Changing the culture...
...and the mindset

Universities across Australia have been part of a continuing quality assurance process since late 1992, when Peter Baldwin, the then Minister, introduced a special incentive for universities 'to reach and maintain the highest possible standard in both research and teaching'. All universities voluntarily participated in the program, not altogether surprisingly with a $76 million carrot to be shared on the basis of the quality assessment.

This program will continue, with an increasing emphasis on teaching and learning practices and outcomes. Meanwhile, the participants are reported to be finding that the program has been valuable in enhancing awareness of their performance and improving their focus on quality outcomes. University libraries, too, have been playing their part in this program, some of them having begun to explore methods of quality assessment ahead of their parent institutions.

One of the approaches used has been 'Total Quality Management' (TQM), introduced by the Commonwealth Government Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce (DITAC, now '… and Regional Development', DITARD) as a means towards quality assurance in purchasing from Australian manufacturers. The early documentation on TQM from the National Industry Extension Service, NIES, seemed to focus almost entirely on the improvement of quality of manufactured goods and products.

However, beginning around 1988 DITAC established its 'Service Industries Research Program', which has already published fifteen reports. The purpose of this Program comes out clearly in the conclusion of its Report N°. 2 on *Services: setting the agenda for reform:*

'The services sector is a very large component of the Australian economy. It is also a sector in which government is heavily involved and in which there are large economic gains to be made from efficiency improvements. Reform of key industries within this sector has the potential to greatly improve the welfare of Australians.'

Quality management in practice

What is involved in the application of TQM, or related approaches? Above all, the realisation that TQM is not something that you do, finish, and move on to the next problem: 'TQM is concerned with sustained, ongoing improvement. It is an approach which challenges the status quo and insists that everything an enterprise does, and how it does it, can be done better. It reminds enterprises of the crucial importance of the customer.' While some of us may be uncomfortable with the terms 'enterprise' and 'customer', conceptually this statement is almost beyond challenging.

Many exponents of TQM would go even further and talk about a quality 'culture', or 'mindset'. If the latter smacks of jargon, some examples of it in the DITAC reports are rather telling. Quotes from production workers before and after the introduction of TQM show changed attitudes to work, to their own self-esteem, commitment to the enterprise as part of a team, and the realisation of 'contributing to a vision'. We spend about half our adult lives at work—apart from anything else, it's worth doing what we can to make both productive *and* enjoyable.

NIES talk of the 'Plan—Do—Check—Act' cycle (see box on following page), based on the seven 'Core

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Total Quality Management is becoming an important tool for reshaping our library planning and operation

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principles and key management imperatives for continuous improvement'. These principles are:
* quality is defined in terms of customers' perceptions;
* the system is improved by improving processes within the system;
* suppliers and contractors are treated as partners within the system;
* statistical thinking and methods are used to manage and reduce variation;
* all people are creatively involved in continuous improvement of the system;
* continuous improvement activities are integrated with the strategic and annual planning cycle;
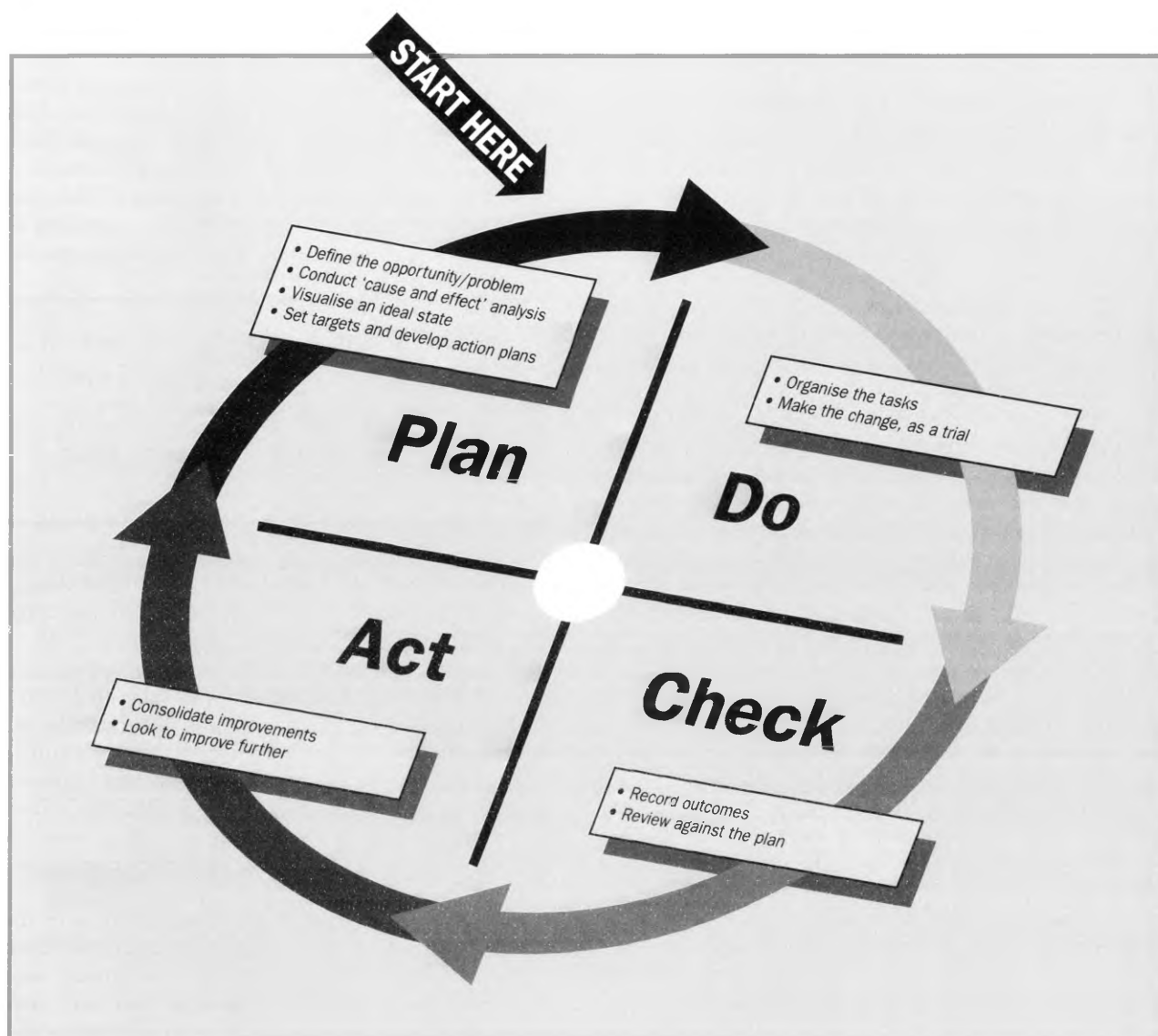* continuous improvement is led, managed and supported at all levels of the organisation.

Quality in the QUT Library

How does this look in a library application? Gaynor Austen, Librarian of the Queensland University of Technology, has been examining this, and writes:

At QUT Library, we have not, as yet, undertaken a formal TQM program. In our post-amalgamation structure we have worked towards introducing some of the essential elements of TQM into our operations. In summary:

1. Mission and Goals—We have developed, and are implementing, a strategic plan based on a statement of mission and goals which were worked out by task forces of staff from across the Library.
2. Customer Focus—Our Customer Services Working Party has been developing strategies for improv-

START HERE

- Define the opportunity/problem
- Conduct 'cause and effect' analysis
- Visualise an ideal state
- Set targets and develop action plans

Plan

- Organise the tasks
- Make the change, as a trial

Do

Act

- Consolidate improvements
- Look to improve further

Check

- Record outcomes
- Review against the plan

ing levels of customer service across the Library. This has included the introduction of a number of mechanisms for user feedback e.g. focus group interviews and specially designed suggestion box forms. In addition, the Working Party developed an outline for a six module staff training program in customer service. The University's Staff Development Section is helping us to implement these modules, one per semester.

3/4. Focus on process/continuous improvement. A number of task forces across the Library have been analysing and improving work flows and procedures. An example of this is a Technical Services task force which is currently reviewing the entire work flow through Acquisitions and Cataloguing with a view to redesigning work patterns to base them on team operation. Similar groups are meeting in Interlibrary loans and Circulation. In addition, this Library has a strong emphasis on program performance evaluation and about half the major areas of the Library now have program performance systems under way.

5. Data based decisions—The Library employs a half time research and Development Officer. One of

her main tasks is to implement research programs aimed at improving library services. This includes application of statistical techniques to measure, for example, collection usage, shelf and seating capacity, loans and shelving throughput. We still have more work to do in this area in inculcating the use of data based decisions with all library managers.

6. Staff involvement—Last year the Library's committee structure was revised with the specific intention of increasing the involvement of non-managerial staff, particularly professional staff, in developing and implementing Library policy. This restructuring appears to have had a significant impact on empowering a greater number of Library staff members and involving them in service improvement.

'Total Quality Service'

Another perspective on the quality scene is given by the Commonwealth Department of Arts and Administrative Services, DAAS. For the past two years this Department has been examining its own administration in the framework of 'TQS' (Total Quality Service), and is now beginning to offer its experience in a consultancy

Changing the culture... and the mindset (continued)

role with other bodies. Its approach is based on American practice, described by Karl Albrecht in his book *The only thing that matters,* published by Harper Business in 1992. Albrecht has worked with many of the larger manufacturing and service companies in the USA, emphasising the *service* aspect of the quality culture, and has provided direct input to the DAAS developments.

TQS is distinguished from TQM by its emphasis and orientation. Concern has been expressed that implementing TQM can lead to a quality-conscious culture that is primarily inwardly-turned, focussed on tightening up systems within the organisation and paying insufficient attention to factors outside. In contrast, TQS starts from the outside—with the premise that the customer is the reason for the organisation's existence, and that failure to perform at peak quality is often due to a lack of understanding of what the customer really wants. For example, different perceptions by the customers and the staff of the value (or accessibility) of various services can lead to feelings of inadequacy, of being threatened, or perhaps to actual confrontation.

Once the points of disagreement between the organisation and its customers (about value, ease of access, etc) have been identified, then discussion can start on how to do something about them. What emerges is likely to be a change within the organisation that reflects a greater responsiveness to the customer. While this change may still require some tough decisions, these decisions will have been taken as a result of consultation with customers and staff. Certainly, a well-run TQM exercise could lead to an end result that may not be very different, although it will have been reached from a different starting point, along a different path.

TQS at Macquarie University Library

Barrie Mitcheson plans to apply TQS. He explains that during 1993 Macquarie University Library was searching for a framework through which to address its quality agenda and managerial process. For a variety of reasons a TQS seemed to provide the best approach to the Macquarie environment: TQS emphasis on service and 'customer' focus suited the Macquarie culture. In December 1993 an agreement was reached with DAAS to assist with the implementing of a Quality Service Program with Glenys Boswarva as facilitator. Financial assistance was forthcoming from the Vice-Chancellor on the undertaking that the exercise would be a pilot study for the University as a whole.

Neil McLean, Deputy University Librarian, is coordinating the project with the assistance of other staff. The program began with two information days for library staff on 24 and 25 January. There was then a program spanning the week of 7-11 February, during which employee focus groups and customer focus groups met to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current library services. A large amount of information was gathered during these sessions and this was analysed and distilled in the following week.

A two-day Strategic Planning Workshop was then held on 18 and 21 February where twenty library staff,

representing management and staff. discussed all the findings and created a new Draft Strategic Plan. This Draft Strategic Plan now embraces all the major findings from both the customer and employee sessions. A number of key result areas have been identified as part of the process and further work remains to be done in defining the desired outcomes and the performance in-

> The primary focus of the Total Quality Management model is realignment of the organisation's strategy and customer needs.

dicators to be applied in assessing the success of the outcomes. Work has commenced on the development of action plans to convert the goals of the strategic plan into operation.

The primary focus of the TQS model is realignment of the organisation's strategy with customer needs. Customer Focus Groups raised issues which became the basis of not only the direction for the library's future strategies, but also the impetus for process improvement plans. A vital by-product of this process is an ongoing relationship with customers, and a sense of heightened expectations that their wishes may be fulfilled.

As many of the 'customers' who assisted us in the workshops were interested in the outcome, a feedback session has been organised to present the primary strategic plan document. The document has been presented to the Library Committee for consideration and will be subsequently provided to university management for endorsement. It should, however, be recognised that while the Plan is the most immediate tangible outcome of the program to date, the Library is much more concerned about the longer term goal of building foundations for a process of continuous improvement in all aspects of service delivery.

The quality service exercise of the Library based on TQS has to date been extremely successful. It has been a comfortable exercise to work with and one which from all appearances seems to be well understood and accepted by staff. The facilitating role of Glenys Boswarva has been critical to the success of the program and she has instilled a high level of confidence amongst library staff in their own ability to critically assess, and respond to, the information gathered from the customer sessions.

Towards a wider appreciation of quality working

Quality assessment and quality management change our way of thinking about everything we do in our professional life. They are not theoretical concepts. In one guise or another, they are here to stay. *inCite* will keep a watching brief on developments in this field and will welcome case studies from other libraries. ■