

Total Quality Management in Academic Libraries: A Desideratum

Richard N.C. Ugwuanyi
Nkechi Anthonia Idoko

Abstract

This paper discusses Total Quality Management (TQM) as a vital strategy in academic library. TQM is designed to bring out the latent potentials of academic library workers for effective services delivery capable of matching the needs and expectations of their clientele. The paper examines the benefits which the application of TQM has for both the academic library users and for the workers. Such benefits include excellent returns on investment, encouragement of team work, and considerable reduction of employee grievances. Discussed also are unskilled leadership, low or absence of frequent feedback from library users, and poorly planned library user education as some of the challenges facing the effective implementation of this intrinsic motivational policy. The paper as well discusses strategies for effective implementation of TQM practices in academic libraries. Some of the strategies examined are the adoption of the principle of quality leadership, inclusion of all the strata of the stakeholders and segments of every library in the planning and execution and continuous improvement of all the sections of academic library.

Keywords: Quality management, academic library, total quality management

Introduction

In this era of knowledge management and information economy, when library users are highly sensitive to time and do not tolerate any delay in information retrieval and delivery, academic libraries have no better option than to apply the strategy of total quality management (TQM). This is a management philosophy which was popularized by Deming in Japan following the ruination of her post world war II industries. Ever since, it has captured the interests of icons in organizational management and fully applied in many organizations to achieve customer satisfaction and worker efficiency. TQM is an organizational approach designed to improve the overall quantity and quality of workers production and services delivery, with view to intent on meeting or exceeding the expectations of customers. In libraries, it involves a steady improvement of all the processes being followed in the creation, management and delivery of information services.

Total Quality Management TQM in libraries cannot be ignored, especially in academic libraries where the obtainable/available volumes of information and strength of users are intimidating. It enhances stakeholders' receptivity to change and innovation. Academic libraries have as their primary objectives the support of teaching, research and

other academic programmes. TQM in academic libraries unveils the expectations of their clientele and enables librarians to swiftly attend to them through their well-trained and empowered library workers. In this highly competitive information market, it is only the judicious utilization of TQM that can help academic libraries compete successfully with other information services providers. If future academic library administrators are to satisfy their staff, enhance staff popularity and overcome their clientele's sensitivity to and consciousness of time, the principles of TQM must be known and adopted without reservation. It is therefore, the objective of this paper to highlight the desirability of TQM in academic libraries by briefly reviewing the available literature on TQM, examining its usefulness, challenges and strategies for its proper application.

Conceptual framework / review of literature.

. As a concept, 'Total' means the whole of anything and not the parts. It is the sum of the entire parts. 'Quality' depicts the degree of excellence and high level fitness for use. It portrays the ability of a product or service to satisfy the stated or implied needs of the users. 'Management' is the process of planning, organizing, coordinating and controlling, with a view to achieving an organization's goals and objectives. Total Quality Management (TQM) is therefore the art of managing the entire parts skillfully so as to fully meet the expectations and requirements of library users. To Keghku (2004) T.Q.M is a process and a systems approach to managing organizations, programmes and projects with the aim of achieving the best results, preferably at the first attempt and at the lowest cost. To Mary (1984) TQM is a process of "continuously meeting agreed customer requirements at the lowest cost by harnessing the potential of all employers." Embedded in this definition are four critical elements of continuity, customer-centeredness, low cost and employees care continuity implies that TQM is a continuous quality improvement that is interminable. Customer-centeredness shows that customer needs must be known and attended to accordingly. While low cost has to do with the organization's production of services at affordable cost to customers without jeopardizing the financial gains or stability of the organization, employees care involves their job security and care by the organization. Mary's definition is very apt and all encompassing. It brings out fully what TQM stands for. Dash (2008) explained that TQM is a management philosophy that enthrones all activities through which the needs of the customers and the community as well as the objectives of the organization are satisfied. This is done in a most efficient and cost-effective way by maximizing the potentials fall employees in a continuing drive for improvement.

In the context of library and information science, quality relates to the performance of the system, quantity and quality of the collections, quality of services, and finally users satisfaction. Quality is the extent to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfills a need or expectation that is stated, or obligatory. Quality according to Walmike (2001) has the following conceptualizations

- Conformity with requirements.
- A degree of excellence.
- The totality of characteristics that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs.
- Fitness for use.
- Delighting customers.

- Freedom from defects, contamination or imperfections.
Describing Total Quality Management as an enhancement to the traditional way of doing business, Dash (2008:169) listed the following as its basic concepts.
- Management's impose support for organizational growth and development.
- An unwavering focus on the customer, both internally and externally.
- Effective involvement and utilization of the entire work force.
- Continuous improvement of the business and production process.
- Treating suppliers as partners.
- Establishing performance measures for the processes.

In academic libraries, Total Quality Management is the act of managing effectively all the human and material resources with a view to satisfying the expectations and requirements of the users. According to Sharma (2001) quality library service entails the satisfaction of the query of each and every user exhaustively and expeditiously. However, the assessment of how well a library succeeds in doing these depends not on the management but on the users as the sole judge of quality.

The primary objective of any library should therefore, be the maximization of user satisfaction, meeting and exceeding user expectations. This may have led Thapisa and Gamiri (1999) to contend that quality service in library is helping a user to define and meet his needs.

For a total quality service, librarians must be in search of excellence through effective gathering of information, marketing of library services, monitoring the quality of their services and bringing the best out of the people who work with them in the library. This is very apt for goods are used but services are experienced. Quality service in library must be total and span across all the facets of library activities. Corroborating this view, Eze (2005:78) states thus:

Achieving quality in people calls for quality in recruitment and selection, quality in orientation, quality in appraisals, quality in promotion and rewards, and quality in human resource development and management. It also calls for quality leadership at all levels of the library administration that can motivate their followers to peak performance through creating room for innovations such as shared vision and empowerment. Qualities in all activities such as collection development, cataloging and classification mechanism, serials management, reference and information services, shelf maintenance, information retrieval system, and conducive environment.

If all the qualities mentioned above are in place, they are capable of delivering to the library users the right services at the first time and at the lowest possible cost. It means that everyone and every department must be assiduously involved and committed in creating and maintaining the quality of the services offered. Total Quality Management addresses, first and foremost, the issues that are of utmost importance to every library user whose main desire is to obtain relevant services at the particular time or times they are needed.

Benefits of Total Quality Management

Total Quality Management as a cardinal catalyst for the achievement of institutional objectives in academic libraries has lots of values which cause its wide applications to be imperative. One of such values is that it brings good returns on investment. Investment in organizations are made with a view to pleasing the stake holders, especially the customers and helping the organization to remain afloat and maintain a cutting edge utility in this global competitive information age. When the library management and staff, vis- a-vis the library users are satisfied with the services given by a library, no amount of resources invested would be regarded as waste. The results emerging from quality investments yield customer satisfaction through excellent services. Such investments are made on library collections, buildings, and on library workers. Assessing the essence of TQM in academic libraries Narasimhan and Kannan (2011) opined that the work force would be of the optimum size and would consist of persons possessing a variety of skills, competences, and attitudes required for successful operation. They further stated that quality consciousness should be instilled into all employees, right from the onset.

With total commitment found to be the hallmark of TQM, team work is vigorously encouraged, pursued and achieved. Following a determined and concerted effort to achieve clientele satisfaction, everybody and every part of academic library works conscientiously to achieve a set objective. From this, team work that proceeds from team spirit emerges. Team work is a very vital dividend that grows out of the desire to achieve TQM. It maximizes the skills of individuals with the results that better decisions are made for quality services. Since everybody shares in decision making, planning and implementation, team spirit is assured while errors and abuses are prevented. TQM breaks down inter-departmental barriers, thereby creating total involvement of every one.

When properly carried out, the TQM philosophy has the capacity and capability of infusing effective communication among those involved in the production, dissemination and utilization of information. Achievement of high level quality of services for the operational efficiency of an academic library demands effective communication of ideas, visions and missions, and decisions on absolute clear terms not open to misinterpretations. TQM ensures downwards as well as upwards flow of information which allows for feedback through varieties of communication strategies. Begum (2003) stated that getting feedback from library users is important to ascertain the quality of services being rendered to them. Regular users of academic libraries can be given questionnaire to get feedback so as to improve services. The TQM principles of effective communication removes the possibility of misunderstanding and eliminates assumptions. To Nnaji (2009) it breaks down barriers, putting in clear perspective the requirements, plans, changes, goals and objectives.

Another benefit that accrues from the application of Total Quality Management is the elimination or considerable reduction of employee grievances. The inclusion of library workers in decision making, planning and execution as well as, in training and development, keep employee grievances at bay. Through these democratization processes employees have control over their job, feel satisfied and give unflinching support to the management. Moreover, TQM is introduced in academic libraries to improve productivity, increase customer satisfaction and enhance competitive advantage. Since

academic library's ultimate goal is to satisfy users, it is imperative that employees must have to understand what is expected of them.

Challenges to TQM

The benefits accruing from Total Quality Management notwithstanding, many academic libraries have not been able to skillfully apply it and profit adequately from its application. Some of the factors making the application of TQM difficult are considered brief here:

When a library management lacks leadership skills enough to carry along its stake holders, the ability to spearhead TQM becomes difficult. Leadership according to Katzenbach and Smith (1999) is the ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members. Leaders who arrange, plan and execute TQM successfully are those who are capable of using various methods like persuasion to positively influence their staff and clientele to achieve the library's stated objectives. Where as leaders because of their command and control styles of administration lack clear vision and mission statements, perseverance, and the capacity to inspire others, practice of TQM cannot blossom.

Since TQM in academic libraries is highly clientele focused, it becomes imperative that adequate and precise feedback from the clients on how they are being served should get to the management as and at when due. Feedback reflects any information that people receive about the consequence of their action and behavior. Such feedbacks enable librarians to be aware of how well they are achieving or trying to achieve the institutional objectives. Absence of feedback stifles any serious attempt at quality management. Positive feedback must be timely, specific, relevant, credible and sufficiently frequent. Feedback enhances the capacity of academic libraries to continuously assess their progress towards attainment of goals. Lack of customers' feedback hinders effort at quality services in academic libraries since the library workers would not only fail to understand the areas of their strength and weaknesses but also the needs of their clientele.

In any academic library where both the workers and the clientele are not cohesively working as a team, the propagation and adoption of TQM strategy cannot be sustained. For a Total Quality Management to succeed, library management should endeavor to build and maintain a virile and sustainable work team. A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. Without it, groups perform as individuals; with it, they become a powerful unit of collective performance (Katzenbach and Smith, 1999).

Sometimes, the library management forgets or becomes less mindful of training their staff so that they could offer efficient and quality services. When this happens, the desire to adopt TQM philosophy abates. Training is vital considering the fact that constantly retrained staffs offer high level quality services that are ultra modern and customer-oriented. It provides a sense of inclusiveness and satisfaction which is an intrinsic motivator that spurs workers to offering qualitative and timely services. Lack of interest in staff training and development serves as a great wedge and a silent killer in the practice of TQM.

Another hindrance to establishing a qualitative library service regime is the neglect of a properly planned and implemented user education. Since total quality management is user oriented, any academic library that wants to gain user satisfaction should be much concerned about educating users. This would enable them to independently make use of different modern technologies invented for information creation and management.

Strategies for achieving TQM

Total Quality Management is characterized by some basic strategies. These include principle of customer focus. The measure of library effectiveness depends on how well it serves its clientele and this as well springs from the library's understanding of the current and future needs of these users. Knowledge of their needs enables a library to strive to meet and exceed its users' requirements and expectations. In doing this, a library considers the information contents of the resources available, the service environment and the organization's ability to deliver services to customers at a precise period.

Another principle of TQM is quality leadership, which entails the unity of purpose and direction for academic library workers. Emphasis here is on the quality of librarians as leaders. Quality leadership produces quality, happy workers and congenial work environment that is productive and stress free. In this type of environment, shared values and visions are created so that every stakeholder becomes aware of what the library is intending to achieve. In creating an enabling and client-centered library environment, leaders have to possess quality attributes of communication skills, information search skills, teaching and record keeping skills. These will place them in a vantage position of knowing and meeting clientele needs.

The strategy of involving everybody and every system is a must if TQM is to be achieved in academic libraries. Stakeholders have to be incorporated at different strata of operations so that they are involved in planning, organizing, staffing, budgeting and implementing of projects and policies. TQM enables academic libraries to tap extensively from the skills and creative contributions of workers at various levels. Involving all in deciding the objectives of the library, in implementing new upcoming technology, reducing cost factor, providing good services, etc are imperative for TQM since stakeholders work as a coherent and committed team. Underwood (1990. 37) observed that the application of team work in library management should be widely adopted in libraries and information services, even in small-scale services, because it enables expertise to be shared, and encourages commitment.

For clientele and other stakeholders' satisfaction, Total Quality Management demands that there be a continuous improvement of every library sector. This shows that improvement on staff quality, clientele satisfaction, user education, and prompt services delivery are to be constantly reviewed and upgraded. In other words, the processes should continually be evaluated and up-graded in the life of academic libraries. This is vital considering the fact that library users' needs and desires normally change over time in line with changes which may occur in some key aspects of the social and cultural environment. they are never static (Ajayi, 2002). Elaborating on continuous improvement in libraries, Eze (2005) stated that anything and everything done should continually be evaluated by asking two fundamental questions thus: Is this necessary? If so, can it be done better?

Effectiveness and efficiency in libraries results from the keen application of TQM through proper management of system approach. The theory of system- approach to management according to Nnaji (2010) recognizes that the behavior of any part of a system has some effects on the behavior of the entire system. This means that if any part of the library, like cataloging is not performing well then the whole system is equally not performing well. In academic libraries, there are many sections with inter-related functions. When any of these derails or slackens, the whole library slackens and, consequently, achievement of its objectives slackens. A system may be taken as an ordered set of ideas, principles and theories or a chain of operations that produce specific results. For effective operations of TQM, library as an entity has to be managed using system approach so as to consistently ensure that all the units operate in harmony for improving performance.

Conclusion

Total Quality Management is an important organizational strategy which when genuinely applied in any management system, especially to an academic library, yields a laudable and inestimable dividend to both the organization and the stakeholders. It starts and maintains a culture of continuous learning and adaptation to the needs, demands and aspirations of academic library clientele. TQM takes interest in the training and retraining of workers so as to push up productivity, excellent services to customers, and workers peaceful co-existence. With these, instead of forcing or pushing people to change, TQM provides a way of attracting them to desire change since they have great stake in the change process. Academic libraries which are the backbones, hearts and souls of academic institutions stand to profit maximally from this policy. They are the basic service suppliers when it comes to research, learning and teaching in academic institutions. The application of Total Quality Management strategies in academic libraries enables librarians to make constant efforts to identify what a library user needs and how best to meet such needs.

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