



Swiss comments on the discussion paper on National Quality Assurance Framework

The draft report from Statistics Canada gives an excellent overview on quality applied to statistics, describing quality concepts, tools and frameworks that already exist today.

We would like in this note to enhance some aspects that are important for us, and make some comments on ideas given in the Canadian report.

The approach

The need for a general structure, a NQAF template, exists : we think that there is a gap today between initiatives that help implementing quality tools (handbook for quality reports, self-assessment checklists, handbook on process variables, ...) and initiatives that help in building a quality concept/approach (Code of Practice, CAF and EFQM frameworks,...). Quality Assurance is in between, and it is a main step in the way towards implementing a global quality framework in a NSO.

Any help in this subject would be definitely very useful for NSOs that do not have a quality framework. For the NSOs that already have such an approach, it is an opportunity to consider possible enhancements. Finally, for all NSOs, it is a means of sharing good practices.

The scope

As mentioned in page 12, we think that there is confusion between the various terms commonly used in quality. So the definitions given in the report are useful.

Despite of this observation, we think one aspect remains unclear: the paper states or takes the view that "the NQAF is targeted at roughly the same organisational level as the quality management system described in the ISO 9000 series", and in page 15, that "a NQAF has more focus on the organization of an NSO". This target is a good one, but we think a quality assurance system is not equivalent to a quality management system. So if this target is confirmed, and we hope it will, we think that the perimeter of the NQAF is broader than drawn in figure 1.

The content

We think that the notion of a NQAF template that provides the general structure within which individual NQAFs can be developed is a good approach.

The structure of the NQAF described in figure 2, page 17, is excellent. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, we think that this approach is really close to a quality management approach, support processes excepted. So the risk can be that the NQAF template becomes the global quality approach of the NSO, with a perimeter broader than a TQM approach. The implementing of a TQM approach therefore can be optional, the NQAF almost covering all the main quality items.

The QAF Implementation guide described in figure 3, is excellent too. It will help quality managers/teams in implementation. But they are mainly describing soft skills in relationship with the introduction of a new organisation in a NSO. We would suggest to do the same, if this is not already planned, for hard skills, that is giving guidelines for every instrument or procedure listed in the NQAF. For example, for a chapter, sub-chapter, giving practical examples, indicators or commonly accepted practice in the field would allow to share good practices and help the NSO to compare itself with the "state-of-the-art" for this specific item easily.

Overall comment

As mentioned, we cannot imagine a generic one fit all NQAF. For us, the notion of NQAF template is more realistic. The structure proposed is a good one, and will be helpful. But the perimeter of the NQAF is not defined clearly, and we think that the description given is broader than mentioned.