

Quality Pathway Information Sheet 1

Quality Management

This Information Sheet defines quality management in the context of providing human services.

Quality is often described as a measure of excellence, meeting particular requirements or standards, or the sum of features and characteristics that meet and even exceed the needs of customers. For providers of human services in disability, child safety, senior and young people services, quality means accessible and appropriate services with strong customer outcomes, skilled and responsive staff, good governance, and high levels of customer satisfaction.

Quality management is the service provider's processes for maintaining and improving quality levels of service delivery and operations, with the intent of providing the best possible experience and outcomes for customer and stakeholders, as well as for staff and governing body members.

Quality management processes help service providers to understand what is working well, identify where improvements are needed, and implement improvement actions. These processes include policies and procedures to guide practice, feedback and consultation with customers and stakeholders, and self-assessment of performance and compliance.

Quality management must be part of core business for all service providers.

A **quality management system** is the various quality management processes linked together and supporting one another.

Quality Management Principles

Quality management principles guide service providers in their quality endeavours and should be evident throughout quality plans and activities. A universally accepted set of quality management principles are those developed by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO). The ISO principles are:

1. **Customer focus** – engaging with customers, understanding and meeting their needs, and regularly gathering feedback from customers and stakeholders on how the service provider has met their needs.
2. **Leadership** – governing body and senior staff providing direction and creating a culture and environment of customer focus.
3. **Involvement of people at all levels** - everyone has a role and accountability for quality across the organisation.
4. **A process approach** – looking at whole processes in the organisation rather than approaching things as individual and unrelated tasks.
5. **A system approach to management** - managing related processes as a system to contribute to the service provider effectiveness and efficiency.
6. **Continual improvement** - aiming to always do better.
7. **Evidence based decision-making** – using facts and data in decision making; this requires the service provider to identify what data is needed, collect it, analyse it and use it.
8. **Mutually beneficial stakeholder relations** - recognising the need to develop and sustain relationships with stakeholders.

Quality management benefits

Good quality management requires some level of investment of time, resources and planning. However, the benefits to the organisation and its customers make this investment both necessary and worthwhile.

The primary benefit of effective quality management is its contribution to achieving best possible outcomes for customers by driving improvements in service provision. A quality system provides a way of coordinating and focussing service evaluation and improvement, ensuring that problems with service delivery are identified and addressed, that the service meets external standards of good practice and that there is a process for working towards excellence.

An effective quality system also enables a service provider to:

- ▶ Keep documentation such as policies and procedures up to date and in line with requirements
- ▶ Ensure that staff are implementing policies and procedures appropriately
- ▶ Manage risks and ensure safety of customers and staff
- ▶ **Streamline evaluation**, performance monitoring and planning processes by integrating them in a single system
- ▶ **Make good use of standards** and related compliance activities to guide practice and inform improvements in service provision
- ▶ Use data obtained from tracking and review processes within the quality system to make sure decision making is evidence based.
- ▶ **Provide evidence** of service quality and achievements and demonstrate this to potential customers.

Overall, a quality system can actually save time and effort by streamlining the management of service quality, risk and compliance.

Continuous improvement

Quality management is a continuous cycle, meaning that service providers review and improve on processes and outcomes in an ongoing manner. This process has several variations, most common is the 'Plan, Do, Check, Act' cycle.

Continuous quality improvement ('CQI') is already part of the activity of most organisations. When a service provider reviews how services or other activities have performed, the extent to which they have met planned goals or achieved results, and the levels of satisfaction of customers and other stakeholders, and then makes improvements to get better outcomes, they are implementing continuous quality improvement.