

Quality management in the information sector

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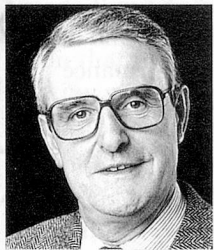
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QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN THE INFORMATION SECTOR

Barry Mahon, Executive Director, EUSIDIC, the European Association for Information Services, Luxembourg.



Quality Management in information environments Encourage the implementation of QM programmes through establishing meaningful guidelines is reported. At the Quality Management and more particularly Total Quality Management (TQM) have become important management techniques in recent years. Starting in Japan TQM has been enthusiastically adopted in the USA and in Europe. Although it is fundamentally a management technique it has developed into a philosophy of management because it incorporates motivational elements which encourage an attitude of quality throughout an organisation.

At its most fundamental TQM involves dedicating all the activities of an organisation towards delivering a quality product or service to the client. This technique can be and is applied within organisations so that for example internal services such as stores or maintenance can operate under a TQM regime even though their 'customers' are internal.

In order to implement a TQM system each employee has to know how their particular function fits in to the overall activities and each function has to be properly documented as part of the

overall activities. The more generic term is Quality Management or QM and since the information sector is wide ranging this term will be used in that context.

QM is often based on the tenets of ISO 9000, the international standard for quality management - which in turn was based on British Standard 5750, itself a derivative of a UK Ministry of Defence internal standard. Whilst it is obvious from this history that QM has come from the world of large organisations in the manufacturing/contracting sector, it is now recognised that the quality approach is also relevant to small organisations and to the service sector.

Implementation of QM in the Information Sector

Many organisations have implemented corporate-wide 'standard' TQM systems throughout their activities and this has included the information and documentation functions. In other organisations the information units, as well as other departments and functions have each implemented their own QM system. In either case the information functions have had to adopt and adapt QM procedures to their actions. Some elements of information products and services are relatively easy to incorporate in a QM programme - they can have clear measures of the required quality of the product or service supplied and can measure improvement or disimprovement over time. Other elements are more difficult to implement either because they cannot be measured or they are not sufficiently repetitive to be incorporated into a QM system. Therefore a scale of measures will be needed to deal with the disparate elements in the information sector. The key to the problem is seen in the accepted definition of quality as 'fitness for purpose', hence the

importance of the customer oriented approach. An approach to this problem is exemplified by the QM technique 'Quality Function Deployment' which seeks to achieve a common language of performance between the system designer and the system user. Quality in the QM context refers not only to conventional product quality, but to quality of service to customers from an organisation. Thus a computerised information service can measure the up time of the computers or the time lag for updating the database. In a document delivery service the number of photocopies delivered to clients in a given period is not necessarily a guide to the quality of the service but the speed at which one copy is delivered in response to one request is. Similarly the number of new documents added to a library is not the same measure of quality as the number of new documents added to a database.

Therefore the implementation of QM in the information and documentation sector is not a straightforward activity. Nonetheless, as a service industry, the sector needs QM both as a means of improving efficiency and as a means either of convincing management of the value of the information function and/or of obtaining funding. Whilst an overall measure of quality can not be expected to result, a series of options which cover both information and documentation functions, i.e. information products and library and documentation services are needed in order to implement QM techniques.

The ISO standards in the 9000 series have been developed for manufacturing applications and have been adapted to the service industries. However, the particular requirements of the information and documentation sector have only begun to be addressed. In particular an understanding of the

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concept of what constitutes a 'quality' product or service in the context of information products and services and the definition of activities within the information sector are needed. In order to do so in an effective way, co-ordinated action at a European level would be the most efficient method. This is not merely to add the European cachet to the activities but would serve to raise the level of quality in the different parts of information sector in Europe whilst ensuring a common set of objectives for the work.

Eusidic in partnership with Eurolog and Gavel have undertaken, with financial support from the European Union, a set of actions in late 1993 and early 1994 to:

- Evaluate attitudes to quality amongst information users, in particular the attitude to database quality.
- Examine the application of QM in a selected number of sites in Europe.
- Evaluate the options for quality measurement in some information functions.
- Make some suggestions for the rational implementation of QM techniques in Information Functions.

The series of actions necessary to achieve the desired objective, that of identifying the elements and defining the measures needed to underpin QM procedures in the information sector in such a way that the legitimate interests of producers, service intermediaries, management and users can be met constitute the present EQUIP project. The programme outlined below is designed to meet the requirements of all the parties and is also formulated in such a way that all can contribute to its successful outcome either by offering their expertise, their

organisational support or their financial contribution as appropriate. The concentration of the programme is on the creation of working definitions and not on finding absolute measures of quality. There is also a concentration on the measurement techniques, perceptions of quality by the different interests and the introduction of the concept of 'fitness for purpose' as a guiding concept in customer-oriented evaluation of information products and services.

- Identification of past and present experience in the service sector and particularly the information sector; work in hand and agencies and individuals already active (in conjunction with FID and the Nordic Group). Survey of the literature, of QM Standards and Quality Awards and of self assessment kits.
- Design and distribution of questionnaires relating to database quality. These questionnaires were formatted in such a way that typically information intermediaries could identify perceived quality criteria from both the supplier side and the consumer viewpoint. (A pilot test of

the questionnaire was undertaken in Germany, NL, and Ireland).

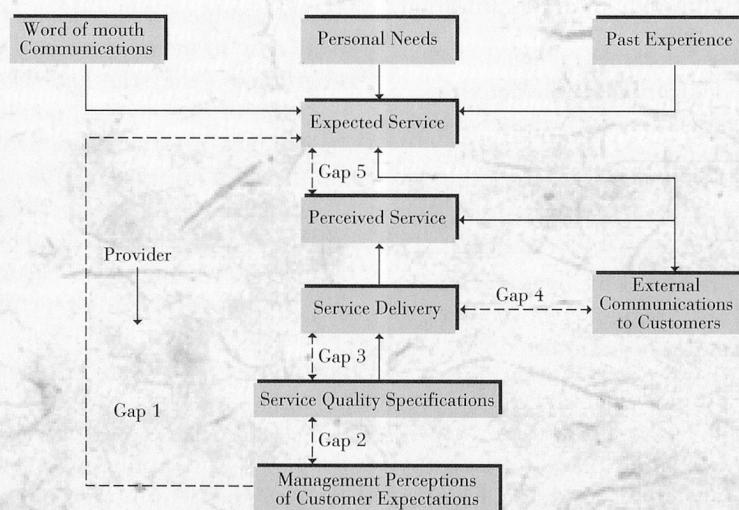
- At a later stage to involve the database producers in this survey, both in completing the same questionnaire and in commenting on and interpretation of the results from 2 above.
- Design and conduct interviews of organisations in the information sector implementing, or contemplating implementing, QM. These interviews will specifically include the same metric criteria and considerations as are present in 2 above.
- Using the results from 2 and 4 above, establish a performance evaluation 'tool kit' enabling both suppliers and users to establish Customer Satisfaction Indexes' at their interfaces. This tool kit will include modular criteria, and techniques for continuous monitoring, analysis and interpretation.

And, if resources permit:

- Case studies of organisations undertaking QM looking specifically at the information handling component (a top down approach complementary to that in 4 above).

The results to date

The conceptual model:



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Referring to the diagram:

It can be seen that Gap 5 is in the customer domain and reflects the mismatch between customer expectations and customer perception of actual service; while Gap 1 is the mismatch between customer expectations and the suppliers perception of customer expectations (the latter being, in effect, a service specification). The other three Gaps are internal to the supplier and thus to the area of QM.

This is the basic model of service provision that the EQUIP group has been working with, based on the work of Zeithaml¹. The emphasis of the work is to specify the meaning of two of the 'gaps' shown in the model, as they apply to information service supply.

Gap 5 (in the customer domain) representing the possible (or likely) mismatch between the expectations of the customer and the perceived service.

Gap 1 (which bridges the customer and provider domains) representing the mismatch between the managements perceptions of the customer expectations (which may or may not be manifested in a service specification) and the service perceived by the customer.

In particular the work is concentrating on:

- Gap 5 independently of particular database service suppliers, i.e. the customers expectations of data bases
- Gap 5 with respect to a particular supplier, i.e. the suppliers view of the service offered
- Gap 5 and gap 1 with respect to a particular supplier
- Gap 5 and gap 1 with respect to an inhouse database supply
- Gaps 1 to 5 with respect to an

Library & Information Service Intermediary and to a database supplier.

Finally, at a workshop to be held in Luxembourg on June 8 1994 both sides, the customer and the supplier, in the realm of electronic database service will discuss the following questions:

- Have you asked your customers or otherwise ascertained what quality expectations they have of your product(s) and/or service(s)?
- a) If yes, how have you assessed those expectations?
- What have you done to implement the expectations, assuming they were not being met already?
- a) Specifically how have you dealt with quality issues vis a vis on-line (and therefore more easily upgraded) and off-line (and therefore less easily changed) products?
- b) Given that 'coverage' is the number one quality related issue in users minds as indicated by the EQUIP survey, what specifically have you done to define your information products or services' coverage and how do you measure your status against the definition?
- c) What means have you implemented to establish a 'specification' for your products which can be objectively measured?
- What have you not been able to implement of your customers requirements and why?
- a) What specific economic issues have you come across which militate against the ability to deliver the customers needs for product quality?

Conclusion

This paper has described briefly the work being undertaken in the EQUIP project by Eusidic, Eurolog and Gavel. The work is ongoing and

it is hoped that the results can be fully discussed at the BDA 1994 Conference in Lausanne.

Quality Management in the information sector.

Total Quality Management (TQM) has become a fashionable management philosophy. Its origins in the Far East provoked a lot of interest in the USA and in Europe and has been held responsible for the seemingly inevitable take-over of manufacturing strength by Pacific Rim countries.

Its implementation in the Western cultures has been more pragmatic - being translated into the renewal of the well known phrase «the customer is king».

In the information sector TQM has been seen variously as a nuisance, a justification for bureaucracy, a system of control and as a means of measuring productivity. None of these really illustrate the role it could play.

In this paper the work of Eusidic in trying to time of writing the work is not completed so the results are partial.

Le «management par la qualité totale» dans le secteur de l'information.

Le «management par la qualité totale» (TQM) est devenu une philosophie de management à la mode. Ses origines extrême-orientales suscitèrent un énorme intérêt aux Etats-Unis et en Europe; cette méthode de management a d'ailleurs été tenue pour responsable de la reprise économique apparemment inévitable des pays bordant le Pacifique. Son implantation à l'Ouest a été plus pragmatique, puisqu'on a simplement réactualisé la locution bien

connue: «le client est roi». Dans le domaine de l'information, le «management par la qualité totale» a été considéré soit comme une nuisance, soit comme une façon de justifier la bureaucratie, soit encore comme un moyen de contrôle et de mesure de la productivité. Aucun de ces éléments n'illustre réellement le rôle que cette méthode de management pourrait effectivement jouer dans ce domaine.

Quality Management in the information sector.

Das «Totale Qualitätsmanagement» (TQM) ist eine Philosophie des modernen Managements geworden. Dieses fernöstliche Konzept hat in den Vereinigten Staaten und in Europa grosses Interesse ausgelöst; ihm wird der wirtschaftliche Wideraufschwung in den Staaten im Pazifikraum zugeschrieben. Seine Anwendung im Westen war pragmatischer, weil man einfacherweise die Redensart «Der Kunde ist König» reaktivierte. In der Domäne der Information ist das TQM bald als Störung, bald als Rechtsfertigung der Bürokratie oder als Instrument der Kontrolle und der Produktivitätsmessung betrachtet worden. Keines dieser Elemente zeigt wirklich die Rolle auf, welche diese Managementmethode in der Informationsbranche tatsächlich spielen könnte.

Quality Management in the information sector.

Il «management della qualità totale» (TQM) è diventato una filosofia di management alla moda. Le sue origini estremo-orientali hanno suscitato grande interesse negli Stati Uniti e in Europa; a questo metodo di management è d'altronde stata attribuita la responsabilità della ripresa economica apparentemente inevitabile dei paesi che costeggiano

il Pacifico. Il suo inserimento in Occidente è stato più pragmatico, poiché si è semplicemente già riattualizzata la nota espressione «il cliente è re». Nel settore dell'informazione, il «management della qualità totale» è stato considerato sia nocivo sia come un modo per giustificare la burocrazia, sia ancora come un mezzo di controllo per misurare la produttività. Nessuno di questi elementi illustra realmente il ruolo che questo metodo di management potrebbe effettivamente giocare in questo settore.

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Dr. Walter Lendi, Vorsteher des Amtes für Kulturpflege des Kantons St-Gallen.



1. Vielfältige Kultur - divergierende Interessen?

Der Aussenstehende ist immer wieder versucht, von der Kultur zu sprechen. Es meint damit etwas Einheitliches, Kohärentes, wie es sich vielleicht

beim Sport noch weitgehend finden lässt. Um so verblüffter ist ein Betrachter, eine Betrachterin, wenn er/sie entdeckt, dass nicht nur die einzelnen kulturellen Tätigkeiten recht verschieden sind, sondern darüber hinaus auch noch die Gesinnung der entsprechenden Kulturschaffenden. Auch ich bin immer wieder erstaunt, wie ausschliesslich, um nicht zu sagen einseitig Künstlerinnen und Künstler in ihrem Bereich sein können. Ich habe bisweilen das Gefühl, zwischen einem Maler und einem Musiker stehen Welten. Nicht dass sie sich gegenseitig beargwöhnen oder gar bekämpfen würden, aber ein deutliches Mass an gegenseitiger Indifferenz ist fast immer auszumachen. Es wäre ungerecht, den Kulturschaffenden Ihre Einseitigkeit zum Vorwurf machen zu wollen, denn wer etwas erreichen will, der muss sich spezialisieren; wer sich spezialisiert, kann der Einseitigkeit wohl nie ganz entgehen. Wer sich dagegen wenig vertiefen muss, wie der Kulturkonsument, der hat es leicht, sich seines vielfältigen Interesses zu rühmen. Wenn wir vom verpassten Ständemehr in der Abstimmung über einen Kulturartikel in der Bundesverfassung am 12. Juni 1994 absehen, so darf uns das Volksmehr von rund 51 Prozent doch auch trösten, denn daraus ergibt sich unwiderlegbar, dass eine wenn auch knappe Mehrheit des Volkes eine Kulturförderung der öffentlichen Hand als zeitgemäss betrachtet. Ich würde behaupten, dass die Abstimmung positiv ausgegangen wäre, wenn es nur ein bisschen mehr gelungen wäre, seitens der Kulturschaffenden deutlicher spartenübergreifendes Interesse und damit Geschlossenheit zu dokumentieren. Der Bürger und Kulturkonsument als Pendant hätte sich von einer geschlosseneren Haltung der Aktiven