

IMPLEMENTATION OF PEOPLE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (NP 4427:20189 INTO THE QMS ALIGNED WITH THE EQAVET FRAMEWORK: ACTION-RESEARCH IN A VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SCHOOL ¹DANIEL MELO ^{(1) (2)}, CARLOS MIGUEL OLIVEIRA^{(2) (3)}, ELISETE MARTINS ⁽²⁾⁽¹⁾ | ESCOLA DE COMÉRCIO DO PORTO, PORTUGAL⁽²⁾ | ISLA – INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DE GESTÃO E TECNOLOGIA, VILA NOVA DE GAIA, PORTUGAL⁽³⁾ | CEOS.PP - CENTRE FOR ORGANISATIONAL AND SOCIAL STUDIES, PORTO, PORTUGAL

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The vocational schools in recent years have been experiencing significant changes in their Quality Management Systems (QMS). The requirement for alignment with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) has profoundly impacted these institutions' day-to-day operations. However, an observation has arisen regarding the EQAVET alignment: the significance of Human Capital within the system remained relatively minimal. Therefore, the main objective was to enhance the robustness of the EQAVET system, particularly concerning Human Capital.

This paper delineates the processes of adapting and implementing a Human Resources Management System. The chosen reference framework is NP 4427:2018, the Portuguese standard for Human Resources Management, based on ISO 9001. This scientific article outlines the practical application of this system and elucidates the specific domains it impacts. The incorporation of the norm aims to seamlessly integrate the Quality Management System (QMS) formulated by ANQEP (the Portuguese agency for vocational education) to align with the EQAVET (European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training).

KEYWORDS: EQAVET, HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT, QSM IMPLEMENTATION, ISO 9001, HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT SYSTEM, VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

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1 INTRODUCTION:

In today's corporate landscape, the significance of Human Resource Management (HRM) has reached paramount importance within organisations. However, a noteworthy observation arises in aligning with the EQAVET, where the centrality of Human Capital within the system appears somewhat residual. As a result, our central focus has shifted toward enhancing the robustness of the EQAVET system, particularly concerning Human Capital.

This article explores the steps in adapting and implementing a Human Resources Management System. The selected framework for reference is NP 4427:2018, the Portuguese standard for Human Resources Management intricately entwined with the core principles of ISO 9001.

We expound upon the practical application of this system, revealing the specific domains essential to work concerning Human Capital. Furthermore, the integration of the Portuguese norm into the Quality Management System (QMS), as formulated by the Portuguese Agency of Vocational Education (Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional - ANQEP), serves as a conduit for harmonisation with the EQAVET framework.

2 THEORETICAL SUPPORT OR LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 ISO

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO), freely translated, means the International Organization for Standardization. ISO aims to standardise organisations worldwide, whether private or public, regardless of their field of operation or size. (Saha, 2011)

ISO is a non-governmental international organisation with members in 164 countries. Through its members, it gathers experts to share knowledge and develop International Standards voluntarily, based on relevant market consensus, supporting innovation and providing solutions to global challenges. (ISO - International Organization for Standardization, 2020)

2.2 EQAVET

When investigating the dimension of action within research, the intent is also to delve into its significance, configurations, and integration within the investigative process. In this vein, there is a concern to identify the actions essential for constructing or understanding the subject of study in question, along with the pivotal steps needed to translate these understandings into knowledge production." (Franco, 2005, p.491)

2.3 The Quality Assurance System in alignment with the EQAVET framework

Vocational schools bear specific obligations and needs, and in this regard, the EQAVET framework, established by the Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council on June 18, 2009, facilitates documenting, developing, monitoring, evaluating, and enhancing the efficiency of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and the quality of management practices. (Gaspar & do Carmo Aires, 2020).

"By the end of 2015, Member States should establish a common quality assurance framework for VET operators at the national level, compatible with the EQAVET Framework. Through the publication of Decree-Law n.º 92/2014, dated June 20, it is the responsibility of the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP) to promote, monitor, and support the implementation of quality assurance systems for training processes and outcomes of vocational schools, certifying them as EQAVET systems." (Gaspar & do Carmo Aires, 2020, p.05).

ANQEP, I.P., based on ISO 9001, established an alignment model for quality assurance systems with the EQAVET Framework to ensure a successful process. This encompasses not only vocational schools but all organisations providing Level 4 Vocational Education and Training services under the national qualification framework. ANQEP, I.P. provides implementation support through technical and methodological guidance and verifies system implementation compliance.

In this context, objectives for aligning with the EQAVET Framework were defined as follows:

- Foster a culture of quality assurance and continuous improvement among VET operators based on self-assessment practices.
- Ensure alignment of quality assurance and continuous improvement policies with the strategic objectives of VET operators and institutions.
- Promote the adoption of procedures, processes, and practices associated with the key components of the EQAVET Framework: its four phases of the quality cycle, EQAVET quality criteria, and related indicative descriptors.
- Systematically and systematically collect and analyse data on achieved outcomes and reflect this exercise in the continuous improvement of VET management practices.
- Attain the EQAVET seal, verifying alignment of the VET operator's quality assurance system with the European Framework.
- Recognition that Quality Assurance Systems implemented by VET operators are aligned with the EQAVET Framework results in the awarding of the EQAVET seal by ANQEP, I.P.

In this context, the implementation of QA systems aligned with the EQAVET Framework is intended to establish a culture of continuous improvement, reinforcing the foundation of dual certification training. This aims to achieve:

- Greater appeal of VET to young individuals and guardians.
- Credibility of the VET system.
- Employer involvement in VET quality assurance processes.
- Increased recognition of VET within the general population.
- To ensure a quality process, four fundamental components were established:

A PDCA quality assurance and improvement cycle consists of four customary phases (Plan, Do, Check, Act). Four quality criteria are applied to the phases of the quality assurance and improvement cycle (one criterion for each phase).

Indicative descriptors specifying quality criteria facilitating their operationalisation are defined at the level of the entire VET system and the level of VET operators.

Ten reference indicators support monitoring, evaluation, and the introduction of improvements in line with set objectives and goals.

A key focus of the EQAVET Framework is active stakeholder participation in the continuous improvement processes of VET service quality. The aim is to apply improvements across all organisation sectors to enhance the quality of services VET operators provide. (Gaspar & do Carmo Aires, 2020).

2.4 NP 4427:2018 - People Management Systems

The new version of NP 4427 considered new terminologies, primarily the transition from "resource" management to "people" management. This change in focus is evident in the norm.

The satisfaction and performance of individuals within an organisation are directly linked; it is challenging for demotivated individuals to achieve high organisational performance. Therefore, large organisations have directed their attention towards motivating their work teams. They utilise performance evaluation to create motivation through feedback and subsequently through compensation based on results achieved. Although it is sometimes considered that good results only require a motivated team, this statement does not reflect reality. Such an

assessment exponentially contributes to organisational failure. Human Resources Management (HRM) is a complex process requiring various actions and decisions. However, a motivated team is closer to achieving positive results. (Fernandes, 2014)

"The need to manage organisations appropriately, particularly companies, is felt by managers worldwide. Due to this need in Portugal, a technical committee (CT 152) was established to develop a reference framework for human resources management. This standard, NP 4427 - Human Resources Management Systems - Requirements, was designed to guide companies in establishing processes and scopes of operation that lead to HRM suitable for their purposes and objectives." (Fernandes, 2014, p. 04)

"NP 4427:2018 replaces NP 4427:2004. It underwent technical changes, adopting a process-based approach based on the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle and risk-based thinking, shifting the focus from HRM to People Management. This involved revising the structure and content of sections and introducing new critical concepts and processes aimed at attracting, developing, and retaining people." (APG, 2018, p. 05)

NP 4427 was prepared to align with current certification standards ISO 9001, ISO 14001, and OHSAS 18001, forming a framework where quality, environment, occupational health and safety, and now human resources are at the vertices. The Standard specifies the requirements of a People Management System (PMS) that encompasses all hierarchical levels, areas of activity, and organisational units of an organisation, serving as a vehicle for improvement in efficiency and effectiveness.

The requirements of this Standard comprise ten articles and apply to organisations intending to address:

- Objective and scope of application;
- Normative references;
- Terms and conditions;
- Policy;
- Planning;
- Support;
- Implementation;
- Internal audit;
- Improvement.

Each article represents and provides guidelines for implementing NP 4427:2018 within an organisation. (APG, 2018)

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology approach chosen was Action-research applied to a vocational Portuguese school.

Action investigation can be applied in various contexts, particularly involving issues related to people, tasks, and procedures. It is particularly suited for situations where changes are deemed necessary. In this specific scenario, it emerges as the optimal approach, given that this methodology is designed to foster improvement through researcher involvement.

Research objectives:

- a) Verify the compatibility of the NP 4427:2018 to EQAVET;
- b) Identify, develop, and implement the methodologies and tools necessary for the conception and integration of NP 4427:2018 into the existing QMS at the vocational school;
- c) Develop and seamlessly correlate the Human Resource Management (HRM) concepts described in NP 4427:2018 with the standard practices and terminologies employed within the vocational school's QMS by aligning the EQAVET framework.

Steps for the NP 4427:2018 implementation:

Step 1 - Verification Checklist: It was essential to gather comprehensive data concerning the system related to human capital and subsequently compare the amassed information with the verification checklist derived from NP 4427:2018. This analysis enabled the identification of gaps within the current Quality Management System (QMS) related to Human Resources Control.

Step 2 – Identify the mandatory documents: The NP 4427:2018 assumes some documents are imprescindible. The documents considered essential for the implementation of NP 4427:2018 are the Human Resources Manual, HR Policy, documented information, record management (professional data), Job Description Manual, Responsibilities, Sanctions, Recruitment and Selection, Induction Manual, Behaviors, Action Plan, Career Training (Collective Labor Agreement for Vocational Schools), Internal Audits, Corrective and Preventive Actions (Improvement Plan).

Step 3 – Determination and Implementation of Documentation: This stage necessitated the enhancement of existing documents alongside the creation of new ones. At this juncture, a profound understanding of the institution becomes imperative. All newly devised documents should align with the institution's mission, vision, and values. The system needs to mirror the institution, facilitating ongoing enhancement genuinely. Additionally, a seamless integration of the new documentation and methodologies within the current control system is of utmost importance. Without this, there might be challenges in effectively monitoring the new implementations.

This pertains exclusively to the PLAN and DO phases, which will be integrated into a methodology known as the PDCA cycle. To enhance clarity, following the PLAN and DO phases, all implementations and improvements become integral components of the system, establishing a cohesive framework. The CHECK and ACT phases serve as validation mechanisms, ensuring the successful alignment of the implementation. If any disparities arise, they will be addressed and revised, underscoring the significance of employing the PDCA cycle for this iterative process.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

The research emphasises the importance of tailoring a Quality Management System (QMS) to each institution's distinct attributes and needs, regardless of its sector. A rigid system falls short of capturing the true essence of a QMS –comprehensive organisational enhancement. Therefore, integrating the PDCA cycle into NP4427:2018 holds paramount significance, as it facilitates the ongoing evaluation of processes, outcomes, and necessary adjustments. Furthermore, in cases where an institution has an existing QMS, new systems need to align seamlessly with the current framework. This approach ensures improvements without unnecessary proliferation of procedures, processes, and workflows, thus preventing resistance from workers.

Concerning the implementation of a Human Resources Management System (HRMS) at the vocational school, the vision is that moving forward, there will be increased data collection, consequently enabling improvements in every facet related to human capital. Moreover, continuous improvement will be assured with integrating the PDCA cycle.

Creating a verification checklist was pivotal to successfully implementing NP4427:2018 requirements within the institution's current QMS. This checklist facilitates the analysis of existing fulfilled requirements and highlights areas that need to be developed, ensuring the comprehensive implementation of the norm.

Table 1 – Verification checklist

Requirements	Yes	No
4.1 UNDERSTANDING THE ORGANISATION AND ITS CONTEXT		X
4.2 UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS		X

Requirements	Yes	No
4.3 DETERMINING THE SCOPE OF THE PEOPLE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM		X
4.4 PEOPLE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM		X
5.1 LEADERSHIP AND COMMITMENT;		X
5.2 POLICY		X
5.3 ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND AUTHORITIES.		X
6.1 ACTIONS TO ADDRESS RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES;		X
6.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE PEOPLE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND PLANNING TO ACHIEVE THEM		X
6.3 PLANNING CHANGES TO THE PEOPLE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM		X
7.1 RESOURCES		X
7.2 COMPETENCE	X	
7.3 AWARENESS	X	
7.4 COMMUNICATION		X
7.5 DOCUMENTED INFORMATION	X	
8.1 PLANNING AND OPERATIONAL CONTROL	X	
8.2 ASSIGNMENTS	X	
8.3 BEHAVIORS	X	
8.4 RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION		X
8.5 ADMISSION		X
8.6 ONBOARDING AND INTEGRATION		X
8.7 PERFORMANCE EVALUATION		X
8.8 DEVELOPMENT	X	
8.9 CAREERS	X	
8.10 MOBILITY		X
8.11 COMPENSATION		X
8.12 CONTROL OF PROCESSES, PRODUCTS, AND SERVICES FROM EXTERNAL PROVIDERS		X
8.13 OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH	X	
8.14 AGE MANAGEMENT		X
8.15 EXIT MANAGEMENT		X
8.16 REHABILITATION		X
9.1 MONITORING, MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION	X	
9.2 INTERNAL AUDIT	X	
10.2 NONCONFORMITY AND CORRECTIVE ACTION	X	
10.3 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	X	

As a result of the verification checklist, it was determined that the creation of various documentation, procedures, processes, and tools was necessary. To provide better clarity, it's important to note that some procedures and processes have been incorporated into existing documents already operating within the institution. For instance, the action plan, monitoring, measurement, analysis, evaluation map, and indicators' monitoring map are examples of this integration.

The subsequent information outlines the documentation and tools that were generated following the implementation of the verification checklist:

- Human Resources Management - Manual;
- Onboarding - Manual;
- Description of Tasks - Manual;
- Performance Evaluation - Regulation;
- Performance Evaluation - Tools;
- Control of Processes, Products, and Services from External Providers - Map;
- Training and Development Diagnosis - Map;
- Professional Satisfaction - Inquiry;

responsibilities comprehensively. This not only guides workers but also equips us for streamlined new recruitments. Should the need arise to create an opportunity for dissemination, we are already equipped with a precise description.

The importance of the Performance Evaluation Regulation and Performance Evaluation Tools cannot be emphasised enough. This significance is further reinforced by the collaborative labour agreement, which explicitly highlights the crucial role of these components. Considering the specificities of each role, the creation of appropriate assessment tools for various types of professionals within the institution (Teachers, Senior Technicians, and other technical staff) was necessary. Notably, the entire workforce is deeply engaged, demonstrating a strong interest in this evaluation process. It's vital to emphasise that Performance Evaluation directly impacts teachers' career progression, as it influences factors such as additional vacation days based on the evaluation's alignment with other aspects.

The Professional Satisfaction Inquiry and Professional Satisfaction Report are indispensable components. Soliciting feedback from our workers about what they appreciate, and areas they believe need improvement is fundamental. Gaining insights into their opinions is pivotal for effective management. This process enables us, at least annually, to analyse fields where improvements are necessary to enhance professional satisfaction.

The Training and Development Diagnosis Map and Annual Training and Development Report have solidified the importance of training within our institution. Empowering professionals to engage in their training actively is crucial. It's important to note that they don't directly select the training topics but provide suggestions. Afterwards, a correlation is established between the institution's objectives and needs, and based on this, the training and development plan for the year is formulated. However, they value and appreciate this opportunity, as they feel their opinions are considered. It's worth mentioning that some of their suggestions often become part of the final training and development plan.

Though less effective, the Control of Processes, Products, and Services from External Providers Map will be revamped to ensure that it effectively generates more data. This data will offer valuable insights that can be used for continual improvement.

While not yielding significant results initially, the Control of Processes, Products, and Services from External Providers Map is slated for a revamp. The aim is to enhance its efficacy in generating more relevant data. This data is expected to provide valuable insights that can be leveraged for ongoing improvement efforts.

These enhancements have optimised our human resources practices and allowed us to intricately align our efforts with the institution's strategic goals, driving holistic improvement across all fronts.

5 CONCLUSIONS, SUGGESTIONS, AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research was focused on the norm itself, supplemented by scholarly resources, exploration of QMS exemplars and their practical implementations, and pertinent legislation relevant to vocational schools and EQAVET-aligned QMS.

The primary aim of this research was to implement and adapt NP4427:2018 within the Quality Management System (QMS) of the vocational school, aligned with the EQAVET framework. During the implementation, it was possible to confirm a strong interconnection between NP4427:2018 and the ongoing QMS at the vocational school. It was possible to underscore that the vocational school's QMS was developed in some aspects, addressing specific requirements of NP 4427:2018. However, creating new control documents and instruments was necessary to fulfil other requirements, prompting a comprehensive review and update of procedures and processes.

Limitations: During the application and adaptation of the requirements, certain instances highlighted the necessity for active involvement of the workforce. Looking ahead, the implementation of an automated human resources management system could prove beneficial. Given that an organisation accumulates the extensive information presented, having a computerised system to manage the data becomes crucial. This centralised approach would facilitate accelerated improvements by enabling a comprehensive data overview.

For future improvements, it will be essential to understand in what fields there is a lack of information to improve the system and, perhaps, apply an HR data system to enhance the worker's results.

Suggestions: Implementing HR analytics within the system could significantly enhance quality while reducing the workload associated with Human Resources Management. This direction aligns with the evolving landscape of human resources management, and vocational schools should adopt these trends to ensure their quality and competitiveness. A comparative study between Portuguese national schools and other European vocational institutions would be particularly insightful for future exploration. This would allow for a deeper understanding of best practices and potential areas for improvement.

Lastly, the development and refinement of procedures, processes, and tools for personnel management were integral. Collaborating with the management team was pivotal, providing a valuable perspective on employee relations. The project entailed extensive effort, involving hours of dedicated research, and significantly augmented my understanding of QMS intricacies and organisational dynamics.

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