

## *To TQS or Not : An Alternative Career Path For Librarians?*

Sandra Barkman  
Phillips Fox, Sydney



### *Introduction*

For the past eighteen months my family, friends and colleagues have been subjected to discussions about my special project, without really understanding much about it or how I came to be heavily involved in Phillips Fox's bid for accreditation to ISO 9001<sup>1</sup>. I have had a number of inquiries about what is required, why librarians seem to become involved in the process and what effect my taking this position has had on the library and my career path. Accordingly I have submitted an article addressing these issues rather than producing a more formal guide to what is involved in the information gathering and documentation process.

### *The offer*

It was at my appraisal in July 1994, that the words TQS or Total Quality Service entered my vocabulary. I had decided to vaguely mention that I was ready for a career change and I think I did mention the words "challenge" - a big mistake. Next time I'll know what to do - take up a hobby, preferably something incredibly time consuming to prevent me from looking for additional work responsibilities. The warning bells started ringing when my suggestion of a change of scene was greeted with a surprising amount of interest and enthusiasm whereas I had expected to be directed towards advanced CD training and more user guide writing. Before I could say "accreditation", I was handed some weekend background reading on Total Quality Management<sup>2</sup> and asked to attend the first national workshop which was to be in Sydney the following week! I should have realised that this was a worry when senior members of staff started to smile benignly at me in the corridors and thank me for taking on the project, all before I had turned to chapter one of my basic text. Despite my apprehensions I decided I had already gone too far to turn back - after all I did say "challenge" and here was a huge one.

1 AS/NZS ISO 9001. 1994 *Quality systems - model for quality assurance in design, development, production installation and servicing*

2 Reed Richard C. *Applying Total Quality Management to the Law Office. An Investment in the Future of Your Law Practice*. PA: Altman Weil Pensa, 1993.  
*Business Law Education Centre: Pulford, R et al Quality Management in the Provision of Professional Services Melbourne: BLEC, 1993*

## *The Library*

In order to accept this new role as TQS Co-ordinator I needed to find a replacement for two thirds of my library management and other duties. Fortunately we were able to secure the services of a former member of library staff who was happy to step into the breach, thus allowing me the opportunity and flexibility to develop my skills in another area. In the early days this took up more like one hundred percent of my time rather than the sixty first suggested. Undoubtedly, without capable, skilled and supportive staff members, the library and I would not have survived the experience.

## *What is TQS?*

Well at this stage I still really did not know what it meant in a law firm context despite reading a few texts and case studies.<sup>3</sup> Phillips Fox had already made a formal decision to attain accreditation to the internationally known standard - ISO 9001 for the provision of professional services. Added to this large task was the way Phillips Fox had decided to approach the accreditation - that is nationally, on a state by state basis which certainly added to the word fest, especially at the beginning. The National Board was committed to gain across Australia consensus and consistency in the quality manuals and if possible in key procedures. One of our agreed important aims was to provide a quality service to make sure that our clients obtain the highest level of legal service in the most cost efficient way as summarised in our mission statement. As this statement was to be displayed in each Phillips Fox office in Australia and New Zealand, it took a few more workshop sessions to settle our key objectives.

I had hoped to approach the project in a very matter of fact, methodical way with a list of duties and due dates in the usual library fashion, but in the early stages none of the offices had been audited and we were fairly unsure of what to expect. Initially, all I knew was that according to the standard, all procedures had to be documented, followed and be able to be controlled which is a much easier task when matter and document management systems are used. Initially the ground rules changed quite often as we tried to adhere to the national framework but still take local conditions into account.

Luckily for us our Perth office was already substantially down the track and our Melbourne office had spent some considerable time settling the Quality Policy Manual which is another essential *standard* requirement

---

<sup>3</sup> Cameron, R. *Understanding Quality Systems* Sydney: Quality Services Management P/L, 1995  
Howell, R; Macqueen, C; Stein, C; Stein D. *Quality Management for Legal Practice* Sydney: Law Book 1994

### *Why librarians suit the TQS job description*

From my discussions with other firms actively pursuing TQS accreditation, it seemed that either librarians were actively involved on committees and the re-engineering phases or like me, actually co-ordinating or auditing the quality system. Why is this so? Having now completed the task successfully, it is easier to see why the records management or librarianship skills and experience we take for granted, is so suited to this sort of project management

All stages of the project required good organisational and people skills; strategic planning; an ability to analyse procedures and document them; time management; familiarity with document and system control together with a good dose of diplomacy - all of which are elements in a librarian's normal job description. Good presentation skills and an ability to train were also handy attributes when it came to TQS teaching and communication sessions.

In a national project like ours, a spirit of co-operation and resource sharing are essential elements and ones which we practise daily in our library lives. That is not to say all of the above are attributes I possess, though I think I can say that as librarians and managers of information we are better placed to approach the TQS task than some other professionals within the firm.

The documentation was particularly time-consuming especially when asked to write a number of manuals for various areas of the office. Even though I did, and do not, understand many elements of our IT Department's operation, overall consistency in the end product and procedures was the desired outcome and that comes easier to those who are used to setting and maintaining limits. The electronic versions of our quality and administration manuals were particularly well received by our firm and the external auditors. They are just natural extensions of the other types of electronic material librarians deal with on a daily basis

In addition there were plenty of mundane, repetitive tasks requiring continual verification and at times I wondered what I had done to myself and how much longer it would all go on! An additional interesting feature for me was that a number of staff members who joined the project along the way for specific tasks (eg auditing) were amazed by the large documentation and control tasks and often stated that they could not consider doing the job even sixty per cent of the time. For me the down side was more the uncertainty of the early stages of the project where we determined the format of the manuals and discussed semantics at length, whereas the tasks of writing, amending, controlling, securing and adhering to the procedures was very much what I was used to doing in another setting. For some reason, what was considered mundane and tedious to others seemed to be a natural, albeit laborious part of the process. Those library bulletin proof reading skills were finally put to a wider use!

### *Increased personal profile*

This was not the reason I accepted the role - I really just wanted a change of direction and in the early days I did often wonder if I had made the right decision

I felt as if I had plenty of exposure as Manager - Library Services, however, this exposure was and continues to be different. This was a brand new way of life for all members of staff. We did not change all our procedures by any means, but the way we document and use those procedures needed to be accepted and trained to all members of staff from the partnership down. We ran a number of sessions on how to use the quality system, including use of controlled forms; where to find and use the administrative manuals and the new requirements for some legal processes. We also formed a number of committees to gain as much staff participation as possible as it is very important for staff to feel that they own the processes. These ranged in size and hierarchy, but all involved the inclusion of the TQS Co-ordinator as did the internal auditing process. Our weekly staff bulletin contained a regular TQS update and continues to be one of our main methods of communication. None of these duties were particularly difficult for an information manager, however, balancing all these responsibilities, keeping people positive and focussed whilst running my eye over the next library budget stretched my personal resources at times.

I did notice that staff members seemed to treat me in a different light and I certainly gained a wider exposure with other members of administrative staff. This has helped me to understand why some procedures are in place. The role often involves a degree of mediation or dispute resolution particularly with regard to suggestions for improvement and complaints with any office procedures. I have particularly enjoyed this type of exposure as my library background continues to give me a level of understanding as a service provider and receiver and I hope that my suggestions and assistance have been valuable. Involvement in these types of situations has shown the *library* in a different perspective, though I am still troubled with why there should be greater apparent acceptance of my skills outside the library rather than within it. I intend to address the reasons why this might be so in the coming year.

### ***The Library documentation***

I suppose this is one area I expected to be charged with, especially on a national level. I had watched the human resources managers from our other centres with some trepidation as they discussed at length the recruitment process and why they could not agree on standard national procedures due to local conditions. I was fortunate that yet again our Perth office was substantially down the track and the Perth information manager had already settled her documentation, resolving some tricky issues. We were all well documented and in most cases each library had an administration and or user manual for most of their procedures which required either amendment or amplification.

The national librarians decided to take some affirmative action to collectively complete our stage of the national manual by adding an extra day to the 1995 Online Conference. We managed to discuss, document and devise the flow charts and narratives associated with our information centres. Despite some discussion

on certain sticking points, you will not be surprised to learn that by the end of the day we had easily reached consensus and produced a workable set of documents which were capable of being followed in a generic sense in each office. From these upper level documents hang the individual library's user and administrative manuals in either hard copy or electronic version depending on the software and desires of the individual offices. Incidentally all other key areas of the national office were also ultimately able to accept a workable higher level of documentation. However, the library materials actually work at a lower, more specific level, as well which is personally very satisfying. As you would expect, there was a high level of co-operation between centres and a practical example of the close level of support the libraries have always offered each other.

The documentation tasks I assigned to my own library staff were accepted with some initial anxiety but proved to be one of the best projects we have undertaken. Each person was responsible for the verification, documentation and training of their job description, duties and responsibilities.

### *The outcome*

I am not going to bore you with a description of the internal auditing phase or the work required to get us to the day of the external audit. However, I am pleased to report that by early May this year all Phillips Fox offices in Australasia had successfully passed the external audit by KPMG and gained accreditation to ISO 9001<sup>4</sup>. This is no mean feat when dealing with over 1000 people. We are now able to practically demonstrate that there is a level of consistency in output from each of our offices where the staff all strive to provide their clients, whether they be internal or external, with the highest level of service. We were able to learn from the experiences and skills of our other offices and continue to share ideas and procedures in the many continuous improvement projects we have chosen for the next few years. We are subject to six-monthly surveillance audits and therefore cannot rest on our laurels. Having achieved accreditation we must keep it and continue to improve our service.

### *The future - what now for the TQS trained Library Manager or library trained TQS Co-ordinator?*

Since April this year I have returned to the Library on a *real* one-third basis and am amazed at the changes in information technology that have taken place in the last eighteen months, especially in our use of the Internet. It is one thing to try to keep abreast of recent developments by reading current literature and publishing schedules and another altogether when you are back on the reference desk and having trouble downloading and printing a Federal Court judgment.

---

<sup>4</sup> *There is now available a very useful publication to be read in conjunction with ISO 9001 AS/NZS 3905 6:1995 Quality System Guidelines Part 6: A Guide to AS/NZS ISO 9001 1994 for the Legal Profession*

In the interim, the library staff have gone from strength to strength, having accepted and proven themselves in their new duties and are justifiably reluctant to relinquish some of the management responsibilities. This could have been a problem in our case, but as TQS continues to occupy two-thirds of my time, we have reached a suitable compromise so that I can continue to manage our quality system whilst hopefully providing some management back-up for our Library staff.

Phillips Fox Sydney has just undergone the performance appraisal process for 1996 and did I mention the word "challenge" in my interview this year? Well no, I did not. I stated that I was content to try to manage my joint roles and prepare for the next round of audits whilst privately resolving to take up Ikebana or Morris Dancing if short of stimulation in the coming year! I also omitted to mention that I managed to squeeze in three months leave between audits and delivered our second child who looks very likely to say *audit* rather than *mum* as his first word, so that is another reason to keep the challenge area confined to the domestic domain for now. As a part-time proposition, TQS is a good way to continue to contribute to the firm whilst building on library-based skills. I would recommend it to others as a change of direction but be warned, it is certainly no less a job commitment.