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**QUALITY THROUGH ORGANISATIONAL CULTURAL CHANGE:  
A MODEL OF BEST PRACTICE**

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**ABSTRACT**

Constant change, new technologies, unstable industrial relations, significant restructure, limited resources and a competitive environment are familiar elements of the environment in which many organisations are trying to implement quality systems. No exception, Central West College of TAFE chose to pursue quality recognition under what may be perceived as difficult conditions. What was exceptional was the tremendous commitment to and participation by all staff in the development and implementation of the quality system into the College.

Central West College of TAFE is the primary provider of quality Vocational Education and Training in the Mid West and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia. The first step on our journey toward quality emerged as a restructure in 1995, through which the organisation rejected the historical hierarchical and autocratic structure and implemented a team-based structure.

The *Teams-based Quality Approach* was developed to provide a clear vision for the quality system and some guidance for its implementation. The strength of the approach is based on a dual focus on task – what quality system elements are required, and process - how the system is developed. Drawing from the research into organisational change, motivation, leadership and the learning organisation, the key elements of the *Team-based Approach* include: self-directed teams, participative planning and management processes, open and transparent processes, the involvement of key internal and external stakeholders, leadership at all levels, use of quality tools, and effective recognition and reward processes.

## **QUALITY THROUGH ORGANISATIONAL CULTURAL CHANGE : A MODEL OF BEST PRACTICE**

### **OUTLINE**

Constant change, new technologies, unstable industrial relations, significant restructure, limited resources and a competitive environment are familiar elements of the environment in which many organisations are trying to implement quality systems. No exception, Central West College of TAFE chose to pursue quality recognition under what may be perceived as difficult conditions. What was exceptional was the tremendous commitment to and participation from all staff in the development and implementation of the quality system into the College. In recognition of these experiences, the Australian National Training Authority awarded the College a best practice grant in 1996, with which the College methodology for quality system development and implementation through culture change has been disseminated and made available to other organisations.

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **About the College**

Central West College of TAFE is the primary provider of quality Vocational Education and Training in the Mid West and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia. The College services an area covering 613438 square km - roughly the size of the state of New South Wales. In 1999 the College offers 197 programs of study across a wide spectrum of Service Industries, Business and Applied Sciences, Metals, Mining and Engineering and Civil and Construction Industries. In 1999 the College provided 1800 full time students, and 5000 part time students with courses in Adult and Community Education, Entry Level Training, Certificate, Diploma and Degree programs.

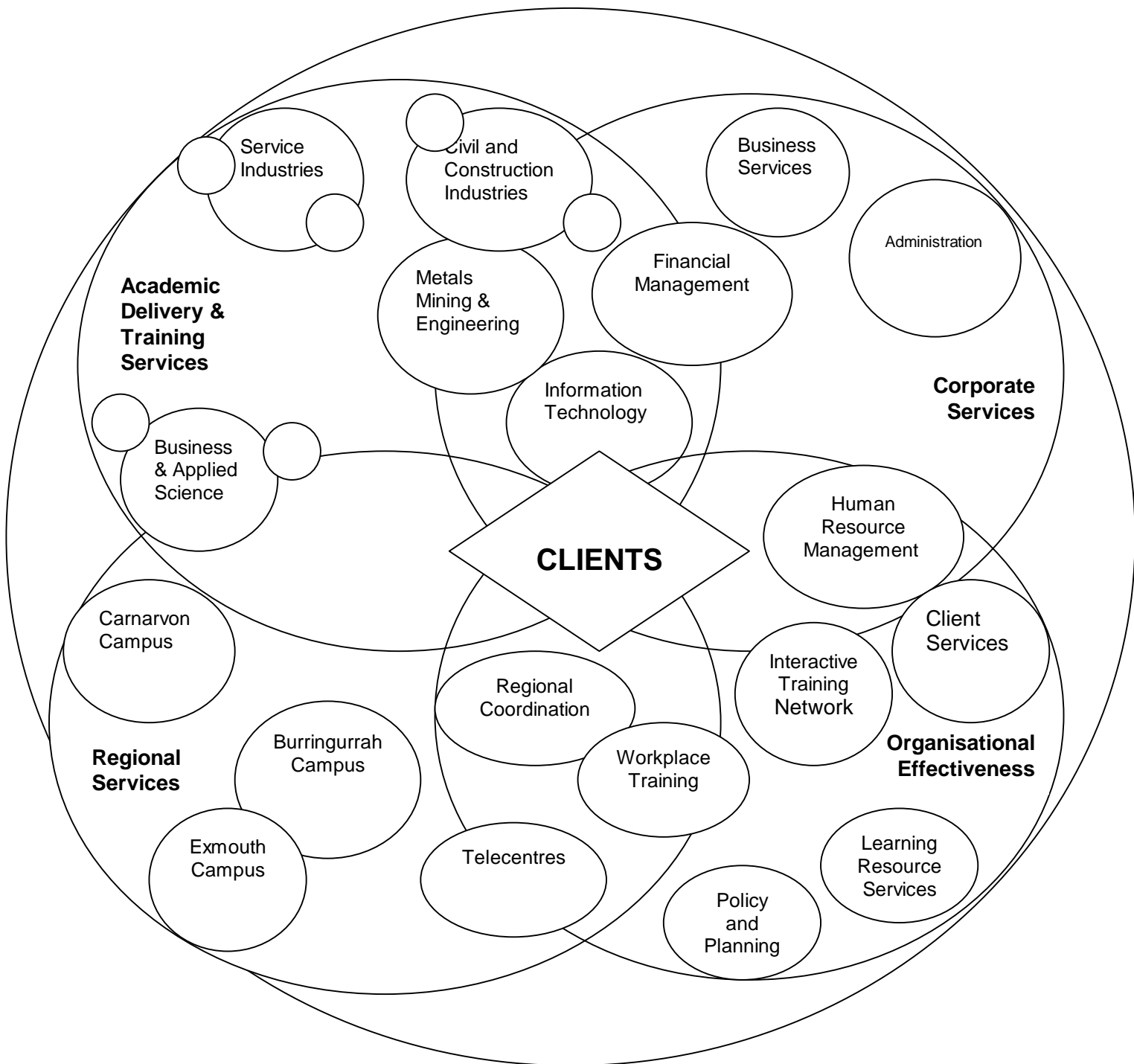
Five years ago Central West College was an organisation in crisis. Class numbers were low, repeat enrolments were minimal, commercial service activity was virtually non-existent and much of the College's delivery performance was reliant upon Government funding. Performance indicators and financial audits were uncomplimentary.

Today, the College has made a quantum leap to where it is being recognised by community, industry, and professional groups, Local, State and Federal Governments and most of all, by its clients, as a flexible organisation capable of initiating change and responding to client needs. An organisation that is client focussed - not program driven.

#### **The College Structure**

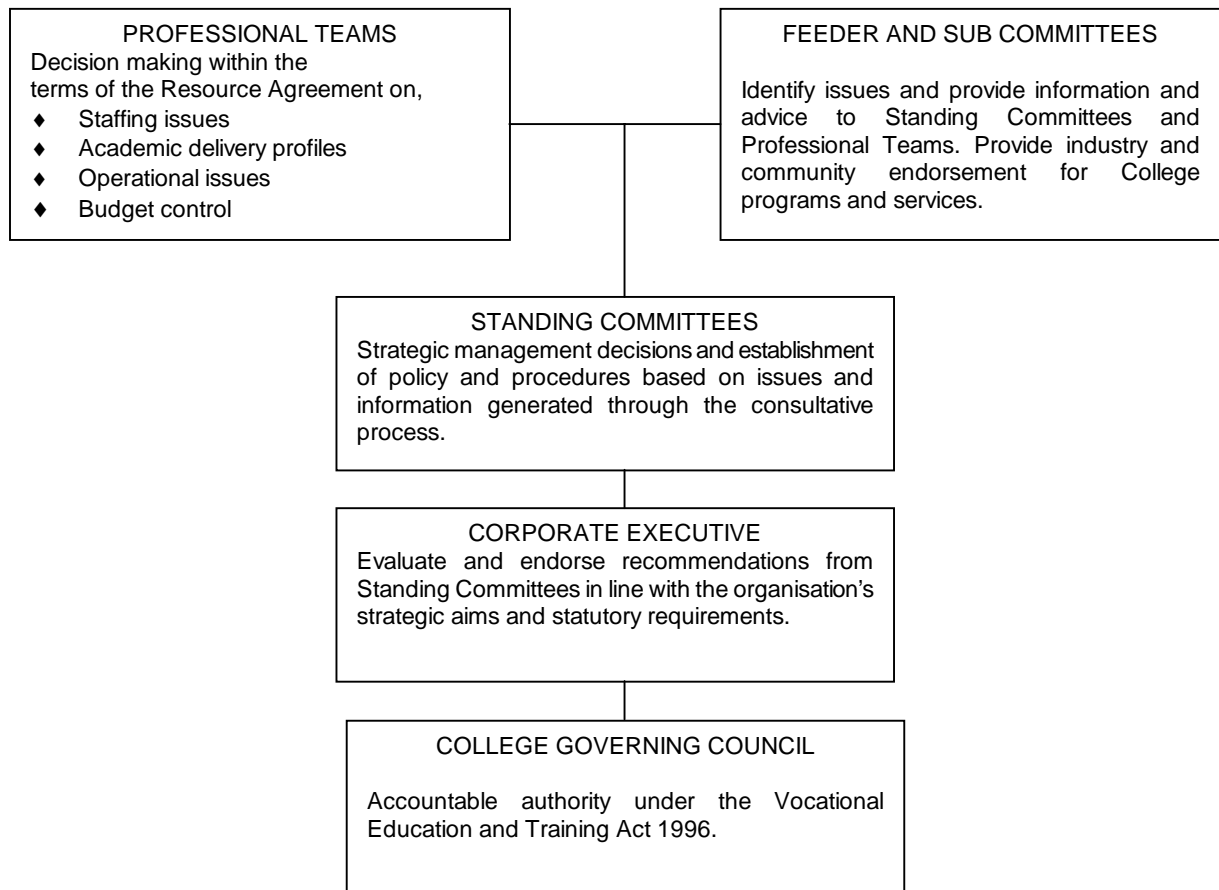
The first step on our journey toward quality emerged as a restructure in 1995, through which the organisation rejected the historical hierarchical and autocratic structure and implemented a team based structure. Eight professional teams including four academic, three organisational support teams, in addition to the regional campuses comprised the new organisational structure. Hierarchical box and line charts were replaced with the new flexible team structure represented as a series of interlocking circles.

**Figure One: The College Structure**



Decision-making responsibilities, once the prerogative of two positions in senior management, were invested in a set of standing committees at which all College teams were represented. Through team meetings and standing committees, all staff were provided with an opportunity to participate in the management of the College

**Figure Two : College Decision Making Framework**



A toddler College structure and culture was in place, somewhat unsteadily, but rapidly gaining strength and coordination. This was the environment into which we decided to implement a quality system.

## **THE TEAMS-BASED QUALITY APPROACH**

### **Designing the Teams-based Quality Approach**

The *Teams-based Quality Approach* was developed to provide a clear vision for the quality system and some guidance for its implementation. The strength of The Approach is based on a dual focus on task - what quality system elements are required, and process - how the system is developed. Drawing from the research into organisational change, motivation, leadership and the learning organisation, the key elements of The Team-based Approach include: self-directed teams, participative planning and management processes, open and transparent communication processes, the involvement of key internal and external stakeholders, leadership at all levels, use of quality tools, effective recognition and reward processes.

## **The Teams**

Nine teams were developed to address the requirements of the nine Quality Standards of the Western Australian Department of Training Quality Framework. Teams were deliberately composed of an appropriate selection of key stakeholders representing a vertical and horizontal slice of the organisation. Teams included teaching staff, non-teaching staff, directors and Managers where their expertise was required. Each team included a team leader and a facilitator. Team leaders were selected on the basis of their stake in the success of the particular standard for which they would be responsible. For example, the Human Resource Manager was the team leader for the Human Resource Management Quality Standard. Teams were trained and provided with tools to facilitate their progress toward meeting the criteria of the Standard for which they were responsible. The scope and responsibilities of each team were outlined in a terms of reference in which responsibility for the dissemination and embedding of the system was as much the role of the team as the development of the system itself.

## **Methodology**

*The Approach* itself consists of a number of stages, some of which run concurrently. These stages are clearly outlined in a set of *Implementation Kits* in which tools to facilitate each of the stages of development and implementation are provided. The *Implementation Kits* are designed to ensure that organisations ask the right questions in the planning, development and implementation of a quality system. It is important to note that the Implementation Kits provide worksheets, analysis and decision-making tools designed to elicit the right answers for the user organisation itself. Many of the quality tools contained in the Implementation Kits may continue to be used in the ongoing review and improvement of the quality system.

## **A step by step Approach**

These steps are not all chronological. Many of them operate concurrently and are ongoing.

Step 1 Awareness - initiate the communication process throughout the organisation.

Step 2 Leadership - identify and develop key leaders at all levels

Step 3 Create the teams and framework for the system

Step 4 Train the movers and shakers - facilitators, team leaders and senior management

Step 5 Train the doers – the teams

Step 6 Planning - identify what exists, what is needed and how to fill the gap, allocating timelines and responsibilities

Step 7 Doing - teams start using their expertise to develop the system

Step 8 Checking - teams consult more widely, seek Standing Committee endorsement and conduct self-assessments of status

Step 9 Embedding - endorsing the systems, including training, promotion, more communication

Step 10 Continuous Improvement - ensuring feedback processes are in place and that they are used to identify opportunities to improve the system

Step 11 Ongoing self-assessment and continuing communication strategies to maintain the “profile” of the system

Contributing to the consolidation of the system within the organisation has been a number of annual events that have come to characterise the College’s approach to the quality system. The annual “Quality Day” is a unique whole-of-College event at which each of the nine Quality Standard teams has an opportunity to showcase the latest developments in processes relating to their Standards. The teams have embraced this event, employing creative ways to inform staff about developments in the system.

In recognition of the significant contribution made by many in the organisation to the continuing development and deployment of the quality system the College has introduced the Central West College Quality Awards. The recipients of these Awards are selected by their peers, in recognition of outstanding service or achievements.

As the organisation’s approach to the development, implementation and continuous improvement of the system has matured so has our ability to refine the teams based approach. A fluid approach has seen the formation of process improvement teams with a brief to work on specific aspects or processes within the quality system.

### **Critical Success Factors**

Critical factors in the success of the Approach include:

- Initial and ongoing promotion of quality using terms and issues that are meaningful and important to people

- Involving people in issues they care about and that affect them

- Providing a framework in which people were inspired by clear goals, but motivated by having control over how they could be addressed

- Creating a team for each Quality Standard and establishing a clear purpose through which that team could participate and gain ownership of the systems they developed

- Using cross-functional, cross level teams to break down the traditional organisational barriers

- Ensuring that process development activities were integrated with College decision-making structures (Standing Committees)

- Building on existing processes, events, activities so preventing the fad image

- Ensuring that teams took responsibility not just for process development, but also for planning and conducting the training, marketing and embedding of the new processes

- Recognising that communication strategies are the responsibility of everyone and a process that requires planning, consideration of target audiences, use of formal and informal methods, and making the effort.

### **BENEFITS OF THE APPROACH**

The cultural shift engendered by the decision to implement a quality management system into the College has become evident at a number of levels. At the organisation level, in the period since the quality management system was first implemented, the College has seen a steady improvement in most critical performance measures. In 1998 84% of the College’s students indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall performance of the College. This is 2% higher than the state average and 6% higher than the same figure for the College in 1997. The College has increased its delivery of Vocational Education and Training programs from 425,000 Student Curriculum Hours in 1995 to 759794 Student Curriculum Hours in 1998. In 1998 70% of College graduates were in employment six months after completing their course. This compares with 63% in 1997.

Individual staff too have indicated the participative approach has led to an improved sense of ownership of the process. Team members involved in the project reported a great sense of pride and satisfaction in the systems they developed and a sense of ownership that itself contributed to dissemination throughout the College. Feedback received from an initially skeptical staff member on Quality Day sums up the way the quality process has converted so many people to support the organisational effort:

*I have viewed the implementation of quality systems in a number of Colleges with some degree of cynicism, and seen management stand aloofly aside during the process, but what I see in this organisation is people sincerely trying to work together to make the College a better place for staff and students.*

The organisation continues to mature and the teams based approach to the Quality Framework has become an integral part of the way we do business. A recent external validation of the College's ability to address the criteria of the revised Quality Framework recommended the organisation's continuing status as a Quality Endorsed Training Organisation but perhaps even more tellingly, the report noted a degree of ownership by staff of the Framework not previously apparent. The Validator reported:

*“ During the validation exercise there were opportunities to discuss the recent achievements of the College. The staff were able to readily identify a range of improvements which have been noted over the past two years. While evidence is available in the various Reports, there was further assurance provided by the body of the staff.*

*The system is now well accepted and has reached a high degree of implementation. It is considered that there is still opportunity for increased performance through challenge to the current Procedures. These opportunities will be of a minor nature and should be recorded to maintain history of progress.*

*The members of all the teams are to be commended for the maintenance of the QRTO System over the past several years and are to be congratulated for achieving a successful outcome in the Annual External Validation.”*

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

The widespread implementation of the Quality Framework and its now intrinsic nature within the organisation places the College in a good position to address future challenges. Recognition by staff that quality systems and processes do in fact offer the organisation a competitive advantage in the marketplace impacts directly on our ability to meet our organisational goals. The College has established five Key Result Areas to carry it forward into the new century:

To be the VET provider of choice for the people and industries of the Midwest/Gascoyne region of WA

To increase Central West College's share of the VET market

To develop “job readiness” that provides graduates with a competitive advantage in the employment market which employers will recognise and prefer.

To attract and retain the highest quality staff

To maximise resources available for the delivery of quality programs

The Quality Framework provides the foundation upon which to build strategies to achieve these goals.

## **SUMMARY**

The Central West College's continuing status as a Quality Endorsed Training Organisation (QETO) and our recognition as such by the State Training Board confirms our status as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). Central West was one of the first colleges in Australia to achieve this status. Our investment in the quality management framework continues to provide the organisation with a competitive advantage in the training market, and our clients with an assurance of the level and quality of training delivery services to expect from the College.

As the College continues its Quality journey towards our vision of becoming a Best Practice provider of training, education and learning pathways the teams based approach lends the organisation both the strength and commitment to achieve this vision.