

# Total Quality Management and Libraries

by *Sandra M. Rowland*

*Westfield Public Library  
Carmel, IN*

## Background

Total quality management (TQM) has been a much used phrase in American management circles since the early 1980s. The concept was brought from Japan where it was developed and used for the past four decades.<sup>1</sup> TQM is not “just another management approach”: it is no less than a paradigm shift, a new management (philosophy, set of concepts and tools).<sup>2</sup> TQM provides a means to better management and increased productivity. Even though for-profit companies in the United States have been involved with TQM for many years, it has just recently reached the attention of librarians.<sup>3</sup> Librarians are now starting to adapt this management approach for use in their own organizations. Whether or not this is a good “fit” remains to be seen. However, since one of the premises of TQM is customer service, and libraries traditionally exist to serve users (customers), the more proper question may be how can TQM be adapted to “fit” libraries? What TQM is and how libraries may utilize TQM will be addressed here.

Total quality management stems from the work of both Dr. W. Edwards Deming, who is called “the father figure of the modern quality revolution,”<sup>4</sup> and J. M. Juran.<sup>5</sup> More current leaders of “the ‘new wave’ of quality gurus” are Philip Crosby and Tom Peters.<sup>6</sup> Much has been written on TQM in an attempt to not only define it, but to show how it is being used in industry. Hundreds of articles on TQM from within the past three years can be found on *Infotrac*, a CD-ROM database which indexes journal articles. Using “Veronica” to search the Internet likewise brings up more than 100 matches.

## Characteristics of TQM

In attempting to define TQM simply and without using Deming’s Fourteen Points,<sup>7</sup> Juran’s “quality planning road map,” or Crosby’s fourteen steps to quality improvement,<sup>8</sup> author Jerry Westbrook<sup>9</sup> generates these six characteristics:

- 1) Supportive organization culture

- 2) Customer orientation
- 3) Teams
- 4) Problem solving
- 5) Continuous improvement
- 6) Measurement

These characteristics are central to TQM, and defining them is important for understanding TQM, but definitions are not enough. It is imperative that all employees of an organization put these qualities into practice, and the commitment and enthusiasm must begin with the top administration. "TQM must start at the top. If there is one vital ingredient for a successful TQM effort in a small firm, it is the CEO's visible and unreserved commitment of TQM. Without it, other managers will hang back."<sup>10</sup> Rick Tetzeli echoes his belief, "research proves that a quality program works only when the chief executives visibly back it." This corresponds to the first characteristic above — supportive organization culture. Without it TQM will not succeed. Another element that needs to be understood is that TQM is not a short term solution. "Managements expect it to be instant gratification, and that is one of the key reasons for failure.... Patience and labor peace are the keys to making it work."<sup>11</sup>

Total quality management looks at quality, but it must not be quality for quality's sake. When this occurred "quality became its own reward. Standards were more important than sales, and companies appeared more interested in prizes than profits."<sup>12</sup> It has been observed that some companies "improved communication, they've got team-building, empowerment, employee involvement—but they've never improved anything yet that's important to their customers."<sup>13</sup> Customer satisfaction/orientation, number two from the above list of characteristics, must be stressed. University of Michigan professor Claes Fornell considers customers to be "an economic asset. They're not on the balance sheet, but they should be."<sup>14</sup> "Today's hallmark of quality, then, is measured both in terms of customer satisfaction and bottom-line results."<sup>15</sup> The term "customer," however, is not limited to the end-user as one traditionally thinks of a customer.

TQM does not, however, only give primacy to the external customer who buys the product and service. It also conceives there to be a whole range of internal customers within the organization, whatever its type. The TQM perspective considers that all the people working within the organization — whether manufacturing, commercial service, or public sector provision — are linked in a network or chain of customer-

supplier relationships. Hence, the intent of TQM is that all internal customers are to be equally well satisfied with the service or product they are supplied with.<sup>16</sup>

Ways to accomplish customer satisfaction and quality lead to other TQM concepts such as empowerment and benchmarking. Empowerment encompasses characteristics three and four above, teams and problem solving. Empowerment gives responsibility to the worker.

People who have the ability to make quality improvements should be given the authority to make them. This process leads to semi-autonomous work groups and greater self-control for individual rank-and-file workers so that they become involved in issues which were previously the prerogative of management.<sup>17</sup>

Some managers are skeptical of empowering employees because they see it as a threat to their own power, however "empowerment doesn't mean abdication... The truth is, you get power by giving power. It's much better to have a thousand people pulling in your direction..."<sup>18</sup> The chairman of Corning, Inc. believes that "employees know more about their jobs and their tools than all the experts or bosses around."<sup>19</sup> He also thinks that today's workers are better educated and want to make their own decisions. They "do not require the same organizational framework that existed 100 years ago."<sup>20</sup> TQM "places greater emphasis on group rather than individual performance because, if managed properly, teams effectively solve work problems."<sup>21</sup> By empowering teams as well as individuals "they [teams] are able to determine their own procedures, sub-goals, objectives, and ways of working providing that the goals they set are commensurate with the strategic goals of the organization as a whole."<sup>22</sup> Through empowerment, both individuals and teams work for the betterment of the organization and the quality of the product in whatever form it takes.

Benchmarking is defined as "the continuous process of measuring products, services, and practices against the toughest competitors or those companies recognized as industry leaders."<sup>23</sup> Morgan and Murgatroyd list four different types of benchmarking: internal, competitive, functional, and generic. They go on to state that "increasingly successful organizations are using benchmarking to sustain their quality improvements and efforts and to focus the energies of teams..." Benchmarking involves continuous improvement and measurement; characteristics five and six above. It "combines internal analyses with external studies."<sup>24</sup>

## TQM and Libraries

What relevance does TQM have for libraries, and are libraries looking into TQM? Even though a search on TQM brought up more than 900 references on *Infotrac*, and more than 100 on the Internet, once the term TQM is linked with the term library (and its variations) fewer than ten references from each source are obtained. One of the reasons for this is that TQM as a management tool in libraries is a fairly new concept, and there simply is not much literature on the subject yet. This very idea is pointed out in the introduction to one of the few materials found pertaining to TQM and libraries. The authors Jurow and Barnard state, "To date very little of it [TQM] has related directly or indirectly to libraries". Nonetheless, TQM seems to have a new found popularity in libraries. A TQM listserv (TQMLIB) has been created solely for libraries. However, many of the messages on the listserv indicate that libraries are still searching for information about TQM. They are interested in finding out how other libraries are implementing TQM in their workplaces. Unfortunately, there was not much input from those libraries on the TQMLIB listserv.

One of the first questions one might ask is why look at another management tool for libraries at all; and then, why look at TQM? There is little doubt that libraries are undergoing a transformation. New and better technology is appearing and will continue to appear. There is also the concept of the "information super-highway." Now, it is not always necessary for the user to go to the library to find information. For example, while accessing a journal index using a computer and modem at home, not only was an article's title established, but the full text was available to be printed out at home, all without going to a library. Stuart and Drake made the same point. "It often is more efficient and more effective for people to use on-line information systems for data, information, and documents than to spend hours in the library..." Library administrators need to plan for this shift in the ways that libraries are perceived and needed. In planning for the future,

Total Quality Management offers an approach for an organization to design processes, policies, and jobs so that they are the best, most effective methods for serving users' needs, eliminating inefficiencies, and making sure that quality service is built into the way things are done.<sup>25</sup>

Once the decision is made to try TQM, what is the next step? One problem is figuring out how to start. "The American stampede to embrace quality programs has produced uneven results because no single blueprint for improvement is broadly applicable."<sup>26</sup> Here one goes back to a premise stated above.

TQM has to start with the top administration. If they are not sold, if they do not embrace it enthusiastically, then neither will their employees. "It is generally agreed and emphatically reiterated that commitment by top management is essential to the lasting success of TQM in any organization."<sup>27</sup> Academic libraries seem to be the first libraries to try TQM, most of them prompted by their university's administrators. Delegates have been sent from libraries to attend initial TQM training at either university training seminars or for-profit companies in order to decide whether to go forward with TQM.<sup>28</sup>

### **Approaches to TQM**

Susan Barnard suggests one approach to TQM, and although her approach is specifically for research libraries, it could be applied to any library. Her model involves ten steps which are accomplished in four phases, but she is quick to point out that "this does not mean that these steps and activities must be strictly sequential, or that all are mandatory."<sup>29</sup>

Phase one involves two steps — exploration and decision. Exploring is gathering information by reading, discussion, and/or attending initial TQM training sessions as the above delegates did. Decision making is deciding whether or not to implement TQM.

Phase two contains step three -- leadership planning. Under this heading is not only the planning but organizational assessment (how compatible the organization is with TQM), understanding both internal and external customers, as well as vision and guiding principles. Once these have been identified phase three can begin.

Phase three contains steps four through eight. Step four defines the products and services offered by the library, identifies and groups internal and external customers, and finally decides what services and products are provided to each group of customers. Step five assesses the needs and expectations of customers. Step six identifies and evaluates the critical processes that drive the organization. In step seven, pilot project teams are initiated to participate in problem solving throughout the organization. The final step of the third phase is pilot team training.

Phase four, evaluation and expansion, includes the final two steps. Step nine has the senior management creating a three to five year master TQM plan; while step ten targets division and departmental planning.<sup>30</sup>

When doing a comparison, it can be seen that these steps parallel the six

characteristics described earlier by Westbrook. A supportive organization culture parallels steps one, two, and three (leadership planning and organizational assessment). Customer orientation correlates with steps three (understanding customers), four, and five. Step six involves measurement, steps seven and eight include teams and problem solving. And finally, steps nine and ten encompass continuous improvement. What Barnard has done is adapt the TQM model used in industry to the library environment.

Mackey takes Deming's Fourteen Points and adapts each one for library use.<sup>31</sup> A few of these points are enlightening in respect to libraries, and eight of those (comparatively numbered to Deming's Fourteen Points) are given below:

- 1) "Created constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service.... In the library constancy of purpose is embodied in its mission statement."
- 4) "End the practice of awarding business on the basis of price tag; instead, minimize total cost.... The long-term benefits of quality (i.e. trust, durability, and trouble-free operation) have been traded for the short-term benefit of lower per unit price [awarding business to the lowest bidder]."
- 6) "Institute training for all employees... training is applicable to all levels of library employees.... Training, like any other process in the library, should be flow-charted and quality built in at each step in the training process.... continually improving the training process should challenge top management... This includes training librarians to be leaders."
- 9) "Break down barriers between staff areas."
- 11) "Eliminate numerical quotas for the work force and eliminate numerical goals for people in management.... These quotas emphasize short-term numerical goals over long-term quality."
- 12) "Remove barriers that rob the worker of pride in their work.... Provide employees with clearly defined job descriptions and the materials and support they need to do their work."
- 13) "Encourage education and self-improvement for everyone.... first train the entire staff in the new principles of the philosophy... Beyond this, training takes place at all levels, at all times.... Retraining employees who

are already established in their jobs is an essential element of the equation."

- 14) "Take action to accomplish the transformation....Quality results when every individual in the library understands and adopts the philosophy of neverending improvement and when all the processes of library operations are in statistical control."<sup>32</sup>

### **The Importance of Customer Service**

When comparing Westbrook's characteristics, Barnard's model, and Mackey's adapted Fourteen Points, one gets a good perspective on how TQM might be used in a library environment. One important focus which should be at the attention of administrators, librarians, and support staff is that of customer service. Unfortunately, often in the past "Librarians were more concerned with internal process rather than perceptions of value or customer service. They saw themselves as keepers of knowledge rather than active agents in information transfer."<sup>33</sup> If one believes in TQM then this past mindset must change. If libraries are to be prominent in the years to come, they must place more importance on the patron's needs, whether they implement TQM or not.

A comprehension of the principles and importance of customer service and satisfaction as a primary goal of quality management is critical for the fullest realization of its potential in libraries. In fact, of all of the elements of quality management, the two which are perhaps least familiar to libraries yet are potentially the most beneficial aspects, are 1) customer focus and 2) continuous improvement through statistical process control.<sup>34</sup>

Case Western Reserve University Library implemented a value-added process which was much like TQM. They also realized the need to identify the customer's expectations and wants and did this by conducting

an extensive user survey. The librarians conducted interviews and surveys to probe into the information gathering and usage behaviors of the campus community. These focused on what the users' information needs and sources were, how they used this information, and how the library fits into their information environment.<sup>35</sup>

In this way, they were not only getting information for the present but for the future. "You can't satisfy their needs unless you know what their needs are."<sup>36</sup> Customer orientation/focus/needs have to be addressed no matter what

type of library environment one is in because competition is becoming keener and "the library is not the information source of choice"<sup>37</sup> that it once used to be.

### Barriers to TQM

Some of the benefits of TQM have been mentioned above: continuous improvement, customer orientation, supportive organizational culture, and breaking down interdepartmental barriers.<sup>38</sup> A brief mention must be made of four barriers to adoption of TQM in libraries. One is vocabulary. Arguments about the language of TQM are time-consuming and may never be resolved. Another is commitment. As mentioned before, TQM is not a quick fix; it requires long-term commitment, perhaps even longer in the service sector. The third is process. We tend to be impatient with process and eager for closure. The fourth barrier is the professional one. Jurow and Barnard state that "The higher the degree of professionalization within an organization, the greater the resistance to certain elements of TQM, particularly its customer focus."<sup>39</sup> In other words, adoption of TQM may not be accepted in the same light by everyone. One person may see it as the answer to all problems, while another sees it as causing more problems than it solves.

### Support and Resources

Once TQM is initiated, the "managers play a key role in supporting the process through ongoing communication and training."<sup>40</sup> With proper support, with communication, and all employees receiving training (all important parts of the TQM process), TQM can be implemented with all working with the process no matter what their initial sentiment.

Fishbone charts play an important role as a tool of TQM, and so do flow-charts. A few libraries have documented the way they are using TQM techniques to deal with problem-solving. Libraries are seeking other libraries to use for benchmarking purposes. In a "Veronica" search on the Internet, there was an announcement of a workshop on total quality management for technical services employees. One book on TQM in libraries that looked particularly interesting, *Total Quality Management in Libraries: A Sourcebook*, by Rosanna M. O'Neil, was published in 1994. A particularly helpful periodical was the *Journal of Library Administration*, January/February 1993, which was simultaneously published as the book *Integrating Total Quality Management in a Library Setting* (Haworth, 1993), edited by Susan Jurow and Susan B. Barnard. Libraries which own a copy are loathe to lend it out.



## Conclusion

Total quality management and libraries do "fit" together. The obstacle, here as in the for-profit sector, is generating enthusiasm among the organization's workers. People are averse to change. Librarians today are surrounded by change. To change management models requires an almost superhuman effort, but the rewards of TQM are worth it. Once a person grasps a full understanding of TQM the concept is much easier to embrace. TQM can help libraries span the tremendous leap that technology has brought forth. With faith, commitment, and enthusiasm, TQM can provide libraries with clearer vision and a brighter future.

## End Notes

1. Mathews and Katel
2. Morgan and Murgatroyd
3. White
4. Morgan and Murgatroyd
5. Barrier
6. Morgan and Murgatroyd
7. Scherkenbach
8. Morgan and Murgatroyd
9. Westbrook
10. Barrier
11. Mathews and Katel
12. Greising
13. Benson
14. Greising
15. Benson
16. Morgan and Murgatroyd
17. Morgan
18. Barrier
19. Houghton
20. *ibid*
21. Bowman
22. Morgan and Murgatroyd
23. Rothman

24. ibid
25. Gapen, Hampton and Schmitt
26. Stuart and Drake
27. Barnard
28. Stuart and Drake; Butcher; Clack
29. Barnard
30. ibid
31. Mackey and Mackey
32. ibid
33. Stuart and Drake
34. Barnard
35. Gapen, Hampton, and Schmitt
36. Barnard
37. Stuart and Drake
38. Jurow and Barnard
39. ibid
40. Clack

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