

# Quality

## Endeavors

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## Now, More than Ever: Continuing Continuous Improvement

On May 4, 2007, the annual Quality Issues Forum was held to recognize 51 improvement teams and other innovation initiatives, and the 396 individuals involved, representing nine colleges and campuses and eight administrative units, for their contributions to innovation and improvement at Penn State. This event, sponsored by the Executive Vice President and Provost Rodney Erickson and the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment, highlights the importance of innovation and improvement throughout the University.

The keynote speaker for the Forum was John Dew, Director, Continuous Quality Improvement and Planning at the University of Alabama. Dr. Dew facilitates strategic planning activities for the University and assists academic and administrative units in improving processes. Prior to joining the University, Dr. Dew worked for 23 years with Lockheed Martin as a quality and training manager supporting the nation's nuclear fuel program and research activities at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory. He is the author of five books and numerous articles, including *Continuous Quality Improvement in Higher Education*, co-authored with Molly Nearing from Binghamton University. He is also Chair of the American Society for Quality (ASQ) Education Division and a member of ASQ's Education Advisory Committee.

Dr. Dew began by talking about the current emphasis on change in higher education:

These are days in higher education where there's a lot of people talking about change. A lot of people outside of our institutions who are talking about change at the state level, at the federal level, people in corporations, have got all sorts of ideas about what higher education needs to do. But what I have found is that change must come from within. It is these processes of assessment and planning and improvement at our institutions that are driving meaningful change for our organizations.

He then pointed out some of the challenges in sustaining continuous quality improvement. It is difficult to remain focused on ongoing improvement and innovation,

particularly when there may be changes in leadership or more appealing projects emerge in the short term, what Dr. Dew referred to as the "Shiny Object Syndrome." International competition in higher education is increasing, and at a faster rate than expected in some cases. Federal and state governments are showing increasing interest in accountability and learning outcomes. This is having an impact on accreditation and funding. There are increasing financial pressures to do more, better, often with less. And, as the Boomer generation begins to retire, organizations must identify rising leaders who will embrace and carry on the culture of continuous improvement. The challenges are increased by the fact that improvement is a journey – there is always more that can be accomplished, and one never arrives at the end.

Dr. Dew shared examples of the consequences when organizations left the continuous improvement path. In the 1980s, Ford stated that "Quality is Job 1", meaning that producing a quality product was the first priority in design and manufacture. In later years, Ford focused on producing vehicles that generated the greatest revenue. These were vehicles that had high gas consumption, and with gas prices rising, they are now facing the consequences. NASA moved from their quality culture to one of delivering programs "Faster, Better, Cheaper." In the process, they gave up many of their independent review procedures. As a third example, Dr. Dew cited BP cutting corners on pipeline inspections, part of routine quality assurance, and, as a result, running into significant overhaul and repair expenses and downtime.

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There are some new tools that can enhance CQI efforts.

- The University of Central Oklahoma is using Lean approaches in their facilities and maintenance operations (“Becoming a Lean University” at <http://www.sacubo.org/2005BestPractices/UniversityCentralOklahoma-becoming-lean.pdf>).
- TRIZ is a problem solving and creativity tool that uses logic and data (<http://www.triz-journal.com/>).
- Root cause analysis is a tool to investigate the causes of events that have had significant safety, environmental, reliability, or similar impact (<http://www.asq.org/pub/qualityprogress/past/0704/qp0704rooney.pdf>).
- Future Search is an approach that can engage a large, diverse group of people in an efficient planning process (<http://www.futuresearch.net/method/whatis/index.cfm>).

to lead and sometimes that means raising the bar. Sometimes that means taking people in directions they don’t even know yet they want to go or that they need to go. In general I find that when you do a good job of sharing information with people and educate them about what the circumstances are, they often reach the same conclusion that their leadership will reach. But now they are committed and they’re willing to do the difficult things that sometimes need to be done.

Whether using old or new tools in planning and improvement efforts, Dr. Dew advised the group to remember the importance of engaging and educating new people and new leadership in the organization. He challenged the group to take risks and move beyond improvements that would gather only low hanging fruit, to reach for the higher fruit where improvement would produce greater returns. He advised the group to think long term, and make sure they were working to be good, not just look good.

Dr. Dew presented a matrix showing an approach to assessment in higher education in both academic and administrative areas on the macro and micro level.

	Academic	Administrative
Macro	Program Review	Performance Assessment Accreditation National or State Quality Awards
Micro	Class specific student learning outcomes with direct or indirect measures	Reviews of how well specific offices or organizations meet the needs of students, faculty, or other offices

Dr. Dew’s slides are available at [http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/qif/2007/John\\_Dew\\_PowerPoints.pdf](http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/qif/2007/John_Dew_PowerPoints.pdf).

For more information about the teams and photographs from the Forum, visit <http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/qif/index.htm>.

In each case, assessment data informs planning, which informs improvement efforts and results in updated performance data. This is the essence of integrating assessment, planning, and improvement. Integrated planning, assessment, and improvement can be accomplished more effectively when those in the organization are working from a basis of trust rather than fear. Dr. Dew pointed out that:

[W]e drive fear out of the organization first of all by being as open as we can and sharing information about what’s really going on in terms of feedback that we get from accreditors...graduation rates... budgets...what’s on the horizon...Secondly, we drive fear out by inviting people to participate in the planning process...everyone...can have a voice in the strategic planning process... [and be]...masters of their destiny. That always creates some new challenges, some tensions...leaders have

## SUPPORT FOR PLANNING, IMPROVEMENT, AND ASSESSMENT IN YOUR UNIT

The Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment is available to consult with units and facilitate the implementation of Penn State’s strategic priorities. It is the Office’s mission to support the University’s efforts to plan, assess, and improve programs and services. The Office uses organizational change tools to help units assess their needs, develop strategic plans, improve key processes, and develop collaborative team environments. There is no charge for the Office’s consultation services. If you would like to discuss the planning, quality, or assessment needs of your unit with one of our consultants, please contact the Office at 814-863-8721 or e-mail [les1@psu.edu](mailto:les1@psu.edu).