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INTEGRATING PHILIPPINE QUALITY AWARDS WITH ISO 9001:2015 PDCA FOR AUDIT EFFICIENCY AND IMPROVEMENT

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A B S T R A C T

This study assessed and enhanced the efficiency, effectiveness, and cost effectiveness of Quality Management System (QMS) activities by integrating Philippine Quality Awards (PQA) criteria with the ISO 9001:2015 Plan-Do Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. Using a mixed methods approach, it evaluated QMS performance at Camarines Norte State College. Key objectives included evaluating QMS efficiency, analyzing cost-effectiveness, and developing a unified PQA-ISO 9001:2015 framework. Findings showed strong support for integrating PQA with ISO QMS among internal auditors, highlighting benefits such as reduced redundancy and improved alignment with organizational goals. Quantitative analysis indicated positive ratings for QMS activities in enhancing process efficiency and resource utilization. Qualitative insights affirmed unanimous agreement on the integrated approach's potential to streamline audits and optimize resource allocation. Recommendations included adopting integrated audit frameworks and aligning organizational policies to sustain QMS effectiveness. In conclusion, integrating PQA criteria with ISO 9001:2015 PDCA cycle enhances audit efficiency, reduces costs, and promotes continuous improvement in quality management. This study underscores strategic advantages for organizations aiming to improve operational performance and achieve long-term success in quality assurance and management.

1. INTRODUCTION

In every State College and University in the Philippines, the adoption and integration of internationally recognized standards such as the International Organization for Standardization ISO 9001:2015 (2015), ISO 2018, alongside frameworks like the Philippine Quality Awards (2023), are crucial for ensuring excellence in operations and continuous improvement, in line with mandates set forth for higher education institutions in the country.

ISO 9001:2015 (2015), is a globally acknowledged standard for Quality Management Systems (QMS), providing a structured framework that helps organizations ensure their processes consistently meet customer requirements and regulatory standards (ISO, 2018). For State Colleges and Universities in the Philippines, implementing ISO 9001:2015 (2015), is not only a means to enhance operational efficiency but also to align with national and international benchmarks in educational quality assurance.

Quality Management Systems (QMS), as defined by ISO 9001:2015 (2015), are essential tools for State Colleges and Universities to streamline operations, improve resource utilization, and consistently deliver educational services that meet international standards (ISO, 2018). This is particularly crucial given the mandates of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and other regulatory bodies that emphasize the importance of quality assurance and continuous improvement in higher education.

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The Philippine Quality Awards (PQA) provide a national framework that promotes organizational excellence and performance (Philippine Quality Award (2023). By integrating PQA criteria into their operations, State Colleges and Universities can benchmark themselves against national standards, enhance governance practices, and continuously improve academic programs and administrative processes. This alignment with PQA criteria supports institutions in meeting CHED's standards for quality assurance and institutional sustainability.

Currently, the resource management practices in Philippine institutions, particularly state universities and colleges, face significant challenges in securing adequate funding for education, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited resource allocation impacts their financial viability, prompting the need for effective strategies in planning, budgeting, allocation, and control. While budgeting and allocation processes are consistently implemented, planning and control practices vary in their application across public higher education institutions (Acido & Kilongkilong, 2022).

To enhance resource management capabilities, institutions should prioritize standardizing policies, leveraging information technology for improved efficiency, and allocating funds strategically towards development programs. These steps are crucial in optimizing resource utilization and enhancing financial sustainability amid economic uncertainties.

Management Information Systems (MIS) play a critical role in both public and private educational sectors in the Philippines, facilitating the management of administrative processes, student data, and overall operations (Zulueta et al., 2021). Despite their utility, challenges such as user experience, adaptability, and training persist, necessitating concerted efforts from institutions to address these issues and maximize the benefits of MIS.

The Philippine Quality Award (PQA) stands as the highest national recognition for organizational performance excellence, aligned with Total Quality Management (TQM) principles and emphasizing results, including customer satisfaction. Established through Executive Order No. 448 and institutionalized by Republic Act No. 9013, the PQA provides a framework that fosters competitiveness comparable to prestigious international awards like the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program in the U.S. Organizations that excel in quality, productivity, and business performance receive the PQA, promoting a culture of excellence and continuous improvement across sectors.

ISO 9001:2015 (2015), serves as a globally recognized standard for Quality Management Systems (QMS), with its equivalent certifications in the Philippines, such as those under PQA, ensuring compliance with ISO QMS requirements (Government Quality Management Committee, 2021). The Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) offers consultancy services to government agencies for the institutionalization of ISO 9001 QMS, enhancing operational efficiency and fostering customer satisfaction.

Integrating robust resource management practices, optimizing MIS capabilities, striving for PQA excellence, and implementing ISO 9001:2015 (2015), QMS are imperative for Philippine institutions. With the issuance of memorandum circular no. 2016-1 by the Philippine Administrative Order (AO) No. 25 Inter-Agency Task Force, it became mandatory for government agencies, including State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), to establish a Quality Management System (QMS) based on ISO 9001:2015 (2015). This regulatory requirement underscores the importance of adhering to international standards in enhancing organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

The Philippine Quality Award (PQA) is a prestigious national recognition for organizational performance excellence, following Total Quality Management (TQM) principles and emphasizing results and customer satisfaction. While specific data on the number of SUCs, colleges, and universities with PQA certification is not readily available in the provided sources, it is recommended that higher educational institutions undergo ISO 9001:2015 (2015) certification to enhance their processes and meet the satisfaction of their stakeholders. This dual approach of ISO 9001:2015 (2015) implementation and PQA adoption contributes to quality assurance and excellence in Philippine educational institutions.

A study conducted in region 3 of the Philippines assessed the ISO 9001:2015 (2015) implementation in SUCs, revealing varying degrees of compliance and certification. Notably, two state universities in Nueva Ecija and one state university in Tarlac obtained ISO 9001:2015 (2015) certification by or before August 2019, showcasing their commitment to quality management practices (Santos et al., 2021). These certifications validate their efforts in aligning with national mandates and striving for excellence in educational service delivery.

By adopting ISO 9001:2015 (2015) and integrating PQA criteria, State Colleges and Universities in the Philippines align with higher education mandates, strengthen their capacity to deliver high-quality education, drive continuous improvement, and maintain leadership in the academic and research sectors. These standards and frameworks are strategic tools that empower educational institutions to excel in their mission of shaping future generations and contributing positively to society, in accordance with national educational policies and guidelines.

This study aimed to comprehensively evaluate and enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and cost-effectiveness of Quality Management System (QMS) activities by developing a unified framework that integrates PQA criteria and the ISO 9001:2015 (2015), PDCA cycle, and to assess the potential benefits of a consolidated audit approach in organizational processes. Specifically, sought to answers the following:

1. To evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of QMS activities in organizational processes.
2. To analyze the cost-effectiveness of QMS activities and the potential savings from an integrated audit approach.
3. To develop and justify a unified framework integrating PQA criteria and ISO 9001:2015 (2015), PDCA cycle.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework titled "Integrating Philippine Quality Awards with ISO 9001:2015 (2015), PDCA for Audit Efficiency and Improvement" outlines a systematic approach to assessing and improving Quality Management System (QMS) activities within organizational settings. The framework is structured into three main components: Evaluation of QMS Activities, Analysis of Cost-Effectiveness, and Development of Unified Framework (Figure 1).

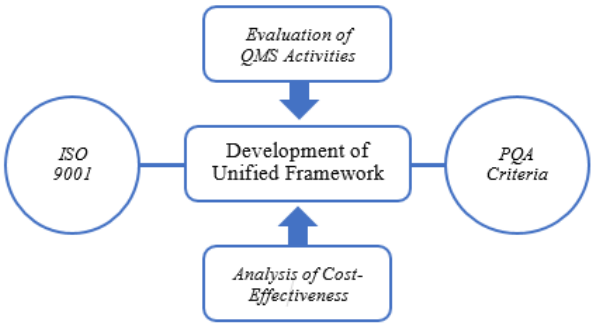

Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm

Firstly, the Evaluation of QMS Activities focuses on variables such as the efficiency and effectiveness of QMS activities, measured through indicators including process efficiency improvements, reduction in non-conformities, and consistency in process outputs. Measurement tools such as stakeholder surveys, internal audit reports, and performance metrics (e.g., cycle time, error rates) are employed to gather data for evaluation.

Secondly, the Analysis of Cost-Effectiveness examines variables related to the financial impact of QMS activities, with indicators such as cost savings from integrated audit approaches, resource utilization efficiency, and return on investment (ROI) from QMS implementation. Financial records, comparative analysis of audit costs, and cost-benefit analysis frameworks serve as measurement tools to assess cost-effectiveness.

Thirdly, the Development of Unified Framework aims to integrate PQA (Philippine Quality Award) Criteria with the ISO 9001:2015 (2015), PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) Cycle. Variables include the alignment of PQA criteria with ISO 9001:2015 (2015), principles, synergy in audit processes and quality improvement initiatives, and organizational readiness for the unified framework. Measurement tools for this component include comparative analysis of PQA and ISO 9001:2015 (2015), requirements, stakeholder feedback from workshops or focus groups, and the development of standardized procedures and documentation.

Integration and Analysis within the framework involve synthesizing findings from the evaluation of QMS activities, analysis of cost-effectiveness, and development of the unified framework. Comparative analysis is conducted to understand how the integrated approach enhances organizational efficiency, reduces costs, and improves alignment with quality standards.

Ultimately, the framework aims to demonstrate how integrating PQA criteria with the ISO 9001:2015 (2015), PDCA cycle can lead to enhanced operational performance, financial savings, and sustained quality improvement in organizational processes. This structured approach provides a comprehensive method for evaluating, analyzing, and developing unified quality management systems within organizational contexts, emphasizing efficiency, effectiveness, and cost-effectiveness through standardized practices and cohesive frameworks.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

Congruent mixed methods research was an approach that integrated quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis within a single study. It aimed to provide a more complete understanding of a phenomenon by combining the strengths of both methods (George, 2021).

In other words, congruent mixed methods research sought to triangulate findings by using both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (in-depth, descriptive) data. This approach comprehensively evaluated and enhanced the efficiency, effectiveness, and cost-effectiveness of Quality Management System (QMS) activities. The study focused on developing a unified framework that integrated PQA criteria and the ISO 9001:2015 (2015), PDCA cycle and assessed the potential benefits of a consolidated audit approach in organizational processes.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data analysis in this study was underpinned by a comprehensive approach to evaluating Quality Management System (QMS) activities at Camarines Norte State College. It focused on variables such as efficiency, effectiveness, and process improvement, assessing improvements in process efficiency, reduction in non-conformities, and consistency in outputs.

Data collection methods included surveys, interviews with ISO internal auditors, and analysis of internal audit reports, which provided quantitative metrics such as cycle time and error rates. Quantitative data underwent statistical treatments including descriptive statistics (such as means, frequencies, and percentages) to summarize numerical findings.

For instance, the average rating for QMS effectiveness quantitatively measured stakeholders'

perceptions. Comparative analyses were also conducted to track changes over time, such as reductions in non-

conformities before and after QMS implementation, offering insights into operational impacts across departments.

Qualitative data, derived from open-ended questions exploring perceptions and assessments, underwent thematic analysis. Responses regarding cost-effectiveness, resource utilization impacts, reduction in redundancies, and integration preferences were systematically coded and categorized into themes. This qualitative approach facilitated a deeper exploration of stakeholders' perspectives and the underlying reasons for their perceptions of QMS effectiveness.

Thematic analysis involved identifying recurring patterns and themes within the qualitative data, providing nuanced descriptions and insights into how QMS activities were perceived and experienced within the institution. Direct quotes and excerpts from respondents' answers were used to illustrate key findings and support interpretations, ensuring a robust understanding of qualitative insights alongside quantitative measures.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained throughout the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Efficiency and Effectiveness of Quality Management System Activities in Organizational Processes

This study focused on evaluating and improving Quality Management System (QMS) activities. To achieve this, a unified framework is developed, integrating PQA criteria and the ISO 9001:2015 (2015) PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle (Chinda et al., 2020). The PDCA cycle, emphasized continuous improvement by following these steps: Plan: Define objectives, allocate resources, and address risks and opportunities within the QMS (Astrini, 2021); Do: Implement the planned actions; Check: Monitor performance and assess results; and, Act: Make informed decisions based on the evaluation, leading to further improvements.

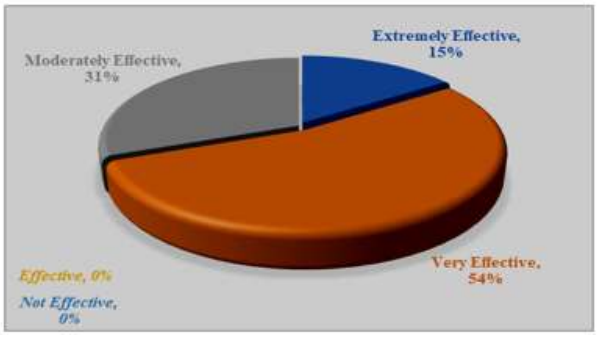

Figure 2. Effectiveness of QMS Activities in Improving Overall Process Efficiency

The findings revealed positive ratings *(*Figure 2*)* for QMS activities, particularly in terms of enhancing process efficiency and resource utilization. These insights underscore the significant impact of QMS activities on operational performance and advocate for a consolidated audit approach (Chinda et al., 2020). The PDCA cycle is a sustained model for improvement, promoting continual enhancement within the QMS. By integrating risk-based thinking and a process approach, ISO 9001:2015(2015) aims to enhance customer satisfaction and overall efficiency.

The findings indicate a significant majority (n=30) of respondents (69%) rated QMS activities as either extremely or very effective in improving overall process efficiency, with 15% finding them extremely effective and 54% rating them as very effective. Additionally, 31% of respondents considered QMS activities to be moderately effective. This suggests that while there is room for improvement, the overall impact of QMS activities on process efficiency is positive.

Meanwhile, in terms of resource utilization, 38% of respondents reported significant improvements, while 54% noted some improvements. Only 8% saw no change, and none reported a decline in resource utilization, see figure 3.

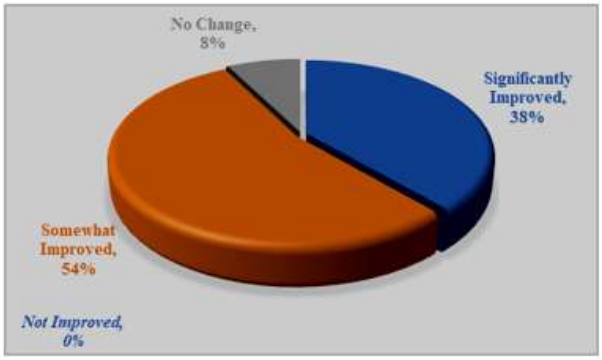

Figure 3. QMS Activities Impacted Resource Utilization

This study indicated that QMS activities significantly enhance resource efficiency, positively impacting various aspects of organizational performance. Specifically, QMS contributes to better operational performance by streamlining processes and improving resource allocation. These benefits extend to areas such as time management, personnel utilization, and material consumption (Fathy et al. 2021, ISO 2024).

The data supports the development of a unified framework that integrates PQA criteria and the ISO 9001:2015 (2015) PDCA cycle. The positive feedback on the effectiveness and resource utilization improvements of QMS activities justifies this integration, which is expected to further streamline and enhance QMS processes. The integrated approach can enhance both the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of QMS activities, providing a structured and systematic method for continuous improvement in organizational processes.

3.2 Cost-Effectiveness of QMS Activities and The Potential Savings from an Integrated Audit Approach

Camarines Norte State College (CNSC) has adopted an integrated audit approach, combining the Philippine Quality Awards (PQA) criteria with ISO 9001:2015 (2015) requirements. This alignment aims to enhance organizational performance and quality management by emphasizing leadership commitment, strategic planning, customer focus, measurement and analysis, workforce engagement, operations management, and performance results.

By integrating these elements, CNSC seeks to streamline audit processes, improve efficiency, and optimize resource utilization. This approach is expected to reduce audit preparation time by 30% and financial costs by 25%, with internal quality auditors noting significant reductions in redundancies within auditing and reporting processes, see figure 4. The data on QMS activities' impact on reducing redundancies in auditing and reporting processes reveals varying perceptions among internal quality auditors. A small portion of respondents (8%) believe QMS activities have significantly reduced redundancies, indicating a considerable streamlining effect.

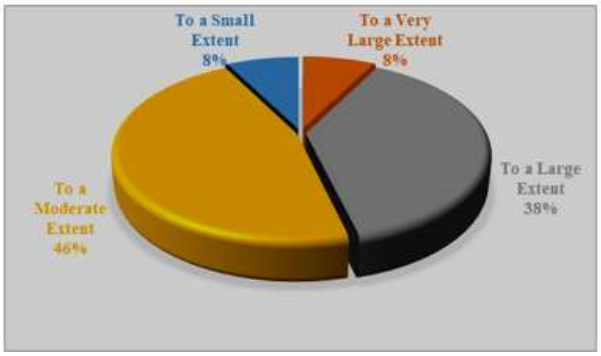

Figure 4. Reduction in Redundancies

A substantial group (38%) feels redundancies have been largely reduced, suggesting notable efficiency gains.

Table 1. Mapping of Overlapping Elements of PQA Criteria and ISO 9001: 2015 (2015)

Element	PQA Criteria	ISO 9001:2015	Common Audit Areas
Leadership and Management	Leadership, Visionary Leadership, Social Responsibility	Leadership, Management Commitment	Strategic direction, ethics, continuous improvement
Strategic Planning	Strategic Planning, Strategy Development	Context of the Organization, Planning	Strategic alignment, risk management, action plans
Customer Focus	Customer and Market Focus, Customer Engagement	Customer Focus, Customer Satisfaction	Understanding customer needs, feedback mechanisms, satisfaction
Measurement and Analysis	Measurement, Analysis, Knowledge Management	Performance Evaluation, Monitoring and Measurement	Data analysis, decision-making, knowledge management
Workforce	Workforce Focus, Workforce Engagement, Workforce Development	Competence, Awareness, Communication	Training and development, employee involvement, competence
Operations Management	Operations Focus, Process Management, Innovation	Operation, Control of Processes	Process control, continuous improvement, operational efficiency
Performance Results	Results, Organizational Performance, Business Results	Performance Evaluation, ↓ nitoring, Measurement of QMS Performance	Performance monitoring, achievement of objectives, KPIs

The majority (46%) perceive a moderate reduction, indicating improvements without overwhelming impact. Additionally, a small segment (8%) reports only a minor reduction, suggesting limited effectiveness of QMS activities in this area. Overall, respondents acknowledge some level of reduction in redundancies due to QMS activities, with perceived impacts ranging from moderate to significant. For a detailed comparative analysis of common criteria and processes in PQA and QMS, refer to Table 1.

In mapping the overlapping elements of the PQA criteria and ISO 9001:2015 (2015), CNSC concentrates its audit efforts on common areas to reduce redundancy and enhance overall audit efficiency. This integrated approach ensures a comprehensive evaluation of the QMS while promoting continuous improvement and strategic alignment within the organization. This comparative analysis also contributed to the development of a unified framework, which will be discussed later. Meanwhile, significant improvements in process consistency were noted, with all respondents indicating that current processes have improved compared to previous years, see Table 2.

Table 2. Improvement in the Process, Consistency, and Overall Benefit of QMS Activities on the Perceptions of IQA

INDICATOR	Significantly Improved	Somewhat Improved	No Change	Not Improved
Consistency of process outputs across different departments.	15%	23%	62%	0%
Improvement in the current processes compared years back.	46%	54%	0%	0%
Overall Benefit Perception. Cost-benefit ratio of the QMS activities	15%	69%	15%	0%

The data revealed varying perceptions of the impact of QMS activities on process consistency, overall improvement, and cost-benefit ratio. For process consistency across departments, 15% reported significant improvement, 23% saw some improvement, and 62% noted no change, indicating limited impact. Regarding overall process improvement, 46% indicated significant improvement, and 54% noted some improvement, reflecting unanimous positive change with no respondents indicating no improvement.

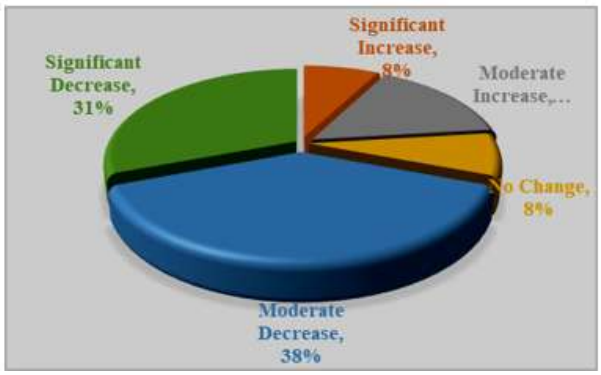

Figure 5. Impact on Nonconformities

In terms of the cost-benefit ratio of QMS activities, 15% of auditors rated it as excellent, suggesting substantial benefits. The majority (69%) rated it as good, indicating that the benefits outweigh the costs explicitly described by figure 5.

Another 15% rated the ratio as fair, implying a balanced perception of benefits and costs. No respondents rated the cost-benefit ratio as poor, indicating a general consensus that QMS activities are at least cost-effective. Finally, the impact on nonconformities yielded mixed results, with some auditors noting increases and others decreases.

The data revealed diverse perspectives on the impact of QMS activities on nonconformities identified during internal audits: A small percentage (8%) of respondents reported a significant increase in the number or severity of nonconformities since QMS implementation, suggesting potential challenges or areas where the system may not have been fully effective. Another 15% noted a moderate increase, indicating a noticeable rise in identified issues post-QMS adoption, possibly reflecting initial adjustment periods or heightened scrutiny.

Conversely, 8% reported no change in nonconformities, indicating consistent identification practices without significant fluctuation. The largest group (38%) observed a moderate decrease, suggesting that QMS activities had effectively reduced identified nonconformities through corrective measures and improved processes. Additionally, 31% reported a significant decrease, highlighting substantial improvements in compliance and process quality attributable to QMS implementation.

While the majority of respondents noted a decrease in nonconformities, indicating overall positive outcomes from QMS activities, the presence of increases suggests ongoing challenges in fully realizing QMS benefits across all organizations. Moving forward, continuous monitoring and adjustment of QMS strategies will be crucial to sustaining and enhancing these improvements (Zgirskas et al., 2021), ensuring ongoing alignment with organizational goals for quality management and compliance.

Furthermore, merging the common criteria of PQA and QMS frameworks could prove more effective in future improvements of institutional or departmental processes. This integrated approach would streamline efforts, enhance consistency in audit outcomes, and foster a unified approach to quality management that leverages the strengths of both frameworks for sustained organizational improvement.

Supplementing the quantitative data, qualitative statements from internal quality auditors revealed unanimous agreement among all 30 respondents regarding the cost-effectiveness of current QMS activities. Auditors consistently emphasized that the QMS significantly reduces costs by preventing errors and minimizing the need for corrective measures such as rework and recalls. One auditor noted, "Errors and mistakes are lessened," attributing this directly to QMS practices. Another pointed out that "QMS plays a crucial role in reducing the costs of implementing corrective measures," highlighting the financial impact of standardizing procedures and continuous improvement practices within QMS. Financial considerations were also prominent, with auditors noting efficient resource allocation during regular working hours and minimal expenses for activities like IQA meetings and trainings. Indirect benefits such as improved resource allocation and conservation of consumable materials were also cited as contributing factors to cost effectiveness.

Overall, the qualitative findings underscore a strong belief in the QMS's ability to reduce costs through error prevention, efficient resource utilization, and streamlined processes. Specific mentions of reduced errors, minimized corrective measures, and optimized resource allocation highlight direct financial benefits. Moreover, the emphasis on continuous improvement and standardization within the QMS suggests ongoing efforts to enhance operational efficiencies and further decrease costs. The auditors' statements reflect a consensus that the QMS not only meets but exceeds expectations in terms of cost-effectiveness, with indications that future enhancements could lead to even greater financial advantages for the organization.

3.3 Develop and Justify a Unified Framework Integrating PQA Criteria and ISO 9001:2015 PDCA Cycle

The study investigated the integration of the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Cycle and the Philippine Quality Awards (PQA) Criteria within quality management systems, aiming to enhance processes, ensure compliance, and drive continuous improvement (Aggarwal, 2020, Al-Bakoosh et al., 2020, Alarcón et al., 2023).

Internal quality auditors' perspectives were also analysed, highlighting the critical role of top management in addressing root causes, with estimates ranging from "almost 85%" to "100%". This underscored the significant leadership involvement required for effective problem-solving.

Respondents widely agreed on the importance of policy making, with estimates around "almost 80%", "about 70%", and "90%", emphasizing the necessity of clear policies to guide effective solution implementation. Additionally, there was consensus among respondents on the critical need for budget allocation, with estimates ranging from "95-99%" to "100%", underscoring the importance of adequate financial resources in supporting effective solutions.

Building upon these insights and synthesizing all the research findings of the study, the researchers developed a unified framework that integrates PQA criteria with the ISO 9001:2015 (2015), PDCA cycle. Illustrated in the Camarines Norte State College Quality Management System Process Map this cyclical approach to quality management aligns seamlessly with both PQA criteria and ISO 9001:2015 (2015), standards. The integrated model supports continuous improvement and strategic alignment, advocating for the consolidation of QMS frameworks to optimize audit processes and resource utilization.

Integrating the Philippine Quality Awards (PQA) criteria with the ISO 9001:2015 (2015), Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle (see in figure 6) offers a structured and efficient approach to conducting quality management system (QMS) audits. By focusing on common requirements and areas of overlap, organizations can significantly reduce time and financial resources dedicated to audit preparation and execution.

The integrated framework also enhances audit effectiveness and fosters continuous improvement within the organization. In terms of cost efficiency, organizations derive significant benefits by eliminating redundant efforts in evidence preparation and documentation. This is achieved through the identification of overlapping elements between PQA and the ISO 9001:2015 (2015), standard. By developing a unified framework that integrates both PQA criteria and the ISO 9001:2015 (2015), Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Cycle, organizations can streamline their quality management processes.

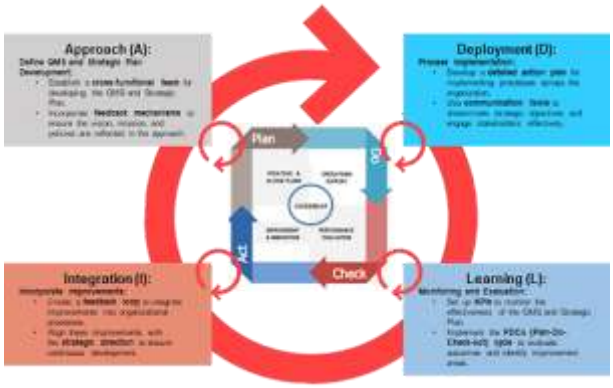

Figure 6. PQA – ISO 9001:2015 (2015), Integration Framework for Internal Quality Audit

Features of this approach include reduced audit burden, as a unified framework minimizes the need for separate audits, optimizing auditor time. Instead of conducting distinct assessments for PQA and ISO 9001 compliance, organizations can consolidate their efforts, resulting in operational cost savings (Rosiawan et al., 2021). Additionally, efficient resource utilization occurs by aligning PQA and ISO 9001 processes, enabling organizations to make better use of resources such as personnel, time, and materials. This synergy contributes to improved operational performance. Lastly, in terms of time and cost savings, case studies have revealed substantial reductions in audit preparation time and associated financial expenditures. Organizations can allocate resources more effectively, focusing on value-added activities (Betegon et al., 2021).

Moreover, the integrated approach ensures comprehensive audit coverage by incorporating robust criteria from both PQA and ISO 9001:2015 (2015), enhancing the identification of areas for improvement. This alignment also improves compliance with standards and drives organizational performance by leveraging the systematic planning, execution, evaluation, and improvement cycles of the PDCA model.

Integrated audits not only establish critical feedback loops essential for ongoing improvement and align audit findings with strategic organizational goals but also promote a culture of excellence and adaptability. This holistic approach facilitates broader insights into quality management, fosters organizational learning, and drives overall improvement. By strategically enhancing organizational excellence in quality management, this integrated approach ensures sustained alignment with long-term objectives.

Moreover, the integration of quality management standards, as seen in Toyota, Siemens, Nestlé, and Unilever, combines PQA criteria with ISO 9001:2015 (2015) to achieve significant cost and time savings (Aldowaish et al., 2022; Quality and safety 2023). These companies have streamlined audits, reduced redundancy, and optimized resource use, resulting in enhanced efficiency and effectiveness. Integrating PQA and QMS frameworks promises future improvements in institutional and departmental processes, simplifying audits and strategically aligning them with organizational goals. Leveraging both frameworks enhances overall performance, supports continuous improvement, and fosters long-term organizational success.

3.4 Feedback to the Proposed Unified Framework of the Study

Based on insights gathered from a focus group discussion (FGD) involving 30 internal quality auditors (IQAs) presenting the proposed framework, unanimous support was expressed for integrating Philippine Quality Awards (PQA) criteria with the ISO Quality Management System (QMS) rather than maintaining separate systems. Participants articulated their views with specific statements:

One participant emphasized, *"They are two sides of a coin. PQA is the measurement of the effectiveness of QMS implementation."*

Another participant highlighted the need to avoid redundancy, stating, *"To avoid redundancy of audit findings."* Regarding cost considerations, a participant remarked, *"It will also lessen the cost as ISO is integrated already in PQA."*

Another participant expressed readiness for integration, stating, *"I would be willing to integrate PQA with the ISO QMS. This integration would greatly simplify work, minimize duplication, and enhance the quality and cost-effectiveness of tasks through more effective audits and a unified approach to continuous improvement."*

Participants noted similarities between PQA and ISO QMS, with one stating, *"PQA and ISO have similar areas."* Some emphasized cost-effectiveness, with a participant stating, *"To make it cost-effective."* Others highlighted the need for harmonization, with statements like, *"For cost minimization purposes."*

Another participant stressed consistency, stating, *"Since it has the same goal, I am amenable to integrating these two, PQA & ISO QMS, to strengthen its consistency to its objectives."* Lastly, a participant with limited knowledge about PQA expressed, *"Though I have limited knowledge*

about PQA, I think both adhere and aim for quality assurance and quality management, thus I think it is possible to be integrated."

These statements collectively underscore the IQAs' perspectives on the benefits of integrating PQA criteria with ISO QMS, emphasizing efficiency gains, cost savings, alignment of objectives, and the importance of management readiness in achieving effective quality management.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, merging the common criteria of PQA and QMS frameworks holds promise for future improvements in institutional and departmental processes. This integrated approach not only simplifies audit processes but also strategically aligns them with organizational goals, fostering sustained excellence in quality management. By leveraging the strengths of both frameworks, organizations can achieve enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, and overall performance, ensuring continuous improvement in quality management systems and long-term organizational success.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizations should adopt an integrated audit framework to streamline QMS audits, reducing redundancy and improving efficiency. Comprehensive training sessions for QMS auditors and personnel are crucial to ensure familiarity with the framework and its benefits. Regularly updating the framework to align with evolving PQA criteria and ISO 9001:2015 (2015), standards promote continuous improvement. Developing and implementing supportive organizational policies facilitates integration of QMS requirements, ensuring sustained efficiency and effectiveness. Prior to full implementation, pilot testing in a controlled environment helps refine processes and optimize effectiveness.

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