

Setting Quality Assurance Objectives

Mission Vs Quality Policy

To fully understand the relationship between institutional strategy and quality policy we need to know what the constituent parts of this relationship are.

Mission - "the specific role of each institution, established by a greater or lesser degree of its history and, more important, by the institutionalization of the strategic vision that players and current leaders manage to implement is what we designate, in certain historical moment, as mission. It translates the how each institution positions itself in a competitive sector, benefiting, in a positive way, of its features." Mano (2007)

In order to understand this, we need to learn the concepts of

- **"Business"**: the type of approach of the institution in its field of action
- **Skills**: what allows the institution to have a competitive edge
- **Values and principles**: the institution identity trait and what differentiates it from others

The concept of quality has changed considerably in the last few years, going from a perspective of attempting to tell customers what they needed to a perspective of listening to the stakeholders in order to adapt internal policies to meet their requirements. Today, the quality policy of the organization must be seen essentially as the creation of value for the different players.

The alignment between the mission and the quality policy (in which the latter should be the Institution's approach based on its distinctive competences and its operating principles) creates value and promotes the satisfaction of collective needs. If an institution's mission represents the essential purpose of its existence, quality policy represents how the institution ensures that said purpose is achieved. In fact, quality is increasingly an institution's ability to define improvement mechanisms that allow it to increase its performance in order to achieve the proposed objectives, always with the aim of responding to the needs of different stakeholders.

Relationship between institutional strategy and quality policy

The abovementioned alignment should take into consideration not only the mission, but also the organization objectives and strategic and quality indicators as well.

The definition of objectives is one of the essential pillars in the relationship between institutional strategy and quality policy. The integrated definition of objectives favours the strategic process and, simultaneously, the improvement process geared towards performance, since the performance of an institution depends precisely on the ability to respond to the objectives set. A good performance represents, above all, the ability to achieve strategic and operational objectives.

In defining quality objectives, it should be pointed out that setting objectives means defining the desired results for an activity in a very practical way. One of the best-known tools for goal setting is SMART objectives:

- **S** for Specific, which means the objective must be clear for everyone
- **M** for Measurable, which implies measurable objectives to make sure that progress can be evaluated and monitored
- **A** for Achievable, meaning the objective must allow the perception that the goal is attainable
- **R** for Realistic, which means objective setting has to be based on knowledge and one must have the sense that it is possible to fulfil the goals
- **T** for Time-Bound, meaning there has to be a timeline for the objectives

Good goal setting is a complex and not necessarily easy process. There are two essential features, measurability and timing. Measurability implies the clear definition of performance indicators. While it is true that not everything can be measured, it is also true that everything that is measured can be managed. At the

same time, the ability to define objectives distributed over time, with a clear definition of priorities, is essential for good strategic management.

It is equally important to break down the objectives into different operating levels in an effort to allow the clarification of responsibilities:

- At a strategic level, where the strategic objective is defined
- At a tactical level, where the policies to meet the strategic objectives are set
- At an operational level, where the policies are established

The process should also consider a mixed philosophy for objective setting. In other words, the objectives don't derive only from the top of the organization (top-down philosophy), but also from the teams that operate in a particular field (bottom-up philosophy).

Process of defining quality objectives

One of the most powerful but at the same time most complex tools for defining objectives is the scenario analysis methodology. This tool seeks to understand the impact of different scenarios on the achievement of the objectives. Usually, three different scenarios are used in this process:

- the worst-case scenario,
- the scenario that corresponds to the defined objective or normal scenario
- the optimistic scenario

The analysis methodology should take into account that an objective has to be thought out in the long term (10% over 3 years). However, in order to allow for evaluation and monitoring that lead to corrective actions, it should be broken down into shorter periods (possibly associated with the team's individual objectives). These processes should take place in the long term and during the implementation period as well.

To ensure consistency, it is important to formalize information so it can be shared by all. A Quality handbook/manual is a possible structuring document for Quality Management Systems. It should answer namely the following questions:

- What is the Quality Policy?
- What are the Quality Objectives?
- What is the improvement cycle?
- How is the quality management done?
- What is the quality structure?

The improvement cycle should be given due emphasis and that can be achieved using the well-known PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) Cycle. A clear definition of how this cycle is implemented and which instruments are associated with it in the Quality Handbook is an essential step towards a clear continuous improvement policy:

- The Plan stage should define the Action Plan for the following year
- The Do stage includes the procedures for implementing the actions defined in the plan
- The Check stage encompasses a monitoring report of the actions
- And the Act stage should include the analysis and redefinition of action

The PDCA Cycle, also known as the continuous improvement cycle, is one of the main quality tools. In fact, it is one of the main tools of strategy and performance management. It is important for institutions to dedicate time to planning. It is important for institutions to implement what they have planned. It is important for institutions to monitor what they implement. Finally, it is important for institutions to take the time to analyse the results obtained in order to define new actions to be included in the next planning.

Decision-making Process

It is important for quality management to be a part of the normal activity of the organization and for it to be considered as part of the normal activity of managers, as well as their teams.

- For the Manager/Polycymaker to be within the quality system, he/she has to make the decisions concerning the area of activity, which, at the same time, are the improvement actions.
- For the Team to be inside the quality system, it has to implement the decisions of the manager, which simultaneously represents implementing the improvement actions.
- Only the Quality Structure and the Internal Audit have a specific role in the Quality Management System, either monitoring or evaluating the improvement actions. Everything else should be seen as the normal functioning of an institution seeking to improve its performance.