TOWARD EXCELLENCE OF INFORM-DOCUMENT-ATION SERVICES

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SUMMARY

The special properties of informative-documentary services, the raw material of the Information and Documentation sector, necessitate the adoption of quality-control systems. Quality must be understood in the context of staff-user interaction, or co-production. Models based on **ISO** and **TQM** constitute two parallel and complementary approaches to excellence.

CO-PRODUCTION, KEY IN INFORM-DOCUMENT-ATION SERVICES

The classic principle in economy of the shortage or limitation of natural resources in the face of a growing market demand can be extrapolated to the information/documentation market. At first glance, no shortage is apparent; however, the selection and filtering mechanisms are sometimes insufficient, and consequently do not satisfy client expectations. The scarcity of Quality, understood as the degree of satisfaction obtained by the users, makes this limited resource a very highly valued one in today's expansive market. Quality is a key matter, and attracts the attention of all informative-documentary companies: it is the single most intelligent investment than a director can make in the middle- to long-term.[1]

If we bear in mind that 50 % of the activities of the advanced industrial countries are related to the production, processing and diffusion of information, the rationalisation and improvement of these activities, is crucial. We rely on programs of Quality systems, in order to face new challenges:

-       *Sociological* challenge: till now centres have been more concerned with offering than with demanding, and products were more satisfying for their creators than for the potential users. At present we have a dual organisation, of production and service.

-       *Commercial* challenge: information marketplace is no longer local --nor national even-- but global and competitive. Consequently, quality has taken on a greater importance in the choices made by user-clients with regards to centres of information and documentation.

-       *Economic* challenge: budgets decrease progressively, creating difficulties in facing the costs derived of the expansion and maintenance of document collections and staff. The organisational habits library and information services must be adapted to this circumstance, by improving the distribution of resources.

-       *Technical* challenge: scientific-technical progress is so accelerated that the technical innovations of the processes have direct repercussions on the quality of the products and

services. Moreover, the role of the information-documentation professional is changing: they are no longer just collection managers; now they work for the user.

- *Functional* challenge: librarian-documentary activities must be conceived as authentic business and management activities, calling for the optimum utilisation of available means in order to achieve some pre-determined objectives. From the standpoint of Total Quality the manager will take into account all the variables involved in the performance of the information unit, including supplies, needs, specifications, operations, products, services, time, and costs.

The 90's have been characterised, in our sector at least, by the pronounced growth of production, the rising cost of documents and resources, and a progressive decrease in budgets, leading to a general situation of impoverishment. For this reason, the challenge of the Information-Documentation Service of the new millennium will be to fulfil, within these real limitations, the needs and expectations of the user/client universe, improving services without adding on to their cost. In order to meet this goal, significant changes will have to be undertaken, using more dynamic and better integrated models of organisation, and adopting a management philosophy centred on new concepts of Quality: competition, effectiveness, efficiency and performance.

One essential is the introduction of a given conceptual infrastructure that favours the adoption of the Quality paradigm by the Information/Documentation Service. In striving to make ISO Procedures 9000 compatible with the different theoretical positions of institutions that work for Total Quality (Deming, Baldridge, EFQM...), the main objective of this article is to awaken in managers, personnel and users of the information/documentation services a new awareness, the conception --along simple and amicable lines-- of a methodological instrument for Planning, Self-evaluation and Improvement of the levels of Quality.

Examining the concept of Quality among those responsible for service, we still run into technicalities that judge quality exclusively on certain features of a product, such as conformity with specifications or the absence of defects, without any consideration of service as the primary factor that accompanies the product.

In recent years there has been a welcome broadening of quality management into services and it is noteworthy that several service companies have been award winners in the national quality awards. A key observation is that in services there is usually a direct interaction between client and service, an immediacy of contact between the user and the provider. The fact that the client requirements can be modified as part of the service delivery process is both a challenge and an opportunity. Customers are participants in a service, because they can alter the product being delivered and the way it is delivered in response to the situation

as it develops; they are involved in the service and its delivery. Quality needs to be considered in terms of "enhancing" and "empowering" the participant [2].

A service presents the particularity of being produced and consumed at the same time, and so the client does not have the possibility of "trying" the service before acquiring it. Consequently it is more difficult to control the quality of a service than that of a product. At the very base of a service strategy there is always a promise to the client [3].

Since the needs of users are less and less uniform and more diversified, singular and in permanent evolution, the quality of the service is a *process*, a permanent construction in which the target user plays a dynamic role as actor and co-producer [4]. Service is an immaterial act, not something storable, in constant metamorphosis, in favour of someone and with uncertain effects. Its quality should always be the equivalent of user expectations.

The information-documentation services are extremely difficult to study because they are:
- *immaterial*, since they are presentations and experiences that can not be evaluated before their use;
- *heterogeneous*, since delivery varies among professionals and among users;
- *transitory*, since they can not be stored;
- *simultaneous*, since they are used at the very moment they are produced, allowing the client an evaluation "in real time" not only of the resulting service, but also of the process by which it was developed. Service delivery and production are two mechanisms traditionally and erroneously linked, though everyday reality comes to demonstrate that they are two activities with different problems and solutions, a difference that lies basically in the importance placed on the processes, which in production are a means, and in services constitute the end.

In fact, service is always based on the existence of one or more products, as activity that includes production and, obviously, as something more complex and multifarious than this. The interaction of four fundamental ingredients (user - employee -product - system) multiplies its difficulty and characterises the processes of service, whose success depends in good measure on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the person. In the case of Information Services, the System of Quality will have to address all the human aspects involved, managing the social processes of service, considering humans interaction as an essential element of the Service Quality, and developing staff aptitudes and attitudes.

We should recognise that there is still insufficient bibliography for Programs of Quality implementation in the informative-documentary services, because its transfer from the productive-industrial sector is complex, since it must contemplate the existing differences

between services and physical goods. The main *vectors of quality* emphasised by information-documentation professionals for services are these:

- *reliability*

- *capacity of response*

- *safety*

- *accessibility*

- *empathy* (or communication, comprehension and incorporation of the needs and expectations expressed by the clients to the service).

Staff are often the key resource in service industries, and their "processing" takes the form of training and development.[5] In information services, not only are staff important for service delivery; often they constitute the product itself.

Clearly what counts most in the eyes of users is the human side of a library service, underlining the importance of staff training, motivation and professional development in overall strategies of quality improvement [6].

If we are serious about providing quality services, we need to learn about the users' quality expectations, with a democratic approach aimed at achieving common goals in the interest of the community as a whole [7].

The user/client, and his/her consequent state of satisfaction, is the most important variable of the system, the authentic motor of Quality, as its origin and its destination: he/she is judge of the characteristics of a product or service, a referee that assesses its appropriateness and relevancy, and a guide that compels the company to anticipate its expectations. In the informative-documentary units, the user is an increasingly dynamic being, a *co-producer* that expresses individual needs, priorities and requirements, and wants to participate in all the documentary processes, from the phase of information entry to the system to the output phase, going through the processing, operation that is conditioned, among others variables, by the documentary objectives of the information unit and by the user needs and expectations. Some authors, ironically, consider the user an "unpaid employee" ("servuction").

The user is a complex entity in whom different aspects reside together: *psychological* (sensations, moods...), *cognitive* (mental structures, body of knowledge or plans, semantic representation manners, effects of the information levels...), *linguistic* and *pragmatic, ecological, sociological, communicative* . .(need of information, channels and forms.. .). From there that his/her performance as products and services consumer need a greater paradigmatic investigation that integrates novel contributions with more academic positions, both in functional and in doctrinal environments, in order to improve the representation and utilisation of the information circuits. We will not venture into philosophical-ideological marginal reflections about minor connotations of the terms user/client. In Spain, still in the

context of the libraries as public-entity suppliers of free products and services, it is frequent to employ *user* instead of *client*, the latter being more in fashion in the documentary environments where services may be attached to the notion of economic value. For us "client" includes the person that receives the product or service as well as the one who participates in the design and production of the technical process in the information unit.

Among the innovative assignments of the information agents, we should emphasise the need of being knowledgeable of the demands of the different user segments, translating those needs into attributes and characteristic of the services, so that there is not a gap between what the user expects and what the centre offers. In this sense, measurement plays a key role, since we should operate with responsible data about the products and/or services (properties and attributes, conformity – non-conformity with the product/service as delivered to the client), processes (behaviour, duration, failures..), clients (values, needs, priorities.. .), in order to know the information unit and its conformity with what is specified in the objectives, and, finally in order to make decisions and establish action towards improvement. The correct selection and processing of the data, with the knowledge that this requires, constitutes the tool par *excellence* for achieving quality.
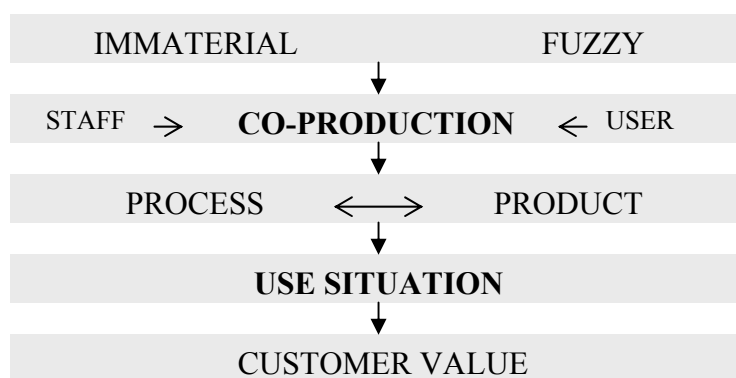
For a better understanding, we must reflect on some concepts related to the world of the user from the standpoint of Quality, such as:
- *Social Quality*, understood as need and exigency of any individual to receive a good service, to maintain good relations with the organisation, to be involved in the process and to have his/her needs recognised and integrated.
- *State of need*, state of affairs which, if present, would improve the well-being of an entity. It may refer to something basic and biological or it may involve social and personal factors and derive from complex forms of learning. There are three states of need: aroused, expressed and recognised.
- *Information demand,* expressed in the formal petition for information and in the resolution of the problem within the appropriate relevancy canons, analysing the physical, cognitive, psychological, scientific and documentary aspects.
- *Perception of the service*, that is to say the set of mechanisms and processes that the user employs to acquire knowledge of the information unit, its products and services, based on sensorial and conceptual information elaborated by their senses.
- *Expectations*, or state of anticipation on the part of the client, by satisfying their needs of information. To the expectancy level of the user entails factors such as personal needs of the individual, the verbal communication with other clients and the messages issued by the centre that provide the service.
- *Degree of satisfaction*, understood as the process by which a need, or generally a motivation recovers the zero level. In a Management Model of Total Quality the satisfaction must be *maximum* and *generalised*, applied to all individuals and entities that, direct or

indirectly, are related with the information service, and it is better understood as an emotional reaction to the service/product supplied. The satisfaction is an emotion and a reaction in which expectations play a crucial role, in such a way that a discussion on the satisfaction and its formation must also include a discussion of expectations --their types and their formation.[8] Satisfaction is balanced between what is needed (minimal satisfaction state) and what is expected (maximum satisfaction), with an inferior state of dis-satisfaction when the programmed *needs* are not met, and a superior state of over-satisfaction when the *expectations* are surpassed.

But the limited work achieved in the informative-documentary sector to measure user satisfaction has not allowed the development of stable models, for several reasons: the quality of the services is more complex to measure than that of products, since the users appreciate not only the outcome but also the process; the global satisfaction measures rarely note the road toward the improvement actions; and finally, it is difficult to quantify in a reproducible manner the "soft" aspects of satisfaction or the relationship existing between this and demand [9].

Anyway, it is important that the information and documentation unit adopt strategic measures routed to know, measure and act on the value of the clients, defining segments to determine their preferences and information habits, needs and demands, degree of satisfaction and expectation, as an objective of profitability, since we have not forgotten that the needs of the users/clients are unlimited and that resources, however, are always limited.

IMMATERIAL		FUZZY
STAFF →	**CO-PRODUCTION**	← USER
PROCESS	⟷	PRODUCT
USE SITUATION		
CUSTOMER VALUE		

INFORMATION&DOCUMENTATION SERVICES

We will summarise our reflection on the informative-documentary services in the following enhanced points:

1) The information-documentation is a good with a high *immaterial* component, and consequently, *fuzzy*.

2) Such characteristic of this "raw material" call for processes of *co-production* that combines the staff and user collaboration.

6

3) Consequently the *process* gets a superlative importance, taking an important part of the product.

4) The individuality of each *use situation* (act of service) derives from the own individuality and personality of the user.

5) The *customer value* is the main variable of the whole system. His of her perceptions, needs and expectations must be studied in-depth.
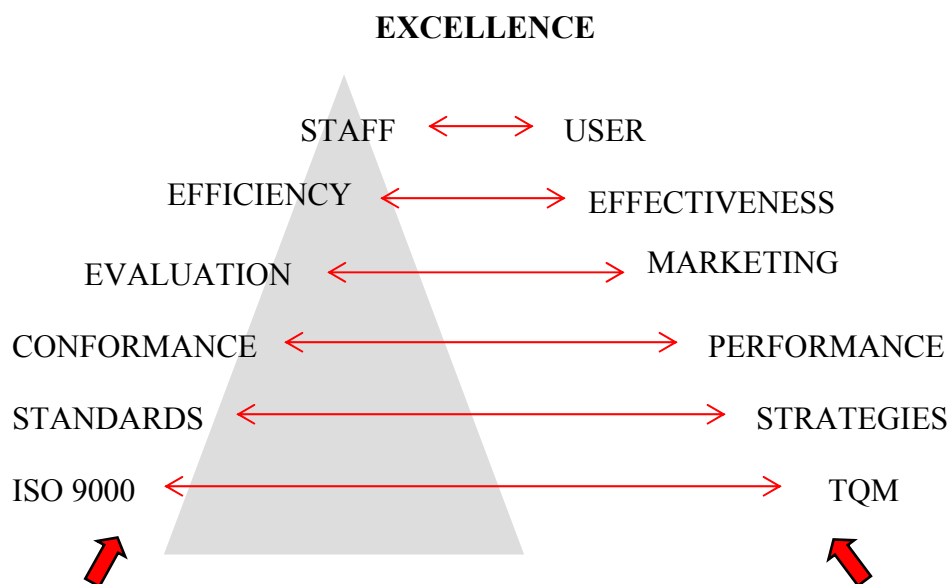
Two Converging Ways toward Excellence of Inform-Document-ation Services

In the road toward the *excellence*, or maximum generalised satisfaction state, the manager of the information and documentation services must to do simultaneously two trends that are complementary. The first watches toward the interior of the service, is concerned of the personal, of its efficiency, of the evaluation, of the conformity, of the standard, of the database quality and of the normalisation, and is reflected in the different ISO procedures. Despite the manufacturing and military origins of the standard, there is ample evidence that ISO 9000 can be applied to service industries, including the library and information service sector. A system such as ISO 9000 can be one of the main elements of a sustained and comprehensive approach to quality management and provides a systematic way to meet organisational objectives. It is important to realise that ISO 9000 is not by itself a "quick-fix" solution to improving quality but a tool which can be used for quality management.

The second trend is much more concerned of the external face of the service, its users, the efficiency, the market, the performances, the strategies, the quality management. The application of quality management within organisation is both larger and wider[10]. Proper performance measurement of LIS sector should rely on a Total Quality Management (TQM) oriented instrument since the scope ISO 9000 measures are too narrow and cannot be applied broadly.[11] TQM is a systematic and holistic approximation to organisations management problems whose principal objective is the achievement of a generalised satisfaction maximum state: of clients, of personnel, of managers and of the community as a whole. Taking into account this objective of Total Quality, more than of quality to singular agrees to speak of qualities, since the Total Quality depends on a series on partial qualities that contribute to that generalised satisfaction maximum objective previously established.

An interesting approach TQM is offered by the EFQM, with the model of Business Excellence, widely accepted in numerous information and service environments, and without doubt reflects better than other the European cultural framework in which we move.

One point of view in the library and information services field connects measurement with effectiveness, determining that the services provided relate to the success of the users as they utilise and implement the information they obtain from the library [12].

The satisfaction of the client depends on the price, on the quality of the product and on the quality of the service, but only the latter constitutes the element of real difference in a competitive market. We understand by modelization of the information services the necessary actions for the design and improvement of the presentations in order to optimise the Satisfaction of the clients in a objective way, from the perspective of the own clients and with the smaller cost for the organisation. Of the many existing methodologies we will allude to the qualitative methods based on questionnaires, interviews, surveys, complaints analysis received ..., and we centre ourselves in the quantitative analysis methods centred in technical statistics of correlation or regression, that will help us to better explain and understand the reactions and the behavioural reasons of the clients. Of the multiple models of this group we emphasise two methods: QFD or Quality Function Deployment and the model GAPS of Parasuraman.

EXCELLENCE

STAFF	USER
EFFICIENCY	EFFECTIVENESS
EVALUATION	MARKETING
CONFORMANCE	PERFORMANCE
STANDARDS	STRATEGIES
ISO 9000	TQM

TWO CONVERGING WAYS TOWARD EXCELLENCE

Services need to implement a *transverse* organisation, as well as the reduction of the hierarchic levels through a more dynamic and shared management. The agents in the relationship of service participate not only in the construction processes of service but also in the definition of the criteria of quality and performance and in the elaboration of the specific organisational strategy.

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