

SECTION: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

ASPECTS OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN THE ROMANIAN SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Quality education represents a major concern in many societies around the world. In a highly competitive educational sector, the success of academic institutions depends on the quality of education. People in the field of education, policy makers, and researchers express their sincere interest in total quality management (TQM), being recognized as an effective management philosophy for continuous improvement, customer satisfaction and organizational excellence.

Since this concept was initially developed in the production sector, there is a great deal of suspicion if this philosophy is applicable in education. In this respect, the main objective of this article is to investigate the compatibility of TQM with education. At the same time, this article will try to identify the main challenges in implementing TQM in education. It is assumed that this article could draw a significant conclusion about the applicability of TQM in education and raise awareness of those challenges that could create obstacles to the implementation of TQM in education.

Key words:

total quality management (TQM), education, compatibility, education challenges, continuous improvement, quality culture.

1. Introduction

Total Quality Management (TQM) is recognized as an effective management philosophy, used as a strategy for business excellence. Although the concept of total quality management was supported by Dr. W. Edwards Deming in the late 1950s in the USA; however, Japan was the first state to embrace this concept in order to recover its economy after World War II.

The success of TQM in Japan has made this concept famous in many countries around the world. Initially, the concept was developed for production organizations; later, it gained popularity over other service institutions, including bank, insurance, non-profit organizations, healthcare and so on.³ It is noted that TQM is also relevant for corporations, service organizations, universities, elementary and secondary schools. Now, TQM is recognized as a general management tool and applicable to any organization.

In this age of intense competition, quality education is a major concern. The pressure and demand for quality education are on the rise. All stakeholders in education are actively thinking about implementing TQM in education, as it is believed that quality education is one of the fundamental building blocks of economic development⁴.

Regarding the applicability of TQM in education, there is a serious debate, because this concept was initially developed for the production organizations. It is essential to discuss some aspects of this issue. While conducting an initial investigation it was found that there are also critical challenges in implementing TQM in education. It is also imperative that we

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explore the nature of these challenges, so that appropriate measures can be taken proactively while pursuing TQM in education.¹

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the compatibility of TQM with education. At the same time, this study will try to identify the challenges that may impede the application of TQM in education. While achieving these goals, this study would place particular emphasis on the term TQM, so that the potential characteristics and benefits of adopting TQM can be seen by all. In this paper, education refers to primary, secondary and tertiary education, including vocational education, etc.

The qualitative methodology was chosen for this study. This exploratory approach would provide an opportunity to understand and clarify the main issue of this study. The data and information for this study are collected through extensive literature, interviewed experts and personal experience.

2. Total quality management: definition, characteristics and benefits.

Total quality management represents a management approach that was initiated in the 1950s and has gradually become popular since the early 1980s. The term quality is at the heart of this philosophy. While defining total quality management, scientists have had the opportunity to present their perceptions about this term in numerous ways; as a result, a large number of definitions appear before us with a number of different meanings. Quality management is a methodical way of ensuring that activities are organized in the way they are planned.

TQM is defined as a proactive approach, to confirm the quality of the product, to serve and design the process and then to continually improve it².

According to these definitions, TQM is a plan, a systematic approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement. TQM is a continuous cycle of progress in the production system that should turn into achieving better performance and quality standards for the product. TQM is the set of practices that focus on systematic improvement, meeting the needs of customers and lowering the cost. TQM is a system and set of practices that aim to improve uninterrupted quality and better business performance.

TQM is supposed to be one that represents a collection of interdependent processes. This (TQM) is a method by which management and employees are involved in the continuous improvement of the production of goods and services. TQM consists of relentless improvement activities, involving everyone in business in a fully integrated effort to improve performance at all levels.

TQM creates an environment in which all goods are used ingeniously and efficiently to provide quality services that the institution must adapt in this fast-paced world. According to some informants, TQM is the combination of terms, namely:

- *Total*: which means one is involved, including customers and suppliers;
- *Quality*: indicating that the clients' needs are exactly met; and management: indicates that executive directors are employed³.

TQM is expressed as an approach that involves the entire organization to understand each activity of each individual in each management layer. TQM strives to integrate all organizational functions (marketing, finance, design, engineering and production, customer service, etc.) to focus on meeting customer needs and organizational goals⁴.

¹ Oakland, J. (2003) *Total Quality Management: Text with Cases*. Elsevier, Butterworth Hei- nemann, Oxford, pp. 198-201.

² Short, P.J. and Rahim, M.A. (1995) *Total Quality Management in Hospitals*. *Total Quality Management*, 6, pp. 255-263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09544129550035422>.

³ Witcher, B.J. (1990) *Total Marketing: Total Quality and Marketing Concept*. *The Quarterly Review of Marketing (Winter)*, 12, pp. 55-61.

⁴ Oakland, J. (2003) *Total Quality Management: Text with Cases*. Elsevier, Butterworth Hei- nemann, Oxford. , pp. 66-69.

According to some authors' vision, TQM is a strategic action that focuses on managing the entire organization to provide products or services that meet the needs of customers by using all resources. TQM is a holistic management approach that incorporates all organizational activities to meet customer needs and achieve global organizational goals.

TQM is defined as a pragmatic model that focuses on service to others. TQM respects the rules that organizations should listen to, constantly assess how well they respond to their needs, and initiate changes to meet or exceed customer desires. The message is clear that the business is improved by satisfied customers and that it is ruined by dissatisfied customers.

Customer satisfaction is largely related to service quality and is an important aspect for service organizations.

TQM is a management philosophy that creates a customer-based learning organization dedicated to total customer satisfaction by continuously improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization and its processes. In the TQM client it is an exclusive problem, and customer satisfaction is considered an important source of success in business.

TQM explicitly advocates for the development of people, because professional affiliation largely depends on the degree to which the employees of an organization are capable in their respective fields. TQM utilizes the capabilities of employees in all activities and processes and makes collaboration as feasible and real as understood by Schargel. This leads to the continuous improvement of the employees' capabilities.

TQM promotes a culture of quality because it can ensure improved quality of products and services. Gaither believes that TQM is the process of changing the basic culture of an organization and redirecting it to a higher quality of product or service. TQM helps to create a culture of trust, participation, teamwork, quality spirit, enthusiasm for continuous improvement, constant learning and, as a result, a work culture that contributes to the success and existence of a company. In a TQM effort, all members of an organization participate in improving the processes, products, services and culture in which they work.

The importance of total quality control is relevant to enhance organizational performance; in his view, quality initiatives should go beyond product and service; The entire organization is under the jurisdiction of TQM, which will lead to increased business performance.

As specified by the British Standard Institution, TQM is composed of a management doctrine and company models that intend to retain the human and material resources of an organization in the most efficient way to achieve the purpose of the organization.

Presenting the definitions of TQM allows the identification of the essential characteristics, as well as the significant offers of the TQM, such as: continuous improvement; integration of people, functions and resources; systematic and structured approach; quality control at all levels of the organization and at every step of the operating process; human and organizational capacity development; efficient use of resources; people's involvement; customer satisfaction; creating a quality culture and so on. To benefit from these benefits, academic institutions are inclined to adopt TQM in their process.

In some respects, TQM can be defined as a general management philosophy and a set of tools that allow an institution to follow a definition of quality and a means of achieving quality, the quality being a continuous improvement determined by the satisfaction of the customers with the services they have received¹.

This indicates the flexible aspect of the TQM, ie it is applicable to any organization and is subject to adaptation as the merit of the situation. With the help of TQM, an academic

¹ Michael, R.K., Sower, V.E. and Motwani, J. (1997) *A Comprehensive Model for Implementing Total Quality Management in Higher Education. Benchmarking for Quality Management and Technology*, 4, pp. 104-120. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14635779710174945>.

institution could develop its own definition of quality, benchmarking and quality improvement practices according to customer requirements.

The results of the literature on the usefulness of TQM in education differ. There are some authors who are very convinced about the applicability of TQM in education. TQM values are just as appropriate in higher education. TQM principles are compatible with higher education. TQM is relevant to higher education, as it is a process-oriented process that is designed to increase productivity, reduce costs and improve quality.

A TQM approach is supported as it will help higher education institutions maintain their competitiveness, eliminate inefficiencies of the organization, focus on market needs, achieve high performance in all areas and respond to the needs of all stakeholders. Education can be improved through quality management.

TQM contributes to the improvement of educational organizations in several ways, such as improving the educational process, motivating the educational environment, improving the educational curriculum, increasing the speed of training services and reducing costs. TQM can be the way in which excellence in higher education can be achieved and maintained. Regardless of the determining reason, if quality management was implemented in education, it made a huge difference as we mentioned.

Even though TQM has developed in the production environment, the benefits are equally applicable to service organizations such as higher education institutions. Murad and Rajesh perceive that TQM is a general management philosophy and a mixture of various instruments that determine the educational institutions to follow a description of the quality and the means of its achievement.

Following some studies, TQM is to some extent applicable in education. TQM values are only somewhat useful in a dynamic and changing environment, which is a feature of modern higher education.

Although higher education institutions are not as companies, but some basic principles and tools are applicable, as they are instruments of service institutions and their governing and management boards, subordinated to the institution's academic mission, goals and strategies.

In two different studies, it was found that TQM is a managerial tool for solving the problems associated with the services, as well as the tactics in the academic industry and can comply with the standard of the educational industry¹.

Continuous quality improvement; consistency of quality; participation of university staff, students and non-academic staff; customer satisfaction; and the existence of management procedures that enhance quality are a series of quality management programs that no one considers irrelevant in the context of higher education.

This quality can create an atmosphere where educators, parents, government officials, community representatives and business leaders work together to provide students with the resources they need to meet current and future academic, business and social needs.

A large number of researchers find that some TQM tools and techniques are convincing and appropriate in education. For example, Sirvancimentions shows that the use of the quality implementation function (QFD), used to incorporate the preference of customers and other stakeholders in the design of programs. Quinn et al. discuss the application of Six Sigma, Quality Quality (SERVQUAL), ISO9000 and TQM in higher education. It has the ability to offer practical solutions, positive results in academic and administrative functions.

From the above discussion, it is clear that TQM is credibly compatible with education. This implies that TQM tools and techniques are subject to fine tuning while being applied in education.

¹ Venkatraman, S. (2007) A Framework for Implementing TQM in Higher Education Pro- grams. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 15, pp. 92-112. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09684880710723052>.

There is no doubt that TQM has the potential to serve education. It should not be considered that there are no challenges or barriers in implementing TQM in education. Some educators believe that the philosophy developed for business may not be suitable for service organizations such as educational institutions. Schools or other types of academic institutions are very different, with a different ethos and characteristics that have made it difficult or even impossible to implement a philosophy that has been derived from the industry. Terms such as product, customer, empowerment or even strategy, reengineering do not easily correspond to higher education institutions.

The biggest obstacle could be the commitment of the parties involved in the education system, in particular the management and the teachers. The lack of top management commitment affects negative TQM efforts, which is one of the main reasons for the failure of TQM efforts. Extreme resistance to improving the quality process comes from teachers who consider it just another business-oriented madness; a typical mentality may undermine the effectiveness of TQM in education.

The role of the individual, especially teachers, is often informative and less bureaucratic in the traditional educational system. Studies highlight the TQM approach that seems to be more administrative and bureaucratic; there is a tendency to produce tireless meetings, to generate huge amounts of steps, and to delay or escape critical decision-making¹.

There is a long debate about the definition of quality in education. Sarrico et al. states that quality can have multiple meanings in higher education and that this variety has considerable influence on the development of quality measurement methods and tools; and this variety can also create different stakeholders for higher education institutions. The way in which the definition of quality is given based on the needs and expectations of the clients in the business and industry environments is not absolutely suitable for education. Overall, this term (quality) can create a complex of situations for academic institutions.

Defining and identifying the client is a challenge in the field of education. A vague identification of customers also creates obstacles in implementing TQM.

The definition (the customer) prevails in the industry or in the business environment which, based on the idea of meeting the needs and expectations of the clients, is a problem in education. Education has many stakeholders. At elementary and high school level, it is relatively easy to define; parents are customers and students are consumers. Clients in higher education are much more diverse and not so easily defined.

This situation is complicated in the case of tertiary education. A student can be both the consumer and the clients, if he pays the tuition fees. In the labor market, employers' organizations are also clients. In the case of scholarship students, the sponsors are the clients. Overall, the state is also a customer. Without precise customer definition and customer focus, quality efforts can be easily diffused.

A wide range of reasons are recognized, these being: lost in the spotlight, meaning TQM tends to place more emphasis on non-academic activities (e.g. collecting invoices, writing checks, admissions requests, and physical inventory of plants) (e.g., curriculum development, teaching and learning style, tuition fees, student welfare, etc.)²; resistance from the faculty members (TQM) impedes their authority and freedom, violates confidentiality in relation to evaluation, promotion, salary and so on and the practice of teamwork in the education process, because they are not in accordance with the traditional teaching process; Defining clients and measuring results are two major difficulties in implementing TQM in education, as a large variety of clients (such as students, parents, researchers, graduates,

¹ Koch, J.V. and Fisher, J.L. (1998) *Higher Education and Total Quality Management*. *Total Quality Management*, 9, pp. 659-668. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0954412988136>.

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business firms, etc.) are involved in higher education, so it is very difficult who are the true clients of education, it is also difficult to evaluate the results of quality initiatives.

There are a number of barriers in implementing TQM in education: the absence of effective communication channels; the problem of measuring the results of the higher education institutions; coexistence of more goals and objectives for higher education institutions; the emphasis on individualism and the considerable degree of internal competition; the bureaucratic decision-making process; and the lack of a strong leadership, very dedicated to the ideas and principles that he wants to apply and able to involve all the members of the institution. Some critical obstacles are observed, such as: inefficient management; obstruction of change; contradictory policies; improper organizational structure; and mismanagement of the change process are other shortcomings in implementing TQM¹.

3. Conclusions

This study does not provide any framework or guidelines that will lead to a successful implementation of TQM in an organization; rather, it is involved in explaining what might motivate an academic institute to embrace TQM in its process; examining the extent to which TQM is relevant and appropriate to education; and what can prevent the successful application of TQM in education.

However, in general, it can be said that in order to make TQM successful it is essential to create a culture of quality, i.e. a change is required from the traditional management culture to a culture of total quality.

TQM is a management philosophy that requires a radical cultural change from the traditional management to the management style of continuous improvement in an organization.

A culture of quality is a system of shared values, beliefs and norms, which focuses on customer satisfaction and the continuous improvement of the quality of products and services. Culture can promote TQM principles, such as continuous improvement, open communication, problem-based problem solving and decision making.

In addition, academic institutions should adopt a more customer-oriented approach in their relationships with their students. The traditional relationship between teacher and student no longer adds value to anyone. It is necessary to spread professional management practices in educational institutions.

There is a wide range of tools and techniques available in TQM. Random choice of TQM tools, techniques and concepts should not yield significant benefits. Instead, it is wise to choose those tools and techniques that are compatible with an academic institution.

The process towards total quality is a slow and constant process; it takes time, this change can be achieved with patience, cooperation and assistance. Besides, each institution should be an organization of learning focused on the individual development of the teacher, as well as on the empowerment of the entire staff.

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