



JOURNEY TO QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: THE CASE OF CENTRO ESCOLAR UNIVERSITY MANILA, PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the journey of an institution in higher education to quality and excellence. The model for performance excellence through the Malcolm Baldrige criteria was adopted to achieve its vision-mission and goals. Given that the University is traditional in orientation and hierarchical in structure and function, the enabling value embraced to attain the vision and fulfill its mandate is that of a learning organization. Thus, the CEU organization has opened its doors to innovations and improvements on current practices. CEU's strategic planning process and activities are well defined resulting in widespread deployment throughout the university and high participation across campuses and various schools, colleges and departments. The regular planning process in the University is an achievement in itself.

The University recognizes that it is only through the proper identification of its target market and the understanding of market behavior would be able to effectively respond to the needs and expectations of its potential customers. CEU plans and implements the measurement, and analysis of data to ensure the effectiveness of the quality management system. Several data management systems, some automated were implemented. The faculty is the heart of the teaching-learning process. The staff gives support for this heart to function effectively. CEU takes pride in having competent faculty and non-teaching staff members. The University's well defined procedures in the recruitment and hiring of faculty and staff members ensure that only those who are qualified are accepted and given regular or to continuously train the teaching force and the non-teaching staff. The development and training plans are formulated by each school/college and department which are aligned with the vision, mission and goals of the university. These development and training plans are well structured based on the training needs assessment. CEU's Performance Results can best be described by the various awards and recognition given by several agencies. Experiences and learnings gained from the awards and recognition are integrated in our continuous quest for operational improvement and organizational excellence.

Keywords: quality assurance, performance excellence, strategic planning, customer focus, results

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions contribute immeasurably to the personal and professional lives of students and enrich the intellectual, economic, and cultural fabric of their communities, states, nations, and beyond. As in the case in most countries, Philippines is experiencing the phenomenon of mass higher education with the concomitant rise of universities and colleges (public and private) offering a greater diversity of programs, and with varying capacity to deliver teaching and learning services. Unfortunately, as several studies on the Philippine

education have revealed, the expansion of educational opportunities is inversely matched by a deteriorating quality of education in the country. This situation has led to an increasing interest in the assessment of the academic programs, the manpower and financial capability of educational institutions, and the efficiency of their delivery systems-through several models for performance excellence.

In the case of Centro Escolar University (CEU), several mechanisms for continuous improvement are employed to ensure the attainment of the vision-mission and goals. A model for performance excellence, particularly the Malcolm Baldrige had been considered. This model helps the organizations assess their improvement efforts, diagnose their overall performance management system, and identify their strengths and opportunities for improvement. In addition, the criteria help strengthen the competitiveness by improving organizational performance practices, capabilities, and results; facilitating communication and sharing of information on best practices among organizations of all types; serving as a tool for understanding and managing performance and for guiding planning and opportunities for learning

II. ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Centro Escolar University, a private higher education institution founded in 1907, has three campuses in Manila, Bulacan and in Makati. The Manila campus and Makati campus are situated in Metro Manila while the Malolos campus is in the province of Bulacan.

CEU provides students from a broad range of socio-economic classes from the Metro Manila, region IV and region III with professional level training in allied medical and health, teacher education and science areas.

CEU offers a wide range of course offerings designed to equip students for professional practice and for local and international employment. The allied health science courses are Dentistry, Nursing, Pharmacy, Medical Technology, Nutrition and Optometry. Other professional courses are Social Work, Library Science, Elementary and Secondary Education and Accountancy.

There are non-licensure courses which lead to advance graduate level studies. The vertically articulated programs allow for the easy transition from the undergraduate to the graduate level also offered in the University. There are preparatory courses for those aspiring to take law or medicine, such as the Bachelor of Science courses in Psychology and Biology and AB courses.

Innovative offerings include Accounting Technology, Office Productivity and Software Development, Management Accounting, Cosmetic Science, Computer Engineering, Information Technology, Doctor of Pharmacy which is a post baccalaureate, Legal Management and Juris Doctor.

The University has programs that are geared towards work in a specific industry/employment such as its four year tourism course and Hotel and Restaurant Management.

For S.Y. 2012-2013 the enrolment is close to 22,000 with 2,801 graduates. The University promotes the total development of its students along its stated mission and vision. Special emphasis is given on the formation of character and personality, by providing numerous opportunities for such. The curriculum include subjects, which are directed at character and personality development such as social arts, theology and values formation. Participation in various University-wide or college based organizations' activities provide experiences for developing these two aspects. Faculty advisers/moderators serve as guide, mentors, coaches and role models. The enforcement of well defined norms of student behavior serve as training in disciplined behavior.

To ensure professional skills development the University provides instructional technology which include internet access through the cyber library. For students with their own laptops, access to internet sources can be held at selected spots since the University is a wireless campus. The allied health science programs maintain well-equipped clinics and laboratories which provide students with opportunities to hone skills in handling sophisticated equipment. The commitment to quality and excellence is evident in many continuous improvement activities of the organization.

III. LEADERSHIP

The University has a tradition of strong leadership which is one CEU's organizational strengths. The current President and Chief Academic Officer Dr. Ma. Cristina D. Padolina is one such leader. Under her guidance the university is involving into a world class instruction of higher learning, with well developed academic and support processes that are constantly undergoing review and improvement. She works with the Management team which consists of highly qualified, seasoned academicians, leaders in their respective professions/disciplines and managers. This enviable convergence of talents is key to high organizational performance.

CEU's Management team is guided by the recently articulated vision mission to wit: with the university motto *ciencia Y virtud*, as its beacon light, CEU seeks to be the university of first choice, the leading institution of higher education" These are CEU's thrusts for the next five years and will be the focus of the action plan for the current year and for the next four years.

Given that the University is traditional in orientation and hierarchical in structure and function, the enabling value embraced to attain the vision and fulfill its mandate is that of a learning organization. Thus, the CEU

organization has opened its doors to innovations and improvements on current practices.

The CEU organization is hierarchical. The top echelon is occupied by the President who is also the Chief Academic Officer. She is ably supported by an Executive Vice President and 6 Vice Presidents. Each of the Vice President is in-charge of a cluster of functions that are broadly categorized as academic or administrative. Makati and Malolos are headed by the Vice President.

Top and middle management empowers its people through committees, councils and workgroups which are involved in the formulation of strategies, action plans, policies and its implementation. The President convenes the top officers twice a month or as often as necessary to discuss pressing issues and to assess strategy implementation. The President then convenes each of the Councils to apprise them of developments and to discuss with them problems and pertaining to daily operations. This council, faculty and staff meetings are both listening and disseminating sessions wherein changes in policies and procedures are cascaded.

As publicly listed corporation, the organization adheres to the provisions of a governance manual, which stipulates that the members of the Board shall act according to the highest standards of integrity and shall safeguard the interests of both internal and external financial audits. CEU complies and even surpasses the regulatory requirements of CHED. It has been awarded full Autonomy status and its program offerings are accredited level II, III and IV by PAASCU and PACOCUA and has complied with the requirements of the Professional Regulation Commission- a clear reflection of corporate governance.

CEU conducts numerous community outreach activities consisting of medical and dental missions and values formation activities in depressed communities in partnership with socio civic, religious organization and non-government organization. CEU is actively involved in the Mendiola and U-Belt consortium thus contributing to the communal efforts of all the Mendiola and U-Belt consortium education institutions.

IV. STRATEGIC PLANNING

The institution of a regular Planning process in the University is an achievement in itself. Commitment to its Mission Vision, to be the university of first choice, the leading institution of higher education served as impetus for CEU to adopt planning as a means to achieve continuous improvement as an organization and as an academic institution.

Planning became part of CEU in the mid seventies when the President then created the Presidential Assistant for Planning and Implementation. There was no formal planning process at that time. The task of visioning and strategy formulation begun in 1994 when the newly established Planning Department was prompted to undertake the first Planning session. After two years of data gathering, consultation and consensus making, a series of management seminars was held. These were mainly to familiarize the management group with the planning



process itself. It was in 1998 when the University began the formal strategic planning. The year 2001 was also the first implementation of a management review which was initially conducted twice a year.

The management reviews incorporated the annual and strategic planning processes. The review of performance in terms of measurable indicators served as internal environment scanning. The functions included in the review were academic, finance, human resource, marketing and quality assurance including customer satisfaction. Opportunities and threats were also presented. Attempts were made to create strategies by matching existing strengths and opportunities.

Institutional strategy is one output of the management review and planning process. The successful course of action taken by various work units may become the basis for adopted strategies at the institutional and department level.

Planning is iterative thus, in CEU, the planning processes may be done several times or there may be parallel activities. The critical elements are : unity of purpose, consistency of purpose, complementation and coordination of implementation.

To enable the implementation process and to ensure that there is adequate resource allocation, the project approach was adopted. In this approach the proponent and would be implementer is required to document critical aspects of the undertaking for review and approval purposes. Also, the Office of Finance has adopted a policy that budget requests for capital and operational expenditures must be in accordance with the annual operations plan.

In September 2007, the management council reviewed the institutional directions and to focus the effort of the University. A new vision mission was proposed and adopted, that of becoming the first choice, the leading institution of higher education fostering excellence in the pursuit of knowledge while engendering personal integrity and social responsibility.

Together with the CEU's vision mission, the core values of the university were formulated. These are valuing others, empowering and caring for them, accountability, integrity and trustworthiness, lifelong learning, unity, teamwork, and loyalty, excellence , social responsibility as Filipinos and as citizens of the world.

The review thus prompted the identification of medium and long term objectives and the strategies designed to meet them. With the ten point agenda as a framework, it crafted policy, strategy, and integrating measures.

As a whole, CEU's strategic planning process, activities, steps and participants are well defined resulting in widespread deployment throughout the university and high participation across campuses and various schools/colleges and departments. Likewise, the strategic planning process has already undergone several cycles of improvements over the past years.

To share with you the processes and mechanism that CEU employ in strategic planning, we gather information both from internal and external sources (e.g. surveys, customer feedback, FGDs, exit interviews, industry tie-

ups) to surface out and validate priority concerns and strategic issues to be addressed. These wealth of data/information are managed by MIS, ICT and EDP departments resulting in its systems constantly undergoing improvements with the changing time and technologies.

CEU is aware of global opportunities and challenges it is facing and correspondingly addresses them as seen in tie-ups with foreign institutions it has been embarking on. We also use the project management framework and it is a systematic and integrated approach which helps align resources with undertakings needed to meet its organizations' objectives.

Involvement and participation of employees from the rank & file, senior staff, middle managers and top management in the strategic planning process helps ensure ownership and facilitates deployment of action plans throughout the university.

The use of various committees headed by executives "patrons" ensures focused and sustained support in the implementation and progress tracking of action plans.

V. CUSTOMER AND MARKET FOCUS

The University's efforts to provide academic and support services that are responsive to the needs, wants and expectations of its customers is a team effort involving several departments under the executive supervision of the University Marketing Committee. These are the Recruitment and Placement Department, Finance, and the office of Executive Vice President.

The University recognizes that it is only through the proper identification of its target market and the understanding of market behavior and attendant market forces that it will be able to effectively respond to the needs and expectations of its potential customers: High School Juniors (primary market), parents, High School officials, enrolled students, employees, general public (secondary market).

The university employs various approaches in determining the market segments for its educational programs such as: Internal Customer Profile Instrument that updates the demographic and psychographic profile of the enrolled students across year levels; Focus Group Discussions (FGD) for the requirements or perceptions of what quality education for the different market sectors of the school; Placement Advisory Council for the expectations of employers and business and industry partners; survey conducted in feeder schools for information on potential students and their preferences/needs. These serve as inputs to curriculum development and benchmarks of student performance in terms of skills and knowledge related to work.

CEU uses various listening and learning methods such as Student Personnel Service Survey, exit interviews, suggestion scheme, customer feedback from internal and external clients, to determine its students' and stakeholders requirements. Results are processed and endorsed to concerned departments and used as input during the annual planning.

Several activities and programs such as high school visits, career & school orientations, and counseling



services are being undertaken to proactively attract students and stakeholders. Positive referrals are gained by providing material and scholarship incentives to feeder schools and providing further training for their high school guidance counselors.

Various student assistant mechanisms are being employed to help and enhance student performance and rapport with the school i.e. Placement Advisory Council, College Freshman Assistance Center, tuition loans, Learning Assistance Program, Placement Services where job openings and staff recruitments from various companies are made available to graduating students through a computer database. The Alumni Department maintain contact with alumni through various university gatherings and publications to involve them in the university's various activities and improvement programs and projects.

Numerous mechanisms are being deployed to address access/contact requirements and for complaint management purposes such as website, counseling department, College Freshman Assistance Center, student lounges and activity centers, intranet & WIFI hotspots and every semester dialogue with the student councils, making its easy for the students to elevate their concerns and ensure actions are taken.

The university deploys various mechanism to identify student and stakeholder satisfaction or dissatisfaction such as Student Personnel Service Survey, Customer Feedback, Suggestion Scheme, Internal Market Survey, and Exit Survey, Results from these instruments are used to improve service delivery and as valuable inputs to the planning process.

VI. MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

CEU plans and implements the measurement, and analysis of data to ensure the effectiveness of the quality management system. Several data management systems, some automated were implemented for this purpose.

The automated information gathering in the Enrolment Administration Registration System (EARS), Financial Management System(FMS), Smart Card ID System and Access Control System(SCIDS) and Integrated Library System(ILS) provide information and tracks various data including enrollment data, student information, students' grades, and financial data that are regularly reviewed prior to objective setting by the academic work groups for an incoming school year. Processing of information includes comparisons, trend analysis, projections, test of significance and other statistical analyses. The information related to these processes is considered critical to the internal and external customers and vital for tracking daily operations and overall organizational performance. Data gathered are used for tracking/monitoring students, projections, evaluation, and decision making purposes.

Also, CEU gathers information through various surveys regularly conducted through manual process before but now as part of the continuous improvements, we have this online such as Teacher Behavior Inventory(TBI),

Clinical Instructor Behavior Inventory(CIBI), and Laboratory Instructor Behavior Inventory(LIBI), customer feedback on services, potential student survey as input to the annual planning.

A variety of performance analyses against academic, financial, market, student, stakeholders, employees, learning process, and support process data provide input into the strategic planning process during the annual management reviews through Key Performance Indicators(KPI)/Targets/Strategies. Results of the management review are cascaded down to the school/college/department levels through action planning. The automated on-line and real time information management system, various meetings of the work groups and the Management Council, in addition to printed reports, memoranda and minutes of the meetings allow the university to share information to support decision making.

The MIS Department provides data and information to its faculty and staff, students and stakeholders through electronic and paper-based media. Its automated systems are shared by the Manila, Malolos and Makati campuses through a local area network(LAN). The university has internet connections in the desktops in all offices, faculty areas and the library. The three campuses are wireless so students with laptops can access the internet in selected hot spots. Students can also access needed information using the CEU Information Services (CEISIS) through information kiosks. It also provides information via bulletin boards, posters, streamers, school publications, memos, dialogues, meetings, orientation, focus group discussion, echo seminars, and local news.

CEU ensures the reliability, security and user-friendliness of hardware and software. There's a firewall to ensure confidential records are secured. CEU has an archiving and back-up system where in data is saved on a microfilm and kept in a bank vault outside the school campus.

The university manages its organizational knowledge through a set of documented policies and guidelines in 16 QMS manuals and other 17 manuals covering both academic and support processes through electronic and paper based media. These manuals also serve as documentation of the university's best practices which is part of an archive of significant activities throughout the University's 103 years of existence.

The university generates organizational knowledge primarily through researches conducted extensively by the faculty in each of the school/college/department and from professional activities exposures. These are formally transferred to students through instruction or in publications, seminars and various for a to the faculty, staff, partners, and the public. Knowledge obtained from professional activities exposures is disseminated through echo seminars.

VII. FACULTY AND STAFF FOCUS

The faculty is the heart of the teaching-learning process. The staff is the part that gives support for this heart to function effectively. CEU takes pride in having competent faculty and non-teaching staff members. The



University's well defined procedures in the recruitment and hiring of faculty and staff members ensure that only those who are qualified are accepted and given regular or to continuously train the teaching force and the non-teaching staff, development and training plans are formulated by each school/college and department which are aligned with the vision, mission and goals of the university. These development and training plans are well structured based on the training needs assessment.

To address key training/learning needs of the university and help faculty/staff attain their career objectives, several mechanisms such as subsidized graduate studies, external/internal seminars/workshops, fellowship grants for research, and echo learning sessions are employed to maximize their potentials in a cost effective manner.

The university utilizes both structured and flexible work teams such as councils, standing committees and ad hoc committees, in organizing and managing its work. Senior leaders are actively involved in these work teams as patrons/heads to ensure that the group's undertakings/projects have top management support. Likewise, flexible work teams take advantage of the diverse skills and work experiences of the faculty and staff to maximize learning within the institution.

To ensure effective communication and sharing of knowledge/skills across campuses and departments, the university's knowledge and best practices are documented in various manuals. Relevant information are also disseminated through its website, intranet, bulletin boards, memos and a like. Other venues complementing the exchange of ideas and learning are dialogues, orientations, FGD, echo seminars, monthly staff/faculty meetings, peer observations and team teachings.

A formal performance evaluation system for teachers and staff is in place ensuring objectivity in assessment by utilizing tools such as TBI, LIBI and CIBI. Feedback by the deans, academic department heads and students are tackled with the subject personnel through dialogues in order to ensure continuous learning/improvement to reinforce high performance work.

To encourage highly qualified academic teaching personnel to pursue higher positions in line with the needs of the university, career progression for faculty members is done through the implementation of formal faculty ranking system which is aligned to the educational qualifications required by the university and tied up correspondingly to increases/improvement in compensation packages. Organizational learning and knowledge assets are utilized and maximized in educating and training the faculty and staff through in-house seminars, new employee orientation, echo seminars, and in-house graduate studies. These enhance competencies and develop multiple skills for teaching and non-teaching personnel. One way of determining the key factors that affect the faculty and staff well-being, satisfaction and motivation is through the CEU Faculty and Allied Workers Union-CEU FAWU where a joint consultation council was created and participated in by the management and union officers in order to address issues/disputes, elevate satisfaction/dissatisfaction of benefits/services implementation and motivation of the

workforce. A CBA is being conducted for economic/non-economic demands every 3 years and CBA's term is every 5 years.

The university provides a variety of benefits for its employees tailored to the needs of diverse workforce such as educational benefits for all employees; research grants and incentives, leave credits - VL/SL commutation of unused leave credits; pay benefits like longevity pay, summer pay, class adviser's pay, holiday pay, etc.; housing loan who rendered at least 15 years of continuous service. To carry out its responsibility to ensure the safety of its members during natural or man-made calamities or when there are security threats in the environment, CEU has collaborated with its neighbors in the Mendiola and U-Belt consortium to have an integrated response.

VIII. EDUCATION AND SUPPORT PROCESSES

The Curriculum/Course/Program Design, Implementation, and Validation processes take into account the minimum standards set by the CHED and comply with relevant requirements of the PRC. Industry requirement, developments in educational technology and employment market trends are factored in by faculty members and deans who gained such knowledge through attendance in seminars, conferences, exhibits and demonstrations as well as from readings and publications. These ensure that the programs are abreast with current developments.

The Dean, the primary curriculum design expert, conducts the annual review with the faculty committees and input findings into redeveloped curriculum and translate the changes into improvements in the syllabi. The new or revised curriculum is presented and approved by the University Council. The improved syllabi are formally issued and discussed with all faculty members of the department. The deans have identified the value creation expectations of these processes along with associated performance measure e.g. students' academic performance. The process ensures that the curriculum is relevant to current development requirements.

The President and Chief Academic Officer conducts academic planning twice a year, before the start of a new semester to discuss changes that will impact on the implementation of each program. Deans, academic heads and key support services department heads participate in this meeting. To accomplish its mission of total development of the person, the university offers a rounded curriculum involving the key academic processes of instruction, research and community extension in all course and programs. There are also student development processes. All these are documented in the annual operations plan of each school/college. The successful implementation of the instructional program is a product of teamwork, beginning with the program/curriculum design, the plan implementation and improvements during academic planning and the faculty member's actual implementation of the program under the supervision of the Dean/Program Head and the academic dept. head.

The support services are delivered by department that support the key processes. Their role is to ensure that



the key processes are implemented as planned. Thus, the Physical Plant and Facilities Department ensures that classrooms are adequate and adequately prepared for classroom activities and the rest of the campus facilities meet the requirements of the various program. The Human Resource department recruits qualified faculty members, monitors their professional development and makes provisions in coordination with deans, that they continue to grow professionally. The ICT together with the Multimedia Instruction Assistance Department provide technology support to the instruction process. The Science Laboratories and the Library play an important role in the conduct of research. While the Student Records Management Department takes charge of the preparation and safekeeping of student records from their entry to their exit. There are also support services dept. that take charge of the exit stage. The Alumni Relations Dept. keeps track of all graduates and maintains the University's contact with them. The Marketing and Placement Dept. runs Placement program for graduates.

The mechanism for continuous improvement is the voluntary accreditation under PAASCU and PACUCOA which ensures improvements beyond minimum requirements and progression along a recognized system of advancement.

IX. ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE RESULT

CEU's Performance Results can best described by the following awards and recognition given by the various agencies: First : Full Autonomy Status – The Commission on Higher Education conferred CEU the full autonomy status for meritorious achievement in higher education, in the provision of instruction and in the conduct of research and community extension services; for high performance of graduates in licensure examinations and for maintaining a tradition of integrity and untarnished reputation in the educational service. CEU is the only non sectarian university in Metro Manila conferred such honor which enable CEU to offer new courses which are responsive to national and international demands. The certification of Autonomous Status was granted to CEU in 2002 and was renewed for another 5 years from 2007 -2012, and was extended up to May 2014 , a clear reflection of excellence performance.

Second: CEU was awarded ISO 9002:1994 Certification by SGS for the Quality Management System maintained by its graduate and undergraduate programs in Mendiola and Malolos campuses on July 2001. The university upgraded its system and complied with the requirements of the transition surveillance audit conducted on October 2002. The management system has migrated to ISO 9001:2000 standard as certified by the Societe Generale de Surveillance International (SGS) on November 2002. From then on CEU sustain the ISO certification up to the present with the inclusion of Makati campus in the coverage of the certification and has passed the transition for the 2008 standards.

Third: The Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines (FAAP) has certified PACUCOA's and PAASCU's grant of level II, level III to undergraduate and

graduate programs of CEU and being the first university in the Philippines with accredited level IV for science program. In fact, CEU was one of the HEIs in the Philippines who received the Institutional Accreditation Award from FAAP on November 2009.

Forth: When it comes to financial performance, CEU has been included as one of the very few educational institutions in the top 1000 corporations of the Philippines. CEU was chosen as one of the country's top 15 corporations with standards of compliance with corporate governance. The recognition was given by the Institute of Corporate Directors (ICD), Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE) and the Ateneo Law School. CEU has been included the elite ICD Companies' Circle.

And Fifth: CEU was recognized as recipient of Philippine Quality Award Recognition for proficiency in Quality Management in 2005 and presently preparing for the higher level. Experiences and learnings gained from the awards and recognition are useful and very much applicable in our continuous quest for operational improvement and organizational excellence.

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