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How the experts tend their own shop

A shift to management quality at Andersen meant full-scale reorganization

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How does a company that specializes in telling others how to run their affairs go about keeping its own house in order?

In the case of Andersen Consulting, the international firm of management and technology consultants, the answer is a formal program of total quality management. The organization has more than 26,000 people in 151 offices in 47 countries. In Canada, more than 700 professionals operate out of offices in nine cities.

One element of Andersen's TQM program involves a client report card – and Andersen is pleased with its marks.

Robert Duelks, managing partner, services, is in charge of quality initiatives in Andersen Consulting Canada's Toronto office. He says getting a formal evaluation has not changed the way the company traditionally addresses issues.

"One thing Andersen is very good at is listening to clients and addressing their concerns," Mr. Duelks says. "This survey assures us that we're listening to all clients and enabling and encouraging every client to give their input."

The current quality management program replaces a "quality assurance" system that had

been in place for about 18 years. The old system involved assessing quality at various checkpoints that had been established in consultation with clients, and meant bringing in another partner armed with an extensive set of checklists every three months. The problem is that, "assurance implies checking rather than managing," Mr. Duelks says.

Four years ago Andersen decided that deeply embedded quality factors would be better than a periodic checklist, and came up with a comprehensive two-part quality management system, one part focused internally and the other on the client.

This company-wide shift to management quality entailed a reorganization from the top down, from the creation of a chief quality officer at world headquarters down to local management groups where the detailed work is carried out by quality councils.

"The purpose of the quality council team is to look at the processes in the office and the way the processes support the primary mission in the life cycle of the project," Mr. Duelks says. These councils, which meet about every six weeks, share best practices and successful changes, an inventory is made and others are encouraged to adopt the principles involved.

The other part of this quality goal is the

external review, a standard survey that asks clients to note their satisfaction and evaluate certain items of importance such as how well they felt the company consultation team scored on factors such as timeliness – how quickly we were able to respond and deal with a problem or situation and implement a solution, and the ease of accessibility of getting questions answered."

Mr. Duelks notes that clients may be more frank in their assessments when faced with a confidential survey, and will provide a "comprehensive view of what our clients have been thinking about us."

The survey involves 28 questions, which clients rank on a five unit scale. Andersen services received an average of 4.7 in the latest results.

This was only the second year using the survey, but Mr. Duelks says that there was a significant improvement over the first year figures because of the changes that had been implemented.

He notes that asking such questions closes the loop in their service, and has the function of showing whether they have been successful or not, whether changes were beneficial. "If it was easier for us but not better for the clients, then it has not been successful," Mr. Duelks says.

The article EM9349 reprinted above is used in Figure 11.16 of the STAT 221 Course Materials.