

**CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AS AN INTERNAL,  
COLLABORATIVE,  
AND TRANSFORMATIVE PROCESS**

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**Overview**

The purpose of this OEES Manual Supplement is to describe the authors' approach to continuous quality improvement (CQI) as an internal, collaborative, and transformative process that is used to enhance an organization's effectiveness and efficiency. We begin by defining CQI, and then provide a summary of our conceptual model, measurement approach, and application framework. The document concludes with a discussion of the advantages to approaching CQI as an internal, collaborative, and transformative process and a summary of five implementation guidelines.

Throughout the document, we refer to the *Organization Effectiveness and Efficiency Scale* that was developed by the International Consortium on Evidence-Based Practices (2013 a, 2013 b) to assist nonprofit organizations meet the increasing need to be more effective in terms of achieving their intended results, more efficient in terms of their resources utilization, and more sustainable in terms of adapting to change and providing a wide range of sound service delivery opportunities and practices.

**The Definition of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)**

We define CQI as an internal, collaborative, and transformative process that results in actionable information used to enhance an organization's effectiveness and efficiency. Based on the four elements or steps of the continuous improvement cycle of self-assessment, plan, do, and evaluate, CQI: (a) is based on the organization's self-assessment of objective best practice indicators that reflect four performance-based perspectives and whose assessed status determines an organization's quality improvement needs; (b) involves the implementation of organization-based and self-directed quality improvement strategies composed of the same best practice indicators assessed in (a); and (c) incorporates the evaluation of the impact of the quality improvement (QI) activities in terms of their relevance to organization learning, knowledge transfer, benchmarking, and program accountability.

### **Conceptual Model**

Human service organizations are increasingly focusing on CQI as a way to transform their services and supports to better meet the challenges of providing quality programs within the context of increased demands for services and supports commensurate with diminishing resources. Within this context, there is wide consensus that CQI needs to be approached from a holistic and collaborative perspective and one based on best practices and actionable information (Friedman, 2013; Kapucu et al., 2011; Krumdieck, 2013; McLaughlin & Kaluzny, 2004; Munk & Dempsey, 2010; Schalock et al., 2014). There is also agreement that these actions involve a sequential process that requires participative leadership and a new leadership role: that of a transformation engineer (Krumdieck, 2013; Krumdieck & Page, 2012). Our conceptual model reflects this consensus and has three major components: (a) best practice indicators, (b) multiple performance-based perspectives, and (c) a collaborative approach to evaluation.

#### *Best Practice Indicators*

Best practice indicators are objective measures of organization processes and performance. Such indicators: (a) are based on current evidence that is obtained from credible sources that used reliable and valid methods; (b) are based on a clearly articulated, empirically supported theory or rationale; and (c) can be used for multiple purposes including the evidence in evidence-based practices, the items of an organization self-assessment tool, and the strategies employed in continuous quality improvement activities (Schalock & Verdugo, 2012; 2013; Schalock et al., 2014). As summarized in Table 1, these indicators can be aggregated into the four performance-based perspectives one commonly finds in the management and program evaluation literature.

Table 1

Literature-Based Performance-Based Perspectives and Best Practice Indicators\*

*Customer Perspective*

1. Aligns services/supports to identified support needs
2. Reports the number of clients living or working in more independent, productive, and community-integrated environments
3. Measures personal outcomes
4. Reports and analyzes aggregated personal outcomes
5. Uses technology to enhance personal outcomes

*Growth Perspective*

6. Articulates the organization's mission and intended results
7. Enters into partnerships
8. Develops program options
9. Utilizes and evaluates high performance teams
10. Monitors job satisfaction and develops job enrichment programs

*Financial Perspective*

11. Compares unit costs across different locations and service delivery platforms
12. Reports percentage of budget allocated to client-referenced supports
13. Monitors the relationship between social capital and agency-based fiscal capital
14. Uses fixed and variable cost data to establish a baseline cost rate
15. Analyzes overhead rate to increase efficiency

*Internal Processes Perspective*

16. Horizontally aligns input, throughput, and output components

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>17. Vertically aligns an organization's input, throughput, and output components to the corresponding individual-level input, throughput, and output components</li><li>18. Demonstrates relationship between units of service/support provided and the clientele's assessed support needs</li><li>19. Uses data related to personal and organization outcomes for multiple purposes</li><li>20. Uses evidence-based indicators for continuous quality improvement</li></ol> |
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\*Specific references provided in Schalock et al. (2014, page 111).

### *Multiple Performance-Based Perspectives*

A multidimensional approach to organization evaluation and change is an emerging characteristic among IDD organizations (Schalock & Verdugo, 2012, 2013). This multidimensional approach is consistent with the balanced scorecard concept that was first introduced by Kaplan and Norton in 1996 to replace the traditional performance system that typically focuses on assessing only financial performance. Incorporating multiple perspectives into performance evaluation allows for a more balanced perspective of an organization's performance, thus providing more useful information to leaders and managers (Niven, 2008; Tsai et al., 2009; Wu et al., 2011). As reflected in Table 1:

- The *customer perspective* focuses on personal goals, assessed support needs, individualized supports, and personal outcomes.
- The *growth perspective* focuses on program options, high performance teams, direct support staff involvement, and networks, consortia, and partnerships.
- The *financial perspective* focuses on a standardized approach to calculating unit costs, cost accounting, cost allocation, social capital, fixed and variable costs, overhead rate, and resource allocation models.

- The *internal processes* perspective focuses on horizontal and vertical alignment of program components, mapping system(s), research and evaluation capacity, data sets, data collection systems, and quality improvement activities.

### *Collaborative Approach to Evaluation*

A collaborative approach to evaluation is consistent with approaches such as participatory evaluation, utilization-focused evaluation, and empowerment evaluation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011; O’Sullivan, 2012; Patton, 2008). Collaborative evaluation involves organization participants, such as administrators, managers, and knowledgeable support personnel, who are involved jointly in assessing or evaluating organization processes and functions. The ultimate goals of collaborative evaluation are to increase: (a) the knowledge and understanding of the evaluation/assessment process; (b) the capacity for self-critique, self-determination, and systematic inquiry at the level of the individual and the organization; (c) organization learning that fosters shared values and understanding among organization members; and (d) the likelihood that the assessment’s findings will be incorporated into subsequent quality improvement efforts (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Fitzpatrick, 2012; Luskin & Ho, 2013; Nichols 2002; O’Sullivan, 2012; Rodriguez-Campos, 2012).

Collaborative evaluation has a number of benefits related to CQI. Among these benefits are increased knowledge and understanding of the evaluation/assessment process; enhanced capacity for systematic inquiry at the level of the individual and the organization; increased sensitivity to key concepts that include quality of life, personal outcomes, individualized supports, systems thinking, balanced scorecard, outcomes evaluation, alignment, continuous quality improvement, program logic models, and best practices; and an increased likelihood that the assessment’s findings will be incorporated into subsequent CQI decision making.

## Measurement Approach

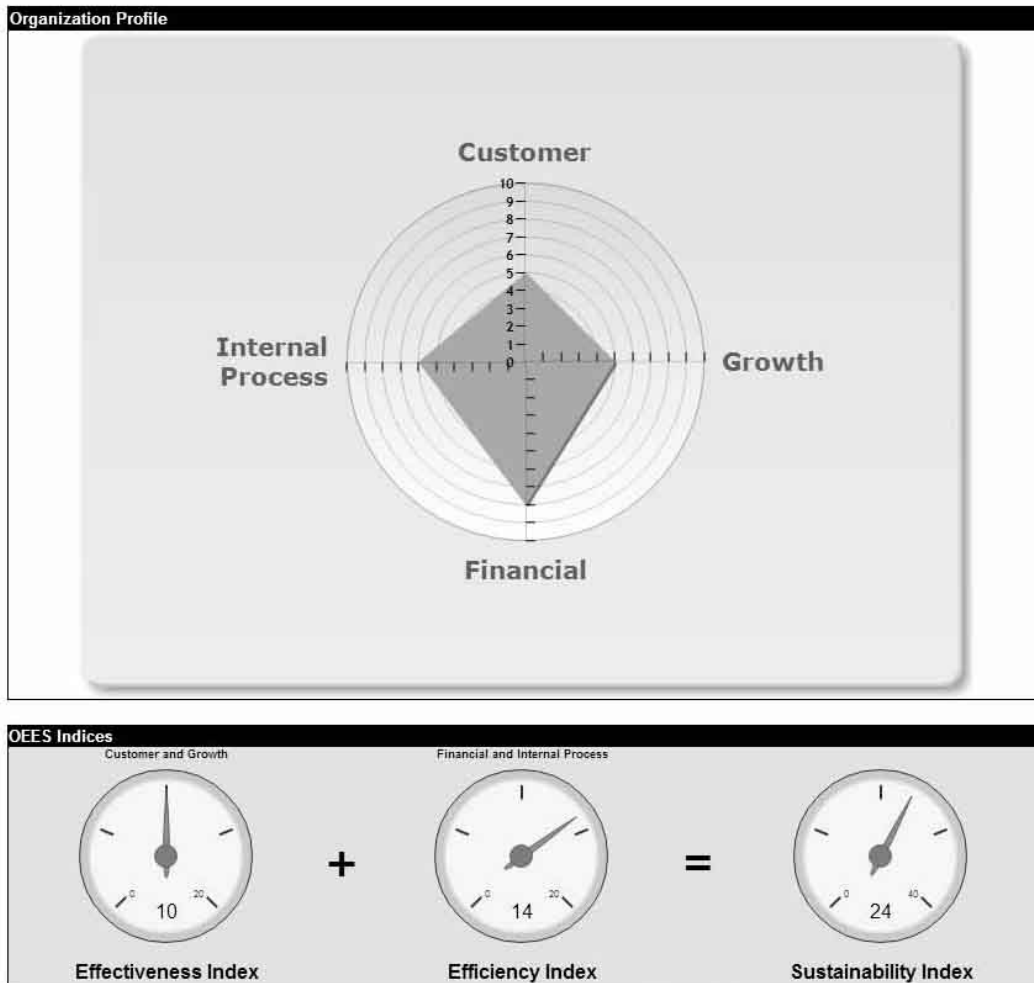
The *Organization Effectiveness and Efficiency Scale (OEES)* was developed by the International Consortium on Evidence-Based Practices (2013a, b) and is based on the conceptual model just described. Full details regarding its development, standardization, multiple language versions, and on-line administration and scoring are available at: <http://www.oeesonline.org>. Details about its use to date in CQI can be found in the *OEES Manual* available on line and in Schalock et al. (2014).

The *OEES* is administered by an individual (internal or external to the organization) who is competent in assessment strategies and the collaborative approach to evaluation, and who is familiar with organization management and the evaluation conceptual and measurement model just described. At least two respondents are interviewed. These individuals are managerial level or above in the organization and need to be familiar with data sets in the organization's management information system, and knowledgeable about how to assess and interpret information.

Indicator scores are aggregated into four performance-based perspective profiles that reflect the perspective of the customer, and the organization's growth, financial analyses, and internal processes. These profiles are depicted graphically in a Radar Chart such as that shown in Figure 1. Three evidence-based indices are also computed and depicted graphically, as shown in the Dash Board presented in the bottom section of Figure 1: An *Effectiveness Index* (the total of the Customer and Growth Perspectives), An *Efficiency Index* (total of the Financial and Internal Processes Perspectives), and a *Sustainability Index* (total of the two indices). These profiles and indices are computed in real time and are available to the interviewer and respondents

immediately following the on-line assessment. This summary information along with item raw scores can be used as a basis for CQI within the application framework described next.

<Figure 1>



**Figure 1. Graphic Summaries of an Organization's Perspectives Profile and OES Indices**

### **Quality Improvement Application Framework**

The quality improvement (QI) framework presented in Figure 2 is patterned after the four elements or steps of the continuous improvement cycle (Deming, 2000; Richards, 2013; Six

Sigma Cycle, 2013; Ries, 2011; Sokovic et al., 2010). As depicted in Figure 2, the four QI process steps of our application framework are: self-assessment, plan, do, and impact evaluation.

<Figure 2>



Figure 2. Continuous Improvement Loop



### *Self-Assessment*

The *OEES* is used to make an initial assessment of the organization's status on the 20 best practice indicators listed in Table 1. This initial self-assessment results in a profile of the pattern (in terms of raw scores) and intensity (in terms of Radar chart graph-see Figure 1) of an organization's QI needs for each of the four performance-based perspectives. QI planning and doing are based on this initial self-assessment of what is important 'for the organization' plus areas deemed 'important to' the organization. Areas, considered 'important to' the organization typically relate to the organization's founding philosophy, ongoing commitment to quality services and supports, and deep culture.

### *Plan*

Planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape what an organization is, what it does with its resources, and why it does it, with a focus on best practices. Planning is based on self-assessment, builds on a shared vision that is values-based and results in a quality improvement plan (QIP).

Planning needs to be based on an organization's quality improvement (QI) needs as *reflected in what is important to and for the organization*. Organization goals reflecting philosophy, commitment, and deep culture represent *what is important to the organization*. Assessed QI needs based on raw and profile scores reflect *what is important for the organization*. The *OEES* represents a balanced approach to determining an organization's QI needs. For example, from the customer's perspective, the QI needs might be to focus on personal goals, assessed support needs, individualized supports, and personal outcomes. From the

organization's growth perspective, the QI needs might be to focus on developing program options, implementing high performance teams, increasing direct staff involvement, and increasing networking, consortia membership, and/or partnerships. From the organization's financial perspective, the QI needs might be to focus on a standardized approach to calculating unit costs, developing a cost allocation formula, increasing social capital, evaluating overhead rate, and/or implementing a resource allocation model. From an organization's internal processes perspective, the QI needs might be to focus on horizontal and vertical alignment, research and evaluation capacity, data sets and data collection systems, and/or quality improvement activities.

Planning decisions and actions are operationalized in a Quality Improvement Plan that is developed and implemented by a QI Team who ensure that QI is a participative and outcomes-focused process. Parameters of such a plan are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Parameters of a Quality Improvement Plan

1. The performance-based perspective (customer, growth, financial analyses, internal processes).
2. The most important organization goal and assessed QI needs related to the perspective.
3. The QI goal or anticipated outcome related to the perspective.
4. The QI strategy employed to accomplish the goal (see Table 3).
5. The requirements of implementation (i.e. the who, where, when).
6. The requirements of monitoring the implementation status of the strategy.
7. The requirements of evaluating the anticipated outcome.

*Do*

Doing involves implementing quality improvement strategies. A system of quality improvement strategies related to each of the four performance-based perspectives has emerged from the transformation era and the program evaluation and organizational changes that are occurring commensurate with this era (Schalock & Verdugo, 2012, 2013). Exemplary components of such a system, which are provided in Table 3, parallel the best practice indicators assessed on the *OEES*. Specific examples of each strategy are found in Schalock and Verdugo (2012) and the International Consortium on Evidence-Based Practices (2013 b).

Table 3 A System of Exemplary Quality Improvement Strategies	
Perspective	Exemplary Quality Improvement Strategies
Customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Aligns services/supports to identified support needs</li> <li>-Measures personal outcomes</li> <li>-Uses technology to enhance personal outcomes</li> <li>-Implements a system of supports</li> </ul>
Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Enters into partnerships (e.g. networks, consortia)</li> <li>-Develops program options</li> <li>-Utilizes high performance teams (e.g. Support Team; Quality Improvement Team)</li> <li>-Monitors job satisfaction and develops job enrichment programs</li> </ul>
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reports percentage of budget allocated to client-referenced supports</li> <li>-Monitors the relationship between social capital and agency-based fiscal capital</li> <li>-Analyzes overhead rate to increase efficiency</li> <li>-Bases resource allocation on major cost drivers</li> </ul>
Internal Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Horizontally aligns input, throughput, and output components</li> <li>-Vertically aligns the organization's input, throughput, and output components to the corresponding individual-level input, throughput, and outcome components</li> <li>-Aligns information systems to performance-based perspectives</li> <li>-Increases knowledge transfer through real-time information technology</li> </ul>

There are a number of positive impacts relative to each of the QI strategies listed in Table

3. Chief among these are:

- *From the customer's perspective:* enhanced human functioning/quality of life; personal outcome information used as a basis for CQI; and enhanced effectiveness due to services and supports aligned to personal goals and assessed support needs.
- *From the growth perspective:* an array of community-based employment, education, and community opportunities; involvement of direct support staff in support and quality improvement plans; knowledge generation and transfer within the organization; and enhanced effectiveness due to increased program options, staff skills and involvement, and network partners.
- *From the financial analysis perspective:* information to develop benchmarks regarding overhead rate, cost per unit of service/support, and percent of budget allocated to client-referenced supports; and increased efficiency due to bundling critical functions, maximizing social capital and natural supports, and allocating resources based on major cost drivers.
- *From the internal processes perspective:* alignment of individual and organization-referenced processes and functions; availability of web-based, real-time information for decision making and knowledge transfer; prototypes for using data for multiple purposes; and increased efficiency due to alignment of program components, availability of relevant performance-based information, and use of outcome data for multiple purposes.

Doing typically involves changing the way that an organization does business. Change not only requires understanding the specific quality improvement technique used, but also involves approaching change systematically. The five components representing a systematic approach to change and their anticipated effects are summarized in Table 4 and discussed in greater detail in Schalock and Verdugo (2012).

Table 4

Components of a Systematic Approach to Change and Their Anticipated Effects

Change Component	Anticipated Effects
Clear Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Understands values guiding the change</li> <li>-Sees implications and benefits of change</li> <li>-Envisions the future and future roles</li> <li>-Provides guidance for decision making</li> </ul>
Simple Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Provides a clear understanding of the interrogatories of change (i.e. what to do and how to do it)</li> <li>-Allows for consistent communication</li> <li>-Facilitates knowledge transfer</li> </ul>
Constructive Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increases motivation and sense of ownership</li> <li>-Increases inclusion and empowerment</li> <li>-Maximizes implementation of change</li> </ul>
Short-Term Wins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Demonstrates successful change is possible</li> <li>-Allows for self-reinforcement and celebration</li> <li>-Increases 'buy-in' by skeptics</li> <li>-Facilitates systematic conversion</li> </ul>
Anchoring the Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Becomes the established way to do things</li> <li>-Becomes part of the organization's culture</li> <li>-Ensures leadership development/succession</li> <li>-Frames staff selection and staff training</li> </ul>

*Impact Evaluation*

In reference to CQI the term 'evaluation' is used differently depending on the quality improvement approach. For some, evaluation refers to checking or studying (Deming, 2000); to others it refers to analyzing (Six Sigma Cycle, 2013), deciding (Richards, 2013), learning (Ries, 2011), or assessing/refining (Sokovic et al., 2010). In reference to the QI framework presented in Figure 2, evaluation is the systematic inquiry used to formulate judgments about the impact of a

QI strategy and its potential use for organization learning, knowledge transfer, benchmarking, and program accountability (Cousins et al., 2014; Schalock et al., 2014). We refer to this approach to evaluation as ‘impact evaluation.’

Impact evaluation can occur at two levels. The first, which we refer to as the ‘micro level’ focuses on whether the intended goal or anticipated outcome of a respective QI strategy occurred. This level of evaluation requires not only a clear description of the QI strategy and its intended outcome, but also a clear indication that the requirements associated with its implementation, monitoring, and evaluation have been fulfilled (see Table 2). Micro level evaluation can also focus on only 1 or 2 of the four performance-based perspectives and changes that result in either evidence-based raw scores or perspective-referenced profiles following the implementation of the respective strategy. The results of micro level analysis/evaluation can be used for organization learning and knowledge transfer.

Macro level impact evaluation involves a re-assessment on the *OEES* (or comparable instrument) to determine whether the status of the evidence-based indicators has changed. This pre-post comparison evaluation design is consistent with the traditional definition of impact analysis/evaluation (Schalock, 2001). Micro level evaluation requires: (a) a pre-post comparison data set; (b) a clear description of the QI strategies implemented and QI activities undertaken; and (c) a balanced approach to QI as reflected in the four performance-based perspectives.

The results of macro level impact evaluation can be presented in at least four ways. First, T1 vs. T2 profile analysis can be done to determine the changes in each of the four perspectives (See Radar Chart-Figure 1). Second, Dash Board graphs showing T1 and T2 Effectiveness and Efficiency Indices (see Figure 1) can be presented. Third, one can summarize and analyze changes in performance-based raw scores. Fourth, organization outputs that provide a measure of

the organization's effectiveness and efficiency can be computed, described, summarized, and analyzed. Exemplary organization outputs reflecting a balanced scorecard are presented in Table 5.

Table 5  
Multidimensional Perspectives on Organization Outputs

<i>Organization Output Focus</i>	<i>Performance-Based Perspective</i>	<i>Exemplary Organization Outputs</i>
Effectiveness	Customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Enhanced personal outcomes</li> <li>-Services and supports aligned to personal goals and assessed support needs</li> <li>-System of supports implemented and functional</li> </ul>
	Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased program options (e.g. community-based living, employment, education, participation)</li> <li>-Increased staff involvement (e.g. ISPs and QIPs)</li> <li>-Increased networks/partners</li> </ul>
Efficiency	Financial Analyses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reduced overhead rate</li> <li>-Reduced cost per unit of service/support</li> <li>-Increased percent of budget allocated to customer-referenced services/supports</li> <li>-Resources allocated on basis of major cost drivers</li> </ul>
	Internal Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Program logic models used to align processes and functions</li> <li>-Web-based information systems implemented that generate performance-based information</li> <li>-Protocols developed for using data for multiple purposes</li> </ul>

While impact evaluation at the micro level can be used for organization learning and knowledge transfer, macro level impact evaluation information can be used for: (a) reporting and benchmarking; (b) as the basis for an evidence-based feedback loop for subsequent planning and doing (see Figure 2); and (c) conceptualizing and measuring dependent variables in outcomes evaluation and multivariate research (Claes et al., in press). This holistic approach to impact evaluation and its multiple uses is an essential characteristic of the transformation of human service organizations. It also results in a number of advantages to approaching CQI as an internal, collaborative, and transformative process. These advantages are discussed next.

#### **Advantages to Approaching CQI as an Internal, Collaborative, and Transformative Process**

In review, thus far we have described the elements of a CQI process that: incorporates the four elements or steps of the continuous quality improvement cycle of self-assessment, plan, do, and evaluate; is based on the organization's self-assessment of objective best practice indicators that reflect four performance-based perspectives and whose assessment determines an organization's quality improvement needs; involves the implementation of organization-based and self-directed quality improvement strategies; and incorporates evaluating the impact of the QI activities in terms of their relevance to organization learning, knowledge transfer, benchmarking, and program accountability. There are a number of advantages to this approach. Chief among these are that it: (a) reflects the key characteristics of the transformation era; (b) focuses on the organization as the key player in organization change and transformation; (c) addresses the challenges involved in building evaluation capacity; and (d) facilitates effective implementation.



### *Transformation Era Characteristics*

Human service organizations are undergoing significant change and transformation (Schalock & Verdugo, 2012, 2013; Schalock et al., 2014). Chief among these are first, the person is central. Accompanying this change is the shift from general services to individualized supports, and the alignment of person-centered values with service delivery practices. These person-centered values relate to quality of life, self-determination, inclusion, empowerment, and equity; the service delivery practices relate to the assessment of personal goals and person-referenced support needs, the provision of an individualized system of supports, and the evaluation of personal outcomes. Second, organizations are becoming more streamlined with a corresponding movement from vertical to horizontal structure that is accompanied by the increasing use of collaborative approaches to organization evaluation, leadership and management strategies, and high performance teams. Third, data systems are becoming information based and organized around performance-based and quality improvement perspectives that provide a balanced scorecard that can be used for self-assessment, reporting, benchmarking, accountability, and quality improvement. Fourth, quality improvement is a continuous process that integrates self-assessment with specific quality improvement strategies.

### *Focus on the Organization*

As an internal and collaborative process that incorporates self-assessment and self-directed QI activities, the organization and its personnel are not only empowered to bring change and transformation about, but also to use the results of QI-related impact evaluation to enhance

organization learning, knowledge transfer, reporting, benchmarking, evidence-based feedback, and outcomes evaluation. Focusing on the organization as the major driver of quality improvement presents at least two significant challenges related to the organization's evaluation mind set and how organizations integrate self-assessment with other assessment systems.

1. *Evaluation mind set.* Valid self-assessment requires a new mind-set that involves four insights: (a) interviewers and respondents need to understand that self-assessment is an internal organization process that involves a set of best practices that frame both the collaborative evaluation process and quality improvement; (b) organization personnel must be honest in their assessment of the status of indicators and formulate their evaluation on the basis of 'what is' rather than 'what someone might want to see'; (c) the evaluation process needs to be viewed as a collaborative effort that increases knowledge and understanding of the evaluation/assessment process, that encourages self-critique and systematic inquiry at the level of the individual and the organization, that enhances organization learning, and that allows organization personnel to incorporate assessment findings into subsequent decision making; and (d) all stakeholders need to realize that collaborative evaluation is consistent with the emerging participative scientific research method (Nielsen, 2011; Toerpe, 2013).
2. *Integrate with other systems.* A second challenge relates to how a self-assessment instrument using organization-based participants can be integrated with other performance evaluation and management systems that are frequently mandated or highly recommended by specific jurisdictions. Examples are CARF standards in the U.S. and Canada, and the EFQM Business Excellence Model used widely in Europe (Heras-

Saizarbitoria et al., 2011; Vallejo et al., 2006). The *OEEES* was not developed to replace these systems, but to augment them in reference to organization evaluation and change.

### *Evaluation Capacity Building*

The focus of capacity building is on improving an organization's ability to achieve its mission in an effective and efficient manner (Crisp et al., 2000; Johnson et al., 2004; Letts et al., 1999; Levine et al., 2013; Loza, 2004; Millesen & Bies, 2007; Schuh & Leviton, 2006; Sobeck & Agius, 2007; Stevenson et al., 2002). In reference to the assessment and evaluation process described in this discussion document the primary focus is on how one can develop within organizations the knowledge and skills required to conduct evaluations that are methodologically sound, relevant to organization information needs, and usable for multiple purposes (Cousins et al., 2014; Stockdill et al., 2002). An approach to QI that gives leaders and managers clear, simple, and actionable process steps builds the organization's evaluation capacity by:

- Stating and operationally defining what to assess in regard to best practice indicators.
- Explaining how the assessment can be done reliably.
- Providing real-time summaries of quality improvement needs.
- Presenting specific QI strategies that are based on the same best practice indicators assessed and aggregated into performance-based quality improvement perspectives.
- Specifying specific roles in the self-assessment and quality improvement processes.

### *Facilitates Effective Implementation*

CQI needs to be a part of any organization's deep culture in order to be a reality. To facilitate that process and to maximize information utilization, the CQI framework needs to be a transparent, collaborative process that is sensitive to the organization's receptivity, furthers the

organization's unique competitive position, provides a mix of values to stakeholders, and be easily understood and taught via consultation and learning teams but within the constraints of organization resources (Meyers et al., 2012). In addition, concrete and objective data are absolutely necessary to make quality issues evident. Although one should manage on the basis of vision and not numbers, numbers generally focus peoples' attention.

### **Key Implementation Factors**

Continuous quality improvement (CQI) is probably one of the greatest challenges faced by any organization. It is like fighting gravity. The natural tendency is disorder and quality decay, the second law of thermal dynamics. We have found that CQI needs to be part of any organization's deep culture in order to be a reality. To that end, we have also found that the successful implementation of CQI as described in this document depends on two factors: (a) understanding the key steps in the implementation process, and (b) following a number of CQI implementation guidelines.

#### *Implementation Process Steps*

The most thorough study to date regarding the synthesis of critical steps in the implementation process has been published by Meyers et al. (2012). The quality improvement framework that emerges from the literature regarding quality implementation involves five key steps: (a) the initial consideration regarding the host setting (e.g. self-assessment, buy-in, and capacity building); (b) creating a structure for implementation (e.g. high performance teams and user-friendly processes/formats); (c) ensuring on-going support strategies (e.g. technical assistance, process evaluation, and supportive feedback; and (d) encouraging learning and sharing.

#### *CQI Guidelines*

We have also found that the successful implementation of CQI depends on organizations and systems being responsive to the five implementation guidelines summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

CQI Implementation Guidelines

1. Use a sequential framework that incorporates organization-based CQI action steps.
2. Incorporate evidence-based indicators that are used for both self-assessment and self-directed quality improvement strategies.
3. Implement CQI from the perspective of the customer and the organization's growth, financial analyses, and internal processes.
4. Base CQI on a self-assessment tool that provides knowledge and understanding regarding current best practices, the role of evidence in decision making, and the value of collaborative assessment.
5. Insure that CQI is a collaborative process that enhances the organization's capacity for systematic inquiry, increases sensitivity to the key concepts involved in effective and efficient service delivery, facilitates best practices, and increases the likelihood that CQI will become part of the organization's deep culture.

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