



Diploma in _____
Managing Quality in Higher Education

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The world in which institutions of higher learning operate is undergoing dramatic changes. These changes challenge to the very core the social, cultural, economic, political, technological and other systems that are at work in these communities. Consequently, educational systems have had to respond to these changes to ensure that the quality of life in each community is maintained and developed. A number of these changes are described below.

One is the rapid growth in knowledge and information bolstered by advances in data storage and communication. Another is the growing this from manufacturing towards more information-based service industries which require thinking, communication and problem-solving skills. Still another one is the growing trend towards a more global, transnational economy and towards global interdependence. There is also an observable this towards greater participation in decision making and equity among ethnic groups, sexes, classes and age groups. Lastly, there has been a growing demand for greater accountability and transparency in education.

Many colleges and universities today continue to face common challenges such as skyrocketing operating costs, spiraling tuition fees, declining student demand, hampering regulations and bureaucracies, pressing calls for productivity and efficiency and public demand for accountability and responsibility. In the past, the standard response has been to contain cost by means of traditional and time-worn methods. Institutions of higher education have resorted to quick-fix solutions which typically included cutting non-basic services, laying off employees, and curtailing education and training of personnel. By doing these repeatedly, administrators have become adept at managing crises, in dealing with quick fixes and in providing simple, short-term solutions to problems which do not seem to go away.¹ Amidst all the retrenchments, hiring and salary freezes, and other cost-cutting measures, college and university administrators have wondered if there is a better way to manage higher education.

The problems faced by higher education are diverse, deep-rooted, and as much social and political. They are for the most part school system problems. Educational failures can be attributed in part to the way schools are structured and managed. Unfortunately, many schools today operate in much the same way as they did decades ago. The schools themselves, however, are not solely to blame. Fundamental causes of poor performance could also be traced to institutions that have traditionally governed these schools.

Educational systems and the education of people are vital to the progress of every society. Educated people, not machines, are the driving force behind a nation's economic growth and development. Education is important because living standards, economic growth, and competitiveness are directly related to the state of a nation's schools. The educational environment, however, is constantly in a state of flux. In such environment, competition for both students and funds will continue to increase at a time when more results are required with fewer resources. In the wake of these rapid changes, colleges and universities today cannot afford to maintain their current course.

No matter how good these institutions are now, or how good they have been, they need to be even better in the future if they are to meet the needs of their stakeholders in a rapidly changing world. Institutions of higher learning need to act proactively and initiate positive, quality-focused and learner-centred programmes. To achieve this end, they need an improvement model that examines each and every process in order to promote continued and permanent reform.



The reformation of higher education needs a model for quality improvement with proven success similar to one tested and practiced in business and industry but adapted to the unique needs of academia. Educational institutions need to pursue quality consciously by systematic means. Such reformation requires a long-term comprehensive approach to quality improvement instead of mere piece-meal approaches to deal with problems. These are the conditions to which the principles and tools of quality are readily applicable.

There are several reasons the application of quality management theory to higher education can be justified. First, quality management in higher education is still an area of warm research activity. Quality remains a significant field for research in academia. Second, quality management is not only compatible with educational reforms but actually builds the case for them.² It supports educators' own change goals, responds to barriers like those found in schools, and helps schools learn. Third, quality management is a paradigm capable of integrating several diverse higher education reform movements (e.g., accreditation or input- based approach and outcomes assessment approach) so that these attempts at reform can make their optimal contributions.³

Quality improvement, defined as continuous improvement of processes is, on one hand, still new to higher education and, on the other, a deeply ingrained tradition. In the early part of the last century, institutions of higher education determined that quality can be assured by controlling process inputs like the credentials of faculty, the ability of incoming students, library holdings, and individual teacher assessment of student performance. This reliance on process inputs, however, has not been adequate to assure quality. The same was true with the movement that emerged during the latter part of that century in response to declining standards in schools. Tests of one kind or another have been administered to identify deficient students and to prevent them from being passed through. Educational institutions went beyond reporting on resources, structure, faculty credentials, and library holdings to assess the educational results in terms of student attainments. Although this outcomes-based approach had its merits, it has not adequately assessed results of processes to determine if they were properly orchestrated. The quality management approach takes care of this gap by taking a holistic approach to assuring quality of inputs, processes, and outcomes.