

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITORS

THE CHANGING CONCEPT OF QUALITY IN LIBRARIES

The fascination of library directors with the latest managerial techniques may be seen positively as reflecting the necessary secularization of libraries - no longer venerable temples for the cult of the book, but dynamic vehicles for the exchange of information in all its forms and states. The devil's advocate might see it quite differently, for instance as the mark of a bewildered profession rapidly losing its traditional identity and uncritically casting around for any new device or symbol which may appear to give it relevance in the present age.

Be that as it may, the concern for quality in itself is not one of the recent fashions of library management. It was always there, early, in the days of classical Pergamon and Alexandria when scholars in their quest for systematic knowledge became librarians, later when Renaissance princes created magnificent collections of books in the same way they gathered precious pieces of art and nature, and until quite recently when libraries were monuments of scholarship enshrined in stately buildings and collections of finely bound volumes organized after the pattern of comprehensive intellectual structures, which were in themselves important achievements of the human mind or considered to be so.

If it is true that the desire for quality has always been an attribute of librarianship, a major shift of focus is taking place in this generation.

The days when books themselves were very valuable objects and often works of art are far gone, of course. Still, librarians' perception of quality as residing in the book as a physical, intellectual or cultural object prevailed until quite recently. Another aspect of perceived quality was the comprehensiveness of collections. However, not only the physical "thing" of librarianship but also certain intellectually based functions like cataloguing and classifications were objects of librarians' thirst for quality. The exaggerated importance often attributed to these functions amounted to a pervasive trait of library culture which Freud would undoubtedly have diagnosed as a collective case of obsessive neurosis or 'process fetishism' had he happened to have librarians among his clients.

The major shift in librarians' conception of quality though having its breakthrough today may have been evolving over a long period. For instance, when the

king of Denmark opened his library to the general public in 1793 he became part of an incipient movement which has, 200 years later, resulted in a redefinition of the library from a storehouse of interesting objects to a provider of information services which are increasingly not based on printed books or periodicals at all. The good library, i.e. library quality, becomes something very different in this context.

Exactly what this concept covers, it may be too early to say as the information age is not shaped by librarians, but by potent social and technological forces outside their control, though not out of their reach.

It is, therefore, a highly appropriate reaction of librarians to turn their attention towards other sectors of society, in this case to industry and the service sector, in order to get new perspectives and fresh ideas on how to provide good service to their customers. This scanning of the environment should be done with an open, but critical mind. Not everything which works well in other sectors or in particular firms and organizations may be applicable in libraries in general or in one's own.

Just to mention one example, it is highly unlikely that certain Japanese management techniques like corporate morning rites of collective rededication to the goals of the organization could be applied to Scandinavian libraries.

Generally, to manipulate corporate culture as an instrument to obtain the whole-hearted participation of staff in managers' quality schemes would be offensive in public service organizations where the mystique of the manager and the fascination with charismatic leaders have given place to completely different motivational structures, not yet well understood by the way.

One very important point in applying quality concepts from manufacturing industry to the library service sector is that quality or total quality should not be taken to mean the immediate success of every transaction with the customer. It would demand a grossly irresponsible use of public resources to be able to satisfy all the users' needs on the spot. It is necessary for any library to make a conscious choice of the service level which ought to be maintained at the given level of resources and to relate specific quality considerations to overall strategy.

The articles in this issue of INSPER are an expression of the library sector's interest in studying and relating - critically - to quality concepts and methodologies used by industry and the service sector. They are based on papers presented at a seminar on *Quality and Quality Management in Libraries*, held at the IFLA Conference in Barcelona, September 1993.

Professor Moores of Manchester Business School describes how production-based quality concepts have been transferred to the service sector and how they may be applicable to the service strategy of libraries having as its obvious components: "Finding out what customers need; putting in place systems to deliver their needs; selecting staff who are committed and trained to deliver them and measuring the extent to which customers are satisfied with the results ..."

Maurice Line studies the relation between strategic planning and quality management, concluding that they are complementary but difficult to do concurrently.

One instrument of quality management are the ISO-standards. **Carl Gustav Johannsen** of the Royal School of Librarianship in Denmark examines and refutes the objections of quality management, experts against these standards. He thinks that they may prove useful to libraries provided that they are not implemented mechanically, something which would stimulate bureaucratic tendencies and be harmful to employee motivation and professionalism.

The first major library known to have actually implemented the ISO 9000 standard on Quality Management is the Library of the University of Central Lancashire. The approach taken by the library and involving the three levels of strategy, operations and continuous quality improvement is described by the University Librarian, **Peter Brophy**.

Allan Foster* describes the development of a method to compare librarians' and customers' conception of quality. There are striking differences. **Monica Ertel** reports on the development of a tool, at The Apple Computer Library, to measure how effectively the library fulfills the needs of its customers on a continuing basis. Finally, **Margareta Törngren** of Stockholm University Library presents the application in a European library of an American model of library performance measurement, developed for the American Library Association by Nancy Van House, Beth Weil and Charles McLure.

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* Mr. Foster's paper is not printed in this special issue.