

CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH PERFORMANCE INSTITUTIONS

Research and experience indicate that common principles — Focus, Involvement, Leadership, Learning, People, Collaboration, Agility, Foresight, Information, and Integrity — permeate colleges and universities that have achieved a systematic approach to continuous quality improvement.

Focus

A mission and vision that focus on students' and other stakeholders' needs provide quality-driven higher education organizations with the foundation they need to shape communication systems, organizational and decision-making structures, and planning and improvement processes. An institution earns the trust, confidence, and loyalty of its current and potential students and its other stakeholders — both external and internal, including faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees — by actively developing and regularly employing listening tools essential for gathering and understanding their diverse and distinctive perspectives. The institution interprets and weighs these expressed needs, preferences, hopes and requirements to frame ongoing communication, discussion and refinement of a common mission and vision. Faculty, staff and administrators integrate this shared focus into their individual work goals and decision-making strategies.

Involvement

Broad-based faculty, staff and administrative involvement encourage better decisions and strengthen individual and group ownership of systems, activities and initiatives. Individuals understand how their actions affect others within and outside the institution, and appreciate how their work helps further the institution's mission. A culture of

involvement draws on the expertise and practical experience of those people closest to a situation and helps leaders across the institution anticipate the complex implications of decisions. Such involvement often helps initiate and implement improvements that better meet student's and other stakeholders' needs. A culture of involvement requires ongoing development of people's skills in making fact-based decisions, working with diverse groups, resolving conflicts and using quality-based tools to build consensus.

Leadership

Leaders and leadership systems that support a quality culture consistently model those values and behaviors that communicate to all constituents a clear and compelling vision of the future. Leaders have a responsibility to make sure that everyone understands and values the institution's mission, goals and directions — and uses this understanding to inform individual work goals and decision-making strategies. Leadership must work to help students and other stakeholders share this understanding as well. Further, leadership must ensure that an institution's systems and processes align with its mission and vision, making certain that the necessary resources — people, policies, funds, facilities, equipment, supplies, time, energy and other assets — are allocated and used to support the overall mission and vision.

Learning

A learning-centered environment allows an institution dedicated to quality to develop everyone's potential talents by centering attention on learning — for students, for faculty and staff, and for the institution itself. By always

seeking more effective ways to enhance student achievement through careful design and evaluation of programs, courses and learning environments, both the institution and its employees demonstrate an enthusiastic commitment to organizational and personal learning as the route to continuous improvement. Seeing itself as a set of systems that can always improve through measurement, assessment of results, and feedback, the institution designs practical means for gauging its students' and its own progress toward clearly identified objectives. Conscious of costs and waste, leadership champions careful design and rigorous evaluation to prevent problems before they occur, and enables the institution to continuously strengthen its programs, pedagogy, personnel and processes.

People

Respect for people and the willingness to invest in them leads the quality-driven institution to prize and support the systematic development of its faculty, staff and administrators. Recognizing that fully developing and using its people's abilities strengthens its most valuable resource, it consciously invests in its people as leaders and learners through ongoing education, training and opportunities for continuing development. Leadership encourages individuals to take responsibility in crafting and following through on professional and personal growth plans aimed at acquiring, practicing and using new skills and knowledge to better serve students and other stakeholders. It nourishes a sense of responsibility and ownership in which all individuals understand how their role contributes to the measurable success of the institution and how they can become engaged as full participants in its improvement processes.

Collaboration

Collaboration and a shared institutional focus promote support for a common mission. A quality-driven institution encourages active collaboration among and within different internal departments and operational areas, and, externally, between the institution and other institutions or organizations. It removes internal barriers to collaboration, such as the constraints individuals often experience within a hierarchical chain of command or when they find themselves working for a sub-unit rather than the larger organization. The institution provides its faculty, staff and administrators with the training and resources successful collaboration demands, rewarding effective cooperation and celebrating model collaborative efforts with internal or external partners.

Agility

Agility, flexibility and responsiveness to changing needs and conditions allow high-performance institutions to transform themselves. Traditionally colleges and universities have enjoyed more reflective and deliberative cultures than other organizations, but the rapid development of new technologies and the rising expectations of external stakeholders are altering these environments. As the pace of change quickens and competition becomes commonplace in higher education, the quality-driven institution develops the flexibility to respond quickly to opportunities, threats, and shifting needs and practices. It redirects its attention and resources in response to new requirements, and accurately monitors its performance in responding to such demands.

Foresight

Planning for innovation and improvement allows quality-driven institutions to think into the future, tracking trends to better predict how conditions will change and anticipating how those changes may affect students and other stakeholders, operations and performance. In dynamic or trying situations, the institution with foresight can innovate proactively, making meaningful changes to improve its services and processes in ways that create new or additional value for its students and other stakeholders. Open to new approaches and techniques, the institution designs, tests, and improves its planning structures and processes through practical use and experience.

Information

Fact-based information gathering and thinking to support analysis and decision-making give the quality-driven institution and its personnel the ability to assess current capacities and measure performance realistically. Faculty, staff, and administrators track progress concretely and consistently, and use performance results to set ambitious but attainable targets that increase and improve the institution's capability to meet its students' and other stakeholders' needs and expectations. Data-enriched thinking nurtures evaluation and a results-orientation that maximizes the benefits and value produced for students and other stakeholders. The institution develops and refines systems for gathering and assessing valuable feedback and data, and continually seeks better methods for obtaining the most useful information on which to base decisions and improvements.

Integrity

Integrity and responsible institutional citizenship allow the quality-driven institution to model its values in both words and deeds. In recognizing and fulfilling its public responsibility, the institution treats people and organizations with equity, dignity and respect. Demonstrating responsible citizenship, it anticipates and takes into account the consequences of its actions upon the various larger communities to which it belongs and upon the higher education system, regionally, nationally, and globally. Mindful that education serves society, the institution continuously examines its practices to make certain its effects and results actively contribute to the common good. 