Creating and sustaining a culture of quality in African academic libraries

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Abstract:
A culture of quality can be described as the improvement of business processes in order to optimize your business (Fisher 2009). This description by Tony Fisher, President and CEO of Data Flux, is applicable in all work environments, including the academic library. When talking about the development of a culture of quality in an organisation, Jagdish Ramaswamy, president of the corporate business excellence group at India's Aditya Birla, says that “this is something that must be accomplished at multiple levels.” He emphasises that "it must include the participation of not only those on the front lines, the operators, but those in the middle and those at the top" (cited by MFRTECH 2015).

Unfortunately, a culture of quality is not always quick and easy to accomplish throughout an organisation. On the macro system level, vision, aim and context are clarified, while on the meso system level, the organisational conditions are created to establish a culture of quality. The last level is the micro system where implementation, measurement and improvement take place. Quality in an organisation needs not only to be created, but also continually nurtured and cultivated on all levels to establish, sustain and spread good practice.

This paper will focus on the scale of the challenge, the components of a culture of quality, as well as the steps to be taken to create and sustain a culture of quality in an African academic library context.

Introduction
Every academic library leader will agree that quality is crucial in delivering excellent service to their organisation and ensuring client satisfaction. However, just because they incorporated a variety of quality principles, quality measurements and continuous improvement methods doesn’t necessarily mean there is a culture of quality in their organisations!

Before looking at ways to create and maintain a culture of quality in an academic library, let us briefly define the concepts organisational culture and culture of quality.
**Organisational culture**

Every academic library has its own culture that can be described as the environment and atmosphere you find yourself in at work. This culture plays an important role in how you relate to other employees, how you perform your job and how much you enjoy your work. Josh Bersin (2015) defines this culture as a “set of behaviors, values, artefacts, reward systems, and rituals that make up your organization.”

The concept of organizational culture was very well researched by Kim Cameron and Robert Quin (1999). They identified four main profiles of organisational cultures categorised by two positive tensions, namely focus and structure. The horizontal axis in illustration 1 indicates an organization’s focus, internally or externally, on customers and the outside world. The vertical axis shows the tension between stability and control and flexibility and individuality. So, the vertical axis represents where decisions are made.

![Figure 1: Organisational culture profiles](image)

**Figure 1:**
Source: Shelby (2012)

The structure of the Clan and the Hierarchy has an inward focus, while the other two are outward focused. The structure of the Hierarchy and the Market are stable and controlled, while the other two, the Clan and the Adhocracy, are more collaborative and flexible in nature.

African academic libraries can mostly be labelled as stable structures and inward focused due to the nature of their academic parent institutions.
Defining a culture of quality

A culture of quality is a system of shared values, beliefs, attitude and behaviour patterns that focuses on customer satisfaction and continuous improvement of products and services (Srinivasan & Kurey 2014).

How do you make sure that all academic library staff members are quality orientated? The only way is when quality is not only deeply embedded in every facet of the organisation’s life, but when every staff member is passionate about quality.

Today’s business challenges

Two research studies are important when looking at today’s business challenges.

1. The first study is the 2014 American employee engagement survey based on the Gallup daily tracking interviews with 80,837 adults working for an employer from January to December 2014. Gallup defines engaged employees as Practical (Adkins 2015). This study found that only 31.5% of employees were engaged, while 51% were not engaged. The rest, 17.5% of employees, were actively disengaged. From a generational point of view, 28.9% of Millennials, 32.2% of Generation X, 32.7% of Baby boomers and 42.2% of Traditionals are engaged.

2. The second study is the Global Human Capital Trends 2015 report with the focus on Leading in the new world of work (Bersin, Pelster, Schwartz & Agarwal 2015). This report shows that “culture, engagement, and employee retention are now the top talent challenges facing business leaders.” Fifty percent (50%) of business leaders who participated in this study rate these challenges as urgent.

Creating and Sustaining a Quality Culture

To discuss the steps to take to create and sustain a quality culture, it is important to first identify the components of a quality culture.

Components of a quality culture

There are two studies focusing on shifting institutions more to a quality-driven culture worth mentioning.

Ashwin Srinivasan and Bryan Kurey (2014) performed an in-depth literature review, interviewed 60 multinational corporations’ quality function leaders, and “surveyed more than 850 employees in a range of functions and industries and at all levels of seniority.” They learned that many of the traditional tactics used to increase quality such as financial incentives, quality training, and sharing of best practices, have very little impact on ensuring a quality culture.

Instead, they found that only four characteristics really predict a culture of quality, namely:

1. Leaders must pursue a culture of quality and lead by example.
2. Employees must believe that quality is really important and embrace quality as a core value. In other words, the leaders’ quality messages must be credible.

3. Leaders not only need to get all employees involved in quality initiatives, but need to keep on encouraging and supporting employee participation in this regard.

4. Increase employee ownership and empowerment to shift from “a rules-based quality environment to a true culture of quality.”

The second study is Forbes Insights (2014) partnering with the American Society for Quality (ASQ) to conduct a world-wide survey of 2,291 executives and managers in April 2014. This study was called Culture of quality: accelerating growth and performance in the enterprise. In the conclusion of this report components of a culture of quality were listed, namely:

   1. “Clearly visible, engaged and unwavering senior management support for quality initiatives.
   2. Clearly articulated vision and values.
   3. Active and ongoing engagement with customers to continually identify and address current and evolving needs.
   4. Clearly stated quality goals.
   5. Performance expectations for all individuals throughout the company that clearly link to quality goals.
   6. Appropriate incentives – which can favour monetary or recognition-based awards, depending on individual circumstances.”

Both of these studies emphasise the key role executive teams and managers are playing in establishing and supporting a quality culture. At the same time, both studies also highlight the need for active participation by all employees in this process.

Steps in creating and sustaining a quality culture

Malhi (2013) describes in a very practical and logical way the steps to be taken to create and sustain a quality culture. He listed 8 steps, namely:

   1. Recognize the need for change.
   2. Diagnose the existing organisational culture.
   3. Determine the desired culture which supports the organisational vision and strategy. This includes “the development of norms which specify both acceptable behaviors and unacceptable behaviors”, as well as the designing of interventions to be implemented to close the gap between the old and the new envisioned organisational culture.
   4. Communicate the desired culture to all organisational members.
   5. Leaders to model the desired behaviour.
   6. Conduct appropriate training at all levels to embed the new culture and “to secure
organisational commitment to quality improvement efforts.”

7. Reinforce the desired behaviour through recognition and reward.

8. Evaluate the progress made towards the desired culture on a continuous basis.

In Malhi’s article (2013) he also discusses the strategies to embed quality in all aspects of the organisation so that it becomes a way of life for each employee. These eight strategies are:

1. Leaders must show noticeable commitment and explicit participation in quality efforts.

2. Leaders must demonstrate the desired behaviour.

3. Leaders need to build an environment of mutual trust and teamwork.

4. Leaders should appoint new employees that will fit into the desired quality culture.

5. Leaders should make available appropriate training opportunities and other support which clarify quality principles and encourage employees to embrace the new culture more readily.

6. All employees should be fully involved in the establishment of the desired culture.

7. “The desired quality culture should be reinforced by incorporating core values in the performance management system and basing rewards on meeting quality goals and demonstrating appropriate behaviour.”

8. “Management should use every vehicle possible (including conferences, videos, posters, in-house magazines) to communicate organizational direction, key values and quality achievements by employees.”

Under each of these strategies, Malhi (2013) provides more information to accomplish the specific strategy. For example under strategy three mentioned above, he lists specific tasks such as the honouring of promises and commitments by the executive team, the avoidance of clique forming, the use of cross-functional teams in projects, and encouraging dialogue on problem areas in the workplace.

Conclusion

It is clear that it is a time consuming, difficult and lengthy process to create a quality culture. Every executive team member and manager in the organisation will need to take the decision very seriously to embed quality throughout the organisation. Full commitment and willingness to follow the steps and strategies mention in this paper will be essential for success in this regard.

It is the only way to build an environment that will not only attract, develop and retain engaged employees who are focused on meeting client needs and delivering excellent services, but will also provide employees the opportunity to do something they love doing in an environment they can be proud of.
References


