

# QUALITY AWARDS AND SURVEYORS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

What is the survey profession doing to respond to the accelerating rate of change affecting every organisation around the world? How does an organisation know it is keeping up with the rate of change? How does it know that it will provide a quality service to its customers?

Increasingly, the world is focussing on the relationship between quality, productivity and international competitiveness. The quality of goods and services is now recognised as a prerequisite to commercial success.

For sometime now, many survey organisations have recognised the benefits of a formal approach to quality. Some have sought certification for Quality Assurance through the ISO 9000 series, others have implemented quality systems and embraced a total quality management philosophy.

Many countries have a Quality Award or Prize which acknowledges outstanding achievements in organisation-wide implementation of the Quality culture and is designed to encourage organisations to pursue internationally competitive levels of performance by identifying organisations that do so and recognizing them as “benchmarks” of performance.

To achieve such a Quality Award or Prize is usually a long journey and can be a costly one from that initial commitment to quality. Even though the journey and the end result is usually well worthwhile for the organisation and its customers.

An organisation on such a journey whether its ultimate aim is for an award or not, needs to be able to assess its performance along the way.

## 2. COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

FIG has adopted a Charter of Quality in which its members recognise and agree to undertake:

- “To commit our respective organisations and member associations to quality, service and client/customer satisfaction;
- To develop a total quality culture through management commitment and leadership within our organisations;
- To develop a continuous improvement approach to all our activities;
- To work towards achieving recognition of our respective organisations to international recognised standards for quality systems;
- To encourage the suppliers of products and services to surveyors to embrace the principles of the quality movement;
- To train surveyors through a total quality approach;

- To share and participate in benchmarking and performance measurement.”

Having committed ourselves to such a charter, what are we doing to anticipate or influence what the market place will require of our survey organisations in the future? We must consider today the capabilities organisations and people will need for tomorrow.

Consider the following:

- Do you analyse your internal capability to manage the continual change demanded by the external environment while continuing to enhance your performance?
- Do all interested parties understand your plans and objectives to the extent that they can help you achieve and measure success against those plans?
- How credible is your organisation in the marketplace? How do you know that your credibility will be sustained or improved over the long term?
- To what extent are planning and structured approaches to developing competitive advantage, increasing productivity and encouraging innovation deployed in your organisation?
- How are you managing your resources to sustain the environment, to achieve long-term business goals and to help people cope with continual rapid change?

We do know that Quality or Excellence Awards for organisations around the world have a set of principles that, if put into practice, will assist us to achieve answers to the above.

These principles include:

- Effective leaders provide direction and create a supportive environment.
- Effective organisations are plan driven rather than event driven.
- Organisations benefit from decisions and actions that are based on facts and data.
- All systems and processes exhibit variability, which impacts on predictability and costs.
- All people work in a system; improvement happens when people also work on the system.
- The most important resource of any organisation is people – especially their creativity and knowledge.
- Continual improvement relies on continuous learning.
- Quality is determined by the customer.
- In order to improve the output, improve the process.
- Impact on the community and the environment are key influences of future sustainability.

How do we know our organisations are moving in a direction that encompasses such principles, at the same time allowing us to answer questions we need to ask about our organisations, as well as allowing us to meet our commitment to the FIG Charter of Quality?

I believe we need to aim to have:

- A system of quality management under which the fundamentals of continuous improvement are adopted;

- A simple Quality Management process which contains an easily followed path to Quality for survey organisations, including a related and appropriate Quality Assurance system;
- A set of guidelines which is related directly and in a practical way to survey practice; and
- Readily understood instructions to surveyors as to how to follow the guidelines.

### 3. PROPOSAL

As indicated for a survey organisation, particularly a small or medium sized organisation, to achieve a national quality or excellence award is virtually impossible due to the resources required. However many organisations and I would like to think all survey organisations, would like to be able to assess their performance at various stages of their life cycle, particularly as they embrace the path to quality.

It is proposed, that the path to become an excellent organisation with quality customer service could be considered as a number of steps. The final step being an achievement of a national quality or excellence award or prize, with the penultimate step being a Survey Quality Award. Therefore the whole process could be made up of 5 steps, as follows:

Acquiring an understanding of Quality	-	Step 1
Starting to implement a quality plan	-	Step 2
Implementation in detail	-	Step 3
The Survey Quality Award	-	Step 4
The Country/Region Quality Award/Prize	-	Step 5

The first 3 steps can be largely undertaken as a self-assessment based on nominated criteria and scores, which would be contained within the guidelines, while steps 4 and 5 would be based on external assessment.

The first step being largely a recognition that there has been a commitment made to quality, which includes, the organisation raising its awareness and being prepared to invest resources where required to move down the path of quality. This step includes an understanding of what is required in all aspects of the operation of an organisation, including strategic and business planning, resource management (financial, assets and human) client management, organisational development and risk management.

The second step is where the organisation has moved further down the path of quality and is ready to undertake a self-assessment to ascertain what progress has been made. This self-assessment could take the form of a series of questions on a range of matters where a ranking is given on a scale from “not implemented” to “fully implemented”.

The range of matters could include:

- Recognition that there is a need for change,
- Awareness of the value of quality principles being adopted for the organisation,
- Strategic and business planning incorporating quality principles,
- Resources available to take the organisation down the quality path, and
- Mechanisms in place to monitor initial implementation changes.

Each of these points could have 5 to 10 questions which are scored as per the ranking scale mentioned above.

Questions will need to be meaningful and carefully chosen. Self-assessment can be undertaken at regular intervals (say 3 monthly) and changes in score noted, so that progress can be monitored.

Having satisfied oneself that a reasonable proficiency has been gained at that step (say a score of 67% or 75% of a possible total score) the organisation could move on to the next step.

This third step could start to align the matters it assesses more to the elements of a country's quality awards criteria. For example the Australian Quality Awards key criteria are:

1. Leadership and innovation.
2. Strategy and planning process.
3. Data, information and knowledge.
4. People.
5. Customer and market focus.
6. Processes, products and services.
7. Business results.

As in Step 2 each of these criteria would have a series of questions which can be scored by self-assessment. Again progress can be monitored by undertaking a self-assessment at regular intervals. It should be noted that self-assessment could be undertaken by all members of an organisation.

When the self-assessment reaches a nominated percentage of the total possible score, the organisation can if it wishes seek an external evaluation. The evaluation would be undertaken by appropriately skilled persons who would provide a report on the positives and negatives of that organisation's quality of operation. If the evaluation score is at a level that warrants formal recognition externally, an award could be made in the form of a certificate or plaque. This is what I would classify as a Survey Quality Award and is Step 4 in the process.

It is envisaged this Award would need re-evaluation periodically (say every 2 or 3 years). The cost of the external evaluation would probably be made through a fee determined for that purpose.

Having been awarded a Survey Quality Award would be recognition that the organisation is at the top end of the scale and the customer is consistently pleased with the quality of service or product which is provided at a low cost to the organisation.

Should the organisation wish to proceed to Step 5 to really prove to all concerned that it is a quality organisation, it can enter that nation's quality awards or excellence competition.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Any organisation undertaking a self-assessment, at whatever stage it may be at in its evolution, will benefit. Not only will it highlight the positive aspects of the organisation, but it will show up areas where improvement can occur to make the organisation one that will provide an ongoing quality service to its customers.

Such an assessment can be based on national or regional matters and questions, or it could be developed internationally. Survey Quality Awards could be evaluated and awarded nationally.

A Working Group could be established within FIG if there was interest to pursue this issue further.

So in conclusion:

- What is your organisation doing to respond to the accelerating rate of change affecting every organisation around the world?
- What are you doing to anticipate or influence what the market place will require of your organisation in the future?
- How can you assess your organisation's performance?

## REFERENCES

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Professor John Parker is currently chair of FIG Commission 1 (Professional Standards and Practice). He provides consulting services to the World Bank, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation and various governments including the Victorian Government where he is the "Registrar of Geographic Names". From 1989 to 1998 John was Surveyor General for Victoria. Prior to that he worked for a state instrumentality and was in private practice for 19 years.

He is a member of a number of societies, including the Institution of Surveyors, Australia. A number of papers have been published and presentations made at national and international forums on a range of themes including quality.

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