

Total Quality Management in Libraries: An Overview

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Introduction

“The function of a harp player is to play the harp. The function of good harp player is to play it well.”

– Aristotle

Today, all kinds of organizations are becoming customer oriented organizations to survive in this world. So, they need to provide quality products and services to their customers. Total Quality Management (TQM), provides the tools and the direction to improve quality.

Libraries has always been committed to provide a high quality of services to its users. In the past, consuming more resources, buying more books, and moving to large premises are considered as improving quality. But that approach is not valid today. One of the good solutions to improve quality is to provide right information to a right user at right time. This requires a through change in the approach – an approach based on user requirements and user satisfaction. It is believed that this can be achieved by implementing TQM. Thus, TQM approach is slowly getting popular in today's libraries.

Definition

Quality

Quality is concerned with meeting the wants and needs of customers. One of the key and enduring definitions is that, “Quality is fitness for purpose.” Quality can be described as doing the right thing, in right way on right time as well as doing it right the first time and doing it right every time.

In the context of Library, it can be described as

Q – Quest for excellence of knowledge

U – Understanding the user's need

A – Actions to achieve user's demand

L – Leadership quality for Librarian

I – Involving all staff

T – Team spirit for achieving common goal

Y – Yard stick to measure progress

TQM

According to British Standard BS 7850, TQM is defined as, “Management philosophy and company practices that aim to harness the human and material resources of an organization in the most effective way to achieve the objectives of the organization.”

Capezio & Morehouse defines TQM as follows: “TQM refers to a management process and set of disciplines that are coordinated to ensure that the organization consistently meets and exceeds customer requirements. TQM engages all divisions, departments and levels of the organization. Top management organizes all of its strategy and operations around customer needs and develops a culture with high employee participation. TQM companies are focused on the systematic management of data of all processes and practices to eliminate waste and pursue continuous improvement.”

In general, total quality management is defined as follows (Kanji):

Quality – is to satisfy customer’s requirement continually

Total Quality – is to achieve quality at low cost

Total Quality Management–is to obtain total quality by involving everyone’s daily commitment.

What is Total Quality?

Total Quality involves a continuous improvement effort by everyone, top to bottom of the organization to meet or exceed the users’ satisfaction. It includes systems, methods and tools

Basic principals of Total Quality

1. Focus on the user: Meeting or exceeding user’s needs
2. Participation and Teamwork: Participation through team work to get maximum output.
3. Employee involvement and Empowerment: Empowering employees with some authority and responsibility to make them a vital force for achieving quality target.
4. Continuous Improvement and Learning: Improvement and learning is never ending process.
5. Senior Management Commitment: Librarian must be personally involved in activities such as planning, implementation of policies , reviewing quality performance and interacting with users etc.
6. Process Identity: Identifying the process and sub process, interrelating and sequencing them in proper way.
7. Continuous Process Improvement:
 - Reduce Resources
 - Reduce Errors
 - Meet or exceed the user’s requirement.

- Make the process safer
 - Make the process more satisfying to the person doing
8. System approach: Operation should be defined by a system followed by sub-system.
 9. Self Assessment: To know the strength and weakness.
 10. Prevention rather than defecting errors: By various tools and techniques such as statistical process control.
 11. Strategic planning: It reveals “who are our users? What are their expectations? How do we achieve this goal? What workforce, machine and money are required? etc
 12. Quality measurement: “To know what is our current quality level? And what quality level we aspire to achieve?

TQM in Libraries

Among the service industries such as Airlines, Banking institutions, Insurance companies and Health care providers, Libraries are the last to adopt TQM practices. For a long time, Librarians saw themselves as keepers of knowledge rather than active agents in information transfer. Though the main aim/objective of libraries is to satisfy the users, the library professionals often forget that. But today's libraries are pushed to a position where they have to provide quality services to its users, to justify their existence. So, now libraries are also started adopting TQM practices following other kinds of service industries.

The practice of Quality Management in Library & Information Science sector existed since the evolution of the subject itself, but the terminology used for these varied widely. Performance indicators; performance evaluation; evaluation of reference sources using check-list of criteria; Evaluation of Information Retrieval systems using Precision and Recall ratios; Cost-Benefit and cost effectiveness studies; user surveys electing opinions on library services - all these studies make part and parcel of Quality Studies using different mechanisms of assessment and methodologies.

In early 1980s, numerous studies were made on automated data validation, error rates and patterns, authority control which belongs to quality control in online databases. However, customer and employee satisfaction are seldom in focus. Quality assurance studies were mostly restricted to special libraries and academic libraries. Although quality assurance studies based on ISO 9000 and other accreditation schemes were conducted in libraries in UK, USA and Canada, such studies are rarely reported in Indian libraries and information systems.

The quality assurance initiative in LIS has primarily come from the parent organization to which it provides services. However, in the later years, the quality assurance system has become as essential feature of LIS management.

Quality studies in LIS sector are mostly isolated and are made on different aspects of library management, services, user-studies, etc. The evidence produced by the few TQM cases in the LIS sector indicates that TQM is a highly relevant management theory for information sector.

How libraries have improve services with TQM

Many libraries have implemented TQM successfully. Harvard College Library created a task force which rewrote the library's vision statement, and considered changes that would have to be made in order to develop a new organization culture--one that "highlights the changing nature of staff roles and responsibilities in an era of pervasive change" (Clack, 1993). With the help of consultants, Harvard learned about TQM, and found that its principles of service excellence, teamwork, ongoing training and skill building, process/systems focus, continuous improvement, and cooperation across boundaries could help them make the changes they needed.

The Oregon State University Libraries also decided to test TQM. Two small teams, the Shelving Team from the stack maintenance unit, and the Documents Team from the government publications unit worked with outside facilitators. Each team surveyed users and staff and found that some issues, perceived as critical by staff, were not perceived as critical by customers and therefore needed rethinking in terms of TQM. The Shelving Team, which wanted to address the problem of longlasting shelving backlogs, found that the shelvees, who worked alone on the floors, felt isolated and unmotivated to make progress. Using this information, the team devised a plan for shelvees to work in small groups and have an assigned floor. The result was an increased "esprit de corps," tidier shelves, and less backlog (Butcher, 1993).

Sirkin (1993) suggests some ways a library might use the principles of TQM to enhance library services.

- Create service brochures and information kits
- Conduct a user survey about library services
- Improve signage
- Change hours of operation
- Provide a more convenient material return
- Simplify checkout of materials
- Use flexibility in staff assignments
- Cooperate with local government
- Ask vendors to give product demonstrations
- Give new staff a thorough orientation
- Create interdepartmental library advisory groups
- Improve the physical layout of the library
- Track complaints
- Develop an active outreach program
- Open satellite offices
- Publicize new or changed services
- Develop user and staff training materials
- Target services to specific groups
- Offer electronic document delivery
- Follow the mission statement
- Smile

Benefits of TQM in Libraries

If implemented carefully, quality management principles yield positive benefits libraries such as (Miller & Stearns):

- Incremental changes lead to continuous improvement – quick solutions may yield only partial results.
- Forces library managers to develop leadership skills interested of replaying on power within position to obtain results.
- Increase staff participation in decision-making, thus increasing the feeling of “ownership” of decisions and directions once charted.
- Improves the level of training given to staff, thus increasing skills.
- Helps break down barriers between library departments and improve communication within the organization.
- Provides a method of improving services to users in a period to similar resources.

Conclusion

From the review of the current status of quality improvement activities in libraries, it is evident that TQM or closely related approaches are not just “flavours of the month” or “fads of the day.” Many libraries are practising quality in the form of Quality Assurance, Continuous Quality Improvement, User Satisfaction, etc., if not in the form of TQM. The success of TQM will vary from library to library as each library is different from the others. The realities of the current library situation indicate that quality improvement is essential not only for survival but for facing major changes and growth required for the libraries of today and tomorrow.

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