Abstract: Currently in China, the gradual mainstreaming of continuing education is the most significant indication of lifelong education evolving from ideal to practice. As the main providers of continuing education, universities should respond instantly to the evolution of continuing education. Under this background and considering the characteristics and development problem of continuing education in universities, this paper discusses the development approach of education institutes. Suggestions are given in several aspects including refinement of quality assurance system, implementation of divergent strategy, strengthening the project research and development, consolidating the teacher resource, and so on.

Keywords: Continuing Education in Universities, Development Approach, Education and Training

Currently in China, the gradual mainstreaming of continuing education is the most significant indication of lifelong education evolving from ideal to practice. The continuing education is experiencing a brand-new and ever-expanding development. As the major provider and being in a main position of continuing education, universities have a wide range of advantages including comprehensive curriculum, experienced teachers and powerful pedagogical resources both for teaching and research, advanced teaching facilities, scientific equipment and teaching method, abundant books and materials in libraries, favorable experimental condition and modern information technology, and extensive and in-depth communication with institutes and facilities both home and abroad. Those unique superiorities determine that universities should play an important role as the main force in the field of continuing education, to actively meet the need of constructing a learning society and respond instantly to the evolution of continuing education.

I. Refinement of quality assurance system

With China's accession to the WTO, the international competitions in the area of continuing education are increasing fierce. Meanwhile, the government and administration department of continuing education reinforce deeper extent of supervision on school-running organizations and facilities. The continuing education facilities in universities should establish the “quality supremacy” concept and enhance the teaching managerial process of assessment and monitoring to ensure the quality of continuing education. The two emphases of refinement of quality assurance system are presented below.

Firstly, establish a clear education quality management system. An essential
precondition for the construction and refinement of quality assurance system is to establish a strict and clear quality management system and its relevant organization and configuration. Concerning the characteristics of education and training activities, quality assurance consists of the construction of professional discipline and training projects quality assurance, teaching quality assurance, learning quality assurance, managerial quality assurance, teacher quality assurance, equipment quality assurance, and outlay assurance etc. Therefore, when it comes to organization settings, it is necessary to fully consider the characteristics mentioned above, and then set up special permanent or temporary quality management committee or panel, such as quality assurance committee, instruction steering committee, teaching steering committee, quality assurance panel, cooperation projects assessment panel, curriculum research and development group, teaching assessment panel, teacher development and management group, etc. Further more, the relations among all levels and organizations in the quality management system of continuing education should also be specific, which helps to provide an organizational assurance for the establishment and execution of rules, regulations and management standards.

Secondly, set up a strict monitoring system for training process. The quality assurance of continuing education is a dynamic and complicated process which includes preparatory project research and enrollment preparations (the preparatory stage), school teaching and training process (the implementation stage), and evaluation and feedback process after the impartment of continuing education (the completion stage). Organizations of continuing education in universities should monitor its educational quality in every specific stage.

**Monitoring in the preparatory stage**

Since education and training is regarded as service product, the oneness of production and consumption process and non-recoverability of training quality indicate that it is extremely important to have quality control in the preparatory stage of education and training. The monitoring tasks in the preparatory stage mainly contain the following: market research and needs assessment, approval of training projects, configuration of teachers resource and mutual supervision, inspection of curricular contents, review of cooperation projects and agreement, review the issuance of enrollment Information, supervision of market promotion and propaganda, and management and supervision of preparatory work for students' enrollment, etc.

**Monitoring in the implementation stage**

This period includes systemic review of the state of implementation process and the feedback from teachers and students. By comprehensively considering the suggestions and opinions of students, instructors, class teachers and project managers, this monitoring process enables executors identify problems quickly to adjust and improve its educational contents and service in due course. The key point of quality control in the implementation stage lies on the hold of training site. In this phase, class teachers act the very important parts. First, they need to ensure a favorable hardware environment; second, they should create an active atmosphere; third, they should get to know students' learning outcomes and feed back in time; forth, they need to tackle the abnormities and instruct students into a learning state to
ensure the training effect.

**Monitoring in the completion stage**

Right after the end of training program, it is highly essential to evaluate and get the feedback of training projects. The succedent tasks include evaluating the extent of students’ satisfaction, tracking students’ learning effects and outcomes, calculating the project cost and benefit assessment, evaluating the project social influence, etc. Specifically, evaluating the extent of students’ satisfaction consists of a range of satisfaction evaluation from training contents, teachers’ resource to the training project provider itself. Tracking students’ learning effects and outcomes after training program is also considerably pivotal for the educational quality. With the subsequent study tracking service, its main purpose is to build a lifelong education system, and provide a wonderful communication and exchange platform for students with its abundant information resources.

**II. Implementation of divergent strategy**

On one hand, with the growing competition for talent and increasing employment pressure, students choose their training organizations more and more rationally, and they tend to focus on the practical benefits from what they’ll learn. On the other hand, education and training industry are increasingly elaborate, and the machine-made training projects are difficult to survive in this industry because of the lack of characteristic. Therefore, how to develop characteristically and diversely becomes the most important problem for continuing education organizations in universities. The feasible divergent strategies are discussed in the following.

1. **Diversity in school-running orientation.** The organizations of continuing education in universities should objectively analyze their advantages and disadvantages to get a clear view of their own school-running orientation and market position, and the various levels of consumers. By fully exerting their advantages of subject characteristics, teacher resources, school culture, course characteristics, and teaching quality, etc, organizations of continuing education can build their unique school characteristics.

2. **Diversity in training brand.** Organizations of continuing education should rely on the cultural traditions of their universities to build their own training brands. By embedding cultural traditions of universities into continuing education, universities can form their training brand with respective characteristics; for example, democracy and freedom in Peking University, staidness and strictness in Tsinghua University, liveliness and creativeness in Nankai University. The colorful cultural traditions endow the training brand with a long-lasting vitality.

3. **Diversity in market expansion.** Before implementing the market divergent strategy, organizations of continuing education should learn the different needs and preference of consumers in the education and training market, to determine the product contents and market expansion strategies. While implementing the market expansion divergent strategies, organizations of continuing education in universities should also consider the following three aspects: first, exploit new areas for education and training business; second, seek the market vacancy and breakthrough; third,
maintain diversity in marketing model. Currently, organizations of continuing education in universities have already establish certain kinds of marketing ideas, however, their marketing models and homogeneity are not a nice fit for their development paths. Therefore, universities should not only innovate actively in their marketing models to reduce cost and increase efficiency, but also promote diversified marketing models according to their product features and various consumer groups.

III. Strengthening the project research and development

It has been a long time that many continuing education institutions follow the specialty, course system, textbooks configuration and assessment methods in the general higher education system. The learning needs and the characteristics of continuing education are often ignored. It leads to a far cry from the social needs and the continuing education provided by universities. In order to kindle the vitality and creativity of continuing education, universities should innovate and strengthen the project research and development. Concerning the short-term and long-term needs, there are three kinds of research and development models available: market research and independent development; experts’ participation and high-end development; industry collaboration and development relying on enterprise. To be more specific, the innovative research and development for high quality continuing education projects can execute the following approaches:

1. Determine the prospect of projects and focus on sustainable development. Organizations of continuing education should undertake the market research to get a clear industrial prospect. By roundly considering the elements of training scale, benefit, sustainable development, they can produce appropriate education and training products and innovative system.

2. Focus on excellent projects and develop series of projects. The research and development of training projects should not base on the short-term benefit. It is necessary to develop series of projects while building the excellent training projects, to engender the competitive training project groups.

3. Establish research and development teams and cultivate the independent research and development capability. Currently, many curricula of continuing education are overly reliant on part-time instructors, and lack of the core competitiveness. Therefore, it is extremely important to maintain the independent research and development capability, and the construction of specialized research and development teams is an effective way. Let’s take the example of the project model of research and development in University of Maryland University College (UMUC). First, experts on relevant subjects design the syllabus (including learning objective, themes, standards requirements, etc). After the approval of syllabus by college, experts on relevant subjects, project coordinators and curricula designers get together to establish the curricula frame. Then based on this frame, instructors can freely exert their own talents in the teaching process.

In addition, developing cases libraries, making the knowledge alliance with

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companies, etc, would be also favorable in strengthening the project research and development capability.

IV. Consolidating the teacher resource

The value of continuing education largely rests with the capability of instructors, which is also a keystone for quality assurance of continuing education. Now, the teacher resources in universities for continuing education are mainly part-time teachers. Because of the instability of part-time teachers, it’s hard to manage and control the whole education and training process. Therefore, it is necessary to specify the cooperation mechanism, incentive mechanism, and monitoring mechanism with instructors and reinforce the capability training of instructors.

1. Specify the cooperation mechanism. Via official agreements, specify the mode, contents and span of cooperation, and establish the risk-sharing mechanism, collaborative interaction mechanism, and interest distribution mechanism between instructors and organizations of continuing education.

2. Set up incentive mechanism. Combine the internal and external incentive of instructors. The specific incentive approaches can be: offering proper payment, performance awards, and subsidy of additional tasks; providing technical supports and courses research and development supports; establishing a platform for communication between instructors, instructors and students, instructors and enterprises; shooting for supports from the work units of instructors; favoring the publication of instructors’ teaching and scientific research outcomes; establishing the rules and regulations for intellectual property protection and course copyright, etc.

3. Set up the monitor and control measures. For example, enhance the teaching capability assessment and performance assessment, and terminate the disqualified instructors.

4. Execute training programs for instructors. There are many ways to improve the capability of instructors, such as executing diversified trainings on teaching methods and course design with one-on-one guidance between course designer and instructor; organizing various types of seminars and workshops; constructing teaching profession websites for online study and communication, etc.

V. Improving the professional qualification of employees

In addition to the instructors charging teaching affairs, organizations of continuing education in universities also have a large number of management employees. The quality and capability of these employees have great impacts on the efficiency and quality of continuing education, satisfaction of the clients, and input-output ratio. Generally speaking, management in organizations of continuing education is short of the ability of marketing operation. Most of employees of management are transferred directly from universities. They have the experience of teaching management or working as instructors, but lack of the knowledge and experience of management and marketing operation. Accordingly, organizations of continuing education should further enhance the human resources development. While providing education and training service for students, they should plan to train their own employees as well, to improve their professional qualification and capabilities of marketing operation and project.
VI. Consummating the service of continuing education

Many organizations of continuing education in universities in China are influenced by the traditional general higher education system. They mainly provide degree education, but put a far less attention on the advanced non-degree education; the imbalance results in a lack of long-term service awareness. As well as a foothold, providing perfect thoughtful education service is a symbol of the maturation of organizations of continuing education. The author believes that there are two aspects to consummate the service of continuing education:

On one hand, provide integrative education and training service. An integrative education and training service includes not only the clients’ training needs analysis, curricula design, implementation of teaching and training, but also the prior specific research on training needs, the subsequent value-added services, and the constant tracking of the training effect. Presently, advisory training is popular with enterprises. That’s because this kind of training provides a whole package of solutions for companies. It focuses on the research of training needs in the initial period and the training effect insurance in the later period. By in-depth research, it comes up with a corresponding diagnosis report and relevant measures for improvement; and after the implementation of systematical and pertinent trainings, it settles the problems for enterprises. For instance, the process of advisory training service in AchieveGlobal Inc. is, “initial advisory period, in-depth diagnosis period, training program design period, implementation of training period, training completion period, follow-up services period”. In each period, there are detailed approaches. For example, the training program design period contains the process of research and advancement of feasible solution, research and evaluation of the alternative solution, submission of design options, and recognition by clients. This systematic and integrative training service process is a valuable reference for organizations of continuing education in universities.

On the other hand, provide individualized value-added services. Based on clients’ needs, organization of continuing education can innovate in the service and mode of service. By providing individualized service actively, it would gain great credits and increase the competitiveness for organizations of continuing education. There are some common ways to follow: 1. Present free courses and lectures such as advanced courses or EQ education courses like Emotional Ease and Stress Management; 2. Organize colorful experience activities such as field visit, field review, and intern, etc; 3. Build an exchange platform for communication such as students salon, alumni association, club, and English salon, etc.

VII. Expanding the outside cooperation

Presently, there are various kinds of continuing education coexist in universities, ranging from correspondence school, night school, adult higher education, adult non-degree training, to networking academy. Fierce snatch for student source, teaching venues and equipment, and teacher resource occurs among the diversified
organizations of continuing education. The in-house vicious competition weakens the overall advantages of universities. In another point of view, most organizations of continuing education make use of educational resources largely from their own colleges or universities such as teacher resource, teaching venues, etc. They well cooperate with the in-house faculties and departments while ignore the utilization of resources in other universities due to the absence of a sound resources cooperation mechanism. Therefore, establishing and optimizing the cooperation mechanism is highly significant for the sustainable development of continuing education in universities.

The organizations of continuing education in universities can maintain multi-trade and inter-regional cooperation with relevant institutions and organizations. By making full use of the other party’s resources (including brand influence, market advantage, curriculum resource, marketing relationship, teacher resource, etc), organizations of continuing education could attain the steady training resources and boost up their own market share and influence to improve the competitive advantages. The cooperation mode can be strategic alliances based on contracts or the non-official cooperation. Generally, the ways of cooperation are the following. 1. Strengthen the cooperation with governments at all levels. Organizations of continuing education can actively participate in the large-scale projects launched by governments, to promote their brand reputation and set a nice social image. In addition, they can assist governments with the development of local continuing education to exploit the local market and expand the brand influence. 2. Strengthen the cooperation with enterprises. Organizations of continuing education can establish strategic alliances with multinational corporations and larger enterprises. For one aspect, they can research deeply into the practical training needs and develop pertinent courses to solve the problems in enterprises and ensure the training effect. For another aspect, it is beneficial for universities to develop cases library and cultivate experienced teachers.

3. Strengthen the cooperation with industry associations. Organizations of continuing education can utilize the specialized resources of industry associations and the teaching organizational capacity of universities to launch the training programs. Based on that, they can further develop training programs for professional qualification accreditation. 4. Strengthen the cooperation with school-running organizations. The cooperation modes can be exchanging resources, co-hosting educational activities, propagandizing for each other. For instance, one can provide the teachers resource and curricula, while the other is in charge of school enrollment and teaching management. The can also work together and offer the unique courses portfolio; in that case students can earn a double certification. 5. Strengthen the cooperation with foreign universities. Organizations of continuing education should strengthen the cooperation with some world-class universities with characteristic curricula and experienced Profs. By co-running schools for both degree and non-degree education, organizations of continuing education in universities can heighten their own brand competitiveness, fetch in the advanced training concepts and management methods, and consummate the construction of curricula system. It is also an effective way to improve the internationalization of continuing education.
Curriculum Vitae

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