DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 996	HE 028 577
AUTHOR	Bielen, Leslie De Reus; Mehallis, Mantha
TITLE	Answering the "Hot Topics" with One Comprehensive Document. AIR 1995 Annual Forum Paper.
PUB DATE	May 95
NOTE	17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research (35th, Boston, MA, May 28-31, 1995).
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Information; *Accountability; Documentation; Educational Quality; Higher Education; *Information Management; Information Needs; *Institutional Research; Models; Organizational Communication; Reports; Self Evaluation (Groups); Total Quality Management
IDENTIFIERS	*AIR Forum

ABSTRACT

A description is provided of the process used by a university institutional research office to respond to questions from external groups and the institutional community about quality, effectiveness, and accountability. The institutional research office incorporated external and internal reports, along with institutional offices' planning, accountability, and self-study documents, into a "live" document. The resulting document is "live," or "working," as it would be continuously revised as new studies and reports are done throughout the institution. This initiative is based on an institutional effectiveness planning and evaluation model that was developed using the Plan-Do-Check-Act configuration of total quality management. The process involved four main steps: (1) conducting a scan internally and externally for sources of "hot topics," (2) designing the model for the information to be collected, (3) developing a survey based on the information model to determine current documents that contain responsive information to the "hot topics," and (4) developing strategies to incorporate the process of collecting documents and using the information model as a viable resource. Characteristics which define a "hot topic" are identified. Appended is the document survey conducted by the institutional research office. (Contains 10 references.) (SW)

Answering the "Hot Topics" with One Comprehensive Document

Dr. Leslie De Reus Bielen
Management Analysis Coordinator
Office of Institutional Research and Planning
Florida Atlantic University

Dr. Mantha Mehallis
Director
Office of Institutional Research and Planning
Florida Atlantic University

Paper Presentation
AIR Forum
Boston, MA
May 1995

for Management Research, Policy Analysis, and Planning

This paper was presented at the Thirty-Fifth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at the Boston Sheraton Hotel & Towers, Boston, Massacusetts, May 28-31, 1995. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum Papers.

Jean Endo
Editor
AIR Forum Publications

Answering the "Hot Topics" with One Comprehensive Document

Abstract

This paper describes the process used by one office of institutional research in an attempt to address the concerns of the external organizations and the institutional community about quality, effectiveness, and accountability through one comprehensive planning and evaluation document. External and internal reports, along with institutional offices' planning, accountability, and self-study documents, were incorporated into a "live" document that is based on an institutional effectiveness planning and evaluation model that was developed using the Plan-Do-Check-Act configuration of TQM.

Introduction

The basic premise of this paper is that the majority of the information that is needed to respond to external and internal concerns about quality, accountability, planning and evaluation are available within the educational institution or from external agencies. The design of this process is to be proactive, to anticipate needs of executive officers - the president/chancellor, the chief academic officer, the chief finance officer. The process is based on becoming more observant as to what is currently operational within the institution. The design is the find out what people are talking about; what are their concerns - their needs. It is set up as an environmental type scan, but not to establish the strengths and weaknesses, rather to discover what is being discussed externally and internally around the committee tables by the various stakeholders in the educational process or a particular institution.

It seems that every year or so there is a new "hot topic," or a new demand, to justify what our educational institutions are doing, and we, as institutional researchers and planners, are still working on the previous year's "hot topics". These "hot topics" appear to have caused educators, usually institutional researchers and planners, to spend an undue amount of time justifying the educational institution to a variety of concerned organizations each with its own perceived agenda. These organizations have challenged educational institutions to determine the "whos", "whats", "whens", "wheres", and "whys" that were used to establish the existence of, and continuance of, our role as educators. A recent example is the Wingspread Report (1993). This report has five challenges for colleges and universities. They are:

1. Evaluate yourselves against the questions in the attached "Self-Assessment Checklist," and to commit yourself publicly to an institutional plan that builds on the strengths and remedies the deficiencies you identify.

2. Define and publicly state your standards of entry and exit in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities you expect from both applicants and graduates, and to put in place measures to assure student and institutional attainment of those standards by a fixed date.

3. Develop a curriculum that will assure all graduates---our future citizens, employees, and leaders---the benefits of a liberal education.

4. Assure that next year's entering students will graduate as individuals of character more sensitive to the needs of community, more competent to contribute to society, and more civil in habits of thought, speech, and action (Wingspread, 1993, p. 23).

These reports and queries into what education is all about and how we are doing have forced us to try to justify that we, as educational institutions, are performing our role. To respond to these challenges and inquiries, one of several approaches can be taken; don't respond to the reports/inquiries and continue on with the regular reporting operation of the institution; take the reports/inquiries to heart and respond to the assessment checklist or whatever is proposed; or deal with the intent of the reports/inquiries and other "hot topics" and demonstrate that the majority of the concerns are already addressed by the institution.

This paper uses the latter approach. It is felt that there is no need to generate new internal studies to address each "hot topic", that educational institutions have the majority of the answers. What is missing is a procedure by which all the appropriate documents can be identified and tied into one source. All the pieces of supporting information on how well the institution is doing its job may already be available, but no one person or one office knows all the pieces. The process described in this paper can used at any institution, to locate, collect, and integrate all the different pieces; the planning documents, self-studies, evaluations, and assessments. The resulting document would be considered "live," or "working," as it would be continuously revised as new planning documents, new self-studies, etc. are done throughout the institution. The end result, hopefully, will be a document that contains the information to respond to the many external and internal challenges for today's institution.

Process

The process used at this institution consisted for four main steps. The first was to conduct a scan, both internal and external for sources of "hot topics". The second step was to design the model for the information to be collected, and, third, based on the information model, develop a survey that would ascertain current documents which would contain responsive information to "hot topics". The last step was to develop strategies to incorporate the process of collecting documents and using the information model as a viable resource into the organizational culture.

The first step is to discover what makes a topic "hot" and where to locate sources to be scanned for future "hot topics". "Hot topics" have been the subject of numerous fora, especially as they relate to new and emerging issues. But, what is a "hot topic" today can quickly become passe. So, how does an institutional research office identify the "hot topics", gather information about them in a useful manner, and, most importantly, disseminate that information in a fashion which allows for quick/easy access, and the degree of flexibility to change what is "hot" with relative ease?

A proactive institutional research office should take the initiative in determining what constitutes a "hot topic." In these authors' joint opinion, a "hot topic" is identified by the following characteristics:

A. Legislated (legal) requirement

A regulatory requirement exists from a governing body (federal/state or national/province) outside the institution which legally imposes a mandate on the institution with sanctions for non-compliance. Generally, these are numerous legislative discussion over time which can be "early alert" signals that a "hot topic" is gestating. This type of mandate could also be originated by an accrediting agency (regional, profession, or national) with the "institutional effectiveness" "hot topic" of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation being a prime example in recent years. Mandated accountability standards are another example whereby legislated accountability results.

B. Reach

Extent of "reach," or "market penetration," are operative marketing research terms which can be used to define the number of institutions affected/involved in the "hot topic" issue. An example of this factor exists in the NCAA where equity of women's sports becomes an issue. This factor has two major components: (1) size in frequency; and (2) geographical dispersion. In other words, the greater the frequency of institutions and the greater the geographical dispersion, the greater the "reach".

C. "Fit" with current values

The extent to which existing societal/institutional values determines its "hotness." For example, in the United States, total quality management (TQM) and continuous quality improvement (CQI) coincide with the current values concerning effectiveness and efficiency and the concept of increasing quality is "in vogue." Therefore, TQM and CQI have become "hot topics" (evidenced in the literature and in recent conferences/fora).

D. Perception of Benefit

The extent to which a concept/approach is perceived as helpful in dealing with constraints on an institution determines degree of "hotness," i. e., the greater the perception of benefit, the greater the "hotness," or urgency of the topic. If CQI is viewed as a way of optimizing the efficient and effective use of scarce resources, it becomes a "hot topic."

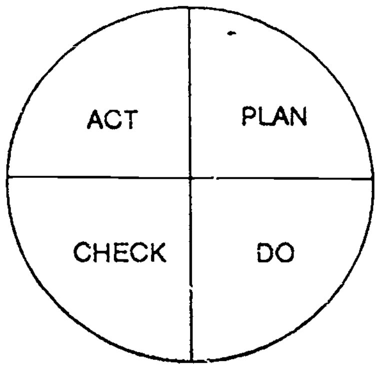
Here are some sources to assist in locating and responding to your institution's "hot topics:"

1. External
   a. National Level
      1) Federal government agencies, eg., DOE, NCES, OERI
      2) Professional associations
      3) Professional/Discipline accreditation agencies
   b. Regional Level
      1) Accreditation agencies
      2) SREB, etc.
   c. State Level
      1) DOE, Boards of Higher Education, Community Colleges, Regents, Vocational Education
      2) Government agencies, legislature
   d. Local-Regional County Level
      1) Planning Boards
      2) Chambers of Commerce
2. Internal
   a. Academic Affairs
      1) Colleges
      2) Departments
      3) Centers, Institutes
      4) Advisory Groups
   b. Non-academic Departments
      1) Administration & Finance Departments
      2) Student Affairs Departments/Student Government
      3) EEO Office
      4) Auditor Office
      5) Athletic Department
      6) Alumni Affairs
      7) Development Office
      8) OIR/evaluation/planning/effectiveness offices
3. Media
   a. Print
   b. Electronic

The next step is to develop a design of the information to be collected. This step creates the foundation of the "live" document, the process used to gather the responses as to what the institution has done, is doing, and will do relative to a particular topic. The basis for the "live" document begins with developing an institutional effectiveness, planning and evaluation model. The model used in this paper was developed using the Plan Do Check Act model for Total Quality Management in response to a regional accreditation (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

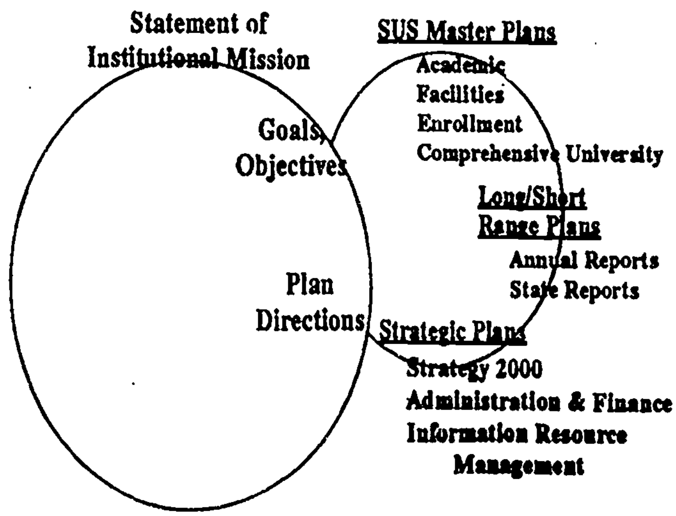
PLAN-DO-CHECK-ACT CYCLE



There are four areas in the TQM model; Plan, Do, Check and Act. The first area, Plan, requires a statement of mission/purpose. Before you head out on any road you need to know where you are going or else you won't know when you have gotten there. Once the mission has be established, goals and objectives are written to verify the achievement of the mission, and the planning of the directions to be taken to help meet the goals and objectives are established (Figure 2). For purposes of illustration examples from a Florida state university are used in all the figures.

Figure 2.

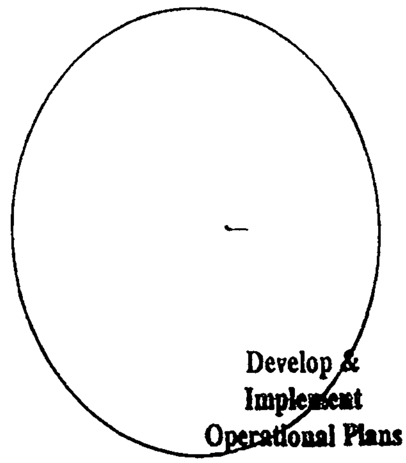
PLAN CYCLE



The second area, Do, requires the implementation of the operational plans that were designed to achieve the goals, objectives and hence the mission of the institution (Figure 3).

Figure 3.

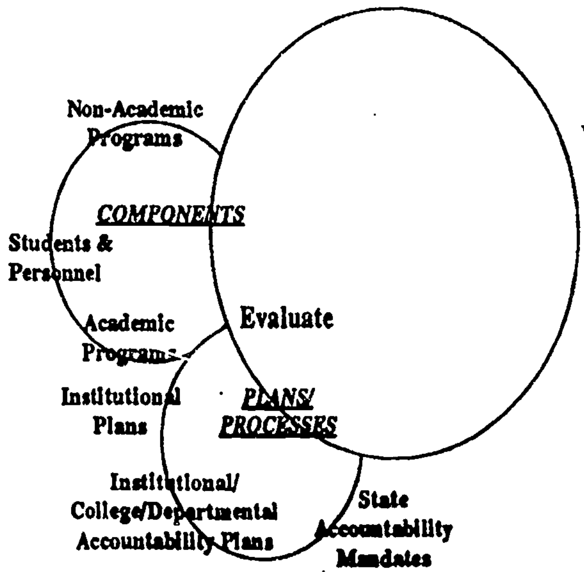
DO CYCLE



The third area, Check, dictates the necessity to evaluate what has been done to verify the meeting of the goals and objectives and the processes used to achieve them, and to evaluate the different components within the institution (Figure 4).

Figure 4.

CHECK CYCLE

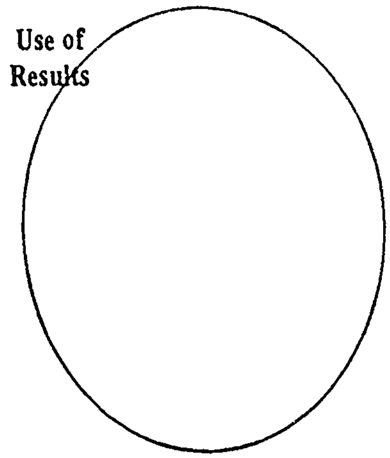


BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The final area, Act, refers to the actual use of what was discovered in your planning and analysis to revise/complement the mission statement (Figure 5).

Figure 5.

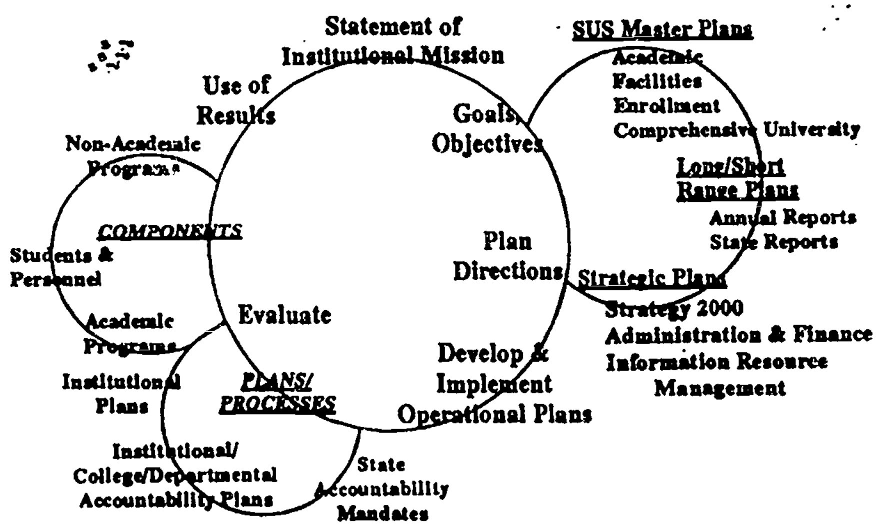
ACT CYCLE



From this total framework one document can be developed which will assist in responding to concerns about quality, accountability, and effectiveness (Figure 6).

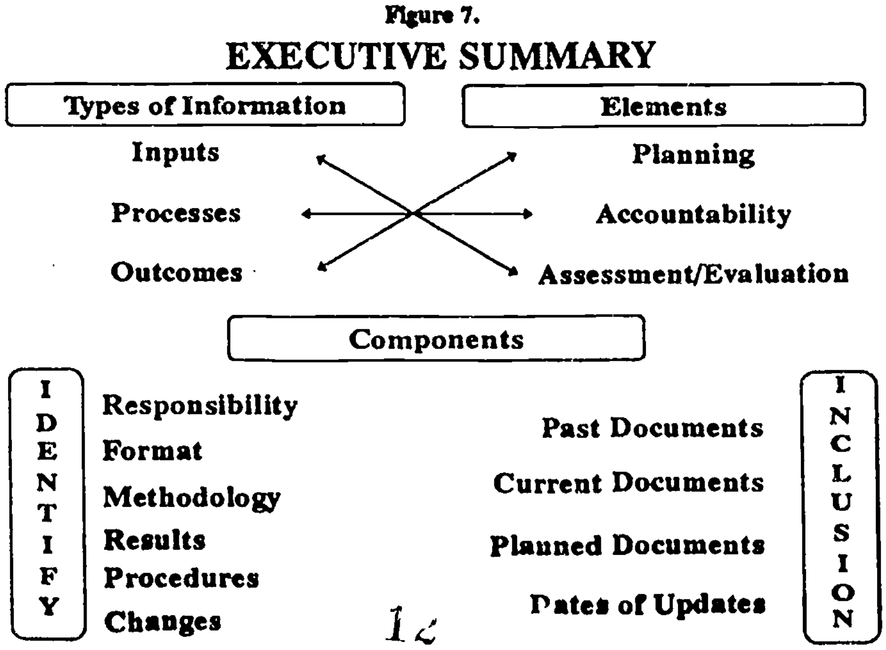
Figure 6.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS, PLANNING AND EVALUATION MODEL



The next concern is how does one discover the different components which will fill in the various circles in the institutional effectiveness, planning and evaluation model. Beyond what was discovered in the "hot topics" scan, there are two ways to establish networks that may supply the answers. The first is to develop the interpersonal relationships with the educational community. Don't take it for granted that because you have been at a particular institution for a number of years that you don't need to work on re-establishing your networks with current administrative and academic committees/task forces/Internet distribution lists. Identify chairs of these working groups, identify what their mission is, discover what each one has done or is doing, offer your assistance at brainstorming sessions, at points in time when they may be developing a survey. The second source is to survey down to the department level exactly what each area has in the way of documents on planning, accountability, assessment, evaluation from the perspective of it being an input, outcome, or process. In the survey identify who is responsible for the document, what is entails, ie. format, methodology, results, procedures for using results and what changes occurred because of the results, where it is sent, what it is used for, and how often does the document get updated, and when. In the initial survey, limit the documents to within the past three years and what is scheduled for the next year. These elements comprise the final "live" document. It is recommended that from the materials collected that an executive summary be created which would reference more specific information if desired by the reader (Figure 7).

Figure 7.



Once developed the executive summary and the background materials should be made available to the institutional community as well as the external stakeholders. If possible, establish a directory on the mainframe where everyone has access. If possible, establish a link with the World Wide Web. Disseminate the information verbally, in writing, and through the computer; provide updates through your networks, generate executive summaries for specific "hot topics" and distribute to appropriate committees. Networks are a two-way street. People are more willing to share if they get something in return.

The final step is to develop strategies in incorporate process into the organizational culture. The first phase is to identify the office or offices that are responsible for developing the accountability, assessment/evaluation and planning documents needed for the information model. As documents are distributed to the appropriate offices, a copy would be entered on the mainframe in the appropriate subdirectory. Documents on the mainframe should be categorized into subdirectories based on the sections in the information model for the executive summary. The executive summary should be reviewed and updated as appropriate and when it has been updated all institutional constituencies should be made aware of its update by making announcements at the President's Executive Committee, Council of Deans, and Department Chair meetings, through the Web, through the computer networks and the committee networks. After the initial executive summary has been established, the university community should be surveyed as to what other information would be helpful to them in addressing internal and external information needs. Examples of surveys are included.

INITIAL DOCUMENT SURVEY

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning is developing a resource center on the mainframe which will contain the university's planning, evaluation, and accountability documents. The plan is for the resource center to be a viable and useful service to you, the rest of the university community and the external agencies and/or individuals who are interested in FAU.

Please indicate on the checklist below the documents you have. Please add any others you have which you feel will be of assistance. IF POSSIBLE, please enclose a copy of the documents, or a diskette with the documents, or place the documents on the N: drive in the directory RESOURCE (N:\RESOURCE).

Document	Do you have this?
Academic Program Plan	Yes No
Facilities Plan	Yes No
Enrollment Plan	Yes No
Other State mandated plans	Yes No
Strategic, long-range, short-range planning documents	Yes No Yes No Yes No
Operational plans for implementation	Yes No
Assessment/Evaluation Plan	Yes No
Assessment surveys (i. e. entry students, non-returning, exit interviews, graduate-senior surveys, needs assessments, employers, alumni, community needs, admission) **Please specify or provide** copies of the ones conducted within your area.	Yes No
State accountability documents	Yes No
University accountability documents	Yes No
Program reviews Program self-studies for accreditation	Yes No Yes No
Annual reports	Yes No
Budgeting documents	Yes No
New Program Proposals/Feasibility Studies	Yes No
Student service documents (major information, program requirements, admissions, job placement, advising, etc.) **Please specify or provide** copies of the ones which are available.	Yes No
Other **Please specify or provide** copies of the ones which are available.	Yes No

THANK YOU FOR HELPING US TO SERVE YOU !

Please return to the Office of Institutional Research and Planning
Computer Center, Building 22, Room 172

SPECIFIC DOCUMENT SURVEY

In the continuation of the development of the resource center, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning appreciate your providing information of the following documents for which your office indicated it was responsible. Please add any others you have which you feel will be of assistance.

Document	Who is responsible?	Type of Document (eg. Planning, Evaluation, Accountability)	Format of Document (eg. word processor, spreadsheet)	How often is it updated?	When is the Next Update Due (approximately)	To whom is it sent?	What is it used for?

Please identify if there are other documents or pieces of information you have available that you use to respond to questions and concerns about our institutional quality, effectiveness, planning and evaluation.

THANK YOU FOR HELPING US TO SERVE YOU !

Please return to the Office of Institutional Research and Planning

Computer Center, Building 22, Room 172

References

Bryson, John M. Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations, Jossey-Bass Publishers:San Francisco: 1988.

Ewell, Peter. "Assessment and TQM: In Search of Convergence", in Total Quality Management in Higher Education, New Directions for Institutional Research, San Francisco:Jossey Bass, (71), 1991

George Stephen, The Baldrige Quality System: The Do-It-Yourself Way to Transform Your Business, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, 1992.

Gitlow, Howard S. and Gitlow, Shelly J., The Deming Guide to Quality and Competitive Position, Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, 1987.

McClain, Charles J., Krueger, Daniel W. "Using Outcomes Assessment: A Case Study in Institutional Change", in Assessing Educational Outcomes, New Directions for Institutional Research, San Francisco:Jossey Bass, Inc, (47), 1985.

Nichols, James O. "The Role of Institutional Research in Implementing Institutional Effectiveness or Outcomes Assessment", Tallahassee:AIR Professional File, Number 17, Summer 1990.

Perkus, Gerald. "Assessment of Office of Institutional Research at Collin County Community College", Presentation at Southern Association for Institutional Research, Myrtle Beach, 1992.

Pratt, Linda. "The Integration of Assessment into the Planning Process", Presentation at Association for Institutional Research, Louisville, 1990.

Sells, Roger. "An Organizational Perspective for the Effective Practice of Evaluation", in Achieving Assess Goals Using Evaluation Techniques, New Directions in Higher Education, 17(3) San Francisco:Jossey Bass, Inc. 1989.

Wingspread Report, *An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education*, Report of the Wingspread Group on Higher Education; Johnson Foundation, 1993.