

Chapter 11

Intranet as a Quality Manual in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study describes how the Intranet of a higher education institution can be used as a quality manual. The study is based on process management. The process architecture can be used as a structure for the Intranet. This Intranet also includes detailed process descriptions and makes them available for management, personnel, and students. The flow charts and process cards provide managers with more awareness and control over their responsibilities and ensure that the objectives and high quality can be achieved. The results of this study are useful for those who want to develop quality manuals for higher education institutions.

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses providing institutional leadership with an understanding of the electronic quality manual based on process descriptions. Inexperienced academic managers are predominantly focused on short-term tactical issues and not on analytical process improvement, and by focusing on all these areas; they might be able to achieve a sustainable situation and high quality. Higher education institutions as well as other organisations need to manage performance and high quality through agility and appropriate information systems.

Process management is an integrated part of quality assurance and the basis for automation. It is important to increase the commitment to process management involving personnel in the process development and description. In addition, education institutions must build quality control into the processes rather than treating it as a separate process of the institution. The majority of improvements in the short run can be achieved without information systems, even though they may be helpful in many ways (Jeston & Nelis, 2008).

Most higher education institutions have quality manuals. People dread making revisions, because someone has to type and distribute them and make

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sure that everybody reads and implements the revisions. The institutions also collect a large amount of manual binders of evidence for the quality audit. Intranet technology provides a solution to avoid these troublesome tasks of paper-based systems. Intranet technology can effectively support process management. Intranet is not only a repository of unstructured information, but also a powerful tool enabling effective information and knowledge accessibility and communication supporting the quality assurance (Buniyamin & Barber, 2004).

A number of researchers (Lari, 2002; Chin et al., 2004; Hussain, 2009) propose the integration of quality assurance with information technologies (ITs) to improve the flow and management of information. The challenge is how the quality assurance system can be integrated with information system technologies and process-based quality management systems to continuously improve operational excellence and achieve the strategic and other objectives of the organisation. The Intranet-based system would provide a standardised approach for process storage, knowledge retrieval and management.

The purpose of this study is to describe how the Intranet was used as a quality manual of a higher education institution. The approach of business process management (BPM) provides the structure for the Intranet which is part of the quality assurance system of the higher education institution. The main elements of the Intranet are research and development, education, and support services at an overall level. The process descriptions at lower levels provide structure on the detailed levels of the Intranet. The example of the Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS) is presented. This institution has identified, developed, and described 187 detailed processes. Flow charts and process cards are filed in the Intranet.

The quality audit was the main driver for describing and developing processes at the TUAS (Hintsanen et al., 2010). The other drivers included the need to develop quality and the lack of process standardisation. The trigger to establish the

Intranet as a medium for the quality manual was the notion that the earlier printed and electronic quality manuals were passive documents that did not include dialogue, feedback, and adequate guidance for students and personnel. Process management provided the structure for the Intranet-based quality manual.

The study is organised as follows. Section 2 provides the introduction to the BPM and process-based quality assurance. Section 3 presents the process map, which includes an overall view of the processes for personnel and students. It also discusses the implementation of process management at the detailed level and describes the process of internships as an example of flow charts. Section 4 describes the process-based Intranet at the TUAS. Finally, the results of the study are discussed and summarised in the concluding section.

Process-Based Quality Assurance

The concepts of BPM were promoted by many scholars (Davenport & Short, 1990; Hammer & Champy, 1993). To remain competitive companies have undertaken business process reengineering projects reorganising their operations. While BPM has taken hold in industry, as more than 80 percent of the leading organisations worldwide have actively engaged in some type of BPM program (Antonucci & Goeke, 2011), the application and operations of BPM practices have reached the higher education only recently. Process management in higher education is underpinned by the view that many issues of teaching and research quality and productivity revolve around improving and reengineering processes.

BPM, known also as process management or process-based quality assurance, is a holistic management approach that aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness by continuous improvement and integration with technology. Process management describes the processes of the organisation. Therefore it improves its capabilities of change, because the management and personnel

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