aspect of leading and managing any enterprise. Russell Ackoff simplifies the illustration using the analogy of a car that if one takes the best parts from each automobile manufacturer and puts them together, one wouldn't have a car that works as it is the fit of the parts that determine the function of the whole system. In this approach, all elements of organizational development, the success stories, and all the criteria of the PQA Framework are considered and taken altogether as a whole to create holistic and meaningful change.</p>

Phase 2: Implement Unfreezing Techniques

After being primed and armed with necessary knowledge, and expectations are cleared, prepare to put the concepts into actions and to loosen norms, replace old behaviors, and veer away from comfort zone using unfreezing techniques. Common theme column shows the best practices in terms of unfreezing of implementers and the step in Kotter's Model is traced to elaborate the rationale behind the implementation as backed up by the science of organizational development.

Unfreezing Implementation Feedback Extracts	Common Theme	Step in Kotter's Model
Strong Leadership for strong direction towards change	Leaders exuding strength as leaders and strength towards change	Creation of urgency
Instilling sense of direction, collaboration and trust with the use of collective tagline, involving stakeholders and all human resources in the decision-process, empowering stakeholders by hearing their voices	Use of battlecry in ensuring direction and collaboration	Sharing of new vision or Communicating the vision
Communication through orientation, reorientation and internalization efforts, information dissemination, focus group discussions, frequent meetings and dialogues with workforce and stakeholders, clear and transparent information about the upcoming changes, increase management committee meetings, listening to the needs of the workforce, use of varied online platforms, and setting-up the tone of quality in the organization.	Strong communication channels and strategies	
Designation of Key People to enact change as in the creation of committees with actual descriptions of tasks, responsibilities, timelines, and corresponding rewards and sanctions	Considering welfare of human assets	Building the Team
Thoughtfulness for Human Resources		
Clear instructions through Guidelines, identified key people, description of tasks and commitments, and rewards and sanctions	Provision of clear committees and workforce with outline of responsibilities	

Creation of new and comprehensive guidelines with spelled out accountabilities

Defining of new vision

Phase 3: Implement the Change Needed

After the implementation of unfreezing activities, the organization is now ready to mold the organization using new strategies.

Change Implementation

Feedback Extracts

Channeling of strong, strategic, and visionary leadership where instructions are clear and channels for communication are open, effective and sufficient

Leadership with Moral Ascendancy wherein Top Management is on top of every transition detail

Creation of Mantra or Slogan for attaining organizational goals. For example, slogan that Quality is non-negotiable.

Use of inventory of resources, competencies, opportunities, strengths, areas for improvement as reference for provision of resources for change, integration of organizational knowledge for changes, and for risk-reduction

Capacitating interventions for gaps and weaknesses as in provision of training, support, adapting mechanisms for all workforce and consideration of the welfare of the workforce and their mental wellbeing

Provision of measures for receptiveness to change as in welcoming new and alternative ways of operating, use of new technologies, and promotion of innovations

Resolute commitment to navigate through unprecedented challenges through policies and other controls
Prioritizing changes critical in the new normal

Collaboration of all departments as in mobilization of taskforce involving all departments where designation of key persons responsible, committees, with corresponding controls are stipulated and involvement of all groups from workforce, stakeholders, and clients

Putting in place Continuity Plans for uninterrupted activities for change such as Crises Management, Business Continuity, and Resilience Plans and other flexible frameworks

Leveraging existing expertise and seeking external best practices

Common Theme

Visibility of strong, visionary, moral, and strategic leadership in the transition process

Sufficient, open, and clear channels for communication regarding the transition

Common theme dissemination through battle cry or mantra

Policy that Quality is Non-negotiable

Inventory of resources, skills, strengths, opportunities, risks, and opportunities for data driven decision making

Strengthening interventions for gaps and risks

Openness to change and new ways of thinking

Unparalleled commitment to outlive extraordinary challenges
Focus on critical challenges

Synergy of all units

Taskforce creation

Step in Kotter's Model

Call to Action

Communicate the vision

Establishing Quick wins

Clear designation and controls

Contingency, sustainability and resilience plans such as flexibility and adaptability framework

External expertise support

Phase 4: Conduct Refreezing

After successfully implementing changes, organizations must focus on solidifying and sustaining these changes. This involves applying a systems perspective to ensure all units are aligned in maintaining the new normal, as indicated by positive feedback from successful implementers.

Refreeze Implementation

Feedback Extracts

Close supervision of Top Management, Middle Management, and staff to change initiatives

Measures for ensuring everyone will do their own share in the pie (collaboration with stakeholders for aligned objectives, taskforce activation comprising of representatives from different departments)

Measurement of outputs of all departments, use of organizational knowledge, and analysis of all data to ensure change

Strict dedication to complying with regulatory requirements to sustain the needed change

Change guided by data from clientele and all engaged entities

Employment of technologies to sustain change

Understanding the interconnectedness and interdependencies of all departments or holistic view prior to any implementation

Harmonizing and synchronizing the actions and commitment to measures for change

Focus on involvement and contribution and capacitating of each individual

Consideration and inclusion of the broader ecosystem of institution in decisions and active feedbacking with all stakeholders about the change

Injecting the change and transformational process in the Strategic Development Process

Goal alignment with all change initiatives

Common Theme

Synchronizing organizational actions and commitment

Valuing individual feedback, input, and contributions to the system

Inclusion of all feedback of the system

Using Change and Transformational Processes in developing strategies

Monitoring of change initiatives

Dedication to regulatory requirement compliance and sustenance of change
Putting collaboration measures

Monitoring contributions

Data-driven change

Investing in technologies

Step in Kotter's Model

Track Progress

Strengthen Change

Conclusion

PQA Framework was found to have enabled organizations to thrive by facilitating strategic planning, focusing on current needs, and ensuring business continuity and agility among the respondents. In the post-pandemic period, it further supported regular stakeholder feedback, crisis management, technology investment, and a comprehensive view on quality. The PQA Framework was particularly effective in navigating the challenges posed by VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) circumstances, promoting innovation, risk management, and resource provision. It highlighted the necessity of strong communication and leadership during organizational change and identified resistance as a significant challenge due to various internal and external factors. Effective strategies to address this resistance involve clear communication and participation. Overall, the PQA Framework proved crucial for enhancing organizational quality, agility, and sustainability during and after the pandemic.

Successful PQA Framework utilization requires careful planning and appropriate metrics, as many organizations struggle due to a lack of understanding of Organizational Development, Change, and Systems Perspective, leading to inefficiencies and failures. Additionally, the absence of standardized models, coupled with the flexibility and freedom for organizations to personalize and navigate through the experience, adds to the challenge. Its being non-prescriptive and the absence of strategies about systems perspective equates to readiness and preparation deficit, resulting in implementation failure of aspirants (Hobcraft, 2017). However, the timeless adage, "When you know better, you do better," and "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail" resolves the case. Organizational Development knowledge, skills, and competence can ease the challenges being experienced by implementers. Implementers need both conceptual and practical references to effectively apply the PQA Framework. The study highlights successful implementers' experiences, offering insights into effective strategies by identifying themes and patterns related to Systems Perspective and Change Concepts that others can refer to. With the quick reference and pattern in an ever-evolving and fast-changing world of organizational development, especially since pandemics have made changes faster and more unmanageable, moving forward becomes calculable and resistance and tensions from heavily invested people in the status quo are reduced.

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