RESEARCH ARTICLE

APPLYING QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN THE PROVISION OF INFORMATION SERVICES IN LIBRARIES IN TODAY'S INFORMATION AGE

Mang'ira Roselyne

Chepkoilel University College, Kenya, Email: rtmangira@gmail.com

Kitoi Andrew

Moi University Library, Kenya, Email: skitoi@yahoo.com

Barnabas Kipkorir Bett

Kabianga University College, Kenya, Email: bettbk@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews relevant literature on quality management concepts, its brief history, its applicability by profit-making institutions and how it is now finding its way into non-profit making institutions (e.g. libraries) due to current developments. Researches done have shown that incorporating quality management in today's organisations cannot be avoided. The paper identifies common practices in libraries which are no longer relevant in today's environment and proposes the need for re-evaluation to allow for the adaption of quality management method. This paper also explains why there is a need for a paradigm shift in today's libraries or information units and suggests what could be done by the librarians to bring quality to information service unit. In addition, the paper highlights barriers encountered while attempting to apply quality management in information services in libraries/information units in today's libraries.

INTRODUCTION

Quality management concept was established around early 1950s when Dr. W. Edwards Deming used his own quality methods to help Japan move into the global competitive marketplace as observed by St. Clair (2000). Since then, major contributions have been made on the different perspectives on its concept and in particular, to information quality as it relates to organizational quality. In the library and information services profession, quality management has generated a lot of controversy as observed by several authors. The resistance could be explained by the fact that the management and delivery of information is usually relegated to a less-than-essential role in the organisational framework, where the services are not taken very seriously since they do not generate any income. To overcome such challenges, libraries/information units must be ready to re-evaluate their information service delivery processes and procedures and they should be flexible enough to move away from concentrating on systems and to adapt new paradigm shifts which are customer-service-focused to enable them succeed in the present competitive information age. It is important to adapt total quality management to information services management, rather than the other way round. According to St. Clair (2000), the accepted principles of quality management are effective in a library, records management unit or other type of information delivery function and so there is no harm in adapting them. 'Quality' has been defined by Feather and Sturges (2003) as 'conformance to the requirements of user' and fitness for user's purpose. Quality management is characterised by its emphasis on: customer service, accurate measurement, continuous improvement, work relationships based on trust and teamwork.

CHALLENGES TO LIBRARIES IN TODAY'S INFORMATION AGE

Currently, libraries are facing a lot of challenges due to: competition from other information providers such as cybercafés; increasing pervasiveness of the Internet and the rapid development of digital libraries; shrinking resource support by parent institutions due to scarcity of resources worldwide; a shift in service orientation from 'just in case' to 'just in time' and to 'just for you; and increased customers'

Corresponding author: rtmangira@gmail.com

knowledge on the required information, where to find it, how to find it and how to use it once found. In the current information age, libraries which are sensitive to the changes in their environment and are ready to adjust to them are the only ones that can survive.

OLD PRACTICES WHICH ARE COMMON IN MOST LIBRARIES

There are certain traditions which librarians have practiced over a long period of time, and have become a library culture. Such of these practices include the following:

Overdependence on Parent Organisation

It is truism that it was proper for libraries to depend on their parent organisation. But with the scarcity of resources worldwide, it is now not possible to support them fully, hence necessitating libraries to find ways and means of survival with the little resources allocated to them by parent organisations. Most libraries have not appreciated this fact and have refused to adapt to change. Other competitors like cybercafés in the liberalised economy have taken advantage of this loophole endangering the survival of "conservatist" libraries.

Strict Follow-Up of Procedures and Processes by Librarians

Librarians have had rules and regulations governing their activities and procedures. Some of these rules and regulations include: having specific hours of opening and closing the libraries, set days of lending a book, etc. These practices do not work in today's information age. No wonder in attempting to find a balanced perspective for the management of information services, a positive one, St. Clair (2000) noted that 'a more optimistic approach is called for.

Failure to Incorporate Information Units' Mission into Parent Organisations' Mission Statement

While formulating their departmental vision and mission statement, most library managers fail to incorporate the overall parent organisational vision and mission statement, therefore failing to fulfil the expectations of the parent organisation – consequently, in most cases, they fail to be supported by the parent organisation.

Lack of Customer Service and Customer Care Skills by Librarians

A number of librarians lack empathy and patience, willingness to take on customer's problem, willingness to do a follow-up about an information product, service or consultation that has been delivered, and alertness to work under pressure and true interest to serve customers.

Failure to Include Information Users in the Selection of Books and E-Resources

Traditional librarians have been judges of what information sources their customers should access. They have been selecting information materials without involving their users,

hence selecting irrelevant sources which are not attractive to customers.

Departmental Barriers

Majority of the libraries have various departments that tend to compete with each other. Some of these departments include: customer care, technical, systems, among others. It is noteworthy that although positive competition is healthy and may enable libraries achieve their missions, negative competition is counter-productive. In this regard, many departments in libraries tend to forget that they are all working for the good of the entire library which supports parent organisations thus hindering the flow of quality services.

Fear or Lack of Confidence by Library Staff to Initiate Quality Practices

Subordinate staffs in the library have been used to giving subordinate services and leaving innovation to library managers and senior managements. They refuse to be innovative, or make positive contribution for the improvement of library services to improve the image of the libraries. In the current age, all staff should be involved.

Lack of Delight and Enthusiasm while Serving Library Users

As Mang'ira (1999) observes, library staff in most libraries serve without delight and enthusiasm. They seem not to enjoy their duties. In fact, some of them complain in the presence of their customers and exhibit rudeness and are not cooperative to their customers.

No Value Added to Information Services

Traditional librarians have been avoiding the use of business concepts which are geared towards meeting and exceeding customers' expectations adding no value to information needs, hence, not attractive to library users.

Lack of Continuous Learning and Training

Library staffs lack continuous training and refresher courses which would, in effect, render them more knowledgeable and enlightened on how they can easily satisfy their customers' information needs. However, due to lack of this training in current information technologies and trends, a traditional librarian may not be in a position to effectively serve customers who are well versed with the kind of information required and how to find it. In conclusion, it is thus arguable that the practices discussed above do not work in the current information environment where there are many options for customers. Librarians ought to think of changing their attitudes and ways of doing things in order to be able to meet and satisfy the expectations of the new breed of customers who value information. St. Clair (2000) states that we must move our customers from that old-fashioned perspective to one that truly reflects the positive effects of information delivery that will make customers confident about the products, services and the consultations which we will provide for them.

THE NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT IN LIBRARIES

Since there are socio-economic changes that have taken place in all spheres of life and in particular the information field, for example manual information service delivery, information processing, to the use of stand alone computers, and now in a network and virtual environment, it is important that librarians adopt new paradigm shifts to be able to cope up with new changes. Joel Barker (2000) in St Clair (ibid.) encourages people to think about the paradigms – the models on which management practices are built. He further notes that in the library and information services field, the paradigm has shifted and managers and faculty advisers must move in a different direction if they are going to be prepared to be a manager in library and information service work.

Some of the things that call for a paradigm shift include:

1. Changing role of the librarians and /or information providers.
2. Technological changes.
3. The authority of the present customers which was not the case in past.
4. Value attributed to information in today's information age. No wise decision can be made without information.
5. Financial cutbacks: only those that justify their existence are supported by their parent organisations.
6. Competition due to globalisation (liberalised market); so librarians must be sensitive to their environment.

NEW PRACTICES THAT COULD LEAD TO QUALITY TO INFORMATION SERVICES

Librarians in the current information age are expected to assume new roles and to change their practices by:

Establishing Consistency of Purpose for Service Improvement

Librarians should do a follow-up and establish if customers and the management are happy with their services and find ways of improving them to attract them back or continue getting support.

Adopting the New Quality Philosophy

Librarians should adapt business concepts (e.g. benchmarking) to enable them compare their processes, products and services operations with the best organisations in the world with similar functions.

Continuous Improvement and Quality Assurance as the Key to Excellent Service

Every library staff should have a self initiative to continuously improve the information services. Quality assurance, according to Fredenburg (1988), 'is the link in acting on, rather than reacting to, an administrative mandate to produce results, justify the library's worth and relate what library is and does to the organisation's strategies and goals.'

Ending the Practice of Awarding Vendor Business based on Price Alone

The management of most organisations and information managers, for a long time, has been used to purchasing goods and services from the lowest bidder which in most cases are of lower quality and which don't last. Instead of searching for cheaper suppliers, they should strive to establish long-term relationships with their vendors which will help them improve on their performance by meeting their customers' expectations.

Applying the Total Quality Management (TQM) Concept

It is important for librarians to realise that the whole issue about TQM must be continued. That's why before settling on this initiative, a departmental manager is encouraged to advocate to all stakeholders and obtain a go-ahead before undertaking this initiative if this idea originated from the department and if it is from the management. They must be informed that this is a journey and not a destination.

Institute Training and Education Programmes for Staff Improvement

There should be continuous education programmes to be able to operate and handle new projects. This can be achieved through activities such as in-house training, professional conferences and formal education among others. If quality has to be achieved, people must posses right skills to give them confidence to work.

Change Leadership Styles

Information Managers must become role models and not bosses who tell people to do as they say and not as they do. It is important to inculcate a spirit of collaboration and working as colleagues to improve on performance.

Empowering Employees so as to Work Effectively

In today's information environment, awareness has been made that ideas made by a group of people are better than one person's ideas and suggestions. Employee empowerment is a complex management tool that has proven that when applied properly, it can be effective in improving performance, productivity and job satisfaction as noted by Nykodym (1994). Employee empowerment involves willingness on the part of managers and supervisors to 'let go', to allow a subordinate to exercise judgement and participate in decision-making process. To nurture these new structures that put everyone in the organisation to work, managers should encourage staff to be open minded and free to contribute their ideas.

Breaking Down Barriers between Departments

Departmental goals can interfere with another's in such a way that it can affect the performance of the entire library. Departmentalism must be replaced by identification with the mission of the entire library and not allowing heads of departments to set their own goals which are not in line with overall libraries mission. Every goal must be targeted to, eventually, support parent organisation's mission statement.

Equitable Staff Promotion

Managers must be very careful in awarding those staffs who are thought to be doing better than others. Fairness and justice should be applied to encourage everyone on board. Otherwise those not motivated might leave a few favoured staff to offer services alone, which affects the quality of service offered.

Eliminating Numerical Quotas, including Management by Objectives

It is important for managers to know that people are made differently and have different ways of working. Some are quick to complete tasks assigned to them whereas others are too slow. Setting work standards, as some managers and supervisors have been doing, hinder productivity since very few will be motivated to produce beyond the expected levels.

Removing Barriers that Rob People of Pride in Workmanship

Many managers, especially librarians, are not aggressive enough to solicit for financial support to help them acquire and maintain their materials, such that many of our libraries today possess outdated equipment such as out-dated or obsolete computers which they might have received through a donation a long time ago, majority keep substandard materials and some staff are led by authoritarian managers. All these hinder quality initiatives thus poor performance which makes customers get bored and run away to places where there are better services.

Creating a New Structure that puts everyone in the Organisation to Work

In information services management, the establishment of a quality environment is obviously an appropriate step in the movement towards improved information delivery. There is a desire for quality and recognition of the authority of the customer which is the critical element underpinning the quality perspective. St. Clair (2000) observes that the information services managers who recognise these new work relationships will take steps to move towards a specific workplace and organizational culture that recognizes The value of 'people' skills and relationships The role of employee empowerment in effective information services delivery The importance of teamwork and teambuilding Teamwork leads to highly motivated environment, shared ownership responsibility, faster response to technological change, common commitment to goods and values, and provides for increased communication - hence better decisions and improved service delivery.

Adding Value to Information Services

'Adding value', according to St. Clair (ibid.), means doing more, going beyond the simple solution to the customer's problem. An example of this is finding out from the customer if s/he found what s/he wanted or if s/he is satisfied with the service. This way, customers will develop trust on the information unit which will make them visit the unit and so retention of customers is assured of.

Making all the Stakeholders Understand your Business of Implementing Quality Information Services

Although managers need a practical 'hands-on' step-by-step guide to developing and implementing a quality initiative in the library, staff in the department together with all other stakeholders should understand that the endeavour and the investment is a serious one so that each one of them becomes committed.

Being Accountable to Customers

An information staff/manager is expected to be accountable to the customer since customers of the present information society have authority and her/his judgement on an information officer is taken with a lot of seriousness unlike before. This calls for a continuous improvement on service delivery by the department.

The Need to Put Emphasis on Analysing Information User's Problem(s)

Some procedures in information handling and delivery are unnecessarily too long and time consuming which delay a user from accessing the required information promptly. This has created negative image for libraries. To change this image, there is need to analyse a user's problem and provide them with relevant information sources instead of putting emphasis in the procedure set and failing to meet a user's information need(s) on time.

Adopting Appropriate Process Technology

The present customers in the information age understand the value of up-to-date information that will enable them make quick informed decisions to achieve their goals. This becomes possible if the right modern technologies are adopted.

Becoming Sensitive to an Environment

Librarians ought to be sensitive to changes that take place within and without their environment to be able to understand what is going on around them. They need to know the people who are holding financial authority to enable them convince them about their quality initiative. They will also be able to know who their competitors are and to prepare to compete with them effectively.

The Need to Understand the Mission of the Parent Organisation

Quality management without organisation approval makes the task more difficult, hence the need for managers to ensure that their goals are set in supporting the parent organisation. Since customers are important to any organisation, information providers (libraries) should concentrate more on customers' needs and not on bureaucratic and institutionalised procedures which are of advantage to staff in those departments. Their vision statement must be clear to avoid misinterpretation over meaning, short, catchy and memorable, challenging and not out of reach, empowering so as to involve all people in vision attainment and value-laden to reflect the values of the organisation and the people involved in product production and delivery as noted by Weller et al. (1994).

Becoming Proactive in Marketing and Delivering of Information

Librarians must market their services and products to attract more customers and to be seen to be doing something by their employers. As information delivery staff, in an information unit, they should take a proactive, creative and positive approach while delivering information services and products to retain the existing customers as well.

Image Building and Social Responsibility

Librarians or those entrusted by information delivery responsibility should bring enthusiasm to information delivery process so that as information users see that librarians are ready to serve them, they will get attracted to them and become free to ask for assistance.

Involving the Information Users in the Selection of Information Resources

Since customers are very important in the present information society and have authority, they should be given an opportunity to participate in the selection of information materials.

Doing a Follow-up of Services Delivered

In the past, librarians did not see follow-up as an important and a good practice that needed to be developed and nurtured. They were not bothered as to whether their clients were satisfied or not. This should not be the case today since librarians will need to rely on the comments, suggestions and general feedback from their customers to improve their services.

Management of Change by Managers

Managers of any institutions are the vision bearers of those organisations and are the ones who can spoil or make their organisations flourish. They are the same people who employ managers of different departments to support parent organisations and the plans they are having. This is critical otherwise many people resist change because of several reasons, one of them being uncertainty.

Continuous Improvement Component in Information Services Units

Temponi (2005) notes that implementing and maintaining a continuous improvement initiative in information services environment is a challenging but an ever-increasing process since it continuously seeks after new and better ways of doing what has to be done and not necessarily to do better what is already being done. There is a misconception by most managers, as observed by St. Clair (ibid.), that 'quality is a fixed goal set by specifications and once it is achieved it need not be improved'. The desire for continuous improvement must be inculcated in the organisations.

Identifying the Customers and Targeting to Meet their Information Needs

It is not possible for an information unit to satisfy every customer that visits their information unit. So the only thing to do is to know who their customers are, what their information needs are, their seeking behaviours and find out what best way to meet these needs.

Evaluating and Measuring the Effectiveness of Information Services

Evaluation provides an ongoing assessment of the value and impact of quality on the performance of the parent organisation. This could be done by employing the performance indicators concept which measures performance or progress against a set target within given time and it should be in accord with the SMART principle - be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and sit within a Timeframe. This can only be said to have been realised if a customer is satisfied.

Incorporating Benchmarking Efforts in Information Units

Benchmarking is a process by which an organisation continuously compares its processes, products and services to those of the world's best organisations with similar functions, present level of performance and the best that exists. Librarians must adapt this practise in their service provision to enable them survive.

Motivating Employees

Capezio and Morehouse (1995) note that to achieve ongoing commitment, continuous improvement can become possible by 'rewarding the creativity and initiative of employees who try new things and who accomplish benefits for customers and gains for the company'. Where staffs are motivated, they work harder hence improving service delivery.

On the overall, effort should be put to implement the above stated positive practices among others. Once library customers see such positive changes and have their information needs met on time, the bad image that has been painted on most libraries will now change for the better and the librarians will be proud of being librarians and will enjoy continuous support from their parent organisations.

BARRIERS TO QUALITY MANAGEMENT SERVICES IN LIBRARIES

Ideally, all organisations would like to continuously provide quality services and would like to have systems that are easy for employees to gather information and to learn about organisations activities, their customers and trends affecting their organisations. However, in attempting to do this, there are opposing factors which make one not to work optimally. Among these are The environment in which the quality information service is to be implemented is a major challenge where people don't like quick-turnaround work, difficult tasks, teamwork, TQM initiative, among others. Lack of senior management participation and approval for ease of support. Lack of teamwork which is a fundamental component for any quality initiative. Many people do not understand the value of information as a management function, so they fail to accord it the seriousness which it deserves. Lack of a good relationship between library staff and organisational management hence the latter withholds their support which affects quality efforts.

Poor knowledge of the parent organisation which hinders quality information services program since the library staff may not relate information to their business issues. Lack of sufficient resources to be committed to TQM projects initiatives. Information services units have been under managed over a long period of time so that bringing anything as sophisticated as quality management into the operation is rejected out of hand. Librarians holding to traditional processes and procedures which contradict TQM initiative which concentrate more on systematic analysis and less on the 'quick fix', as observed by Jurow and Barnard (1993). Holding to professionalism which are based on traditions, standards and respected bodies of knowledge, hence making it difficult to merge this and components of the quality management culture. 'Quality' being an elusive concept which is difficult to define and measure and being worsened by the fact that information service is intangible thus making managers shy away from initiating quality programs. Lack of management skills amongst traditional librarians. St. Clair (2000) observes that the earlier teachings of librarian courses did not have management courses in their curriculum. The same people are now managers and holding to their cultures thus resisting any new initiative.

HOW TO OVERCOME BARRIERS TO QUALITY INITIATIVES

Ferriero and Wilding (1991) observe that 'if the management of librarianship and information services can be moved into a positive framework that builds on the inevitable and desirable attributes of changes, which recognises that the paradigms of information delivery shift as society changes, then that successful future is assured'. St Clair (ibid.) notes that we have the choice and that how we make our decisions, which path we choose, is what determines whether we will be here in the future. He identified three paths which information services managers can take to achieve success, both now and in future, such as changing our perspectives to focus on positive and optimistic thinking; beginning to think about changes in the information services and society to 'shift' the paradigms to a point of view which recognises that change is both inevitable and desirable and working towards the future from a perspective that builds on a vision of library and information services in the twenty-first century.
Other ways of overcoming quality barriers are as follows:

Making a Serious Commitment by Information Staff

Lack of commitment by those entrusted to perform certain responsibilities can become a major stumbling block to any effort made towards a success to implementing quality services. Capezio and Morehouse (1995) describe a committed spirit as 'being the best you can in your job, as well as continuously looking for opportunities to improve the work'.

Recognising Opportunity and Seizing it to Ones' Own Advantages

An information manager should recognise opportunity and exploit it to her/his advantages and do even more work to their best in order to gain more support from such customers/sponsors.

Soliciting/Advocating for Support and Enthusiasms of Senior Management

The senior management of any organisation is a vision bearer and therefore is expected to have visionary leadership. The senior management is thus expected to provide enough resources for the successes of projects under implementation.

Adding Value to the Work

Librarians must add value to those skills and knowledge which they have acquired from their library schools. For instance, instead of doing routine work of pointing to information users where certain information is obtained, they should take an initiative to enquire from them on what s/he actually needs and go out of their way to provide the exact information and/or source.

Attempting to Know if their Customers were Satisfied (Feedback)

It is critical for librarians to seek for feedback from their customers, suppliers and other information stakeholders to enable them improve on their services.

A Need for Competitive Intelligence and General Business Research

Knowing your competitors is critical since it will make you compare your services with those of the best in the world. This will, in turn, motivate you to adapt to the best practices to allow you compete well with others therefore bringing quality initiative.

In conclusion, if librarians accept a paradigm shift and adapt to quality initiative which exhibit the following characteristics: Emphasis on customers, continuous improvement, continuous planned training for staff, teamwork at all levels, employee empowerment, trust and honesty in all levels, decisions made based on factual data not past experiences, continuous effective measures, among others, with this, libraries and/or information centres' image will most likely be improved.

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