



Istat experience and some first thoughts

Istat experience

Istat Quality Policy has been built over the last two decades. As for most EU National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) such a Policy has been defined in full harmonization with the European quality framework, namely the European Statistics Code of Practice and Eurostat Quality dimensions (for measuring process and product quality).

Istat also defined a structure for quality activity:

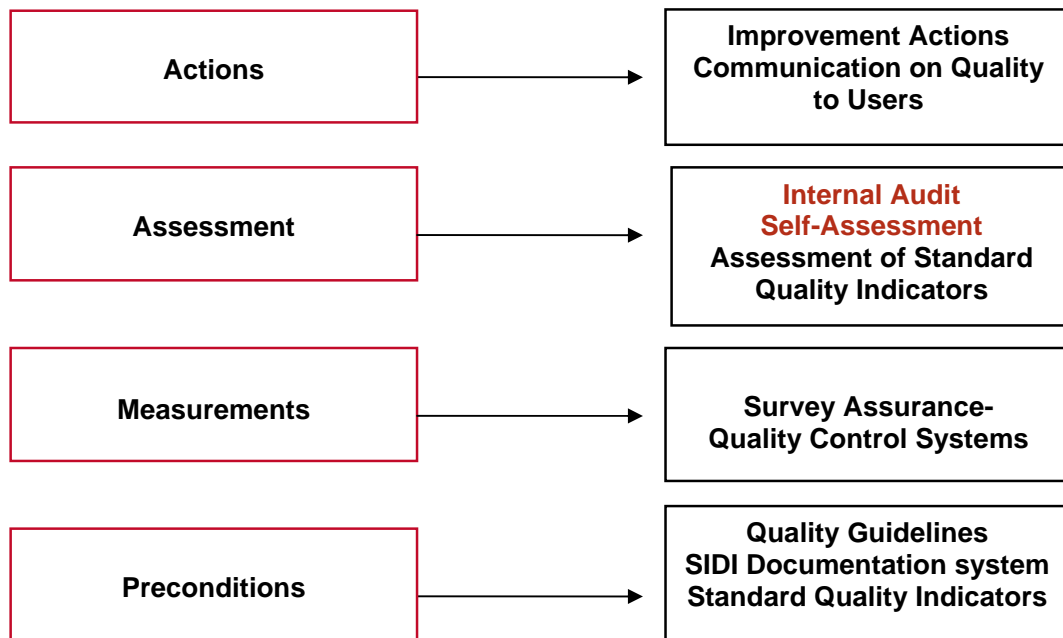
- a Centralized Structure for Quality Assurance (management and assessment);
- a Quality Committee chaired by the Head of Department of Statistical Production with representatives from all Statistical Directions and co-chaired by the Head of Service “Audit for Quality”
- a net of “quality pilots” (around 100 people) in charge of documenting statistical processes and calculating quality indicators for each statistical process in the centralized information system for quality (SIDI); coordinated by a working group with representatives from Statistical Directions

As described in the Handbook on Data Quality Assessment Methods and Tools (DatQAM), (Eurostat, 2007), the most important quality assessment methods are quality indicators, measurement of process variables, user surveys, self-assessment, auditing, labelling and certification. They can be divided in three layers where the monitoring of process variables, quality indicators and users surveys are the first one; self-assessment and auditing are the second one and finally labelling and certification are the final layer. Moreover, process and product documentation and measurement are preconditions for quality assurance.

At present, Istat quality assurance framework comprises a strong infrastructure for quality assessment represented by the standard quality measures and the SIDI documentation system and a quite long experience, gained in the last ten years, on data and process assessment using the tools in the first layer. The procedure for auditing and self-assessment, launched in October 2009, strongly relies on the experience gained so far and on the tools already implemented (see figure below).

As part of Istat Quality Policy, regular training courses on Quality have been held tailor to satisfy different internal needs (e.g. basic and advanced training courses on Quality, training courses for Quality pilots).

In 2009, Istat has developed a National Code of Practice in order to improve the accountability of the Italian Statistical System (Sistan), following the principles of the EU Statistics Code of practice and adapting the indicators to the Italian context. During next autumn, it is envisaged to launch an extensive self-assessment exercise in the Sistan.



Some thoughts and inputs for our work

What are your country experiences with the development or use of a NQAF?

As other EU NSIs, we based our quality work on EU Quality Framework without developing a specific framework by ourselves. Before the launch of EU Statistics Code of Practice, we followed the LEG on Quality recommendations and Eurostat Quality dimensions and definitions for a systematic quality work.

We developed a centralised information system (started in 1994 and operating since 2001), SIDI, managing metadata and standard quality indicators for all Istat statistical processes (direct surveys, surveys based on administrative data, secondary surveys- e.g. National accounts) that has been the heart of our quality policy. More recently, this approach has been followed, with adaptations, by several other NSIs in Europe.

What problems and obstacles have you experienced or anticipate experiencing in developing and implementing a NQAF?

The main problem that we faced was related to lack of a quality culture, in particular with regard to documentation and standardization. We had to convince survey managers that their processes could be described in a standard way. In addition, we also faced some reluctance towards the calculation and internal dissemination of quality indicators.

Two elements have proven to be of great support: the commitment of the leadership and the involvement of people (we created a net of Quality people, with a specific training course and a formalised role). However, it is a long term investment that is quite demanding and not always NSIs can allocate as many resources as required.

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



UN Expert Group on National Quality Assurance Frameworks

Comments on NQAFs (received in response to the questions in the 13 August 2010 EG launch letter/e-mail):

Italy: Marina Signore, 2 September 2010

For EU countries, the existence of EU standards, frameworks and guidelines is of big help and the major problem is not to develop a NQAF but how to implement it. Work is ongoing on this topic, in particular by the EU Sponsorship Group on Quality.

More generally, a NSI would need guidance (such as guidelines, tools, methods, experiences of other countries, training courses, (self)-assessment exercises,...) in implementing a NQAF or in other words in adopting **systematic** quality work.

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

Before answering to that question and comment on the templates, it could be convenient to decide what requisites the template should satisfy: for instance:

- NQAF should be easily adaptable to different national contexts;
- NQAF should take into account the already existing standards (European and International ones)
- EU NSIs will recognise an utility in a NQAF that differs from the EU Code of Practice?
- The guidance for implementing NQAF is at least as important as the framework; are we going to provide also some guidance and knowledge sharing (e.g. wiki area or a web site)?
- Some key concepts are really important for guiding the implementation and should complement the NQAF. For example some recommendations or key implementation steps (e.g. leadership commitment; Systematic work; Long term investment,...) could be developed.

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2 September 2010