

# RELATING QUALITY MANAGEMENT TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

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**Abstract:** TQM (total Quality Management) is following strategic planning (SP) as a process used in libraries. TQM, which aims at providing a userdriven service that is timely, appropriate and free of error, involves a set of techniques for the analysis of operations. Characteristics that SP and TQM have in common include a systematic approach, commitment or involvement of all staff, a focus on users, and improvement; both are likely to require a change of culture. There are also differences, e.g. TQM is more down-to-earth and detailed, involves staff at lower levels more, and is a continuous process. It also requires much more time and effort, and is likely to cause more turbulence. SP and TQM are complementary, but it is difficult to do them concurrently. While a strategic plan with a mission and objectives should be in place before TQM is implemented over the whole library, it may be useful for some TQM exercises to be carried out before planning starts.

## Introduction

Strategic planning is being increasingly used in libraries. It involves standing back from immediate preoccupations and taking a careful and considered look at the future, usually but not always over the next five years. The institution's mission and goals are articulated, and a fairly precise strategy for attaining objectives is devised. While most libraries prepared plans of one kind or another in the past, in few cases until recent years has the systematic approach associated with strategic plans been adopted. There is now quite a substantial literature on the topic<sup>1-7</sup>.

More recently Total Quality Management - TQM - has begun to make its way into libraries<sup>8-13</sup>. TQM developed after World War 2 in Japan under the influence of W Edwards Deming, whose ideas did not gain acceptance in his native USA until some decades later, as American firms began to see the effects of its application on Japanese industry and economic growth. TQM is now an essential element in courses on industrial management<sup>14</sup>.

This paper, like that of Riggs<sup>13</sup>, explores the relationship between strategic planning and TQM, both in principle and in practice: the similarities and differ-

ences between their objectives and procedures, and how the two processes can both be pursued without bringing the library to a standstill.

### Characteristics of TQM

TQM is now becoming familiar enough to make exposition unnecessary. It is in essence a body of principles and a set of techniques. Its main aim is to provide a quality service, timely, appropriate and free of error, quality being defined as *fitness for purpose of use*. Its main characteristics are

#### User-driven

Prevention rather than detection (getting it right first time)

Moving the focus of control from outside the individual to within

Making everyone accountable for their own performance

getting staff committed to attaining quality

Changing the culture of the organization

A continuous search for improvement

A total attitude of mind, involving *everyone*.

The concept that everyone has a customer, internal or external, is important; no job is done except for someone else. Equally, every customer has a supplier. This means everyone needs to ask who their customers are and what they *really* need. They must seek ways of finding out, and ascertain whether they have the ability and the capacity to meet them (ability is personal, capacity is external, i.e. resources); and they must find ways of continuously monitoring changes in requirements. They need also to identify who their suppliers are and what they themselves really require of them; to find ways of communicating their requirements to their suppliers, and discover whether their suppliers have the ability and capacity to meet them.

The pursuit of TQM demands the use of various techniques, some of them quite complex and requiring careful training. Every step in every process is scrutinized for its relevance (what does it contribute?), its effectiveness (does it do what it is supposed to?), and its efficiency (is it done in the most effective and least costly way, and at the right level?). The place where it is done and the sequence of steps in the process are also examined. The methods used for analysis include process flowcharts, flow diagrams, fishbone diagrams, affinity diagrams, systems flow and tree diagrams. The analyses, which constitute a series of projects, are carried out by quality improvement teams and quality circles.

## Applicability of TQM to Libraries

TQM was developed for industry. Industry has visible products; the requirements of most products are not usually too hard to define, and their performance of neither the products nor the processes involved in making them is hard to measure. All industries that are not monopolies have competitors, and they have to fight to acquire and keep markets. Errors can be a matter of life or death - to the industry and (e.g. in the case of cars or electrical equipment) sometimes to the customer. Libraries, on the other hand, have few visible products, and the performance of most of their output is very hard to measure (hence all the literature on performance measurement in libraries). Their market is largely captive, particularly in the case of industrial or academic libraries, and they have few competitors. Except in industry, very few libraries die, however inefficient they are. What incentive do they have to improve quality, except pride?

However, things are changing. For an increasing amount of information the library can be bypassed, databases containing bibliographic references, information or even full text can be accessed direct by anyone with the equipment, and information can be processed and packaged by information brokers. Performance measurement may be difficult, but in more and more countries it is being demanded of libraries. With shrinking budgetary resources, reduced staff numbers and potentially increasing demands, no library can now afford to have imprecise objectives, give services that are little needed, fail to give services that are needed, offer poor quality services, carry out work that is not strictly necessary, or continue with procedures that are not fully efficient. There may be little danger of libraries experiencing sudden death, but there is a real danger of marginalization and erosion, to an eventual point where death might seem preferable: the guillotine is better than a slow and lonely death by starvation.

In any case, there are some areas of library work where TQM principles and procedures are readily applicable. One area is the acquisition and processing of new books (an area which actually consists of several processes): selecting suppliers, demanding of them fast and accurate supply (and changing them if they do not deliver), and ensuring that books are accessioned, catalogued and shelved speedily and at minimum cost consistent with relevant standards. Customers and suppliers can be identified for all of these activities; for example, the supplier for the acquisitions department is the bookseller, the external market is users, and the internal market is the cataloguing department. It is not unlikely that the efficiency - the "quality" - of the acquisition procedure of any library that had not previously analysed its processes could be improved by at least 30% by the proper application of TQM techniques. Other areas that are clearly amenable to the TQM approach

are retrieval from closed stacks and loans to borrowers, the reshelving of books, and binding.

While each process has to be analysed in detail, there is a danger that analyses of processes are conducted on the basis of certain assumptions, for example as to the rightness of selection, and as to policy as well as the practice of binding; if this happens, TQM is not being carried out properly (it is a waste of time finding superior ways of sharpening pencils if ballpoint pens would serve the purpose better). The right selection of projects is crucial if each activity is to be seen in context, serving a wider and higher-level purpose.

### **Similarities and differences between strategic planning and TQM**

At this point let us look at features that strategic planning and TQM have in common.

- Both require a clear mission and objectives
- Both involve systematic planning; SP is more time-constrained, TQM is more detailed
- Both are *action*-directed, not paper exercises
- Both demand an absolute commitment from top management
- Both require the commitment or involvement of all staff: in TQM this is an integral feature, in SP it is highly desirable
- Both are likely to require a change of culture; in TQM this is more explicit, in SP the need is more likely to emerge
- Both focus on users/customers; in TQM this is an essential element, in SP it is likely to become obvious early in the process
- Both require an analysis of procedures - TQM explicitly, SP implicitly as a means of achieving targets
- Both are concerned with improvements - TQM in detail, SP more in outline
- Both involve monitoring and measurement - TQM more explicitly than SP
- Both involve the development of skills; SP requires it, TQM demands and includes it.

The list above identifies some differences of emphasis as well as similarities. There are other differences:

- SP is more a political process, TQM more down-to-earth
- SP has an audience outside the library, TQM's only audience is the library (though its *effects* are on the service)
- SP is basically a plan, TQM an ethos involving a set of principles and techniques

- SP tends to work from the top down, TQM from the bottom up
- SP may involve only senior staff, TQM must involve everyone, at all levels
- SP is a repeated process, TQM a continuous one.

Another difference is in the disruption to work involved. The preparation of a strategic plan is usually very demanding, particularly if carried out as a participation exercise, but it can usually be completed by any library without major disruption. Moreover, it does not generally need to be repeated more frequently than every three years, the first plan being much the most time-consuming. TQM, if it is pursued in a full-blooded manner, consumes a great amount of time and effort, and goes on theoretically for ever - it is a way of life, and while the early years are the most strenuous because of the learning process, analyses must be repeated again and again to meet changing needs and circumstances. TQM is not to be embarked upon without a full realization of the time and effort involved, even though the expenditure of these should pay off handsomely in due course. TQM programmes quite often fail because the time and work have been seriously underestimated.

TQM can also be expected to produce turbulence. A rigid hierarchical institution - and most libraries are more rigid than they think - can be severely upset when staff at all levels are empowered for the first time; the whole structure of command is threatened, senior managers may find it very hard to adapt, and middle managers may find they are not necessary at all. Unwillingness to accept radical change is another reason why TQM programmes fail. A recent British study<sup>15</sup> found that only 8% of managers rated their quality initiatives as totally successful; most claimed only a moderate degree of success or were neutral. An article by Harari<sup>16</sup> called "Ten reasons why TQM doesn't work" is deliberately provocative, but it has useful messages for any-one intending to embark on TQM.

#### **In what order should they be done?**

It is clear that strategic planning and TQM can complement and reinforce one another. Both are desirable, though it should be added that TQM can fail not only for the reasons given earlier but because insufficient care has been given to training etc. Assuming that a library wants both to prepare a strategic plan and to embark on a TQM programme, how can the two be best related, particularly with regard to timing? Which should come first, or can they be started concurrently, demanding of time as they both are? Riggs is in no doubt: "Before implementing TQM, the library should already have a strategic plan in place". Presumably for the benefit of those who are not in this position, he goes on to say that a library *can* begin TQM and concurrently formulate a strategic plan, but that "it will be

difficult in terms of reallocating staff time and sequencing the work. A strategic plan lends credibility to the quality improvement process. Mission statements provide the library staff with long-term projections and philosophical directions. Goals and objectives, respectively, specify the broad and more precise intentions of the library. Strategies, in turn, offer the library staff possible courses of actions for realizing the goals and objectives. ... 'A ship without a rudder' is the best way to describe a TQM program that does not have a supporting strategic plan."

There is no doubt that TQM can benefit if a strategic plan is already in place; quite apart from the need for clear overall objectives, the need for care when deciding on areas to be subjected to TQM was mentioned earlier. However, it can be safely assumed that the core operations of the library will continue, however radical the plan turns out to be, and I can see no reason why TQM should not be applied to those operations in advance of a strategic plan. There are several advantages in doing so. If and when strategic planning is started, staff who have been involved in TQM will already have adopted systematic approaches to work, come to realize the need for an overall set of objectives and strategy, and learnt some techniques. The staff in question will have a much better understanding of the need for a plan and will also be in a good position to contribute to it. A particularly valuable contribution may be in adding hard content to what can otherwise be vague statements of intent - not so much adding flesh to the bones as adding bones to the flesh.

So there are advantages both in doing a strategic plan first and in using TQM in some areas of work first. It must of course be understood that in whatever order strategic planning and TQM are started, TQM will continue for much longer - forever, if the textbooks are followed. IF TQM is started first, therefore, at one stage or another there will be concurrent activity on strategic planning. It would in theory be possible to stop all TQM work while a strategic plan was constructed, but this would be highly undesirable. What is more likely and sensible is that TQM work was slowed down during planning. The library may have no choice in deciding which to start first; many libraries have been required to produce strategic plans, and some (for example, several public libraries in the UK) have been obliged to initiate TQM programmes. I would certainly not start both together unless TQM activity was on a small scale.

TQM often seems to be presented as if it were an all-or-nothing programme. We need to distinguish between the principles of TQM, which must be embraced wholeheartedly, and the techniques, which can be used selectively, both in the choice of techniques and in the areas of activity to which they are applied. Fowcharts and fishbone diagrams, for example, are valuable techniques that can

be used irrespective of whether a TQM programme has been adopted. TQM is in some danger of becoming a fashion in the library world; soon no library will wish to be seen without a quality management programme. In fact, just as Monsieur Jourdain discovered he had been talking prose all his life without realizing it, so many of us have been observing TQM principles and using TQM methods for years; we have tried to put customers first, we have thought in terms of objectives rather than processes, we have delegated responsibility to staff, we have analysed our procedures, and so on. Some TQM methods can be used while a strategic planning exercise is in process without imposing undue strain on staff. Staff are then learning two complementary approaches together; strategic management and quality management.

Strategic management and quality management together make Strategic Quality Management. This is a term that is just beginning to come into use; we shall hear more of it.

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