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## **AC 2012-5363: QUALITY STANDARDS FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT THROUGH SELF-ASSESSMENT AND BENCHMARKING**

**Ms. Kim A. Scalzo, State University of New York**

Kim Scalzo is the Director of the Center for Professional Development (CPD) for the State University of New York (SUNY). The SUNY CPD provides professional development and training programs for faculty and staff throughout the 64 campus SUNY system, and Scalzo is responsible for overall leadership of the Center, new program development, managing relationships with the campuses, and working with other university-wide programs to ensure alliance with the SUNY Strategic Plan. Prior to joining SUNY, Scalzo spent 18 years in a variety of administrative and leadership roles at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute involving distance learning, summer, continuing education, and academic outreach programs. Her primary responsibilities were campus-wide planning, quality assurance, program and curriculum development, new business development, customer relationship management, promotion, recruitment, and the provision of customized services for students, faculty, and corporate customers. Prior to working at Rensselaer, she worked for the New York State Science and Technology Foundation (now NYSTAR) providing oversight for research contracts with universities and scholarship programs for high school students. Scalzo has also served as a reviewer for the New York State Education Department Office of Higher Education for several Institutional Capability Reviews for distance learning programs. Over the past five years, she has participated in an E.U.-U.S. project to develop international quality standards for continuing education centers. She is also a co-creator of the Bray-Scalzo Partnership Model for creating and sustaining successful partnerships. Scalzo is currently serving as a member of the Faculty Advisory Council for Teaching and Technology at SUNY and as Chair-elect for the Continuing Professional Development Division of the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE). She is also a member of the International Association of Continuing Engineering Education (IACEE) Council and serves as the Vice President for Products and Services on the IACEE Executive Committee. Additionally, she is a member of the National University Telecommunications Network (NUTN) Advisory Board.

**Mr. Edward G. Borbely, University of Michigan**

**Dr. Nelson C. Baker, Georgia Institute of Technology**

# **Quality Standards for Continuing Professional Development Organizations and Quality Management through Self-Assessment and Benchmarking**

## **Abstract**

CPD administrators and directors continue to look for ways to be more strategic in focusing resources on programs, processes, people, and goals that align with their vision and mission and for effective ways to both evaluate and demonstrate their value and to document their performance over time. This session will describe an international quality standard and quality management model that has recently been developed for CPD Centers to support strategic planning and ensure alignment by facilitating organizational self-assessment and benchmarking for continuous quality improvement. The quality standard is based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model and a comprehensive set of tools and processes has been developed by a team of CPD Directors at institutions spanning the US, 7 EU countries, and China to ensure applicability internationally.

This paper will provide an overview of the quality model along with descriptions of the core elements that comprise the model. Application of the model will also be discussed to show how it can positively impact organizational development, strategic planning processes, program quality, and allocation of scarce resources in challenging economic times.

## **Rationale**

The projected shortage of engineers in the US has been documented nationally<sup>1</sup> and is being echoed around the world and in other professions<sup>2</sup>. In addition to the many efforts by K-12 and higher education to fill the gap at the early stages of the education pipeline, the need to update the skills of practicing engineers and other working professionals through corporate and university continuing education (CE) or continuing professional development (CPD) programs becomes more critical. At the same time new providers of CE and CPD programs are emerging and entering the playing field.

This creates a challenge for working professionals and employers operating in a global economy in selecting providers of CE and CPD programs. Quality generally drives choice for educational programs, but in the continuing education arena, there is a lack of standards against which institutions or CE/CPD organizations can be compared. Regional accreditations make mention of continuing education, but give them much less attention than traditional undergraduate or graduate programs. Further, discipline specific standards, such as ABET for engineering schools and AACSB for business schools focus on their traditional programs for full-time students. This leaves employers and working professionals with no objective criteria and no national or international standard against which to judge the quality of CE/CPD programs<sup>2</sup>.

A secondary challenge exists for CE/CPD directors who are increasingly being challenged by their leadership to demonstrate value to their institution and ensure that they are providing quality programs. Without an external standard or set of criteria against which they can assess

themselves, it is difficult to demonstrate their quality to leadership. Additionally, without a quality standard to aspire to, it's hard to be strategic in making decisions about where and how to improve quality.

In response to this need, the International Association for Continuing Engineering Education (IACEE), an international professional association made up of CPD Directors around the world, took on this charge and has developed the IACEE Quality Program. The IACEE Quality Program provides a quality model that establishes the first quality standard at the organizational level specifically intended for CE/CPD organizations. The quality model is based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model<sup>3</sup>, the well-known standard for quality in industry in the EU and includes many of the same principles of the prestigious Baldrige Award<sup>4</sup> for Quality in the US.

Over the past four years, an international collaboration team for CPD Directors and practitioners within the IACEE has been working to adapt the EFQM Excellence Model for CE/CPD organizations into a set of criteria that comprise a new, and we believe the first, Quality Standard for CE/CPD Organizations globally. To go beyond developing the criteria, the team also developed a set of tools and processes to enable self-assessment and benchmarking for the purpose of promoting continuous quality improvement at the organizational level. The combination of the quality criteria with the tools, and processes comprise the IACEE Quality Model.

Through a series of FIPSE-EU Atlantis grants and other grants through the European Commission, the collaboration team worked on developing the IACEE Quality Model. The team also conducted extensive testing with a diverse set of CPD directors and practitioners to ensure applicability to a variety of disciplines and with CE/CPD providers from a wide variety of disciplines who offer credit and non-credit programs via distance learning, on-campus, and at customer locations.

### **The IACEE Quality Model**

The IACEE Quality Model is described in detail in *A Self-Assessment Model for Quality Management and Organisational Development for Continuing and Professional Education*<sup>5</sup> and available online at <http://iacee.org>. The model includes the following core elements:

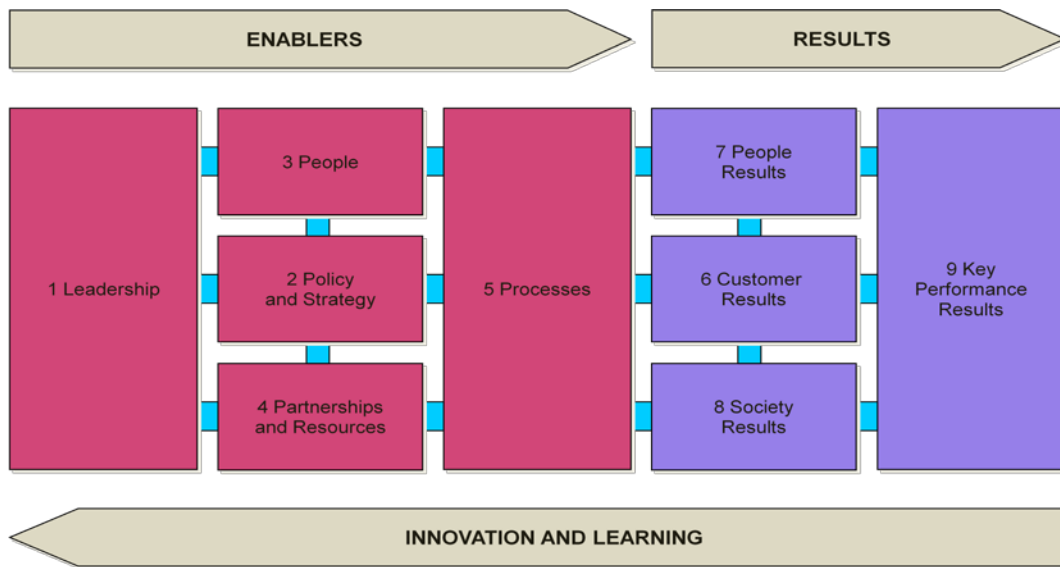
- 1) Self-Assessment Matrix
- 2) Two Benchmarking Demographic Data Sheets
- 3) Best Practices Template
- 4) Online data system for benchmarking analysis

The **Self-Assessment Matrix** is the outcome of the adaptation of the EFQM Excellence Model to CE/CPD organizations. In the EFQM Excellence Model there are 9 high level criteria that break out into two categories:

- Enablers, which are the processes an organization has in place to ensure quality
- Results, which are the outcomes the organization produces and serve as indicators of quality

The concept of Enablers and Results as well as nine high level criteria were all maintained from the EFQM model for the Self-Assessment Matrix to maintain the integrity of the approach.

Depicted in Diagram 1 are the specific enablers and results that comprise the nine criteria of the EFQM Excellence Model and the IACEE Self-Assessment Matrix



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Diagram 1. IACEE Quality Model Enablers and Results

Within the IACEE Self-Assessment Matrix, each of the nine criteria are broken down into a variable number of sub-criteria. Both the criteria and sub-criteria are stated in terms of what excellent organizations do. For example, Criterion 1, Leadership, states that:

“Excellent leaders develop and facilitate achievement of the mission and vision. They develop organisational values and systems required for sustainable success and implement these via their actions and behaviours. During periods of change, they retain a constancy of purpose. Where required, such leaders are able to change direction of the organisation and inspire others to follow.”

Similarly, Sub-Criterion 1a, Development of Vision and Mission, states that:

“The organisation has developed and articulated the mission, vision and values which align with the vision and mission of the institution, and guide the decision-making of the organisation at all levels.”

For each sub-criterion, organizations rate themselves from one to five depending on the degree to which they meet the criteria described in the statement. There is a consistent approach to the five level rating options for each sub-criterion and they are listed below:

- Level 1: Quality depends solely on the individual (no processes)
- Level 2: Process awakening (basic processes)
- Level 3: Vision through processes, professionalization and a guarantee of quality (intermediate processes)
- Level 4: Systematic assessment and improvement of processes (sophisticated processes)
- Level 5: Aiming for external excellence (excellent processes)

There is a weighting assigned to each of the sub-criteria that adheres to the weighting of the EFQM Excellence Model and once all the sub-criteria have been rated, an organizational score is computed with a possible maximum score of 1000 points. There are 500 maximum points each for the enablers and results.

Once the self-assessment is done, organizations can begin to compare themselves with similar organizations. In order to facilitate this within the IACEE Quality Program, the model includes two **Benchmarking Demographic Data Sheets** to collect information that will help distinguish CE/CPD organizations from each other and allow organizations to define the characteristics of organizations against whom they want to compare themselves. The first asks for a wide range of information about the organization, such as: type of institution, type of CE/CPD programs, size and scale of programs, etc. The second asks for more detailed information about finances and student learning hours that enable benchmarking based on those parameters.

One of the drivers of benchmarking is to identify other organizations that may excel in areas where another organization needs to improve. The scoring of the sub-criteria makes this type of benchmarking possible. Another aspect of the Quality Model is the capturing of best practices using the **Best Practices Template**. CE/CPD organizations who participate in the IACEE Quality Program are asked to complete the Best Practices Template to document their activities for any sub-criteria where they have rated themselves a four or five, which are the levels at which they are close to or have met the quality criteria. Documenting the best practice includes a brief description of the organizations activities, links to websites, documents, or other resources, and contact information for additional follow up with the original organization. The sharing of best practices is an important element of the model because it provides a way for organizations who want to improve in a particular area to find concrete examples of how to improve – they can see what other organizations are doing and in many cases quickly implement new policies, procedures, or systems without having to spend the time figuring them out on their own in a vacuum. This promotes the opportunity for continuous quality improvement across organizations.

## **Application of the IACEE Quality Model**

There are many applications for CE/CPD organizations to utilize the IACEE Quality Model. A few are outlined below:

- The obvious application is for the improvement of quality and as a mechanism for implementing a continuous quality improvement program to demonstrate progress over time. Through an annual process of self-assessment and benchmarking, organizations implement a systematic approach for determining and improving the quality of their programs and processes. This exists in many other areas of higher education, but has not previously existed for CE/CPD organizations.
- Organizations that are high performing can apply the quality model to document and demonstrate their quality against an external standard, which, as discussed earlier is a growing need for CE/CPD providers and brings credibility to their organization with university leadership and with peers.
- Depending on how the self-assessment is conducted and how many staff are engaged within the organization, there is a tremendous opportunity for organizational development. By engaging a management team or all the staff and sharing individual results with each other, staff and management learn how people across functions rate the organization differently. The organizational learning that comes from this can be very beneficial toward increasing awareness of quality across the organization and supports the development of shared mission and alignment throughout the staff.
- Organizations engaged in strategic planning or other organizational planning processes can use the self-assessment and quality improvement processes within those processes. The self-assessment can contribute toward a SWOT Analysis and can serve as the basis for setting organizational goals. To go beyond that, many planning processes determine how resources get allocated and this model can be used to encourage strategic allocation of financial and other resources.

## **Conclusions**

This paper describes the first quality standard self-assessment tools established for CE/CPD Centers at the organizational level and the authors intend that by sharing the IACEE Quality Program and the elements of the IACEE Quality Model, more CE/CPD centers can benefit from it.

Organizations that adopt and implement the model have the opportunity to increase their credibility within their own institutions, with their peers, and with current and prospective customers globally.

For more information on the IACEE Quality Program, please contact the authors or visit the IACEE website at <http://iacee.org>.

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