

Using an online quality management system to manage the instructional design process in the e-learning support unit at University of Pretoria.

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Whether your working life is in an airline, an insurance company, or a higher education institution, so much of quality and quality management is about learning how to work most effectively and efficiently with each other. The old saying that 'no man is an island' is never more true than today, when so many complex imperatives from both inside and outside of organisations are driving the need for people to liaise closer and closer together.

Understanding and documenting organisational processes and procedures can sound like a real bore, especially for hard pressed academics and support staff who feel a strong urge to get on with the job at hand. But by taking a little time out, and involving all the role players in a particular process, everyone can take a step back to self-evaluate how they are tackling the required tasks, and to learn how to improve the 'way we do things around here'. In this way it is possible to see quality as something which is actually exciting (yes, really!) and can help individuals to co-ordinate together to produce really good results.

One area where this is well illustrated is in the instructional design process for producing e-learning modules. ID is an intricate process involving many different types of role players, amongst them the lecturer, the instructional designer, graphics and library staff. Each person speaks a different professional language, but must liaise and work together to produce a quality e-learning deliverable. Each person needs to have an understanding of the overall process, how they contribute to it, and what their jointly identified checks and balances are along the way. Depicting the process visually often enables people to relate to it, and then brings them together to work on and improve both process and deliverables as a team.

In a project at University of Pretoria, we described the instructional design process in what they call a 'project timeline', based on the traditional ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation) model. The whole timeline consists of about 15 stages, some of which can be carried out iteratively. Each one of the stages was then documented (using self evaluation task teams) as a procedure to become part of a formal online quality management system. The appropriate standards and guidelines, relevant to the UP context, were built in at each stage as supporting documents. The online QMS has now become the adopted system for planning, developing and evaluating e-learning projects, also enabling new staff to readily assimilate the working methods at UP, and feel self sufficient more quickly, without having to rely on existing staff to explain everything to them.

The online QMS for the e-learning support unit at UP is freely available at:

<http://www.up.ac.za/telematic/quality/quality.htm>

Lesley has been working as an independent quality consultant since 1992, in both higher education and business applications in the UK and South Africa. Her focus is to provide implementation and training services to empower individuals to take responsibility for their own quality management systems, and to integrate them into their everyday working lives.