"Excellent Library"—A Holistic Quality Model and Certificate for Libraries: Concept and Experiences from Germany

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ABSTRACT

In Germany, more than 15 libraries are operating successfully with the quality model Excellent Library. They are part of a research project at Stuttgart Media University where the quality model and certificate have been developed since 2008. The article reflects the experiences of the project: A short introduction to the German library system and quality projects in German libraries will be followed by an overview over the model and certificate. Furthermore, the challenging process of becoming an Excellent Library and related effects will be described.

The German library landscape

The library landscape in Germany is—based on a long cultural tradition of the country itself—very diverse. In 2014, German library statistics recorded about 8,000 public libraries at a total of approximately 10,000 locations in Germany. Only a quarter of them is run by full-time staff. In addition, there are almost 250 academic libraries at universities and similar institutions of higher education. German libraries see themselves as service providers that ensure free access to information and knowledge in different forms of media. In 2014, libraries in Germany were visited around 200 million times; about 10 million active library users borrowed more than 440 million media items (Deutsche Bibliotheksstatistik, 2015).

The German library system can be classified as a decentralized organization that is diversified in many different types of libraries with special collections, functions, and target groups, as well as in a decentralized funding system; for a full overview over the German library system see Seefeldt and Syré (2011). German libraries are funded by public institutions such as the federal government, the federal states, the cities and their authorities, and by religious institutions, as well as public foundations and private institutions. Considering academic and public libraries, the funding responsibilities are assigned on different levels:

The federal government contributes to the funding of libraries with national importance. Due to the guaranteed principle of cultural and educational autonomy of the German federal states, these are mainly responsible for funding of libraries in the academic and research library sector. For public libraries, the most important funding institutions are the cities and their local authorities.

The diversity of the German librarianship has its roots in the development of Germany and its territories. Culture and education in Germany's federal system generally are under the responsibility of the individual federal states. There is no central institution for national library coordination, nor is there a national library law in Germany. While state-wide library laws have been passed in three federal states, similar laws are under discussion in other states (Seefeldt & Syré, 2011).

With more than 200 million visitors per year, libraries are the most-used cultural and educational institutions in Germany. But like libraries all over the world, German libraries are facing new challenges in their future: Decreasing budgets for cultural matters, the digitization of media, and thus, thoughts about libraries' functions force libraries to rethink their services and their performance. These conditions for librarianship are further reinforced by the federal funding system and the decentralization of responsibilities for cultural matters in Germany that lead to an oper-

ating environment which can be described as increasingly competitive. German libraries are forced to provide more tasks and services as effectively and efficiently as possible to increasingly demanding customers but with decreasing resources. At the same time, libraries want to enhance their positive image among their customers, funding bodies, and the public (Deutscher Bibliotheksverband e.V., 2015).

Quality management in German libraries

Libraries can manage these challenges solely by coping intensively with their customers and discussing their needs in order to provide the best service. Indeed, libraries not only must focus on the quality of processes and services but also on the ability to move forward as a whole organization and adapt to a proactive management of quality and continuous improvement. More and more libraries in Germany are facing these challenges by establishing quality management systems within their organizations.

Development of quality activities

The topic of quality management arose in German librarianship in the late 1990s with different quality management activities. Libraries implemented several management tools (mission statements, target plans, complaint management, process management, or customer surveys) in order to discover the users' needs, to work efficiently, and provide best services. Whilst these activities initially focused mainly on an instrumental approach to quality management (Vonhof & Mundt, 2007), a trend toward an understanding of quality management as an integrated strategic management concept can be observed. Over the last years, libraries have searched for quality management tools that enable a holistic approach to strategic library management and continuous improvement (Vonhof, 2010). Thus, more and more libraries are following a trend that evolved in the non-profit sector, in the public sector, and in other cultural institutions in Germany. Quality management, which originally was understood as controlling and quality assurance within the manufacturing industry, more and more also becomes an integral part of the management in the service sector (Vonhof, 2010). Behind this stands the philosophy of "total quality management" (TQM) that defines quality management

as a leadership concept moving quality and customer-orientation as central success factors more and more into the focus of the whole organization (Zink, 1998).

Quality management projects in German libraries

By now, there is a variety of quality management projects in German libraries. These projects contributed to an increasing quality development within the libraries and emphasized the significance of the quality issue in the library community. However, a closer look at the quality projects in German libraries reveals a great variety among the quality models on which these projects are based. They reflect the TQM approach to a greater or lesser extent.

Most of the quality management models implemented in German libraries can be defined as branch-specific models that were developed from libraries or library institutes and focus on the specific requirements of libraries, as follows.

- On the level of the federal state of Saxony-Anhalt, 20 libraries established in 2008 the QM-Network of Public Libraries in Saxony-Anhalt and developed criteria for the future quality norm for public libraries in this federal state (Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt im Deutschen Bibliotheksverband e.V., 2015).
- Within the project Library with Quality and Seal that is conducted by the federal government and the municipal library center of Lower Saxony, public libraries in the federal state Lower Saxony participate in a quality assurance process to achieve a quality certification (Büchereizentrale Niedersachsen, 2015).
- The consortium of art and museum libraries in Germany developed a quality management system based on 80 quality standards for libraries. Libraries can be certified in a peer-review audit (AKMB, 2015).

Using library-specific criteria and vocabulary, these branch-models form the basis for a high value of use and recognition and allow an easier entry into the topic of quality management. In contrast, they are not oriented to industrial or economic standards, and therefore, make it difficult to benefit from a benchmark beyond the library sector.

Nationally or internationally recognized quality models that are established in the industrial sector

are still in the minority within the German library community.

- On a European level, the most recognized industrial framework for quality management is the ISO 9001 family, with the newest version of the standard ISO 9001:2015 (International Organization for Standardization, 2015). Compared to other industrial models, they are the most common quality standards in German libraries. There are several German libraries that were certified according to the standards in the former versions ISO 9001:2000 and ISO 9001:2008.
- By now, a few libraries are working with the EFQM Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM, 2012) or the CAF-Model of the common assessment framework (CAF, 2012). The most prominent CAF user is the Berlin State Library (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation). The library used the quality model as a basis for a process of internal restructuring and strategy development in 2011.

The research project "Excellent Library"

Since 2008, the Institute for Quality Management and Organizational Development in Libraries (IQO) at Stuttgart Media University is conducting the research project called Excellent Library. The research project puts the focus on exploring the applicability of economic management tools to libraries. It aims at supporting libraries that are implementing a holistic quality management system as a leadership approach. For this, the IQO developed several tools that are outlined below.

Project elements

The core element of the research project is the quality model Excellent Library as a tool for strategic and holistic quality management in libraries. During the development process, the IQO attached great importance to the fulfilment of the following requirements for the quality model.

- Suitable for all kinds of libraries, the quality model should support public and academic libraries that are implementing quality management in their organization.
- The quality model should take up the philosophy of TQM as a leadership concept.

- The quality model should be based on nationally and internationally recognized quality models instead of specific purpose-developed concepts for the library sector in order to enable a benchmark with institutions beyond the library sector.
- The quality model should meet the specific quality needs of libraries.

From the perspective of the IQO, the existing (branch) models could not meet these requirements sufficiently. After an analysis of existing quality management models from the industrial sector, the IQO decided to focus on the internationally recognized EFQM Excellence Model and the CAF as base for the Excellent Library model. Behind this stands the argument that excellent performance of libraries fundamentally requires the same management instruments and leadership actions that enterprises or other institutions do. Thus, participating libraries are evaluated on the basis of international standards, which go beyond the library sector. The close orientation of nationally and internationally recognized quality models also suggests an appropriate recognition and reputation of the libraries' achieved excellence.

The conceptual model was enriched by a variety of supplementary documents for the whole implementation and assessment process in the libraries. Furthermore, the IQO developed accompanying training for libraries concerning the implementation of the quality model and establishing the required organizational environment.

From the beginning, an external certification was included as one of the key elements of the concept to ensure transparency about libraries' excellence and the recognition by patrons and funding bodies.

Project setting

The quality model Excellent Library and complementary materials are not available for free. The copyright is held by the Research Institute IQO at Stuttgart Media University. Libraries that want to work with the quality model must enter the research project and pay for the project. In return, participating libraries get access to all project elements.

In order to achieve intensive exchange and best-practice sharing, participating libraries are organized in groups within the project, sharing the whole implementation process within their group. In spring 2008, a group of seven public libraries hit the road toward

being an Excellent Library, starting with the implementation of the quality model. As a pilot group, they contributed to the initial refinement of the methodological approach, as well as to the implementation process. Since the pilot group started in 2008, several public libraries, as well as academic libraries, located in Germany joined the project. In 2011, the second group of six public and one academic libraries started with the project. In 2014, they were followed by three academic libraries. In 2016, nine small public libraries will start the process of implementing the quality model in their organizations. Altogether, almost 30 public and academic libraries in Germany are operating with the quality model Excellent Library. Ten of them are proud to hold the certification as "Excellent Library." Two libraries out of the pilot group have proved their excellence over the years continuously; they have been awarded as Excellent Libraries for the second time.

The quality model Excellent Library

The quality model Excellent Library is a holistic quality management model for libraries. It provides a framework for their successful, evidence-based, and stakeholder-oriented management. It is based on two international quality models: the Excellence Model of the EFQM and its adaptation to the public sector, the CAF. Both of these quality models can be characterized as classical industrial tools and holistic TQM models.

Internationally recognized industrial models: EFQM and CAF

In 1988, 14 European multi-national organizations united into the EFQM, initiating the implementation of a holistic quality management model. The founding members committed themselves to eight fundamental concepts of excellence that contribute to the achievement of sustainable excellence in any organization. The fundamental concepts of the EFQM model include (EFQM, 2012, pp. 4–8):

- "adding value for customers,
- creating a sustainable future,
- developing organizational capability,
- harnessing creativity and innovation,
- leading with vision, inspiration and integrity,
- managing with agility, and
- succeeding through the talent of people and sustaining outstanding results."

These excellence concepts are interpreted in terms of a multi-dimensional quality management model and a measurement system (RADAR logic) as a framework to structure and assess the quality level and development of an organization (EFQM, 2012). Today, more than 10,000 organizations are working with the EFQM model.

CAF was founded in the late 1990s by the European Ministers responsible for public administration. Based on the EFQM model, the CAF quality model has been developed as a holistic but relatively slim-structured, free tool to assist European public-sector organizations in using TQM methods to improve their performance (CAF, 2012).

Both the EFQM model and the CAF model follow the fundamental concepts of excellence of the EFQM Foundation. A successful, holistic quality management approach must take into consideration all of these areas as approaches for improvement. Within the models, these concepts are divided into nine areas classified into five "enabler" areas and four "results" areas that cover an organization in whole (EFQM, 2012). These areas are defined by further subordinated criteria and indicators that specify the quality requirements (CAF, 2012). The enabler criteria cover the potential and actions of an organization which should be implemented into strategic leadership. Results criteria cover the achievements and performance of an organization as results of the enabling actions. In return, the results indicate need for improvement that can be influenced by realignments within the enabler areas. Reflecting this concept, quality management and improvement can be seen as a continuous process of innovation and learning (CAF, 2012; EFQM, 2012).

The philosophy of the model Excellent Library

As outlined below, the quality model Excellent Library reflects the philosophy and especially the structural framework of these two models. The quality model is based on the following core principles:

- Stakeholder orientation: Based on the philosophy of TQM, the quality model comprises all stakeholders and relevant key factors for a successful library management (customers, society, employees, processes, organizational structure, and all resources, such as budget, time, and employees).
- Visible leadership: A successful quality management requires the commitment of the

management. Quality management must be understood as a management task that cannot be delegated.

- Continuous improvement and benchmarking: Quality management needs to be understood as a process of continuous planning, analyzing, and improving the organization. A comprehensive self-assessment serves as basis for identifying strengths and weaknesses of the whole organization. Benchmarking serves as orientation framework towards excellence.
- Management by fact and evidence: Successful management is based on strategic and operational targets and key performance indicators as the basis for management decisions.
- Employee involvement: Employees play a key role for a successful library performance. Their commitment serves as the basis for quality management.

Therefore, the quality model focuses on the underlying thesis that is closely related to the core thesis of the EFQM and CAF models: excellent results of a library focus on key areas, such as performance, customers, people, and society. They are achieved through leadership driving policy and strategy that is delivered through people, partnerships, resources, and processes (EFQM, 2012). These principles are translated into a structural framework that will be outlined in detail in the following section.

The structural framework of the model Excellent Library

Considering the structural framework, the quality model Excellent Library also is closely related to the basic models EFQM and CAF. However, within the development process of the quality model Excellent Library, there has been an adaption of the basic models to meet the specifications of libraries in an appropriate way. The IQO modified the basic models at some points concerning the wording and some cuts with regard to the amount of criteria and indicators. Modifications mainly focused on the result criteria, which were reviewed on their relevancy and fit for library purposes and substituted or supplemented by performance indicators used in the library field. The resulting framework based in the following structure has been mapped into an extensive Excel document serving as a tool for the concrete work with the quality model.

The core structure of the quality model Excellent Library is based on three outline levels that define the quality requirements in detail and provide a highly-structured framework with defined management actions:

(1) First level—Management fields: Like the basic models, the Excellent Library model is based on five enabler areas: leadership, strategy, people, partnerships, resources, and processes; and four results areas: customers, employees, society, and key performance results (see Figure 1).
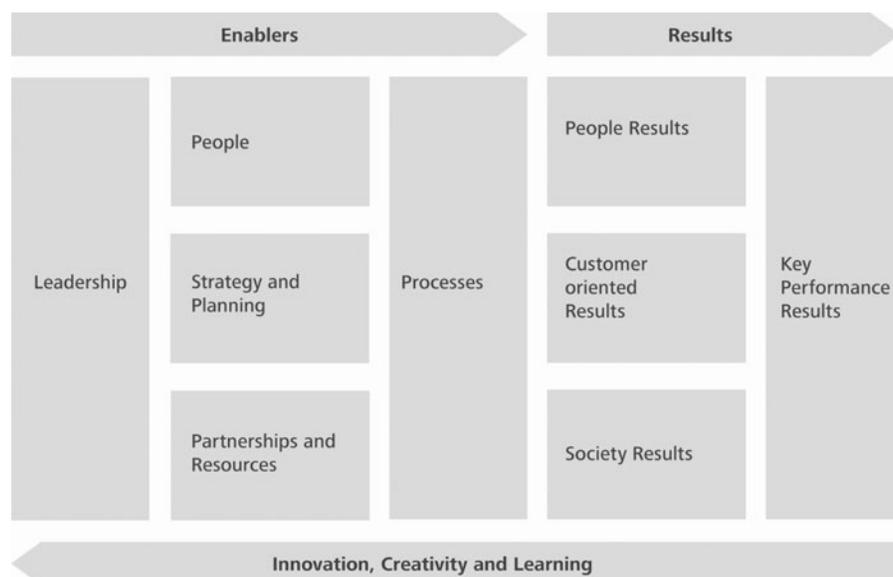

Figure 1. Subject areas of the quality models. Adapted from EFQM (2012, p. 3) and CAF (2012, p. 9).

(2) Second level—Criteria: Overall, 26 subordinated criteria structure the management fields into action approaches and set the framework for the libraries' performance within every management area.

(3) Third level—Indicators: For rendering these criteria tangible, every criterion is refined by several subordinated indicators that provide a very tight, but also a very clear reference framework. In whole, there are 112 indicators related to the enabler fields and 37 indicators related to the results that function as measurement variables.

For a better understanding of the measurement criteria, they are explained with relation to the enablers, as well as the results, in the following.

Enabler criteria

For example, the field of processes comprises several criteria that point out the actions or requirements that must be fulfilled by an excellent library in the field of process management.

- Criterion 5.1: The library is identifying, designing, and managing innovative processes on an ongoing basis.
- Criterion 5.2: The library is developing and delivering citizen/customer-oriented services and products by involving stakeholders and customers.

Working with the example of criterion 5.1, this criterion is further broken down into a list of indicators defining a concrete action plan for the realization:

- Sub-criterion 5.1.1: Involving employees, the libraries' processes will be identified, mapped, described, and documented on an ongoing basis.
- Sub-criterion 5.1.2: Involving employees, the libraries' processes will be analyzed, evaluated, and improved while taking into consideration the changing environment.

These indicators are only a selection. With all indicators defining the enablers, the quality model comprises comprehensively what the library does and how it approaches its tasks to achieve the desired results.

Results criteria

On the side of the results, libraries can measure the effects that result from their management actions. The results criteria aim to capture the assessment of the libraries' performance from all relevant stakeholder perspectives. With focus on results concerning customers, employees, and society, the measurement variables distinguish between direct perception measurement and performance measurement. With focus on customers, the model measures variables like customer satisfaction, as well as performance variables (e.g., number of visitors). Within the fields of employees, there are measured results with respect to the competence, motivation, satisfaction, perception, and performance of the library employees. Results covering the perception of the society can be related to social and environmental impacts as effects of organizational behaviors.

The key performance results that are measured in the ninth management field comprise what the library has determined as essential, measurable achievements for the success in the short and longer term. Key performance results can be divided into external results (outputs and outcomes to goals like market penetration, loan rates, or results of benchmarking) and internal operational results like the level of efficiency and the achieved results in building the library towards excellence (e.g., budgets and financial target fulfilments, topicality of media collection, business hours). For measuring key performance results, libraries can revert to existing parameters and values that are available for strategic library management.

Fundamental idea of continuous improvement

With this structure comprising the whole organization, the quality model provides a precise reference framework for holistic library management. At the same time, there is a high flexibility for the library to fill this framework with actions. It is the responsibility of the library management to translate these quality requirements into management actions by the use of management instruments or methods that are appropriate to the library. In this context, the model does not dictate the implementation of specific instruments or tools. On the contrary, the model intends to integrate existing and well-established management instruments and complementing them by new approaches that meet the needs of the library. Working with the example of process management, the model does not predict how to realize process management. The library can define methods, form, and regularity of the management process on their own. Existing process descriptions,

checklists, or instructions can be used as a basis for the development of a systematic process management.

Concerning the results, the model sets only the frame for results by defining measurement criteria. The model does not define concrete target values or results that must be achieved by the library. More likely, the library is responsible for deriving target values for the measurement criteria that are related to the enablers, follow the strategy of the library, and set their own frame for the performance. Furthermore, the library management has to implement corresponding controlling instruments that are appropriate for checking the achievement of these targets.

However, the focus lies on a structured approach of continuous improvement: it is essential that the library is using the implemented management tools in a structured and strategic way that aims to achieve the targets. This means the library has to plan and implement its actions with regard to the targets. While regularly checking the achieved results, there can be identified approaches for improvement that should cause changes on the action or target side.

Implementation of the quality model Excellent Library

The implementation of the quality model is a perennial process that depends on the quality level of the library, the amount of existing management instruments, and on the libraries' personnel and time resources that can contribute to the working intensity and pace. The process design for implementing the quality model is scheduled by an alternating mix of self-assessment phases and phases of organizational improvement.

First step: Self-assessment as core method

The self-assessment serves as a core method to measure the performance of the library and its progress of excellence. It is a highly structured, fact- and evidence-based technique to identify and assess the libraries' strengths and areas for improvement. Conducted by the library management and staff members, the output provides a unique insight into the library from various perspectives. For a comprehensive assessment of the whole organization, there should be involved staff members of all hierarchy levels into the project group who conduct the self-assessment. The experiences of the libraries show that groups composed of between 5 to 15 participants can realize an effective working style.

Passing through the self-assessment questionnaire, the library staff assesses every indicator toward the level of structural realization within the library and awards points for the level of maturity (1 to 5 points). An intensive discussion is essential in order to reach consensus about strength and weaknesses and the score for each indicator. This contributes to a high learning experience. Relevant to the assessment are only issues that are verifiably and comprehensible for external persons. Therefore, documentation and proof of evidence are essential elements of the self-assessment process. Relevant documents or actions provide evidence about the realization and must be indicated in the questionnaire.

Assessment schemes

The self-assessment is based on two assessment schemes that distinguish between the fields of enablers and results of the quality model.

Focusing management actions, the assessment scheme for the enabler fields is based on the plan, do, check, act (PDCA) cycle. It will be evaluated if:

- There exists no activity for realization of the indicator (0 points).
- There is a plan for activities meeting the requirements defined in the indicator (1 point).
- These activities are realized and implemented in a structured manner (2 points).
- There is an evaluation of the structural approach of realization and the achievement of results (3 points).
- The library is drawing conclusions from the evaluation results and is realizing a continuous improvement of activities and targets (4 points).
- There is a benchmark for the activities and best-practice learning (5 points).

In the self-assessment, the library has to check whether it passes the PDCA cycle completely so that there is sustainable improvement in every action.

On the side of the results fields, the self-assessment is based on two elements: evaluation will examine if the library can achieve its self-defined targets and if the library can prove a sustainable tendency of results over several years. The library will not be assessed regarding external factors or targets but must define and measure its own targets that match the strategy. At this point, the quality model provides the link between the

enabler fields and relevant results: for a strategic leadership approach, the management has to define relevant targets, measuring indicators, as well as controlling instruments (enablers), for checking the resulting achievement of targets (results).

Alternating improvement phases

The self-assessment can be seen as an organizational review revealing strengths and weaknesses of the library. The more employees are involved into the self-assessment, the more ideas and further approaches for improvement can arise during the whole course of the project. While these approaches often cannot be realized immediately, it is recommended to document and capture all of these issues regularly during the self-assessment.

Out of this diagnosis, the results directly have to culminate into planned schemes and actions that lead to a continuous organizational improvement process. Improvement phases should be based on a prioritization of projects and actions that can lead to strategic project management following the self-assessment. All improvements must be designed as a process of integrated systematic action planning with regard to continuous improvement of the organization as a whole. For supporting the libraries in structuring and planning the following steps for a structured realization, the quality model Excellent Library provides a portfolio analysis that is integrated into the self-assessment questionnaires. The analysis gives a visible overview of the results of the self-assessment that are classified into relevant, urgent, and optional improvement actions. Based on these results, the library can develop or implement instruments and tools that fit the needs of their organization and allow a strategic management as required by the model.

Implementation of the quality model: Challenges

By now, almost 30 public and academic libraries are working successfully with the quality model Excellent Library. Within the research project, the IQO is working closely together with these libraries in getting feedback about the experiences gained from the implementation process of the quality model. Regular online evaluations, as well as qualitative interviews, conducted by the IQO allow an intensive insight. As stated by the participating libraries, working with the quality model

is associated with challenges and chances regarding organizational, as well as interpersonal, issues that have to be managed on the way to excellence. Jaksch (2014) sums up the experiences of the libraries and provides a comprehensive insight from the perspective of a library.

One major obstacle can be seen in the great use of staff and time to implement the quality management system over several years. It has to be stated that the quality model Excellent Library is a complex model whose implementation and comprehensive establishment is a time-consuming process that cannot be realized easily besides daily routine. The self-assessment process is especially more than a check of individual actions that have to be ticked off one by one, but an intensive working process for all staff members. This requires not only a structured project planning but especially high endurance of all participants during the self-assessment and the improvement phases. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the management to create the best conditions for an effective realization of the self-assessment process and the implementation of tools by providing adequate time and personnel resources.

Like for all TQM models, involving staff in management activities is a key part of the message of the quality model. These people with all their know-how, experiences, and ideas play a key role for the success of the project and quality management in any case. Their commitment to the project is one of the most important success factors. A good communication about targets and benefits of the quality project are of great importance for the whole organization, as well as for the individual employee. The more transparent targets and actions are communicated, the more likely is a successful realization. The high involvement of all staff members into the self-assessment can contribute to a process of establishing a new quality culture within the library. At the same time, the implementation of the quality model initiates organizational change that may cause fears among employees. It is essential to take these fears seriously, to make the project process transparent, and to involve all employees by regular meetings, news, and personal conversations. Furthermore, the self-assessment often is an initial point for fundamental discussions within the team. This may cause conflicts on a personal level and evolve as a risk for the project's success. For a successful project, a very sensitive leadership and the ability to manage and moderate, as well as to resolve occurring conflicts, are required.

Based on the industrial quality models EFQM and CAF, the related vocabulary, as well as the underlying management understanding, of the quality model Excellent Library may be unfamiliar to the library employees. Therefore, it lies in the responsibility of the leadership to develop management skills among employees. A successful application of the model and the self-assessment process can be supported by an intensive discussion of the model within the whole team, as well as supporting training, considering management know-how, and vocabulary. The model acknowledges that quality improvement can be successful only when employees have the necessary skills and authority to participate.

Finally, all these tasks require a strong commitment by the leadership functioning as a role model. Quality management can be successful only if the management sees it as a leadership task and management philosophy that cannot be delegated to another person. At the best, quality management finally becomes not only a management tool but a matter for every staff member. If the leadership can manage a continuous process of realizing, analyzing, and improving daily work among all employees, it can achieve the goal of quality management as a permanent task according to the philosophy of TQM.

On average, the implementation process of the quality model can take up to 3 years. In the end, it is recommended to take as much time as needed for successful implementation of the model and the development of a broad quality understanding among all employees.

Support by the research institute IQO

Facing the challenges, participating libraries benefit from a close integration into the research project and the use of supporting materials and advice by the research institute IQO.

During the self-assessment, project libraries can use not only the self-assessment questionnaire but also complementing documents with extensive notes and a glossary that supports the understanding of vocabulary and management requirements. One of the central insights during the research project was the fact that libraries often needed to improve, refine, or extend their set of management instruments. In particular, there is a need for improvement of management instruments in the fields of strategy, target and operational planning, process management, and controlling methods. Supporting the implementation of management instruments in the libraries, the IQO provides special trainings and materials within the research project that aim to support the implementation of management instruments within the libraries.

Furthermore, the research project offers the opportunity of working within in a group of libraries. Regular meetings at the IQO offer the possibility for best-practice sharing and exchange of experiences between the libraries, as well as for scheduling the next steps. Between each meeting, an online-platform provides information and a way to communicate. This setting structures the project realization and contributes to the motivation of all participants.

Additional external certification as Excellent Library

Following the successful implementation of the quality model, the IQO also provides the optional possibility of an external assessment that can lead to the certification as Excellent Library.

To identify award winners, a team of assessors of the research institute IQO spends one day, on site, assessing the library. The external assessment is based on the same assessment scheme as the self-assessment so the library can check its self-assessment against an external review. The assessment includes document reviews and interviews with management and staff members to review the level of excellence that has been stated in the self-assessment. For becoming an Excellent Library, the library has to prove its structural and strategic management approach for every action. On average, the library has to achieve a minimum score of 60% across all achievable points. As a result of the assessment, the auditors provide an expertise containing an evaluation of strengths and fields of improvement from an external view.

Passing the external assessment successfully, each outstanding library will be awarded as an Excellent Library. This certification is a registered label in Germany under the German name "Ausgezeichnete Bibliothek" and is valid for 3 years. After 3 years, the certification expires if the library does not apply for the next external review.

Becoming an Excellent Library: Effects on libraries

All libraries working with the Excellent Library model state positive and sustainable effects and changes that

arose during the implementation process and in daily work with the model. Based on observations and qualitative evaluation, the results reveal positive effects on the internal organization, as well as the external image, of the library toward all stakeholders and especially the customers and funding bodies.

Internal effects

The implementation of the quality model and in particular required management instruments directly affects the library on the operational level. All of the participating libraries pointed out transparency about processes, targets, and responsibility as the most important effects. Especially for staff members, the effect of quality management becomes visible at the point of process management. Process descriptions can provide a guiding support for daily work routines and convey a sense of structure. They can set the framework for decision-making.

The implementation of process management, discussing targets, and planning actions by involving the whole team leads to a better understanding of circumstances, as well as to a critical reflection on daily tasks. During the implementation process, the whole team gains the big picture of the library management. If the leadership finds its way of involving all employees in the quality work as an approach for organizational development, a higher identification with libraries' goals, as well as an increase of motivation and willingness of change among the employees may arise.

For the library management, it is both a requirement and a benefit to internalize quality management and continuous improvement as a management philosophy. If this can be realized, "there is a continual improvement loop using critical thinking, creativity, and innovation to drive increased value for the stakeholders," as one of the library managers stated in project evaluation. But libraries can gain a holistic view on the organization and benefit from this model as an impulse for improvement and innovation.

Effects toward customers

The quality model places the primary focus on customers and target groups. The work with the quality model is based on an intensive focus on customer needs and an analysis of all stakeholders within a defined framework. Library managers of participating libraries confirmed a strong benefit of this structural approach: "We changed our thinking and acting towards a more reflected and customer-oriented improvement process," one of the library managers stated. The libraries' strategy, targets, and all actions have to be dedicated to their needs and expectations. This is accompanied by a comprehensive analysis and realignment of strategy and planning where appropriate, as well as to the (re-)development of products and services.

Customers will benefit directly from the development of new products and services, as well as from new ideas that will arise out of the continuous improvement process within the quality project. Efficient and faster processes also will contribute to customer satisfaction. While documenting the libraries' mission and service portfolio in strategic documents (e.g., mission statement or code of conduct), the library is enhancing transparency about its strategy and targets.

Furthermore, using quality management as a management concept demonstrates a modern and customer-oriented approach on library work. An external certification as Excellent Library confirms this positive image, the award makes the Excellent Library performance visible towards customers.

Effects toward funding bodies

During the last years, the research project and the quality model gained great publicity within the German-speaking librarianship. This contributed not only to the efforts of the library community to put libraries on the political agenda. In particular, working with the quality model and being awarded as excellent also contributed to a significant increase of visibility and reputation of the participating libraries within their administration and among funding bodies.

Participating libraries referred to the quality model and especially the certificate as a marketing tool, as well as a means of proving their existence. Working with the quality model supports a library in proving a customer-oriented library performance that is based on an efficient use of public funding. All of the existing Excellent Libraries confirmed a higher recognition of output and outcome on the part of funding bodies that was based on the evidenced key performance results. This positive reception finally could be used as a basis for successful budgetary negotiations.

Conclusion and further perspectives

As mentioned above, the research project Excellent Library aimed to develop a quality model and certificate that supports libraries in implementing quality management as a strategic leadership approach in their organization. With the quality model and certificate Excellent Library, the IQO developed tools that meet the defined requirements. These tools combine a structural approach on holistic quality management as means for library management with a certificate that aims for public promotion of the excellence performance of a library.

Reflecting the applicability of the quality model Excellent Library, it can be confirmed that the underlying thesis and structural framework are appropriate for libraries. Based on two internationally recognized quality models, Excellent Libraries works with a quality model that fits the special needs of library management but at the same time offers the possibility of being assessed toward the same quality criteria as institutions beyond the library sector. Experiences of almost 30 public and academic libraries give evidence about the useful application of the quality model. Using a highly-structured reference framework and a thinking logic focusing on continuous reflection and improvement, it is the basis for a sustainable, strategic library management and a driver for change and innovation. However, experiences of participating libraries also show that working with the quality model Excellent Library is challenging. Not only the complexity of the quality model but also the implementation process itself and resulting organizational changes impose considerable requirements on the library management, as well as on all other employees. Indeed, all of the libraries who are working successfully with the quality model Excellent Library confirm positive effects and state that the effort is worthwhile. The fact, that all Excellent Libraries strive for their re-certification shows their understanding of quality management as a continuous task and indicates the positive value of the quality model for their library management.

According to the understanding of continuous improvement, the research project aims on reflecting and developing its targets and research activities. In 2016, the research project will move to another level by focusing on a new target group. As a result of the evaluation of the applicability of the quality model, there has been recognized a need for an adaption of the model on different—and especially small—sized libraries. Based on the core model, the IQO developed a quality model and certificate for small libraries that are run by one and a half or less full-time employees. The new model is based on the existing structural framework but reduced in its complexity on the level of indicators. With this approach, there will be taken into account the specific organizational framework (e.g., personnel resources) of small libraries. For the first time, in 2016 a group of nine small libraries will hit the road toward their way of being an Excellent Library.

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