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An Integrated Management Approach in a Higher Education Technology Support Unit

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Chapter 12

An Integrated Management Approach in a Higher Education Technology Support Unit

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study is located in the Department for Education Innovation (EI), a teaching and learning support unit at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. The initial problem was the need to apply project management and quality management principles to the services offered by the department to faculty members. The authors describe the implementation of a formal, online, process-based Quality Management System (QMS) designed to self evaluate, document, and improve the Instructional Design (ID) process that guides the development of educational technology solutions in EI. The project was completed in 2005 and was included in a CEN (European Committee for Standardization) Good Practice Guide for outstanding implementations of quality approaches in e-learning. The QMS provides a mechanism to support a consistent project management approach, and the case illustrates successful integration between three cycles: Project Management (PM), Quality Management (QM), and the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) instructional design process.

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ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The University of Pretoria (UP) is primarily a face-to-face institution, offering degree and diploma programs in nine faculties. It is one of the largest Higher Education (HE) institutions in southern Africa, with approximately 60,000 contact students, 20,000 distance students, and more than 3,000 faculty members spread over 5 campuses. The learning model promoted at the University of Pretoria is one of flexible, blended learning, where e-learning is used to supplement and complement face-to-face contact sessions in varying proportions. Education innovation (EI) was defined as a strategic driver at UP as early as 1997, after which the Department for EI was established as a fully funded support department to underpin the strategic implementation of educational technology solutions across the university. The vision of the department is to “Create synergy towards innovative education environments for student engagement and success” (Department for EI, 2011). During its 15 years of existence, the department has grown to a staff complement of around 30, including project managers, instructional designers, education consultants, graphic artists, and audio-visual experts.

As a large, modern university, the central administration provides a link between institutional and departmental imperatives. Departments are responsible for initiating their own internal and some external evaluation reviews, to comply with national and institutional quality assurance requirements. Thus the context is one of a large, well-resourced African university with the necessary institution-wide infrastructure, technology and human resources to pursue its broader mission, including the systematic enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning across all faculties.

SETTING THE STAGE

The Department for EI offers a team approach to the instructional design of electronic learning materials delivered via the institutional learning management system (Blackboard™, 2012). Instructional Design (ID) may be defined as “a *process* involving the systematic development of instructional specifications using learning and instructional theory to enhance the quality of teaching and learning” (www.heacademy.ac.uk). The Instructional Design (ID) process requires the contribution and co-ordination of a variety of experts, each with their own professional discipline, language and working methods, and they are frequently located in different sections or departments of the university (Fresen & Boyd, 2005; Jara & Mellar, 2009; Stephenson, 2005).

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