Quality assurance system: an ecosystem of values and practices

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Training Program
10 - 14 March 2025

In your view, which of these pens has better quality?

100 €

0.50 €

Quality is **not an absolute concept**; it depends on requirements and expectations.

To address our question, we must first clarify what we mean by quality in the context of pens.

Quality depends on context and how we establish the evaluation criteria

If we consider quality in terms of:

durability, premium materials, branding and smooth writing,

then the €100 pen would likely be considered of higher quality.

writing effectively at the lowest possible cost

then the €0.50 pen can also be of good quality

If you like, it's also a question of intended purposes

Now, which pen do you believe is of the highest quality?

It is also a matter of **expectations** and **trust**

In my experience, I am confident that each pen in a pack of 50 will perform exceptionally well

from primary school never betrayed my expectations…

…and for just 50 pence!

concluding...

If the **requirement** and **expectation** are to own a luxury and prestigious writing instrument, a high-end, expensive pen represents quality.

If the **requirement** and **expectation** are to write efficiently while minimizing cost, a more affordable pen provides greater quality for that purpose.

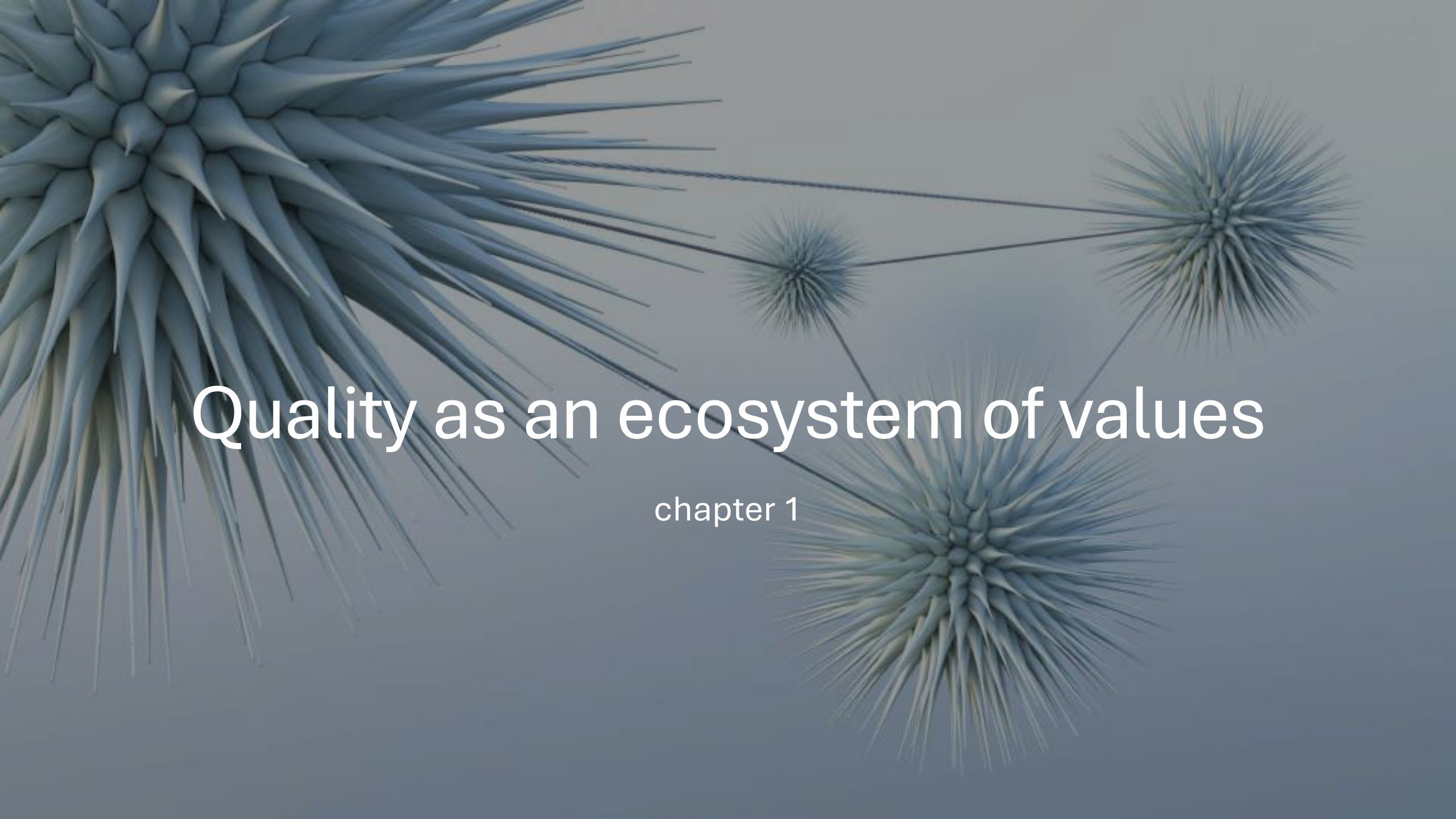
Thus, quality is **context-dependent**, determined by how well a product or service satisfies:

explicit requirements

implicit expectations

How do we ensure **requirements** and **expectations** are met?

values & **practices**



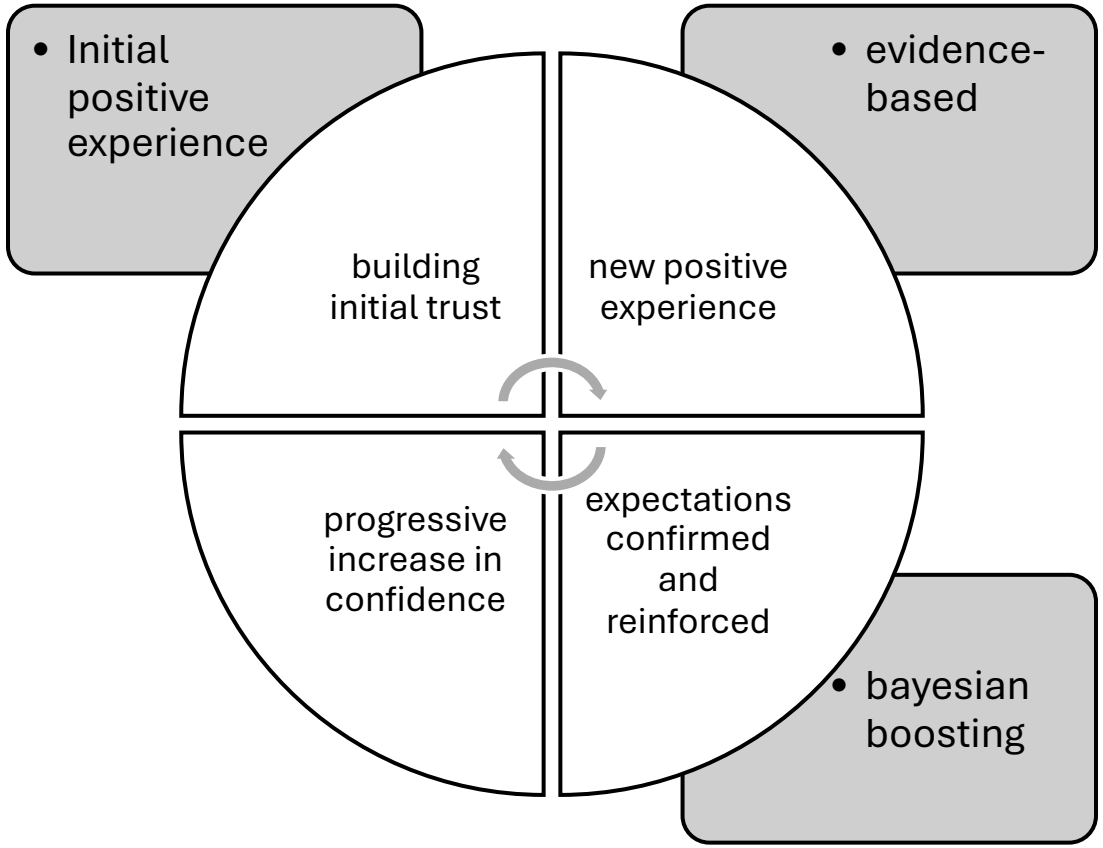
Quality as an ecosystem of values

chapter 1

In Quality Management, quality is defined as **the degree** to which a product or service **meets** both established **requirements and expectations**.

Quality **is not an inherent** characteristic of an item but rather its ability to **fulfill its intended purpose** in alignment with user needs and expectations.

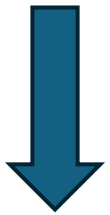
The virtuous cycle of **trust** is underpinned by the manufacturer's Quality System.



Therefore, the manufacturer’s quality system is the invisible yet essential driving force that makes the virtuous cycle of trust perceived by the consumer possible.

The main flaw is the term «quality»

- The word quality comes from the Latin *qualĭtas*, -*atis*, expressing the concept of “nature, property, or essential characteristic of something.”
- This origin explains why the term "quality" today retains a dual meaning:
  - a distinctive characteristic (e.g., physical qualities, personal qualities);
  - a degree of excellence or positive value of something (e.g., quality product, quality of life).



establish a shared understanding

Fundamental concepts: quality

An organization focused on **quality** promotes a **culture** that results in the **behaviour**, **attitudes**, **activities** and **processes** that deliver **value** through fulfilling the **needs** and **expectations** of **customers** and other relevant **interested parties**.

BS EN ISO 9000:2015

Quality management systems

Fundamentals and vocabulary

ISO 9000:2015(E) Quality management systems: fundamentals and vocabulary [section 2.2.1]

The anatomy of the definition of quality

Quality *(Fundamental principle)*

The core purpose that integrates all other elements. Quality is not just compliance but a strategic value that drives continuous improvement, effectiveness, and long-term success.

Value *(Outcome of quality efforts)*

Quality exists to deliver value, ensuring that products, services, and processes meet or exceed the expectations of customers and stakeholders.

Needs & Expectations *(Customer and stakeholder-centric focus)*

Understanding and fulfilling the needs and expectations of customers and other relevant stakeholders is central to any quality-focused system.

Culture *(Foundation for sustainable quality)*

A quality-driven culture fosters commitment, consistency, and alignment throughout the organization, ensuring that quality is embedded in behavior, attitudes, and decision-making.

Behavior & Attitudes *(People as key quality drivers)*

Quality is sustained by ethical responsibility, engagement, and leadership. Employee involvement and leadership commitment shape how quality is implemented.

Processes & Activities *(Operational execution of quality)*

Structured methodologies, workflows, and best practices ensure that quality is not just an abstract goal but an operational reality.

Customers & Interested Parties *(Expanded scope of quality impact)*

Beyond customers, quality also concerns employees, partners, suppliers, regulators, and society. A holistic approach ensures sustainable success.

Concepts and values derived from these words

Quality is a journey, not a destination.	**Continuous improvement (Kaizen)**
A quality culture is built on trust, transparency, and fairness.	**Ethical responsibility**
Quality extends beyond customers to all relevant parties.	**Stakeholder engagement**
Quality requires structured, efficient, and data-driven approaches.	**Process optimization**
The needs and expectations of customers are at the core of all quality efforts.	**Customer focus**
A quality-driven culture fosters knowledge sharing and skill development.	**Organisational learning**

What are the fundamental principles that should underpin the establishment of a quality assurance system?

Centrality of individuals

QA systems prioritise individual development, recognising individuals (students, academics, staff) as active participants and co-creators rather than passive recipients of evaluation processes.

Transparency

Effective QA systems prioritise clear, open communication concerning objectives, procedures, roles, and outcomes, thus fostering trust and stakeholder engagement.

Accountability

QA processes strengthen institutional and individual accountability, ensuring stakeholders systematically take responsibility for their actions and decisions, supported by structured reporting and continuous self-evaluation.

Integrity and ethical responsibility

QA systems are fundamentally grounded in ethical principles and integrity, aiming to build and maintain internal and external trust through consistent, fair, and ethical practices and policies.

Equity and inclusion

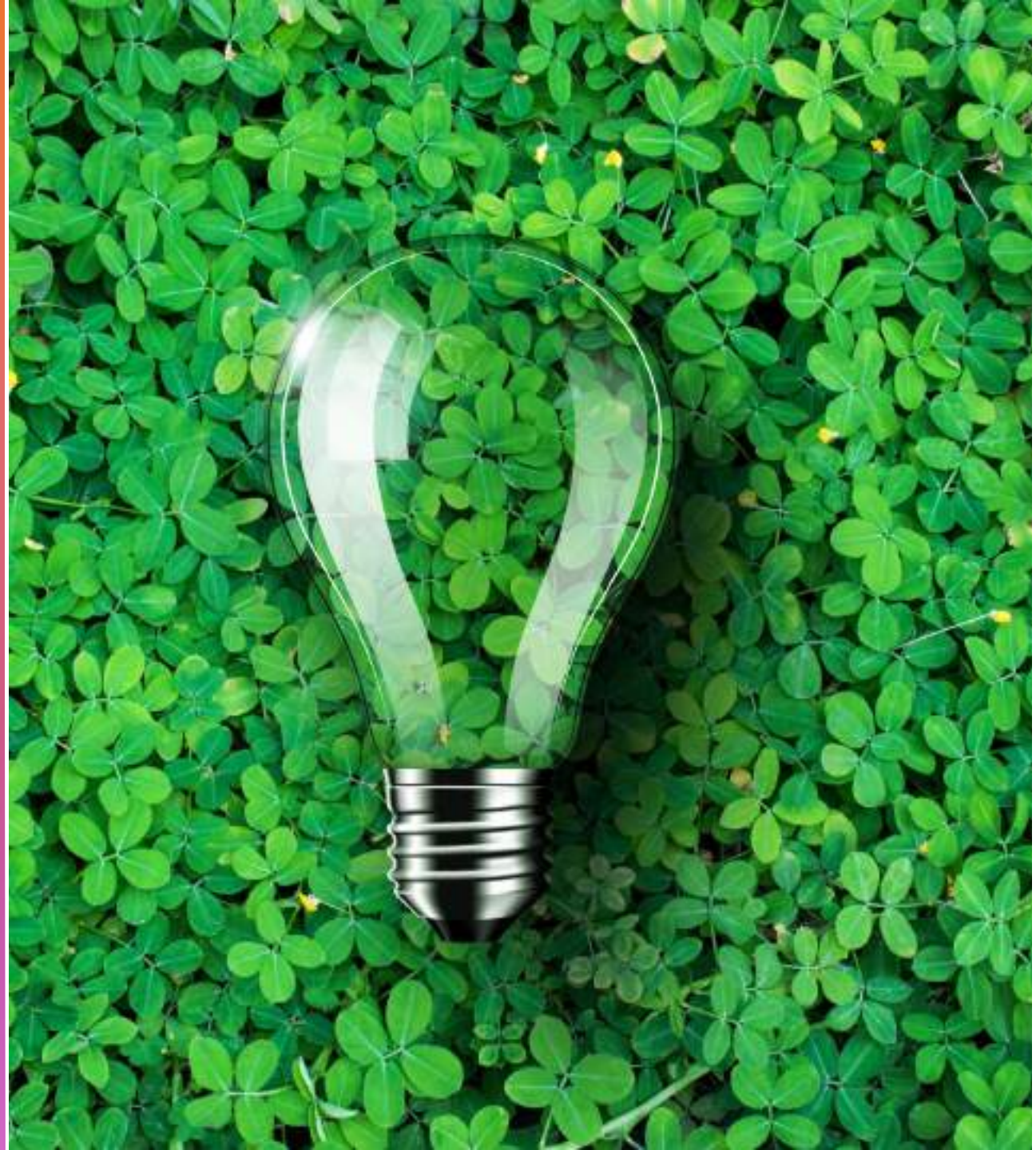
Equity is central to QA, emphasizing equal opportunities, respect for diversity, and balanced representation and participation among all stakeholders (e.g., students, staff, external partners).

Collaboration and participation

Quality emerges through active stakeholder involvement rather than purely top-down control. QA thus promotes collective ownership, dialogue, and shared responsibility for outcomes.

Continuous improvement

QA systems embed an ongoing commitment to improvement, requiring critical self-reflection, learning-oriented approaches, responsiveness to feedback, and adaptability to evolving contexts.



Sustainability

A contemporary interpretation integrates sustainability within QA, addressing environmental, social, and economic dimensions, as well as long-term institutional impacts, including alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Quality as an ecosystem of practices

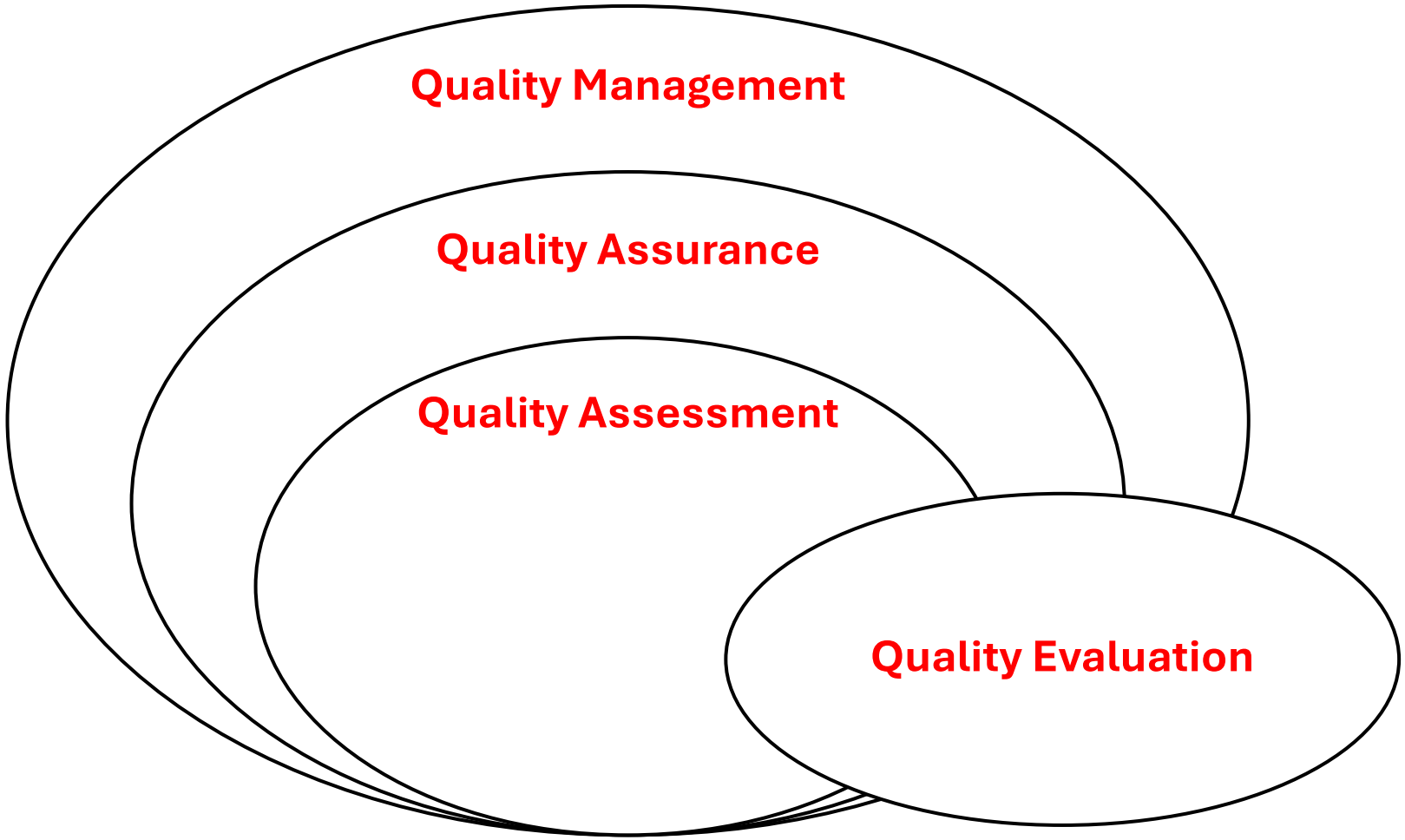
chapter 2

Defintion of ‘qualities’

Quality Management is the overarching framework that includes **Quality Assurance** (preventive) and **Quality Assessment** (measurement), while **Quality Evaluation** focuses on the interpretation and judgment of overall quality

Quality Management	Quality Assurance	Quality Assessment	Quality Evaluation
The overall system of activities to plan, control, assure, and improve quality in an organization.	Preventive processes ensuring products or services meet quality standards.	Data collection and analysis to measure quality against predefined criteria.	Interpretation and judgment of quality based on qualitative and quantitative criteria.

Structure of a Quality System



The role of Governance in defining a QA system

Defining the Vision and Strategic Framework

- Establishes the institutional quality policy and aligns it with national and international accreditation standards.
- Sets long-term quality goals and integrates them into the university's overall strategic plan.

Establishing Policies and Standards

- Develops and enforces QA regulations, guidelines, and frameworks.
- Ensures compliance with external accreditation bodies and regulatory agencies.

Accountability and Oversight

- Assigns clear roles and responsibilities for QA at different levels (e.g., faculty, departments, administrative units).
- Monitors and evaluates key performance indicators (KPIs) related to academic quality, student outcomes, and institutional effectiveness.

Stakeholder Engagement and Transparency

- Involves faculty, students, employers, and external experts in quality discussions and decision-making processes.
- Ensures transparency by publishing quality reports and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

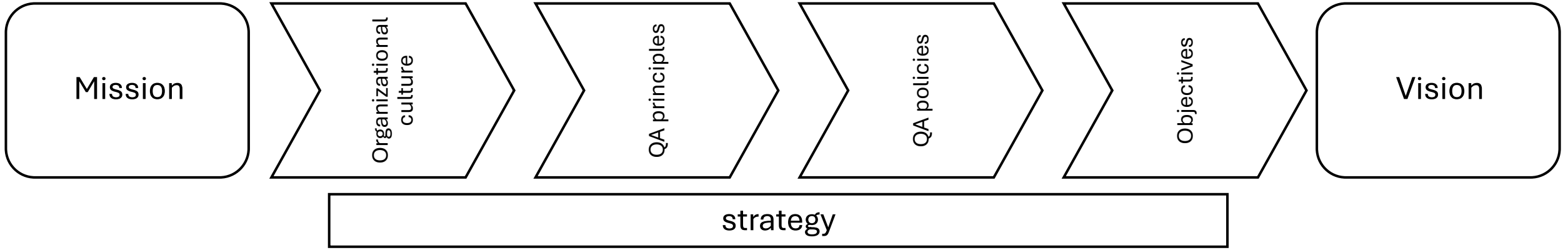
Resource Allocation and Capacity Building

- Provides necessary financial, human, and technological resources to support QA initiatives.
- Promotes faculty development programs and training in quality management.

Decision-Making and Continuous Improvement

- Uses data-driven decision-making to enhance teaching, research, and administrative quality.
- Implements feedback mechanisms to continuously refine QA policies and processes.

The paradigm mission-strategy-vision



The core purpose
Why the organization exists. The fundamental purpose, values, and long-term commitment of the institution.

The context
Includes beliefs, values, and behaviors that shape decision-making and daily operations.

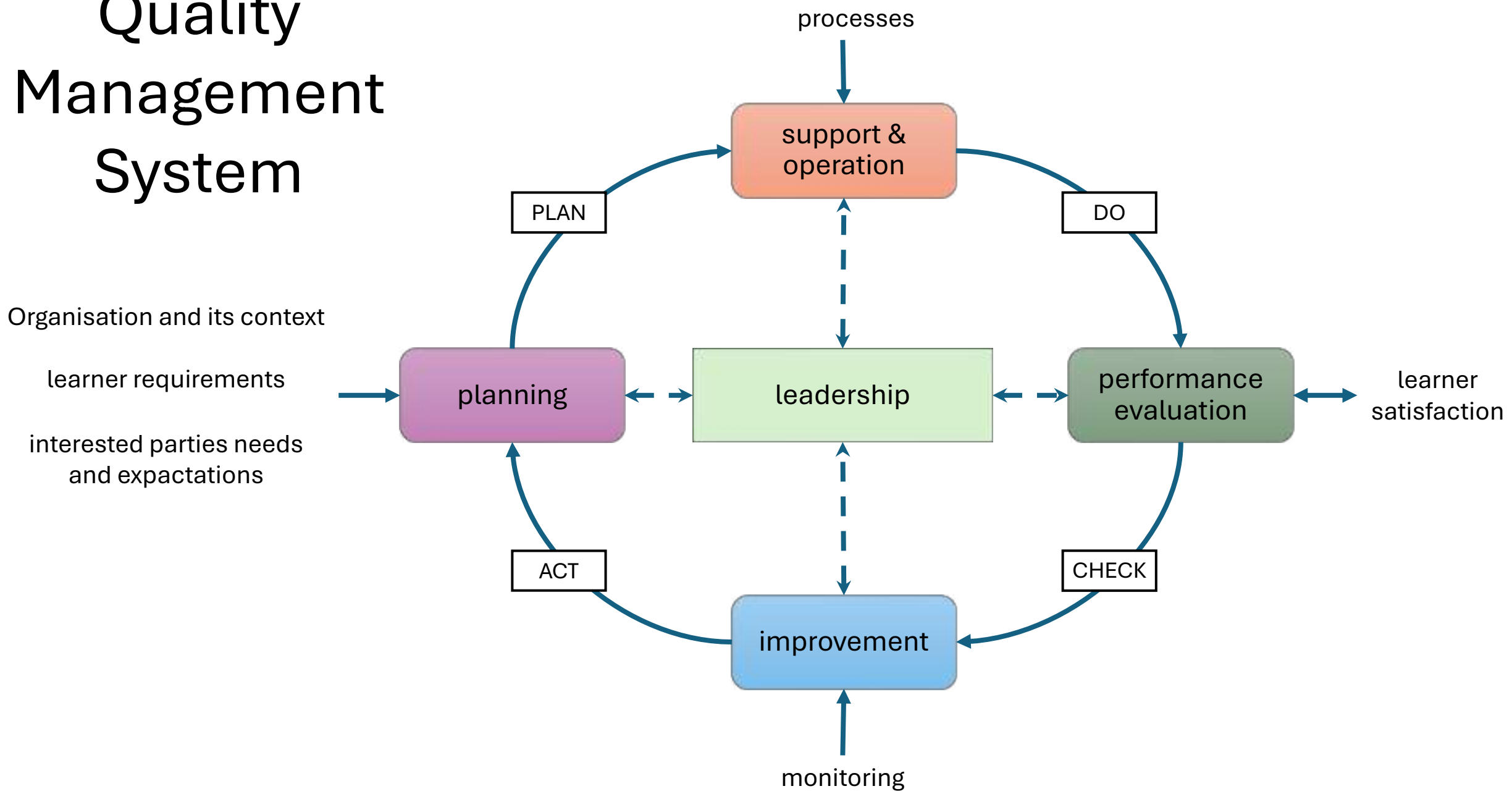
The foundation
Quality Assurance (QA) principles provide the guiding methodologies that ensure continuous improvement.

The strategic framework
QA policies are developed based on the mission, culture, and QA principles. They translate strategic commitments into actionable guidelines.

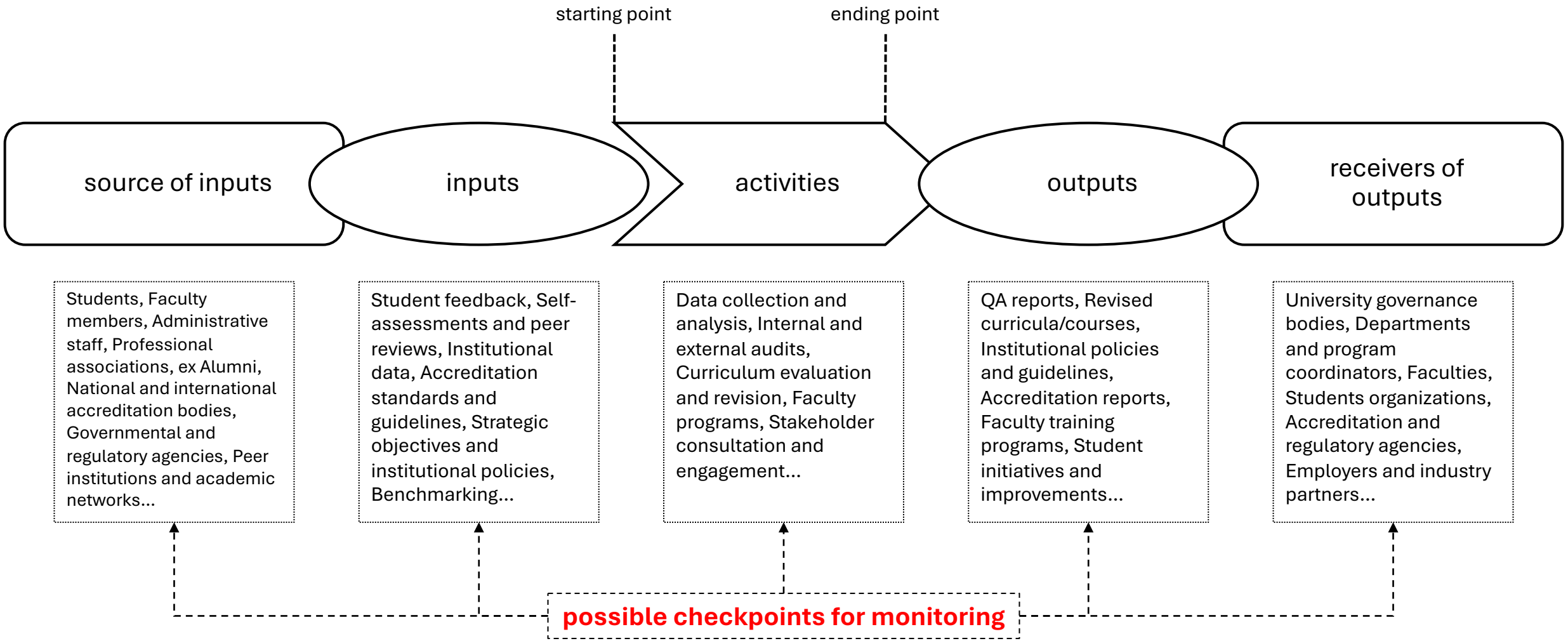
The operational goals
Based on QA policies, measurable objectives are set, to ensure alignment with the mission and QA strategy.

The long-term aspiration
Defines where the organization aims to be in the future. Continuous improvement of QA systems and strategic objectives.

Quality Management System



Schematic representation of a process



The RACI matrix: a fundamental framework for QA

The RACI matrix is a **responsibility assignment model** used in project management and process governance to clearly define roles and responsibilities within a task or workflow.

- (**R**) **Responsible**: the person or group who performs the task or activity. They are directly responsible for execution.
- (**A**) **Accountable**: the individual who has ultimate ownership of the task's completion and ensures it is done correctly. There should be only one Accountable per task.
- (**C**) **Consulted**: the people or groups who provide input, expertise, or feedback before the task is completed.
- (**I**) **Informed**: the person or group who needs to be kept up to date on progress or outcomes but are not directly involved in execution.

Purpose of RACI

The RACI matrix is designed to:

- **Clarify** roles and responsibilities in complex processes.
- **Prevent** confusion and role overlap in task execution.
- **Improve** communication and decision-making by identifying who needs to be involved and informed.
- **Ensure** accountability by assigning clear ownership of tasks.

Difference Between Responsibility and Accountability

ASPECT	RESPONSIBILITY	ACCOUNTABILITY
DEFINITION	The obligation to complete a task or duty.	The ultimate ownership of the outcome of a task or process.
SCOPE	Multiple people can be responsible for executing a task.	Only **one** person is accountable for ensuring the task is completed correctly.
FOCUS	Focuses on **execution and actions**.	Focuses on **decision-making, oversight, and consequences**.
DELEGATION	Responsibility can be **shared or delegated** among multiple people.	Accountability **cannot be delegated**—the accountable person remains answerable for results.

Mapping RACI to Process Elements

PROCESS ELEMENT	RACI ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES
SOURCES OF INPUT	**Consulted (C) / Informed (I)** → Stakeholders providing input, such as students, faculty, external agencies, employers.
INPUT	**Responsible (R)** → Teams or units in charge of collecting and organizing data (e.g., quality office, academic departments).
ACTIVITIES	**Responsible (R)** → Entities executing tasks (e.g., analysis, evaluations). **Accountable (A)** → Authority approving the process and ensuring execution. **Consulted (C)** → Stakeholders contributing expertise and feedback.
OUTPUT	**Responsible (R)** → Teams producing reports, recommendations, and quality improvement measures. **Accountable (A)** → Governance approving results.
RECEIVERS OF OUTPUT	**Informed (I)** → Stakeholders who need to be updated on decisions and outcomes (students, faculty, accreditation bodies, institutional leadership).

Example of a RACI matrix in a HEI QA system

PROCESS STEP	RESPONSIBLE (R)	ACCOUNTABLE (A)	CONSULTED (C)	INFORMED (I)
Data Collection	Quality Office	Quality Director	Faculty, Students, External Bodies	Governance, Departments
Data Analysis	Quality Team	Quality Director	Academic Units, Experts	Institutional Leadership
Quality Assessment	Quality Committee	Rector / Senate	Faculty, External Reviewers	University Community
Improvement Planning	QA Committee	Governance	Faculty, Students, Employers	Accreditation Bodies
Decision Making	Senate / Board	Rector	Deans, Academic Leaders	University Community
Implementation of Actions	Departments	Quality Director	Faculty, Staff, Students	University Community
Monitoring & Reporting	Quality Office	Quality Director	Stakeholders	Governance, Public

Coherence to basic principles and methodologies of ISO documents

- ISO 9000:2015
  - Quality management systems - Fundamentals and vocabulary
- ISO 9001:2015
  - Quality management systems
- ISO 9004:2018
  - Quality management - Quality of an organization – Guidance to achieve sustained success
- ISO 21001:2018
  - Educational organizations - Management systems for educational organizations - Requirements with guidance for use
- ISO 26000:2010
  - Guidance on social responsibility
- ISO 54800:2024
  - Guidelines for the promotion and implementation of gender equality and women’s empowerment
- ISO/UNDP PAS 53002:2024
  - Guidelines for contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

It’s all about empowerment

Empowered people drive quality forward

Definition of empowerment

Empowerment refers to the process of enabling individuals or groups to **gain control**, **confidence**, and **authority** over decisions that affect their lives, work, or community. It involves providing the necessary resources, knowledge, skills, and opportunities to allow people to **act independently** and **take responsibility** for their actions.

How empowerment relates to QA

Empowerment is not just related to QA, but **it is essential** to its success. A strong QA system depends on **engaged**, **informed**, and **motivated** stakeholders **who take ownership of quality** and drive continuous improvement.

EMPOWERING FACULTY AND STAFF

(*ownership of quality improvem*ent)

- Faculty and staff are key actors in curriculum design, assessment, and institutional governance.
- Empowered faculty engage in self-assessment, peer review, and continuous professional development.
- When staff members understand their role in QA, they actively contribute to better student services, research quality, and administrative efficiency.

EMPOWERING STUDENTS

(*active participants in QA*)

- Students are not just recipients of education but active contributors to quality improvement.
- Student feedback systems, participation in governance, and engagement in curriculum evaluation strengthen QA mechanisms.
- Empowered students feel a sense of responsibility to participate in surveys, evaluations, and accreditation processes.

EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP

(*strategic decision-making*)

- Leadership empowerment ensures that QA policies align with institutional goals and are not just compliance-driven.
- Decision-makers who are well-informed and engaged can drive meaningful QA reforms and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

EMPOWERING EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

(*strengthening QA networks*)

- Employers, industry representatives, and alumni contribute to defining graduate competencies and institutional relevance.
- Their involvement in QA ensures that education remains aligned with societal and labor market needs.

Quality is the result of a carefully constructed cultural environment. It has to be the fabric of the organization, not part of the fabric.

Philip Bayard "Phil" Crosby

(1926 – 2001)


Thanks for your attention
Any questions?