

Short Communication

Toward Improving Library and Information Services Delivery in Nigeria through Total Quality Management

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Abstract

Nigerian libraries operate in an environment characterised by weak institutional and social support for libraries and the demanding challenges of the digital society. At the same time, the libraries need to embrace philosophies and strategies for developing quality systems and providing quality services. The paper discusses how various aspects of library systems and services can be transformed and improved upon by applying the principles and strategies of total quality management (TQM). It also identifies and recommends strategies for surmounting some key challenges that may confront library managers in Nigeria in their efforts to use TQM to improve their services.

Keywords

Total quality management, libraries, service delivery, Nigeria

Introduction

Libraries are essentially non-profit social service institutions. However, among the different social service institutions in Nigeria, libraries appear to be

the least understood by the people for whom they are established and, perhaps, the least provided for in terms of resources. Although governments and the parent or funding bodies of libraries usually acknowledge the importance of libraries in educational, cultural and social development of the country, this is often not backed up with commensurate investment in libraries. Moreover, during tough economic conditions like what Nigeria is experiencing under the current global economic difficulties, library and information services often are the first to experience cutback in allocated resources. Accordingly, each library must be able to continually justify its annual demand for resources in the context of other competing community or organisational demand for the same resources.

Libraries in Nigeria need to provide and sustain high quality services to maintain and improve their relevance to their publics, including communities, supervisory and funding institutions, and other stakeholders. A library needs to satisfy its users in order to engender increased patronage, promote improved public perceptions of its community value, and convert its clientele from episodic to habitual library users. The larger the number of patrons using the library, the higher is its prestige or ranking (Opara, 2006). High quality services are also needed to prove to the funding bodies that the library is worth the investment of scarce public fund. Derfert-Wolf, Gorski and Marcinek (2005) have argued that high quality library performance is crucial for the survival of research libraries. They contended that it is the quality of library services that determines the perception of the library within its parent institution and the society. Ward et al. (1995) opine that libraries

are being asked to demonstrate their worth through quality services, to justify their expenditure, and to adopt new practices that involve substantially improved and extended services to users. Quality library facilities and systems are also essential in Nigerian academic libraries because the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) assess the quality of such facilities and library services as part of the requirements for accreditation of academic programmes in universities, polytechnics and colleges of education in Nigeria.

Furthermore, libraries no longer enjoy monopoly of information provision in today's digital environment. The choices available to today's information seeker are so many and varied that no library can afford to be ineffective. The librarian, therefore, must think on his feet, always looking for better ways of providing services so that the library can be reckoned with. This service orientation will help sustain the confidence of the library's clientele. As Kurtus (2004) has noted, a company that seeks to satisfy the customer by providing him value for what he buys and the quality he expects will get more repeat business, referral business, and reduced complaints and service expenses. Therefore, libraries are expected to develop systems, philosophies, and strategies for managing and providing quality services. This implies a management approach that focuses on service quality.

It is against this background that this paper discusses how the principles and methods of total quality management (TQM) could be used to deliver and sustain quality services in Nigerian libraries.

Total Quality Management

Total Quality Management (TQM) is a management philosophy which focuses on human and work processes with the primary goals of ensuring customer satisfaction and continuously improving organisational performance (Obanya, 2003). It is customer-centric, and as Brokman (1993) has noted, it focuses relentlessly on the needs of the customer, both internal and external. It is aimed at embedding awareness of quality in all organisational processes. This way, the quality of organisational products or services is assured. It is in this vein that Adeleke

(2001) has noted that TQM empowers workers and managers of an organisation to constantly improve their processes and outputs to conform to users' requirements and to delight the customers.

Total quality management is a holistic approach in that it integrates organisational staff, suppliers, customers and stakeholders. This is why it is defined by the International Standards Organisation (ISO) (1998) as a management approach for an organisation, centred on quality, based on the participation of all its members, and aiming at long-term success through satisfaction and benefits to all members of the organisation and to society. Crosby (1992) notes that quality movements fail because they are narrow in their focus. Crosby explains that the purpose of completeness is to avoid problems and guarantee success, and that the three principles of completeness are: cause employees to be successful; cause suppliers to be successful; and cause customers to be successful. According to Holt (1996), completeness of effort throughout the entire organisation is the best strategy to achieve quality.

Total Quality Management is also about quality because it is often used to signify excellence of a product or service. It can also signify reliability, durability and relative absence of defects in product and service (Adeleke, 2001). It consists of three dimensions of quality (3Qs), namely: quality of returns, to satisfy the needs of shareholders or promoters of the organisation (in the case of the library, the funding authorities); quality of products and services, to satisfy some specific needs of the customer (in the case of the library, the user or patron); and quality of life at work and outside work, to satisfy the needs of the people in the organisation (in the case of the library, the library staff).

The origin of Total Quality Management is credited to an American, W. Edwards Deming, who developed the approach after World War II for improving the production quality of goods and services. The Japanese adopted it in the 1950s to resuscitate their post-war business and industry and, subsequently, to dominate world markets by the 1980s. The TQM culture is so embedded in the operations of Japanese companies that, according to Ifidon and Ifidon (2007), it has become simply the routine way they do things. TQM is today strongly embedded in the management philosophy and practices of the most successful global firms.

Although the TQM advantage was first taken in the industrial sector, it has been found to be as effective in the service sector (Adeleke, 2001).

TQM in Library and Information Services

Libraries have always been concerned with how well they are anticipating and meeting users' needs. Libraries have been doing this by conducting user studies in order to improve critical processes and to develop internal capacity to be successful in future. When Phipps (2001) admonished libraries to begin to listen and to act on the voices of customers and staff, to transform work processes, and to partner with customers, he was indirectly advocating for the application of TQM to library operations.

Since concern for the information need of the user is the central focus of the library, application of TQM is not expected to be very difficult, provided there is sufficient enabling environment in terms of staff skills and institutional support. In the words of Masters (1997), "libraries are ideal places to implement TQM." They are service organisations dedicated to their customers, the patrons." Hensler (1994), as cited by Holt (1996), notes that the introduction of TQM and other quality improvement methodologies is almost always centred on improving service to library customers. This is because, according to Cullen (2001), libraries are facing two major threats, namely: a global digital environment and increasing competition. He therefore advocated for improved quality of services as a survival strategy.

TQM in a library requires that the library must strive to continuously improve both technical and user services. According to Jurow and Barnard (1993) and Masters (1997), total quality management has been successfully implemented in some libraries. For instance, Clack (1993) gave an account of how the 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 organisation culture – one that "highlights the changing nature of staff roles and responsibilities in an era of pervasive change." With the help of consultants, the Harvard College Library learned about TQM, and found that its principles could help them make the changes they needed and so implemented it. Butcher (1993) chronicled the success of TQM implementation in the Oregon State

University Library. According to him, TQM helped the library to bring about, among many other benefits, increased "esprit de corps" among the shelvers, tidier shelves and less backlog.

Applying TQM Principles to Library Services

The practice of TQM is anchored on certain principles which have been formulated by contributors to management theory and practice. However, there appears to be no consensus on the number of these principles. Saroja and Sujatha (2003) formulated four principles of TQM, while Obanya (2003) enunciated seven principles. In a way, the different sets of principles are basically saying the same thing, in fewer or more principles. The principles discussed hereafter are a synthesis of what these contributors and others have proposed. They are discussed in the context of library and information services.

Focus on the Customer: TQM is customer-centric, and in a TQM environment, there are two categories of customers: internal and external customers. External customers comprise the individuals and organisations procuring or supplying products and services from or to an organisation, while internal customers are the functions within the organisation itself that rely on the products and services of other functions. In the library situation, external customers would include book vendors and any other individual or organisation that supply library materials or provide support services to the library. The circulation department is an internal customer to the cataloguing and classification department in that the former depends on the output of the latter to function. Thus, in a TQM environment, every one is both customer and supplier. This emphasises the systemic nature of the work in which all are involved. The central focus in the external customer category is the library user. The customer-centric principle places emphasis on knowledge of the different categories of library users, and responding to users' expectations. The philosophy behind this is that quality is not determined or defined by the organisation producing the product or service. Rather, quality is defined, or is as determined by the customer - the library user.

Continuous Self-Evaluation and Process Improvement:

This principle emphasises recognising the organisation as system and the work done within the organisation as an ongoing process. Applying this principle entails continuous learning, evaluation and re-engineering of organisational processes. In the words of Kurtus (2001), “You can never be satisfied with the method used, because there always can be improvements.” Members of a library management team must lead and facilitate continuous process improvement by involving all processes and members of staff in the required learning, self-evaluation and improvement tasks. Self evaluation of the work experiences of staff enables them to identify areas of library operations that need improvement, while the active participation of staff in new learning usually translates into improved processes and work habits. As part of the efforts at continuous improvement of services, the library staff should be given opportunity for continuing education and training in new skills to accommodate modern and latest technologies and methods in library functions. Each head of a library unit/department should be encouraged to organise periodic seminars in his or her unit as part of the continuous self evaluation and improvement strategy.

Measurement and Data: This principle is anchored on the saying that “What gets measured, get attention.” It emphasises that record keeping and measurement are critical to the success of TQM. Data will always be required to set direction for strategic choices and also to determine the extent to which organisational objectives are being realised. Data are particularly useful in benchmarking and measuring an organisation’s performance against those of its competitor’s (comparative benchmarking) and comparing organisations specific processes with the best available world class practices (process benchmarking) (Obanya, 2003). Routine library statistics and periodic data collection and research on library processes are relevant here.

Employee Empowerment, Recognition and Reward: Employees are an organisation’s most important asset, and they should therefore be given the right tools, assistance, training and support to work. Their training should enable them to gain awareness of the principles, concepts and techniques

of TQM. It should also enable them to identify and solve problems that cause customer dissatisfaction. This principle also emphasises the need for an organisation to keep her workers happy and productive by providing them with good task instructions, the tools they need to do their job and good working conditions. The principle also requires that workers should be empowered to use their initiatives to take actions to satisfy customers.

Teamwork: The importance of this principle has long been recognised by management theorists. It is one of the management principles enunciated by the French industrialist, Henri Fayol (1949). Also, the centrality of team spirit in management is recognised by Drucker (1973), when he defined management as the act of getting things done through people. Because processes and problem-solving in a library tend to cut across different process owners, TQM emphasises team spirit rather than isolated individual efforts. For instance, efforts of the acquisition department of the library alone cannot see the books on the shelves without the efforts of the other process owners in the library. Thus, the principle requires library workers not to see others as competitors, but as people working toward achieving same goals. To achieve this, the head librarian should foster interaction and knowledge sharing among departments and staff. Thus, a member of staff who learned new ideas and skills should be enabled to share them with his colleagues. The principle of teamwork requires that all members of staff of the library be involved in the system thinking process that underlies all quality objectives setting and the implementation of continuous quality improvement programmes. It is in this vein that Kurtus (2001) argued that employees can provide suggestions on how to improve owned and other processes, thereby eliminating duplication of work and waste of resources.

Implementing TQM in Nigerian Libraries: Challenges and Recommendations

While TQM is a veritable management tool for achieving excellent library services, implementing it in Nigerian libraries is fraught with difficult, but not insurmountable challenges.

Inadequate library funding: Successful implementation of TQM in libraries requires adequate funding to acquire material resources, build and deploy modern library systems, train, retrain and motivate staff, and educate user populations. Unfortunately, the level of funding of libraries (especially public libraries) in Nigeria is so poor that the success of TQM may be limited. There is need for stakeholders in library services, such as the Nigerian Library Association (and its various chapters), to pursue aggressive strategies to sensitise Nigerian governments, non-governmental organisations and citizens to the imperative to improve the funding of libraries as a critical components of the country's efforts to improve literacy and the quality of education.

Poor social ICT infrastructure: It is inconceivable today to think of excellent service in a library without modern information and communication technologies (ICT). The use of adequate ICT infrastructure and equipment enables a library not only to perform its internal administrative and technical functions effectively, but also to provide technology-driven services that meet the requirements of its increasingly technology-savvy clientele. The level of development of social ICT infrastructure in Nigeria is still very low by global standards. However, that should not stop or discourage Nigerian libraries from efforts to exploit TQM principles to source for resources to develop their internal ICT infrastructure. In the digital age, ICT is a pre-requisite resource for providing quality services; hence, Nigerian library cannot run away from the challenge. They must tackle and overcome it in order to derive optimal benefits from the application of TQM strategies in their activities.

Unreliable public electricity supply: Electric power supply to the library is very vital for illumination, humidity control and to power ICT facilities. Effective library services cannot be achieved without regular electric power supply. But the reality in Nigeria today is that the spectre of unreliable public electricity supply would be around for some time. Nevertheless, Nigerian libraries, particularly academic libraries, cannot leave their systems and services to the mercy of such unreliable electricity supply. They need to invest in standby electricity generators in order to be able to exercise

adequate control over the quality and reliability of their physical environments and services to their user populations. This is a challenge that any Nigerian academic library wishing to improve its facilities and services through TQM must overcome.

Managing change: Introduction of TQM will task the managerial ingenuity of any library manager. Since introduction of TQM would mean a paradigm shift, libraries concerned will be confronted with a new management challenge – change management. Some library staff may resist it, while the establishing authority or parent institution of the library might be indifferent. In this case, the library will need to embark on appropriate change management activities to win support for the innovation among the staff. The library management should anticipate and address potential obstacles to TQM and build support by convincing staff members and parent institutions (in the case of academic and research libraries) that the new management strategy is intended to help the library achieve its objectives most efficiently.

Conclusion

TQM is a description of the culture, attitude and organisation of a company that strives to provide customers with product and services that satisfy their needs. In the library, TQM requires continuous improvement in quality in all aspects of library operations: selection of materials, ordering, receiving and checking, accessioning, cataloguing and classification, etc. Each of these processes is required to be done right the first time and thereafter. Total quality management is not a “quick fix” and therefore requires some time to be fully implemented. Emphasis is on continuous improvements of processes, capacity building of staff, synergistic relationship of all work processes and communication. Libraries in Nigeria need to apply TQM approaches in order to successfully surmount the challenges discussed above, and to continuously provide improved services. This is what would ensure that they win and retain the support of their clientele and their funding bodies. It is important to note also that TQM principles and strategies can be applied towards finding solutions to the challenges, as part of the total and holistic strategies to improve library facilities, systems and services.

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