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The Relationship between Continuous Improvement and Strategic Planning

What role does continuous improvement play in strategic planning? Both CI and planning are organizational learning processes. They share the principles of data-driven decision making, broad communication across the organization, assessment of the needs of multiple stakeholders, benchmarking, and strong leadership commitment. Both require critical thinking and attempt to transfer the rigor of learning in the classroom to the larger organization.

George Keller, an educational writer, editor, and planner, said that in the twenty-first century university leaders will be responsible primarily for three things: managing change, financial controls, and quality of service. Leaders will manage new administrative configurations, changes in tenure, networks of colleges linked through technology, three-year baccalaureates, different departmental structures, and interdisciplinary academic programs. Second, university leaders will devote more time and ingenuity to controlling costs, increasing productivity, finding additional revenues, and evaluating expenditures. The third responsibility, maintaining quality of service, will require administrators to vigilantly watch over the quality of teaching, advising, student services, administrative actions, and campus facilities and equipment as never before. Keller's words are ringing true.

The strategic planning processes in academic and academic support units reflect these new ways of managing change, controlling costs and improving quality. Continuous quality improvement tools and processes provide strategies for management of change and a framework for effective strategic planning. When CQI informs the planning process:

- ◆ Mission and vision statements are based on the needs of external and internal stakeholders. Faculty, staff and administrators share common understandings and commitments about what it is they wish to accomplish together for their stakeholders.
- ◆ Feedback is regularly solicited from students, faculty, staff, employers, parents, and alumni and then best opinions and observations are used to improve quality and respond to new conditions.
- ◆ Casual, political, and crisis-oriented administration is replaced with information-grounded, strategic innovations.
- ◆ Quality improvement efforts focus on the core processes of the institution. Strategic planning identifies which processes and subprocesses must be optimized and CQI improves those processes.
- ◆ Close oversight and supervision of daily affairs is delegated by top administrators to vice presidents, directors, and department chairs, who in turn delegate more responsibilities to their staff.

- ◆ Teamwork and team decision making is fostered. CQI teams are built on trust and operate from a common understanding of the institution's systems and processes and a shared commitment to ongoing improvement.

In summary, strategic planning and CQI:

- ◆ Involve faculty, staff and students at all levels
- ◆ Seek and use data that reflect the needs of all the stakeholders
- ◆ Look beyond the immediate day to day concerns and to the future
- ◆ Address limitations, barriers, and weaknesses as well as strengths in goals and objectives
- ◆ Set priorities, so that people know where to focus their efforts
- ◆ Show collaboration and integration of resources across units

Strategic planning provides the framework for defining the University's mission, vision and goals. Continuous quality improvement provides principles and tools for guiding the planning and improvement processes.

For more information, contact the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment at 814-863-8721 or psupia@psu.edu, or visit our website: <http://www.psu.edu/president/pia>.

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