

2. CONTINUING EDUCATION NEED, ISSUES & CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT OF TECHNICAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

This paper discusses the need and role of Continuing Education, its relevance in present environment. It also discusses the issues, approaches and challenges in the field of continuing education. Some aspects of strategic management and marketing issues related with continuing education are also discussed. The paper mainly emphasizes on the applications of managerial functions applied to continuing education considering it as "institute within the institute". A case study is presented to share some efforts taken in the direction, which this paper advocates.

Key Words : *Continuing Education, sustainable growth, reskilling, Life Long Learning, principles of adult learning.*

In the current socio-economic transformations, technical education institutions cannot remain isolated and unaffected from the impact of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG). The institutes have to prepare for facing acute competitive environment, not only at the local scale, but also at global level. To survive in such situation the educational institutes, though are not 'Business firms' but should be managed 'business-like' with professional attitude

Once having accepted the above approach, as a first principle of business that 'Business either Grows or Goes', for the growth of any organization, it can expand with earning additional surplus revenue for the further development and sustenance. The first step towards this direction can be to remove the psychological blocks in the academic

community, regarding earning of revenues.

'Continuing Education' is an important area that can add the competitive strength to the institutes resulting not only in enhancement of monetary gains but also several other strategic advantages. Unfortunately continuing education is under-managed activity in many institutes despite their potential. Number of educational institutes carry out this activity but without strategic approach. Application of the management principles to continuing education can increase the effectiveness and productivity of it as an organizational activity

Therefore it is essential for the institutes to device well-thought management policies and implementation mechanisms leading towards professional performance, which should result, into the sustainable growth of continuing education.

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Continuing Education:

Continuing Education (C.E.) is the formal or informal means of 'reskilling' of the experienced learner, based on the philosophy of 'Life Long Learning', in which essentially, learning package is designed on the principles of adult learning, with the objectives of development of set of specified skills, up to the application level, supported with essential knowledge base.

The skill set may be related with horizontal or vertical expansion of the capabilities of the learner either to augment the existing set of skills or to develop the skills in all together different area for the job switchovers or the skills essential for tangible and / or intangible enrichment of life (enhancement of living standards). Different stakeholders of continuing education have their own perceptions about it depending upon their objectives (Table 1). Instead of treating CE merely as a 'side -product' of their services, if institutes take it as 'capacity expansion' and as a means for increasing 'Reach- Out' of their catchments area, it may provide better opportunities for institutional growth and faculty enrichment. Hence it should be treated as a concurrent activity to the regular operations than a side product.

Need of CEP programs

India has a typical complex problem of unemployment and under-employment of its human resources. When it is producing approx. 36 lacs of new graduates every year, simultaneously retrenchments are offered to thousands of current employees due to lower productivity of the business.

Industry also complains of non-availability of required quality of human resources whether experienced or fresh. The industry needs a proper blend of certain skills such as soft skills, electronics skills, technical skills and computer skills for taking on the business challenges.

As the business situations are dynamic, there is a need to master upon the new business

skills along with the generic skills. People in field find their skills & knowledge perishing against time. The aging and perishing of business skills set constraints on the productivity and hence on the employability of a person. So the employability skills need to be revived continuously through the training and development.

This indicates the need for a concurrent reskilling channels for intervening the present set of professional skills, an individual possesses.

To illustrate the HR market dynamics, following data collected time to time from various newspapers is presented.

- a) In next ten years, 110 - 130 million Indians will seek the Job to attain the \$87 billion IT sector business. Out of them about 80-100 million will look for their first job.
- b) Air lines related field: 10,000 technical persons in coming four years,
- c) Retail industry: 2 lacs trained personnel will be in demand
- d) Telecommunication: needs 30% more employees
- e) SME sector is about 95% (13.5 million units) of the industrial units in country, 40% of manufacturing output is coming from it. 35% of exports with the capacity to offer half the jobs in manufacturing sector are with SME.

These illustrations indicate that the employment opportunities are also expanding in multifold. The educational institutes, especially the technical institutes, have lot of opportunities and potential to tap the reskilling business i.e. continuing education. If planned and implemented strategically, institutes can strongly intervene in socio-economical transformations and steer them in the direction of improved social productivity through CEO

Various perceptions of Continuing Education

<p>Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Institutes generally have following views or objectives in conducting continuing education activities. ● A means for increasing interaction with industry ● Tool for judging current HR requirements ● Improved utilization of resources 	<p>Society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reengineering of the society members for enhancing employability ● Providing alternate learning opportunities to adult learners ● Providing informal/formal learning outlets for underprivileged learners Self employment enabler
<p>Industry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increasing the productivity of HR through augmentation of practical skills with necessary knowledge / skills ● Keeping pace with the advances in technology management practices and other business environment ● Training is essential for development of 'Knowledge Organization' ● Facility for developing human resources of small scale industries. ● Reenergizing the unorganized sector through skills development of operatives 	<p>Individual Learner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Means of stopping professional aging ● Means of self development for alternate avenues for employment ● Means of expanding employability traits ● Development of self employment avenues ● Enabler for enhancing self earning empoymnet

Table - 1

SWOT Analysis Summary

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Located in Business Capital ● Strong Infrastructure ● Professional Partnership Potentials ● Association with Industries ● Reputation ● Economic Offerings ● Autonomy 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Good Market Potential ● Diversified Market ● Reskilling Boom ● Computer Literacy ● Networking possibilities with Experts
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administrative Delay ● Lack of Integrated Approach ● Absence of Marketing ● Programs - Person Centered ● Less Consumer sensitivity ● Lack of involvement of All ● Team Spirit needs to be developed ● Heterogeneous Management of CEP's 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Competition from Private Institutions ● Professional Trainers

Fig. - 1

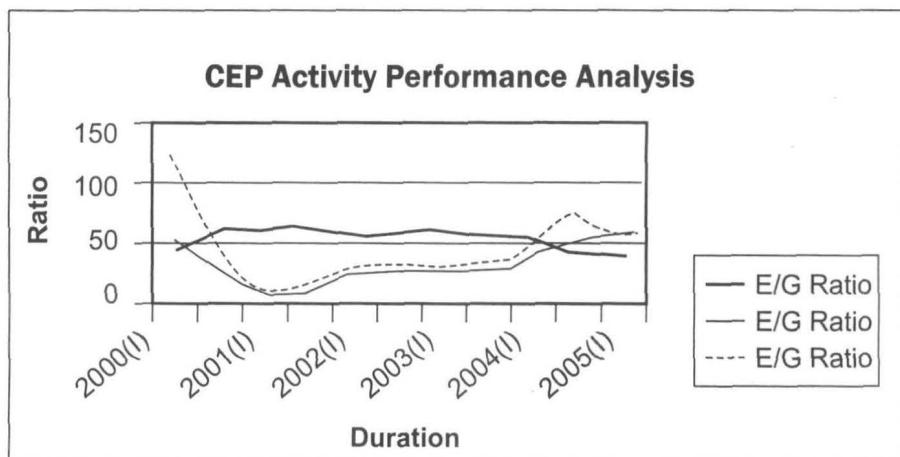


Fig. 2

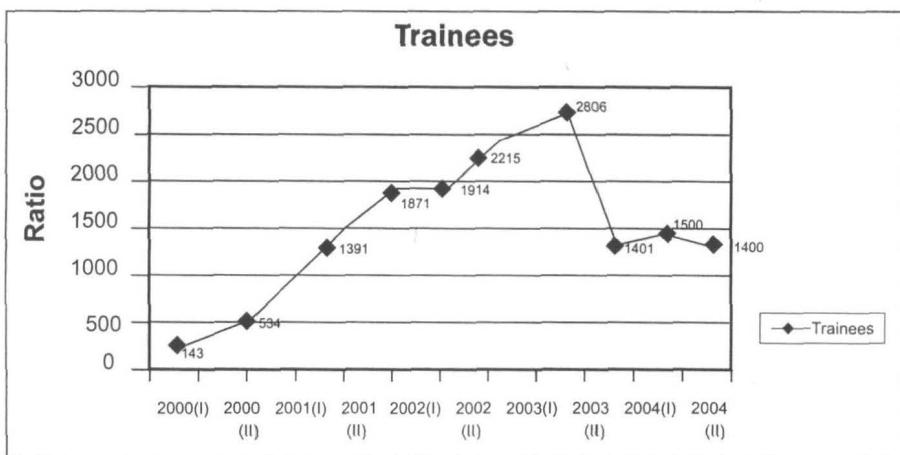


Fig. 3

Following are some of the issues discussed, which have direct impact on the CE activities performed by the institutes.

CE Management Issues:

As any other organizational activity, continuing education also has management issues related to people, finance, product development, administration, Quality assurance and marketing.

People related issues include leadership,

motivation, and recognition & reward system. Scientific identification of motivating and demotivating factors for people to contribute in CE activities is essential. Based on these factors policies and strategies should be designed with the objectives of maximum involvement of people and rationalization of reward system. Strategic use of Moslow's theory and Heisenberg's theory of motivation can help the institute managers to evolve workable policies and strategies because monitory factors may not be influential for every person.

Resource related issues include infrastructure, finance, resources utilization and maintenance, smoothening of resources demand, such as - administrative workforce, lab and technical personnel, faculty, lab resources.

But the priority should be given to the Faculty Development. As a resource, Faculties are the backbone in designing and implementation of continuing education activities. The policies should be intentionally developed for the knowledge acquisition by the faculty in current field. Faculty should develop their skills and attitude in converting the acquired knowledge & information to the competency - based, industry-responsive training product.

Product Design approach for designing training programs should involve use of scientific tools for identification of learners' needs, selection of the processes for development of structured program content, Involvement of industries in program development. This will develop an integrated approach in continuing education development & implementation the concept of **value stream analysis** can also be applied for increasing the productivity of the training programs.

Program implementation: Training programs differ from conventional learning with respect to expectation that they should be skill-based and mainly designed for adult learners. The challenge is in designing and implementing **Competency based** continuing education program. The conventional learning contents offered as Continuing Education Program results into failure. Program content design and implementation should follow the principles and practices of adult learning program implementation should be based on the psychology of adult learner respecting the learner's expectations. The adult learning is self-directed. Any criticism or negative response shuts down the learning process. If required, improvement suggestions should be given in supportive & respectful manner. The instructor has to act as a facilitator, mentor & coach. Immediate assistance to learner is more

effective. Self-evaluation by learner is more effective. The correlation of contents to his professional life, develops the ownership for the problems/ assignments/ experiences on which learning module is based. Small group/ batch sizes give opportunity to effective learning Supporting but challenging learning environment gives good results, Effective instructional methods for adult learners are - problem solving, case studies, group discussion, simulations, project assignments challenging the previous experience.

Administration issues include implementation guidelines such as SOPs, authority/ responsibility matrix definition, identification of bottleneck processes, training /academic administration and Management of funds.

Quality assurance is the crucial area in continuing education. This involves the establishment of credibility of certification through continuing education.

The employers, when are assured about the quality of the trained persons, can save on their test costs during recruitment, time and retraining cost. Industry is also interested in "Work-Ready" candidates that too Just in Time. The trainees' evaluation in terms of competency acquisition with scientific methods/ standards can improve the credibility of trainees as well of training programs.

The validity of the training program must be examined against the dynamic requirements of HR market. The business validity strategies will include to judging the future (short term) skill sets required in HR market, quickness in designing the pack to offer, administering the training program matching field expectations, system to analyze feedback for continual improvement. The ability of activity managers in deciding strategically about timely program withdrawal and doping of new program in CE array of institute is of business importance.

In evaluating training quality, immediate feedback is not sufficient but measurement of

impact of training after some time is more important. For that approaches like six-monthly feedback of pass-outs, life cycle costing, monitoring of key performance quality parameters etc. can be applied. Training market is highly elastic to the training cost and training quality.

Marketing

Marketing of continuing education is one of the important but neglected areas. The institutional marketing material either does not exist at all or is not designed with the principles of marketing. Therefore is not appealing to the potential customer, unable to convert customer's wants into needs.

The focus of the marketing material shall be potential customer (learner) than the glorification of the institute. The help desks for adult learners, electronics marketing, print & visual media marketing have their own pros & cons. Proper selection of marketing mix, understanding the targeted social cross section as the potential customers, proper selection of marketing media is important strategic factors. The periodic effectiveness review of the marketing strategies is essential.

A possibility can be checked for forming the cluster of institutions and adopting the common marketing drives. This may result in effective marketing, reduced cost. This may help in converting competitors into the allies.

Challenges

Continuing education has not stabilized in number of institutions in our country as a regular activity because of lack of professional attitude. The challenges in managing continuing education can be listed as-

- **Knowledge management**

Developing the system for the Knowledge management - acquisition, development and commercialization of it in the form of training program, is the challenging area

to remain competitive in global scenario. This may help the institutes to develop innovative training programs.

- **Establishing the credibility of certification**

Developing Credibility of certification of the CE programs in the HR market is the big challenge. Only high standards of instructions and professional evaluation of skills can bring the credibility. The credit transfer agreements with universities/ colleges for further education can be a advantageous to the learner which is totally missing in our country. This step can be helpful in establishing credibility of certification.

- **Approach for Training Product Development & Implementation**

Training products can be made truly value adding by designing them with a focus on development of the professional skills. This can be achieved with involvement of industry at design stage. The **DACUM** is one of the methodology available for it. But implementation of this type of program needs the prior preparation such as qualified trainer, development of instructional standards, development of evaluation standards etc. Proper implementation and evaluation is the major challenge in competency based program. Development of the learner-friendly, motivating, interactive learning material, allowing self-pace learning, contents with illustrations for CE learners is not available. Thoughtful design of assignments work such as '**WIG** - without instructions given' and '**BIG** - beyond instructions given' give a feeling of achievement motivation for the learner. Program instructional strategies must consider various categories of learning styles as visual learners, auditory learners, and kinesthetic learners.

- **Technology**

The physical boundaries as classroom, region etc are becoming absolute as new modes of learning are being developed such as distance learning, on-line education, blended learning etc. (a blended learning program implemented in Canada in Nursing Training is a successful example). Experimenting alternative modes of training methodology is the challenge. Because of globalization of education and technology, the competition is also becoming acute as a result of physical or virtual entry of foreign trainers. Also the corporate trainers within the country are emerging as competitors to educational institutes.

- **Industry Involvement**

It is observed that the industries are reluctant to offer contract-training assignments to educational institutes other than IITs & IIMs. Institutes have a big challenge to prove their ability for handling such tasks. Institutions can offer training most economically than the private trainers. For this the faculty exposure to industrial practices and meaningful interaction with industries through consultancy and R&D assignments through proactive approach is essential.

- **Resources Mobilization**

Many of the higher education institutions in India face the problem of under-management. The optimum utilization of resources at their discretion should be made. The use of techniques such as manpower requirement forecasting at local level, product mix design etc can help in this optimization.

A Case Study: Government Polytechnic, Mumbai

Background: Government Polytechnic,

Mumbai, established in 1960, is an autonomous institute. It is located at a strategic location in the suburb of the city. The institute reinforced its infrastructure with the World Bank Assisted Project (WBAP). As a component of WBAP, continuing education activities were initiated during 95 to 98. The most successful CEP was a contract-training program for the IOCL blue-collared work force in skill up-gradation, under which approx. 200 persons were reoriented towards their job. Some incidental programs, mainly in Teachers training were also organized but the impetus was lost after the project duration.

As an individual effort of some faculty, some CEPs on regular batch basis were inceptioned in collaboration with outside trainers. Activities were taking place but without specific policies. After some time it was observed that these training programs have developed into the isolated islands and CE was not getting the required momentum. This heterogeneous pattern of functioning was not showing expected growth.

It was an indication of the need of designing specific functional policies and setting up the mechanism for program implementation.

Incidentally one more project, Canada India Institute Industry Linkage Project was awarded to the institute with continuing education as one of its thrust areas. The project inputs were tailored to the local & institutional requirements and the Continuing Education System was redesigned. Some of the interventions have shown positive impact and are presented below.

The objectives of re-engineering the continuing education in this institute were -

- To establish the system for CE management which will result in sustainable growth in CE activities.
- To establish the mechanism for CE program implementation within the existing organizational structure, without disturbing the authority! responsibility matrix.

- To involve more number of people with the sense of belongingness in CE activities.
- To enhance the market responsiveness of CE activities.

SWOT analysis

The strategic review of the institutional potentials and hurdles in achieving growth in CE was taken with the SWOT analysis of the institute. The summary of which is presented in Fig 1.

Formation of advisory committee

The next step was to establish the advisory committee for continuing education (ACCE). The objectives were -

- To initiate a consultative approach for taking decision on CE issues
- To establish a policy formulating mechanism & strategy designing body for bringing uniformity in implementation of CE management
- To give a formal face to continuing education activity through establishing a centralized representative body at institute level.

The structure, scope and TOR of committee were decided. The next major intervention was to develop institute level guidelines & policies for continuing education.

Evolution of Policies

These policies were based on two important adoptions

- The CE functional control should be semi-centralized. ACCE is responsible for major policy and strategic decisions and departmental level program coordination committee is responsible for program implementation and administration.

- Advisory committee should have mainly "staff" function with the overall CE administration based on "Line & staff" structure.

The policies were evolved about the financial management, administration, and partnership with outside trainers, monetary rewards to involved people. The zest of these policies along with central thought line is discussed below.

1. The financial model should be self-controlling and making programs self-financing.

The identified expenditure heads have self-controlling budgetary built-in norms linked by the proportions of the total revenue collected by every batch of program. These proportions are uniform for all programs. Any indiscriminate expenditure automatically gets revealed out and the corrective actions can be taken.

2. To enhance the CE activity, it was decided to diversify in the areas which were totally different from the main stream operations of the polytechnic viz. sound recording, animation, mobile servicing, supervisory development etc. The expertise was borrowed through forming the joint agreement with the private trainers. It is an experience that the trainers wish to form partnerships because of location and goodwill of institute. Adopting the strategic alliance with outside trainers counteracted the major constraint of scarcity of the faculty and lack of expertise.

3. The evaluation criteria for forming the alliance were worked out.

4. The involvement of the people is a must for any change to take place. The program Administration structure was so defined that separate teams are managing the programs and in every team the persons

from sweeper rank to the HOD is involved. The teams are supposed to change after every four months so that everyone gets an opportunity to contribute. This substantially increased the peoples' interest. New proposals for the CEPs coming from the faculty are grossly encouraged.

5. The staffs from the accounting and administration are also involved from the rank of the peon to the administrative officer. Financial and academic responsibilities & authorities of every person involved in program administration are worked out.
6. The financial reward system is defined with the objectives that program administration and coordination expenses should be minimum; the persons directly involved in activity should get maximum reward. (Honorarium for faculty & lab assistant is more than Principal/HOD)

Quality Control

Feedback formats are designed and implemented considering all aspects of teaching learning process so that key quality performance factors can be derived from its analysis.

Some programs were developed with DACUM philosophy but due to infrastructural constraints could not be implemented.

Marketing

Various advertising media are tried and it is concluded that newspaper advertising and leaving student's opinion create the largest impact. It is also observed that a common advertise dilutes the impact. The different programs have different responses from the advertisements appearing in various newspapers. Specimen advertisements and brochures of programs were designed with the principles of marketing.

Outcomes

These interventions have resulted in the following outcome

- The CEPs increased quantitatively
- Previously existing CE activities expanded in new, diversified areas
- More involvement of people & increased alliance with outside trainers
- Uniform administration of CEPs achieved to certain extent
- Increase in the revenue generation
- In majority of cases, institute was successful in maintaining the program administration and coordination expenses within 4% (Cost reduction)
- Increased number of students for CEP
- Better understanding of demand variation pattern for programs
- Sensitization of faculty in marketing aspect & Development of marketing material for CE activities
- Fig. 2 shows fairly stabilized performance of some operational ratios clearly indicating better control of coordination & administrative expenditures.
- Fig. 3 shows increase in the number of trainees
- Joint venture in distance CE was launched as new area deviations from expected outcomes
- Frequent changes in advertising policies & absence of formal students services department have deteriorated the expected financial results
- Academic involvement of faculty could not be obtained due to shortage of staff

- Excellence in specific areas of training is yet to be achieved
- Training content updates are less frequent
- More partnership programs than the self-run program, limits the value addition to institute's academic gains
- Designed competency based programs were not implemented
- Feedbacks are not researched by many coordinators, defeating its purpose number of times
- Fig. 4 shows CE Management model with Systems approach

Conclusion

Continuing education is an important activity for social and institutional transformation. The application of scientific management can foster & strengthen it and can deliver the superior results. It can bring the institute industry close with 'win-win' relationship. Though some paradigm shifts are necessary in the current training management, some primary changes in work philosophy can be the good initiatives, which are demonstrated from the case presented. Continuing education is strategically important for institutes when funding to institutes is reducing day by day.

The professional approach in managing, administrating and delivering CE activities can reengineer the institute for the cutthroat competition

Quality from design stage to program delivery stage must be critically evaluated.

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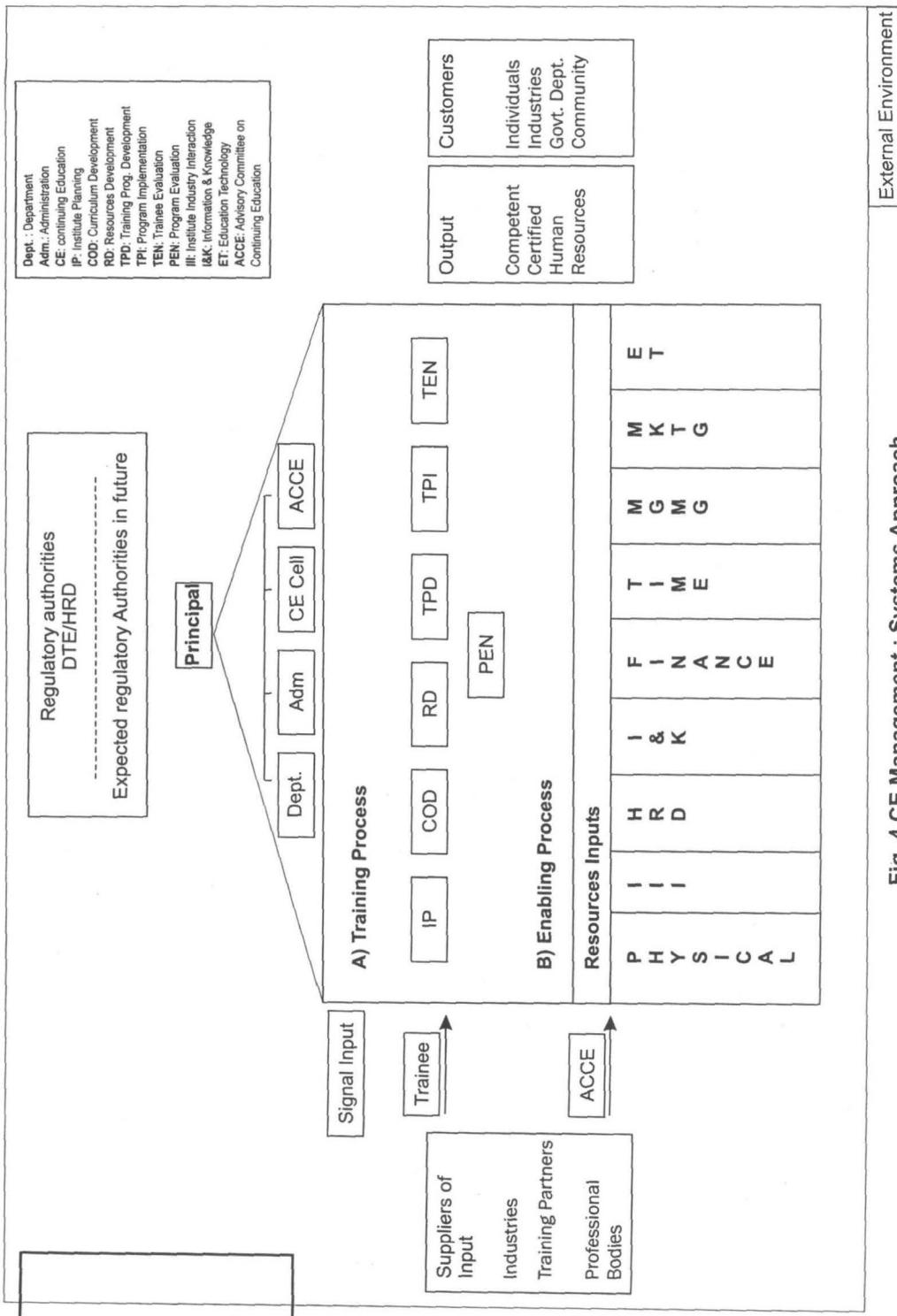


Fig. 4 CE Management : Systems Approach