Total Quality Management (TQM) for Organizational Success

Introduction

Literature on the adoption of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the contemporary world of industry reveals that it is a success story particularly in the achievement of organizational goals while satisfying everyone involved. The present article is a brief discussion about the concept of TQM, its definitions, basic principles therein, and their adoption with a view to making readers reflect on themselves, their practices, their organizations and practices adopted by such organizations so that they would consider the possibility of change, if necessary, at individual as well as organizational levels.

Evolution of TQM

It is generally accepted that Total Quality Management (TQM) evolved from the philosophy of W. Edward Deming who introduced revolutionary changes in the 1950s in Japanese industry after the World War II. Joseph Juran, Philip B. Crosby, and Kaoru Ishikawa have subsequently contributed to the body of knowledge known as TQM. However, it was only in the 1980s that the phrase TQM became a buzzword in the western world. Today TQM systems are successfully implemented in world-renowned companies and organizations such as Ford and Toyota Motor Companies, Motorola, and many electronic industries.

Controversy: who introduced TQM?

Interestingly, Bill Creech, a former General of the US Air Force, claims in his book The Five Pillars of TQM that the term "TQM" was first coined by him to describe the management style that he introduced in the Tactical Air Command of the US Air Force to achieve success in the Gulf War. He calls it a "holistic, humanistic management system" based on a five-pillar foundation of the product, process, leadership, commitment, and organization. His approach was "a total approach to put quality in every aspect of management," and thus the term TQM. Creech also claims that he was not influenced by Deming or any other gurus now known as the exponents of TQM. However, Bill Creech mentions that, in his subsequent visits to Japan, he found extremely similar techniques to the ones he used in the US Air Force being used in Japanese companies like Honda. Despite different opinions and claims of the origin of TQM like the one above, basic concepts and principles of TQM expressed in these different schools are not drastically different, as we can see in definitions worked out in different sources especially after the 1990s as shown below.

Definitions of TQM

1.   "TQM is a management approach for an organization, centered on quality, based on the participation of all its members of the organization and to society." (ISO Definition)

2.   "Total Quality Management is a structured system for creating organization-wide participation in planning and implementing a continuous improvement process to meet and exceed customer needs. TQM is characterized by customer focus, total organizational involvement, continuous improvement of processes, and fact based decision making." (Dr. Ellen Domb)

3.   "Total Quality Management refers to a management process and set of disciplines that are coordinated to ensure that the organization consistently meets and exceeds customer requirements. TQM engages all divisions, departments and levels of the organization. The top management organizes all of its strategy and operations around customer needs and develops a culture with high employee participation. TQM companies are focused on the systematic management of data of all processes and practices to eliminate waste and pursue continuous improvement." (Capezi and Morehouse)

4.   "A total approach to put quality in every aspect of management." (Bill Creech)\

Significance of TQM in military

What is significant and revolutionary in Creech's approach is that he used this system in a military organization, the most unimaginable for TQM, given its rigid top bottom hierarchical organizational structure, which does not usually encourage the humanistic approach of TQM. Thus, it is heartening for any one working in a traditional organization to know that it is not impossible to introduce TQM even in a very rigid organizational set up if one has a vision and is enterprising enough to be an agent of change. What is necessary though is a thorough understanding about the basic principles of TQM and a desire to set and achieve goals that would lead to the overall growth of an organization. What appears below is an attempt to elucidate in simple terms the basic principles of TQM.

Basic Principles of TQM

1.   Customer satisfaction: - Customer satisfaction is the highest priority in a TQM system. This underscores the need for everyone in an organization adopting TQM to bear in mind that every activity of the organization is aimed at and geared to meeting customer satisfaction and going beyond customer expectations. This is a long term strategy that will give the organization an edge in the competitive world of business. This is strategically significant for organizational success especially when we consider the new meaning the word 'customer' gains in TQM culture as described below.

2.   Identification of the customer and supplier: - The new definition of 'customer' under TQM indicates a paradigm shift. In the traditional sense, a customer is a person who buys a product or a service. But in TQM, the term encompasses a broader and more significant meaning. Accordingly, the system identifies two different kinds of customers, as external customers and internal customers. Externally, there is a chain of customers, and at the end of the chain is "the end customer", who uses the product or the service. End customer is the most important one for the organization in terms of its need to reach out to more and more customers. TQM systems also identify suppliers to the organization too as their external customers. It is only if you satisfy these supplying customers that you can expect consistently good supplies in time for your production/service. If you supply them with necessary data for their satisfaction, you will then receive the best supplies as a result. This in turn helps you to produce a quality product or provide a quality service to your customers. Internally, every individual, unit, department, or division is a customer as well as a supplier. Thus, everyone in an organization should do his/her best to satisfy and go beyond the expectation of his/her customers within the organization. So, the satisfaction is mutual and the result is a higher participation, efficiency, and productivity. In such an organization, everybody respects one another and feels an ownership in the organization.

3.   Quality and total quality: - Traditional organizations are concerned with the quality of their products/services. But TQM is concerned with Total Quality, i.e. the quality of a product or a service that is measured in the ultimate satisfaction of customers – the quality that goes beyond the expectation of the customer and the customer himself, the quality of the process involved and the quality of life at work and outside work, and the quality of return to satisfy the needs of shareholders. Once again this brings us back to the concept of customer satisfaction through quality.

4.   Managing quality: - TQM identifies a shift from the concept of quality control to that of quality management. The basic premise is that quality can and must be managed in order to satisfy the customer—customer in the broader sense as described above. When the total quality, the quality of process, quality of product, quality of life, and quality of return are properly managed, everyone in the organization and society is benefited. Thus, in TQM, the quality of a product is the result of the quality of the process adopted.

5.   Processes versus people: - Exponents of TQM believe that problems are not due to people, but due to processes. So, if weaknesses of processes are identified and corrected, problems can be avoided. It is against the traditional concept, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." In TQM, improvement of all operations is a continual process. It is a proactive approach of prevention instead of the reactive one of fixing found in traditional organizations. The continuous improvement of the quality of the product or service helps TQM organizations to meet and go beyond customer expectations.

6.   High employee participation: - Success in TQM depends on the high employee participation. This is achieved by getting them involved in the decision-making process. The basic premise is that workers are the ones who know best how things work. They are the ones who handle situations, and their ideas are the best. Managers and supervisors become leaders and facilitators to get the job done. Sam Watlton, the founder of the Wall-Mart has very succinctly stated in the following quote the significance of employee participation for the success of an organization and what managers should do to ensure such participation:

> Listen to everyone in your company and figure out ways to get them talking. The folks on the front line—the ones who actually talk to the customer—are the only ones who really know what is going on out there. You had better find out what they know. This really is what total quality is all about. To push responsibility down in your organization, and to force good ideas to bubble up within it, you must listen to what your associates are trying to tell you….

Generally, the traditional top down management style with compartmentalized units, departments etc. does not fully subscribe to the total quality process. It does not however exclude the possibility of introducing TQM processes in such organizations as exemplified by the Bill Creech episode discussed above. So, if TQM culture is properly implanted in an organization, members of the whole organization will be bound together as a family that works diligently and tirelessly to attain common goals.

Issues in introducing change

No management system can be considered a "plug and play" system. Similarly TQM may not be the panacea for all ills in an organization. But, it is apparent that the principles of TQM discussed above can be adopted for the betterment of any organization if done in a systematic way and with a broad understanding of the concepts therein.

Some managers get easily carried away by new styles, and in trying to introduce and implement such styles and changes in haste, such managers create further problems in a smoothly functioning organization or a unit of such organization. In such instances, the probability of failure is more than that of success. Hence, it should be reiterated that a manager should have the wisdom to gauge strengths and weaknesses of his/her organization in addition to a sound knowledge of the environment and peculiarities of the organization prior to implementing any change. It is only then can he/she introduce change that would prevail and that would positively contribute to the growth of the organization. It should also be noted that there are many in any organization who look at change with total pessimism. Very often such individuals reject new ideas as being pads because it is convenient to contribute to the status quo. So, it is the responsibility of the manager to be strategic in handling them to achieve organizational goals. In such instances managers can try out implementing TQM principles to bring about positive change in the mindset of such people. Further there can be instances where one has to deal with megalomaniacs who make life and survival in an organization extremely difficult. Then again the best solution would be to do the basics right, and the other things will fall in line with time. All in all, it is the responsibility of a person in any managerial role in an organization to believe in his/her potential and to do small things that will turn the wheel in the right direction so that, with small yet continuous attempts, it will gather momentum, and then there will be a day when the neutral and even the resistant forces will join the task of pushing the wheel up.

Conclusion

There is evidence in the world of industry that Total Quality Management is essential for success in a business organization, and it has spread to even military organizations and success in operations has been attributed to the implementation of TQM principles. Hence, it is possible to extend TQM principles even to educational institutions such as universities that desire growth by redefining their goals in terms of customer supplier dichotomy in TQM systems. Even in an organization in which TQM is not fully adopted within the whole organization, each individual in an organization can identify his/her dual role as a customer and a supplier within his/her organization and then try to satisfy his/her internal and external customers and to go beyond their expectations. One can gradually change non-productive or problematic processes without disturbing the good practices already in place, and for this, one needs to have the wisdom to fathom various impediments that appear from time to time in various guises and more importantly one should have the patience and tolerance to bear them up to achieve greater organizational goals.

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