The effectiveness of total quality management: a response to the critics.

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Abstract: A recent paper strongly berates total quality management, claiming it is a tool of management used to adversely manipulate workers in pursuit of corporate gain. This paper questions this supposition, arguing it is the abuse of TQM by management that is at fault. Effective TQM is based on four principles, customer satisfaction, continuous improvement, speaking with facts, and respect for people. It is the lack of the genuine respect for people that is the demise of most TQM initiatives.

A paper by Howell, Preston, Schied, and Carter (1996) was presented at the 1996 Adult Education Research Conference. It investigated the impact of total quality management (TQM) at a manufacturing plant in Pennsylvania. The study concluded that the workers were worse off after the implementation of TQM, with the workers being "subjected to internalized mechanisms of control," and "objects of the tyranny of management theory and management's economic agenda." They inferred that adult educators were a part of this tyranny, "allowing the corporation to meet their goals using education and training as a facade" (pp. 169-170).

The conclusion that management practices, specifically TQM, was the root of the abject manipulation of the workers is questionable. The purpose of this paper is to question this premise with a counterpoint. Namely, it was not the implementation of TQM that was the cause, but rather poor management and the misuse of TQM for corporate gain at the expense of the workers. This will be done by describing a more complete theoretical framework of TQM than was given in the Howell *et al* paper. A description of the implementation of TQM at one company using the principles of the TQM principles described in this paper is presented.

The Pros and Cons of Total Quality Management

Total quality, as a movement evolved primarily over the last thirty years. Its roots, however, penetrate the last 100 years of striving to improve first manufacturing, and then service. The five recognized gurus of the total quality management are W. Edwards Deming (Walton, 1986), Armand A. Feigenbaum (1983), Joseph M. Juran (1988), Kaoru Ishikawa (1985), and Philip B. Crosby (1979). Individually they molded the framework upon which present TQM practices are based. Collectively, they developed a conceptual framework that has evolved into a worldwide movement that some would call a transformation of every aspect of manufacturing and service. Hence, the term *total* quality.

The implementation of TQM in organizations continues to be strong. The annual report of employee training and development by the editors of *Training* lists TQM as the top initiative in 1995-96, with 49% of all organizations with 100 or more employees initiating TQM ("Trends," 1996). Large organizations (e.g., Federal Express, Ford Motor Company, Coca Cola, Motorola), smaller organizations (L.L. Bean, Wallace, Solectron), government agencies (U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, State of South Carolina, City of Phoenix), and many schools, colleges, universities, hospitals and other health services organizations are at various stages of implementing TQM (Strong and Ford, 1992, Lewis and Smith, 1994, "Training Today," 1995). Peters (1994) lists TQM as one of six of the most important concepts transforming organizations today (the other five are reengineering, leveraging knowledge, trust, the curious/adventurous organization, and the virtual organization).

TQM is not without criticism, however. Zemke (1992), in an editorial on TQM coming under fire, identified five reasons why TQM is being increasingly criticized: A lack of focus on the purpose and goals of TQM, rigid zealotry and adherence to TQM even when it is not being accepted, emphasis of form over function, awareness of TQM over implementation of TQM, and viewing TQM as the fad or flavor of the month, with it being replaced with the next fad, e.g., reengineering and human performance management. The initiatives for implementing TQM are decreasing in some industries, with a drop of nine percent (9%) for all organizations from 1994-95 (58%) to 1995-96 (49%) ("Trends," 1996). However, some industries are increasing, e.g., wholesale/retail trade, from 24% to 44%; and health service, from 66% to 73%. Thus, TQM remains a highly influential management practice that warrants continued attention to its application, and the adherence to *all* the principles.

Theoretical Framework

The basic theoretical constructs of total quality management are well documented by many authors (Deming (Walton, 1986); Juran, 1988; Lindsey and Petrick, 1997; Voehl, 1990; Walton, 1989). Voehl (1992), and Lewis and Smith (1994) identify four fundamental principles or pillars that form the basis of the application of TQM within the organization: customer satisfaction, continuous improvement, speaking with facts, and respect for people.

Regarding customer satisfaction, the core purpose of any quality improvement process is to ensure that the needs and reasonable expectations of the customer are identified and satisfied. Serving the customers addresses three important questions: Who are our customers, what do they want/need, and what must we do to meet or even anticipate their needs? Once the customers' required needs are identified, work processes can be designed or modified to ensure these requirements are met.

Continuous improvement is both a commitment and a process. As stated by Gallagher and Smith (1997, p. 72), Athe commitment to quality is initiated with a statement of dedication to a shared mission and vision and the empowerment of everyone to incrementally move toward the vision."

Speaking with facts, a phrase coined by Deming (Walton, 1986) is more accurately named data driven decision making, as it is based on two functions. The idea behind this is that making a decision without information, or deciding on the basis of influence, hearsay, or a preconceived notion is undesirable.

These first three principles are cited in Howell *et al* (1996), but not the fourth principle. Respect for people is the acknowledgment that, while people work *at* an organization, they work *for* themselves, trying to create a meaningful and satisfying life. Recognition of this by the organization results in a framework that includes, according to Lewis and Smith (1994), (1) creating a sense of purpose in the workplace so that people are motivated to do their best; (2) keeping people informed and involved, showing them how they are a part of the bigger picture; (3) educating and developing people so that all the people are the best that they can be; (4) helping people communicate well so they can do their jobs with optimal enjoyment and peak effectiveness; and (5) delegating responsibility and authority downward so that people are not just "doing what we're told," but are taking the initiative to try to make things work better.

It is this fourth critical principle that is lacking in most unsuccessful TQM programs. This is the principle that professional practitioners in adult education and human resource development can most contribute. With the equal implementation of the first three principles and a genuine respect for all the people involved in the TQM process, TQM is the one management theory that uses a key premise of adult learning, i.e., the recognition of and respect for adults as individuals and learners.

The Implementation of TQM at One Company

To illustrate how TQM is being implemented within the framework of the four principles described above, following is a description of how one company is actualizing TQM. This should be read within the context of a progress report, as the TQM process was initiated in August 1996 and will continue for some time.

The plant processes citrus products, and is located in central Florida. It has been in operation for thirty years, and was owned for most of the time by a major food product company. In 1992 they sold the company to the present owners who have been in the citrus business for a number of

years, having operated other plants in Florida. They originally intended to have this plant be a processing plant for another packaging and bottling plant, but soon discovered this plant was operating well and set it up to do the entire processing and packaging operation, i.e., a self-sustaining profit center.

The plant employs about 130 people (management and workers) who work year-round. During the Winter and early Spring processing time the schedule is increased to a twenty-four hour, seven day work schedule. For the remainder of the year the schedule is a normal forty hour, five day work week.

Regarding the management of the company, the president, Executive Vice President, and Operations Vice President was brought in by the parent company. It is the Executive Vice President who launched the TQM program at this plant, having had previous positive experience implementing TQM. Two consultants, one being the coauthor of this paper (Lewis), were contracted to assist in developing and implementing the TQM program.

Some operational information is necessary. The waste of the juice extraction process, the pulp and peel from the citrus, is conveyed to a feedmill. It is then converted into pellets and sold as highly nutritional feed for cattle. The feedmill is a critical part of the plant because the waste from all the other processing lines goes to the feedmill. Problems here directly affect the rest of the plant. Some problems existed at the feedmill, so management requested the consultants to first work with the feedmill workers.

The consultants have met weekly for about twenty weeks. Their original plan was to conduct various sessions on team development, effective communication, and problem solving techniques. However, they quickly recognized that the workers not only were not interested in these topics, but had great suspicion of the consultants, i.e., "Why are you here? You were sent by management, and management does not listen to us; thus, this is another way to brainwash us and take control." As these questions and attitudes surfaced the consultants listened and, instead of initiating the original plan, they discussed these concerns with the workers, putting them in writing. The consultants then took the workers through an exercise on self-directed teams. At the conclusion of this exercise, they asked the workers to what degree did they want to take control of their actions, to more directly control the operational and managerial functions of their work. They said that, while they still had reservations, the process they had experienced so far had enough potential that they wanted to continue. From this point the workers began to take on some of the problems they had identified. Three will be described.

The first problem was high turnover in the feedmill. With the assistance of one consultant, the workers developed a causal analysis (a fishbone diagram) to examine the causes and problems of turnover. The same day the analysis was done, management was invited for a presentation. The workers presented their analysis; the consultant only gave support. The presentation was well received and became an important turning point for the workers, because it was an indication that management was serious about this.

Management said they would get back with them shortly. When they did not respond after two weeks, the consultant questioned the Operations Vice President, who stated they were still

thinking about the problem. The consultant requested that they tell the workers *something*, because it was an issue of mutuality, trust, and respect. Shortly afterwards they held a meeting and positive feedback was given.

From the turnover problem evolved a problem regarding the company's hiring process. Two issues surfaced that reflect the sensitivity the workers had about management practices. First, when they hired a person they did not tell the person a specific salary, but was only given a salary range by the supervisor. Notice of the hiring was sent to the Operations Vice President who established the salary, but the hiring still required the approval of the Executive Vice President and the President before it was official. It was only then that they told the person the specific salary. This was typically over a week later.

Second, the hiring process was in part inadvertently controlled by the security guard at the front gate. People would come to the gate, ask the guard if they were hiring. The guard would say no and send them away. This frequently occurred after a friend working in the plant had told the person to come because the plant was hiring. This was particularly sensitive to minority applicants whom they would tell the company was hiring, and then were turned away at the gate.

In both issues management did not fully know these actions were occurring, and how the consequences of these actions adversely affected the attitudes of the workers. Because of these presentations, they are reviewing the hiring process at the time of this writing.

These first two problems centered on managerial practices. The third was a manufacturing problem that also exposed a related managerial issue, i.e., the management style of the supervisor and his actions in relation to the TQM process. A persistent problem in the feedmill is the control of the moisture level of the cattle feed pellets. If it is too high the pellets will break apart; if is too low the cattle will drink too much water after eating the pellets. Again, the workers conducted a causal analysis, and invited management in for a presentation. They were favorably impressed, and brought in the Quality Assurance Director to hear the presentation The Q.A. Director agreed with the worker's conclusion and developed a plan for frequent testing. The issue became who would do the testing, the Q.A. Director or the workers. The Q.A. Director was willing to have the workers conduct the tests. The supervisor, however, adamantly refused. The workers went along with the supervisor's decision, but reluctantly. A core really did want to do the testing, but were being blocked by the supervisor.

Also at this time it was discovered that, when the consultants were not at the plant, the supervisor was making different decisions resulting in extensive inconsistency. The Supervisor, it was observed, was managing by manipulation and playing people off each other. The consultant tried to get him to attend a supervision workshop, but he refused ("I do not want to do role playing," he strongly stated.). To date he is yet to attend and this problem remains unresolved.

What has been described are three incidents illustrating the implementation of TQM, with the primary focus being a respect for all the people involved in the process. The consultants, with management's approval and encouragement, are working closely with the workers, serving as facilitators and coaches, giving them guidance in both the understanding of their problems, and the skills to describe them to management. This approach has proven effective as indicated by

the acceptance of the process by the workers and management, the resolution of some longstanding problems that have been getting in the way of productivity, and a mutually beneficial work environment.

The process is not without its casualties. While the Executive Vice President has been the driver for the implementation of TQM, the Operations Vice President has not been a proponent, but accepted it because his boss wanted it. Such a dissonant attitude and relationship can only last so long, and recently the Operations V. P. resigned, choosing early retirement.

Summary and Conclusion

The interest in writing this paper began after reading the paper by Howell, Preston, Schied, and Carter (1996). As stated above, they argued that the TQM process is implemented under the guise of education and training, but is actually driven by a corporate policy to cut labor costs. What the management of the company did in Pennsylvania, described in their paper, is not new. Managers are being forced to extirpate what they perceive are excessive resources, which often are the people, using any measure that they deem rational to carry out their objectives. Total quality management can be a highly effective tool to use for this adverse purpose. Identifying an overall mission and goals by management, justifying it by emphasizing its acceptance in order to counter increasing competition, and then establishing work teams and requiring them to develop "team driven" strategies to actualize the goals, diminishes the onus of responsibility for any changes management must make if they do not realize the goals. The managers at the Pennsylvania plant, described in Howell, Preston, Schied, and Carter (1996) were required to follow rigid standards to comply with the ISO 9000 criteria, the international standard for products and practices. Management's interpretation of the criteria, however, resulted in an arbitrary comprehensive testing of all employees, and the development of a two-tiered status of the workers, i.e., those who past the tests and those who did not. This decision was a decision by management who chose to use their adaptation of TQM to carry it out. Thus, it was the misuse and abuse by management of this plant, and not the TQM process that created the resulting demoralizing havoc among the workers.

In contrast, the management at the plant described in this paper, concentrated on similar goals, the increase of productivity within rigid standards, but without increased costs, and lower costs if possible. They implemented the first three principles described above (customer focus, continuous improvement, and decisions based on facts), but equally concentrated on the fourth principle, respect for people. The result was an increasing sensitivity of the worth and value of the workers, and the allowance and encouragement for their self direction in resolving the problems preventing increased productivity. This is the full use of TQM that, when collaboratively attempted, can result in positive outcomes for everyone.

The pursuit of "quality" is a driving force of every person, of every organization. When individually perceived and defined, we strive to achieve what we believe to be a "quality life," maintaining "quality relationships," spending "quality time." Organizations also want to sell "quality products," provide "quality service," and do it within organizations recognized for their

"quality work environment." Thus, while the growth and implementation of quality as a movement has lessened, the application of the concept is an integral part of our culture, our lives. Chang (1993) in an intense review of the literature on total quality management success stories, and various quality award criteria and certification guidelines around the world, identified ten "core threads" that are evident in successful TQM initiatives: an intense customer focus, hands-on involvement of senior management, deployment of strategic objectives, continuous process improvement, *empowered involvement of satisfied employees*, long term orientation, targeted measurement data, market responsiveness, *continuous learning and development*, and *internal and external partnerships*. We italicized the three "threads" that reflect a respect for people. These are the three that are most often not implemented. They are also the three most difficult to implement. The challenge is evident. Despite it being a process called total quality management, or any other name, to assure successful growth of both organizations and individuals, a genuine respect for people is mandatory.

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