

# Quality Services - An Overview

## Foreword

Canadians want better-quality services from all levels of government. For instance, they want friendly, respectful, courteous service; faster response times; extended hours at government offices; "one-stop shopping." At the same time, Canadians are demanding that governments reduce deficits and get value for the money they spend, so that governments and all parts of society can support Canadian competitiveness in a global marketplace.

These demands are not new, but as Canadians have become increasingly critical of governments, the pressure for change has increased.

Within the federal government, departments have already done much to address these demands. However, departments, and the government as a whole, must now use dwindling resources to provide Canadians with quality services that are relevant, responsive, accessible and affordable.

One means of doing this is through a quality service approach to management, which clearly stresses client satisfaction, employee involvement and innovation. In this approach, all employees contribute to the management and quality of their own outputs and, thus, to the success of the organization. Strong growing evidence suggests that a quality approach to management can yield dramatic results. Remarkable improvements in federal government service delivery to Canadians have occurred. For example, waiting periods for tax refunds (for millions of Canadians) have been reduced from months to weeks. Canada Business Service Centres across the country now provide "one-stop" shopping for business. And, after consulting with importers, the government has simplified customs procedures, saving businesses tens of millions of dollars.

Our challenge is to build on these improvements.

To help departments meet this challenge, many dedicated members of the Public Service from various departments have helped develop this series of guides. To a great extent, the guides are built on best practices and lessons learned in the federal government, other levels of government and the private sector.

Continuous improvement, a cornerstone of quality, applies to these guides as it does to all areas of quality. To keep the guides as current as possible, we intend to update them periodically, based on ongoing lessons learned from departmental work in progress or now in the planning stage. Your comments are essential. Please forward them to:

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As well, the final version of the Declaration of Quality Services Principles is included in this overview to the guides. The Declaration was released as a draft for consultation in December 1994. The final version reflects extensive consultation with employees. I hope you find that it now reflects the basic principles we all want to follow in delivering quality services.

Delivering relevant, responsive, accessible and affordable quality services is not an easy task, given today's environment of discerning citizens, fiscal restraint and downsizing. However, based on the federal Public Service's international reputation for excellence, the many departmental successes to date, and the enthusiasm with which Public Service employees are working to improve the delivery of services, I am confident we are well positioned to meet the challenges ahead.

Art Eggleton  
President of the Treasury Board

## Introduction

This overview to the *Quality Services* series of guides establishes a context for adopting a quality service approach in management. The overview contains the *Declaration of Quality Services Principles*, identifies the characteristics of a quality organization and discusses the benefits of taking a quality service approach.

The *Quality Services* series of guides includes guides on the following topics:

- client consultation
- measuring client satisfaction
- working with unions
- establishing a supportive learning environment
- recognition of individuals and teams
- employee surveys
- service standards
- benchmarking and best practices

- communications

Building on departmental successes to date, these guides will provide, where available, examples, references and best practices. We plan to add other guides to the *Quality Services* series, which you can use as tools to plan for action. In fact, we are currently working on two additional guides: a guide to quality services in a regulatory environment, and a guide to identifying and interacting with the many client groups served by the public sector. If you have suggestions for potential topics, we would be pleased to hear from you.

## **Clients In The Public Sector Environment**

The Public Service operating environment is a complex universe of policy making, regulation, administration, enforcement, programs and service delivery. There are services that the government provides for which one can easily identify a client, such as the recipient of a social benefit cheque. However, the government is also in the business of regulation, enforcement and inspection. In these cases, it is often more difficult to identify a particular client. Sometimes that client may not want the service, as in the case of a tax audit.

There may be several different clients for each government service. There are direct and indirect clients, each of whom may have different concerns or expectations, which may conflict. Direct clients interact with the government by choice, by entitlement, or as a result of laws or regulations that require them to do so. These clients may include an individual receiving an Unemployment Insurance cheque or someone seeking assistance in applying for a government grant. Indirect clients receive a collective benefit from a government service. These clients may include a local business community or all members of the public affected by health, safety, fairness and equity measures.

Government must balance the needs of direct clients with those of indirect clients who, as taxpayers, have an interest in both the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector.

In addition to direct and indirect clients, there are external clients, such as the general public, and internal clients, such as departmental employees who receive services from their corporate sector (e.g. payroll or printing). This diversity of clients, which sets us apart from the private sector, merits our full attention when we are implementing quality services.

The following *Declaration of Quality Services Principles* confirms the Government of Canada's commitment to successfully improving client satisfaction and the quality of service provided to Canadians within our resources.

The *Declaration of Quality Services Principles* is a statement of tenets. Departments may wish to mould these guidelines to fit their own needs as they actively seek to better meet the needs of their clients.

# ***DECLARATION OF QUALITY SERVICES PRINCIPLES***

The Government of Canada is committed to delivering quality services to Canadians. Our clients can expect to receive service that:

- is prompt, dependable and accurate;
- is courteous, and respects individual rights, dignity, privacy and safety;
- is good value for money, and is consolidated for improved access and client convenience;
- reflects a clear disclosure of applicable rules, decisions and regulations;
- respects the *Official Languages Act*;
- is regularly reviewed and measured against published service standards, and these reviews are communicated to clients; and
- is improved wherever possible, based on client suggestions, concerns and expectations.

## **What Are The Characteristics Of A Quality Service Organization?**

Why are quality service organizations so different? Rather than using the traditional "command and control" framework, which implies that "we know what's best for our clients and employees," quality service organizations:

- ask their clients to identify their needs and expectations;
- continuously meet the needs of their clients while managing their expectations;
- support active employee involvement in meeting those needs;
- foster employee innovation to improve processes continuously;
- cultivate a "people-first" environment where teamwork is valued;
- accept the risk associated with innovation;
- support a continuous learning environment; and
- provide visible leadership for employees, which is crucial to the success of any quality services initiative.

How can we recognize a quality service organization when we see one, particularly in the public sector? The National Quality Institute highlights the following characteristics as typical of quality service organizations in both the public and private sector:

- everyone understands where the organization is heading and understands his or her part in the process;
- there is respect for people in the organization and all employees are encouraged to develop their potential;
- the primary focus is on serving clients;
- cooperation and teamwork are a way of life;
- leaders are fully involved in the quality services programs and initiatives;
- everyone concentrates on achieving quality;
- there is a focus on continuous improvement;
- employees appreciate and understand stakeholders' expectations and know how to satisfy them; and
- the organization is driven by quality and innovation.

For the purposes of this overview, these characteristics may be summarized as:

- leadership
- client and stakeholder involvement
- employee involvement
- innovation
- risk management
- measurement

The following section provides some insight on each of these areas:

## **Leadership**

Senior management sets the direction for the company and for its quality management system. Hence, if change is to take place, it must recognize the need and the specific areas that require change, and build a consensus among its fellow executives and throughout the organization on the direction and the

totality of the change. *Conference Board of Canada Study on Quality Award-winning Companies Around the World - 1991*

Critical to the success of any quality service organization is leadership. Leadership begins with a clear vision that gives meaning and direction to employees. Such a vision helps to inspire an entire organization to develop and deliver quality services to its clients. It also fosters innovation and a supportive working environment for employees. As part of this vision, leaders in quality service organizations establish clear performance goals for quality services which emphasize client consultation and satisfaction. Leaders can be found at all levels of the organizations and need to be encouraged and developed wherever they exist.

These leaders recognize that the success of quality service initiatives is tightly tied to the degree to which they live by and support such initiatives. That support must be visible to employees. It requires a long-term commitment to improvement. Thus, leaders of quality service organizations recognize, support, reward and promote successes, both internally and externally.

Leaders in quality service organizations ensure that client needs and expectations are identified and managed, and that the organization measures how well it meets those expectations. In addition, they measure how employees feel about the quality of the services the employees provide, and ask employees for suggestions for improvements.

Leaders create a quality service culture by ensuring systems needed to meet departmental or government-wide policies are in place; that these systems reflect the goals and values of quality improvement; that appropriate feedback mechanisms, such as those that encourage upward feedback, and improvement suggestions are in place; and that appropriate accountability measures, such as effective performance agreements and appraisals, are used. This focus on internal structure is crucial, as the organization's ability to provide quality services to external clients depends on the quality of the organization's internal service delivery structure.

Equally important, leaders build a quality service culture by ensuring that employees are part of the "team", and that they have the context, flexibility, skills, opportunity and authority to make decisions. As well, leaders create a continuous learning environment.

A true test of a leader's commitment is his or her willingness to accept that not all decisions made by employees will be correct or successful. It is during these "moments of truth" that leaders must support and coach their employees rather than implement tighter controls.

## **Client involvement**

The first priority of successful quality service organizations is the involvement of both internal and external clients in improving service delivery. A quality service organization explicitly solicits feedback from these sources. Clients are asked to define quality service through regular interviews, focus groups, comment cards and surveys. As a result, service quality standards adapt continuously to changing client expectations.

Client feedback on the quality of services they receive allows organizations to:

- identify opportunities for service improvement;
- provide feedback to front-line staff, management and political leaders about program efficiency and effectiveness;
- respond quickly to emerging client demands, reducing crises and stress for employees and clients;
- evaluate how well the organization is achieving its mandate;
- strengthen strategic and annual business planning processes; and
- allocate resources more effectively to meet client priorities by focusing on high service priorities and reducing or eliminating services that clients do not value.

Involving clients means understanding and responding to their needs and expectations. Quality service organizations measure client satisfaction and apply what they learn to the design and delivery of services. By consulting with clients on the appropriate level of services, organizations can deliver top-priority services in the most cost-effective way, thereby maximizing client satisfaction.

## **Employee involvement**

Successful quality service organizations treat employees in the same professional, courteous, respectful manner in which they expect employees to treat clients. Equally important, these organizations spend a great deal of time focusing on employee involvement in the quality process. They ensure that employees help set the direction for the organization, work in teams to improve the organization's efficiency and effectiveness, and have the power to make decisions. Without employee involvement and support, quality initiatives are unlikely to succeed. While renewing the focus on client and innovation is important, the rejuvenation of the work force must be foremost in the minds of those leading the quality service initiatives.

Quality service initiatives focus on employees because no one in the organization knows the client, knows where improvements are needed, and can judge the quality of the service being provided better than those employees delivering the services.

However, creativity and innovation only prosper in a working environment that promotes employee involvement, teamwork, trust, respect and continuous improvement contributions. By developing such an environment, employees typically will feel a strong sense of empowerment and ownership. Employees will also know that they are making a valuable contribution to the objective of better government. Successful quality service organizations have found that employees, who are valued for their contributions, tend to be enthusiastic and very positive about changes taking place in the work environment. Indeed, the importance of active employee involvement to the success of quality service organizations cannot be understated and must not be overlooked.

## **Innovation**

The 1994 report of the Auditor General of Canada states that innovation is crucial to the continuous improvement of service delivery. Innovation tends not to arise by itself; it is generated and sustained through the efforts of people. It comes from individuals and from creative, supportive working environments. Innovation is rare in climates of criticism and repression. Quality service organizations need to create environments that support innovation. Otherwise, potential innovators will not innovate, they will "play safe." Untapped creativity and innovation will be lost, or innovators will move to more receptive organizations.

## **Risk management**

Increased employee involvement, innovation and creativity bring with them the risk of failure - that is, the risk of making errors of judgement, which has traditionally caused management to exercise tight controls. Innovative approaches, by their very nature, will not always be successful. Innovation may occur as a result of trial and error. In the past, when a "wrong" decision was made, or a blind alley entered, the initiative was seen as a failure; however, quality service organizations have redefined failure. They understand that failure is part of learning and may occur. More importantly, they believe that a prevailing fear of failure inevitably stifles innovation and creativity. In such an environment, new initiatives simply do not occur with enough speed or power to respond effectively to an environment of constant change.

## **Measurement**

Quality service organizations must measure client satisfaction. To improve continuously, they also need to know where they are, where they want to be and how to get there. Thus, measurement is key to all aspects of a quality services initiative. Organizations assess client needs, measure how well the organization is meeting those needs, and they decide how to best close the gap between expectations and deliverables.

The National Quality Institute [\[1\]](#) has developed a set of criteria that it uses to assess both private-sector and public-sector organizations applying for the Canada Award for Excellence. Departments could use these criteria to assess their own performance.

**Leadership:** How organizational leaders demonstrate their commitment to service quality, and share responsibility and accountability for improvement throughout the organization.

**Client focus:** How organizations define their clients, determine client needs, and convert this information into measurably improved products and services.

**Planning for improvement:** How organizations develop, communicate, deploy, assess and measure quality improvement plans.

**People focus:** How organizations help their people achieve excellence. Recruitment, planning, involvement, continuous learning, innovation, empowerment, feedback, recognition and rewards are key aspects of an environment that helps employees reach their full potential.

**Process optimization:** How work is organized and processes are improved to add value for the client and the organization. The design, monitoring, analysis, review and continuous improvement of an organization's processes are also key to the achievement of excellence.

**Supplier focus:** How an organization's external relations and alliances enhance its ability to meet its strategic objectives and satisfy its customers. Supplier selection, communication, involvement and review are all critical elements of service quality.

## **What Are The Benefits Of Quality Services To The Key Players?**

**Clients** are the ultimate beneficiaries of government services. When quality service becomes a priority they see demonstrated value for tax dollars in the services they receive and find that those services are more accessible, responsive and affordable. In essence, a quality services environment puts organizations in the best possible position to meet the demands of their clients.

**Employees** in a quality service organization are actively involved in creating a renewed, vibrant work environment. They have opportunities to upgrade skills, diversify work, implement improvements and be part of a positive, constructive, client service-oriented culture. They participate and share in the benefits of improvement.

In unionized organizations, quality service initiatives provide an opportunity for union members to help establish a healthy work environment. Unions can actively help the organization change direction and succeed. At the same time, members continuously learn due to their increased involvement in the daily operations of the organization.

**Managers and executives** can improve client satisfaction and build a more efficient and effective organization. By actively involving employees in setting organizational direction and celebrating successes, managers may reduce employee turnover, increase employee morale, and increase employee creativity and innovation. As roles change, and more of the day-to-day operational decisions rest with employees, managers and executives have more time to do organizational strategic planning.

Most importantly, **all Canadians**, both stakeholders and taxpayers, see value for money in affordable, accessible, responsive and relevant quality services. As well, they have greater confidence in the federal government, knowing that we are building more efficient and effective departments which, in turn, will make Canada a more competitive nation.

## Conclusion

This overview to the *Quality Services* series of guides has set out the context for quality services in the public sector and identified some of the key characteristics of quality service organizations.

The *Quality Services* series of guides has been designed to help those organizations augmenting their quality service initiatives.

To succeed with such initiatives all employees must energetically carry out a planned approach to continuous improvement and quality services, as part of normal business planning. Experience has shown that important components of such an approach include:

- clear goals (vision, service standards, etc.);
- leadership accountability;
- support for leaders and staff;
- mechanisms for sharing and celebrating successes and best practices;
- mechanisms for measuring success; and
- methods implementing continuous improvement.

Such an approach benefits the client, the employee, the manager and the taxpayer.

Ultimately, continuous improvement and quality service happen, not through impersonal plans, diagrammed methods for improving processes and performance goals, but because of the involvement of all Public Service employees. These employees, in consultation with clients, look for better ways of improving processes and providing services. We are confident that with leadership, a planned approach focusing on client satisfaction, employee involvement and innovation, the Canadian federal Public Service will build on recent experience to continue to serve Canadians well.

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