

SHIFTING QUALITY FROM "ADD-ON WORK" TO THE WAY YOU DO BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT

Many organizations believe they espouse the tenets of total quality management. However, upon closer inspection, one would observe that few of these companies have truly integrated quality into their businesses to the extent that quality has become a way of life for all employees. Instead, one would notice that quality concepts, methods, and tools are used only in specific activities—quality team meetings, quality training events, and so on. In essence, quality has been laid on top of the traditional organization, creating parallel ways of doing work; quality concepts are used in quality events but it is "business as usual" behind the scenes in what are considered "non-quality" activities (i.e., running the business).

How can organizations transition from quality as "add-on work" to quality as the way they do business? This paper will describe specific things companies can do and issues they must address in order to achieve this paradigm shift. These include:

1. The expectations/rationale an organization communicates to its employees about its need for total quality management;
2. The philosophical and procedural framework which guides the organization through a step-by-step process for transformation;
3. The changing role of managers, supervisors, and employees;
4. Integrating quality concepts into key business systems and organizational strategy; and
5. How quality concepts are utilized by work groups in their daily work activities.

If companies truly want to be competitive in the years ahead, they will find that it is imperative that they commit themselves to total quality management. Having made the commitment, they must learn new ways to continuously apply the principles needed to effectively change how they think and behave with respect to every facet of their organizational management system. This ultimately means replacing old thoughts and methods with new ones. Learning that this change can be made

is the first step. Learning and planning how to do it is the next. Doing it will ultimately lead to successful, and lasting, improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Companies that embark on total quality management usually strive to make quality a way of life. However, they often do not understand what is required to achieve this result, nor, when they do find out, are they always willing to embrace the necessary changes with open arms. Overall, making quality a way of life requires:

- Knowing what changes may be necessary;
- The willingness and involvement of all employees, especially senior management, to do what it takes to make the necessary changes happen;
- An organizational value/belief that quality as a way of life is critical to achieving and maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace; and
- A great deal of faith/trust and patience since this change tends to evolve slowly over a period of several years (1).

WHAT CAN AN ORGANIZATION DO STARTING OUT?

When a company starts a total quality management initiative, the organization must recognize upfront that substantial time and effort will be organizational realities. Why is this? In order to choose and train the people who will provide ongoing momentum for this change, time will need to be allocated for learning and practicing new concepts and skills on-the-job. Senior management will need to set aside time not only for training, but also for meetings to plan, implement, and coordinate their organization's approach to total quality management.

Senior management's responsibility for quality cannot be abdicated or delegated to others. Doing so sends messages throughout the organization that imply:

- There are other activities more important than quality;
- Senior management doesn't need to change—it's the rest of the organization that needs this "quality stuff;" and
- There are certain types of duties in which quality concepts may not apply.

Taking the responsibility is not enough, however. Senior managers need to role model, not just pay lip-service to, the basic quality concepts in their own work before requiring others to change behaviors. The basic concepts include:

1. Viewing work activities and duties as a series of work processes;
2. Continual improvement based on the analytic use of data;
3. A belief that people are naturally "good" and want to do a good job;
4. Using process improvement tools and methods as mechanisms for understanding and improving work processes; and

5. Using a team approach to work and to problem solving in order to optimize the performance of work processes and overall systems.

There are also some fundamental building blocks that senior management must develop and put in place to assure the future integration of quality into all work. The first of these is rationale for why the organization needs to initiate total quality management, including why total quality management is a never-ending process, and the long-term potential benefits to individual employees and to the organization. The second building block is the development of a framework for total quality management. Key to this framework is the adoption or development of a quality philosophy (e.g., Deming, Juran, Crosby, etc.) that is eventually used as the basis for the development of the organization's key quality concepts. A third building block is the development of a specific implementation plan derived from the framework that will move the organization toward its vision for quality and help it achieve its business objectives. Both short- and long-term plans need to be put in place. An excellent resource for determining the elements of these plans is the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award criteria.

One of the toughest realizations senior management will need to accept and communicate is that eventually all business systems, practices, and policies will need to be questioned and most likely revamped in order to reinforce the company's approach to quality. What makes this difficult is that current management may have created these systems, practices, and policies or touted them as organizational strengths. One of the first systems that needs to be reviewed is the performance management system, to the extent it is possible and/or necessary to change it, so that it can be used to recognize and reinforce the total quality management effort.

THE INITIAL QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Initially, many organizations pinpoint an individual(s) and/or functional organization to assist in the planning, implementation, and coordination of its total quality management efforts. This is sometimes necessary due to the enormity of the change, the size of the organization, or the desire to provide on-site change facilitation. In the long run, however, the responsibility for quality training, coaching, facilitation, and reinforcement needs to be shared or assumed by all levels of management and supervision. This expectation will need to be communicated to everyone up-front so that they understand the temporary need for this transitional assistance. The rationale for this will be described later under the new roles of senior management, middle managers, supervisors, and employees.

When a steering committee is set up to guide and implement the quality transformation it should mirror the current organizational structure. That is, the senior management steering committee would be the currently defined senior management team; a divisional/departmental steering committee would be the currently defined divisional/departmental management team. This

framework will help to reinforce that the approach to work, not the people themselves, needs to change. In addition, if at all possible, the agendas for this currently defined group should change to reflect quality items, rather than having separate meetings scheduled to deal only with the topic of quality. Once the individuals on these teams have gone through training, every effort should be made to utilize their new knowledge on how meetings should be managed and, using a quality mind-set, how agenda topics should be addressed in these meetings. Eventually, quality will not be a separate topic—it will become the foundation for the way all topics are addressed.

BUSINESS PLANNING AS THE DRIVING FORCE

The role of business planning as the driving force for viewing quality as a way of life changes as the organization matures in its quality efforts. Initially, the strategic side of the plan should reflect the organization's long-term goal of integrating quality into the business. The tactical plan for this strategy/objective would be the implementation plan referenced earlier in this paper.

Senior management will want to review the organization's vision, mission and values once it has gained a good grasp of total quality management concepts, tools, and methods. Based on their new knowledge these items may need to change, for example, to reflect the importance of the external customer in defining the business of the organization and those concepts of quality the organization wants to integrate into its management philosophy over the long run. All employees need to have a good understanding of the vision, mission, and values in order to behave in a consistent fashion with external customers and suppliers as well as toward each other. If an organization wants to align all its employees around a shared vision, mission and values, it is not recommended that each function/department define its own vision, mission, and values during the first few years of its quality transformation. If this occurs, there may be some mis-match on what the organization as a whole is striving toward.

As an organization matures in its quality efforts, it will want to undertake the task of identifying and assessing the "macro" level work processes that drive its mission (i.e., what business it is in). It's important to define not only those macro-level work processes that are the "core" of the business (i.e., help the organization to meet the external customers' needs and requirements) but also those that are critical to supporting the "core" business.

Once this has been accomplished, several things can then occur. First, these processes can be used as the foundation for business planning. Second, these macro-level work processes can be broken down into sub-processes and ultimately micro-level (task level) work processes for deployment throughout the organization. Ultimately each work group will understand which processes it is responsible for maintaining and improving as part of its day-to-day work. Third, individually, employees will understand how their work fits into the accomplishment of the work processes of their work group, and ultimately how they are helping the organization to achieve its

mission. Business planning then becomes an ongoing process rather than an annual event. Customers' needs and requirements, process and results measures, improvement opportunities, and the like, are monitored at the work group level. This information forms the basis for overall organizational plans.

In addition, management will have the data to identify patterns of problems and/or opportunities. These problems and/or opportunities become the impetus for strategies to move the organization toward its vision of the future. Most often these strategies involve needed breakthroughs in how work is accomplished, the products and/or services of the business, or how the organization is managing itself. Again, using "process" thinking, macro-level work processes can be created to accomplish these strategies/breakthroughs. These macro-level work processes can also be defined in terms of their component parts and eventually monitored in a similar fashion as the mission-driven work processes. As one can see, senior management leadership in this system change is critical.

All areas in the organization need to be involved in order to accomplish and support this latter approach to business planning. And it may require a change in other business systems—financial, information, and compensation—to name a few. Furthermore, it cannot be fully initiated until all employees have received training in the organization's quality philosophy and approach, the tools and methods of quality improvement, and the employees' new roles within the process-focused organization.

NEW ROLES WITHIN THE PROCESS-FOCUSED ORGANIZATION

Before the new roles of senior managers, middle managers, supervisors, and employees are described, it's important to note that this change does not occur overnight. Role redefinition is evolutionary in nature. The more training and on-the-job practice people are given, the more they will come to realize the need for change.

Fundamental to the organization's ability to meet/exceed its customers' needs and requirements and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage are natural teams. Natural teams are in-function work groups—a first-line supervisor and his/her work group. These teams are responsible for the maintenance (i.e., standardization) and improvement of those work processes that fall within their scope. Employees are empowered to identify, analyze, and solve problems utilizing consensus decision-making methods and effective team skills. This includes the ability to implement the solutions and standardize the process improvements to maintain the gain. In natural teams, quality is not viewed as extra work; the quality focus supplies the tools, methods, and thinking that are used to approach all of the work of the team.

In support of natural teams, first-line supervisors have three key responsibilities. The first is to understand the "business" of the organization of which they are a part. This means being able to

articulate and explain the organization's vision, mission, values, strategies, macro-level work processes, financial position, customer base, and so on. The second responsibility is understanding the "work" of the natural team of which he/she is a leader. This includes being able to articulate and explain the role of the natural team within the context of the organization's business, what work processes the natural team has responsibility for maintaining and improving, and customers' needs and requirements of these work processes. The third responsibility is understanding the people who are the natural team members, really getting to know them on a one-to-one basis—their skills, strengths, and what motivates them. Fundamental to this is knowing what creates joy of work in each person; how to coach, train, and assist employees; and knowing who is in need of special help. In addition, in order to demonstrate leadership in these responsibilities, first-line supervisors need to:

1. Develop team skills in natural team members;
2. Effectively lead meetings;
3. Create a work environment, with the assistance of management, that empowers people to make decisions and take actions necessary to accomplish their work;
4. Remove barriers to team success; and
5. Understand basic human resources, financial management, marketing, sales, information systems, and business planning concepts (1).

Middle management has three primary responsibilities:

- Creating an empowering work environment;
- Managing cross-functional process flow; and
- Deployment of organizational policy and direction.

Middle managers, in order to help create an empowering work environment, have dual roles. They need to provide senior management with information on those systems, practices, and policies that prevent participation and involvement and, therefore, need to be changed. Once these systems, practices, and policies are revised, they need to help deploy them throughout the organization. They also have a role in translating the organization's vision, mission, and priorities for deployment throughout the organization and providing feedback to senior management. Once an organization identifies its macro-level work processes, a middle manager can be assigned as a process owner for a particular macro-level work process. Since many of these work processes at that level flow across several natural teams, the middle manager would be responsible for understanding and communicating overall customer needs and requirements, what the macro-level process is supposed to do, how well the overall process is performing as compared to customers' requirements, and what the overall priorities are for improvement. They are responsible for breaking down any barriers that may stand in the way of efforts to improve coordination between and among natural teams.

Senior managers are charged with the responsibility for developing a vision, a mission, and values, and guiding their organization toward them, utilizing the organization's framework for total quality management. Because the key driving force in the integration of quality into the business is the business planning process, senior management has the responsibility for taking an active role in redefining this process and seeing that it is used to manage the business on a daily basis in light of the focus on total quality management. Both of these responsibilities require a keen understanding of the external customers' needs and requirements today and in the future, how well the organization is doing to meet these from the customers' perspective, how well the organization is meeting these needs compared to the competition, overall market forces, and what breakthroughs are necessary to move the organization forward. Barriers to success within the culture need to be identified and systems, practices, and policies changed to foster the types of behaviors integral to total quality management. Defining the new roles and responsibilities of senior managers, middle managers, supervisors, and employees will help to move the organization toward viewing quality as a way of life.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

To reiterate, when the organization starts to train people in the tools, methods, and concepts of quality, training should be provided first to management. This will allow them to model the new behaviors and prepare them to teach others within the organization. In order to more quickly integrate the new skills and concepts into daily work, training, as much as possible, should be provided to intact work groups and their respective leaders.

How managers and supervisors respond to daily work situations is where the "rubber meets the road" in quality becoming a way of life. There are questions that need to be asked and answered which will reflect a change to a quality mind-set. When a problem arises, does the individual ask for the appropriate data? Are cause and effect diagrams utilized to assess root causes? Is there an understanding of process stability so tampering does not occur? When there are questions about how work should be done, is the process flowcharted? Is the customer(s) of the work process consulted on his/her needs and requirements? Are those who work in the process involved in making changes? Are the changes standardized to maintain the gains in process, product, or service performance? If one were to walk through the organization, what demonstration would one see of work processes being monitored on a regular basis; of people meeting to discuss process, product, and service performance and improvements; of the leader coaching people on a one-to-one; and of people being taught how to do a job through the use of flowcharts?

SUMMARY

When an organization embarks on total quality management, quality is add-on work. However, over time, based on customer needs and requirements, those work activities that no longer need to be performed should be identified and stopped; those that need to be modified should be changed, and those that need to occur and haven't been happening need to be initiated. The strengths of the traditional organization need to be combined with a new approach to doing work to create an organization that has quality as the way it conducts its day-to-day business. As with all other changes of this magnitude, senior management must lead the way by modeling the new behaviors, and by providing the mechanisms for others to do so and be successful.

The first step is learning exactly what is meant by integrating quality into the business and what is required to make this happen. This may mean changes in the fundamental systems by which the organization conducts its business. The second step is planning how to make these things happen. Finally, seeking out daily opportunities to approach work with total quality management tools, methods, and concepts will ultimately lead to quality as a way of life.

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