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Public libraries and total quality in Romania

(Biblioteki publiczne a kompleksowe zarządzanie jakością w Rumunii)

Słowa kluczowe: biblioteki publiczne, kompleksowe zarządzanie jakością, Rumunia

Abstract: W artykule omówiono rolę bibliotek publicznych w społeczeństwie. Aby zrealizować wyznaczony cel, wzięto pod uwagę następujące dokumenty: Manifest IFLA/UNESCO, Manifest Oerias i inne. W tekście scharakteryzowano pojęcie jakości i wpływu, jaki wywiera ona na życie społeczne. Opisane zostały sposoby wdrażania kompleksowego zarządzania jakością w bibliotekach publicznych Rumunii oraz wpływ bibliotekarzy na przebieg tego procesu. Autorka porównuje użytkowników biblioteki i ich oczekiwania dotyczące standardów jakości obsługi do wymagań klientów nabywających rozmaite produkty i usługi.

Keywords: public libraries, total quality management, Romania

Abstract: The article describes the public libraries and the social role they perform. This is based on several documents: IFLA/UNESCO Manifesto, The Oerias Manifesto and others. This paper also focuses on quality, its definitions and impact on the social life. It shows several ways of applying the total quality management in public libraries which involves librarians' participation and other aspects connected with the process. The author compares library users appreciation of quality with similar criteria of the clients who buy products or services.

Public libraries and their social role

Public libraries are institutions highly appreciated and intensely visited by the members of a community, according to their interests in reading, information or leisure. Thus, the main objective of libraries is to meet users' needs, through specific programmes and projects.

Libraries' main function is to support the most important missions of these institutions, as following:

- preserve, organise and disseminate collections of documents with encyclopaedic content, according to the number of inhabitants and the size of settlement/county where they function;
- circulation of documents, both in the library and through the lending departments;
- create catalogues and other information instruments, in traditional and automated system, develop databases, in order to provide an easy access to documents;
- train users in using information sources from librarians' collections and electronic/digital resources;
- general, national and local bibliographic information;
- community information;

- support long life learning;
- organise cultural and leisure activities;
- initiate and participate to programmes of development and automation of the specific library processing activities and services;
- preserve cultural and historical traditions of the community;
- protect the local publications collection through the Legal Deposit legislation, for the county libraries.

Public libraries have an important social responsibility, both through their role to provide information and social protection for disfavoured citizens. Generally, public libraries address to the local communities, but *via* Internet, they extended their activities practically to all users in the world.

Even from 1994, the IFLA/UNESCO Manifesto [5] considered that: „The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision- making and cultural development of the individual and social groups”.

Being totally confident in the role of the public library as being „a living force for education, culture and information and an essential agent for the fostering of peace, and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women” [5], the same document recommends to the national governments and local administrations to support the development of the public libraries. These public services should address to all age categories, equally for everybody, no matter of nationality, religion, language, social status, sex. A special mention refers to the people with disabilities, people in hospitals or prisons.

Further on, the UNESCO document refers to the promotion of the cultural dialogue and the cultural diversity, adapting services to the urban and rural milieu, long life learning for librarians, thus they can meet as much as possible information requests expressed by users.

Another international document, The Oerias Manifesto [9] (The Pullman Agenda for e-Europe. Documents adopted at the Pulman Conference from Oeiras, Portugal, 13-14th March 2003) emphasizes that: „public libraries, activating together with information services and museums should:

- support a civil and democratic society that serves the needs of the entire community, provide open access to all cultures and knowledge and fight against exclusion, by providing to people attractive and entertainment spaces;
- meet the requests of special groups, disabled people, young people, old people, the unemployed, people who live in rural areas;
- support the emergence of e-government, e-health, e-commerce and e-learning services;
- assure the unique, objective and friendly access to electronic resources and training to use them;
- be long life learning centres;
- help fighting against digital „illiteracy”, support the creation of digital resources available to everybody;

- encourage the idea of local community, pay attention to cultural, ethnic, religious diversity and participate to the preservation of the Community Memory“.

At its turn, the Alexandria Manifesto on Libraries. The Information Society in Action (adopted by IFLA on the 11th November 2005) [1] underlines that „The unique role of libraries and information services is that they respond to the particular questions and needs of individuals. This complements the general transmission of knowledge by the media, for example, and makes libraries and information services vital to a democratic and open Information Society. Libraries are essential for a well informed citizenry and transparent governance, as well as for the take-up of e-government”.

Through the majority of the above mentioned functions, libraries enter also in a competition with mass-media, but it is obviously that mass-media cannot substitute either of libraries' functions, as the information exclusively from the Internet is not enough in many cases.

Public libraries have also the role, beside the school, university, special or research libraries, to help users to be aware about the information role and encourage them to use information in the most favourable manner.

Quality. Definition and impact on social life

In an abstract way, the concept of „quality” is defined as „the ensemble of features and essential characteristics, under which an entity is what it is, being different from other entities” [3], so quality make the difference between entities. When changing the parameter of „quality”, the object or process changes, as well. Restrictively, quality induces the idea of good or positive. In fact, the definition proves to be rather difficult. It was noticed that the special literature about the quality management is very wide and, although, the term of „quality” is still insufficiently defined.

The economic, social and cultural activities define quality with different meaning, so that the definition can be in accordance with their specific and the levels of superiority they tend to.

Many times, even clients of different products or services understand distinctly quality, according to their exigencies level or thier individual knowledge on market. Although, obviously, there is series of standards about the notion of „quality”, generally accepted at social level.

The 80's represent the starting point of implementation of the integrative concepts of quality, based on the theories expressed by Armand V. Feigenbaum about *Total Quality Control*, who in 1951 published his first book named *Quality Control: Principles, Practice, and Administration* (New York, Toronto: McGrawhill, 1961). He is considered to be the father of this concept, to which he added the „notion of quality costs”.

Some authors consider that Dr. Kaoru Ishikawa, the most important expert in the domain of quality in Japan and the specialist who introduced the notion of „circle of quality” which created the real revolution in the field, as he was the first who „considered quality as way to administrate the entire organization” [4, p. 30]. Thus, for the Japanese professor,

quality is on the first place followed by: orientation to the client, remove sectors, statistics, respect for people-notion which becomes management philosophy – and, interfunctional management [4, p. 30].

David A. Garwin (profesor at Harvard Business School) emphasised in two articles published in 1984 – *What Does Quality Product Really Mean*, published by the prestigious journal *Sloan Management Review* and *Product Quality an Important Strategic Weapon*, published by „Business Horizont” that there are five main orientations to be followed in defining the quality of products:

1. transcendence – quality is an atemporal entity and it is considered very subjectively by people, but this totally unproductive by the enterprises which produce goods;
2. orientation to product – quality is to measured very exactly, but clients’ demands are not taken into consideration;
3. orientation to production – quality is only compliance to the specific of the production flow;
4. orientation to costs – quality is defined only by the production costs;
5. orientation to user.

The concept of „fitness for use” had been introduced by Joseph M. Juran¹¹. A summum was given by Smith who appreciated that: „quality is rather the expresion of the relationship between certain attributes of one entity – the characteristics of its quality – and the standard or criterium of evaluation established in accordance with the clients’ demands” [11].

Principles of the total quality management. General approach

The continuous improvement strategy was defined in Japan under the name of KAI-ZEN [7, p. 105] (in Japanese, *kai* = „change”, *zen* = „for better”) and it refers to a gradually knowledge of the quality rating for products and services, with the participation of the entire staff. In the middle of the ‘80’s and the beginning of the ‘90 of the 20th century, Maasaki Imai-consultant in management quality and researchers of the economic phenomena, wrote some works where he presented the results of his studies in USA and Japan about productivity and quality increase in different companies. When this theory emerged, it was considered an alternative to the strategy of innovation [7, p. 107] which meant changes in large stages, with the important contribution of more and more sophisticated technologies.

Kaizen strategy did not imply big investments one time, on the contrary, it consisted in a technique called „the small steps technique.” Under the „Kaizen umbrella” [6, p. 197], Maasaki brought, on one side: the orientation to the client quality circles, system of suggestions, automation, work discipline, total productivity maintenance, together with the notions of: quality improvement, the activity just in time, zero defects, small working group, participating management, increase productivity, development of new products.

¹¹ American professor of Romanian origin, he coordinated the training of the Japanese workers, under the motto: „Quality concerns everybody”. He also wrote *Quality Control Handbook* (1951) and *Managerial Breakthrough* (1964), considered to be fundamental works in modernising the idea of quality.

The total quality management represents a new culture which can be defined by making people aware about quality and its improvement mechanisms, in every department and at all levels.

The organisations which put in practice this type of management commit themselves on long term to honour quality which they should consider an essential value.

The important mechanisms to prevent errors are the following:

- anticipation;
- inspection at source;
- cessation in time (in the situation of the industrial processes, before a new item is made).

The essential difference between the older management theories which consider quality as being exclusively an *internal matter* and the new theories consists in an *external outlook*. Based on the studies conducted by Japanese and American managers, Deming and Walton elaborated in 1986 the 14 steps of the total quality management which managers of all types of institutions should take into consideration and adopt as the new philosophy [2]:

1. Cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality.
2. End the practice of awarding business on price alone; instead, minimize total cost by working with a single supplier.
3. Improve constantly and forever every process for planning, production and service.
4. Institute training on the job.
5. Adopt and institute leadership.
6. Drive out fear.
7. Break down barriers between staff areas.
8. Eliminate slogans, exhortations and targets for the workforce.
9. Eliminate numerical quotas for the workforce and numerical goals for management.
10. Remove barriers that rob people of pride of workmanship, and eliminate the annual rating or merit system.
11. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement for everyone.
12. Put everybody in the company to work accomplishing the transformation.

Philip B. Cosby created a shorter version of the above mentioned stages [4]:

1. Involve management.
2. Form teams for quality improvement.
3. Evaluation.
4. Quality cost.
5. Make people aware about quality.
6. Correction activities.
7. Plan for eliminate defects.
8. Train staff.
9. Zero defects day.
10. Establish objectives.

11. Recognition.
12. Quality councils.
13. Resume process.

At their turn, Stephen Hill and Adrian Wilkinson synthesised the total quality management principles in a work published in 1995, *From Quality Circles to Total Quality Management*, where they presented the following principles: orientation to client – quality means to meet clients' needs; orientation to processes; continuous improvement – meet the clients' requests means a continuous improvement of products and processes. The definition includes either the total orientation to client or to the quality of product.

The Canadian economist Joseph N. Kelada¹² used at the beginning of the 90's of the 20th century, the expression „la gestion integrale de la qualite” with the meaning of „Total Quality Management” and he defined the concept of total quality according to the „clients' satisfaction regarding the quality of product or service”, as well as the goods delivery in time, at costs as reduced as possible, under the circumstances of efficient relationships between client and provider, and thus involving all processes.

The advantages of applying TQM are studied by economists and appreciated as such. Although, there are also critical points of view on applying TQM, that meaning: the approaches do not have clear results, purpose mistaken with means, orientation on long term is unfair. From the point of view of human resources, philosophers and sociologists consider that there is a certain lack of flexibility of ideas and too strong involvement of subordinates in failure [7].

In conclusion, the most important change brought by total quality management is becoming aware about quality of all processes in an organisation, in each department and at all levels of decision.

The Japanese pattern (based on the 5S technique: *Seiri* – „sorting”, *Seiton* – „organization”, *Seiso* – „cleaning”, *Seiketsu* – „preserve order”, *Shitsuke* – „rigour”) attached to the traditional Western idea of the exclusively internal responsibility for quality, the external outlook, where there are involved both objective and subjective factors.

Apply total quality management in public libraries

As it is already known, there are three types of organisations: those which ask themselves what happened, those which look at what happened and those which determine things to happen.

Nowadays, libraries are requested to be active institutions and take part in the social life development, in measurable terms: libraries support long life education (the disadvantaged categories or the unemployed can find in the library the documentation they need to apply for new jobs, they can have access to databases, train themselves by using computers, etc); disabled people can use computers in libraries with special technological endowments; information through community information centres make people aware about their belonging to a local community.

¹² Professor at the School of High Commercial Studies at the University in Montreal, in charge with the international team for total quality management survey at the same university.

Similar to economical entities or other institutions, libraries can establish their role in community as provider of information and services. Libraries specific activities involve all aspects connected with total quality management:

1. Standard processes in circulation services; standard processes in processing information (cataloguing, record, bibliography, etc). In this situation, users are concentrated on result;
2. Every day processes-accent on „diagnosis” – circulation and marketing studies. The conclusions are that libraries involve both „front room” processes whose results can be seen immediatly, as well as „back room” processes, vital for all activities, but whose results can be noticed in time by users. It is said that, generally, „there is difficult for individuals to master all qualities of efficiency, creativity, advise and diagnosis”¹³, but this precisely concern librarians working with users and, why not, the entire library. Certainly, yes. Libraries should harmonise all these aspects, as close to the real challenges, taking into account all difficulties that can emerge.

The author of the above mentioned volume, David H. Maister¹⁴ appreciated that it is very important for staff to have a profound knowledge of the processes in an organisation, in order to convince public/users about the correctness and efficiency of all actions, in order to meet their requests¹⁵.

Many library science authors affirmed that it is difficult and subjective to measure the quality of libraries services. The „benefits” provided by library services are not tangible, in a very strict way, excepting the taxes paid by users. It will take some time until users notice some changes. On the other hand, libraries did not assimilate easily to the idea of „plan of quality” which the enterprises understood a long time ago. The need of a plan is not to be under debate, as only by planning activities, libraries can measure their achievements, establish the level of development at a certain point, objectives can be established, as well as priorities for future and need for financial and human resources, etc.

In the 80's of the last century there have been done the first surveys upon libraries' activities and they included, generally, statistics on quantities and quality. In fact, the results were meant to support the request for a certain budget to the authorities in charge. At that time, American and British library science literature put under debate ways to evalaue library services which were in full development, but they did not take into consideration the rate between the cost and efficiency of services.

Theories and working instruments of the total quality management have been tested in some American libraries, among which: Harvard College Library, Oregon State University, Pennsylvania State University Libraires, George Washington University Library, etc.

¹³ „It is highly unlikely that any one individual excel simultaneously at all virtues, efficiency, counseling, and diagnosis” (apud David. H. Maister. *True Professionalism*. London: Simon&Schuster, 1997, p. 125.).

¹⁴ British economist. He is considered to be one of the experts in human resources management. In 2002, he was included in the international list of the 40 scholars in economics, by the publication *Financial Times* and the study *Bussiness Minds*.

¹⁵ „It is hard to convince a client that you care about his or her bussiness when it is evident that you don't know what's going on in it” (Maister).

We appreciate that libraries face a limitation of resources, similar to that one in the economic sector. So, „managers dilemma regarding the general improvement of activities”, involving: „total cost management, total productivity management, total quality management, total resources management, total technology management” represent the same type of subjects for libraries management teams. „Productivity” means for libraries the variety of services provided to users.

„Total technology” is also under debate for the library science researchers. Older generations consider that technology is very recently involved in library’ processes and it represents partially the interests of an institution with strong cultural roots. Younger specialists in information science follow the idea of using technology in the most of specific processes: acquisition, record and processing documents (cataloguing-classification-indexation, local history, etc.), online references, lending, reservation of documents.

Genuchi Taguchi¹⁶ emphasised that for the economic sector, the relationship between quality and money is quantifiable at social level: „poor quality is a loss transferred to society, from the moment of delivering products to clients” [8, p. 20-21]. Beneficiaries associate the notion of quality to an initial value which they discover together with the products/services and that create them trust, meaning an appreciation.

In the situation of services provided by libraries, the deviation from the quality parameters is visibly in society, as the organisation becomes a weak link in the local, national or international circuit of information. The potential existing in the library documents loses dramatically its importance, together when the quality of information is poor. These are not the only reasons for which public libraries should apply the laws of total management laws.

The management functions are fundamentally the same in all structures, either they are economic entities, or education and culture institutions [12, p. 18]:

- strategical plan;
- management control;
- change and innovation.

Library users can also be indirect participants to the decisions of the management team, either they express about:

- interests of reading/study/information;
- perception of the working millieu;
- need of documents;
- type of documents;
- level of staff expertise;
- library technological endowment.

All these items lead to the evaluation of the services level at a certain time in accordance with users expectation horizon.

We consider that the analysis of the expected results, used insufficiently in our public libraries represent one of the elements which can lead to the principle of „zero defects” involved the total quality management.

¹⁶ Japanese engineer, he also works for statistics, adviser at the Japanese Institute for Standards and executive director at American Supplier Institute, international consultancy organisation.

The survey of the internal processes of a library as: processing documents – correctly and in time – establish an information flow in accordance with users' information requests, the level of expertise of the institution, human and material resources, provide *a diagnosis of quality*.

It is well-known the fact that modern organisation emphasise the degree of client satisfaction, that meaning the quality of products, as well as the manner to address to the beneficiary, staff efficiency, the best way to answer complaints, etc.

At their turn, 21st century libraries need more than ever to meet these parameters, in accordance with the notion of „quality”, as they are active participants on the information market, being visible together with mass-media, NGO, etc.

Managers should not wait users to notice poor activities, but to make periodically an analysis, following the idea of being aware about the real quality of the services. There are users who, after the first visit to the library – in the building or in the virtual environment – refuse to continue the contract, sometimes because of a poor quality of public relations. This effect can be limited or reduced to zero, through a change in the staff policy and training. On the other hand, a category of users who do not pay so much attention to minimal errors, if they notice that staff want to correct them and increase the quality level of services¹⁷. Library users appreciate quality based on similar criteria of the clients who buy products/services [10, p. 67-74]:

- separate quality – considered implicitly, which they do not especially request; users agree with that;
- satisfactory – the service includes features requested by users and to which they can have a higher or lower satisfaction;
- service includes features they requested on purpose as they expected them to exist; the satisfaction level is maximum.

Although, we cannot deny that users accept many times a poor level of quality, being aware that libraries can not afford some technological endowments or acquisitions, at a certain time.

„Quality simultaneously for the client and organization” [10, p. 71] means for libraries: users' satisfaction in accordance with their expectation horizon about libraries, agreement between the services and information provided by the info-documentary structures and the needs of information, reading, and leisure expressed by users.

It is necessary that libraries create fundamental objectives for the quality of services, resulting in plans of quality of the internal processes, as elements of a general and coherent on quality strategy.

¹⁷ Although, users have high expectancies for public libraries.

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