

EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION.

Abstract:

In this paper quality is measured from three dimensions (Quality of design, quality of Conformance, and quality of performance) proposed by Mergen et al. (2000). A case study approach was used to collect data at College of Computing and Digital Media, DePaul University, Chicago, IL, USA. Using measures developed by Widrick et al. (2002) we evaluated the quality of distance learning at CDM. The lessons learned from this case study apply to military organizations that need to train and educate their work force using distance learning technologies.

1.0 Introduction

Quality has many definitions: Abbott (1955) and Feigenbaum (1951) have defined it as *value*, Pirsig (1974) defined it as *excellence*, Levitt (1972) has defined it as *conformance to specifications*, Crosby (1979) defined it as *conformance to requirements*, Juran (1988) defined it as *fitness for use*, Grönroos (1983), Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, (1985) have defined it as *meeting and/or exceeding customers' expectations*, while Gillies (1992) define it as *quality is people*. Each definition has strengths and weaknesses with respect to measurement, generalization, managerial usefulness and consumer relevance, therefore each is appropriate under specific circumstances. Several authors have pointed out that what is needed is a framework that combines many of these dimensions (Wang and Strong, 1996; Grant 1999; Adelakun, 1999 and Widrick, et al. 2002). Nonetheless, we adopted the quality framework by Widrick et al. (2002) and Grant et al. (1999) for this paper. They Claim that the application of quality measurement (QM) principles to solve industry-related problems has been institutionalized at many firms, such as Xerox and academic institutions like the Rochester Institute of Technology, to gain competitive advantage. Quality management is part of these types of organizations and it is practiced in every aspect of the organizations' management.

CDM has one of the largest graduate programs in computer science, telecommunications and information systems in the US. It is part of DePaul University located in Chicago USA. Over the past few years CDM has expanded internationally to offer graduate degrees in Poland and Jordan. CDM was able to expand internationally based on there the distance learning infrastructure they have developed for their students in the US. This paper proposes a set of measures and tools to evaluate each of the three dimensions of quality (Quality of Design, Quality of Conformance, and Quality of Performance) with respect to the delivery of distance learning education at CDM Chicago. The findings are applied to distributed military locations that need to educate their work force globally.

Reference

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