

# **New quality management for the nonprofit sector**

**Guido Cuyvers**

Thomas More University College, Belgium

**Series in Business and Finance**



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For Rosita, Bart, and Katleen



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## About the author

Guido Cuyvers studied criminology, sexology, and philosophy at the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) and holds a doctorate in criminology with a dissertation on the secondary victimization of crime victims. During his professional life, he was a lecturer, researcher, and head of the social work department at Thomas More University, where he taught psychology, psychopathology, organizational science, and quality assurance. He was also affiliated with the teacher training program of the faculty of psychology and pedagogy at the Catholic University of Leuven.

Dr. Cuyvers has repeatedly been a member, chair, or secretary of assessment panels in higher education (universities and colleges). He has also coached many nonprofit organizations in their process of quality development, a theme on which he has published extensively.

Currently involved in civil society, policy concerning older adults, and research on the social participation of older people in society, Dr. Cuyvers is committed to the Vlaamse Ouderenraad (Flemish Council of Older Adults) as a board member and independent expert as well as chairman of the council's Participation and Inclusion Committee. He is Belgium's representative on the Administrative Council of Age Platform Europe.

Dr. Cuyvers publishes extensively on all types of social themes. He is strongly involved in the problems that socially vulnerable groups in society experience, such as human trafficking and slavery, the unequal position of patients in health care, and the difficulties that aging people experience in asserting control over their own lives. His great passion continues to be publishing and teaching about these themes.



# Preface

Because of the influence of various developments in society, quality has long been the central concern of the nonprofit sector. Partly due to government intervention and increasing competition, all parts of organizations in the nonprofit sector are obliged to work systematically on their quality. Quality has become necessary. However, as more people gain experience with quality assessments, visitations, and accreditations, criticism also grows. This is related to the way in which quality is assessed and the criteria used. In this book, I will take a critical look at this phenomenon. Many questions remain unanswered, and contradictions remain unresolved. Moreover, it is a major challenge to motivate everyone in an organization to think and work in the same direction. In short, there is still work to be done.

When I became interested in the theme of quality in the mid-1980s, what was then called *quality assurance* was still relatively unknown in the nonprofit sector. Initially, there was also a great deal of resistance because the quality was considered something typical for the profit sector and, therefore, not applicable to the nonprofit sector. Gradually, interest grew, partly because governments also began to recognize the importance of quality assurance. Since then, the practice of quality assurance has evolved greatly. Unfortunately, the dimension of control has received too much attention in recent years, often to the exclusion of the other aspects. The social context has also evolved greatly since the 1980s. We live in a society in which standardization, control, and measurement have become increasingly important. The focus has been transformed too much into manageable quality, and quality assurance has quietly taken on the role of controller. It seems like Big Brother really is watching us more. These evolutions and my growing insights made it clear that a different and new way of thinking about quality was needed.

I have several goals with this book. To begin with, I want to place the quality issue even more clearly in the current social context and hold it up to the light of critical thinking that has taken place in the meantime. I hope to achieve a balanced assessment of the risks and added value of striving for quality in an organization.

Subsequently, I want to broaden the traditional view of quality and quality assurance to a vision and approach that is compatible with and supportive of the mission of organizations in the nonprofit sector. Incidentally, I will speak of quality development rather than quality care. The term “quality development” is used in the hope of inspiring people to look differently at quality and at how their organization deals with it. Words create worlds,

according to David Cooperrider. The question is not simply, “What is quality?” It is also, “How can we work on quality improvement in a systematic way?” My answer to this book is “quality development.”

A third goal is to provide nonprofit organizations with methodologies and instruments that can lead to permanent quality development. I consider a methodology in this book to be a strategy or framework of ideas about how to proceed in developing quality. An instrument is a concrete tool that employees in an organization can use to perform their tasks in a high-quality manner. The description of an instrument often takes the form of a step-by-step plan.

I have organized this book into two parts. In the first part, I discuss the fundamentals of the concept of quality and the process of quality development in depth. I am convinced that a good understanding of the underlying concepts is at least as important as a thorough understanding of the methods. Consequently, an organization must meet several conditions so that working on quality does not result in sterile compliance with rules and procedures. This requires a constructive-critical attitude toward the entire quality process. I will also thoroughly clarify my own premises in this section, both the clarification of concepts and awareness of underlying trends—so that the readers can develop their own vision. In the first chapter, I focus on both the meaning of quality and its added value, as well as some of the pitfalls that often obscure thinking about quality and quality development. In the second chapter, I critically examine what visions are in force about quality, their underlying assumptions, and what the consequences are. In the third chapter, I discuss in detail the starting points for my vision of quality development. I close the first part with a discussion of what is needed to develop quality integrally.

The second part of this book focuses on practice. First, I describe the basic methodologies that support our vision of quality development. Quality development requires an empirical approach from organizations. “Facts and figures” is a commonly used slogan. A critical approach is also right here. It is about much more than collecting numbers. It is about how an organization can prove, in a reliable and credible manner, how it develops its quality and systematically checks it so that it does not depend on chance. In the sixth chapter, I therefore discuss aspects of measurement. In the seventh chapter, I review the important quality models that are currently in vogue. They form the framework for the many efforts that organizations make to continuously improve their quality. In the eighth chapter, I discuss a series of techniques used in the different stages of quality development. Finally, I conclude this book with summarizing the core ideas to approach quality from a new perspective.

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