
Application of TQM in the Arena of Professional Education

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Abstract

Changes in the economic and social fundamentals call for transformation in the skills, capabilities and attitudes of the masses. This requires a shift in the delivery and pedagogy used in the current education system. The purpose of this paper is to promote total quality management in higher education for imparting easily accessible, quality higher education leading to the economic upliftment of India. This paper presents a review of current quality management practices within higher education institutions. The review identifies a reliance on industrial models. These are applied with only partial success and identified limitations suggest a need for refinement, particularly in relation to the centrality of student learning within Higher Education. The focus of the paper is on the benefits that quality management in education can provide. The findings reveal that it provides better prospects to the students and also facilitates sharing of best practices and knowledge across the world. It increases the flexibility of delivery of education. TQM leads to the democratization of education. The paper also explores the factors related to policy, planning, technical requirements as well as the training required by the Teachers, Staff and Management for the successful implementation of TQM in an education system.

Introduction

Education is one of the important elements of the service industry. It is the quality of education that shapes the long-term prosperity and well being of both nations and their people. One of the emerging philosophies in quality and management concepts is Total Quality Management, (TQM). TQM has been applied to business and industry and recently has been experimented and implemented in professional education institutions to provide high quality and standards for both industry and professional education institutes. Total quality management (TQM) is a management strategy which is aimed at imparting quality awareness in all organizational processes. Principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) have been successfully adopted and applied in the field of professional education by developed countries such as Japan, USA. In India, TQM has been successfully implemented in some professional Institutions and it has improved the quality of professional education in those institutions. TQM has become the most important concept because the quality of the student makes the difference between success and failure of any institution. TQM can serve as a paradigm for improving every aspect of collegiate functioning from fiscal administration to classroom instruction.

Keywords

*Total Quality Management,
Quality Management
Practices, Industrial
models*

How Quality can be managed in Professional Education System

Managing quality in Higher Education has proved to be a challenging task. The literature suggests that there are two main reasons for this. First, 'quality' has different meanings for different stakeholders. Within higher education there are both internal and external stakeholders who are likely to have disparate or even contradictory definitions of quality.. Pounder (1999) argues that quality is a 'notoriously ambiguous term' given that it has different meanings to different stakeholders. As a result of the difficulty in defining quality, its measurement and management has unsurprisingly proved to be contentious. Cheng and Tam

(1997) suggest therefore that 'education quality is a rather vague and controversial concept'

Traditionally, external stakeholders have been concerned with quality assurance procedures. Quality assurance refers to the 'planned and systematic actions necessary to provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality' (Borah and Ziarati, 2002). The focus on quality for external stakeholders focuses predominantly on the measurement of procedures and the extent to which they result in appropriate levels of quality (Jackson, 1996). The Professional Institutions are required to demonstrate responsible actions in their professional practices and accountability in the results they achieve with the resources used. Elton (1992) in his reference has suggested three things' – accountability, audit and assessment – and suggests that they are concerned with the control of quality and the people who control quality. It is also suggested that Professional Institutions are now also required to become learning organizations, where internal people also interpret and assess the quality of Higher education provision. The emphasis should be not only on quality assurance, but also on quality enhancement which aims for an overall increase in the actual quality of teaching and learning, often through more innovative practices (McKay and Kember, 1999). Elton (1992) suggests that quality enhancement focuses on quality 'Es': empowerment, enthusiasm, expertise and excellence. As students are viewed as an integral part of the learning process, so the imparting of quality should be student centric

TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Meaning and Practices

Before defining the elements of TQM in education it may be useful to say a few words about what TQM is not. TQM is not an imposition. It cannot be done to you or for you. For TQM to work, an institution must itself want to introduce it. It is not inspection. It is about always trying to do things right first time and every time, rather than occasionally checking if they have gone wrong. It is not something that only senior people do and then pass their directions down the line.

The *total* in TQM dictates that everything and everybody in the organization is involved in the enterprise of continuous improvement. The *management* in TQM likewise means everyone, because everyone in the institution, whatever their status, position or role, is the manager of their own responsibilities.

Continuous Improvement

TQM is a practical but strategic approach to running an organization that focuses on the needs of its customers. It rejects any outcome other than excellence. TQM is not a set of slogans, but a deliberate and systematic approach to achieving appropriate levels of quality in a consistent fashion that meet or exceed the needs and wants of people. It can be thought of as a philosophy of continual improvement only achievable by and through people. As an approach, TQM represents a permanent

shift in an institution's focus away from short-term expediency to the long-term quality improvement to create a continuous improvement culture, managers have to trust their staff and to delegate decisions to the appropriate level to give staff the responsibility to deliver quality within their own sphere.

The upside-down organization

The key to a successful TQM culture in an educational organization is an effective student-teacher relation. Once the concept has been grasped, it has enormous implications for the organization and the relationships within it. It is the role of senior and middle management to support and empower the teaching and support staff and the learners.

Professionalism

There is also the additional dimension of a professional workforce in education who have traditionally seen themselves as the guardians of quality and standards. TQM's emphasis is on the sovereignty of the students in an education system. This is a difficult area, and one that will need to be considered by any educational institution taking a total quality route. Training for teachers in quality concepts and thinking is an important element in the required culture change. Staff has to understand how they and their pupils and students will benefit from a change to a customer focus. Total quality is about more than being 'nice to customers and smiling'. It is about listening and entering into a dialogue about people's fears and aspirations. The best aspects of the professional role are about care and high academic and vocational standards. Blending the best aspects of professionalism with total quality is essential to success.

The quality of learning

Education is about learning. If TQM is to have relevance in education it needs to address the quality of the learners' experience. Unless it does that, it will not make a substantial contribution to quality in education. In a period when most institutions are being asked to do more with less,

it is important that they focus on their prime activity—learning. Learners learn best in a style suited to their needs and inclinations. An educational institution that takes the total quality route must take seriously the issue of learning styles and needs to have strategies for individualization and differentiation in learning. The learner is the primary customer, and unless learning styles meet individual needs it will not be possible for that institution to claim that it has achieved total quality. Educational institutions have an obligation to make learners aware of the variety of learning methods available to them. They need to give learners opportunities to sample learning in a variety of different styles. Much work has still to be done on how best to use TQM principles in the classroom. Individual learners should negotiate their own action plans to give them motivation and direction. The process of negotiation may require the establishment of a quality steering committee or forum to provide feedback and to give the learners an opportunity to manage their own learning. Parents or employers might well be

represented on it. Both teachers and students can ensure that all are on track by undertaking detailed monitoring through progress charting. This is important to ensure that timely and appropriate corrective action can be applied if there is a danger of failure. The establishing of a strong feedback loop is an important element of any quality assurance process. Evaluation should be a continuous process and not just left until the end of the programme of study. The results of evaluation processes should be discussed with the students; perhaps by means of completing a record of achievement. It is important that the institution uses the results of the formal monitoring to establish the validity of its programmes. Such organizations have not developed a customer focus and their students are more often than not seen as liabilities, not assets. Improvements, when they are attempted, usually have as their goal reducing costs. What TQM offers is the opportunity for institutions to adopt a different outlook, diametrically opposed to the traditional model. TQM organizations will have integrated quality into their structure and recognize that quality involves everyone's commitment and contribution at every level. To achieve this, a considerable investment needs to be made in people as they are the keys to quality, and hence to the institution's future. If a college aspires to be a total quality institution it must act like one. It must innovate and drive ahead to achieve the vision contained in its mission statement. It must recognize that quality will always provide an edge in the market. Most important, it must carry the message to its staff and ensure that they are partners in the process. The quality route is by now well trodden but just as hard. The driving force has to come from the top and the process has to be constantly nurtured and reinforced. Leadership is the key, but so is listening and learning. It is often the little things that provide the evidence of quality. Institutions that make the effort to get the details right also have the right approach to the major issues. In a world where so many services look superficially similar it is attention to detail that provides the competitive edge. Above all, in the words of Tom Peters, 'Ensure that quality is always defined in terms of the customer perceptions' (Peters, 1987). Under TQM, structure follows process, and the following are necessary features of any quality organization:

- **Unit optimization**—every unit, programme, and department needs to operate efficiently and effectively. Each area needs to have clear, and preferably written, quality standards within which to operate.
- **Vertical alignment**—every member of staff needs to understand the strategy of the institution, and its direction and mission, although they may not need to know the detailed breakdown of objectives.
- **Horizontal alignment**—there should be a lack of competition between units/programmes/departments, and an understanding of the aims and requirements of other parts of the organization. Mechanisms need to be in place to deal effectively with any boundary problems.

A single command for each process—the key processes, whether they are curriculum, pastoral, or administrative—needs to be charted and organized so that each process is brought under a single chain of command. The charting process is best carried out from an analysis that starts by asking who the customers for a process are and continues by analysing their needs and the standards they should expect. Structural reorganizations are not a requirement for TQM. Reorganizations may be useful and necessary to the quality improvement process, but equally they can divert attention from quality improvement and lead to institutional fatigue. There are plenty of examples in education where organizational restructuring has impeded quality development. There is usually only so much energy within a system. TQM usually provides as much change as the organization can reasonably cope with. Staff needs some familiar situations while adapting to new working methods. It is sensible to let structural change develop out of the process of improving quality, and so it is probably best to avoid organizational restructuring at the start of the TQM programme.

Empowering teachers

A key aspect of the leadership role in education is to empower teachers to give them the maximum opportunity to improve the learning of their students. Stanley Spanbauer, the former President of Fox Valley Technical College in Wisconsin who took a lead in introducing TQM into vocational education in the United States, argues that: *in a quality-based approach, school leadership relies on the empowerment of teachers and others involved in the teaching /learning process. Teachers share in decision-making and assume greater responsibilities. They are given more power to act and greater autonomy in almost everything they do.*

Spanbauer, in his *A Quality System for Education* (1992), has put forward a plan for leadership to create a new educational environment. He argues that educational leaders should guide and assist others to develop a similar set of characteristics. This encourages shared responsibility and a style that will engender an interactive working environment. He visualizes a leadership style where leaders 'must walk and talk quality and understand that change happens by degree, not by decree'. Leaders have a pivotal role in guiding teachers and administrators to work for and in concert with their client groups. Spanbauer's model is one of leadership for empowerment. His conclusions are:

- Involve teachers and all staff in problem-solving activities, using basic scientific methods and the principles of statistical quality and process control.
- Ask them how they think about things and how projects can be handled rather than telling them how they will happen.
- Share as much management information as possible to help foster their commitment.
- Ask staff which systems and procedures are preventing them from delivering quality to their customers—students, parents, co-workers.

- Understand that the desire for meaningful improvement of teachers is not compatible with a top-down approach to management.
- Rejuvenate professional growth by moving responsibility and control for professional development directly to the teachers and technical workers.
- Implement systematic and continued communication among everyone involved in the school.
- Develop skills in conflict resolution, problem solving and negotiations while displaying greater tolerance for and appreciation of conflict

COMPONENTS OF QUALITY FRAMEWORK

Developing leadership and strategy

Leadership and strategy are key elements in any quality framework. Quality management requires a commitment from senior management for quality initiatives to succeed. This is the conclusion of all the major writers on quality. Linked to purposeful leadership, effective educational institutions need well-worked-out strategies to deal with the competitive and results-oriented environment in which they operate. Together with effective teamwork, leadership and strategy provide the engine for the transformational process of quality development. To be effective, educational institutions require processes for developing their quality strategy.

These include:

- a clear and distinctive mission;
- a strategy for achieving that mission;
- the involvement of customers, both internal and external, in the development of strategy;
- the assessment and evaluation of the institution's effectiveness against the goals negotiated with customers.

Monitoring of the Delivery System

This is the stage where quality systems are vital. The methods of learning need to be established and followed for each aspect of the programme. The type of information that needs to be part of it includes syllabi, course submissions, schemes of work, records of work, assessment records, action plans and records of achievement. The recording of failure and below-average performance, and the actions taken to correct them, should be documented. This includes documentation of the aims and objectives of each programme, and the specification of the programme. The process of curriculum and programme management needs to be specified, including arrangements for teamwork. The roles within the team and their responsibilities and levels of authority should also be clarified.

Verifying the assessment of student performance

The details of both formative and summative assessments and the criteria for grading and the award of qualifications are necessary elements of the quality framework. A system for the internal verification of the assessment arrangements needs to be in place and documented.

External examiners', moderators' and verifiers' reports will provide important evidence, where available, of the quality of the management of learning.

Meeting the Students Expectations

Delighting the customers is the purpose of TQM. This is achieved by a continual striving to meet both internal and external customers' needs and expectations. Customers' needs are established by regularly soliciting their views. There are various methods of doing this: focus groups; questionnaires; advisory groups; open days; and informally talking to people. It is important that this work is done systematically, and that the views of people who decide not to attend the institution are also solicited. The information from these consultations must be collated and analyzed and used when taking decisions. It is important to involve the customers in the process because, at the end of the day, it is their views that count, not those of the institution's management. As Mike Barrett and Marion Thorpe have so aptly expressed it:

Students do not come to the college because there is a great budget or good staff/student ratios; to them quality is about convenience, promptness, courtesy and reliability. (Sallis and Hingley, 1992). Barrie Dale in his study of Japanese approaches to quality shows the total belief that exists in Japanese companies that business operations and efficiency can always be improved by reflecting customer needs and requirements. He demonstrates the considerable lengths to which Japanese firms go to identify needs and to keep the company focused on the market. However, the key idea mentioned by Dale is the translation of customer requirements into the design of products (Dale, 1994).

Initiating staff training for quality

Staff development can be seen as an essential tool for building the awareness and knowledge of quality. It can be the key strategic change agent for developing the quality culture. If TQM is largely about culture then a means has to be found of capturing the hearts and minds of staff.

Motivational theorists have long recognized that training is one of the most important motivators in an organization. It is important in the initial stages of implementation that everyone is trained in the basics of TQM. Staffs need knowledge of some of the key tools, including teamwork, evaluation methods, problem-solving and decision-making techniques. Both internal and external trainers have their part to play. It can be helpful to visit other organizations, whether educational or business, which are developing total quality initiatives.

Conclusion

This paper has served to provide a review of the current discussions surrounding quality management practice within Professional Education. It has identified the difficulty in defining quality and the complexity this creates in its measurement and management. It has

been explained how quality management has to be taken seriously in the field of professional education and extensive efforts are being undertaken to improve quality management practices. This paper identifies that the findings from this review are of relevance to various fields of service sectors. However, as the review has relied upon current research and publications that are outside these fields, there is clearly a need for further research within our subjects. Further research should identify whether, within our fields, there is a tendency to adopt industrial models like other professional education Institutions across the world or whether the approaches to quality management more closely reflect the centrality of the student in line with a student-centred approach to learning. If the latter, there is a need for these practices to be made more widely known across the academic community.

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