



Framework for service quality – *elements of quality* draft 2

I am working on a framework to enable review and improvement of services – within higher education, but also applicable to other endeavours. For such a framework to be useful, it's important to understand what counts as *good*. This is a second draft of the elements which might be used to measure service quality. It's informed by feedback generously given on the first draft.

Changes from the first draft are in **purple text** (easy to spot, I hope, but not as distracting as mark-up using track-changes).

The feedback raised a point which I think merits further discussion, and I'd appreciate any thoughts you might have:

The point was about **appraisals**, and whether these are a sign of good practice or an increasingly outdated way of managing performance – see, for example,

<http://elysiantraining.co.uk/accenture-to-get-rid-of-annual-performance-reviews-and-rankings/>

<http://www.business2community.com/human-resources/time-get-rid-performance-appraisals-0973451>

My experience is that universities struggle with appraisals (that is, getting good levels of appraisals actually happening, never mind the quality of the discussion), but I think that it's not only the bureaucracy which is the problem. Are managers both willing and able to give feedback to their staff, and are they able to do so constructively? Perhaps the framework needs to talk about giving structured feedback and using it to develop and prioritise, but not worry so much about the precise mechanism. But on the other hand, if appraisals are the dominant mechanism, then it would be odd not to include them. *What do you think?*

What's next?

Next up will be the creation of a first draft maturity matrix which incorporates these elements of service quality. In case you're not familiar with the idea of a maturity matrix, here's how they work.

A maturity matrix is a grid. The rows are the various components of quality which you're using to judge the service; the columns – other than the left hand column – represent the different degrees of service *maturity* (hence the name). The degrees of maturity might have simple numbers – 0 to 5, say – or might have descriptive words: for example, absent, beginner, developer, strong, expert, exemplar. Each cell in the grid describes the evidence which will lead to that degree of maturity being achieved in that particular element.

So the next step – after feedback on this draft – will be a first draft grid. The *elements of service quality* will be used to create the left hand column, giving a separate concept for each row. And for each cell to the right of an element will be a draft descriptor of what that

degree of service maturity would mean. It's a bit like the criteria used for grades at a Board of Examiners.

I'll share this draft in a few weeks, when there's been more chance for comment on the elements below and the questions I raise above. I'll post it on my blog - <http://sweepingleavesblog.blogspot.co.uk/>.

If you post feedback as comments on my blog, that would be great, as then others can join the conversation. Alternatively, I'd be happy for you to send feedback to me by email – hugh@hughjonesconsulting.co.uk.

Thank you!

Draft 2 – the elements of service quality

Purpose: The service will have a clearly articulated purpose, well understood by the people within the service, and matched to the needs of the organisation and the clients of the service.

Service orientation: The service will understand which people and which organisations they serve, and which people and organisations have an interest. They will have structured ways for listening to the observations of their clients and stakeholders, and communicating with them. They will understand what their clients and stakeholders need, and will aim to deliver this first. They will have good complaints handling procedures, and a non-defensive attitude which seeks to listen and learn from complaints.

Priorities: The service will have prioritised the different elements of delivery and the development of the service, having regard to client and stakeholder needs, in line with the strategy, direction and resources of the organisation, and with buy-in from management and leadership beyond the service. Priorities will be reviewed in line with progress in service delivery and development; strategic changes; changes in the operating and regulatory environment; and in any case on a suitable regular basis.

Performance: The service will have identified measures of its performance, will have agreed acceptable and stretching performance levels, and will meet these levels of performance. There should be specific measures relating to effectiveness of service delivery; financial and people management; efficiency; and client and stakeholder satisfaction. There should also be an awareness of external performance measures – whether public performance indicators or appropriate benchmarking with similar organisations – and proportionate engagement with these.

People: The culture of the service will recognise and promote the importance of good people-management. Individual members of staff will be clear about their role and their specific responsibilities, and be aware of how their work contributes the organisation's strategic objectives and success. They will understand what they are accountable for, and to whom they are accountable. They will meet on a suitably regular basis with their manager,

and will be given clear feedback about how they are doing – what is done well and where improvement is needed.

On an annual basis there should be a formal review – appraisal – between an individual member of staff and their manager, which provides an opportunity for two-way discussion about work. Training and development will be supported, in line with resources, which will relate to appraisal discussions; **there will be creativity in the use of opportunities for individual development beyond traditional courses. Staff will be encouraged proactively to plan their personal and professional development.**

There will be good and regular chances for communication as a team and person-to-person, with regular briefings and opportunities for questions and discussion.

There will be proportionate and sensible ways to understand staff engagement, and managers will be regarded as accountable for their team's wellbeing.

Infrastructure: **The service** will have an infrastructure which is fit for purpose. This does not mean that everything must be new, but that within resources the physical environment is safe, welcoming and promotes good delivery; the IT resources meet the needs of the service; that there is an awareness of what could be improved, and that as opportunities arise this is done.

The infrastructure should relate to the service's business and delivery models. Where the operating environment is changing – because of changes in industry practice, client and stakeholder expectations, and information and other technology used in delivery – there should be a development plan to meet these changing needs.

Integration: **The service** will have a business model which is well suited to the situation – integrated with other parts of the wider organisation; sharing knowledge with and complementing other service providers to add additional value; and enabling the effective and efficient use of resources.

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Informed by comments from @ms_peaceweaver, Charlotte Verney and Claire Povah

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