



**LUND
UNIVERSITY**
Campus Helsingborg

Prerequisites for quality improvements in the library

Anette Hallberg, M.Sc.

**Division of Quality Technology and Management
Centre for Studies of Humans, Technology and Organization
Department of Management and Engineering, IEI
Linköping University
SE-581 83 Linköping
Sweden**

anette.hallberg@liu.se

Keywords: *Service quality, library, learning, customer, involvement*

Category: *Research paper*

Why is service quality important to the library?

The library has since long been well positioned in society. In recent years the European life long learning initiative has brought an increasingly amount of adult learners and distance students to the library. As a consequence the library has had to move towards changing customer needs in direct or indirect contact with pedagogues and educators. The library today is positioning itself both as an institution and an actor for the adult learner. Loomba and Spencer (1997) point at the fact that government agencies are facing intense competition through the deregulation of service markets. Not used to competition, the library is an example of an organization that interacts directly with the customer and that needs to attract the user to fulfil its mission and to legitimate financial support from the government. The implementation of quality improvements in the library means a change from an inner process oriented view, to a customer oriented interactive approach. It is the intersection between the public tradition and the service of the customer in a market oriented environment that creates a challenge for improvements of library service quality.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore the prerequisites for quality improvement in a public library.

Methodology

The method used is literature studies and interviews based on case studies. The study has been going on from December 2003 until December 2004. The analysis of the interviews has been done in accordance to clustering. The study includes two English libraries, the Bow Idea Store and the Dover Discovery Centre and three Swedish libraries in the county of Östergötland and study centres in Sweden, all part of the Swedish national network and project going on between 2003-2005 "The Role of the Local Library and Adult Learning" initiated by the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs. The English libraries are part of a national effort by the Secretary of State for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, which launched the first Idea Store concept in April 1999 with the aim of attracting new users to the libraries and to get more people to take part in adult education and is based on London's most comprehensive opinion survey about libraries. Also the Dover Discovery Centre was based on a local opinion poll.

Challenges for quality improvements in public organizations

Kravchuck and Leighton (1993) have concluded that little is known about factors leading to successful TQM implementation within state agencies. They hypothesize that successful implementation of TQM is contingent on a strong managerial and hospitable administrative culture. A prerequisite, and a preparatory step to succeed with quality improvements according to Juran (1992) is an adequate level of awareness and understanding among employees about both the customer and the organization itself. Juran (1988) and Deming (1986) discuss the importance of a nurturing environment. A study from Loomba and Spencer (1997) by the Iowa Quality Government Team identifies the specific environmental elements to be; the organizational climate, the commitment of leadership, the emphasis of continuous improvement, and feedback from administrative culture. According to Salaman and Butler (1994), in order to change appropriately, the libraries must be able to analyze themselves, their process structures and environments, be able to identify preferred and appropriate response and be able to implement them. This means that there is a twin challenge for the library; to learn and to learn from the learning (Rowley, 1997)

Kaboolian (1999) argues that the market is relatively unimportant to public organizations. There is often a fragmentation of interests. The political environment can be complex, dynamic and authoritative (Moore, 1995). According to Sinclair (1991), due to separation between the management and the control, public organizations are very sensitive to changes in the political influence. Rainey *et al.*, (1976) conclude that public organizations have less autonomy and flexibility than at decision making than private organizations. Kaboolian (1999) stresses that the more complex and fractious the political environment and the more exposed the public organization is to its environment, the less likely is it to have stable measures of performance. Public organizations receive mixed signals from the environment about the purpose and mission of their organization. Evaluating and reporting on performance is difficult for the public sector with ambiguous goals (Kaboolian, 1999).

Kaboolian (1999) presents nine hypotheses to succeed with quality methods in a public organization:

- Stakeholders are united and support the organization's goal
- Stakeholders are silent and management adapts the methods
- The external environment more closely approximates a market with identifiable customers
- Tasks are clearly defined
- Goals are defined as outcomes rather than processes
- Technologies are more certain to produce desired results
- Definitions of organizational performance are clear and uncontested
- Outcomes can be measured
- Rewards are linked to performance.

In examine the usefulness of quality methods, it is important to take into consideration the different levels of where the implementation should be done. Claver *et al.*, (1999) points at that the public administration of each country has its own features and that sub-divisions make it difficult to study the characteristics, role and changes in organizational culture in public administration from a general point of view.

Challenges for quality improvements in the library

The difficult to implement quality is the fact that both political and business agendas shape the environment in which information providers operates (Rowley, 1997), which is true for the library as being part of a complex external environment with heterogeneous interest groups. Pors (2003) points at the importance of creating increased visibility of the library sector through branding, political contacts and public relations. A study from Loomba and Spencer (1997) shows that the greatest barriers for successful TQM implementation in the library lies in the agency culture, organizational structure and management policies. The question of a quality culture is discussed by Dahlgard (2002), who argues that the key question in connection with implementing TQM in practice is how to create quality consciousness among all employees. One aspect of the organizational structure is that the libraries must abandon strategies, systems and sources that is not valuable for the user and that the libraries must organize around the end user (Spies, 2000). Line (1996) argues that the library is driven by processes rather than by services and customers. The importance of the management is also stressed by the European Foundation for Quality Management, the EFQM model, and points at the leadership as a driving force for the Business Results. According to an English survey, presented by Johannsen (1995), there seems to be an unspoken agreement that a library's quality project or program typically consists of such components as a mission statement, a definition of service quality level, clearly stated quantitative targets or percentage rate of success, data collection methods and top management support. Johannsen (1995) claims that there does not seem to be an agreement on terminology except from terms such as performance measures and performance indicators. Terms such as quality assurance and total quality management seems to be a little "fuzz around the edges" in the Library and Information Services sector.

Results and discussion

Quality as a change process

Two dimensions have emerged as central when implementing service quality improvements in the library; the ability to learn and to develop the library activities from a customer's point of view and the involvement of the library staff.

Lawes (1996) concludes that a quality implementation will require a new librarian role and that the role will change from that of the provider to that of the consultant and the enabler as the library takes an active part in a quality change process. Also Bakewell (1997) argues that the librarians will have to become more service oriented. Hallberg and Sipos (2007) conclude that to improve the customer interaction the communication, competence of the librarian and the library network has to be improved. It is shown that the library needs to recognize its roles around the user. The management has to support a librarian that acts in a process oriented way, which means that the librarian has the role of the inspirer, the mentor/coach and/or the contact creator. The recognition of the roles can contribute to the library knowledge of the market and the customer and help the library to identify quality improvement opportunities and to act pro-actively to meet the need of the customer. It may also facilitate the creation of learning opportunities for the library.

The implementation of quality improvements can be viewed as a process of change. The prerequisite to succeed with quality improvements in the library is assumed to be related to the same prerequisites as for other library change projects. The basis for this assumption is that the challenges for implementation facing a change project is more related to the internal library environment than to the specific project type. Research from the Swedish library sector when implementing a national project for adult learners shows the importance of the involvement of the staff at an early stage. The staff was concerned about how to implement the project locally and how to manage it. They were also concerned about the relevance of the project, how to deal with the expectations of the customers as well as how to deal with an increasingly number of adult learners (Hallberg, 2005). Other example of staff involvement in a quality change process is when the staff owns the change and when they have an interest in making it successful (Farley et al., 1998). Without staff cooperation, at all levels, research indicates that 90% of change initiatives will fail (Goulding, 1996).

Experiences from another large library system implementation project showed that the staff was worried about their own competences, the complexity of the technology and that they would not have enough time to learn. The way to manage these fears was by training and communication (Farrow, 1997). For the Swedish library sector, training and communication was used as a tool to involve the staff in the project for adult learners throughout the whole project period (Hallberg, 2005). Loomba and Spencer (1997) argue that to institutionalize quality in any government agency, "employees at all levels need to be trained, empowered and rewarded for team work. Above all, to achieve better organizational performance through TQM agency management needs to create an environment that fosters learning, open communication and teamwork."

Conclusion

The ability to learn and to develop the library activities from a customer's point of view as well as the involvement of the library staff can help the library to improve the service quality.

To deal with the customer the development of the role of the librarian as an inspirer, a mentor/coach and/or the contact creator is essential. The ability for the library to create quality improvements is highly dependant of its ability verify its activities from a customer's point of view. As the customer is a vital part of the prerequisites for quality improvements, the setting of the customer is important. The customer is part of an environment of educators, pedagogues, and other students, which indirectly will have an impact on the demand of the library service quality. The network and the dialogue with the environment of the customer are therefore emerging as vital prerequisite for the library to develop quality improvements.

The internal involvement of the library staff in the implementation of quality improvements as a process of change is clear. Another example of involvement deals with the library and the external environment, and for the library to be able to further develop the service quality concept in terms of attracting heterogeneous customer groups as well as getting to know the market better. Systematic, long term collection of data from the market will serve as prerequisites for library quality improvements. For the Swedish libraries in the study, the challenge is to re-direct to include also non library users. For the first Ideas Store in London, which opened in 2002, the location was essential. The combined library and study centre is located near the local shopping mall, which has shown to be a successful way of building customer focused activities.

REFERENCES

- Bakewell, K.G.B. (1997), *Managing User-centred Libraries and Information Services*, (2nd ed.), Mansell, London.
- Claver, E., Llopis, J., Gascó, J.L., Molina, H. Conca, F.J. (1999), Public administration From bureaucratic to citizen-oriented culture, *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*, Vol. 12, No.5, pp. 455-464.
- Dahlgaard, J.J., Kristensen, K., Kanji, G.K. (2002), *Fundamentals of Total Quality Management*, Nelson Thornes Ltd, United Kingdom.
- Deming, W.E. (1986), *Out of the Crisis*, Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Center for Advanced Engineering Study.
- Farley, T., Broady-Preston, J., Hayward, T. (1998), Academic libraries, people and change: a case study of the 1990s, *Library Management*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 238-251.

Farrow, J. (1997), Management of change: technological developments and human resource issues in the information sector, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 312-324.

Goulding, A. (1996), *Managing Change for Library Support Staff*, Avebury, Aldershot.

Hallberg, A. (2005), *Kundorienterad biblioteksverksamhet en jämförelse mellan bibliotek och lärcentra i Sverige och England*, LiTH-IKP-R-1379, Linköping.

Hallberg, A. and Sipos-Zackrisson, K. (2007), Customer interaction for improvement of library service quality, submitted to *The International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management*.

Johannsen, C.G., (1995), *Quality Management in the Library and Information Services Sector*, The Aarhus School of Business, Department of Total Quality Management, Denmark.

Juran, J.M. (1988), *Juran on Planning for Quality*, New York: Free Press.

Kaboolian, L. (1999), "Quality comes to the public sector", *The Quality Movement in America*.

Kravchuck, R.S and Leighton, R. (1993). "Implementing Total Quality Management in the United States", *Public Productivity and Management Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Autumn 1993, pp. 71-82.

Lawes, A. (1996), Training for change, *Library Management*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 29-31.

Line, M.B. (1996), The universal library report, *Library Management*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 33-36.

.Loomba, A.P.S and Spencer, M.S. (1997) A model for institutionalizing TQM in a state government agency, *International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management*, Vol. 14, No. 8, pp. 753-767.

Moore, M.H. (1995), *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Pors, N-O. (2003), Perspectives on Managing Change in Danish Libraries, *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, Vol. 29, No. 6, pp. 411-415.

Rainey, H.G., Backoff, R.W., Levine, C.H. (1976), Comparing Public and Private Organizations, *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 233-244.

Rowley, J. (1997), The library as a learning organization, *Library Management*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 88-91.

Salaman, G. and Butler, J. (1994), "Why Managers won't learn", in Mabey, C. and Iles, P. (Eds), *Managing Learning*, Routledge/Open University, New York, NY, and London, pp. 34-42.

Sinclair, H. (1991), After excellence: models of organizational culture for the public sector, *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 50, No. 3, pp. 321-332.

Spies, P.B. (2000), Libraries, Leadership, and the future, *Library Management*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 123-127.