

<b>Subject</b>	Maintaining Quality within the Institution
<b>Module</b>	Context and Approach
<b>Topic</b>	1.4 Approach

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### 1. Introduction



When National Quality Agencies were being developed and undertaking their first audits, a common question to people throughout the Institution was: "What is your approach to quality?" This often provoked baffled looks and hesitant attempts to recall various policies *ad hoc*.

This topic discusses the institutional approach to quality in terms of the development of quality cycles, from their origins in social science research, through the Deming cycle to the modern cycle used by many institutions today. This forms the basis for the subsequent topics outlining the elements of planning, acting, evaluating and improving.

#### Objectives: Approach

Upon completion of this topic, you should be able to

- describe the different phases of a common quality cycle in detail
- identify some examples of devices used for checking performance and quality within an institution

### 2. Approach

Development of a unifying concept of quality was often a reaction to these early experiences and a useful device for providing people from all levels of the institution with a simple framework for checking off their own responsibilities and actions regarding quality. It is possible to use any number of devices for conceptualising and organising quality within an institution, for example:

- [Baldrige Quality Awards](#)
- [Balanced Scorecard](#)
- [International Organisation for Standardisation ISO](#)
- [Six Sigma](#)

Perhaps because of its origins in social improvement, the main device adopted by institutions to conceptualise their approach to quality has been the quality cycle. With its origins in the work of Kurt Lewin (see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt\\_Lewin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Lewin)) researching social problems in the USA in the 1940s, and later through the Shewhart cycle of Plan-Do- Study-Act (PDSA), the quality cycle came to worldwide attention through W Edwards Deming's studies of

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Japanese manufacturing and the Deming quality cycle of Plan-Do-Check-Act (see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W.\\_Edwards\\_Deming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._Edwards_Deming)).

### Common Approach to Quality Cycle

A common modern approach to the quality cycle is as follows. Click each phase of the cycle to learn more.

**Plan:** denotes formal planning at all levels including university level planning, faculty and divisional planning, school, departmental or unit planning, course or work team planning. At the individual level, it reflects the planning that people do either by project, or over time, including yearly or daily planning.

**Act:** includes all the intentional activities that are undertaken to meet objectives, implement plans and produce outcomes.

**Evaluate:** includes two major aspects – monitoring and review. **Monitoring** is a short- and medium-term activity mainly conducted by internal people for developmental or formative purposes. It may use formal or informal methods and make use of existing data, or generate new data. Action and monitoring usually develop together, informing each other, hand-in-hand.

**Review** is a longer-term and more formal process that has both formative and summative purposes and is often undertaken by external people.

**Improve:** identifies the process by which the results of evaluation - both monitoring and review - are fed back in order to generate improvement. Often this causes modification to an existing plan or development of a new plan, and thus the cycle commences once more.

While there are other interpretations of the quality cycle (for example PIMRI: Plan-Implement-Monitor-Review-Improve), it is the Plan-Act-Evaluate (Monitor and Review)-Improve cycle that will be used in the subsequent modules to consider each aspect of an Institution's approach to quality. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) also has an occasional publication with a limited consideration of quality schemes titled *Quality Frameworks: Reflections from Australian Universities (2006)* which may be of interest to you:

[http://www.auqa.edu.au/files/publications/qf\\_final\\_web\\_pages\\_281106.pdf](http://www.auqa.edu.au/files/publications/qf_final_web_pages_281106.pdf)

In this context it is worth noting that while AUQA's ADRI model of Approach – Deployment – Results – Improvement, may work for a quality agency, it is less relevant and sits less comfortably with an institution. For example, whereas auditors may be looking for a general 'Approach' to a particular issue, an institution is generally and proactively attempting to develop formal and accountable plans. 'Deploy' is not a commonly-used term and is again more passive than 'Act' or 'Implement.' Whereas, 'Results' suggest data; 'monitor' and 'review' suggest the process for actually using data to effect improvement.

Finally, and like so many other aspects of institutional quality, a key question is that of 'reach'. If at the institutional level, there is a stated approach to quality, is this applied at various organisational levels (e.g. Faculty, School, Department) and in different areas (e.g. teaching and learning, research and research training, support services)?

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### **3. Discussion**

#### **Discussion: Approach to Quality**

Consider the following key questions regarding an approach to quality at your own (or choose one) institution:

- Does the institution have a clear and explicit approach to quality?
- What is the 'reach' of the approach in terms of organisational units and areas?
- How far is it understood and used by staff throughout the institution?

### **4. Summary**

**This topic covered the following main points:**

- The elements of a common quality cycle include planning, acting, evaluating and improving.
- Some examples of devices for conceptualising and organising quality within an institution are:
  - Baldrige Quality Awards
  - Balanced Scorecard
  - International Organisation for Standardisation ISO
  - Six Sigma