BOOK REVIEWS


As if health care reform and the information revolution are not sufficiently challenging, health sciences librarians are grappling with a cultural change called, among other things, total quality management (TQM). The literature on quality management is growing, though the application of TQM in the library environment is sparsely represented. I looked forward to actually reading a whole book on the subject.

This collection of articles is co-published in the first 1993 issue of the Journal of Library Administration, and its focus is on academic and research libraries. The editors state their intention to provide a group of articles that examine TQM planning and implementation issues for libraries, as well as descriptions of TQM programs outside libraries but within nonmanufacturing environments. The nonmanufacturing environments described include higher education and the federal government. The introduction mentions that "an area where TQM has had a very substantial impact beyond the manufacturing sector, is in the health care field" (p. 6). I was quite disappointed to discover that in spite of this substantial impact, no examples from the health care field or health sciences libraries are mentioned. The article authors were selected because they "have begun to think about using or . . . are already using TQM in a library setting" (p. 1). Every hospital librarian falls into one of these categories, and TQM efforts are also underway in academic health sciences libraries. The addition of the health sciences library perspective would have expanded the scope of the book to the readers' benefit.

A thoughtful discussion of the reason for using TQM in a library is followed by descriptions of total quality management efforts at the libraries of Case Western Reserve University, Harvard College, and Oregon State University. Two articles outline TQM training processes, and several describe the tools of the technique, such as cause-and-effect diagrams, Pareto charts, and benchmarking. As may be expected from a book that is a compilation of articles, there is some repetitive information. Two identical illustrations of a TQM model appear, and several authors mention vocabulary barriers, particularly the use of the word customer.

Features that I found useful or inspiring include the vision statement of Harvard College Library and the model for implementing total quality management developed by the Association of Research Libraries' Office of Management Services. The articles describing TQM in libraries are useful, while the articles that describe TQM efforts in nonlibrary, service sector environments are not remarkably helpful. The literature on TQM in the nonlibrary environment is voluminous and accessible to librarians. A selective list of resource organizations is provided in the introduction, though the health care industry is not represented. Health sciences librarians will want to add to this list the National Association for Health care Quality in Skokie, Illinois.

The book is a useful overview for the uninformed, with enough detail to educate readers about the tools of TQM and warn them of its challenges. Librarians may use this book as the springboard for their quality improvement efforts precisely because it focuses on libraries. Hospital librarians will glean useful ideas from the book, but its emphasis is clearly out of the realm of the count-your-employees-on-one-hand library. Implementation of TQM in small libraries brings a host of unique challenges; ones that hospital librarians are required to meet. Health sciences librarians will need to augment this book and its suggested resources with gems from the health care industry, most notably The Health Care Manager's Guide to Continuous Quality Improvement [1]. For those who want the meat and only the meat, the thirty-nine-page The Quality Quest: A Briefing for Health Care Professionals is about as succinct as one could be about total quality management [2].

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References


This book is a real gem for those librarians involved in curriculum integration and those who need to teach critical appraisal skills to medical students and residents. In the preface, the author notes the work is intended for several levels of clinical learners. "Medical students, who are beginning to form reading habits, will benefit from an early exposure to the concepts of adequate study design, appropriate sample selection, and use of statistical inference. More seasoned clinicians should become more comfortable with old stumbling blocks, such as 'selection bias'