

TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT (TQM): A COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma Toplam Kalite Yönetimi (TKY) kavramı ışığında açık bir iletişimin önemini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaç için temel TKY kavramları ve iletişim nosyonları incelenmeye çalışılmaktadır.

Toplam Kalite Yönetimi, İletişim, Tüketici Kültürü.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, Total Quality Management (TQM) has been a hot topic in business and academic areas. After facing a fierce international competition, increasing customer dissatisfaction, and shrinking world markets share, many U.S. based firms, following their Japanese rivals, decided to initiate quality improvement programs. After successful implementations, many of the World's other leading companies have adapted quality management techniques as well, in order to compete and survive globally. Lately, there have been discussions whether TQM can be implemented in the public sector, too. TQM implementing organizations have been trying to be more productive and quality oriented by having a superior customer value and continuous improvement. However, not all the organizations have been successful in implementing TQM. One of the main reasons why TQM does not work is insufficient communication among the parts of the organization.¹ In this study, I will analyze the importance of clear communication among members of TQM implementing organizations. In doing so, I will explore the concepts of communication in the light of a recent business concept, TQM.

1. WHAT IS TQM?

Total Quality Management is defined as "a management process and set of disciplines that are coordinated to ensure that the organization consistently meets and exceeds customer requirements."² TQM requires that every employee in the organization pursues the goal of reaching a higher quality to meet customer requirements. Upper-level management's commitment is essential for total quality implementation. Therefore, Total Quality Management, a new way of thinking and improving about organizations, emphasizes quality by focusing on the customers with continuous improvement.

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¹ Bob LAMONS, "Communication is Key to Quality Program." **Marketing News**, No. 29(August 1994), p. 21.

² Peter CAPEZIO, Debra MOREHOSE, **Taking the Mystery Out of TQM: A Practical Guide to Total Quality Management**, Career Press, 2nd ed., New Jersey, 1995, p. 1.

1.1. Some Notions of TQM and Communication

1.1.1. Customer Focus & Communication

Quality is seen as, "meeting the customer's requirements"³ and sometimes exceeding it. Therefore, in TQM customers set the ultimate criteria for quality. The quality guru Edward Demings sees the customer as the most important part of the quality process.⁴ To understand what their customers need and want, managers and employees should continuously work hard to stay up to date since customers' needs change with technology. As stated by Shores, "A customer focus keeps the business aware of the changes taking place in its environment and provides the knowledge needed to change the product or service."⁵ It is important for a quality organization that its employees see their work through the eyes of their customers and know how to satisfy them. As explained by Tom Peters, organizations should see every customer as "a lifetime customer who brings family and friends."⁶ Moreover, the founder of Wal-Mart stores, Sam Walton, taught his employees "a philosophy of treating the customer like a king or queen, empowering the worker to do what is right, and sharing the rewards of hard work with everyone who contributes."⁷ Therefore, organizations should find ways of better serving their customers. One way of delivering a quality service is improving the communication between the customer and the organization. This could be either in the form of two way communication such as openly discussing their concerns together, and finding solutions to their problems, or it could be in the form of one way communication, such as receiving feedback about a product or service, making surveys to assess their satisfaction, and solving their complaints to retain customers.

As stated by Bechtell, "expectations change over time. 'Delight' factors in your service or product quickly become stated requirements, which in turn usually become basic expectations." To assess customers' changing expectations, customer information must be updated continuously.⁸ Also, Hagan sees the importance of this issue, "there is a clear responsibility to know the true status of customer satisfaction and to assure that it receives continued prime attention. Marketing can fulfil this quality responsibility by establishing and effectively utilizing a formal customer communication system for problem reporting, returned goods, complaints, compliments, inquiries, and other communications."⁹ To sum up, improving communication is a good way of understanding what the customers want and solving their problems.

³ Warren H. SCHMIDT, Jerome P. FINNIGAN, **TQManager: A Practical Guide for Managing in a Total Quality Organization**, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1993, p. 5.

⁴ N. LOGOTHESIS, **Managing for Total Quality**, Prentice Hall, New York, 1992, p. 54.

⁵ A. Richard SHORES, "Improving the Quality of Management Systems," **Quality Progress**, (June 1992), p. 54.

⁶ CAPEZIO-MOREHOSE, p. 276.

⁷ Greg BOUNDS, **Beyond Total Quality Management: Toward the Emerging Paradigm**, McGraw-Hill, Inc., New York, 1994, pp. 114-115.

⁸ Michele B. BECHTELL, **Untangling Organizational Gridlock: Strategies for Building a Customer Focus**, Milwaukee, ASQC Quality Press, Wisconsin, 1993, p. 30.

⁹ Jack HAGAN, **Management of Quality: Strategies to Improve Quality and the Bottom Line**, Milwaukee, ASQC Quality Press, Wisconsin, 1994, p. 24.

1.1.2. Culture & Communication

Organizational culture is one of the most important concepts that the managers should think about and work carefully for successful implementation of TQM. Culture guides behavior, "The culture of an organization can be thought of as a shared set of informal beliefs and values that make up the ground rules for what is expected from employees and what employees can expect from an organization."¹⁰ As the culture gets stronger, so does the influence that it has on the behavior. Therefore, a strong organizational culture can have a positive impact on motivating and discouraging certain kinds of behaviors in the workplace. Within this perspective, the communication styles of the members of the organization are clear indicators of the culture of the workplace. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo see this fact and offer the organizational culture paradigm which sees organizations as symbolic realities created by members through communication.¹¹ Managers should realize the culture of their organizations in order to improve it. To understand organizations, one should examine the communication of members and analyze constructs, facts, practices, vocabularies, metaphors, stories, rites, and rituals to identify the organization's culture.

To create a TQM environment, managers should change cultural problems, such as the mind-sets and daily practices of people. Also, "the cultural view helps managers understand the causes of human behavior. To change the way people think and act, managers must understand how the thoughts, interpretations, expectations, and habits that people have are developed and maintained"¹² As a result of such an understanding, managers can have insight about how to change the culture of workplace.

The culture and structure of an organization play major roles in guaranteeing that the organization is focused on customers and improving continuously. In a total quality culture:

- "Management and employees openly discuss problems and mistakes, without fear of being punished for them.
- People are willing to take risks to achieve quality results.
- Instead of fighting fires or relying on breakthroughs, managers and workers focus on continuous improvement.
- The focus is on preventing mistakes and deviations, instead of on correcting them after they occur.
- Managers trust and empower employees to make improvements.
- Individuals and departments cooperate for a mutual goal instead of defending their turf.
- Decisions are based on data, not on opinion or on intuition.

¹⁰ Steven COHEN-Ronald BRAND, **Total Quality Management in Government**, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1992, p. 66.

¹¹ Michael P. PACANOWSKY-Nick O'DONNELL-TRUJILL, "Communication and Organizational Cultures," in **Foundations of Organizational Culture: A Reader**, (eds.) Corman, Steven R. et al., Longman, 2nd ed., New York, 1995, pp. 160-161.

¹² BOUNDS, p. 98.

- The agency has a positive self-image, and morale is good”¹³

To find out how an organization’s culture develops, a researcher first should look at the role of the founders and leaders.¹⁴ The beliefs, ideas, and values of founders and leaders build the culture of organization in the beginning. Then, the researcher should analyze how learning of new concepts occurs in the organization because “culture also develops through a *learning process*”. In this instance, with trial and error and experimentation, members of an organization learn which solutions appear to solve the problems and which do not. Moreover, culture develops through shared understandings. Members of an organization create a communication system among themselves over time, and “this communication system involves not only a common language, but also common beliefs, values, attitudes, emotions, and viewpoints.” Furthermore, the researcher should analyze the critical incidents of an organization to understand the culture of it. In the organization’s history, some critical events occur. These incidents may be “as a result of a major obstacle, threat or opportunity.” They are a shared learning experience for the group that results in new way of looking events. For example, IBM Rochester had a major crisis in the mid-1980’s. In the company, everybody shared common emotions and talked about problem. As a result, “The Market-Driven Quality” culture of IBM at Rochester developed. Stories and incidents are still linked to this critical incident in the company.¹⁵ Therefore, the critical incidents take an important place in the organizations’ history. If one wants to study of an organization, he/she should certainly look at these incidents as well as other sources of culture. To do most of these, communication plays a pivotal role in the organization.

1.1.3. Resistance to change & Communication

Resistance to change is one of the important barriers when organizations try to implement new techniques and projects. Especially, changing the culture of the federal government is more difficult than changing federal rules and regulations. Because of its bureaucratic structure, changes in the public sector are even slower than those in private sector.¹⁶ For example, when the Internal Revenue service of the USA (IRS) first began the quality and customer focus training, the resistance was apparent. Some employees and managers tried to find out reasons not to attend the meetings. Some simply did not believe that this would work. Other employees saw the TQM just another effort that top-level management would support and then give it up to implement another project. And, some others believed that since their goal has always been quality service, TQM would not make any difference in their works.¹⁷ However, if the ultimate reasons are explained and communicated, and people affected by a change participate in decision making and application processes, the acceptance of change will be more valuable to them and resistance to change will be less apparent.

¹³ David K. CARR, Ian D. LITTMANN, **Excellence in Government: Total Quality Management in the 1990’s**, Arlington, Coopers & Lybrand, VA, 1991, pp. 184-189.

¹⁴ BOUNDS, p. 114.

¹⁵ BOUNDS, pp. 114-120.

¹⁶ Cynthia J. GUFFEY-Marilyn M. HELMS, “The IRS and TVA are leading the way,” **Quality Progress**, (October 1995), p. 51.

¹⁷ Bonnie G. MANI, “Old Wine in New Bottles Tastes Better: A Case Study of TQM Implementation in the IRS.” **Public Administration Review**, Vol. 55, No. 2(1995), p. 148.

Implementing TQM usually requires to adopt a new organizational culture. Established organizational culture may conflict with those required for successful implementation of TQM. Where resistance to change exists, it is extremely crucial that managers try to “visualize culture and verbalize it” in order to solve the problems.¹⁸ In moving from the traditional culture to the TQM culture, managers should recognize specific behaviors and attitudes of employees to motivate them and promote the change. As a result, when managers and employees have cultural values and communication skills that reinforce a quality culture, continuous improvement can become an organization’s way of life and resistance to change will be out of the sight.

1.2 Teamwork, Employee Empowerment & Communication

Teamwork is an important part of the TQM implementation. Teams are groups of people working for the same common goal with common methods. They maximize the skills of employees, break down structural barriers by consisting of people from different departments, increase acceptance of change, bring out hidden talents, and train for future leadership.¹⁹ Since “individuals in groups can perform more work, more quickly, than a group of individuals performing related but uncoordinated tasks,”²⁰ the teams are an important part of creating TQM culture.

Individuals work together cross functionally on some tasks and projects in teams where organization’s formal structure and hierarchy are not taken into account in order to get the job done faster to meet customer demands.²¹ Thus, one of the benefits of using work teams is that teams are relatively quick and economical in reaching progress in the workplace.

Some of the reasons to use team approach:

- “Maximizing skill and insight of employees,
- Breaking down structural barriers,
- Increasing acceptance of change,
- Creating structure,
- Bringing out hidden talents,
- Training for leadership.”²²
- Internal structure of teams consists of a leader and team members. A team leader is responsible for arranging meetings, assigning tasks, and keeping schedule. Team members are people who involve in working together to solve problems. Sometimes teams have group facilitators who are from outside and an expert. They help to facilitate group discussion with their expertise.²³

¹⁸ COHEN-BRAND, p. 71.

¹⁹ CARR-LITTMAN, pp. 2- 20.

²⁰ CAPEZIO-MOREHOSE, p. 162.

²¹ Yanan, JU-Donald P. CUSHMAN, **Organizational Teamwork in High-Speed Management**, State University of New York Press, USA, 1995, p. 85.

²² CARR-LITTMAN, pp. 93- 94.

²³ CARR-LITTMAN, p. 94.

- With the use of about 400 quality improvement process (QIP) teams, the IRS in US has saved about \$27 million since 1986. Also, these teams generated more than \$100 million in additional tax revenues. According to Sidney Branch, an IRS consultant in the Nashville District, there have been 65 QIP teams since 1988. These teams have been very active and they examined many processes. "As a result of the employees working as a team and sharing a same goal, several benefits have been realized:
- Employee morale has improved.
- Employee has a sense of pride and ownership in their work.
- Customer relations have improved."²⁴

Furthermore, IRS started to encourage its employees to improve quality and productivity. The agency began to advocate employees to submit written suggestions for improvement by rewarding them with cash. As a result, the number of suggestions has risen by 300%. Also, the federal government has gained a return of \$48 for each dollar it has invested in these incentive programs.²⁵ "In addition to these tangible savings and an improved customer focus, the project teams have improved the agency's internal communication."²⁶ In the IRS Laguna Niguel District Office, serves approximately 4.5 million taxpayers in some parts of California, the agency started to use different types of team based strategies. In the past managers were operating in a top-down fashion, knowing all the solutions and telling the employees what to do. With the new approach, managers required to use teamwork to solve the problems. The key objective was to promote learning "through a continual movement between practice and performance, practice and performance..." As a result each team was expected to have innovative and flexible skills by using these methods. The final goals are to promote communication and cooperation²⁷

Toyota is another organization that uses teamwork effectively. At Toyota, managers develop teams and assign individuals to those teams so that they have sense of responsibility. Employees are seen as valuable assets and are treated as such at Toyota. Team members have a spirit of teamwork. Also, "the committees and task forces help foster cross-functional teamwork at Toyota." They are used as a channel for communication, for consensus building, and for encouragement.²⁸

Lynch and Werner describes the ideal characteristics of a team as follows:

- Trust: In the teams, members should be able to express themselves freely, without fear. They should develop a trust environment in which everybody feel secure.
- Support: Individuals should be able to find help whenever they need it. They should have a sense of being a member of group.
- Communication: Open communication is an important part of the teams. Team members should be able to explain their ideas and concerns about the issues.

²⁴ GUFFEY-HELMS, p. 51.

²⁵ GUFFEY-HELMS, p. 55.

²⁶ Mathew J. FERRERO, "Self-directed Work Teams Untax the IRS." *Personnel Journal*, (July 1994), p. 66.

²⁷ FERRERO, p. 71.

²⁸ BOUNDS, pp. 637- 638.

- Team Objectives: People should know what are their objectives so that they could work with them thoroughly.
- Conflict Resolution: In case of conflict, there should be a process that team members work through the problems openly.
- Utilization of Members: Each person's abilities and experience should be utilized so that the team benefits from this utilization and the member feels pride of satisfaction.
- Control: Everyone should accept responsibility of keeping the team on-track.
- Climate: Every member should find respect for his/her individual differences.²⁹

Vice president of Golin/Haris, a Chicago based public relations firm, Charlene Barnard sees two-way communication absolutely critical in employee involvement processes. She said "as companies are downsizing to a leaner, meaner work force, they recognize the value of their employees. They need the best work out of each employee because individuals make a difference. That elevates the status of employee communications."³⁰

According to Owens, "TQM is not merely some new inspection technique or added activity: it goes to the heart of an organization's culture and becomes the basic operating principle of every participant in the organization."³¹ Therefore, TQM is a new concept that transforms the whole organization into a new set of principles. Also, TQM consists of continuous improvement activities involving everyone in the organization in a totally integrated effort toward improving performance at every level. Thus, everybody in an organization should have a clear understanding of TQM concepts and organizational goals in order to make TQM successful. IBM United States, for example, is one of the companies that sees the importance of communication in its quality efforts. Adrienne Singer, manager of management and strategic communications in the company's White Plains, NY, office explained that a dynamic communication process creates understanding between management and employees.³² To summarize, in teamwork and employee involvement, effective communication plays very important roles.

2. PRODUCTIVITY AND COMMUNICATION

Improving productivity as a result of TQM activities is an issue that has a communication aspect. In order to have a high level of productivity, organizations need to focus on communication. According to a survey, made by Lull, Frank, and Piersol, among presidents of the biggest 100 U.S. corporations 96 percent believed in "a definite relationship" between communication and productivity.³³ Another investigation was conducted in two business organizations and the results showed

²⁹ Robert F. LYNCH-Thomas J. WERNER, **Continuous Improvement: Teams & Tools**, QualTeam, Inc, GA. Atlanta, 1992, p. 119.

³⁰ Jane Easter BAHIS, "Managing For Total Quality" **Public Relations Journal**, Vol. 48, No. 4(1992), p. 18.

³¹ Robert G. OWENS, **Organizational Behavior in Education**, Allyn & Bacon, Boston, 1995, p. 239.

³² BAHIS, p. 18.

³³ Philip G. CLAMPITT-Cal W. DOWNS, "Employee perceptions of the Relationship Between Communication and Productivity: A Field Study." **The Journal of Business Communication**, Vol. 30, S. 1(1993), p. 8.

that "communication was perceived to have an impact on productivity that varied in both kind and magnitude."³⁴ As a result, communication is a vital issue in this area, as well, thus it needs to be treated as such.

3. CONCLUSION OR IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN TQM

To summarize, after analyzing these concepts, we can conclude that there is a strong relationship between good communication and successful TQM implementation. As stated by Schmidt and Finnigan "although communication has always been a key requirement of good management (and it will appear on any list of managers' key concerns), it is even more important in the TQM organization." They further indicate that "TQM organizations depend on communication that flows in all directions: up, down, and laterally. The TQM manager has to monitor the process, spot flaws in it, and improve it. Internal and external customers have to let suppliers know what they need. Suppliers have to let their customers know what they can realistically provide. Communication is, indeed, the lifeblood of an organization. By constantly improving their own communication skills and helping their colleagues to do the same, TQM managers add significantly to the vitality of the organization."³⁵

IBM is a good example of TQM organization that recognized the importance of communication in its quality attempts. One of the managers of company's New York office explains the relationship between the culture and communication and states that a dynamic communication process creates understanding between management and employees: "Through focus groups, surveys and talking with employees one-on-one, the company discovers what employees value while communicating its corporate culture."³⁶

Finally, the success of an organization's quality efforts relies largely on focusing on the right objectives and its ability to communicate them to customers both internal and external.³⁷ And, as Stamatis³⁸ and others³⁹ see communication is one of the most important factors of a total quality initiative. To conclude, as stated by American Management Association International, "for total quality to work, communication between all levels in the organization is vital. But, without understanding, direction and commitment from the top, quality will never happen in your organization." Because "total quality is a game that everyone must play,"⁴⁰ it is important to note that without effective communication, TQM will not work in an organization.

³⁴ CLAMPITT-DOWNS, p. 5.

³⁵ SCHMIDT-FINNIGAN, p. 41.

³⁶ BAHIS, p. 18.

³⁷ LAMONS, p. 29.

³⁸ D. H. STAMATIS **Total Quality Service: Principles, Practices, and Implementation**, FL: St. Lucie Press, 1996, p. 34.

³⁹ For a few of them see: Stephen GEORGE, Arnold WEIMERSKIRCH, **Total Quality Management**, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1994, p. 88; Michael, BARRIER, "Small Firms Put Quality First," **Nation's Business**, (May), 1992, p. 29; Alan GOLDMAN "Implications of Japanese Total Quality Control for Western Organizations: Dimensions of an Intercultural Hybrid," **The Journal of Business Communication**, 1993, p. 29; V. Daniel HUNT, **Quality Management for Government**, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: ASQC Quality Press, 1993, p. 244; Colin MORGAN and Stephen MURGATROYD, **Total Quality Management in the Public Sector**, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995, p. 186; Joel E., ROSS, **Total Quality Management: Text, Cases, and Readings**, FL: St. Lucie press, p. 37-38.

⁴⁰ American Management Association International, **Global Management 1992**, Brussels: Management Centre Europe, v. 8, 1992, p. 407.

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