

Editorial

Improving Quality: Organizational Benefits of Total Quality Management

My last editorial advocated improving the quality of articles submitted to the journal by avoiding several common foibles. Now I want to share some ideas about improving organizational quality through the use of total quality management thinking in the organization. Last year Don Riggs wrote an editorial about the benefits of total quality management for running an effective library. Penn State University is also actively involved in quality work through a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) program using the Oregon State model for process analysis. Our experiences are generalizable to other institutions and answer the "so what" question about the value of total quality management. Two specific benefits of CQI thinking are team initiative and customer focus.

Team initiative: Uncertain and falling state support has caused many institutions to examine priorities. Planning for a 10 percent cut encouraged Penn State library administrators to examine operations carefully. This impetus, combined with the promotion of the chief for acquisitions to an associate dean's position in another university, provided an opportunity for reorganizing the acquisitions department. Instead of making a predictable change in internal structure, CQI thinking necessitated consultation with the owners of the process—the staff in acquisitions.

In a half-day facilitated working session, the staff generated many innovative ideas. This group had already identified a number of redundant and outdated processes. Now they settled into the question of how their whole en-

terprise might operate. Two breakout groups generated the idea of self-directed work teams, while other groups addressed a lack of staff empowerment. As the name suggests, a self-directed work team is "a highly trained, committed team of employees fully responsible for turning out a final product or service."¹ The team eventually manages the work assigned to it through agreement rather than from the directions of a supervisor. Most of the staff had attended total quality management introductory lectures, which probably provided the seed for this idea. Eventually, almost the whole department either endorsed the self-directed work team idea or expressed a willingness to try it.

Because staff had only a vague conception of what the acquisitions librarians did, their suggestions about departmental governance were more predictable. Librarian managers need to communicate the nature of their special organizational contributions more clearly, as Larry R. Oberg has noted in his work on paraprofessionals.² Working to prepare a finished recommendation on reorganization, the Penn State Libraries' Human Resources Manager Nancy Slaybaugh, the university's specialist on organizational design Anita Schmidt, and I decided to initiate team management by asking the order librarians, receiving librarian, and approval plan librarian to form an Acquisitions Management Team that would assume the duties of the chief for acquisitions.

The risks were considerable: To whom would staff report? Who would be "responsible"? How would the

teamparticipate in more general library governance? With whom would vendors work? Who would coordinate with collection development, cataloging, and campuses? How exactly would day-to-day problems be resolved? One of my mentor's repeated observations that a library is not a hospital emergency room and reassured me that all these problems could be solved.

The advantages were compelling. If three librarians who had adopted an every-woman-for-herself approach to the interim period could forge a team, the remainder of the acquisitions department would realize that they, too, could make a transition to team management. The libraries would gain three people who were thoroughly trained in all acquisitions issues as well as in the dynamics of team management. Any one of them could assume leadership in a difficult situation. The libraries and the university would have another example of the principle of CQI empowerment at work. The salary from the chief's position could be contributed to the impending cut.

The transition is difficult. Schmidt's aggressive training program for the new team members has only begun. Becoming a team is a mystery—time-consuming, emotionally taxing, and somewhat frightening. As they did with CQI, the staff has taken a wait-and-see attitude. Building trust is an incremental process, and some are impatient. Yet many others are optimistic. Empowering staff, reducing management layers, and streamlining operations are CQI objectives that can add quality through alternative organizational solutions.

Customer focus: Many of the processes initially undergoing CQI review here are ones whose customers are internal. For instance, preorder searching has acquisitions and selectors as its customers. This team and others (serials check-in, materials budget invoices, equipment ordering, wage payroll, campus added-volume marking, and faculty recruitment processes) have focused on increasing efficiencies in-

ternally, eventually to serve users—students, faculty, staff, and others—better. In the past, some internal customer needs have been aggrandized, misinterpreted, and immortalized. Changing procedures without the analytical framework of total quality management has allowed unnecessary steps to be perpetuated. CQI review identifies these anachronisms, and teams move through a process of quick fixes that can return needed resources to the organization.

Organizations regularly engaging in quality exercises seek the opinions of external customers, too. Even when we are not engaged in a formal CQI endeavor, we think in terms of customer needs. Too often libraries do not know what the customer wants or needs. Our students report in surveys that they want more books to be on the shelf, but will they, and the faculty, accept a shorter loan period to accomplish that? What are students' needs for information about due dates? What would be student reaction to a self-charge system? How can students become more empowered to recall materials desired?

As the *College & Research Libraries* editor, I regularly urge a more aggressive approach to research in librarianship; too few of our decisions are based on data. Total quality management brings that research/knowing approach into the arena of daily library processes. Communicating with both internal and external customers helps to maximize our effectiveness in this area.

Emphases on team initiative and on understanding customer needs have helped the Penn State Libraries to respond to the strains of shrinking resources. In addition to the revised processes that result from structured total quality management work, we have also realized benefits from applying quality principles to other organizational problems. As in writing articles for this journal, selecting problems that need solving and using innovative approaches to them can improve library quality.

GLORIANA ST. CLAIR

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Linda Moran and Ed Musselwhite, *Self-Directed Work Teams: A Lot More Than Just Team Work*, (San Jose, Calif.: Zenger-Miller, 1993), 1.
2. See Larry R. Oberg, "Guest Editorial," *College & Research Libraries* 52(Jan. 1991): 3-4; "The Emergence of the Paraprofessional in Academic Libraries: Perceptions and Realities," *College & Research Libraries* 53(Mar. 1992): 99-112; and Larry R. Oberg, Mark E. Mentges, P.N. McDermott, and Vitoon Harusadangkul, "The Role, Status, and Working Conditions of Paraprofessionals: A National Survey of Academic Libraries," *College & Research Libraries* 53(May 1992): 215-38.

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