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Managing Quality in a National Library

The case of the National Central Library of Florence, Italy

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Abstract

Over the last few years the National Central Library of Florence, Italy (referred to as BNCF) has been developing its Quality Management System (QMS). In December 2001 this system, in compliance with the ISO 9000 series standards, was accredited by the Det Norske Veritas, an independent foundation and a leading international provider for certifying management systems. The Quality System upgrade involved the Library staff in the implementation of a new release of the Procedures Manual. The whole system, maintained in conformity with the ISO standard by means of recurrent auditing inspections, the most recent in March 2005, aims to manage the organizational process and customer satisfaction through a monitoring and measuring process development plan.

This paper describes the efforts and other issues associated with the development and implementation of a Quality Management System.

The case of the BNCF, the first library accredited for its Quality Management System in Italy, is presented here as a "case study". The QMS procedures and products include managing interrelated processes as an entire system; measuring customer satisfaction through a survey form and acting on the results; the creation of a Quality Manual, a Procedures Map, and a Services Chart. The analysis of the development of these procedures and results will permit the evaluation of this model for other National libraries.

1. Introduction

Since the mid 1990's there has been a slow but continuous organizational change in the Italian Public Administration which has gradually introduced the modernization of the government-run libraries. In the same period the introducing of new laws insisting on efficiency and transparency in all government administrative procedures has led to a new relationship between the Public Administration and its users, closing the previously existing gap.

This new trend has helped to settle the dichotomy existing between public administration and its users. Today this modernization process continues to give improved public utilities to both individual users and the public and private sectors, such as government agencies, public enterprises, companies and corporations. A sign of this renewal is the modernization process of the libraries and the birth of a new generation of librarians devoted to information management. This technological change in libraries in order to be efficient, should be supported by an organizational change as much graduated as it is radical. In other words, new organizational models should be applied in libraries and government agencies to help continuously improve services satisfying the needs of its "clients". One of these models is proposed by the ISO 9000 standard series. The following text describes the BNCF's efforts associated with the development and implementation of its Quality Management System, in compliance with the ISO 9001 standard.

2. Features of the National Central Library of Florence, Italy

To better understand this case study it may be useful to present some information on the National Library of Florence. Founded in 1747, it opened its doors to the public under the name of Magliabechiana. Based originally on the private library of Antonio Magliabechi who had left his large collection of books to the city of Florence, the Magliabechiana Library merged with the collection of books owned by the Medicis, Grandukes of Tuscany and the Palatina-Lorenese Library to form the National Library in 1870.

In 1886 the BNCF was given both the right to receive one copy of every publication printed and published in Italy, according to legal deposit laws, and the institutional duty of producing a bibliography of all publications received by legal deposit, under the name of *Bollettino delle pubblicazioni italiane ricevute per diritto di stampa*, and after 1958 *Bibliografia Nazionale Italiana*. Publications deposited with the National Library of Florence were made available to its users in its various reading rooms, preserved for the benefit of future generations and becoming part of the national heritage. Today these publications are recorded in the on-line catalogue which is accessible on the World Wide Web, and which will remain an essential research tool for generations to come.

Most of the books, new serial titles and other materials, such as doctorate theses, children's books, printed music and school textbooks, are listed in the different series of the *Bibliografia Nazionale Italiana*, which is available in printed, CD-ROM and on-line formats and has a world-wide distribution.¹

In 1970 the BNCF became the first director of the National Library Service (Servizio bibliotecario nazionale).

The BNCF is today a national cultural institution and the largest library in Italy, with almost 5,300,000 items on 108 kilometres of shelving. Its rich collection include more than 5,000,000 printed books and other printed materials, 115,000 periodicals (14,000 still in publication), 3,700 incunabula, 25,000 old manuscripts, 30,000 books published in the sixteenth century and 1,000,000 autograph writings.

The Library is run by the National Cultural Heritage Ministry and has 273 people on its payroll.

¹ *Bibliografia nazionale Italiana. Serie monografie. N.S.* Firenze, BNCF, 1994-; *Libri per ragazzi, Musica a stampa, Tesi di dottorato, Periodici, Libri scolastici.*

In December 2001 the BNCF was accredited the Quality System Certificate in compliance with the ISO 9000 standards.

3. The Library “Quality Management System Project”

In 1998 the management of the National Office for Library Patrimony, now Headquarters of the National Cultural Heritage Ministry, in Rome, planned the introduction of a quality system in the libraries run by the Ministry. The purpose was to test a model for developing quality systems in order to choose the final procedures to be used in the introduction of the systems throughout Italian libraries.

The National Library of Florence was given the task of developing a Quality Management System that would meet the requirements specified by ISO 9000 Standards. The three-year ‘Quality System Management Project’ was certified by external auditors in 2001 and has since been maintained by means of recurrent auditing inspections, the most recent in March 2005.

4. The ISO 9000 Model

The term ISO 9000 refers to a set of quality management standards elaborated by the International Standard Organization, located in Switzerland and established in 1947 to develop common international standards in many areas. The set of norms presents the necessary requirements for organizations to achieve reliability and improve the quality of its products and services. ISO 9000 currently includes three quality standards: ISO 9000: 2000, ISO 9001: 2000 and ISO 9004:2000. More specifically:

ISO 9000: *Quality management systems - Fundamentals and vocabulary*

ISO 9001: *Quality management systems - Requirements*

ISO 9004: *Quality management systems - Customer satisfaction - Guidelines for performance improvements.*

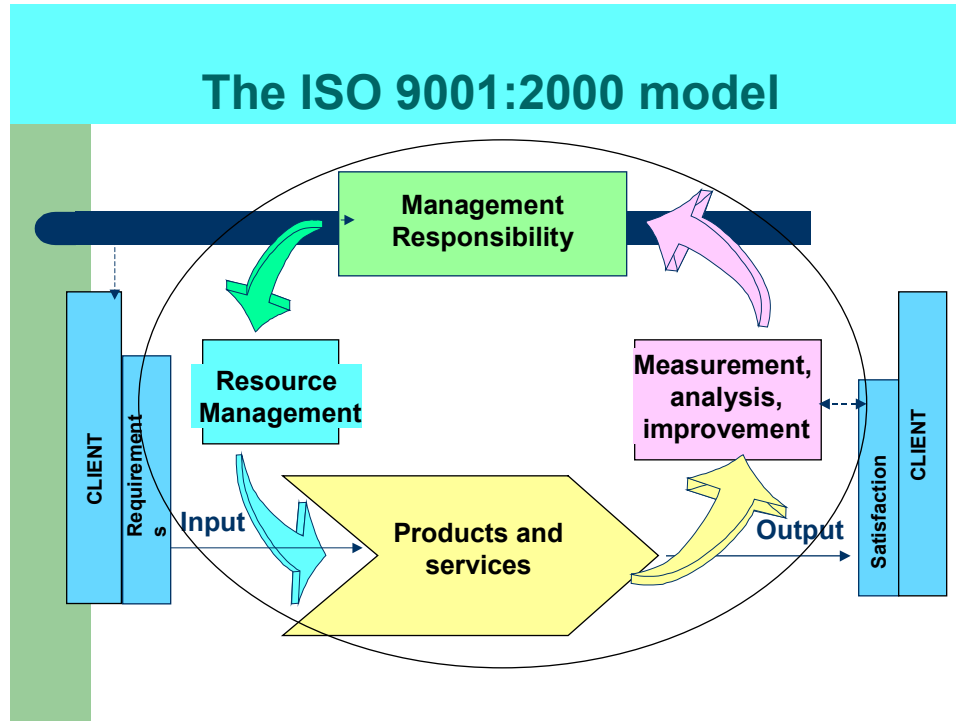
ISO 9000:2000 describes fundamentals of quality management systems, which form the subject of the ISO 9000 family, and defines related terms for a mutual understanding of the terminology used in quality management (e.g. suppliers, customers, regulators).

ISO 9001:2000 specifies requirements for a quality management system where an organization needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide a product that would meet customer and applicable regulatory requirements, and aims to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement of the system, the assurance of conformity to customer and applicable regulatory requirements. The ISO 9001:2000 aims at guaranteeing the effectiveness (but not necessary the efficiency) of an organization. For improved organizational efficiency, however, the best results can be obtained by using the guidance given in ISO 9004:2000 in addition to the previously named standard 9001.

The ISO 9004:2000 provides guidance on the process of complaints handling related to products within an organization, including planning, design, operation, maintenance and improvement of the product and customer service quality. The complaints-handling process described is suitable for use as one the processes of an overall quality management system. ISO 9004:2000 is a guidance standard, which is not intended to be used for certification purposes.

All of these are process standard, and not product standard. The three norms complement each other.

Figure 1



5. Steps towards project completion

In July 1998 a Committee was formed to analyse the norms provided by the ISO 9000 standards, step by step, assisted by external consultants. At that time the 1994 ISO version was in use. Nevertheless, the Committee decided that the Library Quality System should conform to the ISO 9002 Standard. After several months work a guideline for the application of the ISO 9000 in the Library was produced to lead the initial audit phase and to set in motion the process of compliance to these norms.

As a result, this process upgrading involved the majority of the Library staff in the implementation of the quality system procedures and in the drafting a list of instructions for implementing services. The structure of the system has since been synthesised in a *Quality Manual*, produced in January 2000.

In 1999 almost 38% of the Library staff participated directly in the Project Groups, working on the Quality System Management Project. The final result was the definition of the management procedures and the operational instructions for monitoring the Library services. The staff involved in the Project were taught through intensive training:

- how to profit from Total Quality Management logic and the 'techniques' used in working in a group
- to use data in order to improve performance
- to be aware of working with a "process approach", a key element of the ISO 9000 standards.

In 2000 the Library began the second stage of the Project putting into practice what had been set out in the management procedures and in the operational instructions. In that second stage the "Project" became "System". From then on the *Procedures* and the *Operational Instructions* were used as work tools to manage services and guarantee its continuing development.

The system was then accredited by the Det Norske Veritas, an independent foundation and a leading international provider for certifying management systems, in December 2001, and maintained by recurrent auditing inspections, last of them in March 2005. In December 2003 it was updated to comply with the new edition of the ISO 9000.

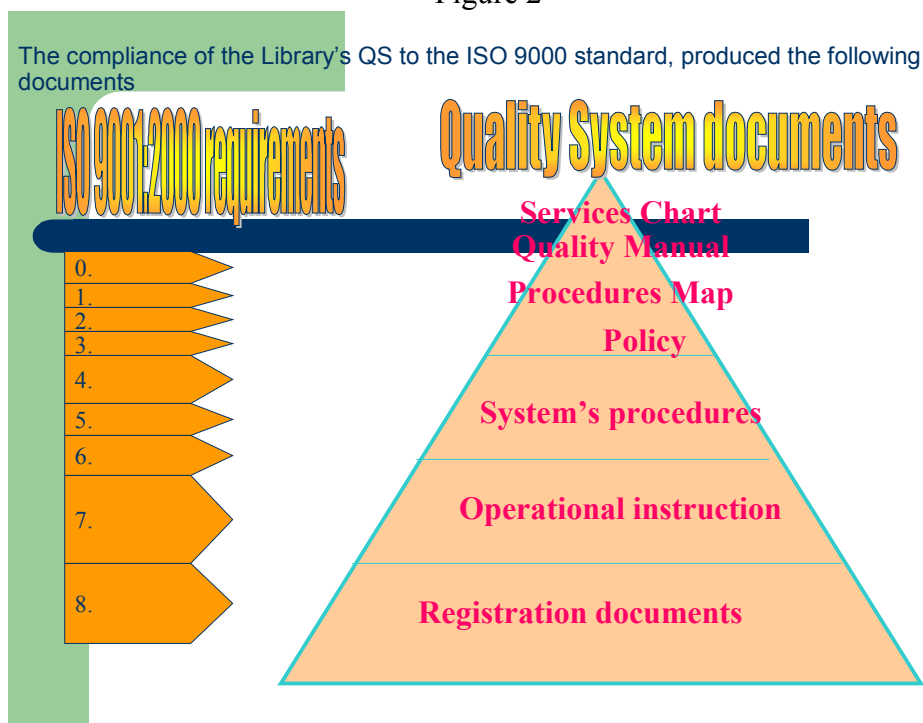
6. Results and advantages from this experience

The advantages gained from this experience have been the acquisition of an innovative organizational methodology that has led to the production of a series of systems documents by which the Library monitors its activities.

The tools developed have been:

- the *Quality Manual*, now in its Third edition
- the *Procedures Map* which links the functional structure of the BNCF to the client-provider chain philosophy
- the *Services Chart*, now in its Second edition, in which the BNCF states the performance standards of its services.

Figure 2



A further but external result of the creation of the BNCF Quality Management System has been the publication of a guideline for the application of the quality systems in Italian libraries, elaborated by a national group of experts, according to the instructions of the Italian national body of standardization.²

In 2004 the BNCF carried out a user satisfaction survey. Between the 24th and 29th May 2004 1,352 questionnaires were distributed. From a quantitative point of view the survey was a success, with 75.5% of the questionnaires distributed, filled in. Qualitatively speaking the Library administration was extremely pleased with the methodology used in formulating the questions, that had been suggested by the Department of Psychology of the Florence University. The results are presented in the following table.

² *Applicare la norma UNI EN ISO 9011:2000 nelle biblioteche*. Milano, UNI, 2002. Members of the team were management experts, assisted by librarians.

A majority of female users	54.0%
A high percentage of undergraduate students	46.3%
A low percentage of postgraduate students	13.3%
A high percentage of regular users	49.1%
A very high prevalence of Italian users	90.1%
A high percentage of users who recognize the BNCF's function as the collection and conservation of the national patrimony of books, manuscripts and various documents	47.9%
A high percentage of users who frequent the BNCF due to its comprehensive collection	49.7%
A majority of users who frequent the BNCF because of reading room availability	52.1%
A reasonable percentage of users who turn to the BNCF not having found relevant material elsewhere	33.5%

The BNCF was given an average valuation of 3.49 on a scale of 1 to 5 by its users.

Figure 3

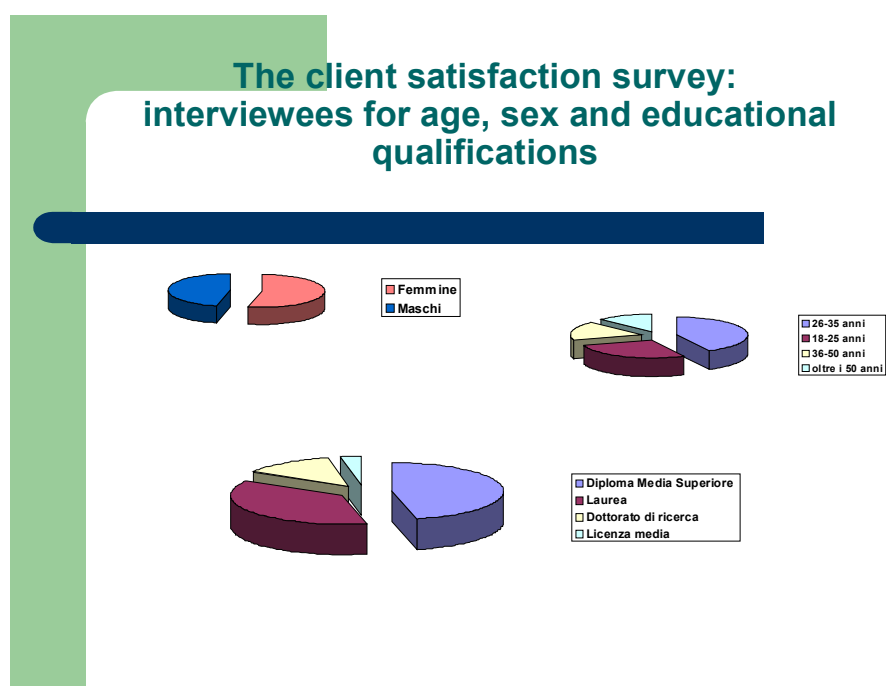


Figure 4

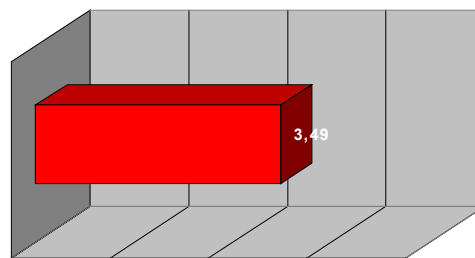
Library services mostly used



Figure 5

Global evaluation of the BNCF by its users

Valid answers 964 (scale of 1 to 5)
Average valuation of 3,49



This survey brought to light various criticisms, that the BNCF will resolve in the near future, such as:

- to improve information on the Library and its services for the user
- to improve public notification of timetable changes and alterations to its services
- to improve user guidance, to provide clear indications, and availability of brochures
- to reduce the delivery time of documents
- to train front-desk staff to give better first-level information and to reduce the time required to resolve user-complaints

- to improve the service of collections of special materials, such as CD-ROM, multimedia, electronic resources etc.
- to improve photocopying services, with possibility of external management.

What we cannot do by ourselves:

it would be necessary to involve our Ministry in order to provide necessary resources for the following:

- to improve Reading Room conditions and public service areas; to re-open the disused cafeteria
- to complete our national library patrimony, by the acquisition of lacking documents
- to increase expenditure for the acquisition of foreign publications
- to organize staff training courses.

In order to better the relationship with its users, the BNCF has published the Second Edition of the “Services Chart” (valid for the next two years) and every second year will repeat the user survey to enquire into client needs and satisfaction. We will consider all the requests and suggestions derived from this questionnaire.

The Library proposes to organize meetings with its users in the next few months to which experts from outside the Library will be invited. Themes to discuss will include:

- those matters arising from the survey
- the main purposes and tasks of the Library according to the library’s mission, and its area of responsibility
- the BNCF user services and electronic services (such as Internet access, use of library website, OPAC etc.).