A BRIEF OUTLINE ABOUT FADRIVE. A PATTERN TO IMPROVE E-LEARNING

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"Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skilful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives".
W. A. Foster (1915-1945), American Hero during the WWII.

Introduction

The above mentioned aphorism seems to be very well appropriate towards the problem of quality inside e-learning.
Marconi University in Rome (Italy) is for sure today a leader-centre concerning highest quality of e-learning; Marconi University has, in fact, developed a special "system", called FADRIVE. But what does it mean? Fadrive is an acronym coming by a mixture from Italian English languages, where FAD means - in Italian - formazione a distanza (in Eng.: e- learning, distance learning) and the English word drive. So FADRIVE could mean: "how to conduct and realize the e-learning".
The passage from a traditional teaching model to an innovative way of providing education implies the modernization of the organizational structures within institutions and the development of ICT (Information & Communication Technology).
So "Quality" (written with a capital "q") inside e-learning is the main problem to solve in order to realize a high-quality of e-learning.
In the following lines I would like to give some hints about FADRIVE.

FADRIVE Model: just a brief survey

FADRIVE focuses its attention towards the following aspects:

- the input requirements fulfillment
- the process assessment in terms of added value

- the results achievement in terms of performance and process effectiveness
- the continuing processes improvement based on objective measurements

The core element of this process is the Human Capital, where the students play a central role inside an interactive dynamic process of e-learning.

In this point of view, the university organization must:

- determine the necessary competence of the staff carrying out the activities affecting compliance with the requirements of the product
- where applicable, provide training or take other action to acquire the necessary expertise
- evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken
- ensure that its staff are aware of the importance of its activities and of how they contribute to achieving the objectives for quality
- maintain appropriate records of instruction, training, skills and experience

On the basis of the above mentioned scenario, the university structures have to include:

- buildings, workspaces, and related services;
- process equipment (both hardware and software).

Inside FADRIVE, or better some hints about its methodology

FADRIVE's methodology can be well summarized by the acronym PDCA (meaning: Plan-Do-Check-Act). Therefore:

P - *Plan*. Planning, i.e. establish the objectives and processes necessary to deliver results in accordance with the expected output (the target or goals)
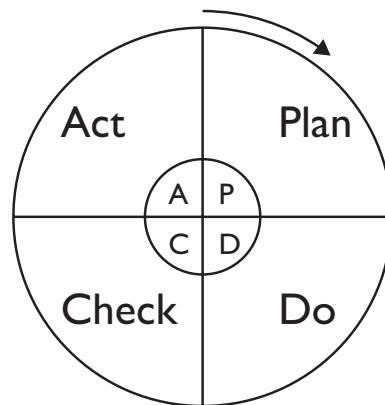
D - *Do*. Implementation of the program, firstly realized in limited contexts

C - *Check*. Test and check the actual results (measured and collected in Do above) and compare against the expected

results (targets or goals from the Plan) to determine any differences

A - *Act*. Action to complete and/or improve the process

So, the PDCA Cycle can be represented as follows:

In agreement with FADRIVE Model, distance education is a systemic process which provides contents and services to be planned, delivered, managed, monitored and assessed and that requires an accurate cost planning for being developed.

In order to provide high quality learning paths, the concerned institutions should comply with a set of organizational, technological and pedagogical requirements that are clearly specified in a Technical Specifications expressly developed. Those requirements concern four different phases of the learning path, namely:

1. The *planning* process is the starting point and the focal element of the training project. Indeed this phase is characterized by the processing of all information shaping the whole activity structure, the establishment of a first analytical contact with the social, cultural and organizational environment in which the training action will be carried out and the definition of all the strategic guidelines to follow during the subsequent stages.
2. The *production* phase determines the teaching materials needed to meet the training needs identified in terms of: duration,

treatment content and levels of interactivity/ multimedia/ usability/ accessibility. The different characteristics of the materials fit the content and the educational objectives of the course.

3. The *delivery* phase is aimed at implementing all the strategies needed for a correct/complete fruition of the course by the final users: counseling services, tutoring and Help Desk can assist and support the learner throughout the course. These exchanges of reports, among other things, allow the unit design/production to constantly monitor the fruition of the course and have continuous feedbacks on published materials.

4. An *evaluation* process is foreseen at the end of the course/ program to evaluate its quality and overall coherence, contribute to its further improvement for subsequent deliveries and reshape the training plan on the basis of the potential criticisms detected.

For each phase the Technical Specifications identifies: organization and process, activities, human resources involved, infrastructure & technology required.

The *goal* of the procedure is therefore to provide functional management and operational criteria to handle, monitor and complete the four phases in question in terms of effectiveness/ efficiency of the entire process.

FADRIVE and Academic Institutions

Complying with FADRIVE Model could bring lots of benefits to institutions, especially in terms of:

-   giving evidence of standards implementation
-   ensuring that their own processes are fully deployed
-   ensuring their students on the high quality of their distance learning method and technologies
-   increasing market visibility
-   having a model to improve their own presence at an international level

The institutions interested in adopting this model are:

- open and distance learning universities, centers and associations
- campus-based HEIs (= High Education Institutions) providing courses in online modality beside their traditional educational offer
- any training organization offering distance learning

Towards a conclusion or better just a… left open!

As I have above mentioned, FADRIVE is able to realize high quality of e-learning process. For realizing a Telematic University is therefore necessary more than a pc and a speaker!

An University which wants to realize an high e-learning system is therefore compelled to adopt right strategies and patterns, or the quality of the education will be superficial, poor and - in a word - completely useless for the students. E-learning is not now at its beginning phase, but in a deep developing one.

I think that in realizing e-learning it would be necessary to have in mind always what Seneca wrote two thousands of years ago: "It is quality rather than quantity that matters"!