



1) What are your country's or agency's experiences – if any – with the development or use of an NQAF?

Prior to developing its QAF, Statistics Canada had a good quality culture and many good quality management good practices. We first put out our Quality Guidelines in 1985. The guidelines were more process-oriented. We later started defining our Quality Assurance Framework, which was more output-oriented. It's really when we were targeted for an audit on quality by the Office of the Auditor-General of Canada (OAG) that we accelerated and completed a first version of our QAF in 1997. It was revised after the audit and released in 2002 (current version). The QAF didn't add much in terms of quality practices. It's value added was (1) to define quality – fitness-for-use, 6 dimensions – and (2) assemble and document existing practices under a certain structure (more or less one of the proposed templates). Doing so identified areas where good quality management practices needed to be re-emphasized (such as the need for good metadata to inform users of data quality and methodology) and probably areas where quality management practices were lacking.

The more important experiences that I retain, in the context of Statistics Canada, are:

- Although we had a good quality culture and good quality management practices, we needed an additional external “push” (from the OAG) to elevate the QAF as a priority and dedicate the time and resources needed to finalize it
- While our senior management supported quality, one of the pillars of a statistical agency (Fellegi), the push from the OAG brought additional support and pressure from senior management to finalize the QAF
- Hans Viggo Saebo rightly states “It is important to move quickly from a (theoretical) framework to concrete measures.” One could say that we did the opposite and built the framework from concrete measures (existing quality management practices). This is one of the reason that led us, in the paper, to recommend not A quality framework, but a template (or basic) content in which a national agency can start building their framework from their own current practices, fill in gaps on their own or “import” some practices from other agencies.
- QAFs are more useful when created by the agency for the agency. We finalized our QAF because it was a pre-requisite to be permitted by the OAG to conduct a self-assessment for the purpose of the audit on quality. We could have created a QAF solely for that purpose and be done with it. Instead, we took this opportunity to develop a framework that assembled good practices across our agency. Statistics Canada is a large centralized agency with numerous statistical programs (demography, health, justice, business, national accounts, agriculture, etc.). Not all practices were present in all programs. Since developing the framework, some good practices have made it into more programs. Yet, more than 10 years later, some practices are not present in some programs.
- While a statistical agency needs dedicated resources to develop, implement and support a QAF, such as a quality unit, division or secretariat, it is important to clearly communicate that quality is everybody's business, not just that of the quality unit. At Statistics Canada, the QAF and other quality management initiatives are maintained and supported by a small budget of 2 full-time equivalent employees.



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- Another means of further implementing the QAF was to include parts of it in our career advancement process (e.g. testing broad knowledge of the QAF or specific aspects of it in written or oral tests) or manager's performance indicators (e.g. director of statistical program must ensure that all surveys have proper metadata by a certain date).

2) What problems and obstacles have you experienced or anticipate experiencing in developing and implementing an NQAF?

As mentioned by many others in the expert group, a QAF needs sustained support from senior management. The other big challenge is to disseminate the QAF, its principles and its practice across the agency. Statistics Canada needed and still needs senior management support to implementing the QAF across its numerous programs. The other challenge is to communicate the QAF at all levels of staff, from senior managers to production clerks. The communication (information, training, etc.) needs to be adapted to each level.

The QAF, once developed and implemented, also needs to be reviewed and enhanced. As stated in the paper, in the absence of a strong proactive effort, quality can decrease over time. After having experienced a few unfortunate errors in released data, Statistics Canada's senior management re-emphasized the importance of good quality practices. We put in place a series of quality reviews (still ongoing), a mandatory course on quality assurance practices (completed) and a close monitoring of corrections, big or small, made just prior to, or after, the release of data in The Daily (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/dai-quo/index-eng.htm>). On the latter initiative, we overcame "some reluctance towards the calculation and internal dissemination of quality indicators" (Marina Signore – Istat) by producing correction rates by statistical programs and presenting them to our upmost senior managers. Needless to say the number of errors came down quite a lot!

Compared to many other national agencies, we did not have the challenge of developing and implementing a QAF across several producers of statistical information. Furthermore, two other agencies responsible for collecting and disseminating official statistics, the Canadian Institute for Health Information and the Institut de la statistique du Québec, adopted a quality framework and quality guidelines similar to those of StatCan.

3) What are the main needs and priorities from a country perspective vis-à-vis the development and implementation of an NQAF?

- To define the scope of the NQAF (as stated in section III.B of the paper). This is also where there is a need to clarify and agree on a certain terminology, i.e. quality framework vs quality assessment vs quality guideline. Thank you, Martina, for sharing the glossary with us.
- To determine what the NQAF should contain. The paper does not propose the detailed content (i.e. THE framework), just its broad headings. The three frameworks provided as examples (StatCan, IMF and Eurostat) contain much of the same overall content, but are organized somewhat differently. The objective is to come up with a NQAF template to which existing frameworks could fairly easily be mapped to. The other objective of the template is to be more or less detailed depending upon how much material can be reasonably assumed to be common to all national statistical office.
- Once the template is set, a statistical agency is in the position to lay out its own NQAF. The first step would likely be to map or slot their existing quality



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management practices under the headings of the template. This could avoid some unnecessary duplication. The agency could also look at other practices carried out by other agencies under the same headings. The vast amount of information and practices already gathered by the UNSD and presented on their site would be very useful for this.

4) What are your initial comments regarding the three proposed templates for a generic NQAF presented in the Statistics Canada report ?

The three frameworks contain much of the same overall information. The three templates derived from each framework share the same basic structure. They only differ in the way they presenting quality assurance procedures. Even that aspect could be further summarized as: procedures to assure quality (as defined in section 2 of the template) in statistical processes and outputs. A common structure (template) will provide the basic starting point to develop the content of each NQAF and share/compare this content with other organisations keeping in mind the specific environments in which they operate. Yet, at the end of the day, the detailed content of the NQAF is much more important to a statistical agency than how it is structured.

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