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Total Quality Management in the Academic Library

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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**

What is quality? Each one gives his or her own definition, but one meaning of quality is customer satisfaction through product or by service. The customer in the academic library is the user/reader/student. Here the customer is not an outsider, but part of the academic community.

As a response of this challenge of quality, India's University Grants Commission (UGC—www.ugc.ac.in/) has set up NAAC (www.naac-india.com/index.asp), the National Accreditation and Assessment Council. NAAC conducts audits and inspections on the quality of service provided by educational institutions, including library service. Grants are linked to the outcomes of these assessments. In light of this, academic libraries must develop systems, philosophies, and strategies for managing quality.

The primary purpose of an academic library is to support the teaching, research, and other academic programs of its parent organization. An academic library is part of a service organization which delivers products personally to the customer.

In a manufacturing concern, the customer is remote, where as in service organization like an academic library, producers and consumer meet face to face. The complexity of managing service organizations is typically compounded by the existence of multiple interfaces.

Managing Quality in an Academic Library

In a service organization like an academic library the customer satisfaction means fulfilling expectations.

Librarians must find out what readers want and concentrate upon providing it. Designing an appropriate service means asking

- Who are the customers?
- What do they want?

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- What can the organization provide?

In a library there are basically two types of customer: those who are in a hurry and those who want to kill time. An academic library has to identify these and serve them accordingly.

Managing Customer Expectations

The expectations that the customers bring to a library have a critical effect upon their perceptions of quality. It is better to acquire a reputation for one or two factors which are important to customers and to concentrate upon developing those.

Service delivery is like a theoretical performance. If customers are to gain maximum benefit from a service, they must know how to use it. So, properly planned user education is a must for an academic library.

Support systems should reflect customers' priorities. It is important to find out which services can be automated without losing the personal touch.

Getting feedback from the user is important to ascertain the quality of service. Regular users of an academic library can be given a questionnaire to get feedback from them for improving service.

The circulation desk staff are the front line staff who play a critical role is an academic library because they represent the library; first deal with inquiries/crises; manage the reader interface. Public services staff must be carefully-appointed and be given periodic training to keep up-to-date.

All academic library staff must receive training, including skill training; on the job guidance; retraining. Well-trained staff are the competitive weapon for better quality service in an academic library.

Teamwork plays a vital role in giving better quality service. People have to develop a culture and commitment towards quality service in an academic library.

ISO 9000 Series Steps Towards TQM In Academic Library

ISO 9000 (www.iso.ch/iso/en/ISOOnline.openerpage) has an internationally accepted certificate that accredits an organization for its quality management systems and procedures. ISO 9004-2:1992 (www.9000-2000-iso.com/9004-2.html) has guidelines for services and was issued by ISO to establish and implement a quality system within a service organization such as an educational institution.

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